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From 1922 to 1930, during my years of study at the Hebrew Theological College, it was my privilege to meet with and listen to some of the great Talmudists of that generation. I discovered that the Rav of Lomza, the Gaon Judah Leib Gordon, acknowledged universally as a great rabbinic authority, knew astronomy, mathematics, Russian literature, and even the theory of music. The renowned Gaon of Lublin, Rabbi Meir Shapiro, was one of the most brilliant Polish orators, whose command of the Polish language could spellbind the parliament in which he sat. The genius of Talmud at the Hildesheimer Seminary, Rabbi Yechiel Weinberg, whose Talmudic competence was held in high esteem in the Lithuanian Yeshivot, towered in his wide cultural erudition. I remember the amazement of our class in Codes one day when the saintly sage who instructed us, Rabbi Chaim Korb, mentioned that he had read Shakespeare in German in his younger years, and there lingers in my memory the volume of Spinoza in Yiddish that surprised me upon entering the home of my former Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Nissan Yablonsky, who had been a Dayan and Rosh Yeshiva in Slabodka. We all knew, of course, that the versatile Talmudist, Dr. Bernard Revel, the distinguished president of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary in New York, was remarkably competent in the broad area of the humanities.

To be sure, there were many great rabbis at that time whose scholarly achievements were limited exclusively to the field of Talmudic learning, but they did not ridicule nor attack their peers who had included ingredients of wisdom from other storehouses. On the contrary, there was the important statement of a student of the Gaon of Vilna, "To the degree that a person is deficient in his knowledge of other sciences, he will be deficient one hundred portions in Torah wisdom, because Torah and sci-

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ence are intertwined." In the same age, some two centuries ago, the chief rabbi of Berlin, Zvi Hirsch Levin, wrote also, "While the very essence of Torah establishes it as the mistress, and all other departments of wisdom are its handmaidens, yet it is not fitting to ignore them." The immortal of Pressburg, Rabbi Moses Sofer, whom secular historians generally describe as an extremist, engaged a tutor for his children to instruct them in worldly subjects and languages. Certainly, the knowledge of a foreign language or the understanding of a mathematical or scientific treatise did not constitute *prima facie* evidence of an inclination to heresy.

A radical change occurred in the Yeshivot after World War I. The bloody experiences of the Jewish communities in Europe during and after those years of slaughter and pogrom made all values associated with the gentile world intolerable, so that the young students of Talmud avoided every manifestation of general culture. Religious life concentrated completely upon a carefully isolated and self-centered sphere. Whoever dared to break out in the slightest measure was suspected of treasonable motives, and sometimes the suspicion itself drove him out of the inner circles of the pious to an irreligious way of life. It is interesting to note that the new generation of Talmudic scholars that frowned upon even nibbling at non-Torah intellectual food did not by any means excel in profundity and extensive familiarity with Talmudic sources those scholars of the preceding era who permitted themselves such educational excursions.

Since the initial Orthodox rabbinical schools in the United States, first the New York school now known as Yeshiva University, and later the Hebrew Theological College in Chicago, were organized by Talmudists of the earlier age, it was accepted that the students could combine secular learning with their religious disciplines. Indeed, it was felt that young men who would seek to build the Jewish loyalties of American Jews needed an intensive general education to understand the men and women of their congregations and to convey through the pulpit an intelligible interpretation of Torah purposes. Although the inspiring teachers in these seminaries never wearied of urging upon their young listeners the transcendent importance of more and more Torah knowledge, deeper and deeper piety, they simul-

taneously extolled the ideal of communal service, the responsibility of plunging into the activities of congregations everywhere in order to stir the Jewish masses out of their religious indifference and tragic ignorance. The earlier classes of our Chicago Yeshiva remember how much love for Judaism was instilled into us by Rabbi H. Rubinstein, who often interrupted his lecture to tell us of his experiences with the members of his congregation, hoping that we might profit by them and learn the affection and tact needed to draw men closer to Heaven. Long and bitter battles were fought over what techniques should be used, what strategic concessions might be made, what spiritual risks the young rabbi must take with his personal preferences and the education of his own children on the altar of rescuing hundreds and thousands from assimilation. No simple formula was ever developed and no total agreement was ever reached, but the fundamental objective was widely shared that the American Yeshivot must train scholars whose love of halakhic books and unshakable religious convictions would be wed to a passionate desire to raise the Torah dedication of the Jewish public throughout the land. There was a strong consensus on the high value of a college degree as a tool in the attainment of the latter goal.

