A decade and a half ago, Dr. Isadore Twersky, ZaTzaL, articulated a powerful vision for what Jewish education should ideally be:

Our goal should be to make possible for every Jewish person, child or adult, to be exposed to the mystery and romance of Jewish history, to the enthralling insights and special sensitivities of Jewish thought, to the sanctity and symbolism of Jewish existence, and to the power and profundity of Jewish faith. As a motto and declaration of hope, we might adapt the dictum that says, “They searched from Dan to Beer Sheva and did not find an Am Ha’Aretz!” “Am Ha’Aretz”, usually understood as an ignoramus, an illiterate, may for our purposes be redefined as one indifferent to Jewish visions and values, untouched by the drama and majesty of Jewish history, unappreciative of the resourcefulness and resilience of the Jewish community, and unconcerned with Jewish destiny. Education, in its broadest sense, will enable young people to confront the secret of Jewish tenacity and existence, the quality of Tora teaching which fascinates and attracts irresistibly. They will then be able, even eager, to find their place in a creative and constructive Jewish community.¹

Twersky, in his contributions² to the volume Visions of Jewish Education³ fleshes out an approach to Jewish education that he feels not only would satisfy his overarching vision in A Time to Act, but that is based upon the writings of RaMBaM, and which he calls “Hergel”. I propose to consider whether the three Maimonidean references from which Twersky constructs his educational vision in fact support the conclusions that he draws, and then turn to the Twersky-esque version of “Hergel”

² Visions of Jewish Education contains not only Twersky’s original written statement of his educational vision, but also subsequent articulations and clarifications that took place in discussions with other educators and thinkers, and which he never was able to incorporate into his written statement due to his unfortunate passing..
itself to analyze its parameters and implications in terms of both the terminology in light of classical Jewish sources as well as its viability as an approach to contemporary Jewish education.

I. Three sources for Twersky’s concept of “Hergel” in RaMBaM’s writings.

The first source attributed to Twersky as serving as a basis for “Hergel” is drawn from Maimonides’ commentary to “Mishna Menachot” 4:4:

פירוש המשנה למשנה פורק ד פ/false Languages in the light of classical Jewish sources as well as its viability as an approach to contemporary Jewish education.

I. Three sources for Twersky’s concept of “Hergel” in RaMBaM’s writings.

The first source attributed to Twersky as serving as a basis for “Hergel” is drawn from Maimonides’ commentary to “Mishna Menachot” 4:4:

In my opinion, it is notable that the three Maimonidean sources for “Hergel” appear only in the “Supplement” to Twersky’s essay (beginning on p. 77 of Visions), rather than in the original essay itself. In the introduction to the “Supplement” (Visions, p. 78), it is explained that this material was drawn from notes taken during discussions with educators over the course of the years following the initiation of the Visions Project. Furthermore, “He (Twersky) had read and approved these materials, intending to use them as the basis of the articulation of the classical ideal” (Ibid.) I am curious to know whether those to whom he personally presented these sources, as well as the Atid Fellows who subsequently studied them after Twersky’s death, read the sources carefully and critically in light of the concept of “Hergel” that Twersky proceeds to promote. If it can be demonstrated that these sources “leave something to be desired” in terms of clearly leading to the conclusions about “Hergel” that Twersky draws, did Twersky intend these sources to serve as essentially “Esmachtot” (little more than hints) to the “Hergel” dimension—the fact that RaMBaM felt strongly that reasons for “Mitzvot” must be considered, and that philosophy must be part of Tora study are not in dispute—of his educational vision, or did he understand them as truly formative of “Hergel” both for RaMBaM as well as himself?

The first of the three texts in question is translated differently by Daniel Marom in Visions and Rabbi Jeffrey Saks in the pamphlet “Spiritualizing Halachic Education”. Here are the two English versions of RaMBaM’s commentary on Menachot 4:4:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marom, p. 82</th>
<th>Saks, p. 29</th>
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<td>The term חינה is used metaphorically in the case of the vessels, referring to “initial use”. This term is applied here to the initial use of the vessels for the purpose of worship in a way that it is similar to its application to a person. At first he is taught a measure of wisdom or a proper disposition so as to habituate himself until it is ingrained in him.</td>
<td>The reference to “education” (חינוך) with regard to consecration is because of the aspect of “habituation” (הרגל)…and the language of חינה is applied to these matters because of the attention to the habituation of actions, since this is the vessel which is habituated for worship in the same way that the person who is in the beginning of his way is taught a bit of wisdom, a bit of ethics, so as to habituate himself in it until it has become ingrained in him.</td>
</tr>
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For comments regarding the bolded portions of these translations, see fn. 19 below.
It appears to me that RaMBaM’s comparison between the initiation, i.e., initial usages, of the Temple altar by means of offering varied and specific sacrifices, and the early education of a human being, apparently inspired by the sharing of the term “Chinuch”, is difficult to fathom, at least at first glance. An altar, however holy, is an inanimate object used by those worshipping the Divine to carry out specialized religious rituals; a person who is at the early stages of his education is not an unfeeling entity to be merely acted upon, but rather a sensate being whose cognitive, emotional, sensory, and physical dimensions evolve and respond to the outside stimuli to which he is exposed and subjected in a cumulative fashion.

Whereas metaphysically, there may be a difference between an altar before and after it undergoes its “Chinuch”, empirically, aside from some remnants of the substances that have been offered upon it and physical processes such as oxidation, wear corrosion and decomposition, its copper exterior and wood interior remain exactly the same, no matter how many times it has served as the platform for sacrifices offered upon it. However, an individual who stands at the threshold of his education, assuming that he is not beset by severe learning disabilities, will be progressively and cumulatively changed (“altered”? sic.) as a result of each finite learning activity in which he engages “becoming ingrained within him”, no matter how quantitatively minute is the “Madda” or “Middot” to which he is exposed, even at the most formative of stages of his development. Furthermore, King Solomon recognized that in order for even the earliest educational experience to have its most substantive effect, one approach and one type of subject matter does not suit everyone. Consequently, the nature of the specific human initiate must be taken into consideration when deciding upon the contents and approach of his “Chinuch” however limited its initial doses may be:

משלי פרק כב
While the number, size, or quality of sacrifices placed upon the altar for the first time are not determined by the nature of the altar in any way, the verse in Proverbs sets a different standard for a child’s introduction to learning.

A Mishna that appears to more closely approach the concept of the first portion\(^8\) of Stage 1\(^9\) “Hergel” as delineated by Twersky deals with fasting on “Yom HaKippurim”:

\(\text{משנה מסכת יומה פרק ב מסנה ד}
\)

היתנונת יאמעumin את אינן בירמ ומכを作る המותנים ואתיםummין למידה שינא רבים שנות

\(\text{בבשרין שיאתי רגילות במצות.}\)

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\(^6\) Mishlei 22:6 “Educate the youth according to his way; (as a consequence of doing this) even when he is elderly, he will not depart from it.”

\(^7\) The following biblical commentary appears to offer a more nuanced concept of early education than that of RaMBaM in his commentary on Mishna:

\(\text{מצודת דוד משלי פרק כב פסוק \(v\)}
\)

(1) Nathan - הרוחות מתירות את מענין עבודה חלולית בשביוודת ולפי דרכ דותמה אםミニثمان ואתים tekstום מ荙 ירמ בהעבורה והא

\(\text{אופי יייקן לא יוסר מפרים כי יזחמי בישרי המעשהיה והא}

Metzudat David: “Begin and habituate the one who is a youth in years to guide him to serving God in accordance with the nature of his wisdom, whether it is small or great. And when he is habituated in the service of God, then even when he ages, he will not depart from it, because he will pay attention to understanding the characteristic of that action.”

