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Section 2: The Pairs Structure in Avot 1

...No one can so well understand a thing and make it his own when he learns it from another as when he discovers it for himself.

Descartes, Discourse on Method

...An author who wishes to address only thoughtful men has but to write in such a way that only a very careful reader can detect the meaning of his book.

...Writing between the lines. This expression is clearly metaphoric. Any attempt to express its meaning in unmetaphoric language would lead to the discovery of a terra incognita, a field whose very dimensions are as yet unexplored and which offers ample scope for highly intriguing and even important investigations.

Leo Strauss, Persecution and the Art of Writing

Introduction

We will now turn from the Torah to a third century C. E. text, the *Mishnah*. In more than a millennium that separated the composition of the Decalogue from the composition of the *Mishnah*, there is no indication that the Decalogue was read as I have described it. Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.E.-50 C.E.) uses virtually the same division that appears several centuries later in the *Mekhilta* and places the first five Words according to this division on one tablet and the next five on the second tablet, like the *Mekhilta*. So there was an ancient tradition regarding the division of the Decalogue which was not consistent with the MT division. This tradition is the only non-Augustinian one that reached us in writing and was certainly current at the time of the composition of the *Mishnah*. In this section, I will present the possibility that Rabbi Judah the Prince, known simply as “Rabbi”

and traditionally cited as the author/editor of the Mishnah, was aware of another reading of the Decalogue, one consistent with reading the Decalogue as five consecutive pairs of Words according to the Masoretic Text, (MT). This possibility arises from the analysis of a part of the Mishnah that presents itself as five pairs of aphorisms.

Tractate Avot

The text we are about to analyze is part of the early third century Jewish legal compendium known as the *Mishnah*. The Mishnah forms the basis for the Talmud, which was redacted over the next three centuries after the appearance of the Mishnah. Tractate Avot is *sui generis* amongst the sixty-odd tractates of the Mishnah because it contains no laws. The first four of its five chapters appear to be a loose collection of aphorisms quoted in the names of rabbis who lived in the centuries immediately preceding the publication of the Mishnah. It is probably the best known and most loved of all rabbinic writings.

From Moses to the Mishnah

The first chapter of Avot is organized chronologically. It begins with Moses and ends with the father of the author of the Mishnah, a period of more than 1500 years of biblical chronology. It begins by citing five periods that are parallel to divisions of the Bible: Moses, Joshua, The Elders (Judges), Prophets, and The Great Assembly (founded by the last of the prophets who returned from the Babylonian exile.) These are the words of the Mishnah; "Moses received instruction (torah- not *the* Torah) at Sinai and handed it down to Joshua, and Joshua to the Elders, and the Elders to the Prophets, and the Prophets to the men of the Great Assembly." We should note that whatever instruction was transmitted to the spiritual leaders of the Jewish community, it was in addition to the written Torah, which was given to each of the tribes by Moses and adjudicated by the priests. So the stated subject of the chapter is the transmission of knowledge which originated at Sinai but was not written in

the Torah and which was accessible only to the select few in each generation. If this description is accurate, then the subject of at least the first chapter of Avot is esoteric knowledge.

The Beginning of Hellenization

After introducing its subject by means of its chronology, the chapter quotes one aphorism in the name of each recipient of the esoteric teaching, beginning with the Great Assembly and Simon the Just who was its last surviving member. This is the same Simon the Just who reputedly had conversations with Alexander the Great as he passed through Palestine. Even without mentioning Alexander, the author of Avot has made it abundantly clear that this is the beginning of the Hellenistic period, because Simon the Just was followed by “Antigonos of Soco”, possibly named after Antigonos Monophtalmos, Alexander’s general. Like his Greek namesake, the Mishnah’s Antigonos is also a transitional figure who ushers in a new historical epoch based on a formal division of power. While the Hellenistic world realigned under the diadochs, the Jews of Palestine, according to the author of the Mishnah, instituted the dual leadership of the prince, or president (נשיא) and the chief justice (אב בית דין). Avot presents the individuals who held these two positions over the next three to four centuries as the recipients of the esoteric tradition.

Pseudo-History and Pseudo-Aphorisms

Avot introduces five consecutive pairs of leaders over a period that spans nearly four centuries, from the demise of the Great Assembly with the establishment of Hellenism, to the fall of the second Temple in the first century CE. One aphorism is quoted in the name of each of the ten leaders who comprised the five pairs. These ten aphorisms form the literary structure we will examine. It should be clear that the author is not writing history as we understand it. The five pairs enumerated in Avot as consecutive generations could not have

spanned the nearly four hundred year period they occupy in Avot's chronology. It would appear then, that the author's primary concern was to create the five pair structure of aphorisms, rather than deliver an accurate history. The literary structure that appears at first to be subservient to the chronology of the esoteric tradition is in fact more significant than the purported history.

The author has utilized a literary device, a pseudo-history, in order to place his composition within the framework of an esoteric tradition. It is also most likely that the aphorisms themselves are pseudepigraphical, thereby pointing to a second literary device. It is most unlikely that the statements of the earlier pairs quoted here should be the entire corpus that has survived in their names. This point will become clearer in the detailed analysis of the sayings, where we will see to what degree the aphorisms were crafted to fit the author's plan. What then was so important that the author of Avot felt he could play free with history and put words into the mouths of the leaders of previous generations?

The Puzzle of Avot and The Maharal of Prague's Solution

While it is not too difficult to see, despite appearances, that the author is not primarily concerned with history, it is not at all clear what his actual concerns are. One who looks for an answer in the content of the aphorisms quoted in the names of the ten leaders who received the esoteric Mosaic tradition will be disappointed. While the aphorisms do contain sound advice, such as "distance yourself from a bad neighbor," they can hardly be seen as justifying their appearance as the sole surviving exemplars of the wisdom of those who inherited the esoteric tradition from Moses. The key to unlocking this conundrum is found in a little-read sixteenth century commentary on Avot.

The Maharal of Prague (Rabbi Judah Loew, 1525-1609) viewed the Mishnah as a composition rather than a collection. He did not use such terminology, of course, but this

view is clearly implicit in his explanation of how the various parts of the text are related. In his unique commentary, *Derekh Hayyim*, he demonstrates that this passage must, in fact, be read as a literary and philosophical composition. Perhaps because of the obscurity of the Maharal's language and the complexity of his ideas, the implications of his reading have not yet been fully appreciated. After analyzing the Pairs according to the Maharal, we will return to the question of why this passage was placed in the framework of the transmission of an esoteric tradition.

