

Article

Learning through Listening and Responding: Probing the Potential and Limits of Dialogue in Local and Online Environments

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Abstract: This article explores an age-old form of dialogical learning, *havruta*, which has been employed by Jews throughout the centuries to study the Torah and the Talmud, and evaluates the experiment of extending *havruta* from a couple of fellow students (*haverim*) to an international, multi-religious group reading philosophical texts together, and transferring the learning process from the Jewish house of study (in Hebrew: *beit ha-Midrash*, in German: *Lehrhaus*) to an online environment. Methodologically, the experiences from the online *havruta* are brought into a theory-practice feedback loop and are discussed from various theoretical angles: (1) The first section introduces how *havruta* was conducted traditionally and how Franz Rosenzweig, who in 1920 founded the Frankfurt *Lehrhaus* and invited Martin Buber to offer lecture courses, advanced *havruta*. (2) The second section explains how Rosenzweig's pedagogical principles as distilled from his writings on education are applied and modified in the above-mentioned contemporary online reading group. (3) The third section draws on Buber's philosophy of dialogue, Juhani Pallasmaa's architectural theory and Michel Chion's film theory in order to investigate the epistemological and pedagogical significance of different modes of listening, asking, and responding, and the role of trust for dialogical learning in local and online learning communities.

Keywords: *havruta*; traditional Jewish learning; reading Scripture; dialogical learning; modes of listening; listening with the heart; trust; theories of education; existential orientation; questions of identity; online learning; Rosenzweig; Buber; Pallasmaa; Chion



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1. Introduction

The pandemic has challenged and changed our learning practices. Even though many topics can be successfully studied in online environments, educators struggle to maintain dialogical learning, a critical constituent of our investigation. Digital tools and educational literature offer an abundance of tips for facilitating conversation and participation, but a truly dialogical character of learning is difficult to achieve (Sousa 2021). For instance, having to 'unmute' oneself before speaking may be a hurdle for shy students, and the lack of signals from body language and of the motivational dynamics arising from physical co-presence can be experienced as discouraging. However, the pandemic, as in every crisis, also has the potential for initiating innovations, as we shall demonstrate. In this study, we aim share and evaluate our experiences in a digital reading group inspired by *havruta* (הַבְּרִיחָא), an age-old practice of paired Jewish learning that involves a *haver*, i.e., a fellow student, friend, or fellow scholar (see Schwarz 2018 for an overview of research on *havruta*). As the analysis of actual interactions has shown, studying texts in dyads (or in small groups) through unguided critical discussions may promote profound social change in democracies (Schwarz et al. 2019, p. 17).

We conducted a modified *havruta* in an international group of scholars and read Martin Buber's philosophical dialogue *Daniel* (published in 1913, see [Buber 2018](#)) and then his most famous book, *I and Thou* (published in 1923, see [Buber 1995, 1996](#)), in a Zoom room. This proved to be a surprisingly deep learning experience combining philosophical theory with dialogical practice. Moreover, it has provided possibilities of building bridges of communication across national, cultural, and religious borders.

What most captured our interest in the reading sessions were issues of respect, or perhaps of custom, such as the role of listening, and maintaining attentiveness to, and waiting for, others' responses. Such practices are overlooked in contemporary educational thinking, yet indispensable for learning to coexistence peacefully ([Kristiansen 2012](#), pp. 124–26). Listening as part of a process of 'embracing' the other, as Buber would have it ([Gordon 2011](#), p. 211; with reference to [Buber 1996](#), p. 178), is uncommon in formal education. The German word *Umfassung* used by Buber is an 'embrace' or 'inclusion' through which a person experiences and identifies with someone else's situation "while maintaining a clear sense of oneself" ([Gordon 2011](#), p. 212). Genuine, 'deep' listening that can constitute an 'embrace' of the other requires an active and engaged attentiveness (cf. *ibid.*, pp. 215–16). Yet oftentimes learners are so concerned about achieving their learning objectives that their listening becomes too focused and thus too narrow, or they are so concerned about presenting themselves and their own abilities that there is no space for listening to others.

Havruta accentuates listening and responsiveness, trust, and dialogue. It provides insights that are important for contemporary learning formats, including online learning. In this article, we will (1) first introduce *havruta* as a traditional communicative practice and then the pedagogical principles of dialogical learning by Franz Rosenzweig, who in 1920 founded "The Free Jewish House of Study" (in German: *Das Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus*) in Frankfurt am Main, an institution for adult learning where Buber in 1921 was invited to offer lecture courses. Buber's classes were oversubscribed because of "his reputation as an enthralling speaker" ([Mendes-Flohr 2002](#), p. 7). In 1938, the *Lehrhaus* was closed by the Nazis. (2) Secondly, we will explain how we applied and modified these principles in our online reading evenings and what this implies for our methodology. (3) Last but not least, we will introduce various modes of listening and discuss their role in dialogical learning. In this context, we will not only draw on Buber's philosophy of dialogue but also on film theorist Michel Chion, and architectural theorist, Juhani Pallasmaa. Finally, considering the *Lehrhaus* tradition and our own experiences with it, we hope to demonstrate that trustful recognition of different dialogue partners and the art of listening can cultivate far more nuanced theories of contemporary learning.

2. *Havruta* Learning as a Communicative Practice

In Western learning traditions, a teacher ordinarily performs his or her work with expectations that students will absorb specific content. Many classrooms have top-down authoritative structures, as the teachers propose the learning objectives, provide relevant instructional materials, and do most of the talking. By contrast, *havruta* is based on peer-learning. The learning methods used in a traditional Jewish house of study (in Hebrew: *beit ha-Midrash*, in German: *Lehrhaus*) are practiced by an assembly of people with different backgrounds and different levels of knowledge. In what follows, we will first introduce traditional Jewish *havruta* learning and then turn to Rosenzweig's *Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt.

2.1. Traditional Jewish Learning

Traditional *havruta* learning is an age-old practice of Jewish text study conducted together with a study partner (in Hebrew: *haber*). *Havruta* learning is based on a relational epistemology in which knowledge is created in an encounter between the text and learners ([Holzer and Kent 2013](#), p. 43; [Raider-Roth and Holzer 2009](#)). Traditionally practiced in *yeshivot* (ישיבות), i.e., Jewish schools for the study of rabbinic literature, and limited to Talmud study, *havruta* learning has made its way into a larger variety of professional and lay learning contexts especially in Jewish communities ([Holzer and Kent 2011](#), p. 407). Re-

cently, *havruta* learning has received scholarly attention as a pedagogical strategy also outside Jewish communities (Bergom et al. 2011; Blumenfeld 2010; Shargel 2019). In addition, online applications of *havruta* have been developed (Gold et al. 2021). Yet the connections between traditional *havruta* learning and the pedagogical ideals of the *Lehrhaus* tradition have not yet received much attention (see, however, the volume *Bildung—Lehrhaus—Frankfurt* edited by Wiese and Pollock forthcoming).

2.2. Rosenzweig's Pedagogical Principles and the *Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt am Main

As Paul Mendes-Flohr argues in a chapter with the telling title “Jewish Learning, Jewish Hope” (2021, pp. 47–65), Rosenzweig “envisioned renewal of Jewish spiritual life as first and foremost the reestablishment of Jewish learning—*learning* as a communal activity of shared reading of sacred texts as opposed to the individual *study* of texts” (ibid., p. 50). Jewish learning does not isolate the individual in his or her study but rather impels him or her to social intercourse. While the German verb *lehren*, which entered into the noun *Lehrhaus*, connotes teaching and instruction as opposed to studying, it is more adequate to translate *Lehrhaus* as “house of study,” not least due to the communicative character of studying texts together and learning jointly (cf. ibid., p. 51).