\(^8\) Since Twersky includes in Stage 1 of “Hergel” the acquisition of “spiritual aspects” of the performance of “Mitzvot”, neither RaMBaM’s Commentary on “Menachot” nor the “Mishna” in “Yoma” appear to address this need. See the discussion regarding Twersky’s second source from “Mishna Tora” below.

\(^9\) Visions, p. 88; “Spiritualizing”, p. 37. Twersky proposes that as the child matures cognitively, the nature of “Hergel” becomes progressively more complex.


**Stage 1** (from birth until the individual can read)—induction into practice of Halacha by imitating and internalizing actions of role models, as well as listening to stories, singing songs and engaging in other activities that help the child appreciate Judaism’s beauty and power.

**Stage 2** (from reading until adulthood)—Study of “Mikra”, “Mishna”, “Talmud” so that not only subject matter is acquired but also the development of an Halachic personality and Halachic practice are promoted. The student should come to know the text, recognize the totality of the Halachic system as well as the reasons for its details as well as the greater whole. He should also come to appreciate the interplay of major Jewish principles and their applications.

\(^{10}\) Yoma 8:4 “Young children, one does not afflict them, i.e., force them to refrain from eating and drinking, on “Yom HaKippurim”, but we educate them one or two years (prior to their reaching the age of “Mitzva” obligation) in order that they will be habituated in the Commandments.”
On the one hand, it appears that RaMBaM could just as easily have raised the issue of educating children in a comment on this “Mishna” in “Yoma” since it deals directly and exclusively with the education of the young, instead of introducing his ideas about “Chinuch” much later in Tractate “Menachot”, where the explanation concerns using early childhood education only as a metaphor for the dedication of the altar. However, it could be argued that the reason why RaMBaM did not choose to apply his educational insight to the “Mishna” in “Yoma” is that whereas in the case of fasting, the relevant “Chinuch” and “Hergel” might be limited to enabling a child to develop the physical self-discipline to increasingly go without food and drink so that he will be completely accustomed to do so by the time he is Toraitically obligated once he becomes “Bar Mitzva”, a type of training that could very well be devoid of any specific cognitive content, the “Mishna” in "Menachot", by speaking of "Chinuch" with respect to the altar, allows RaMBaM to address the idea of initiation of the total entity, i.e., in the case of a child the totality of his being, the beginning of an extended process whereby his entirety—internal as well as external, physical as well as spiritual—grows and matures.

A possible homiletic approach to better understanding the parallel between altars and children could be based upon Yonatan ben Uziel’s Aramaic translation/commentary to a verse in Devarim:

דֶּבֶרֶם פְּרֵק כ (ה) וְדִבְרֵי הַשֵּׁטֶרִים אֵל הָעָם לֵאמֶר מִי הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר בָּנָה בֵית חֵדֶשׁ לֹא יוֹשֵׁב לְאֵלֵי וּשְׁבֵּי יָם וּלְאֵלֵי חָלָל בְּמִשְׁמָרָה

As an answer to the question of what specifically constitutes “Chanukat HaBayit”, the Targum states:

11 Devarim 20:5
And the officers shall speak to the people saying: What man is there who has built a new house, and has not dedicated it? Let him go and return to his house, lest he die in the war and another man dedicate it.
The definition of "Chanukat HaBayit" as the affixing of a "Mezuza" is astutely analyzed by the German exegete and scholar R. David Tzvi Hoffmann: 14

Hoffman’s understanding of “Targum Yonatan”’s clarification can lead one to then extrapolate to the cases of the altar and the child, that until these entities begin to be utilized/function for the purpose for which they were created, they are as yet in a state of incompleteness. Just as a house that is never lived in is lacking in its “house-ness”, so too an altar upon which no sacrifice has ever been offered or a human being that has never learned anything remain intrinsically lacking in terms of the functions that they were intended to fulfill. Consequently, “Chinuch” is more than mere dedication or designation; it constitutes an initiation into the entity’s ultimate purpose which therefore becomes its “Maka B’Patish” 16 (lit. the final hammer blow; the transformation of something into its final, complete form).

But even if such an homiletical perspective is proposed, the fact that the learning that “completes” a human being is never-ending, in contrast to the altar or the house with regard to which even if only a single sacrifice would be offered, or people would reside in the dwelling a single time, the identities of these objects

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12 In contrast to the dedication of the altar discussed in Menachot 4:4, which in itself is a clarification of BaMidbar 7:10, 11, 84, 88.
13 The phrase that Targum Yonatan adds is: “and he did not affix a Mezuza to dedicate it”.
14 Sefer Devarim, Netzach, Tel-Aviv, 5721, p. 399.
15 Since it is concluded in the Talmud that the obligation to affix the Mezuza is upon one who dwells in a building (see Pesachim 4a; Bava Metzia 101b; Avoda Zora 21a—Rav’s statement rejects the alternate possibility that the obligation to affix the “Mezuza” comes about by virtue of owning a structure, whether or not one dwells within it), affixing the “Mezuza” is the beginning of the act of dwelling.
16 See Mishna Shabbat 7:2.
would be complete, causes the comparison to remain difficult in my opinion. Consequently, I persist in my claim that “altars” and “children” are essentially like “apples” and “oranges”, any comparisons being strained at best, thereby throwing into question how useful such a source might prove for substantiating a particular educational vision. Beyond their sharing the word “Chinuch”, further comparisons appear to beg credulity.

The second source cited by Twersky for his understanding of the Maimonidean perspective on education comes from “Mishna Tora”:

המצים חלצות משימה והן
ויכולים ירגיל אדם עמהו בעילות אלה עד شكโบון, ועשיה וישנה וישלח
במעשים וấuות על פי הדעות האמצעיות ויחזורו בהם לפי הדבר עד שיקבעו

כולם עליי ולא יהוה בו צדיק עלי ויקבעו הדעות הנפשה...  

Twersky himself translated “De’ot”, the overall subject of “Hilchot De’ot” as “dispositions”, i.e., personality traits. In a manner similar to Twersky’s first source for “Hergel” from the Commentary on “Mishna Menachot”, this second source also appears to focus upon only a single aspect of Stage 1 of Twersky’s “Hergel”

17 With regard to the second source, the translation in Visions, p. 83, and “Spiritualizing”, pp. 29-30 are identical:

(From A Maimonides Reader, ed. Isadore Twersky, Behrman House, 1972, p. 53.)

How shall a man train himself yargil atzmo (yargil comes from the same root as hergel) in these dispositions so that they become ingrained? Let him practice again and again the actions prompted by those dispositions which are the mean between the extremes, and repeat them continually until they become easy and no longer irksome to him, and so the corresponding dispositions will become a fixed part of his character.

18 See fn. 17.

19 It is notable that Marom, with regard to the first source from the Commentary on the Mishna, translated the term “Middot” as “proper dispositions”—see fn. 4. From the examples of “De’ot” that RaMBaM provides in Mishna Tora, Hilchot De’ot 1:1, e.g., anger vs. calm, haughtiness vs. humility, uncontrolled lust/desire vs. absence of lusts, etc., it would appear that “Hilchot De’ot” is the context for the discussion of “dispositions”. These “De’ot” however appear to be not the result of instruction, but rather are indigenous to an individual’s personality and sometimes do need of adjustment via positive/negative reinforcement and self-conscious neutralization via striving to achieve the opposite extreme. Whereas I would argue that one cannot teach “De’ot”, but rather can only hope to sublimate and redirect them, “Middot”, the term used in the Commentary on the “Mishna”, which could be translated as “exemplary attributes, modes of behavior”, are proper subjects of education. Saks’ translation of “Middot” as “ethics” is also too unspecific for my taste.

