

TRAVERSING DICHOTOMIES

Steven D. Fraade

The word “trajectory,” as used in this series of self-reflections, usually denotes a linear progression, even if, as in most cases, the trajectory is not straight, but a continuous *arc*. Even so, my guess is that as lived, rather than as retrospectively charted, my story is at least as *dis*-continuous as continuous, as fragmented as whole, as zigzag as linear. The anecdotes of my intellectual progression only add up to being a unitary teleological line through the opportunity, here appreciatively provided by the Koerner Center, to imagine and re-imagine them in roughly chronological sequence. Viewed differently, those episodes of my intertwined personal and intellectual lives constitute a *variety* of trajectories that crisscross and collide, even if, in their telling and retelling, they constitute, or at least I imagine them as, something somehow whole and complete.

The “theme,” such as it is, of this retelling is that of dichotomies that I have persistently straddled, traversed, and even transgressed. I will focus on my more formative years, in good Freudian (no relation) fashion, rather than on my later academic path and achievements since coming to Yale, which you can peruse easily enough on my academic website.

Parents and Grandparents

I begin where I began, in the Washington Heights neighborhood of Manhattan, more specifically the section north of the George Washington Bridge, today called by real estate agents as Hudson Heights, growing up in close proximity to Fort Tryon Park and the Cloisters in a two-bedroom apartment on Fort Washington Avenue. It was a neighborhood with excellent public schools, that was largely, at least in my experience, populated by European Jewish refugees from the Nazi plague. My parents, especially my mother, and their family and friends, fit in easily as German refugees. As I liked to say, the Kissingers lived across the street, and around the corner lived Dr. Ruth.

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I am told that as an infant and toddler I was raised in a bilingual German-English home, with fluency in both. However when it was time to enroll me in the neighborhood public school, across the street, my family stopped speaking German to me lest it impede my academic advancement and social acculturation. It was only in graduate school that I needed to relearn the German I had forgotten. As it turned out, multilingualism, especially as a pedagogic aid, would become an academic preoccupation of mine for years to come, down to my forthcoming book on the subject.

My mother, Dorothy (Dorothea) Spitz (Fraade, 1923–2011), an only child, arrived in Washington Heights in June of 1940, with her parents, Otto and Carola Spitz, at the age of sixteen, having escaped from Berlin, to Prague, to Amsterdam, to Paris, and, via Cleveland, eventually to Washington Heights, always managing to just escape the Nazis. Once in New York Carola worked valiantly to obtain visas and boat tickets for her mother Paula Michels Joseph (1866–1943) and brother Heinz Joseph (1900–1942?) to escape the Nazi death machine but was unable to do so in time. The Washington Heights neighborhood was both very cosmopolitan and very Jewish, with as many synagogues, it seemed to me, as there were churches.

My father Bert's (Berthold at birth in Harlem; 1915–1997) family was also Germanic, but from Riga, Latvia at the very end of the nineteenth century, having left, we think, to avoid conscription to the czar's army. The family name in Riga was Friedmann, which became Fraade (or Fraad), the reason for which has never been determined. I have never met or heard of someone named Fraade (or Fraad), who was not a descendent of David and Hannah Friedmann, my great-grandparents.

They did not hide their Jewishness, but neither did they practice its rituals and obligations except minimally: Hanukkah candles, (a greatly abbreviated) Passover Seder, occasional synagogue attendance, and minimal Jewish education and Jewish/Hebrew literacy, but with mainly, but not exclusively, Jewish friends and liberal proclivities.

Speaking of Passover, the Seder that I remember the clearest was one in which I, who, alone among the family could read the Hebrew with any accuracy, was once given the honor of leading, a real coming of age for me. However, I insisted on reading, actually chanting, the long stretches of the Haggadah in Hebrew, which my family was not accustomed to reciting, even in the English translation. My father and grandfather kept interrupting me to ask the traditional fifth Seder question, "When do we eat?" I persisted as did they. Finally, I became so upset at their lack of interest in the ritual, that I slammed shut the Haggadah book, almost upsetting the table with its full glasses of wine, went into the adjoining living room, slamming its door as well. In that living room, where we kept the family's modest record collection, I found one that I knew well, that had Hanukkah songs on one side and Christmas songs on the other. I put the record on the phonograph, Christmas songs side up, positioned the arm, turned up the volume. Opening the door to the dining room, I self-righteously proclaimed: "This is all you deserve!" Everyone, as I recall, was speechless. We proceeded directly to the meal.

For many years, I went to the Fort Tryon Jewish Center Hebrew School three times a week and to the Junior Congregation on Saturday mornings. I recall having a teacher who dressed in black and had a thick dark beard, most likely from the nearby ultra-orthodox community, whose name I do not recall, even though I was taken with his seeming gravitas. Thanks to him, one day I came home after Hebrew School and declared to my mother that I would henceforth keep kosher, something no one in our family did (not even “kosher style”). My mother, after consulting with my father, took this to be a passing “phase” that, if “humored,” I would soon “outgrow.” They compromised, as did I, on the level of *kashrut* (kosher standard) that we would maintain in our home. It worked in that we continued to eat together as a family, with my lowered level of *kashrut* tolerated and accommodated. I only “outgrew” this “phase” to the extent that I became a vegetarian my last year of college, which simplified both practically and socially keeping kosher, as it has my whole life since.