The climate of the Orthodox rabbinical seminaries became transformed with the arrival of the Talmudists who suffered through the Hitler catastrophe and lost both their nearest of kin and their Jewish world. The indifference to general culture and opposition to all forms of non-Torah learning that characterized the post-World War I period turned into an intensive hatred after World War II. What could be more natural than to despise the whole system of norms and social procedures of governments that murdered defenseless people, including more than a million children, or that observed such barbarian slaughter without a word of protest? As the spokesmen of this new wave of Roshei Yeshiva were brought into the classrooms of the American institutions, they introduced a violent spirit of negativism towards every manifestation of modern civilization. Wherever possible, they discouraged the students from enrolling at any colleges; or if they found their disciples required higher

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education to earn a living — accounting and mathematics were becoming popular fields for Orthodox Jews — it was clearly spelled out that only the skills should be pursued, but the values should be expunged forever from the mind. In a similar vein, since government and anti-Semitism had proved themselves in Europe to be synonymous, every genuine *ben Torah* would regard patriotic customs with suspicion; for example, he would avoid turkey on Thanksgiving, and he would piously turn away from the barbaric fireworks displays of July Fourth. (This attitude to government seems to have been intensified by the situation in the State of Israel, where the irreligious dominate the cabinet and Knesset, and where piety consequently expresses itself in many Yeshivot, for example, in refusing to honor *Yom ha-Atzmaut*.) Although Halakhah applies several technical restrictions to the precept “and ye shall not follow their statutes” to protect the observant from pagan practices and foreign religious habits, the impression was strongly circulated among the students that *anything* “goyim” do must never be imitated by Torah-guided people. Emphatically in this area, there was a total elimination of a major Talmudic premise, *koach d’hetera adif*, to uncover possibilities of permissiveness within the law demonstrates a higher power.

Of particular concern in these new ranks of Talmudists was the danger that would inevitably befall a young man who would make his home among non-observant Jews. Even though he would move among them as their rabbi, he might accept more from them than he would give, with a resultant deficit in the spiritual balance of trade. Admittedly, there was a solid basis in experience for these fears: a long generation of American-trained Orthodox rabbis was heavily pock-marked with defections, and a sad number of extremely devoted Yeshiva *bachurim* who had entered the rough arena of congregational leadership had lost no inconsiderable measure of their idealism. Rather than undertake a solution along the lines of better preparation, more carefully planned indoctrination, more thorough research into the factors responsible for weakening of principle — after all, there were impressive statistics of American-trained men who had successfully and triumphantly met the challenges — the recently appointed

Roshei Yeshiva went to great pains to deride the rabbinical career, to discourage their students from entertaining any thought of the pulpit, and to urge them to seek the kind of employment that would keep them geographically safe, surrounded by their own kind of religiously committed families, and holding positions that would not tempt them to depart from any established patterns.

To make certain that the rabbinical life would not appear attractive, additional viewpoints were injected into the perspective of the students. Non-Orthodox Jews, it was insinuated, were disreputable creatures; while the instructor was generally cautious in conveying this impression, since he knew that very often the funds to keep the seminary doors open came from such people, the uninhibited youth spoke of them as *posh'im*, *goyim*, *apikorsim*, etc. An unfortunate corollary rose to the surface when fierce battles broke out in the homes of students whose parents were not observant, and the rabbis sought to reconcile the Fifth Commandment with the disrespect bred into their students toward irreligious Jews. The trend, of course, was likewise far from wholesome when the question of gentiles was involved. Obviously, young men with such attitudes would scarcely consider leadership in a synagogue with very few Sabbath observers or kosher homes, and such institutions as brotherhood week and interfaith committees. (Occasionally, it should be noted, character proves stronger than propaganda, and one meets a pious son who displays admirable reverence for his irreligious parents, a Yeshiva bachur who esteems the divine image in a person of a different creed, a young Talmudist who dares to accept a pulpit in a midwestern town.) In fact, the Yeshivot of the United States have contributed more than they know to the diminution of reverence for the Rav in most communities, since their students show so little elementary courtesy to the spiritual leaders in our country that the general public considers the Rav unworthy; is he not derided by sincere young Talmudists?

Orthodox Judaism will ultimately pay a heavy price for this negative approach to the spiritual needs of the American Jewish masses. For one thing, an iron curtain will be drawn between

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the religious and the irreligious, or more accurately, a progression of iron curtains, since every group that considers its standards of observance more stringent will cut itself off from those of alleged lesser devotion. The opportunities for reaching promising children of ordinary Jewish homes and attracting them to higher Talmudic studies will diminish. Sources of financial support for Yeshivot in non-Orthodox circles will begin to run dry, as the contributors become disgusted with the disparaging attitudes they encounter among the observant. Federations in small communities, leaders in average towns, will reduce still further their already inadequate allocations, when they discover they can expect no assistance from the Orthodox seminaries in solving the problem of manpower shortage in the traditional rabinate.