20 Visions, p. 88; “Spiritualizing”, p. 37. See fn. 10.
An educational concept, i.e., repetitions of actions intended to instill positive habits and traits. Not only is Tora study, the primary component of Stages 2 and 3 of the “Hergel”21 that Twersky promotes for Jewish education, nowhere to be found in “Hilchot De’ot” as a means by which an individual can attempt to improve his “dispositions”, sources for the additional elements associated with Stage 1, i.e., utilizing

“the qualitative aspects of the experience of Mitzvot, and accompanying stories from Jewish lore and history, songs, and customs and other mimetic devices”22 are equally not in evidence. RaMBaM in the first chapter of the “Hilchot De’ot” section of “Mishna Tora”, rather than recommending an educational process whereby an individual is taught through study of the Halachic process as well as the spiritual significance of Commandments how to act properly in keeping with Jewish tradition and values, appears instead to be recommending a “self-help” program whereby one can adjust his own behavior by identifying objectionable extremes of personality traits and subsequently attempting to adopt and internalize a corrective middle course by means of repetition and habit. The antecedent of the phrase “De’ot Eilu” (these dispositions) in Hilchot De’ot 1:7 is found in an earlier section of the same chapter:

רמ續 מקדמ 활용ת דעות פא קתלא ד
הדרד תישה היא מקדמ יבגניאש לכל דעה דעה כל הדעות לשיש ולגולם. והיה הדעת שליה היחסק השית הקצאות יהיה שליה בין כל הדעות שליה אל לו לא לו. לפיכך הוא ילך העמדים והאערתניא שישאם אדום יש שהלוי תמידות מימד תמידות ממך ומימד ממך באדום בדר
האמרויה דל שיחה שלמה בנהות...23

22 Ibid.
23 Hilchot De’ot 1:4
The proper path is the “middle” attribute between each disposition which a person possesses. This is the disposition that is equidistant from the two extremes, and is neither closer to the one or the other. Therefore the Early Scholars commanded that an individual pay attention to his dispositions constantly, evaluate them and guide them in the middle path in order that his body be whole...
In addition to this second Maimonidean source not dealing with ideas and concepts which seem to constitute the main thrust of Twersky’s ideas regarding “Hergel”, when one considers the current day school educational setting, one would be hard-pressed to identify portions of a typical school’s program, either curricular or extra-curricular, where considerable proactive effort is devoted to regulating and recasting emotions and behaviors such as anger, haughtiness, uninhibited pursuit of desires, etc. More often than not, schools are reactive to these types of behaviors and attitudes, i.e., in the event that students exhibit extreme untoward behavior, they will be subject to various disciplinary procedures, administered by a teacher, administrator, counselor or other school staff member. The idea that a school will deliberately devote classroom time to directly teaching, exhibiting, modeling, and promoting ideal behaviors while critiquing and censoring those types of deportments that are deemed objectionable, does not take place on a formal basis in the typical school setting.24 If challenged, most school personnel will contend that teaching proper behavior is the primary responsibility of the home rather than the school.25 If by including the source from “Hilchot De’ot” as a basis for his educational vision, Twersky is serious about including teaching proper “Middot” and “De’ot” among the goals of the “Hergel” approach to Jewish education, a considerable revamping of the

24 Interestingly, schools seem to become hyper-sensitive to these matters when students will be going on a trip or an athletic team will be competing away from the school campus. Another area of concern for Middle School officials is what takes place on “Shabbat” or at a party when an entire class is invited to a Bar/Bat Mitzva in a particular community. Suddenly school officials become sensitive to the impression that will be given by students associated with the school should they behave improperly. If time would be invested on an ongoing basis prior to these off-campus activities, perhaps the results would be more positive. Nevertheless, the study of proper “Middot” has never been a regular subject area in any of the schools with which I have become familiar during my 30+ years of day school teaching.

25 The extent to which the contemporary home can be relied upon by educators for instilling proper Jewish moral values and general behavior can of course be challenged. Just as at one point it was possible to assume that “Kashrut” and “Shabat” practices could be accessed by the young by means of a mimetic tradition, this has increasingly become questionable as a result of the lack of Halachic knowledge and ethical behavior on the part of many adults in the Orthodox Jewish community as well as the increasing number of “latch-key” children who do not spend quality time with their parents. The scope of “in loco parentis” has expanded more and more over the years. However, there are limits with regard to what schools and educators can be expected to reasonably take on as their responsibilities. While parents empower teachers as their “Shlichim” (surrogates) with respect to teaching their offspring Tora, how broad must we assume the definition of “Tora” to be?
programs of these schools would have to be undertaken. It is one thing to urge that Tora and “Mitzvot” be taught with philosophical and theological sophistication (Stage 2 of “Hergel”)—the subject matter is already being presented and even if staff must be retrained and the manner in which material is taught undergoes a radical reorientation, the organization of the typical school day can be maintained. However, to take on the additional educational dimension of influencing individual behavior, new thinking would be required not only with regard to how this is to be done, but also with respect to what is known as the “economy of the curriculum”. For every subject area that is newly introduced, short of lengthening the school day or the number of years required for graduation, something that is presently being taught will have to be eliminated. Determining what and how that will take place becomes not only an educational question, but even a political one in the sense that schools have certain images to uphold within their constituent communities if they wish to attract a certain type of student body.

Prior to the time that R. Yisroel Salanter’s students established “Mussar Yeshivot”, devoted to the development of proper “Middot”, no such institutions ever existed, and today the remaining “Yeshivot” that are devoted to such disciplines are extremely few in number. In “Yeshivot” where students spend all of their time devoted to Tora study, there often is a “Mussar Seder” (a time slot devoted to the study of Jewish ethical and behavioral teachings). But devoting time to such an endeavor has traditionally not been taken all that seriously within an educational setting.

A personal anecdote to illustrate the pervasive bias against the study of “Mussar”: When I returned from two years of study at an Israeli “Yeshiva”, I was determined to continue studying “Mussar” since the ideas of these classical works resonated deeply within me. I was accepted as a member of the RIETS (Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary) “Kollel” at Yeshiva University, but when I informed the “Rosh Kollel” that I would like to devote some of my allotted “Kollel” time to “Mussar” study, I was told, “All of the “Mussar” that you need to study can be found in the Talmud.” As a result of my feeling that I could not abide with such a position, I dropped out of the “Kollel” in order to pursue my Tora study in the manner most meaningful to me. Postscript: At this point in my Tora study, I would not disagree with the “Rosh Kollel”, i.e., I now have the training, life experience and perspective to perceive the ethical and moral issues underlying Talmudic discussions. However, at that earlier point in my life, I was certainly not able to do so. By extension, issues of morals and proper behavior for students in elementary and secondary schools cannot be presumed to be obvious to them by means of the primary Tora sources that they may study during their day school educations.

E.g., a typical issue in Jewish Orthodox high schools is boys studying “NaCh” (Prophets, Writings). In many places, boys are given a double period of Talmud—this is of course bemoaned by the Judaic studies faculty members that this is not enough—and the subject which is sacrificed is “NaCh”. (In one school with which I have been associated, an option to substitute a formal “Ivrit” (Hebrew language) period with another Talmud “Shiur” taught in Hebrew similarly reflects this interest in offering extra periods of Talmud within the school day (as opposed to asking students to come in earlier or stay later). When schools are

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Twersky draws the third and final source for “Hergel” from the Guide for the Perplexed, where RaMBaM lends his own interpretation to a Talmudic passage in Shabbat 31a:28

Once again, it is difficult to see the connection between the source and the conclusion that Twersky purportedly draws from it according to the Supplement in Visions in Jewish Education (p. 83).33

challenged with regard to the importance of “NaCh” for boys, they will usually respond that were they to offer less than two periods of Talmud, they would be perceived as not taking Talmud seriously and the better students would attend other institutions.

A man is required first to obtain knowledge of the Tora, then to obtain wisdom, and then to know what is incumbent upon him with regard to the legal science of the Law—I mean the drawing of inferences concerning what one should do. (A Maimonides Reader, p. 354.)