The Five Pairs According to The Maharal of Prague

The Pairs, Avot ch.1, According To The Maharal Of Prague

The Maharal's Commentary	<i>The Maharal's Dyad: One based his admonition on love and the other on fear.</i>	
<i>The counsel (mussar) of each Pair adds to that of the previous Pair.</i>	A Love	B Fear
1	(4) Yose ben Yoezer of Zereda and Yose ben Yohanan of Jerusalem received tradition from them.	
<i>For the first Pair ordained correct behavior in regard to those members of one's household to whom he is most closely related.</i>	Yose ben Yoezer of Zereda said: Let your house be a meeting place for the Sages; sit in the dust of their feet, and drink in their words thirstily.	(5) Yose ben Yohanan of Jerusalem said: Let your house be open wide; let the needy be part of your household. Do not speak too much with women. They said this of one's own wife; how much more is it true of another man's wife. Hence the Sages said: When a man speaks too much with women he brings evil upon himself, neglects the study of the Law and in the end will come to perdition.
2	(6) Joshua ben Perahia and Nittai the Arbelite received tradition from them.	
<i>After this, the second Pair ordained behavior toward one's teacher, friends and neighbors, who are more distant but still close to one.</i>	Joshua ben Perahia said: Get yourself a teacher, acquire a comrade, and give the benefit of the doubt.	(7) Nittai the Arbelite said: Stay away from an evil neighbor, do not associate with the wicked, and do not despair of retribution.
3	(8) Judah ben Tabbai and Simon ben Shetah received tradition from them.	
<i>Then the third Pair</i>	Judah ben Tabbai said:	(9) Simon ben Shetah said:

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<p><i>ordained behavior toward those one judges and leads, for they are yet more distant.</i></p>	<p>Act not the part of counsel; while the litigants stand before you, regard them as guilty, but as they leave, regard them as innocent, for they have accepted the verdict.</p>	<p>Examine the witnesses thoroughly, and watch your words, lest they learn from them to lie.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">4</p> <p><i>And after that, the fourth Pair spoke of the behavior of one who gives orders, who is even further removed, for being over the others he is set apart from them....</i></p>	<p>(10) Shemaia and Avtalion received tradition from them.</p> <p>Shemaia said: Love labor, hate domination, and do not make yourself known to the ruling powers.</p>	<p>Avtalion said: Sages, watch your words, lest you incur the penalty of exile, and be banished to a place of evil waters, and the disciples that follow you drink and die, and the Heavenly Name be profaned.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">5</p> <p><i>Finally, the fifth Pair ordained correct behavior in regard to all men, that the bond of peace be not broken; for there is no greater order than that of the world as a whole.</i></p>	<p>(12) Hillel and Shammai received tradition from them.</p> <p>Hillel said: Be of the students of Aaron, loving peace, pursuing peace, loving one's fellowmen and drawing them close to the Torah. (13) He also said: He who invokes the Name will lose his name; he who adds not will be taken away; he who studies not deserves death; and he who makes use of the Crown will soon be gone. (14) He also said: If I am not for myself, who will be for me; and if I am only for myself, what am I; and if not now, when?</p>	<p>(15) Shammai said: Make regular your [study of the] Torah; say little and do much; and greet everyone cheerfully.</p>

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הזוגות, אבות א', על פי המהר"ל מפראג

'אחד היה מזהיר על האהבה והשני על היראה' (ג"ג)

תיאור המהר"ל

'כל מוסר של הזוגות כל אחד מוסיף על שלפניו

ב יראה	א אהבה
<p>יוסי בן יועזר איש צרדה ויוסי בן יוחנן איש ירושלים קבלו מהם</p> <p>(ה) יוסי בן יוחנן איש ירושלים אומר יהי ביתך פתוח לרוחה ויהיו עניי בני ביתך ואל תרבה שיחה אם האישה (באשתו אמרו קל וחומר באשת חברו מכאן אמרו חכמים כל המרבה שיחה אם האישה גורם רע לעצמו ובוטל מדברי תורה וסופו יורש גיהנם)</p>	<p>יוסי בן יועזר איש צרדה אומר יהי ביתך בית ועד לחכמים והוי מתאבק בעפר רגליהם והוי שותה בצמא את דבריהם</p>
<p>(ז) נתאי הארבלי אומר הרחק משכן רע ואל תתחבר לרשע ואל תתיאש מן הפרענות</p>	<p>(ו) יהושע בן פרחיה ונתאי הארבלי קבלו מהם</p> <p>יהושע בן פרחיה אומר עשה לך רב וקנה לך חבר והוי דן את כל האדם לכף זכות</p>
<p>(ט) שמעון בן שטח אומר הוי מרבה לחקור את העדים והוי זהיר בדבריך שמא מתוכם ילמדו לשקר</p>	<p>(ח) יהודה בן טבאי ושמעון בן שטח קבלו מהם</p> <p>יהודה בן טבאי אומר אל תעש עצמך כעורכי הדינין וכשהיו בעלי הדינים עומדים לפניך יהיו בעיניך כרשעים וכשנפטרים מלפניך יהיו בעיניך כזכאין כשקבלו עליהם את הדין</p>
<p>(יא) אבטליון אומר חכמים הזהרו בדבריכם שמא תחובו חובת גלות ותגלו למקום מים הרעים וישתו התלמידים הבאים אחריכם וימותו ונמצא שם שמים מתחלל</p>	<p>(י) שמעיה ואבטליון קבלו מהם</p> <p>שמעיה אומר אהב את המלאכה ושנא את הרבנות ואל תתודע לרשות</p>
<p>(טו) שמאי אומר עשה תורתך קבע אמור מעט ועשה הרבה והוי מקבל את כל האדם בסבר פנים יפות</p>	<p>(יב) הלל ושמאי קבלו מהם</p> <p>הלל אומר הוי מתלמידיו שלאהרן אוהב שלום ורודף שלום אוהב את הבריות ומקרבן לתורה (יג) הוא היה אומר נגד שמא אבד שמה ודלא מוסיף יסוף ודלא יליף קטלא חיב ודאשתמש בתגא חלף (יד) הוא היה אומר אם אין אני לי מי לי וכשאני לעצמי מה אני ואם לא עכשיו אימתי</p>

1

כי זוג הראשון תקן
ההנהגה בבני ביתו שהם
היו הקרובים אל האדם רק
שאינם האדם עצמו

2

ואח"כ תקן הזוג השני רבו
וחביריו ושכיניו שהם
יותר רחוקים ומכל מקום
הם קרובים אליו

3

ואחר כן תקן הזוג הג'
ההנהגה עם אותם שהוא
שופט ומנהיג להם שדבר
זה עוד יותר רחוק

4

ואחר כך הזוג הרביעי
מדבר בהנהגת בעל
השררה שהוא עוד יותר
רחוק במה שהוא בעל
השררה עליהם נבדל
מהם...

5

ואחר כך הזוג החמישי
תקנו כל אדם שלא יהיה
נפרד הקשור של שלום
שאינ עוד תיקון כסדר
העולם'

דרך חיים, עמוד נ"ב,
הוצ' 'יהדות', ירושלים,
תשל"א

Reading the Pairs as a Sequence

The Pairs passage comprises a literary unit with clear principles of organization. The most obvious is that the Pairs are presented in chronological order: each Pair "received tradition" from the previous one. This simple observation permits two different approaches to the text. On the one hand, it could be maintained that the contents of the statements are not related to the fact that they are part of a sequence. This is the way the text is usually read. Each aphorism is examined for its own merit. On the other hand, one could take the approach of the Maharal, looking for the connection between the content of each statement and its place in the sequence. The Maharal's reading implies that the text was arranged so as to reflect a meaningful rather than chance relationship among the aphorisms. The Maharal's comprehensive, or contextual, reading does not necessarily conflict with the more narrowly focused reading that takes each statement on its own terms. He, too, is certainly concerned with the spiritual and philosophical views of each of the speakers. But he adds two levels of possible signification. First, he relates the content of a given statement to a specific historical stage. Second, he gives a broader overview which adds its own level of meaning: the "forest" rather than just the "trees".