An unsuspected penalty will be the actual weakening of Talmudic competence in the seminaries. The Oral Law of Judaism has ever been a living organism, deriving its body in direct descent from Mount Sinai and sustaining its growth by the nourishment drawn from interpenetrating communal experience. When we remember the brilliant Talmudic accomplishments of the eastern European academies from the sixteenth to the twentieth century, we must bear in mind that what was learned in the study hall served as guidelines in the street, market and home. The rabbi could pore day and night over the most abstruse section of ancient lore, but his acumen was called upon to deal with the real problems of the men, women and children under his care. Thus, a stream of consciousness and conscience flowed ceaselessly from the passages of the Gemara into the thought and practice of the struggling, suffering, working, playing people of the village, and that stream itself became deeper and broader in the process. If in the United States the Roshei Yeshiva will dam up the stream, a sizable lake may be formed, but of stagnant waters. Historians are beginning to ask already, why the thousands of American-trained Orthodox rabbinical students of this recent intensive Talmudic period publish infinitely fewer volumes of Talmudic novellae and responsa than their European parallels. Is it not logical to conclude that a Torah scholarship divorced from life falls victim to sterility?

Today Orthodox Jewry abounds in Talmudists who spent many years at an Academy hoping to be appointed to posts in advanced schools but find themselves teaching children nine or ten years old in a Day School, where often their vast knowledge is an impediment to effectiveness, and they taste the full bitterness of frustration. Such men can hardly become creative writers. They might have, had they gone to serve an adult congregation, no matter how ignorant and unobservant. Halakhah, I once wrote, is the hand of God reaching out to people; where there is no reaching out there is no living Halakhah.

Significantly, Judaism once boasted of its great academies of learning in Europe and lamented the *am ha'aratzut* of the Jews in America, but the United States began to develop rabbinical schools where spiritual bridge-builders were trained — men who could follow the intricacies of a Talmudic lecture by a Lithuanian, Polish or Hungarian Gaon and who were no less at home in a room with American intellectuals. Such rabbis sent many a bright youngster from the local Hebrew School to a Yeshiva in the great Jewish centers, and such rabbis were instrumental in establishing Day Schools in dozens of communities. Such rabbis were equipped to serve Jewish college students on campus by becoming Hillel Foundation directors, and such rabbis kept young people in uniform in touch with intensive Torah loyalties when they volunteered as chaplains in the Army, Navy and Air Force. To the extent that the new Orthodox philosophy of the Yeshiva world takes deeper root will the numbers of Orthodox Hillel leaders and chaplains be reduced, and where there was once a bridge there will be only the widest chasm. Can we have highways in modern Jewry if our spiritual engineers are taught to build vertical spans only, none of horizontal function?

Strange things have been happening to the character of students breathing this anti-social air. A view has become widespread among Yeshiva students that the paramount goal of concentration upon Torah learning justifies a reduction, in some degree, of proper standards to pass high school and college examinations. Inasmuch as a diploma is nothing but "a piece of paper," often required to be able to provide for a wife and

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children, certain mild liberties in acquiring it may be forgiven, if thereby more hours are reserved for Torah learning. The outstanding Talmudists of the old school have attempted to campaign against this approach, yet the forces let loose by their basic aversion to university values have become too powerful to be easily checked.

No less disconcerting is a sad carelessness in the treatment of public property. Were there an effective carry-over from the classes in *Nezikin* (Damages) the floors, tables and chairs in every senior Yeshiva would be a noble demonstration of how ardently a *ben Torah* cherishes the value of things donated by benefactors. But alas! the appearance of rooms and halls is rarely such a demonstration. While the school losses due to youthful malice constitute a national problem in the United States, one might reasonably expect nothing of that character in schools of intensive religious motivation. The explanation once again is to be sought in the philosophy of denying significance to anything associated with modern life. It was hard to keep things tidy in the poverty-ridden ghettos of Poland, and tidiness is therefore too modern, inconsistent with the ideal of Talmudic erudition — some such subconscious reasoning seems to prevail in many seminaries.