A translation of additional material appears in “Spiritualizing” (p. 30) drawn from Twersky’s “Some Aspects of the Jewish Attitude Toward the Welfare State” in Tradition 5 (1963) pp. 144-5.

Man is first required to obtain knowledge from the Tora, then to obtain wisdom, then to know what is incumbent upon him with regard to the legal science of the Law—I mean the drawing of inferences concerning what one should do. And this should be the order observed: The opinions in question should be first known as received through tradition; then they should be demonstrated; then the actions through which one’s way of life may be ennobled should be precisely defined.

Essentially the same interpretation of the source, from the Guide to the Perplexed, albeit somewhat shorter, appears in “Spiritualizing” (p. 30).
In Twersky’s view, Maimonides’ point is that a Jew is evaluated not solely by knowledge of the Tora, nor only by the recognition of its truth, but also by the ability to apply learning to practice. If the previous sources distinguished “Hergel” from the extreme of routinization, this one distinguishes it from the extreme of abstraction, or knowledge that is not applied to behavior. “Hergel” liberates Halachic practice form being a mechanical undertaking, adding to it spontaneity, subjectivity and emotion—referred to by Twersky as “Lachluchit” (succulence).

Not only is the term “Hergel” absent in this passage from the Guide, but where in this text, let alone in the Talmudic passage which RaMBaM’s comments are based upon, is there any mention of applying these lessons from tradition, wisdom and personal inference and creativity, to Halachic practice? While an educational agenda is clearly being set with respect to Tora study itself, i.e., one’s formative years should be spent in building up a rich knowledge base of the components of Jewish tradition, followed by serious reflection and attempts to be innovative in one’s understanding, the latter two elements clearly essential for the practice of “critical thinking”, where is it indicated that such study will per force impact upon religious observance? Is Twersky then advocating in the name of RaMBaM that one must only study those parts of the tradition that are “Le’Ma’aseh” (have practical application) on an everyday basis for laymen, e.g., Tractates “Berachot”, those in “Seder Moed”, and “Chullin”, so that what is learned can not only be deeply understood, reflected upon and creatively interpreted, but also be immediately applied repeatedly and consistently? Furthermore, the application of the contents of even tractates as practically oriented as these for the most part will take place outside of school and therefore not under the supervision of teachers and educational staff members. The

34 Saks, in “Spiritualizing” (p. 30) takes note of the term’s absence; the Supplement in Visions (p. 83) does not.
35 E.g., “Shabbat”, “Eiruvin”, “Pesachim”, “Rosh Hashana”, “Yoma”, “Beitza” and “Megilla”, to name those which contain the most practical material.
36 I realize that such a Talmud curriculum is the course of study at the Maimonides School, and was originally established under the guidance Rav Soloveitchik, ZaTzaL, and was continued to be overseen by Twersky when the Rav could no longer do so himself. However, does this necessarily mean that there are no alternative choices of Talmudic subject matter that could be justified as a middle and high school curricula?
only religiously practical activities that take place during the hours that a student spends in school are “Tefilla” (prayer)—usually no more than “Shacharit” and “Mincha”—and “Berachot” (Blessings)—before and after eating. How (or even whether) a student observes the Commandments and prays on “Shabbat” and “Yom Tov”, as well as what he eats aside from school breakfasts and lunches, all take place off campus and usually in unregulated settings. While a teacher could creatively orchestrate classroom scenarios wherein all sorts of Halachic dilemmas could be posed either in writing or by virtue of assorted props and artifacts, nevertheless, repeated modeling and practice will be impossible for a school to undertake. Only when the school’s teachings and Halachic positions are reinforced and carried through at home, in the community at large, while the student is away at camp, etc., would there be the possibility of a student’s being exposed to a “Hergel” educational approach. The other alternative would be to promote dormitory schools where students’ practices could be more easily regulated both inside and outside the classroom for longer periods of time. While in Israel, “dorming” during attendance at “Yeshiva Tichonit” (high school) is a widespread phenomenon, this has not been the case within the North American Jewish community. Consequently, even if the school environment could promote certain behaviors and ways of thinking, the heterodoxy that is to be found within the Modern Orthodox community in general, and the student population in Modern Orthodox schools in particular, would appear to preclude being able to count on such an all-encompassing program affecting the majority of students in light of the significant amount of time that students spend outside of school.

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37 In instances where there is no Jewish high school in a child’s home community, the family does opt to send the child elsewhere in order that he can attend an acceptable school. Nevertheless, even in this type of boarding situation, the supervision that students receive is usually not on the order of what would be necessary if the expectation is complete compliance and reflective understanding of the lessons learned in school.
2. The connotations of the term “Hergel” within the context of the Halachic tradition in general and the Mussar Movement in particular.

Whether or not one sees a clear correlation between Twersky’s presentation of his educational vision and the sources that he cites from RaMBaM’s writings, his choice of specific terminology for the overall program, i.e., “Hergel”, seems to me to be particularly counterintuitive in light of his intention to present Jewish education in a manner whereby “the quality of Tora teaching...fascinates and attracts irresistibly.”

In Talmudic passages as well as the writings of Halachic authorities down through the ages, “Hergel” appears to be associated with either instinctive actions that Halacha is attempting to control and improve, or the type of learned behavior, or “take-it-for-granted” attitude that is devoid of the type of serious thought and reflection that Twersky believes is key to meaningful Jewish education.

The concept “Hergel Aveira” (being accustomed/desensitized to transgression) is used in the Talmud with respect to two specific areas of spiritual malfeasance: a) the innate inability to resist sexual temptations (1-6) and b) carelessness in terms of “Kashrut” (7).

\[\text{משנה מסכת שבת פרק א מ麝נה:}\]

\[\text{א לא אוכל móg עלذهب מופני הרגל עבירה.}\]

\[\text{ר עובדיה מברטנורא מפני הרגל עבירה – שמתוך שמוח מתיחדים יאכלו בין חיות שיהיא בכרת.}\]

\[\text{וב בהב לברוח נקט שהמשמח קשת לחז אויאון לידיו הורגלא עביאה אמא לא אוכל הזה עו' ז.}\]

38 The invocation of the phrase “Hergel Aveira” by a Halachic authority like R. Sherira Gaon (6) and commentators on the “Mishna” such as RA”V (2, 3, 4) obviously derives from the appearance of the term in the “Mishna” (1), a “Baraita” (2) and the “Talmud Yerushalmii” (5).

39 Shabbat 1:3

A male whose status is “Zav” (ritual impurity due to abnormal seminal emissions) should not eat (alone) with a woman whose status is “Zava” (ritual impurity due to abnormal staining) because of “Hergel Aveira”.

R. Ovadia MiBartenura:

As a result of their being alone with one another, he will come to be intimate with the “Zava” which is punishable by ritual excision. Choosing “Zav” and “Zava” as the examples (as opposed to others who are prohibited from being intimate) is because physical intimacy is difficult for them (due to their physical abnormalities), and it would be reasonable to assume that in their case one
would not have to be concerned about the possibility of intimacy. (The Mishna comes to inform us) nevertheless, they should not eat alone together.

40 Pesachim 8:7
A Pesach sacrifice is not slaughtered on behalf of a single individual—these are the words of R. Yehuda. (Since it is important to avoid having leftovers from the Sacrifice since one has only a relatively short period of time to consume it, therefore it should be sacrificed on behalf of a group of people large enough to guarantee that it be completely consumed.)…A group should not be comprised of women, slaves and minors.
R. Ovadia MiBartenura:
A single group should not be made up of women and servants because of “Hergel Aveira”.