Since Rosenzweig preferred the idea of the learning community to lonely learning processes, it seems natural that he founded the *Lehrhaus*. He wished to build a community constituted by language and culture, not by a common national identity (cf. Rosenzweig 1937, p. 80). Similarly, Mendes-Flohr criticizes “particularistic identities” (Mendes-Flohr 2021, p. 3) and instead seeks “to fortify a Jewish identity as spiritually and intellectually engaging yet honoring an individual’s equally passionate affiliation with other cultural and cognitive communities” (ibid., p. 4). Taking heed from Rosenzweig that Jewish identity must neither be national nor ethnic, neither political nor secular, Mendes-Flohr explores the possibility that Jews, who embrace other cultures, can root their lives anew in Judaism as a “faith community” in which one’s identity is “constituted dialogically” through studying sacred texts together (ibid., p. 8). He underlines that one is not to adopt a “doctrinal affirmation of the teachings and truth claims” of Jewish tradition; rather, the texts are continually subjected to “questions and revision” (ibid.).

In the Frankfurt *Lehrhaus*, the teachers were not only rabbis, but also laymen, both men and women, local residents, and guests, among them Leo Baeck, Erich Fromm, and Gershom Scholem. Rosenzweig wanted them to be present for each other’s lectures in order to allow for an exchange of thoughts. Let us now turn to Rosenzweig’s principles of education, which can be distilled from his pedagogical writings (for more information on Rosenzweig’s ‘New Learning,’ see Licharz 1987; Seiffert 1988; Schulz-Grave 1998).

2.2.1. Learning for Life

In his 1916 essay “Volksschule und Reichsschule” on the German public elementary school and secondary school of his time that was supposed to educate future civil servants, Rosenzweig claims that education is to be tested and verified in the lifeworld. Educational formation (*Bildung*) is understood as an action ability that can help a person to come to terms with his or her life and master the challenges (s)he will meet on his or her way (Rosenzweig 1937, pp. 420–66). Rosenzweig wanted pupils to learn not only the German language and history; rather, he hoped they also would learn to love the beauty of foreign languages in order to become capable of relating critically to their own familiar tradition, thus thinking for themselves and raising questions instead of being fed with ready-made answers (Mayer 1986, pp. 18–19).

This attitude entails a special understanding of the relation between pupils and their teacher. In one of his most important epistles, “Bildung und kein Ende” (Rosenzweig 1937, pp. 79–93), which literally means: “No End (of) Education,” translated as “Towards a Renaissance of Jewish Learning” (Rosenzweig 2002a, pp. 55–71), addressed to his friend Eduard Strauss early in 1920, Rosenzweig states: “Books are not now the prime need of the day. But what we need more than ever, or at least as much as ever, are human beings”

(ibid., p. 55). The teacher must be “a master and at the same time a pupil” (ibid., p. 69). Rosenzweig made it explicit that there is “no end to learning, no end to education” (ibid., p. 59). Rosenzweig himself embodied this attitude when he was heading the *Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt for seven years.

As Rosenzweig wrote to Margrit Rosenstock in a letter of 17 April 1918: “Erst im Lehren bewährt sich das Lernen.” (Rosenzweig 2002b, p. 76) Teaching is the locus where learning proves its worth and either stands the test of time or fails. This unpretentious attitude places the teacher on eye level with the students and emphasizes that learning is without an end.

2.2.2. Dialogical Learning through Trustful Listening and Speaking

Methodologically, Rosenzweig’s ‘new’ principles of learning link up with the ‘old’ traditional forms of Jewish learning in the *beit ha-Midrash*, the house of the study of the Torah and Talmud. In a rabbinical *havruta* session, one reads texts loudly, and the *haver* interrupts one whenever something is not immediately comprehended or gives occasion to discussion. The other’s questions are taken as points of departure for one’s own comments. In this way, the Jewish tradition transmits and passes on the disagreements and controversial points of a dialogue.

In a dialogical *havruta*, adult fellow students value the fact that they are not just passive ‘end points’ in the transmission of knowledge but also have an active part in its appropriation. Their questions are taken seriously. Learning needs a room to move between the already given and the not yet found. The dialogue that moves between questions and attempts to answer can offer such a room. The ability to speak is both presupposed and trained, which is key not only for oral exams, but also for the larger project of democracy. After all, learning is not just a private matter but also of public interest, and it needs a public forum, which Rosenzweig’s *Lehrhaus* provided.

In addition to lectures, Rosenzweig offered open seminars at the *Lehrhaus* without planning the themes beforehand. He wanted to make a new, “bookless” start, a “modest beginning” without a curriculum, without “a planned whole” (Rosenzweig 2002a, p. 68). The meetings were supposed to offer nothing more than “Sprechraum” and “Sprechzeit”—space and time in which to speak (Rosenzweig 1937, p. 91; 2002a, p. 68). Rosenzweig gave the session leader the advice to have trust, to renounce all plans and to wait for people to appear in the discussion room: “To begin with, don’t offer them anything. Listen. And words will come to the listener [*aus dem Hören werden Worte wachsen*], and they will join together and form desires [*Wünsche*]. And desires are the messengers of confidence [*Boten des Vertrauens*].” (Rosenzweig 2002a, p. 69; 1937, p. 91) Translated literally, Rosenzweig argues that the words (*Worte*) of those who signed up for the seminars will grow (*wachsen*) out of the listening (*Hören*) of the host. Moreover, the participants’ words voice their desires or, more precisely, their wishes (*Wünsche*), which convey a message of the participants’ trust since the expression of one’s wishes presupposes trust in one’s counterpart.

One may ask: trust in whom or what? In the given context, the German word *Vertrauen* means trust in another person or in a shared process of learning rather than self-confidence, which is why the above translation is slightly misleading. *Vertrauen* has an other-related character whenever one does not speak specifically of self-related trust (*Selbstvertrauen*). Taking the temporality of trust into account, another connotation of the word *Vertrauen* is that it focuses on the present moment and holds the fear of an unpredictable future at bay (cf. Welz 2009, 2010b, pp. 2–3, 215–16).

Accordingly, the teacher’s task is, first of all, to listen to the voices of those assembled, to be open to their suggestions, to receive their spontaneous wishes. This openness is the ‘empty’ form of readiness or willingness that will be ‘filled’ with the contributions by those who will begin to speak. According to Rosenzweig, there is “one recipe alone that can make a person Jewish and hence [. . .] a full human being: that recipe is to have no recipe [*das Rezept der Rezeptlosigkeit*]”: namely, trust (*Vertrauen*), which is defined as “a state of readiness that does not ask for recipes” (Rosenzweig 2002a, p. 66; 1937, p. 89), a state in

which a person does not stammer perpetually, “What shall I do then?” and “How can I do that?” but rather is prepared for whatever may happen next, organizing nothing but time and space to speak in (Rosenzweig 1937, p. 89; 2002a, p. 67).

