In our critically acclaimed volume, *Double Takes: Thinking and Rethinking Issues of Modern Judaism in Ancient Contexts* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2004), Bruce Zuckerman and I, individually and collaboratively, present ten essays on a variety of topics that are construed to challenge the reader's assumption about modern Jewish thought by demonstrating how biblical and rabbinic traditions can be an unpredictable lens for the present-day. The intent of our volume is to illustrate how shadows of longstanding traditions continue to shade current perceptions. In his chapter, “Choosing Among the Strands: Teaching Hebrew Bible Survey to Undergraduates at a Secular University,” Bruce opines that teaching the *Tanakh* is an “evolving process,” and that the instructor “step(s) back from his or her more myopic scholarly endeavors and reconsider the larger picture of biblical studies, reviewing the broader issues and asking again the essential questions.” I agree. And in this vein, I offer my perception on innovative undergraduate classroom pedagogy, which embraces midrashic dialogue and theological hermeneutics. My article is offered as an expression of gratitude and respect in honor of Bruce Zuckerman, collegial friend and co-author over these many years.

1. Dialogue, A Learning Exchange

Dialogue gives insight to the temper of our age and to the temper of our tradition. In the field of scriptural studies, it means to go beyond acquiring bits of information to a critical exchange of ideas and experience. It means to take seriously the four sequential steps of a learning exchange:

*Confrontation*, where the participant experiences the text superficially; *Analysis*, where the participant seriously probes the text in light of previous knowledge; *Interaction*, where the participant’s mutual or reciprocal communication with others helps him/her benefit from their views; and *Internalization*, where by turning the sharing of ideas upon oneself, the participant rethinks the text as it relates to him/her as an individual and as a member of a religious community.

Biblical exegesis clothed in dialogue has all the possibilities and dangers inherent in any real communication. On the one hand, it can extend one's experience at the most profound level of his/her religious sensitivities. On the other hand, it can devaluate one's past attitude and ideas and develop a new orientation of what it means to be scripturally informed. Comparisons are inevitable, and this may lead to a crisis in faith interpretation. That is to say, the old meaning/orientation may have to disintegrate while a new one emerges. Clearly, visions of the other are altered when Christians and Jews read Scriptures in dialogue.
2. Rabbinic Torah

Various biblical verses point to the Pentateuch as Torah distinct from the rest of the Scriptures. The verse “Moses charged us with the Teaching (Torah) as the heritage of the congregation of Jacob” (Deut 33:4) suggests the inalienable importance of Torah to Israel: It is to be transmitted from age to age, and this transmission has become the major factor for the unity of the Jewish people throughout their wanderings.

The rabbis of the Talmud kept the Torah alive and made its message relevant in different regions and times. This has been done by means of the rabbinic hermeneutic of a dual Torah that has been read into verses from the book of Exodus. Regarding God’s words to Moses on the covenantal relationship between Himself and Israel, it is said in Exodus, “Write down [ktav] these words, for in accordance [’al pi; literally, ‘by the mouth] with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel” (Exod 34:27), and, “I will give you the stone tablets with the teachings [torah] and commandments which I have inscribed [ktav-ti] to instruct [by word of mouth] them” (Exod 24:12). The sages saw the words “write,” and “accordance,” and “instruct” as the legitimate warrant for the written Torah (Torah shebiktav) and the oral Torah (Torah shehb’al peh). In their view, the written Torah of Moses is eternal. The oral Torah is the application of the written Torah to forever changing historic situations, which continues to uncover new levels of depth and meaning and thus make new facets of Judaism visible and meaningful in each generation. Take the laws of tithing, for example.

Ma’aserot and Ma’aser Sheni, the seventh and eighth tractates in the order of Zera’im in the Mishnah, Tosefta and Jerusalem Talmud (Babylonian Talmud lacking) contain rabbinic rules and regulations in performing scriptural demands for agricultural tithing, that is, when and under what conditions payments are due and by whom and to whom and how a common Israelite may proceed to eat from his own crops after payment of agricultural taxes.

Specifically, ma’aserot (“Tithes”) deals with the laws concerning which kinds of fruits and plants of the Land of Israel are tithed to benefit the landless Levites (Num 18:24), who, in turn, provide for the Priests (terumat ma’aser) and the regulations protecting produce misappropriation. Ma’aser sheni (“Second Tithes”) discusses (1) the tithing of all yearly produce that is set aside for the benefit of the farmer and his household—after separating the first levy in the yearly produce given to the Priest (terumat gedolah) and the levy parsed to the Levite (ma’aser rishon) taken to Jerusalem in the first, second, fourth, and fifth year of the shemita (seven-year) cycle and eaten there (Deut 14:22–26); (2) legislation to redeem monetarily the ma’aser sheni by a second party or by the owner himself, who is required to add a twenty-percent surcharge to the crop value (Lev 27:30–31), and in both situations the capital must be spent in the capital (Jerusalem); (3) the rules regulating the fourth year harvest of tree or vine fruits sanctified by the Torah (Lev 19:24), whose produce or its redemption money must be used by the farmer and household only in Jerusalem; and (4) the instructions regarding the elimination (bi’ur) of the ma’aserot (Deut 14:28–29; 26:12–15), whereby at the termination of the third and sixth years of the shemita cycle, the ma’aser sheni is devoted entirely to the poor and destitute (ma’aser ‘oni).

In reading ma’aserot and ma’aser sheni in the Jerusalem Talmud (Yerushalmi), one sees (1) how Torah-based agricultural laws, written and oral, are understood by the sages as legalism and teaching; (2) how the Yerushalmi editors augment Scripture and this in turn becomes the pattern for the Tradition (e.g., “You shall certainly tithe all the produce of your seed” [Deut 14:22], understood by the Yerushalmi to be whatever is found and is guarded and grows from the soil, which Maimonides interpreted as all human food which is cultivated from the soil—the Torah states only cereal, wine and oil—is liable to ma’aserot [Hil. Ter.2:1]); and (3) how the