In retrospect, this incident made me think of the vocation of teaching: who knows what impact a teacher has on the countless students who never get to credit them for the impact of their teaching on their lives, or should we say, trajectories? This is especially true at the undergraduate level, where a teacher can sometimes feel like a revolving door, welcoming and parting with each generation of students in turn. Then, out of the blue, you hear from or run into a former and forgotten student, who says, “You know that course I took with you at Yale (possibly decades before), it changed my life.” Even allowing for exaggeration, it only takes a few such encounters, multiplied by some undetermined factor, to imagine the cumulative impact you must have had. I will return later to some other intellectual (and rabbinic) mentors, whom I never got around to acknowledging and thanking.

When I was young, we had a Christmas tree in our apartment in Washington Heights, which we ceased to have once I began Hebrew school and strongly objected. However, the custom persisted in my maternal grandparents’ home, even after I, when in college, boycotted the annual Christmas gathering. It caused, I now recognize and regret, great pain to my parents and grandparents, not because of what, if anything, the tree represented, but for my disrespect for the customs of the larger family and especially for those of my grandparents. Acculturation has its own internal inconsistencies and contradictions. Only later in life did I learn that the greatest Judaic scholar of the twentieth century, Gershom Scholem, grew up with a Christmas tree in his parents’ home in Berlin. He too rebelled.

Once I and my two younger brothers, Alan and Jonathan, had largely “left the house,” my mother worked for thirty-five years as the receptionist and office manager of the Fort Tryon Jewish Center, just down the street from our apartment, at the time a nominally orthodox synagogue (but with mixed, men-and-women seating), working closely with the synagogue’s founding rabbi, Rabbi Jacob Goldberg, with whom I, as an adult, developed something of a collegial friendship. Having received very little of a Jewish education growing up in Berlin, and at a boarding school in Switzerland before leaving Berlin, she now made up for lost time and opportunity. Later, she was

a vociferous advocate for equal status for women in the synagogue liturgy, which was then (and is still now) a radical position to take in a synagogue which prided itself in upholding the orthodox tradition. She penned a letter to the synagogue newsletter (this being decidedly not her style), invoking the examples of her three daughters-in-law who assumed such synagogue ritual roles.

My father was a proudly cultural, social, and intellectual, nonobservant Jew. Yet, it was largely due to him, that we were members of *three* synagogues: the Hebrew Tabernacle of Washington Heights (Reform, now in Hudson Heights), the Fort Tryon Jewish Center (orthodox, now “traditional egalitarian”), and Temple Sholom (in rural New Milford, Connecticut, to which I will return shortly). Each, in its own way, was, in the words of Sesame Street, “in our neighborhood.” My father was less interested in the prayers than in the socializing that took place after (and often during) the services, and thereby the experience of neighborhood and community that each synagogue, in its way, embodied and conveyed. Their multiple synagogue memberships reflect their multiple lives and identities.

My father was an automotive engineer (and a frustrated intellectual), whose work required him to travel most of the week. But once he changed to an office job, he spent at least a couple of evenings a week attending a wide range of Jewish adult education classes, of which there were many available in New York. One teacher, with whom my father was enamored, was Professor Louis Feldman, a long-time professor of classics at Yeshiva University, but who was also a renowned scholar of what is sometimes referred to as Hellenistic Judaism, e.g., Philo of Alexandria and, especially Josephus. I, as a graduate student at the time, was well aware of Feldman’s high standing in academia, even if he was too “old school” for some. Since Feldman lived in Washington Heights (where Yeshiva University is located), my father, who drove to and from his evening classes, would serve as Feldman’s personal driver. This was an unlikely but mutually beneficial “friendship.” I also recall my father’s listening to the weekly radio program, *The Eternal Light*, which featured talks and performances by a wide range of scholars and artists, under the advisement of the Jewish Theological Seminary. The “eternal light” thread will reappear.

One aspect of myself, perhaps not thought of so much as intellectual (but it is), is my love of music of most kinds, but especially classical. My father’s mother, Ida Hutshing (Fraade, 1838–1915), who died before I was born, was a voice coach for opera singers in New York. My father loved to sing, especially during long family car drives. In our home, listening to music (and news) meant listening to the *New York Times*’ WQXR. I took music theory classes and instruction in piano and clarinet for over ten years at the Mannes School of Music. A photo of David Mannes, the school’s founder, and a group of young students, including myself, appeared in a *New York Times* article marking Mannes’s ninetieth birthday in 1956 and my earliest claim to fame.

Interestingly, considering my Jewish gravitational pull and several rabbis who were influential teachers and role models (on whom more below), as a child and young adult I never imagined myself becoming a rabbi when I grew up, perhaps

since it struck me as a very public job, not suited to a very private person such as me. However, I did imagine, for a time at least, being a cantor, perhaps due to my love of music, and song in particular, which I attribute to being my father's son and *his* mother's grandson. I occasionally assume a cantorial role at my neighborhood synagogue. To my love of music (and theater) I attribute at least some of my proclivity to recognizing (or imagining) the "performativity" of sacred texts and their manifold interpretations, both for the Dead Sea Scrolls and early rabbinic literature. I will return to my grandparents, especially my maternal grandmother, shortly, but only after exploring the longest-standing and most persistent dichotomy that I repeatedly traversed, that being between my identity as both a city mouse and a country mouse.

Sherman

When I was only a few months old, my parents rented a house for the summer in Sherman, Connecticut, a small rural town which is on the northwestern shore of Candlewood Lake in northernmost Fairfield County. Two years later they bought the house and its adjacent woods, which remain actively used, especially in the warmer months, by my parents' three sons and their wives, eight grandchildren, and three great-grandchildren. Back in the day, it took around two hours to drive from Washington Heights to Sherman, now around an hour and a quarter, and around the same from New Haven. When I was offered the job to teach at Yale in 1979, I accepted the job, in some small part due to New Haven's equidistance to Washington Heights and Sherman, my two family homes.