2.2.3. Teacherless Learning through Questioning and Asking in Reply

In a presentation of the Free Jewish House of Study for a newsletter published in 1925 (“Das Freie Jüdische Lehrhaus: Einleitung für ein Mitteilungsblatt”), which is not translated into English and thus cannot be found in the essay collection *On Jewish Learning*, Rosenzweig indicates how co-learning in the *Lehrhaus* community distinguishes itself from a lecture or seminar at the university: firstly, joint learning leaves time and space for “das lebendige Fragen und Gegenfragen” (Rosenzweig 1937, p. 100), for spirited questioning and asking in reply; secondly, “gemeinsames Lernen wächst nur aus dem Umgang mit den echten großen Problemen oder mit der großen klassischen Literatur” (ibid.): learning together with others prospers only if the real problems of a time or great classics of literature are discussed. And both aspects are dependent on a general rule of politeness: “anzuhören, was der andre, in diesem Falle also das Problem oder das Buch, zu sagen hat, und nicht alles vorher zu wissen” (ibid.), i.e., one should listen to what the other person (or the problem or the book) has to say and not believe that one knows everything in advance.

Rosenzweig admits that this “lehrerlose Lernen” (ibid., p. 101), this teacherless learning, requires a mixture of modesty and audacity. At the *Lehrhaus*, even professional teachers were not expected to assume their usual role; rather, they were expected to be listeners (“Hörer”) and leaders of the chorus of askers (“Chorführer des Chors der Fragenden”) (ibid.). In this way, the ‘teachers’ remain ‘students’ on equal footing with the other participants in the adventure of *Bildung* understood as learning for life, character formation, and personal maturation.

2.2.4. Learning as a Transformative Practice of Existential Orientation

Rosenzweig welcomed existential questions inquiring into what one believes, how one lives (or should live), and why one is in doubt. The courage to be doubtful (*Mut zu zweifeln*) was just as welcome as the power to desire (Rosenzweig 1937, p. 93). Raising good questions was seen as more decisive than giving normative answers. After all, giving normative answers to others’ existential questions is impossible whenever these questions refer to a decision that cannot be delegated to anyone else. Ideally, the outcome of teaching is not only the knowledge of ‘objective’ facts but also the backbone to have ‘subjective’ convictions and to respond even though one will be changed in this process. Years later, Rosenzweig’s friend Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy (1969, pp. 741, 751) coined the Latin formula *respondeo etsi mutabor*: I answer even though I will be changed. This formula also expresses Rosenzweig’s ethos of responsivity, which turns learning into a transformative practice of existential orientation.

As Nahum N. Glatzer points out in his “Introduction” to Rosenzweig’s epistles and treatises on Jewish learning, Rosenzweig avoided historicism in favor of “a synchronistic attitude” (Glatzer [1995] 2002, p. 17) that allowed him and his fellow students to connect the past with pressing questions of the present when patiently examining sources and considering what they had to say in the current situation. Rosenzweig himself thought that this unsupervised learning is dangerous (“gefährlich”) and yet necessary in a time of transition when the old teachers, the scholars, were no longer recognized as guides, and the new ones had not yet appeared (Rosenzweig 1937, p. 101). Rosenzweig’s ‘new’ learning thus also entailed finding new paths in one’s attempt to navigate through a complex and confusing world. To this aim, “the discussion period should bring everybody together” (Rosenzweig 2002a, p. 70) in the *Lehrhaus*, allowing everyone to ask questions, entertain doubts and express desires, instead of perverting the speaker’s platform into a pulpit.

In the epistolary treatise “Die Bauleute/The Builders: Concerning the Law,” written in 1923 and addressed to Martin Buber, Rosenzweig (1937, pp. 107–13) elaborates on the inter-

action between teacher and students: “New listeners [. . .] always imply new demands; thus a teacher himself is changed by what he teaches his students; or, at least he must be prepared to have his words changed, if not himself” (Rosenzweig 2002a, pp. 73–74). In “The Builders,” Rosenzweig put forward a “pragmatic approach” (Glatzer [1995] 2002, p. 20): just as knowledge can be acquired only by the individual delving into that knowledge (because learning what is knowable is a condition for learning what is unknown), so practice can be understood only by doing what “cannot be known like knowledge, but can only be done” (Rosenzweig 2002a, p. 82). This pragmatic, existential approach to the Law of the Torah and God’s commandments will also leave its mark on the teacher who “is changed by what he teaches his students” (ibid., pp. 73–74), at least if his teaching involves deeds corresponding to words (cf. ibid., p. 88). The one who learns is asked “to stake his whole being for the learning” (ibid., p. 75). For the teacher, the subject matter he wants to teach “changes into inner power” (ibid., p. 76) when interiorized and embodied in his own conduct of life (cf. ibid., p. 92).

Rosenzweig wanted the students to listen and think for themselves, thereby avoiding parochialism and reopening “the silenced dialogue between the presently living generation and classical Judaism” (Glatzer [1995] 2002, p. 24). Only in emphasizing the orienting power of Judaism could Rosenzweig regard it as being “more than a power in the past, more than a curiosity in our own era” and claim that “it is the goal of the future” (Rosenzweig 2002a, p. 30), as he did in “It Is Time: Concerning the Study of Judaism”.

2.2.5. Religious Learning through a Return to the Sources

Rosenzweig wrote “It Is Time” (*Zeit ists . . .*) at the Balkan front in 1917 and addressed it to Hermann Cohen who was teaching philosophy of Judaism at the liberal rabbinical seminar (*Hochschule für die Wissenschaft des Judentums*) in Berlin, envisaging a new type of educator who is not only a transmitter of knowledge, but himself a scholar in living contact with his sources (Glatzer [1995] 2002, pp. 10–11). The ‘return to the sources’ (*ad fontes*) thus became the watchword of the *Lehrhaus* (cf. Rosenzweig 1937, p. 78). The main emphasis was on the Hebrew language as the key to the great documents of classical Judaism, on the Hebrew Bible and its commentaries, the Midrashim, and the Siddur, the prayer book, and Jewish mysticism in the form of the Sohar and the Lurianic kabbala (cf. Rühle 2004, p. 63). Around this core, a comprehensive program was arranged: conversations about arts, music, history, philosophy, etc.

Remarkably, Rosenzweig did not determine a common ‘central perspective’ when starting the enterprise of communal learning; rather, he kept open what might turn out to be that which everyone actually has in common. Learning is a form of contextualization that involves moving in and through the differences. We need a passion for distinctions. The dividing line created by the definition of what is ‘one’s own’ and what is ‘foreign’ may run not only *between* persons, but also *within* a person who changes in the course of his or her learning process.

In his inaugural address upon opening the *Lehrhaus* in 1920, which is entitled “Neues Lernen/New Learning,” Rosenzweig (1937, p. 95; 2002a, p. 96) describes how the intellectual horizons of thought were enlarged by the emancipation of the Jews who since then have found new *geistige Heimstätten*, i.e., a new spiritual and intellectual home outside the Jewish world. To Rosenzweig’s mind, the old style of Jewish learning is helpless before this “spiritual emigration” (Rosenzweig 2002a, p. 96), which is why a new learning is necessary: “A learning that no longer starts from the Torah and leads into life, but the other way round”: from a lifeworld knowing nothing about Judaism back to the Torah, thus performing a movement “[f]rom the periphery back to the center; from the outside, in” (Rosenzweig 1937, p. 97; 2002a, p. 98). This sort of learning, which implies that Jews need not convert but only return to what is theirs (cf. Pollock 2014, p. 115), is supported best by those who bring with themselves “am meisten Fremdes,” i.e., “the maximum of what is alien” or unfamiliar (Rosenzweig 1937, p. 97; 2002a, p. 99) in returning home to their own, innermost life (cf. Rosenzweig 1937, p. 99; 2002a, p. 102). This process of coming

home with a lot of questions raised in a foreign world outside of Judaism, of reading old texts with a fresh perspective, and thus of re-appropriating one's own religious tradition, ensures that the ability to distinguish between different traditions is preserved, and that tradition is linked up with innovation.

