LEHRHAUS

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In honor of the 25th anniversary of the Rav's passing, *The Lehrhaus* is re-running some of its previous hits on Rabbi Soloveitchik

Ode to a Nightingale

Yocheved Friedman

In memory of Rav Yosef Dov Ha-Levi Soloveitchik, zt"l

A shooting star, you streaked across our skies,

And lit a path for those who'd lost their way.

With your poetic voice and burning eyes,

You blazed a trail that still leads us today.

Your tongue charmed thousands, who sat there, enthralled.

You wove for us a brilliant tapestry.

Be it in Boston, or in Lamport Hall,

We learned humility and majesty.

In Talmud class we trembled at your word,

Afraid to offer a "farkrumte svara."

The voices of the past were clearly heard:

Maimonides through “numen fun mein Zeyde.”

You taught us to live life heroically:

Halakhic man’s eternal destiny.

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Who Will Defend Maimonides? Rav Soloveitchik on the Mishneh Torah and the Guide

David Curwin

To what extent did Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik view Maimonides as a guide and master? Was the Rav more beholden to Rambam's halakhic Mishneh Torah or his philosophical Guide for the Perplexed? This question has occupied a number of scholars.[1] Now, more than ever, perhaps, we are equipped to grapple with the quandary: thanks to the recent publication of student notes penned during a semester-long graduate course delivered by the Rav on the Guide.[2] Edited by the very capable Prof. Lawrence Kaplan, these lectures were delivered in 1950-1951, during a period of time in which we possess relatively little material written by or transcribed from the Rav. Rabbi Soloveitchik composed his lengthier treatises in the 1940s.[3] Others appeared in the late 1950s and 1960s.[4] While Maimonides was always a focus of the Rav's thought, this is the only book dedicated exclusively to analysis of one of the Rambam's works. Within these lectures lie a critical piece of the puzzle. They show that the Rav made a distinction between different aspects of Maimonides, but not in the way we might expect.

I. Briskers and Rambam

This relationship to Maimonides was, to some extent, inherited. The Rav's father, Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik, and particularly his grandfather, Rabbi Hayyim Soloveitchik of Brisk, were known for making ample use of Rambam's Mishneh Torah. This essential code was their prism to resolve conflicting passages in the Talmud.

The Rav, too, cherished the Mishneh Torah. In his forties, the Rav recalled how Maimonides was his only childhood friend, and he would anxiously listen to his father's lectures to see if he would succeed in defending Maimonides from his detractors, such as the Ravad:

> Father's lectures were given in my grandfather's living room, where my bed was placed. I used to sit up in bed and listen to my father talk. My father always spoke about the Rambam … My father would say, almost as a complaint against the Rambam, "We don't understand our master's reasoning or the way he explains the passage." It was as if he were complaining to the Rambam directly, "Rabbenu Mosheh, why did you do this?"
>
> My father would then say that, prima facie, the criticisms and objections of the Rabad are actually correct … I would strain my ears to listen to what he was saying … Slowly, slowly, the tension ebbed; Father strode boldly and bravely. New arguments emerged; halakhic rules were formulated and defined with wondrous precision. A new light shone

… The Rambam emerged the winner. Father's face shone with joy. He had defended his "friend" … I too participated in this joy.[5]

The Briskers held no such reverence for Maimonides's philosophical writings. According to a family tradition, Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik once promised his father, Rabbi Hayyim, that the former would not study the Guide.[6] The Rav, though, made no such commitment, and in his studies in Berlin dived deeply into the world of Jewish and secular philosophy, and became very familiar with the perplexities of Rambam's philosophy.

II. The Rav and the Guide

This does not mean that the Rav revered the Guide in the same manner in which he cherished Rambam's halakhic code. Throughout his works, he did not hesitate to criticize Maimonides's philosophical views. In one essay the Rav, in a dense discussion of ta'amei ha-mitzvot (the reasons for the commandments), was very critical of what Maimonides wrote in the Guide, while praising his explanation of the commandments in the Mishneh Torah. According to the Rav, the reasons Maimonides offered for a rationale of commandments "neither edify nor inspire the religious consciousness. They are," averred Rabbi Soloveitchik, "essentially, if not entirely, valueless for the religious interests we have most at heart."[7] Compare this to the Rav's sentiments for the Mishneh Torah:

It is worthy of note that Maimonides, the halakhic scholar, came nearer to the core of philosophical truth than Maimonides, the speculative philosopher. In contradistinction to the causal method of the philosophical Guide … the halakhic Code (the Mishneh Torah) apprehends the religious act in an entirely different light.[8]

Perhaps, then, the Rav saw two different Maimonideses: the halakhist of the Mishneh Torah and the philosopher of the Guide. What is more, he preferred the halakhic Rambam.[9] Apparently, this was the position of the Rav's son-in-law and student, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein. He once asked the question:

What is the Rambam's magnum opus? Is it the Mishneh Torah or Guide for the Perplexed? And what has been presumed to be the Rambam's major contribution to the Jewish people historically?

Rabbi Lichtenstein's answer: it is "undoubtedly, the halakhic Mishneh Torah!"[10] He rejected academic scholars like Shlomo Pines who claim that Maimonides "only expressed his true way of thinking in Guide for the Perplexed." To Rabbi Lichtenstein, "if the Guide for the Perplexed had been lost, it would have been a loss, but not a monumental one."[11]

Of course, there is inherent danger in drawing any sharp distinction between the Maimonides of the Mishneh Torah and he of the Guide. Most importantly, despite being a

work of halakhah, Mishneh Torah begins with important philosophical discussions. For instance, the opening chapters of Hilkhot Yesodei Hatorah addresses how to prove the existence of God through the study of the cosmos, particularly the revolving spheres of the heavens:

For the sphere revolves continuously, and it is impossible that it revolve without [a force] that makes it revolve (1:5).

This cosmological argument is also known as the "unmoved mover" or "prime mover" theory, found in the prevalent philosophical theories of his time. Ultimately, and expectedly, the notion is easily traceable to Aristotle, after whom Maimonides patterned many of his philosophical ideas. This method is also found in the opening chapter of Hilkhot Avodat Kokhavim, where Maimonides described the biblical patriarch Abraham discovering God in precisely this way:

He [Abraham] would wonder, "How could this sun behave like this always, without a Guide, or someone to keep it in motion? Because certainly it is impossible for it to cause itself to orbit." … And he knew that there is only one God, that He guides the sun, that He created everything, and that there exists no other God besides Him (1:3).

In time, the science of the prime mover theory was disproved by Galileo and Newton. Both helped demonstrate that objects remain in motion by inertia, not by any external force. But more important from a philosophical point of view, Immanuel Kant rejected the entire premise that one could prove the existence of God from any examination of reality. He demonstrated that the intellect cannot define God (or anything else) into existence.

Here the Rav differed from his ancestors. He did not reject Maimonides because he represented philosophy. Rather, the Rav found the philosophy of Kant more convincing than that of Aristotle. He therefore accepted the Kantian approach and rejected the cosmological argument found in Maimonides. This is evident in his elucidation of man's search for God. In one essay, Rabbi Soloveitchik argued that "man cannot come to God on his own, through the initiative of his own spirit" and "such rationalism, which emerges from time to time in philosophical religious thought, lowers prophecy to the level of a pedagogical tool."[12] These statements and others differ strikingly from much of Maimonides's writings regarding philosophy and prophecy.

All of this stands in contrast to the Rav's story (in the same work!) where he was deeply concerned for the welfare of Maimonides, under siege by Ravad and other "attackers." Put simply: how is it that he could defend Maimonides against Ravad, but not against Kant?

III. Throwing New Light on the Rav's Stance: Inductive and Deductive Approaches

To answer this question, we might examine how the Rav addressed another medieval scholastic philosopher who provided proofs for God. In a number of locations, the Rav criticized the approach of the eleventh century philosopher, Anselm of Canterbury. Anselm is known for his ontological argument, which posited that a perfect being, i.e. God, must exist. The Rav repudiated this approach by quoting 19th century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard:

It is related that, prior to his discovery of the ontological proof of God's existence, one of the great non-Jewish philosophers [Anselm of Canterbury] fasted for three consecutive days, praying and beseeching his creator to enlighten him with a valid proof of His existence. Kierkegaard ridiculed him, saying, "You fool, does a baby in his father's arms need proofs or signs that the father exists? Does a person who feels the need to pray to God require a philosophical demonstration?"[13]

There are significant differences between Anselm's ontological argument and the cosmological argument of Maimonides. Those distinctions are not significant for a modern thinker like the Rav. For him, all "proofs" of God's existence can be equally dismissed. The intriguing revelation of this new book on the Guide, however, is that the Rav argued that Maimonides as well would reject Anselm!

He did so by making a distinction between two different approaches to the question of how we encounter God, quoting from the Guide (1:34):

There are two methods of argumentation: deductive and inductive. Maimonides insisted on an inductive approach to God. "There is … no way to apprehend Him except through the things He has made."[14]

The deductive approach, as defined by the Rav in another context, starts "with abstract theological propositions and postulates, proceeding gradually from the abstract and general to the concrete and particular."[15] In other words, we begin with the concept of God and use that concept to prove His existence. The Rav associated this approach with the scholars who "worked deductively from set premises that could not be demonstrated but were assumed to be either self-evident or innate ideas whose validity could not be denied."[16] He proceeded to say that Anselm's ontological proof of God's existence is an example of the deductive method, and Kant was the first to disprove it.[17]

According to the Rav, the inductive approach meant "that one must begin by exploring God's creation, by investigating reality in all its levels, and thereby ascend gradually to God."[18] But unlike the deductive approach, God's existence cannot be proved with induction. "We do not infer God's existence from exploring the world; we immediately apprehend it. No logical inference is necessary."[19] We know God exists because we experience Him, in Kierkegaard's example, as a child experiences the embrace of a parent.

