Fighting Fire with Fire:  
The Quiet Revolution of Rabbi Dovid Tzvi Hoffmann  

Suggestions for Further Learning:  


https://archive.org/stream/essaysinjewishbi000988mbp#page/n198/mode/1up

**Biography**

**Youth and Education**

November 24, 1843 – Born in Verbó, Hungary (Austrian Empire)
- Father, Rav Moshe Yehuda, Dayan (Av Beit Din) of Verbó
- Early prodigy; Claimed later that by age 4 he knew Chumash-Rashi by heart
- 77th birthday – 50th yr. in Berlin – said D’var Torah, claimed said at 7 in father’s house
1848 – Father dies
1853 – Community sends him away to learn in neighboring Yeshiva
1855 – Returns to Verbó, Hungary to learn under R’ Shmuel Sommer – first real teacher
1857 – Left with Sommer when Sommer went to town of Papa
1859 – Learned with (and close to) Maharam Schick (Rav Moshe Schick) for a year,
  - Maharam Schick - student of Chatam Sofer, but favored general knowledge
1860 – Eisenstadt, Austro-Hungarian border, student of Ezriel Hildesheimer in his new Seminary; also kept learning secular studies
1863 – To Pressburg (today Bratislava); student of K'tav Sofer (son of Chatam Sofer)
  - Said if could have prepared properly, would have given Shiur worthy of Chatam Sofer
1865 – Graduated from Evangelical Gymnasium of Pressburg; went to U. of Vienna
1866 – To support mother, took up job teaching in Teacher’s College in Hochberg, Bavaria, near Germany; he would stay in Germany until his death
  - Came into contact with R’ Seligman Bar Bamberger of Wertzburg (the Wertzburger Rav), and German “Havanat Ha’peshat” approach to Gemara as opposed to Pilpul of Hungary – comes to mix both plus outside/scholarly influences
  - “Anyone who doesn’t know Pilpul doesn’t know how to learn Gemara”
- Age 74/75 – Hungary – Same shiur in Pilpul one day and Havana the next day!
- Businessman Jona Rosenbaum of Zell, friend and Talmid of Wertzburger Rav
1868 – Marries Rosenbaum’s daughter Zerline – they would have 5 sons, 3 daughters
1869 – To Berlin to continue at University and learn under Hildesheimer, newly there
1870 – Doctorate from Tubingen University in Semitic Languages
  - Thesis: “Mar Shmuel, Rector of the Jewish Academy of Nahardea in Babylonia”

- Career in Hildesheimer’s Seminary and Research on Mishna
  1871 – Becomes teacher in Rav S. R. Hirsch’s Seminary in Frankfurt am Main
  1873 – “Mar Shmuel” biography published as book – deemed heretical by Hirsch et al
  1873 – Jr. Lecturer in Hildesheimer’s new Seminary in Berlin, focusing on Chumash;
        started with Vayikra, then Devarim – his foci over next 25 years of classes
  - Reform sweeping the Austro-Hungarian world; Hildesheimer felt secular learning
        critical to combat Reform and intrinsically as a part of Torah; RDZH incorporated use
        of other languages in particular to understand Chumash; same with Mishna
- Haskalah producing scholars; biblical scholarship in vogue; questioning authorship –
  attempted to destroy Divinity of the Torah
- Berlin seminary produced 2 scholarly magazines a year; 40%-50% from him
- Taught Rabbinical studies, secular studies, and Tanach in the Seminary, administrator
- Av Beit Din of Berlin; Posek of German Jewry
  1874 – Along with report on the Yeshiva there is published RDZH’s 50-page treatise on
        מצות שעליה מצות
  1874 – Began Gemara class for Ba’alei Batim and own students (Chevra Shas) – Daf Yom
        before there was Daf Yomi – finished Shas several times – cont’d until 1908
  - Taught in Teacher’s Seminary of Isaac Ber Bamberger in Wertzberger – Seminary
        supplied teachers for Orthodox schools throughout Germany
  1876-1893 – Editor of magazine – תמונות לccionת ישראל
  1879-1880 – Series of articles against Wellhaussen’s Documentary Hypothesis
  - Rebbe only “editor” of Mishna, incorporating Mishnayot into new Mishna;
        purpose (Wein) to prove Mishna not “made up” by Rabbis, since it was older
  1884-1895 – Published scholarly monthly supplement to “Jewish Press”
  1884, 1885, 1895 – “The Shulchan Aruch and the Rabbis About the Relations Between
        the Jews and the Non-Jews” – defending SA against Justus’s Judenspigiel (i.e., Akum)
- Argued against new Reform Prayer Book in Baden with careful polemical response
  1887 – “Contributions to an Introduction to Halachic Midrashim” (parallel, lost Midrash)
- Work vindicated one year later and beyond; instrumental in finding, editing, and
  publishing rare and newly-discovered Midrash Halacha (Shachter/Cairo Genizah)
  1890 – Refused naturalization by German gov’t
  1892 – Started recording Teshuvot (responsa) at urging of son, who published them