3. The Context and Method of Our Investigation

The majority of studies discuss *havruta* in its traditional form, conducted in pairs, face-to-face on site. There are only a few studies about remote *havruta* learning (Holzer and Kent 2011, p. 408) and synchronous online learning (Gold et al. 2021; Cohen 2022). Another research desideratum is the closer investigation of the role of listening in *havruta*. Our investigation will fill this lacuna, focusing also on different forms of listening such as listening to follow along, listening to understand and listening to figure something out (Kent 2010, p. 224).

3.1. Applying and Modifying Traditional Havruta Learning in a Contemporary Context

Our group did not conduct Talmud studies. Rather, our reflections on *havruta* as a method for dialogical online learning are based on our experiences in a group of people who read and discussed philosophical materials. In the beginning, our study group consisted of twelve scholars, but grew incrementally to eighteen. The group attracted participants from remarkably different ethnic, national, religious, and cultural backgrounds. In terms of group standing and participation styles, it did not seem to matter that the members spanned the academic gamut from doctoral students to professors and emeriti. From the spring term 2021 until the winter semester 2022 (four semesters in two years), we studied Buber's works *Daniel* (for an insightful introduction, see Mendes-Flohr 2002, pp. 18–22) and *I and Thou* in virtual meetings via Zoom, covering 10–15 pages at a time, usually for two hours in the evening.

Despite the differences in experience and title, all participants were equally regarded; more to the point, all questions and interpretations of the text were equally welcome. However, two persons in the group had notable roles: (1) Professor Claudia Welz was the initiator of the project. Since 2008, she has incorporated *havruta* sessions in her university teaching. As is her approach, for our group she personally invited group members, hosted the meetings, planned and coordinated the readings (and other input), moderated the sessions, and oftentimes forwarded follow-up reading. (2) Professor emeritus Paul Mendes-Flohr, well-known scholar in Philosophy and Jewish Studies, with profound and extensive knowledge on Rosenzweig, Buber, and other German-Jewish thinkers, often extended pertinent background information on Buber's life priorities, answered many questions raised by participants, and prepared roadmaps for further reading.

To our good fortune, several professors, who for years have taught within the philosophy of dialogue, joined the group. As for the goodness of the discussions, sometimes highly specialized scholarly points arose. However, the format permitted utmost inclusion: to read the text aloud, to interrupt the reading as soon as questions surfaced, and to converse. When there were no more comments or questions, someone continued reading.

In these procedural ways our *havruta* sessions corresponded to the core practices of traditional *havruta* learning, as inspired by the founder of the Frankfurt *Lehrhaus*: (1) listening and articulating; (2) wondering and focusing; (3) supporting and challenging (Kent 2010). Yet, instead of studying in pairs, we met as a group, and online, not on site. Keeping cameras open enabled face-to-face dialogue.

3.2. Inspiration from Rosenzweig

The host and convenor of our online-*havruta*, as well as all its members, keenly accepted and observed the five afore-mentioned pedagogical principles, as informed by Rosenzweig's writings on 'New Learning':

3.2.1 Rosenzweig emphasizes endless learning and calls attention to the fact that 'learning for life' is bound to one's own undelegable response to existential questions. This

means learning by experience takes time. Therefore, our *havruta* stretched over several semesters in order to offer the continuity necessary for this process, which offers both a ‘shelter-room’ and a ‘laboratory’ for thought experiments, in which old and new ideas can be put to the test.

3.2.2 Rosenzweig’s principle of granting *Sprechraum* and *Sprechzeit* to everyone present and of employing trustful listening and speaking as a means of dialogical learning was the core principle also of our online *havruta*. We reserved plenty of time for questions and answers, conversations, and discussions in the group. The genuine interest in each other’s thoughts may generate not only a mutual openness but also an interdisciplinary cross-fertilization.

3.2.3 Just like Rosenzweig and his *haverim*, we practiced ‘teacherless’ learning through questioning and asking in reply, which lead us beyond the alternative of either giving lectures (thereby promoting one’s own research) or arranging groupwork for our students (thereby promoting their ability to teamwork). There are forms in-between in a dialogue with phases of intense listening and a ping-pong of questions and replies. Being in a constant mutual face-to-face relationship, we were able to draw inspiration from each other’s eyes, as Rosenzweig (2002a, p. 41) encouraged us to do.

3.2.4 For us, too, learning together has become a transformative practice of existential orientation or re-orientation. As one group member expressed it, our *havruta* had become a kind of ‘lifeline’ for her. If we want to learn something new, we need the self-critical reflection in the face of another who remains—the other. Another person has another view on the world and can thus see aspects that are concealed for me. Allowing another’s verbalized perspective to touch me may change my own standpoint and make me realize how the other’s view still differs from mine. The positions of all parties can change without necessarily flowing into consensus.

3.2.5 Regarding religious learning, it is noteworthy that both Jews and Christians and the adherents to any other religion have to appropriate their own tradition. We did not pursue any pre-formulated agenda in our multi-religious group, which also embraced non-religious people. Yet, we followed Rosenzweig’s effort to return to the sources, to move from the periphery to the center and to patiently consider what a text has to say (see Glatzer [1995] 2002, pp. 16–17). The motto *ad fontes* includes the interdisciplinary illumination of these sources and the discussion of their relevance for ethical and existential questions today.

Our appropriation of Rosenzweig’s pedagogical principles has methodological implications in regard to the relation between the theory and practice of dialogue for which we will account shortly.

3.3. Methodological Implications

Since the backgrounds, interests, and moods of the learners steer the learning not only for themselves, but also for their study partners, variations in these factors may result in fundamentally different kinds of learning experiences for different individuals, even if they study the same text in the same way and in the same learning environment. Moreover, factors like the allocated time, the genre of texts studied, and one’s expectations make each *havruta* session unique (Holzer and Kent 2011, p. 409).

In what follows, we will use our own experiences and selected insights from the philosophy of dialogue, theory of architecture and film as the point of departure for our pedagogical reflections on *havruta* in audio-visual online settings. Our hermeneutical approach is akin to the ‘thinking with theory’ approach (Jackson and Mazzei 2012), which calls for a reading of data through various theoretical lenses in order to reveal new insights on the phenomena under investigation. In our case, Rosenzweig’s and Buber’s writings, current research on *havruta*, and conclusions we have drawn from our own online *havruta* provide a feedback loop between theory and our own practice of dialogue-related listening and learning.

4. Dialogue-Related Listening and Trusting

The diagram below (Figure 1) depicts the dialogical relationships on three platforms, or levels of listening, in online *havruta* learning: (1) the text (and through it, its author); (2) the ‘audience’ and participants in the Zoom room; and (3) one’s own mind.

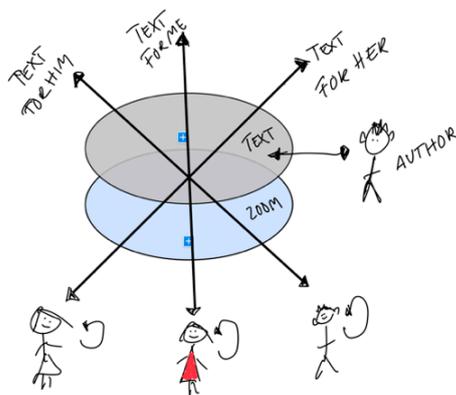


Figure 1. Dialogical relationships in online *havruta*.