The Rav affirmed that examining the world can lead us to God, but this is different from a cosmological proof:

Maimonides' position in the Guide is that the dynamics of the world lead to the idea that there is a God, but this does not have the status of a demonstrative proof. God does not serve as a theoretical explanation of the cosmos. Rather, my apprehension of God follows immediately, not indirectly, from my apprehension of the cosmos.[20]

Remarkably, the Rav held that the deductive approach, using God to explain the universe, is found in the Mishneh Torah, whereas the inductive approach is in the Guide:

True, God cannot serve as a formal explanation for the physical motion of the universe. In the Mishneh Torah, Maimonides believed that God could serve as such an explanation. 'For the sphere revolved continually, and it is impossible that it should revolve without something that causes it to revolve' (Hilkhot Yesodei Ha-Torah 1:5). But in the Guide Maimonides gave up on the attempt to view God in such a fashion.[21]

Therefore, it is evident that the Rav did not reject the Guide. Instead, he believed that it is the more philosophically mature of Maimonides's works. Of course, the Rav did not believe that Maimonides's personality had changed between authoring the Mishneh Torah and writing the Guide. The Rav said as much:

Can we possibly say that there was a change in his attitude between his writing the Mishneh Torah and his writing the Guide? This is not the case. One cannot delineate the periods in Maimonides' life so neatly. The thoughts found in the Guide are not the product of some sudden inspiration; they matured in his mind over many years. Indeed, there are very few contradictions between the two works, and one cannot differentiate between them.[22]

This approach does leave us with two figures of Maimonides: the Deductive Maimonides and the Inductive Maimonides. It is the former who provokes the Rav's criticism. Consider Rabbi Soloveitchik's rejection of speculative attempts to understand evil. Job, as described in the Rav's most well-known essay on Zionism, is initially described as a philosopher, condemned as a "slave of fate." This philosopher is in the mold of the Abraham, as depicted in Rambam's Hilkhot Avodah Zarah. However, unlike Maimonides, who viewed this kind of philosopher as a role model, the Rav condemned Job the philosopher. He depicted him as "arrogantly [presuming] to ask so many questions regarding the governance of the cosmos."[23] Only in the end of the story, when he abandons this type of speculation, did the Rav describe Job as a "man of destiny."[24]

Maimonides believed that we should all be philosophers like Abraham, and included deductive speculation as obligatory upon all of us—"The knowledge of this matter is a positive commandment" (Hilkhot Yesodei Hatorah 1:6). The Rav, however, interpreted this statement as referring to the inductive approach:

I do not agree with those who interpret "to know" as meaning "to understand," indicating that each and every Jew would have to philosophize and investigate for himself all that is relevant to the existence of God. I do not believe that this is what Maimonides meant. We cannot "understand" the Almighty… I am convinced therefore that Maimonides did not mean that every Jew had to become a philosopher or, in modern parlance, a theologian. I would say that "to know" (lei'da) means that our conviction of the existence of God should become a constant and continuous awareness of the reality of God.[25]

According to the Rav, the obligation "to know" God does not require deductive proofs in an attempt to logically understand that God exists. Rather, we know God exists inductively, by constantly being aware of His presence in our lives. As the Rav wrote, "the religious sensibility does not offer decisive proofs, draw inferences or make deductions. It 'senses' and experiences God in its innermost ontological consciousness."[26]

By introducing the distinction between the deductive and inductive approaches to God, the Rav did not merely expunge the negative stigmas regarding speculation from the Guide. He also restored the status of Maimonides from a "theologian" to a halakhic authority, even regarding the previously problematic commandment of knowing God. In the end, the Rav came to the aid of his friend, rehabilitating and rescuing not just the halakhic Maimonides but the philosophical one, as well.

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[1] See, for example, Aviezer Ravitzky, "Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik on Human Knowledge: Between Maimonidean and Neo-Kantian Philosophy," Modern Judaism 6 (May, 1986): 157-188 and Zev Harvey, "He'arot al HaRav Soloveitchik ve-ha-Filosofiah Ha-Rambamit," in Emunah Bi-zmanim Mishtanim, ed. Avi Sagi (Jerusalem: WZO, 1996), 95-107.

[2] Lawrence J. Kaplan, ed., Maimonides: Between Philosophy and Halakhah: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Lectures on the Guide of the Perplexed at the Bernard Revel Graduate School (1950-51) (Brooklyn: Urim Publications, 2016).

[3] Ish Ha-Halakhah (Halakhic Man), U-Vikashtem Mi-Sham (And From There You Shall Seek) and The Halakhic Mind.

[4] Kol Dodi Dofek (1956) and The Lonely Man of Faith (1965).

[5] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, And From There You Shall Seek, trans. Naomi Goldblum (Jersey City: Ktav, 2008), 143-44.

[6] Shulamit Soloveitchik Meiselman, The Soloveitchik Heritage: A Daughter's Memoir (Hoboken: Ktav, 1996), 109-10.

[7] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, The Halakhic Mind (New York: Seth Press, 1986), 92.

[8] Ibid., 93-94.

[9] There is a long history of rabbinical figures accepting the halakhic mastery (and the "principles of the faith") of Maimonides, while criticizing his philosophical works. Examples can be found in the writings of Rabbi Jacob Emden, Hatam Sofer, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, and Samuel David Luzzatto. See Warren Zev Harvey, "The Return of Maimonideanism," Jewish Social Studies 42 (Summer/Autumn, 1980): 249-68 and David Henshke, "Li-she'eilat Ahdut Haguto shel ha-Rambam," Da`at 37 (1997): 37-52. However, the Rav, following his family's Brisker method where contradictions are transformed into dialectical tensions, developed these conflicts into two different epistemological approaches overall.

[10] Haim Sabato, Seeking His Presence: Conversations with Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, trans. Binyamin Shalom (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Books, 2016), 43-46. On p. 44, Rabbi Lichtenstein quoted his brother-in-law (and also a son-in-law of the Rav), Prof. Isadore Twersky, as writing "that the Rambam's stature was established … by his greatness in halakha." However, it appears to me that Twersky, from his Introduction to the Code of Maimonides, is best known for insisting on the integrity of the halakhic and philosophical aspects of Maimonides. See Prof. Carmi Horowitz's article on Twersky, "Halakha and History, Intellectualism and Spirituality" in Torah and Western Thought: Intellectual Portraits of Orthodoxy and Modernity, ed. Meir Y. Soloveichik, Stuart W. Halpern and Shlomo Zuckier (Jerusalem: Maggid Books, 2016), 268-70. Horowitz noted, "Prof. Twersky did not accept the bifurcated Maimonides: Maimonides the halakhist and Maimonides the philosopher."

[11] Sabato, Seeking His Presence, 50.

[12] Soloveitchik, And From There You Shall Seek, 40, 126.

[13] Ibid., 16. See also Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "The Lonely Man of Faith," Tradition 7 (Summer 1965): 32, where the Rav quoted the same story of Anselm and Kierkegaard, although this time using the metaphor of the "loving bride in the embrace of her beloved", who doesn't "ask for proof that he is alive and real." This metaphor is perhaps more appropriate to the overall theme of The Lonely Man of Faith (which discusses the Adam-Eve relationship) than the father-child one found in And From There You Shall Seek.

[14] Kaplan, Maimonides, 102.

[15] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer, ed. Shalom Carmy (New York: Ktav, 2003), 113.

[16] Kaplan, Maimonides, 102.

[17] Ibid., 103.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid., 104.

[20] Ibid., 106.

[21] Ibid. On p. 110, the Rav quoted Hilkhot Yesodei Hatorah (2:2): "And what is the way to the love and fear of Him? When a person contemplates his great and wondrous works and creatures and discerns from them His wisdom" and said that this "cosmic experience" is the "primary way to know and love God." For the Rav, loving God is possible through reflecting on Creation, but that is not the way to a proof of God's existence.

[22] Ibid., 209. And even more forcefully on page 216, he rejected "the method favored by historians when dealing with apparent contradictions between the Mishneh Torah and Guide, namely a developmental approach. After all, we are not dealing here with two texts written, say twenty years apart, an early text reflecting perhaps the author's immaturity, and a later one reflecting perhaps his senility…" This is consistent with the ahistorical approach of the Rav to the sages. As he wrote in Halakhic Man, trans. Lawrence Kaplan (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), 120: "The consciousness of halakhic man … embraces the entire company of the sages of the masorah. He lives in their midst … all of them merge into one time experience … Both past and future become, in such circumstances, ever-present realities."

[23] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Fate and Destiny: From the Holocaust to the State of Israel, trans. Lawrence Kaplan (Hoboken: Ktav, 2000), 11-12. A similar criticism of Job before his encounter with God can be found in Halakhic Man, 9-10, where Job eventually "returns to God with the discovery of mystery in the created world and of his inability to understand that mystery."

[24] Interestingly, Maimonides in his discussion of Job in the Guide (3:22-23) has a reverse order of Job's progression. He initially wrote that Job was moral, but not intelligent or wise, and only knew God "because of his acceptance of authority" and "traditional stories," and not due to philosophical speculation. But when Job eventually gained that wisdom, he "admitted that true happiness, which is the knowledge of the deity, is guaranteed to all who know Him."

[25] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, On Repentance: The Thought and Oral Discourses of Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik, ed. Pinchas Peli, (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 2000), 130.

[26] Soloveitchik, And From There You Shall Seek, 13. In the adjacent footnote, the Rav conceded that Maimonides does discuss proofs of God's existence, but wrote, "Even though Maimonides did not desist from presenting indirect demonstrations of the existence of God … the essence of his view is that this knowledge is based on the immediate ontological cognition that there is no reality but God." (p. 158 n.4).