41 Yevamot 11:1
A man is permitted to marry the near-relative of a woman whom he has raped or seduced. He, however who has raped or seduced a relative of the woman to whom he is presently married, is guilty (of incest)…
R. Ovadia MiBartenura:
…(Even though according to the Tora this is permitted even during the lifetime of the woman who was raped or seduced), the Rabbis prohibited such marriages to her daughter, her sister, her mother or one of her relatives (during the lifetime of the woman who was raped or seduced) because she (the woman who was raped or seduced) is constantly in their proximity, and this will bring one to “Hergel Aveira”.

42 Avot 1:5
…And a man should not speak extensively with “the” woman. This regards his wife, all the more so with regard to a woman to whom he is not married.
R. Ovadia MiBartenura
Since it says “the” woman, rather than “a” woman, we derive that the Mishna is referring to one’s wife. There are those who say that we are specifically referring to when his wife is in a state of ritual impurity, so that one should not come to “Hergel Aveira”.
...مكان שנהגו להדליק את הנר בלילי יום הכפוیرים מדליקין
...אין מדליקין...

תלמוד ירושלמי מסכת פסחים פרק ד דף ל ט› ימי נאטרן Lopez מסכת פסחים פרק ד דף ל ט› ימי נאטרן Lopez

ר' שמעון בן אלעזר אומר: "יוה"כ שחל בשבת, ואפילו במקום שנהגו לא להדליק, מדליקין...

מקום שנהגו להדליק משובח ממקום שנהגו שלא להדליק...

רבי ברו ורבי סימון תריהון אמרין: תדע לך שהאיש הזה צנוע ואינו משמש מיטתו לאור הנר בין כמאן דאמר מדליקין בין כמאן דאמר אין מדליקין מפני הרגל עבירה; שאם הוא רואה ומתבייש, או מאן דאמר אין מדליקין שלא יראה ויתאוה...

Responsa of the Gaonim, Gaonim of the East and West, #44.

The following is the view of R. Sherira Gaon: Concerning your inquiry with regard to “All activities that a wife performs on behalf of her husband, a woman in a state of ritual impurity can also do with the exceptions of pouring a cup, making the bed, and the washing of his face, hands and feet…these three categories that the Rabbis prohibited, are not prohibited due to ritual impurity, but rather these activities brings one to “Hergel Aveira”. Consequently they wished to create a fence to distance one from transgression, but not due to ritual impurity.

Bava Metzia 91a

It has been taught: Dough may not be kneaded with milk, and if it is, the whole loaf is forbidden, because it might lead to “Hergel Aveira”.

RaShI

43 Commentary “Korban HaEida”
Throughout the year he is not intimate with his wife when there is light. Consequently when there is light (on the evening of “Yom HaKippurim”) he will not be intimate and guarantee his modesty throughout the year.

44 Mishna Pesachim 4:4.
...In a place where it is the custom to light lights on the evening of “Yom HaKippurim” one lights. In a place where it is not the custom to light lights, one does not light lights.

Yerushalmi Pesachim 4:4.
A place where it is the custom to light lights (on the evening of “Yom HaKippurim”) is superior to one where this is not the custom. Said R. Yirmiya: You should know that this is true, for behold, “Yom HaKippurim” that occurs on “Shabbat”, even a place where the custom is not to light lights, they light. R. Bo and R. Simon both said: You should know that this is true, because this man is modest (see fn. 43 above), and would not be intimate with his wife with the lights on, whether one accepts the view that the lights are to be lit, or the lights are not to be lit. According to the view that the lights are to be lit as well as the view that they are not to be lit, this is, due to “Hergel Aveira”. Either he will see (with the lights on) and be embarrassed, or according to the view that the lights should not be lit, in order that he not see, and become consumed with passion.

45 Responsa of the Gaonim, Gaonim of the East and West, #44.

The following is the view of R. Sherira Gaon: Concerning your inquiry with regard to “All activities that a wife performs on behalf of her husband, a woman in a state of ritual impurity can also do with the exceptions of pouring a cup, making the bed, and the washing of his face, hands and feet…these three categories that the Rabbis prohibited, are not prohibited due to ritual impurity, but rather these activities brings one to “Hergel Aveira”. Consequently they wished to create a fence to distance one from transgression, but not due to ritual impurity.

46 Bava Metzia 91a
It has been taught: Dough may not be kneaded with milk, and if it is, the whole loaf is forbidden, because it might lead to “Hergel Aveira”.
The application of the concept “Hergel Aveira” not only to illicit sexual behavior, but also to the self-discipline associated with the observance of the dietary laws, suggests that “Hergel” in general is to be understood as representing unthinking, undisciplined, instinctive behavior, which must be counteracted or at least sublimated by means of Toraitic and Rabbinic legislation. While the countermeasures to untoward aspects of “Hergel” might include learning and deeply understanding the Halachic system,\(^{47}\) that type of study should hardly in itself be referred to as “Hergel”.

“Hergel” as an intrinsic human quality over which control must be asserted from without rather than within, is also suggested in the following well-known prayer:

\[
\text{תלמוד בבל מסכת ברכות א ס טימד ב}
\]

הכלה לולע על מתנה אוכקר משמיע וישארא דרוה אפ שפומ. אוומר בורך המפלק הтелיל שינה על עיני זוחמה על עפפי ומאירי אלأشן בת ען,ACHERי רצון מלפינך ה.

اهلיא שמשכהני שלם, ותחק ב товаров, והריגלי לוד מזווג, ולא תרגילי לוד עבורה, ולא תבניא לוד חטא, ולא לוד אען. ולא לוד יושן ולא לוד יושן גוף, ולא לוד יושןertation חיות, ולא לוד יושן גוף, ולא לוד יושן הוגלוGES מפנין ע"ן המלאים יראות ואלי יבנהלו תלמודי עין והרוחהוים ירא, הוהו מתני שמלות.

לפניך, אוור עיני פ"א אושי המות, ברוך אתה ה' חמאיר לעולמ כל בכבדו.\(^{48}\)

\(^{47}\) Individuals associated with the “Mussar Movement” thought that the passionate study of works that deal with the Fear of Heaven and the terrible consequences that would be brought about should sinners not repent, is a means by which reprehensible practices could be at least curbed if not obliterated. However, this type of study does not appear to be what Twersky is advocating in Visions, or the various citations from his work that was studied by the Atid Fellows and referenced in “Spiritualizing”.

\(^{48}\) Berachot 60b

Upon going to bed, one says from “Shema Yisroel” until “VeHaya Im Shamaa”, (i.e., Devarim 6:4-9). And he says: Blessed is He Who Causes the bands of sleep to fall upon my eyes and slumber on my eyelids, and gives light to the apple of the eye. May it be Your Will, Oh Lord, My God, to Make me lie down in peace and Set my portion in Your Law, and Accustom me to the performance of religious duties, but do not Accustom me to transgression, and Bring me not into sin or iniquity, or into temptation, or into contempt. And may the Good Inclination have sway over me and let not the Evil Inclination have sway over me. And Deliver me from evil happenings and difficult diseases and Let not evil dreams and evil thoughts disturb me, and may my couch be flawless before You, and Enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death. Blessed are You, Oh God, Who Gives light to the whole world in Your Glory.
If an individual is expected to believe that whether or not he performs Commandments properly, and that control over his troublesome Inclinations can only be achieved with Divine Help, then of what good is study, learning the Halachic system, understanding the reasons for the Mitzvot? If, as is implied in this prayer, our behavior is essentially out of our hands, and we are at the mercy of the configuration of impulses and situations to which God Decides we are to be subjected, we cannot be held all that accountable when we fail, nor deserving of commendation when we succeed. Even if we temper the implications of the prayer by positing that we are in partnership with the Divine when it comes to our behavior, in the spirit of R. Chanina’s fundamental assumption, nevertheless, our overall “Hergel”, i.e., the physiological, emotional, intellectual qualities and predilections that we find ourselves possessing, are not obviously subject to all that much reconfiguration and emendation. Consequently, is it appropriate to presume that via Twersky’s “Hergel” involving sophisticated lifelong study, a new “Hergel” can be substituted for the old, or at least can the pre-existing “Hergel” be significantly and permanently altered for the good?