For my entire childhood and young adulthood, I spent summers in Sherman, as well as virtually every weekend in the spring and fall. During the summers I and my two younger brothers lived there with my mother, while my father joined us for the weekends. For most of those years, we managed fine without a car during the week, as from our house, the general store, the library, and the lake, being the three points on our summer compass, were a very short walk from our house, located as it is in the "village." We made weekly excursions to "town," meaning New Milford, with our next-door neighbor Bertha Warwick, a real Connecticut Yankee, who became, like her husband Joe, a professional carpenter, virtual (in the old sense) family. I continued with weekly clarinet lessons in New Milford over the summer.

The absence of TV and the proximity to the public library made me an avid and insatiable lifetime reader and bibliophile, as I would later come to think of myself. The proximity to the Sherman beach meant I was in or on the water virtually my whole life. On the weekends, my father would escape to his tenderly tended organic vegetable garden, for which he was way ahead of his time, nurturing in me a love of nature and, eventually, farming, which would play out in manyfold ways in subsequent years. My parents, especially my father, were committed to our not being just "summer folk" in Sherman.

Although our house was not fully winterized, we often spent the winter break in Sherman, staying and celebrating the winter holidays with locals, such as the Warwicks

and the Duncans, even though they knew full well and respected that we were Jewish. That they had Christmas trees in their homes did not bother me when we visited them, as it had at my parents' and grandparents' homes. In inverse fashion, when I became a bar mitzvah in March of 1962 at the Hebrew Tabernacle of Washington Heights, I remember clearly looking out to the congregation to see that among the gathered city family and friends, sat Joe and Bertha Warwick. I wondered whether Joe had driven them to the city in his pickup truck, which is all I had ever seen him drive. It was the same pickup truck with which he rescued my mother, me, and my brother Alan from the flood waters of hurricane Diane in August of 1955, as our house is built on the foundation of a grist mill that once was powered by the Sawmill River, a stream most of the year, but prone to flooding during serious hurricanes.

Even though Sherman, then more than now, was a rural "hick town," it was a community, in which everyone seemed to know and care for everyone else (sometimes to excess). My father, to our great embarrassment, would post notices of our life-cycle events and academic achievements in the biweekly *Sherman Sentinel*, under the heading, "all around the town." I had my winter friends in Washington Heights and my summer friends in Sherman (sons of farmers and tradesmen), feeling equally at home among both, notwithstanding their standing at opposite ends of the urban-rural dichotomy, representing, as it were, the world's greatest metropolis on the one hand and what seemed to be one of its smallest towns on the other. My father, in particular, loved the city as city and the country as country, throwing himself fully into each in its season, as did we, but feeling no attraction to their suburban hybrids. Although my father might be said to have lived his whole life in New York, having grown up in Harlem and having acquired his whole education, including college, in New York public schools, it could also be said that as long as I knew him, he spent half of his life and emotions in Sherman.

The dichotomy, however, was for us not so complete, as Washington Heights had its beautiful parks, and Sherman had its cultural landmarks, albeit of smaller size and lesser renown, e.g., then and now the Sherman Playhouse and now the Jewish Community Center and the Sherman Chamber Ensemble. As mentioned, Temple Sholom of New Milford was less than a ten-minute drive, and the Merryall Community Center, with its rich social and cultural program, was only a little further, but still in New Milford. As my father never tired of pointing out to me, Sherman was the home of the writer and literary critic Malcolm Cowley, the painter and sculptor Peter Blume, and the arranger and clarinetist Eric Simon, with whom my father imagined I might apprentice. At the vital heart of Sherman was the biweekly *Sherman Sentinel*, which we received by mail in Washington Heights during the winter months so as to keep abreast of local news, which in its early years Cowley edited with superb literary essays and to which my father enjoyed sending letters to the editor regarding local issues.

I spent virtually every summer working in Sherman or nearby throughout my high school and college years, not in CV-building internships but often in physical labor alongside "locals," including an assembly-line factory job in New Milford. I

learned first-hand the meaning and power of “community” (as much of a cliché as that might seem), the forms and natures of which continued to draw me in my later personal and scholarly pursuits, to which I will return anon.

Carola Spitz/Spreads

108

Carola Joseph (Spitz, 1901 Berlin–1999 New York) was my maternal adoptive grandmother. My mother’s birth mother died while birthing my mother. My mother’s father, Otto Spitz (1887–1980), married Carola Joseph in 1932, when Dorothy was nine. After marrying Otto, Carola adopted Dorothy as her daughter. She was the only mother my mother ever had and the only grandmother I ever had (my father’s mother Ida having died before I was born). I am devoting significant time to Carola since she, after my father, had the greatest intellectual impact on me of my immediate family. She supported my decision to pursue an academic career, insisting that I send her every book and article I wrote, which I found carefully collected in her apartment after her death, with indications that she had read at least some of them. She and Otto lived, for most of my childhood and adult life and until her death in 1999, in a tenth-floor apartment at West 85th Street and Central Park West overlooking Central Park. The largest room, intended as the living room, was her “studio,” where we as children loved to play (shoes off) for hours. In that studio, which we regarded as a sort of “holy of holies,” she taught, continuously almost to her death at the age of ninety-eight, her version of “physical education,” derived from her teacher, Elsa Gindler, with whom she had studied and apprenticed in Berlin. We, her family, never participated in her classes, as she maintained a curtain, so to speak, between her private, family life and her professional identity, as signified by her dual names (Spitz and Spreads). Her method, as I understand it, relied on a series of exercises intended to un-teach the body its bad “habits” and re-educate the body to its natural posture. Learning how to breathe correctly was a major emphasis of her method and practice. In 1978 she wrote an illustrated book on her breathing techniques and exercises, titled *The ABCs of Breathing*, which was reissued, slightly revised, in 1986 as *Ways to Better Breathing*. I had the privilege of contributing to the introduction, in which she noted that the lexical connections between breath, spirit, and soul trace back to ancient times and languages, including Hebrew. The book was translated into many languages and established her as a senior international guru to the Somatics health movement, wherein she was often interviewed in publications and invited to give visiting classes, especially in Germany. Her students were so devoted to her that she continued to teach them until only months before her death at age ninety-eight, using hand signals after a serious stroke left her without physical voice.