The Maharal demonstrates two interrelated rules of organization or conceptual elements in the structure of the Pairs passage. One is dynamic and the other static. The first relates to the flow from Pair to Pair and parallels the historical progression defined by the editor. I refer to this as a dynamic rule because it defines the movement from

one Pair to the next. The static rule points to a fixed relationship between the members of each Pair.

The Static Rule: Love and Fear

We know from the Mishnah itself (*Hagiga* 2) that each of the Pairs was comprised of the two highest officials of its generation, those who bore the titles *nasi*, President, and *av beit din*, Chief Justice. The order of the appearance of the two is consistent: in each of the five Pairs, the President precedes the Chief Justice. The first of the conceptual principles described by the Maharal relates to a uniform distinction between the content of the statements of the Presidents and those of the Chief Justices.

ויש לך לדעת כי הראשון שהוא יוסי בן יועזר הוא נשיא ויוסי בן
יוחנן הוא אב בית דין, והנשיאות הוא התרוממות מעלה ומי שנתן לו הש"י
בשביל התרוממות מעלה וגדולה הוא אוהב הש"י בשביל התרוממות
שנתן הש"י אליו, אין זה עובד רק מאהבה שיש לברך הש"י על הטוב
שעשה אתו ולפיכך מוסר שלו היה על אהבת הש"י, והאב"ד שהוא ממונה
על הדין שלכך נקרא אב"ד, ומוסר שלו על היראה כי כאשר מדתו דין יש
לו יראה ויצחק שהיתה מדתו דין נאמר (בראשית ל"א) ופחד יצחק היה
לי שבעל דין ירא פן יעבור ויעשה דבר כנגד היראה, ולפיכך האב"ד
מוסר שלו על היראה

דרך חיים ל"ז, הוצאת יהדות, ירושלים, תשל"א

You must know that the first, Yose ben Yoezer, was the President and [the second,] Yose ben Yohanan, was the Chief Justice. Now the presidency is exalted, and one whom the Lord has exalted and glorified will love the Lord for the exaltation bestowed upon him and will serve Him out of love, for he must be thankful for the goodness done to him, and therefore his instruction concerns the love of the Lord. The Chief Justice, as is implied by his title, is responsible for justice, and his instruction is connected with fear. For insofar as his characteristic quality is justice, it is based on fear. For it is stated of Isaac, whose chief attribute was justice, "The fear of Isaac filled me" (Gen. 31). For litigants are afraid of seeming to show insufficient respect [for the court]. And so the Chief Justice's admonitions concern fear.

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Each of the Pairs has a common frame of reference, with positive and negative aspects. Within this frame, the first statement emphasizes the positive and the second the negative. In the Maharal's terms, the President speaks from the viewpoint of love (אהבה) and the Chief Justice from the viewpoint of fear or awe (יראה). This is consistent with the traditionally cited difference in character between Hillel and Shammai, the fifth Pair. Hillel, the President, is considered to have been lenient and forthcoming, as opposed to Shammai, the Chief Justice, who is known to have been strict and aloof. As the Maharal points out, the text implies that this difference may have been one of role rather than of personality. In each of the five cases, the President, as we would expect from Hillel, is more positive and lenient than the Chief Justice, who like Shammai, comes across as stricter or more preoccupied with the negative. In some of the Pairs this distinction is quite obvious. For example, it is the President who asserts in positive terms, "Acquire a comrade," (קנה לך חבר) whereas the Chief Justice confines himself to the negative injunction, "Do not associate with the wicked" (אל תתחבר לרשע). In the following table I have selected the elements in each Pair that illustrate the distinction made by the Maharal.

Distinctions Between Love and Fear In the Aphorisms of the President and Chief Justice

Pair	Love-President	Fear-Chief Justice
1	drink in their words thirstily	do not speak too much with women
2	acquire a comrade	do not associate with the wicked
3	regard them as innocent	watch...lest they learn to lie
4	love labor	watch...lest... the Heavenly Name be profaned
5	loving peace... loving fellow men	say little

Following traditional interpretive methods, the Maharal stresses the consistent relationship between attitude and role in the Pairs. Literary analysis corroborates this insight. While a full analysis of all the literary techniques employed by the author of Avot is beyond the scope of this article, I will give one example now of how such an analysis would lead to conclusions like those of the Maharal. Each Chief Justice, except Nitai the Arbelite, indicates that one should limit one's speech: "Do not speak too much," "Say little," "Watch your words". This finding is consistent with the Maharal's concept of *יראה*, fear or awe, which implies a negation or limitation.

The Dynamic Rule, התפשטות, Spreading Out

The basic structural unit in our text is a Pair. Insofar as it is a Pair, the two members must have something in common. And since they are two distinct elements they must also differ. As we have seen, the elements of all the Pairs differ in the same way, thus obeying the static rule. We must now examine each Pair in order to define what its members have in common. The author has left no doubt as to the common element in the first Pair. Both statements begin with the identical phrase "Let your home be," thereby unmistakably defining the home as the common frame of reference. The home provides the origin or baseline for a conceptual process parallel to the chronological order.

The Maharal points out that each succeeding Pair "adds" to the previous one and expands on its statements. By "adds" he means that the social framework widens from Pair to Pair. While the first Pair confines itself to actions within the home, the second Pair expands the circle, going out of the home to deal with close personal contacts such

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as friends, neighbors and teachers. While the second Pair, like the first, deals with private, individual matters, the third Pair moves into a more formal area, the court of law. The Maharal describes this as yet "further" from the initial privacy of the home. The fourth Pair addresses itself to men of power, the leaders of society. The progression from the home to the halls of power is quite clear and convincing through the first four Pairs. The fifth Pair, the Maharal emphasizes, is the most inclusive of all in the reach of its statements. Hillel refers to Aaron the Peacemaker, who as high priest embodied an all-embracing social consciousness. Shammai, too, speaks of relating to humanity as a whole: "Greet everyone cheerfully." There is thus a complete progression: from the total privacy of the individual home to an overview of society. The Maharal refers to this movement from Pair to Pair as "spreading out", התפשטות.

What does the Maharal's description of the dynamic flow from Pair to Pair add to our understanding of the text? On the aesthetic level, his analysis is striking in its elegance. He has made one of the many, a whole of the parts. He has found a progression in the inner meaning of the text which runs parallel to the outward historical progression it describes (the transmission of torah from generation to generation). We are now confronted with two parallel processes which share only the sense of progression: the transfer of knowledge from the leaders of one generation to those of the next, and circles of social concern that expand steadily outward. It is clear that we are dealing with an extraordinarily complex *composition*. In light of the clear rules of organization which we have seen so far, it is impossible to view our text as a

chance collection or historical accretion. Someone put a great deal of effort into constructing this literary document.

The Pairs Draw Apart

The Maharal repeatedly refers to the foregoing principles of organization when speaking of the relationship between the members of each Pair and the flow from pair to pair. There is evidently yet another rule which he found but only hints at, one which differs in kind from the first two. The Maharal alludes to the third rule when he speaks of a gap between the President and the Chief Justice that develops during the period of the second temple. The members of the first Pair start out "close" to each other. "The succeeding Pairs draw farther away from each other": "והזוגות הבאים אחריהם יותר רחוקים." The process culminates in the establishment of the separate schools of Hillel and Shammai.

