

IMPORTANCE AND METHOD OF TEACHING BIBLICAL HEBREW AND ARAMAIC IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND ADULTS

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ABSTRACT

Aim. The aim of this paper is to show and explain the meaning and the importance teaching biblical Hebrew and Aramaic in religious education.

Method. The paper presents a descriptive study of philosophy of teaching Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic as an integral part of religious education, and at the same time it points out the main problems of this education which are connected with the fact that the original language of the Tanakh (one of the basic textbooks for religious education) is not the native language of the students being taught (even Israelis whose native language is Hebrew do not speak Biblical Hebrew) and studying it demands knowledge of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic.

Results. However, as the ideal method for teaching a foreign language does not exist, the choice of teaching methods must be based on the fact that each student or teacher prefers different method of work.

Key words: Hebrew traditions, teaching, values, education, language, methods



INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most important values in human life; as Midrash says: “If you have gained knowledge, what do you lack? If you lack knowledge, what have you gained?” (Vajikra rabba 1,6). Enabling children to educate themselves has been one of the basic responsibilities of parents since ancient times (Josephus Flavius, BT, Kiddushin 29a; BT, Shabbat 127a; BT, Berachot 21b). Already in ancient Israel, great emphasis was placed on upbringing and education.

According to rabbinic tradition, education brings life and health. Many rabbis believed that the roots of all illnesses (both physical and mental) were caused by a lack of study of the Torah. According to Wiesel (1991, p. 12), studying is not only an integral part of Judaism, but “Judaism is studying”. Thus, studying was not only a means to achieve the goal, but itself a goal Nosek (1996, p. 14). The nation of Israel was the “people of the book” (studying) who called their God “*melamed*”, a “teacher” (Dt 4,1). Their dream was a land full of knowledge because women and men would study the Torah (Isaiah 11,9; BT, Sanhedrin 94b). Studying has no limit (similarly to merciful acts); the man always studies, even after death, as the pious Jews believe; the devotee of the Lord comes to the heavenly yeshiva (study hall), where they continue to study the Torah.

Christian teaching of religion (in schools, Sunday schools, courses) also includes the study of the Torah, or the Study of the “written Torah”. Religious education, as regards the first part of the Bible, essentially means “learn studying”. The Tanakh is thus one of the basic textbooks for religious education (beside grammar books, dictionaries and exercise books). Many of its texts were used for private and public teaching even in the very distant past. The texts were copied, privately and publicly read (Josephus Flavius, Contra Ap. Ii.) (e.g., each seventh year at the end of Sukkot) and written-on stones (Dt 27,2-3).

BASIC PRINCIPLES FOR RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (INSPIRATION FROM THE PAST)

The basic principles of education already mentioned by the Tanakh and the Talmud can in principle be successfully applied for teaching nowadays: (1) loving wisdom and rationality; (2) investing assets in their acquisition (Prov. 4,6-7, 4,21); (3) listening to words (narratives, laws, family trees, riddles, advice, admonition and rebukes; (4) constant (loud) repetition, (Prov. 4,5-6; BT, Sanhedrin 99a; BT, Chagiga 9b; BT, Eruvin 54a); (5) observation (Prov. 6,6; compare Lk 12,27, Lk 12,24 Isaiah 48,6; Ez 40,4); (6) thinking (Prov 4,1); (7) perseverance (Prov. 4,13); (8) drawing knowledge from various sources (parents, grandparents, teachers, priests, prophets, scribes, eyewitnesses). Teaching began at a very young age in those times. The study was gradual and age appropriate.

Children were first taught by their parents, later by a private teacher or would start attending a local school. In the family, the children were first taught by the father, and later girls would receive education from the mother. Girls received only primary education in the Torah; the rabbis considered their education as important as the education of their sons. For a girl to receive higher education in the Torah was uncommon. Their upbringing and education by their mother was primarily focused on the practical maintenance and the proper functioning of the household. In this way, the child learned to be subordinate to various authorities. Education was a family and a community matter. The child accepted different roles (those of a son, daughter, pupil, student, classmate).

According to the Maharal (2009, p. 119), it is necessary to teach children “pleasantly, in an atmosphere of peace”. Children in the Jewish family have learned a great deal through play. Also, the first introduction to the Hebrew alphabet often took place in a fun way (wooden letters covered with honey, letters from gingerbread). The basic aim of these educational games was to develop all the senses of the child. The child saw the letter written, heard its pronunciation, could feel it, smell it (gingerbread spice smells beautiful) and taste it. (Compare to Komenský (1954):

Let it be a golden rule for teachers that everything be demonstrated to as many of the senses as possible. The visual phenomena to the sight, the sounds to the ear, the smells to the nose, the taste to the tongue, the tangible phenomena to the touch. If something can be perceived by more senses, let it be that way (Great didactic, chap. XX, 1954).

Children usually started school at the age of six or seven (BT, Bava Batra 21a). The student was prepared to study the Tanakh (often from the age of five) and Midrash, the Mishnah (from the age of 10), religious commandments – “mitzvah” (from the age of 13) and the Talmud (from the age of 15) (Pirkei Avot 5,21). The boys also learned their future occupation and family property management. Mother taught her daughters housework and housekeeping (ליה תשא). Illiteracy was very rare among Jews.