(Ad 1) The text itself can be viewed as a platform of encounter and a ‘dialogue partner’ (Holzer 2006, p. 191) of a paradoxical nature: On the one hand, it is mute and cannot make itself heard aurally nor defend itself against misreading and manipulation. On the other, it is multi-vocal in the sense that it lends itself to more than one interpretation. Yet not all interpretations are equally accurate. *Havruta* learners are encouraged to bear responsibility, to make the text “speak” on its own terms (Holzer and Kent 2013, p. 48), with the capacity to hear the voice of the author speaking through the text (Buber 1996, p. 175).

(Ad 2) We meet each other and ourselves in the text and through the text. It opens itself to us in new ways due to the readers’ questions and insights. We also listen to each other with the hope and aptitude to understand. While the text frames the discussion, the virtual classroom enables visual and audible contact among participants.

(Ad 3) Finally, the practice of listening and interpreting the text together creates an inner dialogue. One may readily listen to one’s inner voice and subsequent responses when engaging in dialogue with the text and with other participants. *Havruta* provides a frame for our listening, steers it, and sets a limit to it by pulling our individual thoughts back to the text and the shared discussion. In what follows, we will explore the pedagogical and epistemological significance of listening and the importance of mutual trust for dialogues with others.

4.1. The Pedagogical and Epistemological Significance of Listening

Listening is highlighted both by Buber and Rosenzweig. As Mendes-Flohr (2021, p. 63) demonstrates trenchantly, “Jewish learning is a preeminent act of listening rather than mere reading.” In a first step, following Buber, we will spell this out in religious contexts; in a second step, we will turn to secular contexts, including architectural and film theory in order to elucidate the relation between vision and audition.

4.1.1. Listening to Scripture—Listening with the Heart: Inspiration from Buber

According to Mendes-Flohr (2021, p. 63), Buber and Rosenzweig conceived of their Bible translation as “revalorizing the reading of scripture as a performative act [. . .] in which the reader is prompted to listen to the voice resonating in the text.” For Buber, the commanding word of the Bible is a personal address (*Anrede*), calling for a personal response (see *ibid.*, with reference to Buber 1936, p. 140). Most often, listening denotes an act of attending to sounds with our sense of hearing, and the latter is definitely involved when we attend to the biblical word in its spokenness (*Gesprochenheit*) by reading Scripture together aloud, which requires the art of reading slowly (see *ibid.*).

However, embodied listening does not have to be restricted to the ears. In a text on education and worldview, “Bildung und Weltanschauung”, Buber holds: “If I attend as faithfully as I can to what it contains of word and texture [*Gefüge*], of sound and rhythmic structure, of evident and hidden connections, my interpretation would not have been made in vain” (Mendes-Flohr 2021, p. 63; referring to Buber 1935 in MBW 8, p. 282). The quote beckons to listen not only to the sounds and rhythms that affect our bodies but also to the meaning of the words which may not reveal itself to us immediately. In addition, we are invited to listen to what is going on inside of us, to strain towards our own interpretation, to search for connections between what is inside and outside of ourselves, between the text and its effects on our experience.

Mendes-Flohr concludes pointedly that Buber and Rosenzweig “raised for a post-traditional Jewry the vision of a homeward journey forged by listening with the heart” (Mendes-Flohr 2021, p. 65). The pedagogical and epistemological significance of this kind of listening consists not only in new intellectual insights but also in training our compassion and sparking our imagination, thus achieving an emotional nobleness or ‘formation’ of the heart (*Herzensbildung*) and cultural empathy allowing us to see things not only from our own but also from the perspective of other people. Suddenly discovering new angles of a situation and new aspects of a text with the help of other people who see the world differently on the basis of another culture, religion, and tradition, is exactly what we have experienced in our international *havruta*—a great gift we have received from each other.

When listening to Scripture, something special happens because ultimately, something more-than-human is at stake. The voice that is to be heard anew in the sacred literary sources of the tradition is not just a human one. As we can read in the Hebrew Bible, King Solomon’s legendary wisdom is rooted in his willingness to listen to the creator and sustainer of the universe. Solomon asked God for a “listening heart” so that he would be able to hear God’s guidance and could discern the difference between good and evil (1 Kings 3:9; see Janowski 2018). Despite of the secularization in our times, “the impact of the Unconditional” (Mendes-Flohr 2021, p. 58; quoting Buber [1918] 1967, p. 151) may still be sensed. Yet, insofar as God’s voice remains supersensible, it cannot be heard by itself but becomes audible only through human language, mediated by human words and deeds. Hence, the divine voice reaches us only indirectly: through our listening to its resonances in our heart and in the world around us (cf. Welz 2014, p. 143). Listening and responding to the divine voice as ‘hidden’ in other voices is part and parcel of the practice of prayer, which can be conceived as being a conversation with God or as a practice of listening to silence (cf. Welz 2019a, 2019b).

Since the God-relationship, according to Buber, permeates our entire life in this world, strictly speaking, there is no sharp dividing line between a religious and a secular sphere. In his 1957 Afterword to *I and Thou*, Buber wrote: “God carries his absoluteness into his relationship with man. Hence the man who turns toward him need not turn his back on any other I-You relationship: quite legitimately he brings them all to God and allows them to be transfigured ‘in the countenance of God.’” (Buber 1996, p. 182) Here we learn that our relationships with other human beings enter into our God-relationship. Although Buber is aware of the fact that we can neither prove the existence of God nor “the existence of mutuality between God and man,” Buber assumes that we can communicate with God as “God’s address to man penetrates the events in all our lives and all the events in the world around us” (ibid.). This assumption opens the door to an understanding of religion as an integrated part of our everyday lives. As such, the God-relationship has an ethical bearing, and our interhuman relationships affect the ways in which we perceive and conceptualize divine ‘presence,’ ‘absence,’ or ‘hiddenness.’

Listening to this divine voice can re-establish the connection between God and human beings in such a way that we also may become capable of hearing the truly human voice in each other’s utterances and silences. Mendes-Flohr (2019, p. 390) concludes his monumental Buber-biography with a thank-you to Buber, “who taught me to listen to the muted, inner voice of the Other—including one’s own—before trying to understand his

or her words. One might call this the hermeneutics of *Menschlichkeit*." Ultimately, what we learn in listening to each other is that all of us are created to participate in a humanity, humaneness, and brotherliness (*Menschlichkeit*) vis-à-vis God to whose call we respond by being human.

4.1.2. Listening to Emerging Meanings in Philosophical Texts—Vision and Audition

In our *havruta* sessions, we not only listened to each other, but also to emerging meanings: those stemming from the text, those suggested by our *haverim*, and those entangled with our own lives.

An analogy between audition and vision might be useful here. Architect [Pallasmaa \(2012, p. 50\)](#) distinguishes between focused and unfocused vision. Unfocused vision and explorations in shadows and darkness are important for inviting fantasy: "In order to think clearly, the sharpness of vision has to be suppressed, for thoughts travel with an absent-minded and unfocused gaze. Homogenous bright light paralyzes the imagination in the same way that homogenization of space weakens the experience of being." Reading a text aloud in *havruta* learning slows down the pace of studying. Reading slowly creates a space where focused attention and unfocused attention can oscillate in an organic way. We can listen to voices, meanings, and rhythms simultaneously, and let them touch us instead of forcing our attention to a certain point of view. A slow pace of reading and the absence of preset learning objectives open a space for a multiplicity of meanings and enables us to dwell in the midst of emerging meanings. Not only unfocused vision but also unfocused listening has the capacity of bringing forth ideas and emotions under formation and touching unconscious levels of our thinking and being in ways that the focused gaze or focused listening cannot. Unfocused listening facilitates an exploration of the above-mentioned "hidden connections" emphasized by Buber ([Buber 1935](#) in MBW 8, p. 282). Accordingly, it facilitates the rooting of new knowledge in the learners' personal meaning structures.