The Maharal, uncharacteristically, does not explain in detail what he means. It sounds as if he were superimposing the first two rules upon each other. From the static rule we learned that the President and the Chief Justice have a fixed relationship stemming from the difference in their roles. But over the course of five generations, as the common subject area broadens, the relationship between the members of each Pair also "broadens" in the sense that they grow apart, polarize. It could be that the matters with which they must deal become increasingly substantial, thereby heightening the differences between their positions. Alternatively, we could speculate that as the roles became more clearly defined over the generations, the individuals who occupy them became more entrenched in their respective role orientations. This line of speculation

fits well with the chronological sequence in which the Pairs are presented and would be appropriate for an idealized history of the Second Temple period. Unfortunately, as we shall see, this theory is at best only marginally relevant to the composition before us. As the Maharal might say, this would be an attractive explanation if we read Rabbinic thought (דברי חכמים) as mere speculation (סברא ואמד דעת). However, the respect due to the sages (חכמים) and their wisdom (חכמה) demands that we look for a deeper level of meaning.¹

The Progression of Literary Devices

Close analysis reveals that a subtle device is used to convey the sense of a widening gap between the Pairs. In each of the five Pairs the common frame of reference is expressed differently. For example, in the first Pair there is a simple repetition of the initial phrase. But the devices which point to the common subject change from Pair to Pair, thus creating a progression parallel to the progression described in the dynamic rule. As we will see, the overall effect of this sequence of devices is to create a sense of increasing distance between the members of the Pairs. We will see now how this "rule of literary devices" is derived from the first three Pairs and then utilize it to understand the fourth and fifth.

¹ This specific element in the Maharal's analysis of Rabbinic literature is especially worthy of further expansion. It is the key to understanding the unique character of his approach. He states again and again throughout his many books that one must take very seriously the traditional appellation "sages," חכמים. They were truly wise, and their wisdom is to be found in the Rabbinic literature which has come down to us. This is not the common form of אמונת חכמים, belief in the wisdom of the Sages, which is prepared to accept a literal understanding of texts even when they conflict with reason. The Maharal's approach demands that we study the teachings of the Rabbis as if they were philosophers of the first order, dealing with fundamental questions of metaphysics, theology and philosophy in terms which could be understood by simple people on their own level, while providing deeper insights for those capable of understanding them.

The First Pair

Yose ben Yoezer of Zereda said: Let your house be a meeting place for the Sages; sit in the dust of their feet, and drink in their words thirstily.	(5) Yose ben Yohanan of Jerusalem said: Let your house be open wide; let the needy be part of your household. Do not speak too much with women. They said this of one's own wife; how much more is it true of another man's wife. Hence the Sages said: When a man speaks too much with women he brings evil upon himself, neglects the study of the Law and in the end will come to perdition.
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The statements of the first Pair begin with the identical words "Let your house be". This has two effects. As we have seen, in reference to the second rule, it gives them an absolutely common frame of reference and directs us to seek similar frames of reference in succeeding Pairs. It is also the basis for the Maharal's description of the Pairs as beginning "close" to each other, using the same words. In terms of our modern literary analysis, we can add that their statements are also structurally similar. Both of them have three parts, speak of who should be in the home and, in the third element, relate to conversation: "Drink in their words", "Do not speak too much."

The Second Pair

Joshua ben Perahia said: Get yourself a teacher, acquire a comrade, and give the benefit of the doubt.	(7) Nittai the Arbelite said: Keep away from evil neighbors; do not associate with the wicked; and do not despair of retribution.
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The statements of the second Pair do not share as clear a linguistic link as the first pair, but structurally they are identical. Each statement has three parts. The first two point to close personal contacts and have the root "חבר", "connect", (which, translated in context means: "comrade" and "associate"), in common in the second element. The third part of each of their statements speaks of a general attitude rather than a specific relationship. It is clear that the two statements have been cast in the

same mold, even though they do not share the same language, as did the first Pair. However, since they do not have an explicit common element, they can be described as "farther apart," in line with the Maharal's observation.

The Third Pair

Judah ben Tabbai said: Act not the part of counsel; when the litigants stand before you regard them as guilty, but as they leave, regard them as innocent, for they have accepted the verdict.	Simon ben Shetah said: Examine the witnesses thoroughly, and watch your words, lest they learn to lie from them.
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The statements of the third Pair have neither a linguistic nor a structural common denominator. It is clear from their contents that both statements are addressed to a sitting judge. While the statements have diverged in form, they are still close in substance. Each of the first three Pairs indicates its common subject in a different way. I will summarize this point in the following table.

Parallels within the First Three Pairs

Pair	Literary Device	Degree of Parallel
1	a. identical opening language—"Let your house be" "יהי ביתך" b. identical structure (three parts)	absolute
2	a. similar language—"comrade, associate" "חבר" b. identical structure (three parts)	very precise
3	obviously similar subject	close

In our terms, we have seen three different types of textual parallels in the first three Pairs. In the Maharal's terms, the Pairs grow farther apart, the differences between them become more pronounced. Evidently, he is speaking in terms of form, not of content. Both speakers in the third Pair are quite clearly addressing the same audience. Their common subject is even clearer than that of the second Pair. Only when we analyze the devices utilized to define the common frame of reference in each Pair,

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does it become apparent that it is the devices themselves that are logically ordered. The similarity in the first two Pairs is based on structural and linguistic parallels. These are elements of style and can be thought of as extrinsic to the content. The statements of the third Pair have no common structure or linguistic element to tie them together, but there is an intrinsic parallel in their content. We began with an obvious linguistic parallel and have been drawn more and more into the content of the statements in order to see what they have in common. Of course, we have read the statements of only three Pairs and can not draw substantive conclusions at this point. Still, we have already seen a degree of literary sophistication in the overall scheme which demands that we be prepared to follow wherever the text may lead. It seems to be leading to the conclusion that analysis of the structure reveals additional layers of meaning. Before analyzing the literary device employed in the fourth Pair, I would like to underline this link between form and content by means of a short digression concerning the names of the Pairs.

The Progression of Names

Pair	The Names of The Pairs
1	Yose ben Yoezer of Zeredah and Yose ben Yohanan of Jerusalem
2	Joshua ben Perahia and Nittai the Arbelite
3	Judah ben Tabbai and Simon ben Shetah
4	Shemaia and Avtalion
5	Hillel and Shammai

There is a dynamic flow in the names of the Pairs which runs parallel to the chronological and conceptual flow. Through the five generations, the names undergo a process of simplification. In the first Pair, both of the names have a three-part form: first name, father's name, place of origin. Both start with the same first name, Yose, just as

their statements begin with the same words. Both have a place delimiter, as does the content of the statements, the home. In the third Pair, the names are in the standard form of "A ben (the son of) B." In terms of the structure of their statements, the second Pair is closer to the first than the third. However, the form of the names indicates an intermediate position between the other Pairs. Like the third Pair, one, Joshua ben Perahia, is in the standard form. Like the first Pair one has a place delimiter, "the Arbelite." Looking forward to the fourth and fifth Pairs, we see that they are introduced only by their first names. Since the names of the fifth Pair are shorter than those of the fourth Pair, we can infer a process of "simplification" from generation to generation. In Hebrew, we could use the word *התפשטות* to describe the process. This is the word used by the Maharal to describe the conceptual flow of expanding social circles. The same word is used for seemingly opposite processes, expansion and contraction. This is more than just a linguistic curiosity of Hebrew usage. We are about to see that the interdependence of these concepts is an essential feature of our text.