A psychological approach in addition to this sociological interpretation suggests itself. Adolescents need outlets for their frustrations, and the young Yeshiva student experiences not only the normal frustrations of the teen-ager, perhaps compounded by his almost total isolation from the other sex, but there is a gnawing intuition of inadequacy in the attainment of the ideal goals of piety prescribed by his teachers. The visible manifestation is constructed out of many individual acts of devotion: remaining in meditation during silent prayer a minute longer than his friend, wearing a more conspicuous *talit katan*, eating the bitter herbs at the seder "the size of an olive" where the olive appears larger than a grapefruit — an entire system of ritualistic escalation wrapping itself around his physical movements until he disregards any obligations to mere physical objects in detail or the physical environment in general. Even towards teachers there is an occasional outburst of *chutzpah*, and

boys who cannot quarrel with girls enter into bitter fights between themselves. The Torah, to be sure, exercises all its disciplines in restraint, so that nothing remotely similar to the violence of juvenile delinquency ever occurs at a Yeshiva, but young people encouraged to deride as unholy anything and everything in the total society about them suffer scars.

A term has been introduced into the vocabulary of the Orthodox community, *Daat Torah*, the Torah opinion. It covers the entire range of contemporary problems, private and public. Although there may be no specific law in Halakhah to apply in a given situation, the Torah scholars, by virtue of their erudition, may make the best decision on what should be done, and their opinion is binding. It is painful to observe that some of the great Talmudists have neither the experience nor the inclination to study the issues but take the analysis submitted by their practical associates and junior colleagues or disciples and render judgment accordingly. Not always, therefore, does a proclamation of the great Roshei Yeshiva represent a conclusion objectively reached, for it may be the conviction of an individual or several individuals advising them, and quite conceivably the viewpoint of another group without the same easy access to the Roshei Yeshiva would have been more valuable in the totality of Torah development.

Two specific examples merit particular attention. In an earlier generation the leading English-speaking Orthodox rabbis of New York participated in the New York Board of Rabbis and the Synagogue Council of America. The outstanding Talmudic scholars of that time saw no basis for protest and certainly never attacked the idea. Indeed, men who are today held in high reverence in the Agudat Yisroel movement helped to found the Board and the Council. In the wake of the new intensive American Orthodoxy several of the younger Orthodox rabbis approached the Roshei Yeshiva and gave them a one-sided picture of how the Board and Council function, with little or no mention of the positive values derived from speaking with a united voice in the public relations sphere on issues of immigration, discrimination, relief, anti-communism, anti-fascism, etc. Since those who were involved in the activities of the Board and Coun-

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cil were not invited to meetings of study and investigation, eleven Roshei Yeshiva concluded that the *Daat Torah*, now called the Halakhah, requires a ban on membership in mixed bodies of rabbis. Obviously, since there was no clear Halakhah on the subject, else there never would have been Orthodox rabbis there in the first place, or there would have been an outcry of protest at the very beginning, what happened was a rabbinical decision based on hearing only one side of the case and failing to take into account the damage that might accrue to American Orthodoxy. One wonders, even granting that a mixed Board of Rabbis is harmful to the Torah position, whether a distinction should not have been recognized between inaugurating such a Board where it did not exist — it is understandable that not in every time and not in every locality are circumstances identical — and destroying one that has operated for decades. A postscript may be in place: at least one of the eleven who signed the ban stated subsequently it was meant as a private guideline to rabbis who were uncertain about joining, but it was not intended for public pronouncement.

The second illustration comes from the midwest. In Chicago the Hebrew Theological College was an Orthodox rabbinical seminary granting Semicha since 1922. All the great Roshei Yeshiva who came to visit the United States gave Talmudic lectures there. To list a few: Rabbi Moshe Mordecai Epstein of Slobodka, Rabbi Shimon Shkop of Grodno, Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin, Rabbi A. I. Bloch of Telshe, Rabbi L. Y. Finkel of Mir, Rabbi Aaron Kotler of Kletsk, Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman of Baranowicz (all of blessed memory) and Rabbi J. Kahaneman of Ponovez. In the same building where the young men studied, classes were held for young women who were trained to become Hebrew teachers. To be sure, there were no mixed classes, but there might be a lecture for young men at 7 p.m. in one room and in the very next room at the same hour a course for young women. From 1947-56 the Men's Dormitory was in the next building. None of the Roshei Yeshiva at the Hebrew Theological College from 1922 until 1956 ever lodged a complaint about this arrangement, and some of them enrolled their daughters in these classes while their sons were regular students

in the Yeshiva.