However, focused listening, too, has an important role in *havruta* learning. Sometimes a certain sentence captures our attention, and our listening focuses on what this particular sentence is telling us. Being absorbed in listening to different layers of meaning enhances the possibility that we scrutinize the text in ways that are personally meaningful to us. Just as every city has an echo which depends on the pattern and scale of its streets and the prevailing architectural styles and materials ([Pallasmaa 2012, p. 55](#)), every book has its own sound and rhythm, which depends on the sound and organization of its words. When dwelling in a certain building, our bodies become attuned to the architecture of the building ([Pallasmaa 2012, p. 72](#)). When reading aloud, the unique soundscape and rhythmic pulse of a book become more tangible, evoking atmospheres, feelings, and memories. The text enters not only our minds, but also our bodies.

In our reading sessions, we often paused and tried to understand why Buber used a certain metaphor instead of another, and what the metaphor does in the text and in us. For instance, the metaphor of sea evokes in each of us a collection of sounds, rhythms, and visual images based on our experiences of the sea. Our bodies become attuned to the rhythms of the sea, and we can feel the push and pull of tides in our physical constitution. As a group, we become connected at a deeper level when reading the text together and being influenced by the same sentences and their rhythms. Human beings enjoy becoming attuned to each other and finding a common rhythm. Children enjoy swinging in the same rhythm, and dancing partners delight in sharing the rhythm. In dialogue, mutual attunement creates a feeling of ease in communication and a bond connecting us despite conflicting interpretations.

Considering the epistemological and pedagogical potential of listening, the question is how we learn to listen. Practices such as listening, waiting, and being attentive to others cannot be taught through a formal method because their very nature calls for an appreciation of the context in question. However, these practices can be learned from example: "while listening for Buber is more about being present to the other than about displaying a skill or technique, it is possible to be moved by someone to become a better listener"

(Gordon 2011, p. 219). *Havruta* learning is an exemplary practice, which nurtures ‘deep’ listening and attuned learning (Holzer 2016; Raider-Roth and Holzer 2009, p. 232; Holzer 2006, p. 201; Kent 2006, p. 230; Kent and Cook 2012, p. 245).

Holzer and Kent (2013, p. 50) characterize the process of co-constructing textual interpretations in *havruta* learning as a consensus-seeking dialogue, even in cases where interpretations contradict each other. When trying to resolve a law case, consensus in the conclusion is a worthwhile goal. However, in other cases, search for consensus, even if interpreted in the weak sense of finding a competitive interpretation compelling, is not necessary for successful learning. On the contrary, it may unnecessarily narrow down the scope and depth of learning. When studying a difficult philosophical text, consensus may not be possible. When interpreting poetic texts, there are no specified truth conditions we could apply to determine the truth (Fleischacker 1996, p. 125). Rather, the truth conditions arise from the interpreter’s life-experience and involve planes of persuasion that transcend the linguistic and cognitive levels (Ikonen 2020, pp. 39–40). The combination of words and a certain rhythm can touch upon the unconscious layers of experience and summon a feeling of meaningfulness before I can explicate why a certain poem or philosophical text makes me say that it conveys a certain truth about human existence. Hence, *havruta* listening and learning would be better described as an ‘insight-seeking’ dialogue where consensus is not the best possible learning outcome.

Another question is how we actually listen when engaging in *havruta*. Film theorist Chion (2019, pp. 22–28) distinguishes between three different modes of listening: causal, codal, and reduced listening. (1) Causal listening consists of listening to a sound in order to determine its source. (2) Codal listening aims at detecting the meaning of what is heard. (3) Reduced listening tries to avoid both causal and codal listening and focuses on the sound itself in order to describe it independently of its cause, meaning, or effects. Listening to the pitch, intervals, and rhythm are examples of reduced listening. Could we apply his logic to detect the modes of listening in reading and interpreting a text together?

(Ad 1) The actual sounds in *havruta* sessions are the voices of other participants. We do not need to detect the cause of their voices and, in this sense, we are not concerned about causal listening. (Ad 2) By contrast, we listen to the meaning of the questions and comments by other participants. Even though we do not hear the sound of the text itself, we want to understand what it means. In the process of listening and interpreting the text, we also try to hear the voice of the author who, like the written text, is mute but nevertheless saying something. The meaning we infer from the text is never due to the voice of the author alone, yet we try to detect his voice and distinguish it from our own interpretations, for instance by familiarizing ourselves with his life and other works. (Ad 3) Reduced listening is not focal in *havruta* learning. Concentrating on the sound of the reader’s voice would take our learning away from its goal: to interpret the text. However, Chion’s idea of giving up causal and codal listening goes well with an idea of unfocused listening varying Pallasmaa’s idea of unfocused vision.

Chion mentions evocative aspects of sounds, but as his interest is in understanding listening to actual sounds, he does not discuss introspective listening. Listening to our responses to others’ comments may help us in becoming aware of our own lenses of interpretation and in opening ourselves to alternative interpretations. Sometimes group discussions drift from the original theme of the text to the personal interests of the participants. While strict instructions and pre-determined pedagogical tools are more probable to hinder the dialogue than promote it, a simple question may bring the discussion back to the text while supporting the dialogical atmosphere. ‘What in the text has provoked your thought?’ Being in dialogue only with oneself or with many partners at the same time is impossible. In a successful *havruta* learning session, all planes of dialogue are at play as long as we oscillate between the text, the other participants, and ourselves.

The ‘insight-seeking’ dialogue is especially important for heterogeneous learning groups because a secular atheist and religious believers may not share a common framework of truth criteria. Therefore, seeking consensus may even become a stumbling block

for interreligious dialogue (Qadir and Tiaynen-Qadir 2016) or the dialogue between believers and atheists. By contrast, listening without an aim of consensus may give rise to an ethics of communication that is attuned to difference and engages with what is unfamiliar, strange, and not yet understood (Lipari 2009, p. 45) and, for this reason, has a potential for creating communality where shared cognitive meanings are not available. In this context, the importance of mutual trust cannot be overrated.

4.2. The Importance of Mutual Trust for Dialogues with Others

From Buber, we have already learned how important it is to be really present vis-à-vis each other, to face one's concrete individual counterpart, and to include every single one in the communion. Buber maintains that when an experience becomes self-reflexive and self-reliant, it loses its dialogical character, which includes "a living mutual relation" with one's dialogue partner(s) (Buber 2002, p. 22) and "the deep intercourse" with a real Other who is never just "a passive object of knowledge" (ibid., p. 23). The "sense of reciprocity" (ibid., p. 24) is what distinguishes a genuine dialogue from self-absorbed "monologue disguised as dialogue" (ibid., p. 22).

In addition to the emphasis on co-presence and mutuality, we also find the idea of confirmation (*Bejahung*) in Buber (1988, pp. 57–59; see Buber 1995, p. 17): to be seen and listened to means being confirmed and accepted in one's existence by one's fellow human beings. Being confirmed by others in this way is a condition for being able to learn together and to "actualize one's own potential" (see Scott's (n.d.) entry on Martin Buber in *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, section 2d). An 'insight-seeking' dialogue cannot be achieved without trust. Mutual relationships of trust have a positive influence on our learning aptitude, and they also promote the openness of the listeners and allow them to cultivate other moral human qualities (Kristiansen 2008). But what is trust, and in what sense is it 'basic'?