Social Circles and Social Roles

We will now examine the literary device employed in the fourth Pair. It requires the application of a lemma of the second rule. The lemma can be described as follows. Each of the expanding social circles is associated with a social role. The range of the first Pair is the home, and the role is that of householder (*בעל הבית*). In the third Pair the range is that of law or formal relations, and the role is that of judge. There is an inverse relationship between the size of the sphere of influence and the number of people in the role. Householders are much more common than judges, but their individual

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influence is less than that of a judge. This inverse relationship is the lemma, and it will lead us to the role associated with the fourth Pair.

While we have had no difficulty in identifying the roles associated with the first and third Pairs, the second is less clear. If, as in the first Pair, we derive the role from the common linguistic element, we can identify it as that of the חבר, (comrade). This role typifies the types of interpersonal relationships considered in the first elements of the second Pair. The word חבר is also the formal title of a student in the time of the Mishnah; he is a "member" of the academy. After him comes the judge, the subject of the statements of the third Pair. We see that the social circles of the second rule may imply an academic pyramid:

Judge דין
Student חבר
Householder or Layman בעל בית

Each Pair Addresses a Different Audience

We have jumped from the "social circles" pattern to one which is defined in terms of academic standing. This could imply that the basic standard for social groupings is an academic standard, or that the text forces a quantum jump, a new level of differentiation between the Pairs. Now comes the point of internal verification. All of the statements of the Pairs are imperatives. The speakers in the third Pair are not describing an abstract theory of justice. They are giving advice to judges. They and all the other Pairs are directly addressing specific role requirements. The subjects being addressed are those we identified in the academic pyramid. Therefore we were justified in making the jump from the "social circles" theory. In fact, the academic pyramid is a closer representation of the text, because it acknowledges that different types of roles

are being addressed by each Pair. Part of the artifice of the text, in fact, is the direction of each set of aphorisms to a different audience. Actually, the line between artifice and substance is no longer clear. Now we will consider how the academic pyramid is connected to the progression of literary devices.

The Literary device Suits the Audience

We found that a literary device was used to define the common subject of each Pair's statements and that each Pair addresses a specific role. Each of the devices is suited to the role being addressed. The layman is the least sophisticated and must be addressed with statements that are literally identical, "Let your house be", in order to grasp that both members of the Pair are speaking about the same subject. The student or "comrade" (חבר) is more advanced and, as his title implies, deals with connections, which is another form of the Hebrew (חיבור). He is equipped to appreciate the more subtle device used by the second Pair. The judge is told to examine carefully what the witnesses say. He involves himself with content. The first two stages are similar in that they utilize superficial similarities to establish the common element in the respective Pairs. The Judge is limited to the testimony of the witness, the content of his statements. Superficial resemblances have no significance for him. From this reading of the link between the type of literary device and the role, we are prepared to predict some things about the fourth Pair. First of all we are looking for a role on a higher level than that of the Judge of the third Pair. Secondly, we are looking for a literary device which goes beyond the content of the two aphorisms.

A Word to the Wise

The Fourth Pair

Shemaia said: Love labor, hate domination (authority), and do not make yourself known to the ruling powers.	Avtalion said: Sages, watch your words, lest you incur the penalty of exile, and be banished to a place of evil waters, and the disciples who follow you drink and die, and the Heavenly Name be profaned.
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The author has left no room for doubt as to who is next up the ladder from the judge. Avtalion's statement is addressed directly to sages, חכמים. Proof that the next category is in fact the Sages appears in Shemaia's statement. It is also the solution to a textual problem. He says שנא את הרבנות, which can be taken literally to mean "hate authority." But Shemaia is hardly likely to be telling the average citizen to rebel. If, however, he is addressing the Sages (or those who could become such), his admonition makes sense: "Those of you who have been chosen to lead must commit yourselves to the task--'love labor'-- and not become enamored of the perquisites of the role--'hate domination.'" There can be no doubt that both members of the fourth Pair address themselves to leaders. And yet it is virtually impossible to reach this conclusion without going through the process of analyzing the previous statements, abstracting the academic pyramid, and then seeing that Avtalion address "Sages". Otherwise, we would not be able to understand who the audience for Shemaia's statement is. Only because of our prediction that *both members of the fourth Pair address people in a higher role than judges* were we prepared to extend Avtalion's addressing "Sages" to Shemaia. The fact that one of the Pair addresses "Sages" verifies the existence of the academic pyramid and discloses the audience of Shemaia's statement.

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The key element in identifying the role addressed by the fourth Pair is the literal appearance of the term "Sages." But this is not the point of departure for an analysis of the statements of the fourth Pair; it is, rather, the fulfillment of a prediction. From observing the process that begins to unfold in the first three Pairs, it is possible to predict that the fourth Pair would speak to those higher up the academic pyramid than judges, and sages exactly fit the expectations. Literally, "a word to the wise is sufficient," if the word is "the wise"! The parallel in the fourth Pair is predicated upon the fact that the reader comes to the text prepared by the dynamic rule of the academic pyramid which has developed over the first three Pairs. Once he or she spots the opening, "Sages", he or she knows that the pyramid theory, that each Pair addresses those on a higher rung, is valid.

Activating the Reader

The device employed by the fourth Pair is not limited to the content of their statements, as was that of the third Pair. This new literary device requires *the reader* to be "wise" and integrate the content of the statements of the fourth Pair into the rule determined by the first three Pairs. The fourth Pair demands that the reader be aware of the previous Pairs. It dictates his or her active participation on a level beyond that of the isolated parts of the text, the level of a comprehensive overview. In terms of the progression of literary devices, the Sage transcends the limitations imposed upon the Judge who was directed to the evidence of the witnesses, the Pair which stood before him. As a Judge he could clearly determine that their statements supported each other and were addressed to a judge, thereby fulfilling the requirements for testimony. The

Sage does not limit his judgment to the evidence presented to him in the testimony of the fourth Pair. He is wise because he integrates their statements within the context of all that preceded them. The device is his inclusive reading of the text.

Avot is Not a Collection

It is no longer sufficient to say that each Pair independently addresses a particular role. The fourth Pair *requires the context of the first three Pairs* in order for its common subject to be comprehensible. This fact has implications regarding the authorship of the text. We must concede that we are reading a text written by one hand. Avot is redefining itself. Far from a collection of popular aphorisms, the text has revealed itself as a highly sophisticated literary composition. This revelation takes place in the framework of statements addressed to Sages. The exoteric *collection* has been replaced by an esoteric *composition*, one reserved for the initiated, the Sages. I believe that here, too, the text provides internal verification. Avtalion's statement, which otherwise seems inscrutable, begins to make sense if it is read as a warning to those who have begun to probe the esoteric level of the text. The key is in the reading of the word *galut*, גלות, dispersion, as גלות, *galot*, revealing.

Exoteric and Esoteric Knowledge

Avtalion's statement has *no overt meaning*. It is a cryptic metaphor addressed only to those, the Sages, who are capable of deciphering it. I suggest the possibility of reading the warning as if it said "choose your words carefully lest you be forced to reveal [more than you should]..." Not all knowledge can or should be transmitted openly. This reading of Avtalion's statement sheds additional light on part of Shamaia's

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saying: "do not make yourself known to the ruling powers." The free transmission of certain knowledge is dangerous, both to the teacher, as implied here by Shemaia, and to the student, as stated by Avtalion, "the disciples who follow you (will) drink and die." The image of knowledge as water already appeared in the first pair: "sit in the dust of their feet and drink in their words thirstily." The beginning student, the layman of the first pair, lacks the necessary tools of discernment to understand the teacher fully. Nevertheless, because of his "thirst" he may "drink" ideas which he cannot digest. Therefore the teacher must be careful not to expose the unprepared student to ideas that could harm him.