In Carola and Otto’s New York living/dining room, there was a very large floor to ceiling library of books, mainly in German, but also English. No one I knew at the time had so many books in their home. From perusing them, I could see that there were many books by and about Freud, in addition to books about psychology and

psychoanalysis more generally. After Carola's death in 1999 we discovered in her stored files the names and clinical details of students, some famous, who had been referred to her for "treatment" as a complement to psychotherapy or analysis. For purposes of privacy, we destroyed those files. Getting back to her library, there was not a Hebrew or Jewish book to be found among them, nor were there any identifying Jewish ritual objects or art in her apartment. Later I discovered that in her back, private study, she had quite a collection of books on the history of religion and comparative religion by such acclaimed scholar-authors as Mercia Eliade and Joseph Campbell. She once told me that she had taken classes with the influential Protestant theologian Paul Tillich in Germany. Clearly, and previously unknown to me, she was interested in religion in general, if not Judaism in particular.

Here is where the story gets interesting, if it has not been so already. When I became, in 1974, a graduate student in ancient Near Eastern studies at the University of Pennsylvania, every year, for many years to come, Carola would give me, for my birthday, a carefully wrapped book of Hebrew Jewish law, or scriptural commentary, or liturgy, or ritual practice, mainly in Hebrew, some with facing pages in German translation. Please recall that I had never seen a Hebrew, let alone Jewish, book in her possession. This gift-giving continued for many years, during which I must have received around twenty such books, some of which were very old (eighteenth century) in varying conditions. The most important one for me (whose value, not just monetary, she must have known since, she later told me, she spent a sizable sum to have its binding repaired and restored before giving it to me) was a famous Passover Haggadah printed in Amsterdam in 1781, in excellent condition. I still conduct the Passover Seder using it, after it not having been used for a couple of hundred years, but I handle it gingerly (so far I have managed not to slam it), leaving the similarly aged matzah crumbs between the appropriate pages to rest in peace, alongside wine stains. On the Haggadah's flyleaf, as on several others of these Hebrew books, was the name Michael Michels, who, I later learned from my genealogical research, was Carola's maternal grandfather, born in 1839 in Krefeld, Germany. Later Carola revealed to me that he had been a rabbi, and that these books were a small part of his library that she and Otto had been able to get out of Germany, and eventually to my home library.

One day, upon looking more closely at the bookcases, I noticed that due to their overflow, many books, including presumably the Hebrew ones, had been shelved, out of sight, in a back row. I would like to imagine that all of those old, Hebrew, religious books had been shelved behind and hidden by the books by and about Freud. Perhaps we might think of them as having been "post-Freudian," if I might be allowed a "Freudian slip." In any case, and as ironic as it may seem, I trace my great love (and acquisition) of *Hebrew* books, and the beginning of my own Judaic library, to my grandmother's *long-hidden* Judaic library.

In 2020, a German professor of American studies, Christoph Ribbat, published a full-length book on Carola in German in Germany, where it has sold briskly. It has

now been translated by the author into English and was recently published under the title *Breathing in Manhattan: Carola Speads – The German Jewish Gymnastics Instructor Who Brought Mindfulness to America* (Transcript Press, 2023, distributed by Columbia University Press). I worked closely with the author on the research and writing, to my great satisfaction. Its publication in English brings Carola’s story, a central part of *my* story, to a wider audience.

From Bar Mitzvah to College, or, From the “Space Age” (1962) to the “Age of Aquarius” (1968)

In my bar mitzvah speech at the end of March 1962, I spoke of coming of age in the space age. I know this since two days after that joyous day, my father took me to Steinway Hall, diagonally across 57th Street from Carnegie Hall, to professionally record an LP record with my bar mitzvah speech and Torah chanting for posterity, which I still have. Only a month previously, the astronaut John Glenn became the first American to orbit the Earth, in a five-hour flight that was followed by millions on TV. While I never aspired to being an astronaut, I was drawn to the sciences, and at Stuyvesant High School to physics and math, where I took advanced-placement courses in both, with a sense that the future of the world and society depended on scientific progress, of which I wanted to be a part. Also at Stuyvesant, I had some gifted literature teachers, who developed in me a life-long sensitivity to the performative interpretation of written and spoken words, whether in theater, poetry, or prose. My other intellectual loves, and pieces of my identity, persisted: Judaism, music, and nature.

For example, and as an example of my nerdiness, on some afternoons, when I did not have swim-team practices or meets, I would stop on my way back from high school at the central branch of the New York Public Library on 42nd and 5th, spending hours reading in the Judaic Reading Room. It always had a strange mix of people, including some asking for handouts. I recall one such person who, dressed in rags and sporting a wild beard and head of hair, proclaimed that he was the messiah and that the end was near. People tried their best to ignore him by burying their heads in their books until he left. One day (and only once) many years and life-changes later, I was teaching my introductory history of ancient Judaism at Yale and used this man to illustrate how in first-century Palestine, there were probably many such Jews wandering the roads of Judea and the Galilee, claiming messianic powers and identities. In other words, the phenomenon was not unique to the one who eventually gained a large and lasting following.