■ Head of Berlin Seminary, Commentaries, and Later Battles Against Reform
  1893-1897 – German Translation/Commentary on Mishna Seder Nezikin – Academic
  1894 – Hildesheimer sick – RDZH takes over advanced classes
  1895, 1910 – In review of Reformer’s critical “The Dietary Laws,” proved
  1899 – Hildesheimer dies – appointed RDZH RY, not own son, Tzvi Hirsch, a Rebbe
  1899 – RDZH takes over as acting RY; full in 1902
  1900 – Again refused naturalization by German gov’t
  1904 – Book vs. Wellhausen’s Doc. Hypothesis –
  1905 – Daughter Hannah married Alexander Marx (1878-1953), JTS Librarian and
  Professor, who would go on to write mini-biography of father-in-law (P. 1)
  1905-1906 – Monumental commentary on Vayikra
  1910-1916 – Trans./commentary on seven parts of Mishna Taharot (rest posthumously)
  1913 – First volume (out of two) on Devarim
  1918 – German gov’t awards him Professor, a high honor
  - Last Beit Din story
  - Yustus Vaker story (fake anti-non-Jew Shulchan Aruch)
  - Bereishit – Creation – Avot – shows why things are included/not included; geography
    is accurate; people are real; history is accurate; time frame is accurate
  - Literate commentary aimed at non-Jews, Reform, and for believers to have answers
  - Fabulous Chazzan, musical composer, orator
  - Berlin Seminary recognized by Jews and non-Jews as best in the world; eclectic staff
  - Mussar story (“not in my nature”)
  - Depressed by Jews killing Jews in WWI (Tefillin story [(Wein])
  - Interested in moving Hildesheimer Seminary to Israel, but E. European Rabbis said no
    (1930’s – R’ Weinberg – same – R’ Chaim Ozer also said no)
  - Later years – couldn’t stand unless Chazzan; that revived him
  - Seminary instruction was in German but 40%-50% of students were Hungarian
  - 1) “Every Jew’s life is a commentary to the Torah; 2) loyalty to Mitzvot; 3) represent
    your Creator – Kiddush Hashem” – Mussar movement channeled through scholarship
  1914-1919 – Series of articles in Jeshurun on “Problems of Pentateuchal Exegesis”
  Nov. 20, 1921 (19 Marcheshvan) – Died quietly in his sleep
  1922 – Second vol. Devarim (missing last Parshiot) – published by son Moshe Yehuda
  1925 – Son published father’s Teshuvot (on 3 parts of SA)
  - Relevant contemporary questions; classic approach to scholarship (see later packet)
  - Four RY’s – Hildesheimer (1874-99), Hoffmann (1899-1921), Avraham Eliyahu Kaplan
    (1921-24, brain tumor), R’ Yechiel Weinberg – Seridei Aish (1922-38, escaped)
  1938 – Yeshiva closed, never reopened, never copied – product of Berlin
  - Children escaped Germany, descendants still in Israel today
  - A. Marx: Tough outside, but very kind inside; distant at first, but very intimate and kind
Finding Rav D. Z. Hoffmann Online

**AlHaTorah.org**

WWW.Daat.co.il

Complete PDF’s of Hoffmann’s Commentary on Bereishit and Devarim
From Hoffmann’s Book Against Graff-Wellhausen’s Documentary Hypothesis
מלמד לחרעיל
מלל סלולה והשבבה על י"ע, חלה שני

ഷ"א ול"ה

אם אופייל משונש פפיריך.