We need only to read our text as the Sages would have, in order to understand some of the potential danger inherent in the knowledge they acquired. We can now see that Avot exemplifies the dichotomy between exoteric and esoteric knowledge. For seventeen hundred years readers have been delighting in the collected aphorisms of the Sages, the exoteric Avot. Rabbis and teachers have found inspiration for countless homiletic flights within each of its sayings. Yet, from our analysis, the scholar who grasps the text as a whole is forced to say that it is a composition written by one hand, not a collection. Is the scholar free to contradict common wisdom and declare these conclusions in the marketplace? This question is similar to the question our author is addressing through Avtalion. The author has created a vehicle for transmitting esoteric knowledge to the few who can profit from it while keeping it totally hidden from the masses, for reasons yet to be discovered. At the same time, he has created a popular

work which can be used profitably by the general public, while reserving its treasures for the initiates. The continued popularity of Avot attests to the author's skill.

Predicting the Fifth Pair

The fifth Pair is the last step up the religious-academic pyramid. As such, it presents the final stage of the progression, the apex of the pyramid. If we follow the pyramid metaphor, we reach a point at the apex, which differs in kind from the previous stages. We have followed a progression of classes of people associated with academic achievement: 1) layman, 2) student, 3) judge, and 4) sage. Each class was progressively more restrictive, containing fewer members. This gave rise to the pyramid metaphor. At the apex, there is room for only a single individual, not a class. While we need not follow the metaphor slavishly, so far it has led us to a deeper understanding of Avot. Therefore, we should attempt to follow it, and ask the obvious question "who is on top of the pyramid." We will see that the answer, "I am", is just as unavoidable as the question. An examination of the progression of literary devices will lead us to that answer.

We have been following two parallel developments. The first, the revelation of the academic pyramid, was a direct corollary of the Maharal's description of the subject flow from Pair to Pair. Each Pair has a common subject. We found that the subject could be identified with a specific station on the religious-academic pyramid. The second development was the discovery of the set of literary devices associated with the various levels of the pyramid. We found that the common elements of the first two Pairs were superficial devices. The third Pair depended solely on similar content without an extrinsic device, leading us to say that the content itself was the device. With the fourth

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Pair we made a quantum jump. The device was no longer within the text of the Pair under investigation. It would remain invisible if the reader were not חכם, sagacious, if he or she were not able to abstract the dynamic rule of the first three Pairs and anticipate its application to the fourth Pair. In this sense, the text has become "interactive." Only an active reader who identified the progression of the first three Pairs would receive the feedback of internal verification which we found in Avtalion's speech. The literary device was thus dependent on the reader's wisdom. The reader-sage read the statements of the first three Pairs, formulated a theory and verified it with the fourth Pair.

Reading between the Lines

The process we have analyzed across the first four Pairs can be considered a process of education. The author has taught the reader how to read "between the lines." The reader gradually discovers that the text is two-faced, exoteric and esoteric. The exoteric text appears in the ostensible quotations of the Pairs, the common sense aphorisms such as "stay away from an evil neighbor." The esoteric text is developed between the lines, in the structure that led us to identify the process created by the flow from Pair to Pair. As we discovered the process, we also discovered that the text contained internal verification that we were on the right track, such as the fact the Avtalion addressed "Sages." The same speech can be read as an indication that the process of education of the reader is in some way completed with the fourth Pair. The reading is based on the use of the literary device, closure.

Closure is created when the end of a composition recalls the beginning. In our text it is created by the repetition of the "wisdom as water" metaphor. It first appears in

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1A as “Let your house be a meeting place for the Sages; sit in the dust of their feet, and *drink in their words thirstily.*” It reappears in 4B “Sages, watch your words, lest ... the disciples that follow you *drink and die.*” In both cases the Sages speak and the disciples “drink.” However, there is a significant difference of perspective. In 1A the reader is addressed as a thirsty disciple, but by the time we reach 4B, the reader has become a Sage. Therefore, the literary device, closure, can be understood to indicate that the education of the reader has been completed with 4B. This is an example of reading between the lines.

Having successfully completed the required analysis, the reader-student learns that he or she is being addressed by the author. His or her proven ability has won him or her the title "חכם", Sage. The fourth Pair addressed Sages; if he or she understood their message, he himself or she herself must be one of them. This awakening is at the heart of the process that we began identifying as the progression of literary devices. They were indeed devices, but different in scope than we might have thought at first. Their function was not simply to acquaint us with the common elements of the Pairs, but to make us aware of the teacher, just out of sight, who whispered encouragement at every small step of progress, finally to reveal himself with the fourth Pair. The last step of the process is thus the student's self-realization. He or she recognizes that the author is trying to reach him or her as a unique individual. The reader has already seen that the text must be viewed as esoteric, written for the few. At the pinnacle of the pyramid stands just one, the reader who has gone this far in the analysis.

Creating Torah

Once the reader becomes aware of the fact that this ostensible historical collection is in fact a composition, it must be reread and reevaluated. The reader is required to establish a new reading that will link the substance of the speeches of the fifth Pair to what has preceded. The reading must be integrative, as demanded by the new understanding that the text is a formal composition. Each reader must create a new integrated reading that will be a function of the reader's own ability to analyze, and talent to synthesize. The academic pyramid effectively self-destructs when the reader grasps its full implication: it was constructed in order to place the individual reader at the apex. From this exalted point, at the top of the pyramid, the reader must develop a reading that integrates all ten speeches in a composition that addresses the singular reader rather than the classes of the academic hierarchy with which we have dealt up to now.

Even before reading the speeches of the fifth Pair, it is clear that the reading which integrates the ten speeches must have a theme consistent with the emergence of the individual reader as the recipient of the esoteric content of the composition. We will see that "self-realization" may itself be the theme of the composition as a whole, as well as the specific subject of Pair 5. The unique reader who reads the whole text as containing a composition written between the lines will, perforce, develop a unique reading. The reading will be a function of the reader's creativity, while adhering to the framework of the text. By applying individual creativity to the task of understanding the esoteric message embedded in Avot, the reader becomes a part of the creative process

of maintaining and developing the tradition handed down from Moses to Joshua et al., as described in the opening of Avot.

Creating an Integrative Interpretation of the Pairs

In developing the metaphor of the academic pyramid, we have focused on the “dynamic” rule, the progression of the Pairs. In order to develop a fully integrated reading of the five Pair structure, it is necessary to integrate the “static” rule, the rule of the columns (the Maharal’s “love and fear”), with the dynamic rule (the progression of the five Pairs). The goal is to see how the two rules integrate into a unified composition. The author has aided us in this quest by embedding several hints within the text. Two of them are linguistic, and one is formal. One linguistic hint is based on no less than a form of the titular name the author was known by in his own lifetime, as well as later, רבי, *Rabbi, teacher par excellence*.