Upon returning after class to my office, I saw there was a voicemail on my phone that had been left only minutes before. I gasped when I heard that it was the head of the Judaic Collection at the library asking that I call him back. Could this be some sort of messianic sign? It turns out that Yale was a co-sponsor of the launch of a new Encyclopedia of Jews in Islamic Lands, which the Judaic Collection was hosting in a few weeks. The caller needed to make travel arrangements for a group of Yale scholars,

including me as chair of the Judaic Studies Program, to attend the event. What a coincidence! But as Freud would ask, are there “mere” coincidences devoid of meaning, in this case spanning over fifty years between my past (as aspiring nerd) and my present (as nerdy scholar)?

On other afternoons after leaving Stuyvesant on my way home, I would stop at the public music library at Lincoln Center, where I would borrow albums of classical records to bring home with me to record them on reel-to-reel tapes for my listening pleasure. My musical interests expanded to include playing clarinet in a high school jazz band and joining the folk music club at Stuyvesant, which met weekly to sing and exchange folk songs, folk music being all the rage. I only hope that Ida, the opera voice coach, approved.

111

After becoming a bar mitzvah, I was encouraged by Rabbi Robert Lehman of the Hebrew Tabernacle of Washington Heights to become a volunteer usher at Shabbat services and to attend, on Sunday mornings, the select “Rabbi’s class,” which discussed the intersection of Judaism and current events. Under his guidance, I prepared for the Boy Scout’s Ner Tamid (Eternal Light) Merit Badge, which required me to both research and write a lengthy report, the subject of which, unfortunately, I do not remember.

Speaking of scouting, I was an active member of our local troop, and after that the Explorer troop, both in Washington Heights, and thereby acquired a life-long love of hiking, especially in the mountains, and wilderness camping, including extreme winter camping, later expanded to cross-country skiing and snow shoeing. My love of nature became and remains year-round. This might seem unexpected in New York City, but from Washington Heights it is relatively easy to escape to wilder environs of New Jersey (the Alpine Scout Camp in nearby Alpine, New Jersey). Wilderness, often romanticized, is also a major theme of the Hebrew Bible and Dead Sea Scrolls, upon which I have written on several occasions, with another article in press.

Brown/Providence

I first left home for any duration to attend Brown University as an undergraduate from 1966 to 1970. I have often thought that those four years saw more change on college campuses (and beyond) than any such period. For me, at least, that was true. When I began at Brown, men were expected to wear jackets and ties to dinner, whereas by the time I graduated, clothing would seem to have become optional. I chose Brown for three main reasons: its location (close but not too close to my two homes); its physics department had an excellent reputation; and (first time revealed) I was wait-listed but eventually rejected by Yale, where my father had hoped I would go, in part for the Connecticut location.

At first, I threw myself into my studies and sailed along (being also on the sailing team, having sailed for years on Candlewood Lake) but soon realized that, whereas at my previous schools I was at the top of the class, I was now in the middle of the

pack. More significantly, to quote a Jewish folk singer of the time, “the times they were a-changin’.” I was swept up in civil rights and anti-war organizing and protesting. The “relevance” of physics and math was less certain than it had been only a few years earlier during the space age. During my sophomore year I decided to sample courses in other departments before having to declare a major at the end of the year. I tried history, literature, sociology, and political science, but could not decide among them. That year I signed up for a two-semester course on the history and religion of the Jews from ancient to modern times. It was taught by a visiting professor from Columbia, Salo Baron, who unbeknownst to me was a Jewish studies luminary, one of, if not the first, to occupy a full-time senior academic position at an elite secular university. Each week, he taught for an uninterrupted two hours without a single note. I was both mesmerized by the teacher and enchanted by the subject. It was the first time that I studied Judaism in an academic context and manner. I was hooked (speaking of the profound yet unacknowledged effect a teacher can have on a student). With trepidation, I decided to switch from physics to religious studies. But there was another reason: I felt that studying religion, and Judaism in particular, was a way to incorporate history, literature, sociology, and political science, that is, to *avoid* choosing, or, more positively, to have them all.

My physics professor and advisor my first year was Fred Pollack, with whom I had grown close. By my sophomore year, I feared that he would take my decision personally or that he would think less of me intellectually for it. So, I avoided meeting him and having to inform him of my abandonment of physics. But with Brown having a compact campus, I could not avoid him forever. One day, late in my sophomore year, I saw him walking in my direction, and me in his, along a central campus walkway. There was no way to avoid meeting him or meeting his eyes. He said (and it still amazes me how clearly I remember our exchange after over fifty-five years), “So, Fraade, I haven’t seen you in the Physics Lab.”

I said, “I’ve decided to change majors.”

He said, “To what?”

I said, “To the humanities.”

He said, “To what in particular?”

I could not avoid telling him, so I took a deep breath and said nervously, “To religious studies.”

He thought for a moment, looking up to the sky, and with a twinkle in his eye said, “Oh, that’s not a big change.” I let out my breath, thanked him, and we both continued on our opposite, now not so opposite, ways. Even though I was now released and relieved, there is a sense, to which I will return, that I still carry the sensitivities of a physicist within me. Notice that he did not say that there was no change, but no “big change,” suggesting not an absence of difference but a dialectic of difference. I hope I will not offend anyone by saying that of all the sciences, this response is most likely to have come from a physicist. That was one of the most formative and profound academic exchanges that I have ever had, and I still cherish it. It is one more example

of the unacknowledged (until now) impacts of the teacher-student relationship.