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Forty Years Later: The Rav's Opening Shiur at the Stern College for Women Beit Midrash

Saul J. Berman

In late 1976, Dr. Haym Soloveitchik and I met to discuss Jewish Studies at Stern College for Women. Dr. Soloveitchik told me that he never understood why Talmud was not being more systematically taught at Stern College. He had been raised with the impression that it was natural for women to study Talmud. As a child, Dr. Soloveitchik had studied with his father, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, together with his older sisters, Atarah and Tovah. When he began, at the age of ten, studying Talmud with the Rav, Dr. Soloveitchik joined as a junior participant in their class. The same culture was manifest at Maimonides School in Boston, which his father and mother, Dr. Tonya Soloveitchik, had founded, and where boys and girls studied Talmud in the same classes.

By this time, many of Stern's Jewish Studies courses made use of Mishnah, Talmud, and its commentaries. The undergraduate women used these texts, engaging with them as primary sources to study Jewish Law, Jewish History, and Biblical Exegesis. Yet, Stern College did not make room in the schedule for its students to acquire the skills to develop competence in independent text study. This is how the movement to introduce intensive Talmud study at Stern College was born.

The Background

Dr. Soloveitchik and I believed that the time was ripe for introducing advanced Talmud to the Midtown campus. Much of this had to do with personnel. In the fall of 1976, Rabbi Norman Lamm assumed the presidency of Yeshiva University. He made several exciting appointments to set the tone for Yeshiva College and Stern College for Women. President Lamm appointed Dr. Karen Bacon as Dean of Stern College and Rabbi Jacob Rabinowitz as Dean of the Division of Undergraduate Jewish Studies. Earlier, President Samuel Belkin had tapped Dr. Haym Soloveitchik as Dean of the Bernard Revel Graduate School and engaged me as Chairman of the Department of Jewish Studies at Stern College. Torah Studies at Stern College had always had areas of great strength and outstanding faculty members. However, there was little emphasis on the systematic acquisition of text skills. Stern's previous Dean—Rabbi David Mirsky—and I worked very hard to improve that. Still, there was more work to be done.

My meeting with Dr. Soloveitchik encouraged me to pursue the matter with great vigor. Several years earlier, I had published a lengthy and much-discussed article on the "Status of Women in Halakhic Judaism" in *Tradition*, the journal of the Rabbinical Council of America. There, I explored a lot, including the early Talmudic diversity of opinion as to whether women are obligated in the mitzvah of

Torah study. However, it did not occur to me then that Talmud study might be added to my action agenda for Stern College. Now, four years later, I was intent on effecting change. I consulted with Dean Rabinowitz, Dean Bacon and numerous faculty members and students to develop a practical approach to enable as many students as possible to experience the distinctive mode of Talmudic study, combining lecture time and *havruta* time, which supports the growth of competence in independent study skills.

I kept Dr. Soloveitchik abreast of our progress. He, in turn, made frequent detailed suggestions to refine our thinking in areas such as level distinctions, time allocations, and skill building. He also kept his father, Rabbi Soloveitchik, in touch with our planning. The Rav was deeply encouraging of our plans. He also offered guidance. For example, the Rav suggested that for the first year we should begin with the study of the tenth chapter of *Pesahim* because of its natural interest to students, dealing as it does with the order of the Passover Seder.

Sometime in the Spring 1977 semester, the academic planning was completed and Dean Bacon announced the creation of the Beit Midrash courses to be offered in the ensuing Fall. We had created two sections: one for beginners and one intermediate level for students who had previously studied some Talmud in high school or in their "Year in Israel." The course required nine hours a week of participation: three hours devoted to lecture and six hours devoted to *havruta* study. Registration exceeded our expectations. In all, about sixty students signed up. We recruited Rabbi Mordechai Willig to teach the more advanced women. By then, Rabbi Willig had emerged as a popular and brilliant young Torah scholar. The fullness and excitement of his own engagement in the process of teaching Talmud to women was a vital element in the general acceptance of the project within the walls of RIETS and Stern College.

We also needed an appropriate space for our Beit Midrash. Dean Bacon chose the most elegant room on campus, a wood paneled room on the first floor of Stern's Lexington Avenue and East 35 Street building. The room's high windows flooded the Beit Midrash with natural light. It was also appropriately furnished with library-style tables and chairs. In addition, students were very excited for the new initiative. Here are the eager comments of the campus newspaper:

It was inevitable that the revolutionary spirit should lead to careful reevaluation of the academic construction within Stern, meticulously accomplished by the Presidential Planning Commission delegated by President Norman Lamm. The PPC's observations concerning the status of the Judaic Studies program at Stern found a dire need for expansion within the department. Thus necessity became the mother of invention. As a result of the extensive evaluation of the PPC, new and innovative changes have been introduced to extend the boundaries and disintegrate some of the limitations. The new Judaic Studies proposal, as formulated by Rabbi Saul Berman, Dean Jacob Rabinowitz and Dean Chaim [sic] Soloveitchik recognizes the necessity for intensive Jewish learning to be open to

young women on a college level. It is a daring venture, for it opens new options to women that have never before been approached by normative *halakha*. The proposal is commendable in every respect, and the general reaction among the student body has been a mixture of surprise and delight.

We were in good shape to launch the Talmud program in the Fall 1977.

The Rav Comes to Stern

We were nearly set to begin. Then, Dr. Soloveitchik informed me that he felt strongly that the initiation of this learning experience required the strongest possible confirmation of halakhic legitimacy. He was also eager to provide the most exciting intellectual and spiritual experience for the Stern students. He therefore asked his father, the Rav, to travel downtown to Stern College and personally deliver the opening lecture. The Rav agreed.

At Stern College, both the Jewish studies and the general studies faculties were excited about the presence of Rav Soloveitchik and the inauguration of the Beit Midrash. The Jewish Studies faculty had been consulted throughout the planning process and were deeply supportive of the introduction of the Beit Midrash Program. Faculty members in all areas of Jewish Studies used primary sources as much as possible in their teaching and understood that this program would enhance their ability to teach their own courses at a higher and deeper level. Many other faculty members saw this step as a hopeful indication of the openness of the new university administration under Rabbi Lamm, and with the leadership of Dean Bacon, to plan and execute innovative improvements in the entire educational experience at Stern College.

By and large, the Stern College students were thrilled by the recognition of the importance of their study of Talmud. Some, no doubt, were frightened that they might be called upon by the Rav. They were aware of his reputation as a demanding teacher. Many students were relative beginners in Jewish Studies and were in no position for systematic exposure to Talmud study. But, they aspired to reach that level and felt inspired that the Rav took part in the pioneering project.

The *Shiur*

It was a Monday, October 11, 1977. The Rav entered the Beit Midrash, accompanied by Dr. Lamm and Dean Bacon. The room fell utterly silent, the sense of awe was palpable as all stood until the Rav took his seat at the front table, next to a large Talmud folio. The students had already begun studying the tenth chapter of *Pesahim*. However, the Rav had decided that he would lecture on the opening Mishnah of the tractate, to introduce some of the fundamental ideas of the tractate. He started the *shiur* in his unique manner, weaving a web of intellectual excitement and spiritual engagement which enmeshed the students present into the world of the Rav's own mind and soul. There was no fundamental

difference between the Rav's Stern College Talmud lecture and any other *shiur* that he might have delivered at YU or elsewhere.

I knew, however, the Rav would somehow mark the occasion. As he concluded the *shiur*, Rabbi Soloveitchik reflected on the experience of Talmud study. He remarked on being in the presence of his predecessors—the sages of the Mishnah and the Talmud, the *Rishonim*like the Rambam, the Vilna Gaon and, of course, his grandfather Reb Hayyim—as he struggled to penetrate to the deepest will of God as expressed in the *Halakhah*. This is how he closed the lecture:

They are all right here in the room. When a Jew recites *kiddush levanah*, so he proclaims "David the king of Israel is alive." He [King David] is right here. This exactly applies not only to "*Dovid Melekh Yisrael hai vi-kayam*"—it applies to every *rishon*, every scholar and every member of the community of the Mesorah which formulated *Torah She-Ba'al Peh*, which lived *Torah She-Ba'al Peh* and experienced *Torah She-ba'al Peh*, who remembers the past and who has uncompromised hope for the future. That's why I am very glad that you invited me to come to give your first *shiur* and I hope actually a year later to see that you've displayed interest in *Torah She-Ba'al Peh*. Without *Torah She-Ba'al Peh*, there is no Judaism. Any talk about Judaism minus *Torah She-Ba'al Peh* is just meaningless and absurd. Like if one never studied physics and writes the philosophy of nature. It's ridiculous, you can't write the philosophy of nature before you are acquainted with physics, so you cannot write about Judaism if you are not acquainted with *Torah She-Ba'al Peh*. It's important that not only boys should be acquainted, but girls, as well. I'll support you as far as education is concerned. If you have problems come to me, I'll fight your battles. I wish you success, *brakhah ve-hatzlahah*. I hope that next year you'll know a lot, lot more.

The Aftermath

As the Rav concluded, the students stood in silence. They were overwhelmed by his presence and by his encouragement. Before the Rav departed, he said to me: "Tell them that if their fathers or brothers say to them, 'what are you doing learning *gemara*, *bist duch nor a maidel* (you're just a girl)?!'—tell them not to answer them. They should refer the fathers and brothers to me. I will answer for them."

There was some skepticism and consternation. But it did not emerge out of YU. I was aware of a certain buzz about the matter amongst students at the uptown men's campus. Yet, the RIETS faculty did not protest too loudly, not with Rabbi Soloveitchik's support of our initiative.