Particularly among the proponents of the “Mussar Movement”, past and present, “Hergel” both connotes a positive type or routinization of action intended

49 Berachot 33b
And R. Chanina said: All is in the hands of Heaven, with the exception of the fear of Heaven, as it is said, (Devarim 10:12) “Now what does the Lord your God Want from you aside from fear…”

50 “Mussar Movement” refers to a Jewish ethics educational and cultural movement (a “Jewish Moralist Movement”) that developed in 19th century Orthodox Eastern Europe, particularly among Lithuanian Jews. The Hebrew term “Mussar” (מוסר) while literally derived from a word meaning “tradition”, usually refers to Jewish ethics in general… This movement began among non-Hasidic Jews as a response to the social changes brought about by the Enlightenment, and the corresponding “Haskala” movement among many European Jews. In this period of history anti-Semitism, assimilation of many Jews into Christianity, poverty and
to replace regrettable habits with more desirable ones, as well as a negative quality associated with religious practice that impedes an individual’s becoming reflective, inspired and personally engaged with what he is learning and doing.

R. Yisrael Salanter, the founder of the “Mussar Movement”, discusses his understanding of “Hergel” in his “Iggeret HaMussar” which is printed in his monumental work Ohr Yisrael. He appears to expand upon the concept “Hergel Aveira” that was cited in the Talmud above, and suggests that an “objectionable” “Hergel” must be ultimately replaced with an “acceptable” one.

The poor living conditions of many Jews in the Pale of Settlement caused severe tension and disappointment. Many of the institutions of Lithuanian Jewry were beginning to break up. Many religious Jews felt their way of life was slipping away from them, observance of traditional Jewish law and custom was on the decline, and what they felt was worst of all, many of those who remained loyal to the tradition were losing their emotional connection to the tradition’s inner meaning and ethical core... (From http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mussar_Movement)

Twersky was obviously aware of the typical implications of “Hergel” when it is stated in “Spiritualizing” p. 28.

“Hergel” might literally be translated “habituation”, but R. Twersky cautioned that this translation lends itself to a negative association with “routinization”.

Vilna, 5640.

“Igeret HaMussar”—R. Yisrael Salanter

...Our eyes have seen many transgressions that a person naturally avoids, and he would not transgress them even when outside pressure is brought to bear upon him to do so, and there are transgressions that are even more severe than these, and this very same person transgresses them easily. For example, a great portion of our brothers, the Children of Israel, the great majority if not all would not eat (bread) without ritually washing their hands, Heaven Forbid, even at a time when they are starving and in great distress. Yet when it comes to speaking badly of another which is so much more severe, they easily transgress even without a particular lust to do so. And now behold we see that the essential prevention from transgressing is to make which is routinized into second nature for a person. Consequently, even when such a person makes a great effort to walk in the ways of ethical teachings, to struggle to prevent himself from engaging in speaking badly of others with all of his emotions and thoughts as is befitting, as long as his nature and his customary behavior does not go in this path, i.e., that he has no natural inclination to speak
Salanter posits that human nature and one’s natural tendencies ("Hergel") often stand at odds with what one knows intellectually and even consciously commits himself to live by. For Salanter and his disciples, innate "Hergel" therefore is not a method of study and practice; it is a state of being that exists whether one engages in the program that Twersky outlines or not. The object of Jewish education, be it Salanter’s “Mussar Movement” or Twersky’s educational vision, is to overcome and redirect the “Hergel” that is already extent from the earliest moment of an individual’s consciousness. Calling such a process itself “Hergel” does not seem to me to capture the essence of the program or its ultimate purpose.

In the same essay, Salanter, seeming to echo at least in part Twersky’s concept of the effectiveness of deep study, does advocate serious and careful analysis of the specific Commandments that the individual has the most trouble observing properly:

This is well-known that a change in nature can only come about via study and considerable “Hergel” (it would appear that Salanter is referring to routinization intended to counter the objectionable particular natural tendencies). Therefore the fundamental principle and the most substantial pillar by which one can prepare himself to guard against transgressions and promote the fulfillment of Commandments is the great study of this “Halacha” that pertains to this specific transgression or Commandment. In particular, a close and precise study, because this type of

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54 It would appear that Salanter is not concerned with a comprehensive approach to Tora study as outlined by Twersky, but rather that a student should focus upon studying those Commandments which the person is presently failing to observe. Using his own examples, someone who has no trouble washing his hands before eating bread, should therefore not focus his Tora study on the “Mitzva” of “Netilat Yadayim” but rather on the transgression of “Lashon HaRa” about which he presently is not careful. Although later in “Iggeret Mussar” Salanter does note that the careful study of any Tora topic should contribute to higher sensitivity to Halacha in general, he does not outline specifically what a person should study and the manner in which he ought to go about it independent of his personal shortcomings and weaknesses, as does Twersky.

55 Ibid.
Yet Salanter does not see such study as the sole, or even the most important means by which the educational goal that he has outlined, i.e., the improvement of personal behavior, is realized, as Twersky suggests in his contribution to Visions and the various citations of his writings in “Spiritualizing”. For Salanter, there is another contributing component to his educational vision that carries at least equal weight along with careful study of the Commandments.

Salanter would appear to believe that study of the Tora, however sophisticated and all-encompassing, which is exclusively intellectual and devoid of the emotional element of paying attention to the development of a powerful, visceral sense of the Fear of Heaven, will not result in the students’ overcoming their innate “Hergel” and devoting themselves throughout their lives to overall compliance with the Tora and its Mitzvot. Twersky does address an emotional component, i.e., “Ahavat HaShem”

study causes a powerful impression upon the soul leading the transgression to become distanced from him in terms of his nature…”

56 Bava Batra 16a

Rava said: Iyov sought to remove accountability from the entire world. He said, “Master of the Universe! You have Created the ox with split hooves and You have Created the donkey with whole hooves; You have Created “Gan Eiden” (Paradise) and You have Created “Geiinnom” (Hades); You have Created righteous men and You have Created wicked men, and who can prevent You?” His companions answered him, (Iyov 15:4) “You do away with fear and restrain devotion before God’. If God Created the Evil Inclination, He also Created the Tora as antidote.”

57 “Iggeret HaMusar”—R. Yisrael Salanter

By this (Talmudic passage), the Sages of Blessed Memory instruct that the antidote constituted by Tora is the Fear that emanates from it, as the verse cited above stated, “You do away with fear”. And this is a physical/concrete quality, understood in the eyes of flesh and blood, the cause of the cure for those sick in spirit—if an individual focuses his heart and soul upon the fear of the Tora, to know and understand from the Tora that every transgression carries with it powerful and awesome punishments, and each Commandment is accompanied by exalted rewards.
(the love of God), but only within the context of a result of proper Tora study rather than as a motivator to study in the first place. Whereas Salanter’s recommendation that the student become acquainted with the serious consequences of non-compliance with the tenets of the Tora so that he will realize how important it is that he learn what proper behavior entails, Twersky assumes that all-encompassing study alone will achieve the same goal. While I am fairly certain that in our contemporary day schools, “scare tactics” such as those suggested by Salanter will for the most part prove unsuccessful, and will be resisted by not only students, but their families as well, to assume that students will want to and then actually succeed in studying so well and completely that they become enamored with Tora and Mitzvot for the rest of their lives, is not in my opinion terribly likely either. I agree with Salanter that some sort of urgent motivator must be found, even if I disagree with the specific strategy that he recommends; Twersky, on the other hand, only focuses upon process and desired outcome, without analyzing how educators will influence students to subject themselves to such a rigorous and lengthy course of study.

