**Abstract**

Waldorf education, based in the spirit of anthroposophy as introduced by Rudolf Steiner, was founded in Austria in 1919. Since then, it has been disseminated worldwide and adapted in accordance with local cultures in each country. In Israel, Waldorf education has existed for thirty-five years or so and is expanding steadily. A new phenomenon is the effect of Waldorf education on the religious sector, reflected in several schools affiliated with the religious education system that have adopted various elements of the Waldorf method.

This study examines the complex encounter of education in a haredi Talmud Torah(an ultra-Orthodox school for young boys) and Waldorf education via ethnographic research that focuses on the Talmud Torah “Ohel Mo’ed”, which chose to integrate elements of Waldorf education into its program, as a test case. The study examines the integration of the Waldorf method at this school by asking two research questions. The first centers on aspects of practical pedagogy: how does the staff of a State-haredi Talmud Torah implement and interpret elements of Waldorf education? The second question considers theoretical / ideological aspects of the matter: how do staff members of the Talmud Torah regard agreements or contradictions between the Torah educational outlook and Waldorf education?

To understand how these features interact, I chose an ethnographic research approach that entailed making contact with frontline staff members, observing lessons and various activities at the Talmud Torah, and documenting them in writing and photography. The Talmud Torah is a recognized and official educational institution that operates as part of the “State-haredi” education system and is affiliated with the “Ma’ayanot Rabbi Hiyya” network. I chose to focus on the staff of the Talmud Torah because it is they who maintain direct contact with the pupils, link theory and spiritual perspectives to the practical world, and shape the children’s encounter with the cultural outlook. To complete the picture and understand the outlook behind the educational endeavor, I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with seven staff members.

The findings indicate that the composition of the Talmud Torah community —made up of newly religious Jews — influences the nature of the institution and its tendency to search for an educational path that will preserve Jewish values, as well as values such as aesthetics and connecting with nature. It is this quest that establishes the connection with “Ma’ayanot Rabbi Hiyya”, which seeks to offer Jewish religious education that also has includes attention to art, aesthetics, handicrafts, and relationship with the land. The resulting educational method is influenced by Waldorf education. Viewed from the outside, the Talmud Torah has much in common with Waldorf schools, as to verge on identity. This resemblance, however, does not necessarily indicate that the Talmud Torah operates in the light of anthroposophy. In interviews, the staff members presented the Torah as the basis of their work and traced the inspiration for their work to ideas and personalities in the Jewish world and not to anthroposophy. Their attitude towards Waldorf education is typified by mixed emotions of attraction and aversion. Namely, they are drawn to the tools that the Waldorf method offers, but reject the underlying philosophy and spirit of the method simply because these are foreign to Judaism. In their educational work, they reconcile this acceptance and rejection by “filtering” the Waldorf tools and, where necessary, revising them, so as to fit the values and the educational outlook of the Talmud Torah.