Even the smallest community would have a teacher. The municipality that did not meet this provision should be “put under ban until the inhabitants thereof appointed one. If they persist in not appointing a teacher, the city school be destroyed for the world exists only through the breath of schoolchildren” according to the Shulchan Arukh (Yoreh De’ah 245, 7).

Local schools usually had one or two classes attended by children of different ages. One teacher had a maximum of twenty-five children in the classroom (being assisted by an older student or another teacher in case of a larger number) (BT, Bava batra 21a). Older children were encouraged to help younger children and so the younger children would work with the older children.

The obligation to send children to school was taken very seriously by some parents, (BT, Kiddushin 30a) while others neglected it (BT, Shabbat 119b). A student (at the age when he was able to do so) was obliged to find a suitable teacher. The teacher was supposed to be patient, experienced (of advan-

ced age), not very talkative and able to repeat the subject matter until the student had learned it (Pirkei Avot 4,15.26, BT, Pesachim 3b; BT, Eruvin 54b). The importance of the teacher's role is evident from the Jewish proverb saying it is the worst thing to meet a bad doctor and a bad teacher for man because a bad doctor will deprive him of his life in this world and a bad teacher will deprive him of his life in the future world. According to the Talmud, real guardians of cities are not soldiers but teachers (JT, Hagigah 76c). The relationship between the teacher and his pupil corresponds to the father-son relationship. The child was even supposed to show more respect to his teacher than his parents (Compare: Pavlikova, Zalec, 2019).

The student was supposed to be attentive. Each student belonged to one of four basic temperaments:

Easy to become angry, and easy to be appeased: his gain disappears in his loss;
 Hard to become angry, and hard to be appeased: his loss disappears in his gain;
 Hard to become angry and easy to be appeased: a pious person; Easy to become angry and hard to be appeased: a wicked person (Pirkei Avod 5,11).

Other comparison of students:

There are four types among those who sit before the sages: a sponge, a funnel, a strainer and a sieve. A sponge, soaks up everything; A funnel, takes in at one end and lets out at the other; A strainer, which lets out the wine and retains the lees; A sieve, which lets out the coarse meal and retains the choice flour (Pirkei Avod 5,15).

The teacher had to remember what types of students he had in his class when teaching.

HEBREW-ARAMAIC TEXT OR CZECH TRANSLATION IN TEACHING THE TANAKH

Studying the Tanakh presupposes the knowledge of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic. This requirement is clearly formulated, for example, in the *Shema Yisrael*' - *שמע ישראל* as a call to the father, since in ancient Israel he was responsible for the education of children, especially sons: (Dt 6,6-9). Devarim noted not only the obligation of parents to educate their children, but also the duties of those children: the basic task of the child is to ask. The father awakens their interest and the child begins to inquire (Dt 32,7). The child asked in Hebrew and his father answered in Hebrew (later in Aramaic). The basic requirements of the Tanakh for adults and children (speaking, listening, writing, reading) presuppose the knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic languages. Since the earliest times, many teachers and pupils have tried to work only with its translations. Deciding whether to choose the original language or translation is not easy for the student. The original languages of the Tanakh are not his native language (even Israelis whose native language is Hebrew do not speak Biblical Hebrew), which implies demanding studying of usually several years. The attitude of the students, in this case, is usually shaped by the fear that they will not translate the original text better than

the numerous translation (ecumenical) groups of Biblical theologians did. In contrast, the language of translation is the student's mother tongue (ideally). For this reason, its use seems to be a much easier way to reach the goal. As is usually the case, the easier and shorter paths are sometimes very dangerous. The student progresses quickly, but may miss the goal. Peter Newmark (In Al-Azzam, Bakri, H. S., 2008, p. 53) indicated this danger when he wrote: "there is no such thing as a perfect, ideal or correct translation". The poet Chaim Nachman Bialik, poetically said: "reading the Bible in any language except Hebrew was like kissing your bride through her veil" (Abley, 2005, p. 208).

The fundamental problem is that every translation is actually a commentary on the translated text. The situation is even more complicated in the case of the Hebrew-Aramaic text of the Tanakh. The Hebrew (and Aramaic) alphabet contains only consonants as there are no vowels in Hebrew and Aramaic alphabets. It was added to the text many centuries after its creation as punctuation (vocalisation) in the form of dots, commas and their combinations, usually listed under letters (consonants). This punctuation (vocalisation) of the text is therefore the first interpretation of the consonantal text (Biblical scholars often propose another punctuation of some words, which then gives the text additional possible meanings). The translation of this vocalised text is thus another interpretation of the previously interpreted text. The authors of the ancient Aramaic Targums have already discovered a solution to the relatively frequent dilemma whether to use an original or a translation. A Hebrew text was introduced first, followed by an Aramaic translation, which was longer because it included an interpretation.