I would like to extend the critique of Twersky’s educational vision implied by Salanter’s “Iggeret HaMussar”, i.e., except for a portion of Stage 1 of “Hergel” there is no attention paid to the religious emotional dimension of the student during the educational process, one step further. If the goals of Twersky’s “Hergel” is “Ahavat HaShem” and “Avodat HaShem” (the service of HaShem via the performance of Commandments), there is a presumption that students’ strong belief

59 Salanter of course was not the first to suggest an emphasis upon “Yirat HaShem”. Classical works dedicated to religious self-improvement already from the medieval period, e.g., Mesilat Yesharim, Sha’arei Teshuva, etc. reflect a similar consideration. Nevertheless, Salanter as founder of the “Mussar” Movement, placed these issues front and center after their having fallen into disregard.
60 See Visions, p. 88; “Spiritualizing”, p. 37.
in God is a foregone conclusion, and the educator’s challenge is to build upon that belief and offer the student a means by which to consolidate and thereby strengthen his faith and practice by means of understanding the Halachic system and its spiritual implications. In my experience, this is a presumption that over the years has proven resoundingly false. To look for theological implications during the course of Tora study, instead of adding to the mystery and inspiration of what is being studied, might in fact create a barrier between the student and the subject matter should the student not share or at least have doubts about the underlying postulate of traditional Judaism, i.e., God’s very Existence.

When asked by Lookjed (http://www.lookstein.org/lookjed/read.php?f=1&i=13476&t=13476) at the beginning of the current school year to submit a focal point for day schools to consider, I wrote the following:

When thinking about where Orthodox Jewish day schools might place renewed emphasis both curricularly as well as experientially, I would advocate that God and the manner in which an awareness of His Presence should impact all that we do should be made the central theme of all religious education initiatives. If “Avodat HaShem” is the ultimate purpose of Judaism and Jewish belief, I am not sure that day schools are presently doing enough to nurture such a sensibility. While a symptom of the problem is the quality of “Tefilla” (prayer) that the average day school student engages in not only within the school precincts, but also on “Shabbat”, “Yom Tov” and during vacation times - if a student sensed a personal closeness to “HaShem”, his/her “Tefilla” per force would have to be serious and heartfelt - I believe that the manner in which the subject matter of the “Shiurim” that comprise roughly half of the dual curriculum is approached, also contributes to spiritual aridity. “TaNaCh”, “Tora SheB’Al Peh”, “Halacha” and “Hashkafa” must all be perceived by teachers and students as so much more than mere examples of ancient literature and commentaries that comprise Jewish culture and tradition. While wishing our students to achieve literacy with regard to the texts and concepts of our heritage is an important goal for our educational institutions, nevertheless I would maintain that literacy must be understood as little more than a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Even if a student upon graduation can competently read, decode, analyze and comprehend Jewish primary and secondary texts, if s/he is devoid of spirituality and a sense of having a relationship with the Divine, then literally and figuratively “Ikar Chaser Min HaSefer” (the essence is missing from the text). I have always been inspired not only in my personal study, but also in my teaching by the insight of R. Chayim Volozhin in his commentary “Ruach Chayim” on Pirkei Avot 1:1: For when one engaged in the study of Talmud and Codes and “Tosafot”, and in his research and dialectical discourse concerning them, he is attached (“deveikut”) to the Holy One for all comes from Sinai ... The Holy One and Tora are a unity, and he who is attached to His Tora is attached to Him.[1] Placing God front and center in the day school experience is crucial to the viability of Orthodox day school education.

I am wondering if Twersky’s “Hergel” will necessarily make inroads into this problem that presently besets many Modern Orthodox day schools.

Many like to cite the following passage from “Talmud Yerushalmi” to justify focusing upon Tora study, even at the expense of theology, and the “bigger questions”:

61 When asked by Lookjed (http://www.lookstein.org/lookjed/read.php?f=1&i=13476&t=13476) at the beginning of the current school year to submit a focal point for day schools to consider, I wrote the following:

When thinking about where Orthodox Jewish day schools might place renewed emphasis both curricularly as well as experientially, I would advocate that God and the manner in which an awareness of His Presence should impact all that we do should be made the central theme of all religious education initiatives. If “Avodat HaShem” is the ultimate purpose of Judaism and Jewish belief, I am not sure that day schools are presently doing enough to nurture such a sensibility. While a symptom of the problem is the quality of “Tefilla” (prayer) that the average day school student engages in not only within the school precincts, but also on “Shabbat”, “Yom Tov” and during vacation times - if a student sensed a personal closeness to “HaShem”, his/her “Tefilla” per force would have to be serious and heartfelt - I believe that the manner in which the subject matter of the “Shiurim” that comprise roughly half of the dual curriculum is approached, also contributes to spiritual aridity. “TaNaCh”, “Tora SheB’Al Peh”, “Halacha” and “Hashkafa” must all be perceived by teachers and students as so much more than mere examples of ancient literature and commentaries that comprise Jewish culture and tradition. While wishing our students to achieve literacy with regard to the texts and concepts of our heritage is an important goal for our educational institutions, nevertheless I would maintain that literacy must be understood as little more than a means to an end rather than an end in itself. Even if a student upon graduation can competently read, decode, analyze and comprehend Jewish primary and secondary texts, if s/he is devoid of spirituality and a sense of having a relationship with the Divine, then literally and figuratively “Ikar Chaser Min HaSefer” (the essence is missing from the text). I have always been inspired not only in my personal study, but also in my teaching by the insight of R. Chayim Volozhin in his commentary “Ruach Chayim” on Pirkei Avot 1:1: For when one engaged in the study of Talmud and Codes and “Tosafot”, and in his research and dialectical discourse concerning them, he is attached (“deveikut”) to the Holy One for all comes from Sinai ... The Holy One and Tora are a unity, and he who is attached to His Tora is attached to Him.[1] Placing God front and center in the day school experience is crucial to the viability of Orthodox day school education.


62 Many like to cite the following passage from “Talmud Yerushalmi” to justify focusing upon Tora study, even at the expense of theology, and the “bigger questions”:
of “Hergel”, when we are dealing with a very young child who is not usually given to question abstract issues of belief, we can take for granted the student’s faith in God, this is certainly not true during Stages 2 and 3. Consequently, to expect “Ahavat HaShem” and “Avodat HaShem” at the end of the process when “Emuna BaShem” (belief in God) may not be extent during the beginning years of study once the child has begun to read, seems to me to be leaving a great deal to chance, and not addressing an important question within the minds of older children and adolescents, even if not for the very young.\(^{63}\) I would argue, in response to the Talmudic passage

Yerushalmi Chagiga 1:7

R. Huna, R. Yirmiya in the name of R. Shmuel b. Rav Yitzchak: We have found that the Holy One, Blessed Be He, did not Hold Israel accountable for idolatry, sexual immorality and murder; however because they despised the Tora He did Hold them accountable. What is the basis for such a conclusion? Because it (Yirmiyahu 9:12) does not say, “And God Said: Because they engaged in idolatry, sexual promiscuity and murder”, but rather “And God Said: Because they forsook My Tora.”

Said R. Chiya b. Bo: Their forsaking Me I would not Hold them accountable, as long as there remained the possibility that they would observe My Tora. Because even if they forsake Me, and keep My Tora, perhaps the “leavening” that is within it would bring them closer to Me. R. Huna said: Study Tora not for its own sake, because there is the possibility that from study for ulterior motives one will come to studying for its own sake.

While there have been instances where someone who is an agnostic or even an atheist, becomes a “truer” believe via Tora study, I am not sure that it is responsible to create an educational program that universalizes such an assumption.