During my junior year (1968–69), as a religious studies major now, I took two courses with a newly arrived young professor of religious studies, who specialized in the history of ancient Judaism, Jacob Neusner, who would become the most influential (and published) Judaica scholar (for better or worse) of his generation, at least until his eventual fall from favor. Neusner was very generous to me at first, urging me to find my own intellectual voice while encouraging my interest in Jewish, especially ancient, history, but problematic in many other ways that will not detain me now. Little did or could I know back then that he would become my intellectual nemesis, for which I was in excellent company. However, as a result of his coming to Brown, I got to know two of his best graduate students, Robert Goldenberg and David Goodblatt, both relatively recently and tragically deceased, who would become, in time, among my closest academic models and colleagues, each in his own way.

113

Another formative factor during my junior year at Brown had little to do with Brown. With the draft drawing tighter around the necks of men (boys) of my age, I decided to file for a Conscientious Objector status, which was generally approved, to the extent it was approved, on religious, rather than philosophical grounds. As a result, I had to delve into biblical and rabbinic sources as well as modern Jewish thought on war and peace in framing my argument. Rabbi Lehman of the Hebrew Tabernacle of Washington Heights, while not agreeing with me, wrote a genuinely and deeply supportive letter on my behalf (which I still have) and accompanied me to my draft board interview. Instead of acting on my application, the draft board granted me an exemption based on my being a seminary student: they confused, perhaps intentionally, being a critical student of the study of religion (a religious studies major) with being a trainee for the religious ministry (seminary student). I was frustrated that all my study in preparing my application had been for nought but relieved that I was exempt from military service. Rabbi Lehman and I remained in communication for several years thereafter, as I was with Rabbi Jacob Goldberg of the Fort Tryon Jewish Center, to both of whom my mother personally delivered copies of my books.

While I was able to maintain other intellectual passions at Brown (chorus, Outing Club, sailing team, and Hillel), my senior year was particularly significant for my later life choices. That was the year of the student strike in protest against the Vietnam war, during which classes generally were suspended. Instead of spending my freed-up time organizing against the war, I occupied myself with two activities that were connected by my interest in community, both religious and non-. I received a work-study grant to do community organizing of a tenant union in public housing in the then depressed Fox Point neighborhood of Providence, working for a local Protestant church. Come the summer, after graduation, my part-time community organizing job became full-time, paid for by the church and others.

Also during my senior year and the student strike, I pursued an independent study senior project that I devised on the dynamics of residential religious communities. Besides library research, I chose to visit three such volunteeristic, residential, religious

communities, to live with them for a few days, and to interview their members. They were a Quaker community (whose name escapes me) outside of Philadelphia; Packard Manse, a religious ecumenical retreat and conference center in Stoughton, Massachusetts; and Havurat Shalom, an alternative Jewish religious community and seminary in Somerville, Massachusetts. At the latter two I met two rabbis who would later become influential intellectual and activist role models for many years to come: Rabbi Everett Gendler at Packard Manse and Rabbi Arthur Green of the Havurat Shalom. In visiting the former, I met his young daughters, one of whom, Tamar (age four at the time), would become (who could have predicted?) a colleague at Yale, and eventually my “boss” as dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Arthur Green would become, among other leadership roles, a professor of religious studies at the University of Pennsylvania, with whom I took a course on Talmud as part of my graduate studies. I was moved by their combining of scholarship with religious, social, and environmental advocacy, that is, the intellectual with the spiritual.

I recall, visiting Rabbi Gendler at his home in Andover, Massachusetts after he had left Packard Manse and returned to the pulpit rabbinate and after I had returned from Israel and was deciding what to do with my life. At his home I was impressed with two things in particular: the size and intensity of his organic vegetable garden and the size and diversity of his private library in an adjacent barn. They too would serve as role models to emulate as someone aspiring to be a person of both the land and the book. Having spoken twice of the Ner Tamid (Eternal Light), I should mention how inspired I was by Gendler’s design for his synagogue of a solar-powered Ner Tamid, wedding technology, to ecology, to tradition in a profoundly beautiful and spiritual way.

Kibbutz/Israel

The next four years, mainly lived in Israel, would be life-changing and -defining. While visiting Havurat Shalom, I learned that a group of young American Jews was planning to re-establish an abandoned kibbutz, Kibbutz Gezer, located on farmland about half-way between the major cities of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. There we would establish a havurah-style religious, vegetarian community. I would have my way paid by the Jewish Agency for Israel and be at the ground level of building a kind of kibbutz that was neither orthodox (*dati*) nor secular (*hilloni*), but more in line with the American Conservative movement, a sort of “new-age kibbutz.” It being the fall of 1970, with the frustration of many that the “revolution” had failed to come, the Jewish Agency thought that such a kibbutz would attract what was expected to be a large wave of disaffected Jewish youth who would find meaning in such a Jewish agricultural “commune.” My parents were outwardly supportive, perhaps again seeing it as another “phase” to be “humored.” Nevertheless, to others my mother would exclaim, “For this we needed to send Steven to Brown University to pick artichokes?” To me, however, it was an opportunity to put to practice what I had been studying during my last year at Brown.

While the group was successful, after just one year at rebuilding the kibbutz and sustaining itself economically through agriculture, socially it did not cohere, in part because it fundamentally disagreed on its understanding of what it meant to be a Jewish religious community. After two years, for one of which I served as secretary of the kibbutz, it became apparent to me that our experiment in communal living would not succeed. One of our greatest accomplishments was to grow Israel's first fully commercial organic cucumber crop, free of insects and disease, for marketing to supermarkets in Tel Aviv, where organic produce was still largely unknown. I was channeling my father's and Rabbi Gendler's organic gardens but in a very different part of the world.