The Rav could not hold others in check, however. Newspapers covered the Rav's Stern College lecture. The appearance of the story and the iconic picture on the front page of several weeklies set off an extraordinary course of events which has never, to my knowledge, been reported publicly. Soon after the *shiur*, I was

informed that an attempt was underway by a group of leaders of the so-called Yeshiva World to place Stern College and Rabbi Soloveitchik in "*herem*" for this supposedly outrageous breach of the standards of *Halakhah*. Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner of Yeshiva Rabbi Chaim Berlin and Rabbi Shimon Schwab of Kahal Adath Jeshurun spearheaded the effort. In haste, they had gathered eight signatories for this official decree.

However, they were reluctant to issue the ban without the signature of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, whom they had yet to persuade to join the campaign. Still, influential people had told Reb Moshe that this was the first step in YU's broader plan to ordain women. I feared that such false rumors would be viewed as credible, since the Reform Movement had recently agreed to ordain women (1972) and Conservative exponents had just appointed a Special Commission to study the controversial issue (which practice they subsequently adopted in 1983).

I and a few others took action, believing it essential for Rabbi Feinstein to understand the parameters of the Stern College Beit Midrash Program, under the guidelines supported by the Rav. We therefore arranged a meeting with Rabbi Feinstein. There, Reb Moshe insisted that Rabbi Soloveitchik's educational decision on this matter did not need validation by him. He was gladdened to meet faculty members involved in the Beit Midrash, as well as a student who was a participant in one of the Beit Midrash classes. Soon after, I learned that the *herem* campaign was abandoned.

The Legacy

The Rav's support of women's Talmud was not new. Decades earlier, he had directed similar policies at the Maimonides School. In subsequent years, Orthodox educators corresponded with him to discuss how to implement women's Talmud in day schools. What is more, Rabbi Soloveitchik's son-in-law, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein had, in 1976, published a halakhic argument in favor of women's Talmud study. The Stern College lecture, though, demonstrated the dramatic force of the Rav's position.

The very public character of that moment lent a level of energy to this position which set further educational opportunities in motion. The Rav's presence at Stern College on that occasion, the clarity with which he spoke on the importance of Talmud study for women, essentially closed down the debate on the issue within the Modern Orthodox community. I believe that many later steps in the direction of intensification of the role of women in service to the community based on their expertise in Talmud and *Halakhah*, initiated over the course of the following twenty-five years were fueled by this precise moment, much to the credit of the Rav and Dr. Haym Soloveitchik.

Rabbi Saul J. Berman is a leading Orthodox teacher and thinker. As a Rabbi, a scholar, and an educator, he has made extensive contributions to the intensification of women's Jewish education, to the role of social ethics in Synagogue life, and to the understanding of the applicability of Jewish Law to contemporary society. Rabbi Berman was ordained at Yeshiva University, from which he also received his B.A. and his M.H.L. He completed a degree in law, a J.D., at New York University, and an M.A. in Political Science at the University of California at Berkeley.

Rabbi Warns Jews on Education: Advises Blend of Secular Study

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (as told to Sibyl Soroker)

Editors' Note: In August 1932, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik arrived in the United States with his young family. Several months later, the Rav agreed to be interviewed by two local Boston newspapers. The first was published in the Boston Herald *on December 12. The second was a more elaborate vision statement, appear in the pages of the* Boston Sunday Advertiser *on December 25. At that time, apparently, Rabbi Soloveitchik was not comfortable articulating his views in English. He therefore communicated with the* Sunday Advertiser*'s interviewer, Sibyl Soroker, in Yiddish or German. Owing to this, some of the Rav's language is imprecise. In fact, the original article identified him as "Joseph S. Soloveitchik" (this was only change in the version below). Nevertheless, the interview below represents Rabbi Soloveitchik's very first presentation of several educational matters. With the agreement of the Rav's family members, it is our pleasure to present this rare interview from 1932.*

Boston Sunday Advertiser
December 25, 1932, p. D5

"To Bridge Gap Between Old and Modern Culture Not Easy"

Orthodox Jewry faces a difficult, a most serious problem today, a problem which involves the harmonious blending of two hostile educational systems, each one very significant and valuable in its own right, but each one most essential to the spiritual and mental make-up of the modern Jew.

The study of the Jewish religion—of the Talmud and the Jewish Law—represents a complete culture in itself. The modern secular educational system is another.

Yiddish religious culture and the modern educational culture have no conflicts. They belong side by side; instead, they are separated by a so-called Chinese wall. To penetrate the wall between these two entirely different kinds of culture—to combine them into an ideal oneness—is the problem of orthodox Jews.

A Difficult Problem
Other religions may know the conflict between faiths, but they do not know this type of collision between the old Jewish religious study and the modern scientific study. They are accustomed to a combination of the old tradition and the new methods of training.

Development of the Christian religions was different. It was inevitable that the religious and secular education go hand in hand. But for the Jews, it is a more recent problem and an exceedingly difficult one with which to cope.

In the days of our forefathers, religious study was all-absorbing. The youngsters started to go to their "Cheder" (religious school) at the age of four or five years. From then on, the study of the Talmud and the Jewish laws demanded all their time and attention. It enveloped their very souls. The result?

Strong Secular Movement
There was no time or energy or thought for the study of secular subjects. They came secondary. And when these boys grew to full manhood and then to old age, their old

Jewish religious education still absorbed them completely. That is our old orthodox Jew of today.

Within the past half century, however, a strong secular movement has begun to break through this orthodoxy and is making great strides, so that there has arisen the necessity of combining the study of Jewish religion with modern subjects.

The Talmud and the Torah once demanded one's mind and attention entirely. The new educational system demands time and attention also. One of the two systems must suffer. Obviously, it is the religious study.

A Constant Conflict

The problem, then, is to give our generation of growing boys and girls an all-embracing, well-balanced educational development, one that will include the complete Jewish spiritual education as well as the modern secular training, both to meet side by side on an equal footing, neither one to suffer because of the other. How may this ideal result be effected?

The problem is in itself not yet clear either to the modern Jew or to the orthodox Jew. For this reason, there is a constant conflict between orthodoxy and the modern culture. This struggle is useless; it is fruitless, for they are struggling against the stream of the times. Our Jews must, instead, try to coincide.

Here we have the accumulation through each succeeding generation of two cultures which have traveled along different roads, trod different paths, met different conditions in different countries.

Give World Picture

The modern Jew does not wish to understand the importance to the Jew of the old Jewish culture. He thinks Jewish culture comprises the modern Jewish or Hebrew literature—the study of Bialik or Hirschbein or Sholom Aleichem.

He does not understand that it is not enough—that it involves something essentially deeper—that the old Jewish laws are not merely legal conceptions handed down through the ages, but that they give a world picture of the old Jewish life, of the old Jewish point of view, which penetrates into the inner soul of man and rewards him with that deep spiritual feeling he cannot obtain only from reading Jewish or Hebrew literature. The latter is merely a small part of the whole panorama.

To bridge this gap between the old Jewish culture and the modern culture is not an easy task. It is a task for generations. I have seen Jews try to coincide these two different cultures.

Fault of Background

They seek the spiritual combination, not the mechanical one. And the more thinking Jews suffer within themselves because of this wall which they cannot climb. It is not their fault. It is rather the fault of their background and religious study. It is because the spiritual feeling is not there.

The modern products of Jewish culture are not able to present the old Jewish point of view.

Without the absorbing study of the Talmud and the Jewish Law, they will never be able to answer the question "What is Judaism?" in the true spiritual sense of the word. And the future of orthodox Jewry depends upon this answer!

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993) was one of the leading Orthodox rabbis and scholars of the twentieth century. Well-known as the Rav, he was viewed as the premier talmudist, theologian and leader for generations of America's Jews. In 1932, he arrived in the United States with a vision to help Orthodox Judaism respond to modernity.

On the Educational Mission of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

Seth Farber

In order to address fully the significance of the "newly" found article from the *Boston Sunday Advertiser*, one would have to understand the context in which it was written and the motivation of its author. As the article itself indicates, this record is some form of interview, "as told to Sybil Soroker." She was a Zionist activist in Boston in the years following the war.

Why was the article published? Without trying to be anachronistic and assume that Rabbi Soloveitchik or his colleagues had engaged a public relations firm, I think it is safe to say that from the moment he exited in the train in the second week of December 1932, Rabbi Soloveitchik attracted significant public attention within Boston's Jewish community. As I demonstrated in *An American Orthodox Dreamer*, Rabbi Soloveitchik's arrival was "an event" in the Boston Jewish community and a number of articles were published in the Boston Jewish Advocate and Ha-Pardes relating to his first days in Boston.

From the very moment that he touched down in Boston, Rabbi Soloveitchik was driven to establish his unique Jewish educational agenda. Principally, I have argued, he accomplished this through his (and his wife's) efforts at Maimonides School in Boston. It has always been my feeling that Rabbi Soloveitchik arrived in the United States, intent on making a significant contribution to American Jewish life.

Now, an article from the *Boston Sunday Advertiser* has come to light, which complements the arguments I made in my book: Rabbi Soloveitchik saw his role

as revitalizing (or perhaps bringing to life) Jewish education in Boston. In order to catalyze the community, he utilized the press to "get his message out."

It is within this context that the content of the "interview" should be understood. Rabbi Soloveitchik here was not—in my opinion—making a theoretical case for Torah u-Madda or the blend of Torah and secular studies. Rather, he was reaching out to a community that is overwhelmingly non-observant but committed to Orthodox Judaism in theory.