\(^{63}\) Two anecdotes come to mind from my day school experiences:

While I was studying in Yeshivat Kerem B’Yavneh following my graduation from Yeshiva College, I was asked to serve as the Jewish studies teacher for a group of Middle School students completing their 8th grade in Israel. Myself having attended public school prior to YU, I assumed that the day school students whom I was teaching were all observant and that it was my role to try to deepen that observance, much within the framework that Twersky refers to as “Hergel”. On the day before the group was to return to the United States, one of the students to whom I had become close, told me that I should realize that many of the students did not observe “Shabbat”, “Kashrut”, etc. If I had known this information—I take responsibility for not inquiring at the outset regarding where these students were religiously, an error that once I began to teach professionally, I tried not to repeat—I would have geared what we were studying to engendering belief and commitment rather than trying to build on those cornerstones. Based upon Twersky’s great confidence in the power of sophisticated Tora study, would he recommend the same course of study for those who were secure in their religious faith as for those who are not?

Well into my day school career, one of my students described to me a discussion that had taken place in his English class. The subject of belief in God had come up and a vote had been taken as to whether students believed in His Existence or not. God “lost”, unfortunately. My student then told me that
in **Shabbat 31a**\(^64\) which serves as a strong basis for Salanter’s views about instilling fear of Heaven as a religious incentive, that like “Yirat HaShem”, “Ahavat HaShem” is also to be viewed as both a prerequisite and a desired end-product of the religious experience.

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he had asked for “equal time” and would I be interested in seeing the sources that he had used in his presentation to try to affirm God’s Existence. Aside from admiring this student’s self-confidence and assertiveness in the face of the majority of his peers disagreeing with him on something so fundamental (it is possible that whatever they actually believed, students enjoyed publicly displaying a rebellious point of view), I began to think about why such a discussion had never taken place in my own classes. I realized that it was “safer” for a student to bring up such an issue in a secular studies class because no matter what he would say, he would not be subject to the judgment that would inevitably be rendered by a religious teacher. But shouldn’t such subjects be discussed preferably in a traditional Jewish atmosphere and moderated by a traditional Jewish educator? I went on to devise a course that would raise issues of belief before the students on a regular basis, rather than waiting for them to raise them. But this course was not part of “Talmud” class; it was a class subject unto its own. Shouldn’t a responsible educational vision include such topics as precursors to Tora study, rather than simply assume that they will be part of the outcome?

64 The various passages appear to be oscillating between positing that “Yirat HaShem” is the goal or that it is the prerequisite:

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Shabbat 31a-b

a) (See fn. 28 for the translation of Rava’s comment, which appears to assume that “Yirat HaShem” is a **prerequisite**.)

con’t. of a) This can be compared to a man who instructed his agent, “Bring up for me a ‘Kor’ of wheat into the Loft”. He went and did so. “Did you mix in a ‘Kav’ of ‘Chumtin’?” he asked him. “No”, he replied. “Then it would have been better if you never had carried it up,” he answered—**prerequisite**.

b) The Yeshiva of R. Yishmael A man may mix a “Kav” of “Chumtin” into a “Kor” of wheat and have no fear (that he will be accused of shortchanging the buyer in terms of the wheat.)—**prerequisite**.

c) Said Rabba b. Rav Huna: Every man who possesses learning without the fear of Heaven is like a treasurer who is entrusted with the inner keys, but not with the outer. How is he to enter?—**prerequisite**.

d) R. Yannai proclaimed: Woe to him who has no courtyard, but makes a gate for one. —**goal**.

e) Said R. Yehuda: The Holy One, Blessed Be He, Created His world only that men should fear Him, for it is said, (Kohelet 3:14) “God has Done it so men should fear before Him”. —**goal**.
While it is apparent that the Talmud was primarily concerned with “Hergel Aveira” and Salanter proposed that this can be substituted for with “Hergel Mitzva” or “Hergel Middot Tovot”, R. Eliyahu Dessler notes that even good “Hergel” can be problematic for the religious sensibility.

We read in “Kriyat Shema” (Devarim 6:6): “And these words that I am Commanding you today should be on your hearts.” And RaShI comments, citing the language of “Sifre”: They should not be in your eyes like an old decree that no one is curious about, but rather like a new one that everyone runs to read.

A very important lesson is learned from this. Behold “Hergel” where we accustom ourselves to something good, is very praiseworthy. How would it be possible for a person to learn good behavior other than by routinizing himself to such actions? However, there is also a great loss in “Hergel”. Whatever a person becomes accustomed to, no longer makes an impression upon his heart. For example, if we would see only for a single time an extraordinary thing, and it would not be this way constantly, e.g., we would see that one takes a grain of wheat and puts it in soft ground and water it exceedingly to the point where the grain completely decomposes. Then from this dead and decomposed grain, little by little new life begins to emerge, a complete stalk containing numerous grains, wouldn’t we be amazed by this, comparable to the actual Resurrection of the Dead? And wouldn’t we see in this an extraordinary miraculous act? So what is the reason why we


66 We read in “Kriyat Shema” (Devarim 6:6): “And these words that I am Commanding you today should be on your hearts.” And RaShI comments, citing the language of “Sifre”: They should not be in your eyes like an old decree that no one is curious about, but rather like a new one that everyone runs to read.
Consequently, if “Hergel” is not only associated with the type of non-thinking behavior that can lead one easily to sin, strips away from proper behavior its religious significance and the means by which we increase our devotion and love of “HaShem”, and prevents us from appreciating the miracles inherent in the world around us and in the nature of our very existences, to refer to an educational process intended to enhance spirituality and closeness of HaShem as “Hergel” flies in the face of what such terminology means to those acquainted with the primary sources of our literature. While I essentially agree with Dr. Twersky’s proposals for what Tora study should be, how it should be conducted the results to which it should lead, I believe that he has painted an incomplete picture in terms of an educational vision, and that the term “Hergel” is neither justified by the Maimonidean sources that he cites, or the history of the word in our classical tradition.

Over the years I have gained a great deal from Dr. Twersky’s scholarship, insights and personal example. I deeply regret that due to his premature passing, I do not see in this process a miracle? Why do we refer to this as natural and we are not astounded and amazed to see HaShem’s Acts and Wonders and Miracles—“We thank You for all Your Miracles each day on our behalves”—why don’t we notice those miracles and why don’t they impact upon us to strengthen our faith and to see His Greatness and His Power? Why? Only because of “Hergel”. In truth, there is no difference between “miracle” and “nature”, because “nature” is also a “miracle”. But “nature” does not make an impression upon us because we are accustomed to it (“SheHurgalnu”). **The principle: “Nature” is a routinized “Miracle” (“Neis Murgal”)**

But then a great question arises: How do we eliminate “Hergel”? Is it by simply thinking that a "Mitzva" should be in our eyes like something new, will this cancel our sense of “Hergel”? It is quite obvious that this will not help at all. However, deep study and serious reflection those are what will eliminate “Hergel”! Whatever a person looks into very deeply, he will find new aspects, insights, facets, whether in "Halacha" or "Aggada", prayer or "Kriyat Shema". Similarly in every Mitzva, if a person properly prepares himself for it and he finds new understandings for the intent with which he fulfills it, and he finds innovative ideas while beautifying the “Mitzva”, then it will be like something new to him. The prophet has already cried out and said, (Yeshayahu 29:13) “…their fear towards me is as a Commandment of men learned by rote”, because the fear of Heaven and the fulfillment of Commandments within the context of “Hergel” is not acceptable. …From here it is apparent that deep study and the innovation of new ideas in Tora are not only beneficial for the understanding of a topic that we might be studying, but they add to us something that is essential and fundamental—additional love of Tora, feeling enamored of the “Mitzvot”, and fear of Heaven.
can only raise these questions without being able to benefit from his personal and no
doubt enlightening responses.