In each of the five Pairs, one of the speakers uses a form of the root “רב”, which has two basic meanings here, “much” and “master, authority”. Each column uses one of the meanings exclusively. In column A, 2A contains “רב” (teacher) and 4A contains “רבנות” (authority). In column B, 1B and 3B contain the verb form meaning “much” and 5B has a similar meaning in an adverbial form. The two meanings thus successively alternate from column to column: 1B, much; 2A, teacher; 3B, much; 4A, authority; 5B, much. So we have two pieces of evidence that the choice of this root is not arbitrary. The first is that one speaker in each Pair uses this root, but never both. The second is that the two meanings successively alternate columns.

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The second linguistic hint is that four of the five speeches in column B contain warnings regarding speech: 1B) “Do not speak too much”; 3B) “watch your words”; 4B) “watch your words”, 5B) “say little”. None of the speeches in column A contain similar references to speech. Since all the occurrences restrict the speech of the individual addressed in the aphorism, we can conclude that column B addresses people who have a need or tendency to speak.

A third hint is found in the substance of the ten speeches. Five of them refer to the consequences of actions, 1B, 2B, 3B, 4B and 5A. In the first four Pairs, those that comprise the academic pyramid, column B exclusively points to the consequences of actions. The last two hints combine in a way that also clarifies the first. The fact that speech appears exclusively in column B, would seem to indicate that B focuses on interactions with others, as opposed to A, which focuses on the self. Consequently, the consequences associated with social interactions also appear in B. If column B contains a social component lacking in column A, that could explain the first hint also. The meaning of “רַב”, used in B, much, could imply that this column deals with manifoldness, as opposed to A which has a more unitary subject. This distinction is locked down by one more structural consideration, which we will examine now.

Three Speeches and Three Speakers

1B	5A
<p>a. Yose ben Yohanan of Jerusalem said: Let your house be open wide; let the needy be part of your household. Do not speak too much with women.</p> <p>b. They said this of one's own wife; how much more is it true of another man's wife.</p> <p>c. Hence the Sages said: When a man speaks too much with women he brings evil upon himself, neglects the study of the Law and in the end will come to perdition.</p>	<p>a. Hillel said: Be of the students of Aaron, loving peace, pursuing peace, loving one's fellowmen and drawing them close to the Torah.</p> <p>b. He also said: He who invokes the Name will lose his name; he who adds not will be taken away; he who studies not deserves death; and he who makes use of the Crown will soon be gone.</p> <p>c. He also said: If I am not for myself, who will be for me; and if I am only for myself, what am I; and if not now, when?</p>

We are now going to compare two unusual speeches, Yose ben Yohanan's, 1B, and Hillel's, 5A. These speeches are related chiasmically: 1B is at the beginning of column B, and 5A is at the end of column A. Each has been clearly marked by Rabbi as an exception. 1B is an exception because it contains three speakers. 5A is an exception because it contains three speeches. We will see that these two exceptions may be the "exceptions that come to teach the rule". The rule which they teach is: how to read the five Pair structure as an integrated composition. By closely comparing these two units, 1B and 5A, we will see how to integrate the static rule of the columns with the dynamic rule of the Pairs.

While each of the other sages in the text has just one speech quoted in his name, Hillel has three. The first is introduced as all others, "Hillel said"; the next two are introduced "He also said." The first of these three speeches is similar to those of the other nine Sages because it is a second person imperative. Hillel's second speech is

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formatted in the third person and his third speech is in the first person. These unique formats in the second and third speeches emphasize the fact that they should be seen as additions to his first speech, which fits the overall format of second person imperatives. This unusual three-speech unit is balanced by an equally unusual unit, 1B, which contains three speakers. Yose ben Yohanan's speech ends with: "Do not speak too much with women." Following it are two external additions, "They *said* this of one's own wife...", and "Hence the Sages *said*..." So both 1B and 5A are similarly "enlarged"; 1B contains speeches by two extra speakers and 5A contains two extra speeches by Hillel. Since 1B and 5A are in the first and last Pairs, they help define the framework, or the limits, of the Pairs. Specifically, Yose ben Yohanan is the first speaker in column B, while Hillel, 5A, is the last speaker in column A. The inverse placement of the two "enlarged" speeches, together with the inverse enlargement of speakers and speeches, led me to look for an inversion in the contents of the speeches. I quickly realized that the type of "enlargement" pointed to the link with the content.

The additions to 1B are outside commentaries and thus extrinsic to Yose ben Yohanan's speech. The additions to 5A are by the same speaker, Hillel, and so should be considered in-place, or intrinsic. I then saw that the distinction between "external and internal" or "extrinsic and intrinsic" or "other and self" could replace the Maharal's "fear and love" as the dyad that best characterizes the distinction between the columns in an integrated reading. I then interpreted the expansion of 1B to indicate that the emphasis in Pair 1 was on "the other" or "the external", and Pair 5 "the self" or "internal". The evidence gathered from the three "hints" supported this distinction between the

columns. The five-step process would then be seen as the transformation of the individual from a state of dependence on external influences, to one of independence, capped by Hillel's "If I am not for myself, who will be for me". Each of the three intermediate Pairs could then be read as facilitating the shift from the dependence on the external in column B to creative independence in column A. This process would integrate the static and dynamic rules into a tightly woven fabric.

Summary of the Proposed Integrated Reading of the Five Pairs

Each of the five Pairs contains one speech which points "inwards" (A) and one which points "outwards" (B). Speech (A) focuses on the individual and speech (B) focuses on the individual's contacts with the "outside" world. As the individual develops internally, his or her dependence on the outside diminishes, reaching the stage of full "self-actualization" in Pair 5. In the first stage, Pair 1, the individual is considered a vessel that needs filling, a tabula rasa, thus the metaphor of the house. At this beginning stage, there is complete dependence on the external world: "Let your house be open wide", (1B). Even the inner person -within the "house"- is dependent on the input from others: "drink in their words thirstily", (1A). At the other extreme, we hear Hillel assert "If I am not for myself, who will be for me" (5A). By stage 5, the individual has morphed from the tabula rasa totally dependent on input from others, to an independent "self-starter". (This polarization of the extremes is reflected in a similar five-part structure in the second chapter of Avot. There, Raban Yochanan ben Zakai describes the character of each of his five students. He calls the first "a sealed cistern which loses not a drop", and the fifth "a spring that ever flows stronger." Although both descriptions employ a water

motif, the first student merely contains “water”, while the fifth is an ever-growing source of “water”.) We are now prepared to see how Hillel and Shammai address the reader’s creative independence.

Hillel and Shammai

The fifth Pair, Hillel and Shammai, are a class apart from the previous four Pairs about whom we know very little and whose rulings had a minimal influence on the development of Jewish law. Hillel and Shammai are both transitional as well as seminal figures, being at the same time the leaders of the last generation of Second temple scholars and the founders of two new schools, named after them, which would have tremendous influence on future generations of scholars. The founding of these schools can be seen as the beginning of the rabbinic era, which parallels the early development of Christianity. The disputes between these two first century schools constitute the bedrock upon which the oral law developed during the rabbinic period. Over three hundred of their disputes are recorded in the Talmud. The unique status of Hillel and Shammai amongst the Pairs cannot be overestimated. It is not inconceivable that the five-Pair structure was constructed in order to present Hillel and Shammai as the final stage of a five-step process. It may be possible to encapsulate the significance of the five-part figure by considering the link between the opening words of the members of the first Pair, “Let your house be”, and the historical contributions of the schools of Hillel and Shammai.