The "problem of Orthodox Jews" as the interviewer puts it, is to face the new modern realities; the need for secular education alongside religious education. The "historical" analysis provided in the first two sections of the interview is, in my opinion, an attempt to justify why the "*melamdim*," the teachers, of 1930s Boston are not relevant to the average student. They came from a different era, and the needs of the youth are foreign to them. Rabbi Soloveitchik made a similar argument when he started the United Hebrew Schools a year later.

Thus, the main point of the interview comes when Rabbi Soloveitchik discusses the "boys and girls." Rabbi Soloveitchik here identified his main audience: young children studying in Hebrew schools in Boston (and their parents). His main goal was to attract them to a more significant experience of study, an experience that he would attempt to create by leading a movement during his first years in Boston, first by trying to reform the Hebrew Schools and then by creating the Maimonides School. And, Rabbi Soloveitchik understood who he was competing against: The "Hebrew" culture which so dominated Boston's Hebrew schools (as differentiated from *heders*) in the 1920s and 1930s.

Essentially, Rabbi Soloveitchik saw the Hebrew Schools as educational institutions which attempted to teach Judaism through the eyes of Bialik and through Hebrew culture, and the *heders* as anachronistic institutions that had no future. His call for the study of Talmud as essential to the Jewish experience was not meant to

be understood as a plea to return to the yeshiva approach, but rather, to explain that Judaism has a future only if it is studied fully.

In this context, it is worth remembering the program that Rabbi Soloveitchik promoted, less than 11 months following the interview. The initiative, which was developed together with principals from the Bureau of Jewish Education schools, was published in the *Jewish Advocate*. In addition to fundamental knowledge of reading, writing, and spelling of Hebrew and familiarity with prayers, the new program emphasized the following cardinal points:

> 1. The Torah is to be studied in the original unabridged form, and to be interpreted in the spirit of the tradition and according to the commentary of Rashi.
>
> 2. The meaning of the prayers should be made clear and intelligible to the children.
>
> 3. Jewish history should be made familiar to the child in such a way that the great personalities of the past should captivate their affections.
>
> 4. Mishnah, Talmud, and ethics of the fathers should be made an integral part of the course of study. (*Jewish Advocate*, November 7, 1933)

In the end, this program was implemented in day schools throughout America (although in Maimonides School, the emphasis on prayers and their meaning took on greater significance). But at the time of this interview, the notion of a day school—or for that matter, any educational institution that could synthesize Judaism and secular studies—was not relevant. Instead, the interview as laid out in the newspaper, was an attempt, in broad strokes, of an educator to set out his educational vision, and begin a process of synthesizing traditional Jewish education with modern values and ideas.

During Rabbi Soloveitchik's first years in Boston, all the Jewish students living in Mattapan, Roxbury, and Dorchester were studying in non-Jewish public or private schools. Thus, his focus was enhancing the Jewish after school programs. But he believed, from the outset, that a full Jewish and secular education was completely consistent with traditional Jewish values.

Rabbi Dr. Seth Farber is the founder and director of ITIM: The Jewish-Life Information Center, an organization that aims to assist Israelis with the legal intricacies of personal status like marriage, divorce, conversion, and burial. He is the author of An American Orthodox Dreamer: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Boston's Maimonides School (2004) and several scholarly articles on Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.

A Religion Without Visual Art? The Rav and the Myth of Jewish Art

Ranana Dine

The Art History 101 class at the small college I attended was a must-take course, a bucket list item. And so, like many freshmen, I found myself in a darkened auditorium—usually reserved for concerts and major performances—on the first day of the spring semester.

It was the largest classroom of my entire undergraduate career. The professor started the first class with an apology: a lecture on why we would spend most of the semester studying art made by white, Christian, men. As a "throwaway" sentence in the lecture, the instructor, a Jewish woman, stated that Jews, historically, had not made art since they followed a literal interpretation of the Second Commandment: the prohibition on idol worship and making images of God. The comment was tangential, it was not meant to evoke passionate feelings or argument. But I, one of the very few observant Jews on campus, was quite surprised by it.

Growing up in a Modern Orthodox community, I had loved frequenting art museums, doodling all over my papers and painting anything in sight. My schools, parents, and community had all encouraged my art making. No one had ever mentioned the Second Commandment to me in relation to my passion for the visual arts. So, when the lecture concluded, like every impertinent freshman, I walked up to the front of the auditorium and told the professor I thought she was simply wrong. Her years of art historical expertise, however, were not going to be upset in one moment by my life experience, although she would later enjoy telling me about newfound illuminated Jewish manuscripts. As I sat through the many subsequent lectures, learning about Dürer's prints and Manet's paintings, my professor's comment about the lack of Jewish art would continue to intrigue me. And unsurprisingly, it turns out that things are a bit more complicated than either of us initially thought.

During the twentieth century Jewish artists—and distinctively Jewish art—became part of the canon of Western Art history. After centuries of oppression and isolation, Jewish artists emerged from the ghetto and the shtetl and became major forces in the world of Western fine art. Marc Chagall, Max Weber, and R. B. Kitaj dealt explicitly in Jewish themes, showing that Jewishness was an acceptable subject for fine art. Artists like Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko were major players in the mid-century avant-garde and were important developers of Abstract Expressionism and other artistic movements. Although these artists were known to be Jewish, their Jewishness was often seen as being in tension with the

art world or as leading them to eschew figurative depiction. "Religious Judaism" and the fine arts did not mix.

For example, in the preeminent art history textbook Jansen's History of Art, the author assumed that the famous third century synagogue frescoes at Dura-Europos broke the Jewish "age-old injunction" against visual images, rather than considering the possibility that Judaism condoned image making.[1] Theorists and critics considered abstraction, in many ways the defining concept of twentieth century visual art and a style in which Jewish artists excelled, as an expression of Jewish aesthetic ideals. Leo Steinberg, the renowned art historian, wrote in his introduction to a catalogue for the Jewish Museum in New York: "Both Jewry and modern art are masters of renunciation [sic] having at one time renounced all props on which existence as a nation or art, once seem to depend. Jewry survived as an abstract nation, proving, as did modern art, how much was dispensable … like modern painting, Jewish religious practices are remarkably free of representational content, the ritual being largely self-fulfilling, rather than the bearer of a detached meaning."[2]

Yet, Jews have always valued the visual arts, both representational and abstract. Judaism may never have developed an impressive artistic tradition akin to that of Catholicism, but Jews have been creating pieces of both decorative and ceremonial art for centuries. Although Jewish artists were often barred from entering the world of fine art, Jews created exquisite illuminated manuscripts, built mural-filled synagogues, and painted portraits of their leaders. A deeper look at rabbinic texts reveal as well that no blanket prohibition on images ever existed and that the relationship between Jewish law and the visual is much more complex than just the Second Commandment. Despite the visual and literary evidence to the contrary, however, the myth of Jewish "artlessness" persisted, assuming "canonical status."[3]

So why do people think that Jews did not make visual art, or if they did, it was necessarily abstract? Sure, biblical sources like the Second Commandment appear to condemn the making of images. But other biblical and rabbinic texts embrace the plastic arts, suggesting that observant Jews are not meant to abjure all images. The narrative, or myth, of Judaism as "artless" is actually in large part a development of nineteenth-century philosophical and academic debates. This myth, developed in the "secular" world of German philosophy and art history, would go on to have a significant impact on modern religious Jewish thought, particularly the philosophy of Rav Joseph Soloveitchik, which will be explored below.

The Traditional Sources of Jewish Iconoclasm—Or not?

Although the idea that Jews did not create or appreciate visual images crystallized into a truism only in the nineteenth century, it does stem from sources in the Tanakh. The Second Commandment in Exodus 20 (repeated in a slightly different

formulation in Deuteronomy 5), "You shall have no other gods besides Me. You shall not make for yourself a sculpted image, or any likeness of what is in the heavens above, or on the earth below, or in the waters under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them" (Exodus 20: 4-5), would play an outsized role in conversations about Judaism and visual arts, but similar injunctions against the creation of images appear six other times in the Humash, all in the context of idol worship. The most elaborate of them is Deuteronomy 4:15-18:

For your own sake, therefore, be most careful—since you saw no shape when the Lord your God spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire—not to act wickedly and make for yourselves a sculptured image in any likeness whatever: the form of a man or a woman, the form of any beast on earth, the form of any winged bird that flies in the sky, the form of anything that creeps on the ground, the form of any fish that is in the waters below the earth.

In contrast, other verses call for the construction of various beautiful objects and spaces, particularly in reference to the Mishkan, and later on, the Beit ha-Mikdash in Jerusalem. The iconoclasm of the Second Commandment stands in stark contrast with the praise of Betzalel and the other craftsmen drafted to build the Mishkan who are described as being filled with "divine spirit of skill, ability and knowledge" (Exodus 31:3). The Tanakh therefore presents us with a profound tension: visual art can both glorify God and lead to the terrible sin of idolatry.

Already in the Mishnah, however, one sees a softening of the condemnatory language used for image making in the Tanakh. The third chapter of Avodah Zarah reports an argument regarding the permissibility of images: "All images are forbidden because they are worshipped once a year. So [said] Rabbi Meir. But the Sages say, only that which bears in its hand a staff or a bird or a sphere is forbidden. Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says: That which bears anything in its hand [is forbidden]" (Avodah Zarah 3:1). Although Rabbi Meir would ban all images because of their use in idol worship, the majority opinion bans only a selected group of objects. The argument in this Mishnah demonstrates that there was no unified opinion among the Tannaim regarding the place of images, and that the majority believed that most images were fairly harmless.