4.2.1. Ways of Understanding Trust

We all know that, without trust, both our private and professional relationships, political institutions, as well as economic ties would break down. Trust is fundamental in various respects: (1) seen from the perspective of developmental psychology (e.g., Erikson 1985, pp. 247–74), 'basic trust' (*Urvertrauen*) is the basis of psychosocial development; (2) seen from the perspective of moral philosophy and the philosophy of emotion (e.g., Baier 1986; Jones 2005), trust is the (pre-)reflective basis of deliberate acting, reasoning, and communicating; (3) seen from a sociological point of view, trust can be regarded as "a basic fact of social life" (Luhmann 1979, p. 4).

However, all three of these prominent explanations have limitations (see Welz 2010a, pp. 45–53). Alternatively, trust can be understood as 'basic openness' in the sense of being a form of eccentric relationality versus self-enclosure, an openness towards the future, an ungrounded ground of judgment providing practical (re-)orientation, and a response to ontological and epistemological uncertainty (see ibid., pp. 54–58). Even if trust is taken to be a movement of self-transcendence, it is crucial to consider trust not only as a basic trait of the trusting and/or trustworthy self or social relationship, but also as an aspect of the situation in which the trust-relation takes place (see ibid., pp. 58–63), which corresponds well with Buber's "ontology of the interhuman" (*Ontologie des Zwischenmenschlichen*) (Buber 1979, p. 290) and his accentuation of the sphere and forces "between I and Thou" (see Buber 1996, pp. 66, 89).

Communication ethicist Ronald C. Arnett, who has explored the implications of Buber's philosophy of dialogue for the understanding of communication and community building, explains why the tendency to aim only at oneself does not take seriously the reality of that which takes place between us: the failure to really listen to the other because one does not believe what is stated but rather looks for some hidden and supposed meaning to be unmasked is linked to mistrust, which ultimately leads to an atmosphere of suspicion (see Arnett 1986, pp. 47–49; quoting Buber 1965, pp. 87–88; Buber 1967, p. 308).

4.2.2. Trust and Education

A community of learners is in many ways a society in miniature. A society characterized by competition and caution, mistrust, and mutual control leads to stagnation and the suffocation of spontaneity. According to [Mendes-Flohr \(1989, pp. 112–21\)](#), Buber defines the concept of community or *Gemeinschaft* as a transhistorical pattern of relations where the individuals open themselves to each other. Buber maintains that the teacher should win the pupil's trust before the teaching can start:

“When the pupil's confidence (*Vertrauen*) has been won, his resistance against being educated gives way to a singular happening: he accepts the educator as a person. He feels he may trust this man, that this man is not making a business out of him, but is taking part in his life, accepting him before desiring to influence him. And so he learns to *ask*”. ([Buber 2002, p. 126](#))

What does ‘trust’ mean in the context of education? For Buber, trust implies “a breakthrough from reserve, the bursting of the bonds which imprison an unquiet heart” (*ibid.*, p. 127). A trustworthy learning environment is neither a safe space that would rule out the risk of possible harm, nor a brave space for which we could identify certain rules of conduct, as suggested by [Arao and Clemens \(2013\)](#) who encourage risk-taking yet aim to prevent unreasonable risks. Risk is a necessary condition for learning and growth ([Ikonen 2020; Suissa 2010, p. 68](#)). Taking a risk requires bravery, while trust leaves space for one's vulnerability. For Annette Baier, trust is the “accepted vulnerability to another's possible but not expected ill will (or lack of good will) toward one” ([Baier 1986, p. 235](#)). Opening oneself in trust requires the belief that the other persons will not harm me ([Baier 1991](#)). On this basis, a learning process can be carried out as a common investigation in which students dare to ask questions and reflect upon issues that matter to them (cf. [Kristiansen 2005, pp. 54–55](#)).

The teacher, too, must take the risk of fumbling around without knowing the ‘correct’ answer. The teacher's task is not to “dictate what is good and evil in general” because if one does so, one places oneself outside of the relation of reciprocity (see [Buber 2002, p. 127](#)). What counts is the teacher's effort to find a possible answer together with the students. After all, “[i]t is not the educational intention but it is the meeting which is educationally fruitful” (*ibid.*, p. 127). When a teacher is listening attentively, it is easier for the students to offer their own thoughts and experiences. By holding him- or herself back while trusting in his or her students, the teacher can give them a maneuvering room in which they can speak, act, and grow as human beings.

For Buber, trust is a distinctive way of experiencing or knowing the world, of finding an entrance into reality because trust—also in the form of faith in God—is that through which we can experience the everyday as “God's personal address to each of us” ([Mendes-Flohr 1986, p. 185](#)). For Buber, faith in God is an abiding trust derived from the insight that God, the ‘eternal Thou,’ is present in all interhuman relations between I and Thou and, for this reason, trust is also the source of the courage to open oneself to others in dialogue (cf. *ibid.*, p. 184). Here again, we can see how the religious and ethical, pedagogical, and epistemological aspects of dialogue intersect.

5. Discussion of Results and Concluding Remarks

As this paper has shown, *havruta* learning and the philosophy of dialogue developed by Rosenzweig and Buber can offer something unique to the rapidly expanding online learning practices in our times. Let us briefly sum up the results of our study:

Section 1 outlines connections between traditional *havruta* learning, which is a dialogical, teacherless peer-learning practice, and the pedagogical principles of the *Lehrhaus* tradition established by Rosenzweig in Frankfurt. Rosenzweig favors endless learning in the pragmatic sense of learning how to orient oneself, to respond to existential problems, and to acquire the ability to act. Learning is based on trustful listening, asking questions, and replying even if one's own identity and sense of belonging is transformed in this pro-

cess. Religious learning is practiced in the form of a return to the sources and a movement from the periphery to the center of a tradition.

Section 2 accounts for the methods of our investigation, which combines theoretical and empirical approaches to learning through listening and responding, thus probing the potential and limits of dialogue in local and online environments. We have applied and modified Rosenzweig's principles in our online reading evenings where we so far have read two books by Buber, who lectured at the *Lehrhaus* in Frankfurt and became its leader when Rosenzweig stepped back because of serious illness. Our *havruta* can count as a text-based international, interreligious, and intercultural dialogue following Rosenzweig's idea that giving others time and space to speak and opening oneself to the unpredictable outcome of this adventure is decisive for studying together and for learning something new.

Section 3 elucidates different modes of listening by comparing Pallasmaa's idea of focused versus unfocused vision to the practice of focused and unfocused listening in *havruta* learning, and by asking to whether and to what extent causal, codal, and unreduced listening à la Chion can be discovered there. Buber's and Mendes-Flohr's testimony to the pedagogical and epistemological significance of listening with the heart points to the ability to 'hear' the inaudible divine voice in and through other voices, written and spoken ones, and to 'see' the complexity of a situation from different angles, both intellectually and emotionally. We found that mutual trust is utterly important because it enables dialogue partners to open themselves and take the risk of exposing their vulnerable sides in order to seek new insights.