ת שרב ה

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ת שרב ה

שא ל"ה

ביור, אחר ערב אופייל משונש פפיריך, נמיות של מצטברת, החוצה את הנושאים של הים, תמונות שהיוסי וגיוסי, מאיון מופעים של טווחית את היה המפ_gate להראות ש_INTERFACE" Wiederholen

ת שраб ה

בר כהアナ הפקד

אח"ת יוניקט

השידי
Highlights of Rav D. Z. Hoffmann’s Torah Commentary

1) Copious organization of text and discussion of why it is organized that way
2) Blocks of Pesukim as basis for commentary
3) Torah She’ba’al Peh as bridge to Torah She’bichtav
4) Preference for original source – i.e. Midrash Halacha – rather than quote from Gemara
5) Cross-referencing within Tanach without explanation; assumption of knowledge of Tanach
6) Use of non-Jewish or unpopular Jewish sources, often as support or proof
7) Attention to contemporary psychological thought

Pesukim 10-13: When you go out to war against your enemies, and Hashem, your God, delivers them into your hands, and you take them as captives, and you see among the captives a beautiful woman, and you desire her and you take her as a wife. You will bring her into your house, and she will trim her hair, do her nails, and remove her clothing of captivity. She will sit in your house crying about her father and mother for one month, and after that you may come to her and have relations with her, and she shall be for you as a wife.
And she will do her nails – Onkelos translates: “And she will increase her fingernails,” and so does Rashi – “she will grow them.” And that is the opinion of Rabbi Akiva in the Sifri, which is brought in Yevamot 48a. (Compare to Yishayahu 7:22 and Iyov 15:27.) The intention of the Pasuk is to make her unattractive, in order that he will not marry her. Rabbi Akiva brings a proof for his words from the words of the Pasuk, “And she will cut off her hair,” which is also a way to make her appear unattractive. However, Rabbi Eliezer brings a proof for his words from the words of the Sifri, which is brought in Yevamot 48a. (Compare to Yishayahu 7:22 and Iyov 15:27.) The Ramban explains “do” means to cut off. (This is also what Philo says.) The Antiquities of the Jews, vol. 4, 8:23. However, all these actions are only commanded because she has been converted by force, and therefore she should be given the opportunity to mourn and to collect her thoughts, in order that she becomes complete with her new situation. But if she accepts upon herself to convert of her own free will, it says in a Beraita in Yevamot 47b that she is permitted to be taken as a wife immediately.
Her father – Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer argue about this in the Sifri: According to Rabbi Akiva, the meaning here is idol worship. Meaning that she should leave the gods of the other nations; Rabbi Eliezer explains the Pasuk in a literal way. It is possible that the two of them are going according to their explanations that they made regarding “And she will do (her nails).”

Pesukim 15-17: When a man will have two wives, one who is loved and one who is hated, and he will have children from both the loved and the hated, and the oldest child is from the hated. And it will be on the day that he gives his inheritance from what he has to his children, he may not give preference to the loved one’s son over the hated one’s. For the son of the hated one must be recognized to receive double from everything that he has, for he is his first effort; to him is the law of the firstborn.

As relates to the juxtaposition of this section to the section that came before it, see Rashi. We are commanded to protect the rights of the captive, and not to treat her like a maidservant; but we are likewise commanded to not infringe on the rights of any other woman in a situation where she is hated.

One is loved and one is hated – Our Rabbis were surprised about a Pasuk that utilizes such an example: “Could there possibly by one who is loved by Hashem or hated by Hashem?” Meaning, it is obvious that the laws of the holy Torah cannot take into consideration the love or hatred of a person. The answer to this question is found in the Mechilta of Rabbi Yishmael (in the Sifri in the name of Rabbi Shimon): “The Torah is discussing a matter of common sense, that if a person has two wives, ultimately he will come to love one and hate one.” Meaning that in this Pasuk it is hinted that even though it is permissible to take two wives, this is not a good idea (just like taking the beautiful captive woman).
וכן Natürlichkeit פשוטו של מקרא

שהתורה מדברת כאן על מצב בלתי

רגילה, אשר אם כי לא רצה הש"ת

אסור על חליפיו, אם אירא להו

�tırיה חזרה על דימויים על נברחת

כד שלא עזרו על נסיבות או.

בטוחה: הפר נארכו (5) אحامית

והיה זכרה, יחי, yaş תעימן

במר遊びה של אחותים, על כל ב用户提供的文本。
Key:
- Netziv (1816-1893)
- Malbim (1809-1879)
- Hirsch (1808-1888)
- Hoffman (1843-1921)