Later on in the same chapter, a story is adduced regarding Rabban Gamliel, who would bathe in the Bath of Aphrodite despite the presence of a statue of the goddess. When challenged by "Proklos, the philosopher" about this practice, Rabban Gamliel responded first that the statue of Aphrodite was not the purpose of the bathhouse, and had rather come into his "territory." Rabban Gamliel goes on, explaining that also only those sculptures that are treated as gods are problematic, thus allowing him to bathe before the merely decorative statue of Aphrodite (Avodah Zarah 3:4).

Following from these Mishnaic sources, the halakhic codifiers chose not to condemn all art forms but rather specified which particular images were

problematic. Rambam wrote in his Mishneh Torah that the "prohibition against fashioning images for beauty applies only to the human form and, therefore, we do not fashion a human form in wood or plaster or in stone … However, if the form is sunken, or of a medium like that of images on panels or tablets or those woven in fabrics, it is permitted" (Avodat Kokhavim 3:10). Rambam also allowed for the creation of images of non-human beings, viewing only figural art as potentially problematic. Rav Yosef Caro also allowed for the creation of images of non-human forms, while offering the opinion that figural art is limited only to "an image of the head or of the body without the head" (Yoreh De'ah 141:7).

These halakhic sources show that the Second Commandment was not considered by the rabbis to be a blanket ban on all visual art—indeed these sources show that there was some variation in interpretation when it came to the permissibility of images. Although the biblical text did, according to some authorities, limit the type of images allowed, rabbinic interpretation of the Second Commandment attempted to balance the fear of idol worship with appreciation for visual art.

In reality, the lives of most Jews throughout history have been full of visual art. Although Jews did not embrace the "high art" tradition of Western Europe until the modern period, Jewish communities created visual cultures that suited their needs. Jews were often barred from the Medieval craftsmen guilds, and they lacked the cathedrals and courts that stimulated the creation of so many of the greatest masterpieces in Western art history. Instead, Jewish life was surrounded by a different, yet still rich, visual culture: from painted synagogues in Eastern Europe to illuminated medieval manuscripts, from elaborate silver work for Torah scrolls to nineteenth century Jewish genre paintings.

One medieval rabbi, Profiat Duran of Spain, potently combined love of Torah study with appreciation of the visual. He believed that scholars should study from illuminated manuscripts and in beautiful study halls, because "people's love and desire for the study will increase. Memory will also improve … with the result that the soul will expand and be encouraged and strengthen its powers."[4] Along with the marginalia and ownership notes that adorned medieval parchments, illustrations could contribute to a reader's interaction with holy books. Duran's advocacy for beautifully illustrated texts and architecturally pleasing centers of learning undercuts the cliché that Judaism is a religion solely of the book—for Duran, the learning of "the book" was strengthened through aesthetic appreciation. Visual beauty contributes to Torah study rather than competing with it.

The tradition of rabbinic portraiture similarly calls into question the assumption that Jewish law forbids the making of images, particularly figurative images. Emerging in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in Italy and Amsterdam, rabbinic portraits became common in books and even in Jewish homes in the modern era. Although there were originally some halakhic reservations regarding the creation of rabbinic portraits, especially among Hasidim, pictures of rabbis

"became a standard commodity" within traditional Jewish households by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly with the advent of photography and other technologies that allowed for the easy creation and spread of these images.[5] The popularity of rabbinic portraits shows that Jews sought to create religious homes and lives that were aesthetically beautiful, finding art in their religion and their religious leaders, rather than in spite of them.

Philosophical and Art Historical Sources of Jewish "Artlessness"

Christian thinkers and theologians had long discussed the issues of image-making, idolatry, and the Second Commandment—these issues were central, for example, to many disputes during the Protestant Reformation. The place of "Judaism" within these discussions was complex. While many thought that contemporary Judaism lacked the visual splendor of Catholicism, they also associated particularly biblical Judaism with materialism and visual opulence. Beginning in the late eighteenth century, however, Christian scholars chose to emphasize image-hating biblical sources when discussing the relationship between Judaism and art, ignoring or unaware of the Jewish sources that tempered the Tanakh's iconoclastic language.

Immanuel Kant, for example, declared that "perhaps the most sublime passage in the Jewish law is the commandment: Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven or on earth, or under the earth, etc. This commandment alone can explain the enthusiasm that the Jewish people in its civilized era felt for its religion when it compared itself with other peoples."[6] German Jews, seeking acceptance within larger German society, stressed Kant's approval of Judaism's supposed suppression of the visual, while at the same time disputing his points regarding Judaism's lack of ethical concerns and universal claims.[7] The neo-Kantian Jewish philosopher Hermann Cohen maintained this balancing act, arguing that the Second Commandment is an example of essential Jewish law, leading the religion to true monotheism as opposed to "visual" polytheism.[8]

Hegel, like Kant, emphasized the Second Commandment in his discussions of Judaism, but he turned the biblical statement against the Jews, arguing that the Commandment's iconoclasm required a far too abstracted God. Hegel claimed that in order for an object to exist in reality, including more abstract objects like "spirit and nature," it must have the ability to be made concrete. Jews, with their supposed reticence towards visuality, have "not been able by art to represent their God, who does not even amount to such an abstraction of the Understanding, in the positive way that the Christians have."[9] German Jewish intellectuals, unable or unwilling to disprove Hegel by calling on a Jewish art tradition, instead reinforced Kant's praise for Jewish iconoclasm by raising up poetry as the true Jewish art form, helping to strengthen the idea that Judaism was a religion of the book and the word, rather than the visual. The Wissenschaft des Judentums movement, the 19th-century German movement for the academic

study of Judaism, also emphasized the Second Commandment in order to underscore the similarity between Judaism and Protestantism's own depreciation of images.[10]

Hegel's and Kant's belief in Jewish "artlessness" was further enforced by nationalist and anti-Semitic discourses then taking place in Western Europe. German art dealers used the myth of Jewish iconoclasm to keep Jews out of the lucrative art business and asserted that Jews lacked creativity and originality.[11] Christian theology helped reinforce these anti-Semitic tropes: Thinkers connected the Jews' inability to appreciate or create fine art to the tradition of Jewish theological "blindness" to the coming of Jesus.[12] The founders of the modern discipline of art history, a movement also largely based in nineteenth century Germany, corroborated these ideas. Art history first developed along nationalist lines, with art historians emphasizing the uniqueness of "German art" or "Greek art."

Due to the lack of a Jewish state, Judaism "grew into a threatening anti-nationality and could reenter art history as the villain," since it lacked a clear-cut identity that critics could easily understand and work into their academic systems.[13] The rhetoric of Kant, Hegel and the early art historians, reinforced by German Jewish intellectuals, would go a long way, eventually transforming the idea that Judaism lacked a visual art tradition into authoritative doctrine. It was through these philosophic and art historical discourses that the myth of Jewish "artlessness" became canonical in art history and Western philosophy, eventually finding its way into Jewish theology and Modern Orthodoxy.

Art and the Visual in the Writing of Rabbi Soloveitchik

Wariness towards the visual seeped into twentieth century Jewish thought: three of the period's most influential Jewish philosophers, Martin Buber, Franz Rosenzweig, and Emmanuel Levinas, all proclaimed that Judaism is traditionally non-visual. Levinas, for example, like Kant, considered the Second Commandment the ultimate ethical command of Judaism.[14] Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, unsurprisingly, was not immune to this way of thinking. He wrote his doctorate on Hermann Cohen, an opponent of religious images.

The Rav's disdain for religious art is made clear in his 1964 article "Confrontation." In typical fashion, he established a binary between two different types of persons in the article: confronted man versus non-confronted man. For him "confronted man" is someone who has discovered the transcendence of God and the limited nature of man—at the moment of confrontation "man becomes aware of his singularly human existence which expresses itself in the dichotomous experience of being unfree, restricted, imperfect and unredeemed, and, at the same time, being potentially powerful, great, and exalted, uniquely endowed,

capable of rising far above his environment in response to the divine moral challenge."[15]

For the Rav, Jews are doubly confronted, meeting God while living as a minority within a larger, different faith community (this is the essay where he outlines his opinions on interfaith dialogue). "Confronted man" is contrasted with the "non-confronted man" who does not realize "his assignment vis-à-vis something which is outside of himself" and also lacks awareness "of his existential otherness as a being summoned by his Maker to rise to tragic greatness."[16] The non-confronted man is an aesthete who indulges in the visual and the sensual, stopping him from discovering the moral call of God:

The hêdoné-oriented, egocentric person, the beauty-worshipper, committed to the goods of sense and craving exclusively for boundless aesthetic experience, the voluptuary, inventing needs in order to give himself the opportunity of continual gratification, the sybarite, constantly discovering new areas where pleasure is pursued and happiness found and lost, leads a non-confronted existence. At this stage, the intellectual gesture is not the ultimate goal but a means to another end – the attainment of unlimited aesthetic experience. Hence, nonconfronted man is prevented from finding himself and bounding his existence as distinct and singular. He fails to realize his great capacity for winning freedom from an unalterable natural order and offering this very freedom as the great sacrifice to God, who wills man to be free in order that he may commit himself unreservedly and forfeit his freedom.[17]

Art and images, beauty and aesthetic experiences, are not part of religious faith or Jewish worship. Instead, they stand in opposition to godliness and transcendence, enslaving the non-confronted man to pleasure and cheap gratification.

In his great existentialist work, Lonely Man of Faith, the Rav, while not denouncing the visual or aesthetic in quite as harsh terms, does place them in the earthly, secular, realm. Adam I is the majestic man of Genesis I who rules over the Earth, while Adam II of Genesis II is the man of faith. The world needs both types of men, or categories, to thrive. It is Adam I who appreciates the visual: "He is a social being, gregarious, communicative, emphasizing the artistic aspect in life and giving priority to form over content, to literary expression over the eidos, to practical accomplishments over inner motivation."[18] It is therefore the work of the more earth-bound Adam I to create beauty; it is not part of the religious experience or work of Adam II.