One event in particular represents for me the deep confluence of ancient and modern history in Israel. In December of 1970, during the festival of Hanukkah, a group from the kibbutz mounted a bus for a demonstration, organized by the World Union of Jewish Students, at Masada, the mountain-top remains of the last rebel outpost in the rebellion against Roman rule that resulted in the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 70 C.E. The demonstration was against the Leningrad trials of Jewish "refusenicks" seeking to leave Soviet Russia. We marched at night in silent procession, candle lanterns in hand, up the Roman rampart to the top of Masada, which was filled with people, there to hear speeches, sing songs, and dance, all by the light of a giant Hanukkah menorah, communally lit. The confluence of the archaeological site of Masada, the plight then of Society Jewry, and the symbolism of the menorah (even as scholars had already debunked the "Masada myth," and others had warned of the Zionist militarization of the Hanukkah story) was palpable, as it could not have been anywhere else. Ancient history was brought alive while modern history was collectively ritualized, all for a noble political cause.

After a brief visit to my family in New York for my brother Alan's wedding and my brother Jonathan's bar mitzvah, I returned to Israel to be a candidate for membership at a much older and more conventional kibbutz, not far from Gezer, Kibbutz Huldah. At Huldah, as a candidate for membership, I worked for over a year in the *refet*, or dairy farm, milking cows, delivering calves, and maintaining the herd, while seriously considering making *aliyah* (ascension) to Israel as a full citizen, which would have allowed me to vote in national elections but would also have required me to serve in the Israeli armed forces. My pacifistic convictions were challenged by the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War in October of 1973, during which all of the young kibbutz men were sent to fight the invading forces of either Egypt or Syria. In the absence of many of the kibbutz members, those noncitizens, like myself, who were not obligated to fight, took over the running the kibbutz, in my case the *refet*, when not consigned to bomb shelters. I remember so clearly how at every meal in the kibbutz dining hall, phone messages would be posted from service men letting their families know that they were alive. Those families for whom there were no messages were increasingly and visually distraught. Many such men never returned.

Toward the end of my year at Kibbutz Huldah I had to decide between two possibilities for my life going forward: Would I be principally a farmer living a communitarian life in Israel, while studying as best I could in the evenings, or a full-time scholar and teacher, tending my organic garden in my spare time? The latter was the path I eventually chose, but not without consulting with David Goodblatt, the Jacob Neusner graduate student whom I got to know at Brown.

By 1973 David was a professor of ancient Jewish history at the University of Haifa, in Israel's north, whom I traveled to meet. He helped me to sort out my options, especially the question of whether to pursue graduate studies in Israel or the United States. A number of factors, including not feeling ready to serve in the Israeli military, as well as longing for my family after a long absence, tipped the balance in favor of returning to the US. In addition, the Israeli universities that I considered would not recognize my liberal arts undergraduate degree from Brown as being sufficiently concentrated for me to apply to a PhD program in Israel. In effect, I would have to do a second, preparatory undergraduate degree. I knew my parents would draw a non-humoring line at that!

During my many years on the Yale faculty I had numerous opportunities to return to Israel as a visiting teacher, lecturer, and researcher, in some cases for several months at a time. I was able to maintain close relationships with colleagues and friends, as well as an attachment to the land, especially for its archaeological treasures and secrets. I became something of an armchair archaeologist and epigraphist, visiting sites in Israel whenever I had the opportunity, often with family members in tow.

One of my greatest pleasures in Israel was and is hearing and speaking the Hebrew language, largely dormant for well over a millennium. I found it beautiful, both in its own right and in its interactions with the myriad of other languages, both Jewish and non-Jewish, brought into renewed contact with one another through the “ingathering of the exiles” and the role of translation in mediating between them. Whatever one's politics with respect to Israel, the “rebirth” of Hebrew remains, when viewed in deep and broad historical and comparative perspective, a modern-day cultural miracle. One of my most important accomplishments in Israel (aside from organic cucumbers) was to become fluent in Hebrew as both a spoken and literary language.

Among the greatest honors of my academic career, many years later, was to be elected as an Honorary Member of the Academy of the Hebrew Language in Jerusalem, in recognition of my publications (mainly in English, but also a few in modern Hebrew) in this vital and vibrant field of linguistic, historical, literary, and social study. My interests in languages and language pedagogy are also reflected in my five-year chairing of Yale's Language Study Committee. My most recent (2023) book, *Multilingualism and Translation in Ancient Judaism: Before and After Babel* (2023), is the fruit of this long and winding cultural and linguistic engagement.

The University of Pennsylvania/Philadelphia

After returning from Israel at the very end of 1973, I resumed living with my family in Washington Heights (and Sherman), while visiting and applying to graduate schools with religious studies and ancient Near-Eastern studies programs. I knew that I was interested in something Jewish and ancient, but unsure what in particular. As I would (and still do) say, "It's bad enough that I'm forced to live in the modern world, without having to study it also!" Burying my head in things ancient satisfied that sentiment. While waiting to hear back from graduate schools, I spent the spring 1974 semester taking classes at the nearby Jewish Theological Seminary, dividing my studies between the Hebrew Bible and ancient Jewish history and literature, especially rabbinic. I fell more in love with the latter than the former but sought (again) to split the difference by concentrating, as I would for the rest of my career, on the earliest "post-biblical," both rabbinic and pre-rabbinic, forms of biblical interpretation. The "dean" of that field was Professor Judah Goldin at the University of Pennsylvania, in what was then called the Department of Oriental Studies. Goldin had only the previous year come from Yale, where he had taught for many years in the Department of Religious Studies. Penn also had an excellent program in the Hebrew Bible, including Jeffrey Tigay, who had previously studied at Yale in the NELC department. Little did I know that I would jump on the shuttle between Yale and Penn to take, as it were, Goldin's place at Yale five years later.