PASSIVE OR ACTIVE KNOWLEDGE OF BIBLICAL HEBREW AND ARAMAIC?

Biblical Hebrew (like Aramaic) is not a spoken language and its grammar differs substantially from Modern Hebrew. It uses many grammatical forms (e.g., narrative, consecutive perfect, absolute infinitive) that are no longer common in Modern Hebrew.

Learning to speak a language that is no longer spoken seems unnecessary. At the same time, there is no doubt that it is easier to learn a language that is both read passively and spoken and written actively. For this reason, older textbooks and workbooks included translation exercises both from and to Hebrew. Current textbooks do not include translation exercises to Hebrew and students are encouraged to combine the study of Biblical Hebrew with Modern Hebrew.

The teacher can also complement the lessons with translations from Czech to Hebrew, using biblical vocabulary in grammatical forms used in both Biblical and Modern Hebrew (e.g., using "*amar*" instead of "*vajomer*").

FREQUENCY OF LESSONS

The time devoted to language learning is very important. Two hours per week (schools, courses, Sunday schools) are generally quite inadequate. Students must be encouraged to work every day thorough self-study which complements the lessons (shorter daily sessions are better for the resulting effect than longer ones once a week). An unprepared student, who only tries to learn the subject matter by repeating it in the classroom, when the teacher corrects his mistakes again and again, is responsible for delaying the whole group. The emphasis on strengthening the responsibility of the group is therefore an important motivational element in teaching.

It is advisable for one to complete grammar lessons in Biblical Hebrew within three years. Shortened courses (common at universities in particular) put more pressure on student performance, increasing the percentage of "unsuccessful" students who end (in the worst case) or re-start their studies (at best). However, the repeated start of language learning brings many problems. A student who has not been successful at the first attempt usually loses motivation (this is also supported by the fact that he already knows how difficult the curriculum awaiting him is). In addition, students usually have a fairly incorrect estimate of the quality of their memory. As a rule, they overestimate their knowledge and do not usually come to the first lessons when returning to the course. Upon their arrival, they will find that their level is not enough for ongoing teaching and they are set to repeat the course for the third time (the problem of "eternal" or "false" beginners).

Teaching of Biblical Aramaic usually starts once the process of teaching the Biblical Hebrew grammar is completed. Because of their great similarity, one-year study is usually sufficient. It can be said that learning Hebrew and Aramaic never ends (as is the case with other languages), that there is always something to discover; moreover, the language does get forgotten without repetition.

BASIC FORMS OF TEACHING AND STRUCTURE OF LESSON

There are three basic forms of teaching that should be combined with each other in the classroom: frontal (collective) teaching (the teacher takes the initiative, the interaction is mainly between him and individual pupils); cooperative (group) teaching, where pupils work in smaller or larger groups and individual (independent) study. Frontal teaching prevails in the interpretation of new subject matter, cooperative teaching in repetition of old subject matter and practicing new subject matter and the individual form is most commonly done in the form of homework.

Teaching is done in several basic steps:

- a) Initiation (the teacher welcomes students and familiarises them with important organisational matters). The aim of the teacher is to create a friendly atmosphere in the group with this introduction. Students should not

feel that their struggle with the teacher or their rivalry is just beginning. They must learn to cooperate because this ability is very important for their future life (e.g. at work). The work of the group can affect the individual both in a positive and in a negative way (a curious student in a group which does not want to learn anything will learn much less).

The friendly atmosphere will make the student less afraid and not ashamed to ask questions and answer. The real interest of the teacher in his students promotes their appropriate activeness during the lessons. The low interest of the teacher, especially in the case of smaller children, will make them passive or increase their activity to an unbearable level.

- b) Homework review – the student has to repeat the subject matter, they read various texts and translates them into his mother tongue. Students will then try to translate the Hebrew sentences translated into their mother tongue back to Hebrew and will soon realise which words he can translate in several ways. They can read selected texts repeatedly.
- c) Knowledge testing, checking homework and repetition from the last lesson can take the traditional form: midterm test, grammatical analysis, common repetition of memorised phrases, language forms and fixed phrases.

CONCLUSION

A universal method for teaching a foreign language does not exist. The choice of teaching methods must be based on the fact that each student or teacher prefers different methods of work. It is practical to combine methods (among other things, to prevent stereotypes) according to the individual needs of the students and the skills of the teacher. It is appropriate to combine traditional methods (grammar and translation methods) and alternative methods (audio-lingual/oral method, direct method, Total Physical method, Nepustil's method, Lozanov's Suggestopedia method, e-learning, Act & Speak or communicative approach (Aydin, H. et al., 2019; Zahorec et al., 2018, 2019; Procházka et al., 2016; Gadušová & Hašková, 2015).

Each part of the lesson should use methods suitable for it (motivational, activation, explanatory, fixation, classification and application methods).

The ultimate mastery of every language is to learn to think in it, and the only way to that end is to never stop studying. A student who does not stop learning gradually starts to understand the written and spoken language, speaks (in Modern Hebrew or simplified Biblical Hebrew) and "starts to dream" in Hebrew.

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