The Rav's tune does change a bit when he discusses the importance of beauty and aesthetics in prayer. The book Worship of the Heart, a collection of the Rav's teachings on prayer, includes a chapter discussing religious aesthetics. It begins with familiar language downplaying the spiritual significance of aesthetic experiences: "The aesthetic performance is not anchored in any transcendental

eternal sphere. It is a thoroughly this-worldly phenomenon, which lays no claims to the beyond."[19] But the Rav goes on to discuss a point where the religious and the aesthetic meet, allowing the aesthetic to be raised "to the plane of transcendental."[20]

The Rav uses the term "exalted" to describe the religious search to see and experience God's perfect beauty; it is the unique and spiritual experience of the beautiful in regards to the Divine: "Exalted is only the unattainable and inapproachable, and it can only be experienced if man is driven toward infinity itself. Truly, only God is exalted since only He is outside finite existence."[21] Only the aesthetic experience, often an experience of prayer and worship, can "taste and see" God: the religious-aesthetic man can perhaps find the exalted God, the rationalist and the ethicist will always remain at a distance.[22] The Rav focuses particularly on the richly evocative language of Psalms, how it describes a glorious God and a beautiful world of divine creations. His sense of the aesthetic is highly literary, there is no discussion of visuality or sight particularly. Although prayer may be a spiritually rich aesthetic experience, it is one created by language, not by sight. And in practice, the Rav was uncomfortable with human images adorning prayer spaces, as can be seen in his responsum against the inclusion of biblical figures in the stained-glass windows in Cornell University's interfaith chapel.[23]

In the seminal work Halakhic Man, however, the Rav did not explore any unique world of Jewish visuality that is artistic in its own right. In this text, the Rav defines the halakhic man by his way of visualizing the world around him. "Halakhic man," writes Rabbi Soloveitchik, "orients himself to reality through a priori images of the world which he bears in the deep recesses of his personality."[24] It is the way that halakhic man sees the world—through the tapestry of Torah law, through the commandments that create an idealized world—that separates himself out from the typical religious or cognitive mindset. Throughout Halakhic Man the Rav uses the visual image of a sunset to explore the observant Jew's unique way of seeing: "When halakhic man looks to the western horizon and sees the fading rays of the setting sun … he knows that this sunset or sunrise imposes upon him anew obligations and commandments."[25]

Not only, however, does the halakhic man see the world through the prism of the law, but the law also colors his vision, adding beauty to what is already the extraordinary in nature. Using the example of a sunset again, the Rav explains that the halakhic man "will perceive the sunset of a Sabbath eve not only as a natural cosmic phenomenon but as an unsurpassably awe-inspiring, sacred and exalted vision—an eternal sanctity that is reflected in the setting sun."[26] This halakhic visuality allows the observant Jew to see more than natural beauty; halakhic man sees the world as more magnificent than even the greatest works of art:

From the very midst of the law there arises a cosmos more splendid and beautiful than all the works of Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. Perhaps these experiences … are lacking in the emotional dynamic and turbulent passion of aesthetic man … However, they are possessed of a profound depth and a clear penetrating vision.[27]

The Rav, even in this quotation, continues not to have much patience for "aesthetic man" but he does express a "halakhic aesthetic" that surpasses Western art in its depth and transcendence. A world colored by halakhah is more beautiful than the painted figures soaring through the Sistine Chapel or the Mona Lisa's enigmatic smile. For the Rav, mitzvot, not Monet's water lilies, are the sublime, and like the best aesthetic experiences, mitzvot are meant to be performed "first and foremost for their own sake alone."[28] In the Rav's halakhic philosophy, mitzvot replace paintings, commandments substitute for sculpture, halakhah supersedes photography—Jewish law is what does the work of creating a visually more beautiful world.

If halakhah is the greatest work of art, then the halakhic man is the greatest artist, the frum yid rivals and surpasses Rembrandt, at least metaphysically. The Rav writes that halakhah makes man a "creator of worlds."[29] The halakhic Jew is a partner with God in the creation of beauty, a legalistic artist carving into reality a better and more magnificent world: "Just as the Almighty constantly refined and improved the realm of existence during the six days of creation, so must man complete that creation and transform the domain of chaos and void into a perfect and beautiful reality."[30] The ultimate goal of halakhah can be read as an attempt to transform man into a divinely inspired artist, one who uses God's law to create an idealized world. Torah law ought to change a person's vision, shaping a unique halakhic aesthetic with which the halakhic man designs a more perfect world.

Conclusion

By the mid-twentieth century, the idea that Jews do not have an authentic tradition of visual art, that paintings, photographs, and sculptures are not part of religious experience or halakhic life, was ingrained enough that Rabbi Soloveitchik could define the man of faith, the confronted man, at least partly by his lack of interest in the aesthetic and the visually beautiful. It did not necessarily have to be this way—a world that appreciated illuminated manuscripts, silverwork, or micrography as the finest and highest of art forms would not have believed that Judaism was "artless."

If Kant or Hegel had read Rambam or the Shulhan Arukh, they might have known that Jewish law does not actually proscribe the creation of images. But that was not the way of history. It is important to reclaim visual culture and aesthetics for

religious Judaism so that beauty can be allowed to inspire halakhically bound actions, to color worship, and give meaning to our rituals.

We can bring beauty into our religious lives partly by reading texts that are seemingly anti-visual for the artistic metaphors that hide within them. Although the Rav did not, on a surface level, have much appreciation for the aesthetic, he has left us the chance to see beauty of an artistic nature in our halakhic lives. For the Rav, halakhah is the perfect artist's studio, where the Jew can be taught to see the world in a unique way and create godly masterpieces. Just like someone who is being trained in drawing is taught to truly see the shadows and the highlights that make up the world, observant Jews learn to see the beauty of new blossoms or setting suns through a distinctive, and legally bound, lens. This visuality is the frum Jew's paintbrush or chisel, it is the tool that the halakhic person can use to design a more perfect and godly world. The halakhic artist may not paint a sunset like Turner's or Van Gogh's, but hers will be a unique one, with a composition perhaps balanced by the inclusion of a lone figure davening minhah.

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[2] Leo Steinberg quoted in Aaron Rosen, Imagining Jewish Art (London: Legenda, 2009), 10.

[3] Asher Biemann, "Art and Aesthetics," in The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy: The Modern Era, ed. Martin Kavka, Zachary Braiterman, and David Novak (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 761.

[4] Profiat Duran of Spain quoted Vivian B. Mann, ed. Jewish Texts on the Visual Arts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 14.

[5] Richard I. Cohen, Jewish Icons: Art and Society in Modern Europe (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 152.

[6] Bland, The Artless Jew, 15.

[7] Ibid., 15-16.

[8] Ibid., 18.

[9] Ibid., 15.

[10] Melissa Raphael,. Judaism and the Visual Image: A Jewish Theology of Art (London: Continuum, 2009), 12.

[11] Ibid., 12.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Olin, Margaret, The Nation Without Art: Examining Modern Discourses on Jewish Art (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 18.

[14] Raphael, Judaism and the Visual Image, 34.

[15] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Confrontation," Tradition 6 (Spring-Summer 1964): 5–29.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Lonely Man of Faith," Tradition 7 (Summer 1965): 20.

[19] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer, ed. Shalom Carmy (Hoboken: Ktav, 2003), 51.

[20] Ibid., 55.

[21]Ibid.

[22] Ibid., 58.

[23] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Community, Covenant, and Commitment: Selected Letters and Communications of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, ed. Nathaniel Helfgot (Jersey City: Ktav, 2005), 3-10.

[24] Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Halakhic Man, trans. Lawrence J. Kaplan (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), 17.

[25] Ibid., 20.

[26] Ibid., 38.

[27] Ibid., 84.

[28] Zachary Braiterman, "Joseph Soloveitchik and Immanuel Kant's Mitzvah-Aesthetic," AJS Review 25 (April 2001): 3.

[29] Soloveitchik, Halakhic Man, 99.

[30] Ibid., 106,

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The Pedagogical Imagination of a Subversive Conservative: Rabbi Soloveitchik's Arrival as an Educational Visionary

Jeffrey Saks

The appearance of a short article in a local Boston Sunday newspaper introducing the wider community to a new clergyman in town should not—in and of itself—be of significance for students of religious thought. The recent unearthing of the column will nevertheless interest readers of *The Lehrhaus*, not merely because the young rabbi in question is the 29-year-old Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, but because of the remarkable way in which he used the journalistic platform to communicate a vision for his leadership of Jewish Boston.

Yet, we would little note nor long remember the 800 word article, even with our fascination of all-things Soloveitchik, were it not for the fact that it contains the seeds of a religious and educational manifesto to which he would remain true for another half-century of public activity. His words reside at the intersection of his philosophical worldview and his educational vision and agenda.

The Text

Published a mere four months after his arrival in the United States, and a few weeks into his tenure as the Rabbi of the Boston Jewish community, we are amazed at the degree to which the Rav's distinct voice is already discernible. Reading the newspaper clipping, we wonder how perfected the Rav's English was at that point, rumors that he had mastered the language during the Atlantic crossing notwithstanding (he shares the by-line with the "as told to" interviewer)—but there is no doubt that the *kerygma* (to borrow one of his own favored words), the religious message being heralded, is uniquely his own. We can plot a straight line from the words in the *Boston Sunday Advertiser* from that

Christmas morning over 84 years ago directly to his most significant philosophical writings of subsequent decades.

His statement was framed in the context of schoolchildren but it has broad implications for his larger worldview, and has bearing on what he later set out for adults and the community at-large. Between the lines, we glimpse the raw material of what we today view as the foundation stones of Torah u-Madda, Modern Orthodoxy, et al., although admittedly these were terms that the Rav never invoked himself, neither here nor elsewhere.