117

For five years I studied at Penn, in addition to the aforementioned fields and faculty, taking courses in Aramaic dialects, Greek language, Roman history, Jewish law, Second Temple Judaism, early Christianity, and German, my *mame loshn*. In Oriental studies and classics the emphasis was largely linguistic, philological, and textual, with a good dose of ancient history more broadly, which were excellent for me as my undergraduate education had been largely lacking in all of these. For two years I taught undergraduate courses in biblical and modern Hebrew, and for one year I taught rabbinic literature and history at a nearby Jewish high school, my first chance to teach what I was studying and my first opportunity to think about my studies in pedagogical terms.

My respect, gratitude, and admiration for Goldin would be permanent. He was first and foremost a master reader and translator of ancient texts and taught me the critical tools, skills, and sensitivities to do the same, as I have sought to do with my own students. I would still describe myself as his student, even after having blazed my own intellectual trails. Needless to say, once again, I never acknowledged to him my intellectual and personal debt. After I came to Yale, we kept up a regular correspondence by postal mail until his death in 1998, a year after my father's and a year before my grandmother's.

I should mention that I was able to continue some of my other nonacademic (but no-less intellectual) activities. Soon after arriving in Philadelphia I was a co-founder

of a Havurah-style Shabbat and festival worship *minyán* (quorum/community) that began in people's living rooms but moved into the nearby Germantown Jewish Center, continuing, I am told, to today. I continued to enjoy backpacking, including in the winter on skis in the northern Pennsylvania woods. Similarly, to keep my farmer identity alive, I worked summers for the nearby Schuylkill Valley Nature Center, which had a teaching farm for inner-city children. After a day of manual work on the farm, I would drive to the Penn library to do a few hours of academic study, as I had previously done on the kibbutz.

My dissertation (1980) was a comparative study of the radically diverse translations and interpretations in many languages and scripts of a single verse (actually half a verse): Genesis 4:26b, which proclaims that “then [in the time of Enosh, grandson of Adam and Eve] was begun the calling on the name of the Lord.” It was published in 1981, in the prestigious Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series, as *Enosh and His Generation: Pre-Israelite Hero and History in Post-Biblical Interpretation* (1984). It would launch my lifelong love of the study and teaching of rabbinic *midrash* (commentary) and *targum* (translation), among other forms of rabbinic discourse, both legal and narrative.

My graduate student days also exposed me to the relatively new field of Dead Sea Scrolls studies, which would become a major preoccupation of mine beginning in the early 1990s, in large part due to the communitarian nature of what scholars refer to (not without its problems) as the “Qumran community” (or “communities”) but also to the *physical*, scientific aspects of their study, including archaeology and the decipherment of ancient, often fragmentary, manuscripts. They beautifully demonstrate how false the law/spirit dichotomy has been in the study and practice of Judaism in all of its periods and varieties.

Yale/New Haven: Academic Highlights

In the interest of time and begging your patience, I will greatly abbreviate my academic trajectory/trajectories over forty-three years at Yale, since I view them in terms of themes already enunciated with respect to my earlier stages of intellectual passion and attractions.

I begin this roundup by recalling the words of my Brown physics professor, in my migration from physics to metaphysics, as it were: “that’s not a big change.” My own version of that would be, “While you can take the boy out of physics, you cannot take physics out of the boy.” I have a weakness for hard, physical evidence to support an argument, whether that comes via philology and etymology, or archaeology and epigraphy, or manuscripts and documents, or coins and images, all of which, of course, require interpretation in their own rights. This is part, as I have suggested, of what attracted me to the study of the Dead Sea Scrolls and its communitarianism, especially once they were completely “liberated” in the early 1990s. My first full-length article on the scrolls, and one that has enjoyed considerable long-term mileage, was

titled “Interpretive Authority in the Studying Community at Qumran” (1993) which terms have continued to define my interest in the scrolls (and early rabbinic literature) ever since.

Getting back to the empirical scientist in me, there is one German word that Judah Goldin would often use when I presented him with what I thought to be a novel idea or interpretation: *Vielleicht!* (Perhaps!), which could be taken to be neutral, but I always experienced to be (politely) damning. In other words, can you prove it, that is, convince me with verifiable evidence? Needless to say, “verifiable” is a relative measure.

119

Another such guiding principle that I have acquired as a translated Yiddish saying, the origin of which I have been unable to locate, is: “‘For example’ never proves anything.” This is because examples are always selectively cherry-picked to illustrate the argument, being thereby inherently partial and circular. These are warnings that apply as much in academia as they do in the town square. They are what has attracted me to the commentary form, as well as that of translation, since they must interpret a source text or artifact (as they in turn must eventually be interpreted) as a progressive, performative continuum, to which the commentator and translator must repeatedly return, come what may. Over the long course of my scholarship and teaching I have discussed and practiced both at great length, even as I have done my own fair share of evidentiary cherry-picking in topical monographs and essays.

In conclusion, at the outset I said that the theme of this retelling of some of my life’s stories would be the dichotomies that I have persistently straddled, traversed, and even transgressed. Here is a partial list of those dichotomies, as viewed with the advantage of my life’s and this talk’s hindsight: It began with city/country, continued to physical/intellectual, proceeded to textual/visual and legal/spiritual, and, with many other such stops along the way, concludes with the most basic and universal of all, individual/community, or, in rabbinic and Qumranic terms, *yaḥid* and *yaḥad*, etymological cousins denoting the oneness of both. Finally, I wish to express my deep appreciation of the Koerner Center, its fellows and staff, for providing a supportive, stimulating, and caring community as I get used to the fit of my emeritus status.