



TORAH IS LIKE AN ONION

APPROACHING LIFE
WITH MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES



MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES

Learning Torah is a foundation of Jewish life. What does it mean to learn Torah? How do you learn Torah? What is accomplished when we learn Torah?

P psychology is a Soft Science, therefore it is based on observation and theory. Different psychologists hold varying perspectives regarding the causes of behavior. Given a case study, psychologists may hold varying theories for the cognitive processes causing the physiological reactions. Yet, despite the fact that many psychologists may take different approaches, they all have one main goal: to determine the cause of behavior.



Four Approaches To Psychology	
Behavioral	Analysis of how learning occurs based upon reward & punishment.
Biological	Examines how our genes, hormones, & nervous system interact with our environment.
Cognitive	Focuses on how we process, store, & use information.
Psychodynamic	Based on the belief that childhood experiences greatly influence the development of later personality traits & psychological problems

CHOOSE ONE OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEWS DISCUSSED, AND EXPLAIN HOW THE PSYCHOLOGICAL VIEW WOULD APPROACH HANDLING THE FOLLOWING CASE STUDY

CASE STUDY

Suzy Schwartz is 7 years old and hates to go to school. Every weekday morning, Suzy wakes up with a stomach ache and complains that she can't get up. She has on occasion thrown up and been unable to eat anything for breakfast. Her mother is not sure what to do about Suzy. If Mrs. Schwartz takes Suzy to school, Mrs. Schwartz often gets called by the nurse because Suzy has become physically ill. While Suzy is in class, she sits by herself or hides in the coat closet, refusing to talk to anyone.

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- ❖ DO YOU THINK THERE CAN BE MORE THAN ONE RIGHT ANSWER TO A PROBLEM?
 - ❖ WHY ARE DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO A PROBLEM SOMETIMES NECESSARY?
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PARDES: THE FOUR LEVELS OF UNDERSTANDING TORAH

The Gemara tells the story of four great scholars

Talmud Bavli Chagiga 14b	תלמוד בבלי מסכת חגיגה יד עמוד ב
Ben Azai Ben Zoma Acher and Rabbi Akiva who entered a "Pardes"- an orchard. The Talmudic narrative cryptically states that upon entering the "Pardes" Ben Azai looked in and died, Ben Zoma looked in and was stricken, and Acher chopped off the roots. Only Rabbi Akiva came out of the "Pardes" in peace.	תנו רבנן : ארבעה נכנסו בפרדס, ואלו הן : בן עזאי, בן זומא, אחר, ורבי עקיבא... בן עזאי הציץ ומת, עליו הכתוב אומר גיקר בעיני ה' המותה לחסידיו. בן זומא הציץ ונפגע, ועליו הכתוב אומר דדבש מצאת אכל דידך פן תשבענו והקאתנו. אחר קיצץ בנטיעות. רבי עקיבא יצא בשלום.

BY RABBI EPHRAIM BUCHWALD

The rabbis explain that the "Pardes" that the rabbis entered was not a real orchard, but rather the four levels of Torah study and understanding scripture represented by the acronym "Pardes."

פ	PEY	פֶּשֶׁט	Pshat	"The literal meaning of the scriptural text.
ר	REISH	רֵמֵז	Remez	"That which is the alluded-to meaning of the text.
ד	DALED	דְּרָשׁ	Drash	"The homiletic meaning of the text.
ס	SAMECH	סוּד	Sod	"The mystical meaning of the text.

Four great scholars entered into a "Pardes" - began to delve into the four levels of scriptural meaning. Of the four, only Rabbi Akiva was able to reach the full depth of understanding and come out in peace. Ben Azai died. Ben Zoma became demented. Acher (whose real name was Elisha ben Avuya) cut off his roots and became an apostate. Rabbi Akiva was the only scholar great enough to explore the deepest levels of the Torah secrets without being harmed.



According to Jewish tradition, every verse in the Bible has many levels of interpretation. Each verse has a literal meaning, the plain and simple message that the written text conveys (pshat). At times, the text itself raises questions that allude to interpretations other than the literal meaning (remez). On occasion, these questions are responded to by citing a Midrash, a legendary interpretation of the Bible, which attempts to resolve the disparities in the text (drash). Finally, there are instances where the verse suggests deep and intense new meanings that are generally hidden from the rational mind and are often beyond the understanding of mere mortals (sod).

Study of the Torah is like an onion; the more layers you peel off - the deeper you go to the heart or soul of it.

❖ DO YOU THINK IT IS GOOD TO HAVE MULTIPLE WAYS TO INTERPET SOMETHING? WHY?

INTERPRETING THE CONSTITUTION



When the courts must decide a case, the meaning of the laws in question is not always clear. The Fourteenth Amendment, which guarantees equal protection of the laws, has been particularly difficult to interpret over the years because of the ambiguous nature of the concept of equality. Does treating people equally mean treating them exactly the same? Or are there circumstances when equal treatment sometimes requires different treatment? The courts have come to different conclusions at different points in history and in different cases.