The interview's focus on educational challenges facing the community was clearly deliberate (for the facts on the ground in 1930s Boston see Seth Farber's contribution to this symposium and his excellent book). Facing a community of largely non-observant Orthodox Jews (an oxymoron by current parlance, but a sociological reality at the time), he was speaking to the parents of public school-educated Jewish children, with an eye on his plans to revamp the supplementary Jewish schools within a year, and—together with his wife—to launch New England's first Jewish day school within five years.

With a bold plan most readers would likely have found surprising from the mouth of an Orthodox rabbi, the Rav identified the problem of Jewish education as the "collision between the old Jewish religious study and the modern scientific study." While each one is "very significant and valuable in its own right" and both are "most essential to the spiritual make-up of the modern Jew," the failures of Jewish education until that point were a result of the separation of the two by a "so-called Chinese wall." When the two systems exist in conflict, naturally it is religious study which will suffer in the competition for time, energy, and resources. The Rav imagined a parity wherein the wall is torn down and each stands on its own, maintaining its own integrity, "coinciding," with "neither one to suffer because of the other."

The Implications

The most surprising turn comes when he critiqued, with what we presume to be disdain, the status quo: a type of exposure to Hebrew culture and Jewish literature, in which the curriculum has been neutered of the rough and tumble of classical Jewish learning, presumably for its perceived abstruseness, hair-splitting, and pushing elephants through needle eyes. In short, he attacked a learning system which had been guided by a need to generate "relevance." The Rav charged it as being most irrelevant because it did not address the pressing issues. It could not provide a grand and dignified spiritual-intellectual experience capable of standing shoulder to shoulder with the secular studies so prized by an immigrant generation and its children.

Rabbi Soloveitchik's "modernity" and "innovation" lay in his call to return to a more traditional curriculum; his plan was subversively conservative! The only Jewish learning that could hold its own side-by-side with physics and philosophy, literature and mathematics, was the intense study of what is called here "Talmud and the Jewish Law," what he would go on in later writings to refer to colloquially as "*Halakhah*"—but using the term expansively, transcending the particular sense of ritual law, and developing a concept of traditional rabbinic study, as exemplified by the Talmud, as the authentic repository of Jewish thought.

Immersion in this subject matter, and not merely Bialik's poetry, was the only object of study that will enable the youth to answer the question "What is Judaism?" Only the *havayot de-Abaya ve-Rava* and the "old Jewish laws" penetrate into the "inner soul of man and reward him with that deep spiritual feeling he cannot obtain" elsewhere. (The Rav was keenly aware that this does not happen automatically; that proper pedagogy was required; that his lack of concern with what passed as "relevant" did not mean he thought learning could succeed if it wasn't engaging.)

Similarly significant is his *en passant* inclusion of girls as equal beneficiaries of his nascent educational plans. In describing the schooling of old, with the all-absorbing religious education of the "Cheder" in which "boys grew to full manhood," there was nary a mention of young women, or if or how they received any education. (We know the answer.) But in presenting his picture for the future he aimed "to give our generation of growing *boys and girls* an all-embracing, well-balanced educational" experience. Knowing the ways that the continuation of his career would advance women's Torah learning it is remarkable to see the germs of the ideas in place from the outset.

The Context

With these convictions in hand as he arrived in the United States it is easy to see how the Rav's ideas were implemented—in the larger Boston community and his Maimonides School, at Yeshiva University, RIETS and their satellite communities and institutions (many of which were founded by the Rav's disciples), and in his exercise of leadership in the larger American Orthodox community. But on the ideational level, we can see these seeds germinate in his later published philosophical writing.

The conclusion of *Halakhic Man* (1944) speaks of the freedom that his typological title character experiences through the act of intellectual creativity, the type of learning experience he was aiming at in 1932:

> And halakhic man, whose voluntaristic nature we have established earlier, is, indeed, a free man. He creates an ideal world, renews his own being and transforms himself into a man of God, dreams about the complete realization of the Halakhah in the very core of the world, and looks forward to the kingdom of God 'contracting' itself and appearing in the midst of concrete and empirical reality.

What is this, if not a potential end result that can only be accomplished by the breaking down of the "Chinese wall" between Judaism and culture for which he had hoped!

Similarly, around the same time (although the reading public would have to wait 40 years for its publication), the Rav concluded *The Halakhic Mind* with a far more developed statement about the combination of Jewish thought and modernity—that the two are not in conflict—and that the encounter might promise a vivifying effect on Judaism itself:

> The purpose of such an analysis is not to eliminate non-Jewish elements. Far from it, for the blend of Greek and Jewish thought has oftimes been truly magnificent. However, by tracing the Jewish trends comparing them to the non-Jewish we shall enrich our outlook and knowledge. Modern Jewish philosophy must be nurtured on the historical religious consciousness that has been projected onto a fixed objective screen. Out of the sources of Halakhah, a new world awaits formulation.

Two decades later, Rabbi Soloveitchik was still boldly confident, projecting strength of conviction and optimism in *Halakhah* itself to take its place alongside any other academic discipline. What he was telling the immigrant generation in 1930s Boston, and was repeating to their Americanized children and grandchildren in the 1960s, was that Judaism has nothing to fear from the secular realm. Writing in *The Lonely Man of Faith*(1965) he candidly admitted: "I have never been seriously troubled by the problem[s] of" evolution, Biblical criticism, psychology, or historical empiricism. When Rabbi Soloveitchik told his readers that these pillars of nineteenth and early twentieth century science and philosophy do not pose a contradiction to religious commitment or belief we readers never once think that he was undisturbed for lack of critically wrestling with these topics. Quite the contrary!

He goes on: "However, while theoretical oppositions and dichotomies [between Judaism and science or philosophy] have never tormented my thoughts, I could not shake off the disquieting feeling that the practical role of the man of faith within modern society is a very difficult, indeed, a paradoxical one." Out of that torment he births the image of the Lonely Man of Faith—another typology which very well might have been the ideal product of the American Jewish education he was first beginning to imagine upon arrival in Boston.

The Vision

These aspirations for the flock he was leading were motivated by a sense that contemporary Jews "seek the spiritual combination, not [a] mechanical one." The pressing issues of American Jewry are not merely resolving specific conflicts of how to manage as a committed Jew in modern America—although such conflicts were painfully real, especially the matter of Shabbat accommodation. But the Rav understood that even were all barriers to observance ameliorated, something our own generation has largely merited thanks to the leadership and vision of those that came before us, we would still be in need of a vision of how to develop an integrated religious personality and community. No matter how daunting his "*altneu*" curricular innovations may or may not have seemed at the time, history has now judged that they were indeed successful. However, it was specifically in this affective, "spiritual" realm that he maintained lifelong reservations, and even self-doubt. A 1960 essay "*Al Ahavat Ha-Torah ve-Geulat Nefesh Ha-Dor*" ("On the Love of Torah and Redemption of the Soul of Our Generation"; desperately still in need of an English translation), perhaps Rabbi Soloveitchik's most personal piece of published writing, is an overlooked source in understanding the Rav's educational philosophy. Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein called it "the single best introduction to the Rav's thought" [see more on the essay's content and background here].

In surveying the successes of religious education in America, the Rav confessed to three troubling phenomenon, almost three decades after his arrival:

> First, the percentage of youths learning in yeshivot is very small. Even though it's increasing every year, it is not yet sufficient to calm our worries. Second, we have not yet succeeded [in America] to produce true *Gedolei Torah* of whom we may be proud … [The third point constitutes] a serious educational-philosophical problem, which has long troubled me. Orthodox youth have discovered the Torah through scholastic forms of thought, intellectual contact, and cold logic. However, they have not merited to discover her [the Torah] through a living, heart-pounding, invigorating sense of perception. They know the Torah as an idea, but do not directly encounter her as a "reality," perceptible to "taste, sight and touch." Because many of them lack this "Torah-perception," their world view (*hashkafah*) of Judaism becomes distorted… In one word, they are confounded on the pathways of Judaism, and this perplexity is the result of unsophisticated perspectives and experiences. *Halakhah* is two-sided … the first is intellectual, but ultimately it is experiential.

This fact, the spiritual and experiential deficiencies of American Orthodoxy, was a source of considerable frustration for the Rav—one which he described on a number of occasions. Rabbi Lichtenstein noted that this "frustration centered, primarily, on the sense that the full thrust of his total [effort] was often not sufficiently apprehended or appreciated; that by some, parts of his Torah were being digested and disseminated, but other essential ingredients were being relatively disregarded, if not distorted … [He often felt] that even among *talmidim*, some of his primary spiritual concerns were not so much rejected as ignored; indeed, that spirituality itself was being neglected … [T]he tension between the subjective and the objective, between action, thought, and

experience, was a major lifelong concern. The sense that he was only partially successful in imparting this concern gnawed at him."

We come after. We are the beneficiaries of the vision of so many that came before us. The preceding paragraphs to the contrary, it is of course idiotic to imagine that Rabbi Soloveitchik disembarked from the Mayflower at Ellis Island after having discovered America, carrying the two tablets of the law in his hand, single-handedly creating Orthodoxy in the New World *ex nihilo*. But if we live in a world where Judaism and modernity have been "coincided," that phenomenon contains in its DNA traces of ideas articulated first by a 29-year-old rabbi, only weeks into his ministry.

And yet, if, nearing a quarter-century since his passing, we, too, recognize the spiritual shortcomings of our religious communities and spiritual selves, failures that haunted the Rav despite his herculean efforts and achievements, can we afford to be any less self-critical than he was himself?

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