The word that we have translated “house”, in “Let your house be...”, is the very same term that is used for “school” in “the school of Hillel.” This supports the view that

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the five-stage process is one of transformation. The private domicile of the first pair is transformed through the five-stage process into an historical reality capable of affecting not just those within the “houses” of Hillel and Shammai, but also their spiritual descendants for millennia to come. If this is the case, then we would indeed be justified in describing the process vis-à-vis the individual reader as self-actualization. This is in fact close to the Maharal’s description of the process as “יציאה מן הכוח אל הפועל”, (realization of potential). The fourth Pair addressed those who were public figures, community leaders. Through their schools, Hillel and Shammai, the fifth Pair, transcended the limitations of time and place to become leaders of a people across the ages. Even more than transmitting a received tradition, they created the framework of the future. If the transformation of the reader in the five-part process culminates in a demand to shape the future, like Hillel and Shammai, it is clear why the author hid this message deep within layers and layers of structure. It is a call for the continuous development of tradition, as we will see immediately in Hillel’s words. The beloved little book of aphorisms, Avot, has transformed itself into something as powerful and threatening as the little red book of Chairman Mao! The reader is invited to become a partner in shaping ever-changing reality. Self-actualization goes hand-in-hand with the universal creative process.

Pair 5 Self Actualization

5A Hillel said: Be of the students of Aaron, loving peace, pursuing peace, loving one's fellowmen and drawing them close to the Torah. He also said: He who invokes the Name will lose his	5B Shammai said: Make regular your [study of the] Torah; say little and do much; and greet everyone cheerfully.
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name; he who adds not will be taken away; he who studies not deserves death; and he who makes use of the Crown will soon be gone. He also said: If I am not for myself, who will be for me; and if I am only for myself, what am I; and if not now, when?	
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If the whole of the Pairs structure has been contrived to place the individual reader at the apex of the pyramid, as a participant in the creation of tradition, then the beginning of the fifth Pair would be the appropriate point to welcome the reader as a participant. I would like to read the opening of Hillel's speeches, "Be of the students of Aaron, loving peace, pursuing peace, loving one's fellowmen and drawing them close to the Torah" as the author's "welcome", as well as an example of the creation of tradition. This is the first reference of any sort to the historical Torah in the Pairs structure. At the very point where the author of Avot begins to address the self-aware, uniquely creative reader, he does so through the persona of the most rigidly defined role in the whole Torah, the High Priest. Yet, while seemingly expressing the character of one of the central figures of the Torah, Aaron the High Priest, Hillel, in fact, expresses a totally new understanding of Aaron and the High Priesthood.

The Esoteric Society of the Students of Aaron

As High Priest, Aaron occupied the highest position in the formal religious hierarchy. Moses the prophet, Aaron's brother, was the law-giver and was in continuous contact with the divine, but he did not occupy a formal position. While the Torah describes in detail the role of the High Priest, there is no such description of the "prophet". Hillel's first speech focuses the reader on the holder of the highest office in

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the Torah's theocracy, the individual at the top of the religious pyramid. (This can be read as verification of our prediction that the fifth Pair addresses the top of the pyramid.) At the same time, Hillel creates a distance by instructing the reader "Be of the students of Aaron" rather than "be like Aaron." Aaron had no students in the biblical narrative. They are clearly an invention of Hillel's. It is as if Hillel has given the name "students of Aaron" to the esoteric society which the reader has just joined and said: "Welcome to the society of the students of Aaron." Moreover, there is no biblical foundation for ascribing to Aaron the characteristics "loving peace, pursuing peace." What then might be the connection between the "society of the students of Aaron" and the qualities mentioned in the context of Hillel's first speech?

Aaron, as High Priest, was required to leave the community in order to enter the Holy of Holies and stand in the presence of God, both as an individual and as the representative of the entire nation. While God spoke to Moses, His prophet, regularly from between the cherubim, Aaron's contact with the divine was regulated by prescription, a formal process. Aaron, as High Priest, thus possessed a manual, a method, for entering into the closest possible contact with the holy. I would like to suggest that the author of Avot may have had Hillel invoke Aaron at this point both to restrain and encourage the reader who has begun to engage the esoteric. The image of Aaron restrains the reader from rushing into the holy place with strange fire like Aaron's sons, while at the same time assuring the reader that there is a method for developing intimacy with the divine, a method known to "the students of Aaron." The preconditions for undertaking the study of the method are "loving peace, pursuing peace, loving one's

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fellowmen and drawing them close to the Torah.” I would interpret these instructions as applying to two realms of experience, the private and the public. I take “loving peace, pursuing peace” as referring to the private realm since “fellowmen” are mentioned afterwards. This is consistent with the ritual of entering the Holy of Holies. Like the High Priest, students of Aaron must first pursue inner peace in order to stand before God as individuals, and then return to the community waiting in the courtyard in order to extend the experience of the holy to them.

While the invocation of Aaron in Hillel’s first speech has confirmed our prediction that we are now involved with the top of the pyramid, it is Hillel’s third speech that confirms that the individual reader has become a participant in the process. “If I am not for myself, who will be for me?” The use of the first person places the onus of self-realization squarely on the reader, as if Hillel were saying “Repeat these words after me, if I am not for myself...” The reader has been activated. Lest the now “realized” reader, who has become an “ever-growing source of water”, cause a flood, Shammai has the final word.

Hillel has addressed the final stage of the individual’s inner development. Shammai describes the face that this individual shows the world. The Hebrew phrase translated/paraphrased “greet everyone cheerfully” contains the word “face”. A more literal translation would be “receive all of humanity with a pleasant face.” The permanent “pleasant face” could be seen as a mask to hide the inner turbulence of the bubbling waters.

Conclusions

The first chapter of tractate Avot begins with a listing of the individuals who, from generation to generation, received and passed on an esoteric tradition that Moses first received from Sinai and handed down to Joshua. We began by noting an apparent dissonance within the text: while the stated subject of the chapter is the dissemination of esoteric knowledge from Moses, the contents of many of the individual aphorisms quoted in it seemed quite trivial. With the aid of the Maharal, we are now in a position to better understand the nature of the Pairs passage. There are two different ways to read the aphorisms of the Pairs, exoteric and esoteric. The exoteric, popular, reading sees each aphorism as a self contained unit. This is how virtually all commentators except the Maharal approached the text. The esoteric reading combines the ten aphorisms into a single dynamic structure which contains within it a five-step process. By carefully following the five steps, we found that the process ultimately empowers the reader to hear the voice of the author from within the text. Perhaps the clearest statement by the author is that *there is an author*, and not an editor or a redactor. The text is not what it initially presents itself to be, a compendium of wise aphorisms organized according to an historical key. What is it then?

On a purely technical level, the Pairs structure is a composition constructed in the format of a table. Only a reader who deciphers the tabular structure, consisting of the organizing principles of the columns and the rows, can begin to explore the substance of the composition. To all others, the composition is invisible. Thus the composition must be viewed as esoteric because its inner message is only accessible to very careful readers, and in some way contradicts its outer message, which is available

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to the general audience. This observation should help us assuage the cognitive dissonance mentioned earlier. The framework of the chapter is the transmission of esoteric knowledge, and the author has demonstrated a method of transmitting esoteric knowledge by means of the Pairs structure. So we can conclude that the framework is consonant with the content, both of them concern esoteric knowledge. We are left with many questions for further explorations. In the next section of this study we will address two of them: what is the source of the “literary table” employed by the author of Avot; and what is the connection between it and what Moses received from Sinai.