For more on interpreting the concept of equality, see [Does Treating People Equally Mean Treating Them the Same?](#)

Judges use their reasoning skills to decide what particular laws mean when they rule on cases. Different judges sometimes use different reasoning skills to interpret the Constitution, meaning that judges do not always agree on the meaning of the Constitution. There are six widely accepted methods of interpretation that shed some light on the meaning of the Constitution.

Historical Interpretation	A judge looks to the intentions of the framers and ratifiers of the Constitution to shed light on its meaning.
Textual Interpretation	A judge looks to the meaning of the words in the Constitution, relying on common understandings of what the words mean today.
Structural Interpretation	A judge infers structural rules (power relationships between institutions, for instance) from the relationships specifically outlined in the Constitution.
Doctrinal Interpretation	A judge applies rules established by precedents.
Ethical Interpretation	A judge looks to the moral commitments reflected in the Constitution.
Prudential Interpretation	A judge seeks to balance the costs and benefits of a particular ruling.

❖ WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BENEFITS OF BEING ABLE TO INTERPRET THE CONSTITUTION?

❖ WHAT DANGERS ARE THERE IN BEING ABLE TO INTERPRET THE CONSTITUTION IN MANY WAYS?

DIFFERENT VIEWS

Talmud Bavli - Eruvin 13b	תלמוד בבלי מסכת עירובין יג עמוד ב
Rabbi Aba said in the name of Shmuel- for three years the house of Shamai argued with the house of Hillel. This one said the law is according to their opinion and this one said the law is according to our opinion. A heavenly voice came and said- "These and these are the words of the living God. And the law is according to the house of Hillel"	אמר רבי אבא אמר שמואל : שלש שנים נחלקו בית שמאי ובית הלל, הללו אומרים הלכה כמותנו והללו אומרים הלכה כמותנו. יצאה בת קול ואמרה : אלו ואלו דברי אלהים חיים הן, והלכה כבית הלל.



- ❖ HOW CAN BOTH OPINIONS BE "THE WORDS OF THE LIVING GOD"?
- ❖ ONLY THE LAW OF HOUSE OF HILLEL IS FOLLOWED- WHAT IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEORETICAL LAW AND PRACTICAL LAW?

BLESSINGS ON THE TORAH

According to Ashkenzi tradition, these blessings are said in the morning before learning Torah

ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצוותיו וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה :
 והערב נא ה' אלקינו את דברי תורתך בפינו ובפיית עמך בית ישראל. ונהיה אנחנו וצאצאינו. וצאצאי צאצאינו
 וצאצאי עמך בית ישראל. כָּלֵנו יודעי שמך ולומדי תורתך לשמך : ברוך אתה ה' המלמד תורה לעמו ישראל :
 ברוך אתה ה' אלקינו מלך העולם. אשר בחר בנו מכל העמים ונתן לנו את תורתו : ברוך אתה ה'. נותן התורה :

Blessed are You, Hashem, King of the universe, Who has sanctified us with His commandments, and commanded **to engross ourselves in the words of Torah.**

Please, Hashem, our G-d, sweeten the words of Your Torah in our mouth and in the mouth of Your people, the family of Israel. May we and our offspring and the offspring of Your people, the House of Israel – all of us – know Your Name and study Your Torah for its own sake. Blessed are You, Hashem, who teaches Torah to His people Israel.

Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who selected us from all the peoples, and gave us His Torah. Blessed are You, Hashem, Giver of the Torah.

- ❖ WHY IS THE BLESSING FOR LEARNING TORAH SO MUCH LONGER THAN MOST?

EFFORTS, NOT RESULTS



Why is the blessing over the Torah phrased as *la'asok* (to engross ourselves), instead of *lilmod* (to learn)? The Chofetz Chaim (Rabbi Yisrael Meir Kaegan) explains, that the goal of learning Torah is not focused on the result, not on the mastery of any area of study. Rather, the goal of Torah learning is the effort one exerts to try and understand the Torah.

[See the Chofetz Chaim's example about a shoemaker](#)

IMPOSSIBLE, DON'T BELIEVE IT

Talmud Bavli Megillah 6b	תלמוד בבלי מסכת מגילה ו עמוד ב
Rabbi Yitzchak said: If a person says: I have labored [in Torah] and not found success, do not believe him. If he says: I have not labored but I have found success, do not believe him. [However,] if he says: I have labored and I have found success, believe him.	ואמר ר' יצחק : אם יאמר לך אדם : יגעתי ולא מצאתי - אל תאמן, לא יגעתי ומצאתי - אל תאמן, יגעתי ומצאתי - תאמן

WHY SHOULDN'T YOU BELIEVE SOMEONE WHO SAYS THAT THEY LEARNED TORAH WITHOUT TRYING?

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

- ❖ Looking at something from multiple perspectives is an important way delve into a concept thoroughly and realize there is more than one approach
- ❖ The Torah has multiple layers and depth which needs to be uncovered- this is the beauty of Torah learning
- ❖ Interpretation and creativity in understanding Torah is the greatness of its study.



The Jews have been given this precious gift and the unique license to interpret, study and master it.