Finally, let us address two legitimate concerns: (1) Firstly, one might object that it will be difficult to transfer the classic *Lehrhaus* tradition to online learning environments without truncating some dimensions of the learning experience, which is rooted in real-life dialogical face-to-face encounters. (2) Another possible objection might be that our experience in adult learning differs fundamentally from that of institutional learning at schools and ordinary lectures at universities—two settings that involve an unbalanced power relation between the teacher and the students, which sets limits to reciprocity. At the very least, the contexts of childhood and adult learning differ widely in both scope and purpose.

(Ad 1) Interestingly, our experiences with *havruta* do not support the concern that dialogue would be difficult to achieve in online learning environments. Worries about not being heard, worries about not being able to be oneself or being too vulnerable to speak out have not surfaced, even though we are a heterogeneous group. The question is: why not? Part of the explanation might be the slow pace of reading and the long-term commitment to collective study, which strengthened the internal group relations.

Moreover, the concern that audio-visual technology has a detaching effect proved to be groundless. Pallasmaa (2012, p. 14) maintains that "[c]omputer imaging tends to flatten our magnificent, multisensory, simultaneous and synchronic capacities of imagination by turning the design process into a passive visual manipulation, a retinal journey." The haptic contact with the object is lost. However, our *havruta* experience has shown that the haptic relationship to a book under stay may compensate for the detaching effect of online learning. We turned pages, took notes, and sometimes we had to make sure that we were on the same page. With a book in front of every participant, listening is connected to the sense of touch. Thus, the intellectual learning process is tied to the place where the body of the learner is located.

Yet, without doubt, in online classrooms, body language is subdued, and this narrows the range of interpretive cues for understanding each other's non-verbal messages. However, even the Zoom room gives access to the faces of other participants and their facial micro-expressions, which are a significant part of a speaker's and listener's conversational repertoire (Bavelas and Chovil 1997, p. 344). In fact, the camera allows us to see each other's faces much closer than in a classroom on campus or at school. The closeness of faces creates a certain intimacy, which may facilitate listening and grasping the meaning of other speakers' utterances.

Even though communication in digital learning environments may be disturbed by unstable internet connections (Sousa 2021, p. 233), audio-visual online platforms may also deepen our communication because occasional disruptions of the connection contain the demand to wait for the other's reappearance and reply. One has no other choice than to wait and be attentive, which pushes us in the direction of Rosenzweig's imperative to take one's need of the other (and of his or her response) and time (i.e., the time difference between call and response) seriously (see Rosenzweig 1937, p. 387: *Bedürfen des andern und [. . .] Ernstnehmen der Zeit*, cf. Dober 1990). Rosenzweig's time-bound epistemology acknowledges the contingency of reality as well as the singularity of human experience and thus champions patience and serenity in the face of the unforeseeable (cf. Wiehl 1988, p. 48).

(Ad 2) But what about the imbalance of power between teacher and students—would it not be naïve to assume that a Zoom room is a domination-free sphere and that *havruta* indeed can be practiced as the 'teacherless' learning envisioned by Rosenzweig? Let us first consult Buber. He underlines that the teacher-student relationship is a communion in which students are encouraged to ask questions. Instead of dominating their learning, the teacher is called to be attentive to the unique voices and insights of the students:

"He [i.e., the teacher] enters the school-room for the first time, he sees them crouching at the desks, indiscriminately flung together, the misshapen and the well-proportioned, animal faces, empty faces, and noble faces in indiscriminate confusion, like the presence of the created universe; the glance of the educator accepts and receives them all". (Buber 2002, p. 112)

The educator embraces all students by drawing them into a communion of dialogical learning. A process of education can be effective only when it springs from "experiencing the other side" (ibid., p. 114)—an inclusion equivalent to the above-quoted *Umfassung* mentioned in *I and Thou*.

Buber claims that an experience of inclusion involves (1) a relation between two persons, (2) an event experienced by them in common, and (3) the fact that one person "at the same time lives through the common event from the standpoint of the other" (ibid., p. 115). However, teaching sets limits to an inclusive reciprocity between teacher and pupil since the pupil cannot experience the educating of the educator (cf. ibid. p. 119). Buber writes: "The educator stands at both ends of the common situation, the pupil at one end. In the moment when the pupil is able to throw himself across and experience from over there, the educative relation would be burst asunder, or change into friendship" (ibid.).

Hence, the educational relationship at schools and other educational institutions with the duty of grading the students' oral performance and written assignments involves a paradox: It cannot be based on mutual inclusion because mutual inclusion would turn the educational relationship into friendship; rather, education is based on a "one-sided experience of inclusion" (ibid., p. 118) as the teacher selects the content of learning and has the authority to evaluate the learning progress, thus influencing the life of pupils or students who are not able to throw themselves over to the teacher's side because of the enormous power imbalance inherent in their relationship.

This paradox is not supposed to occur in *havruta* learning—not least because the latter involves listening practices in radical openness and because it can only be performed in a climate of trust and equality. In *havruta*, the usual asymmetry of power in the relation between the teacher and the students is overturned. In our role as co-learners in a *havruta* session, every one of us has equal rights. Those who would otherwise function as teachers are regarded as co-learners. Insofar as everyone can learn from everyone and insofar as everyone listens to everyone else, the power balance is equilibrated.

Yet, there remains an undeniable difference in academic experience, seniority, and areas of scholarly expertise. Despite this difference, leadership can be performed in subtle and unobtrusive ways if it is borne by mutual trust. The saying that the one who teaches learns most has a *particula veri* to it. In our *havruta* sessions, no one presents lectures, but the art of listening and 'leading' a conversation also implies a kind of leadership. In this

context, we can conclude that true leadership rests on the authority of a master in dialogue who is not just a great speaker but, maybe even more, a great listener who, above all, builds bridges in and through the ways in which he or she connects and communicates with others.

This applies not only to dialogues in the fields of religion and education but also in philosophy and psychology, which is why ‘dialogue’ as a “trans-disciplinary concept” (Mendes-Flohr 2015) is invaluable in its pathbreaking potential. However, its strength is also its weakness: life-saving dialogues that potentially mitigate conflicts and crises depend on people who are willing to enter into dialogue with others and to listen, but in the event of serious conflicts, let alone wars, such people are rare. These are the limits of dialogue based on trust: if this basis breaks away, the dialogue is dead. In the years 1958–1961, Buber encountered Dag Hammarskjöld, at that time Secretary General of the UN. In their meetings, the two had to find alternatives to dialogue—such as the peace brigades and the education of a new generation—since they realized that “dialogue as quiet diplomacy” (Marin 2010, p. 74) failed in the world’s worst conflict zones because of the mistrust of the involved parties. However, this predicament is no reason to discard dialogical learning through listening and responding. On the contrary: it shows us why dialogue has a priceless pedagogical, epistemological, and ethical significance.

This may be illustrated by Shmuel N. Eisenstadt’s personal encounter with Buber in the years 1949–1952, when the State of Israel was still very young. At that time, when there were huge waves of immigration and pressing problems of incorporating the new immigrants into Israeli society, Buber established a Center for Teachers of Adult Education. Eisenstadt asked Buber why he considered it so important to invest in adult education. “It is very important that we have a common discourse,” he replied. “We must be able to talk and dream together.” Eisenstadt (2002, p. 178) admits that he, at that time, did not fully understand Buber’s answer. However, 50 years later, he discovered that people talk only within their own social and ethnic group, and then, he began to appreciate more fully “the social thrust underlying Buber’s approach to education” as well as “the combination of the social and the sacred modes of communication that is the crux of fruitful dialogue” (ibid., p. 179)—a dialogue through which a community continually looks beyond itself and thus manages to reach others.

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