In 1958 the Yeshiva opened a new large campus in Skokie, a Chicago suburb. Plans were announced for a Women's College to be built on the east end of the campus, approximately as far away as 37th Street is from 34th Street in Manhattan and farther away than the Beth Jacob Teachers Seminary for Women in Brooklyn was from the Chafetz Chaim Yeshiva for many years. Furthermore, after some sharp arguments on the subject, the Yeshiva Board voted to have only the classrooms for women on the campus, while the dormitory would be much farther away. Nevertheless a few Roshei Yeshiva in the east issued an *Issur* on locating the Women's College on the Skokie campus. These Roshei Yeshiva never came personally to see the actual location, never consulted the Chicago administration, and proclaimed the *Issur*. Again there was obviously no halakhic precept involved, only a matter of judgment of whether or not the existence of an Orthodox women's college without dormitories three blocks away from a rabbinical school would violate the conscience of Orthodoxy, and a *Daat Torah* was shaped into Halakhah without investigating all aspects of the issue or even considering such factors as past history and communal need.

This last element brings up a delicate point. As before we found ritualistic escalation, we now encounter halakhic escalation. There is almost a terror among rabbis of being left behind in the race to establish maximum standards, and each Gaon raises the bar an inch or two higher. Since the authority to find a *kula*, a less exacting norm, has ever been regarded as stemming from greater erudition, our contemporary Talmudists have become exceedingly humble, and exceedingly cautious. Furthermore, whoever dares to suggest a somewhat easier approach to a problem is overwhelmed by scorn or abuse. Torah periodicals published in the United States abound in new *chumrot*, until restrictions are multiplied upon restrictions and piety is driven into ever novel extremes. If occasionally some scholar suggests that Halakhah should meet the challenge of our day by extending its principles in conformity with its own formulas of growth, no matter how scrupulously he observes the practices of the Shulchan Arukh,

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he is branded a dangerous reformer; and whoever permits him to speak or write has sealed a covenant with the enemies of the faith. Thus the forward movement of Halakhah becomes thwarted and the phenomena in our world are denied reality because they cannot be fitted into the fixed categories of the past Talmudic generation. In a strong sense, the refusal to allow Halakhah to develop in every direction and not merely to travel the most stringent path will create Torah pygmies. Torah giants knew that there are opportunities for leniency as well as for severity in the majestic vastness of Halakhah, and that that realization must never be banished from the thought of our decision-makers. Even where an honored Talmudist is bold enough to advance a more permissive theory, it will be located today in the area of some particular ritualistic rule but seldom in the broad perspective of major social issues. A happy exception can be indicated only in the offices of the nation-wide chief rabbinate in Israel, where the halakhic judges must come to grips with the daily problems of an expanding political and economic society; and, although impatient voices cry out in Orthodox circles there, especially in the religious kibbutzim, against the slow pace of the rabbis in providing guidance on the swift changes confronting observant people, we must acknowledge the dynamic responsiveness of some of the younger Talmudic leaders to the new issues. In the United States, however, what one social analyst terms the halakhic "freeze" threatens to become a forbidding glacier.

The position of the few who reject the philosophy of ever greater internal congealment, of ever taller barricades between the chosen within the Talmudic stockade and the forsaken outside, is far from comfortable. Men of tremendous Talmudic prestige like Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Dr. Samuel Belkin, whose outstanding abilities in the general fields of human knowledge have been combined with the loftiest status in the halakhic world, are not really "in" as far as the majority of the Yeshivot and their heads are concerned. These two scholars believe in keeping open the lines of communication between the fervent halls of the academy and the ignorant, indifferent lanes of the congregational bowling league. While they joyfully write

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in every youth who asks for instruction, they do not write off those who do not. Yet it is precisely the open line of communication which is shunned by the post-World War II Roshei Yeshiva. They welcome into their midst the lost soul of an untutored lad who in some miraculous way discovered in himself a desire to become *frum*, but they will tolerate no exodus of their students into the wilds of the larger Jewish community. This permanent division denies to the Jewish public the elevation of being in contact with men of Torah and denies to the men of Torah the chance to serve a total people.

The latter denial has resulted in the development of a general attitude sometimes referred to as *bittul*, a term with so many overtones that no English word is an adequate translation. Particularly prevalent among Yeshiva students between the ages of sixteen and thirty, it is reflected in phrase, expression and gesture to indicate that people not of our type are unworthy of quotation or even of mention. Why listen to anything such people say, why observe anything they do, why be interested in their experiences? Because the human mind cannot cage viewpoints once embraced, the philosophy of *bittul* never ends, however, with this derisive sneering at only those far out of the circle, and often a Torah student is deeply wounded by the discovery that his method of interpreting a complex paragraph in the Code of Maimonides is brushed aside without any reverence by scholars of another school. A wise observer once remarked that the Talmudists who spent all their years in Yeshiva X took the position that the woman who scrubbed the floor there before Passover really understood Jewish law better than the sages in Yeshiva Y. Where the atmosphere is so conditioned, there is little chance, obviously, for any desire to become acquainted with the masterpieces of man's creative genius in literature, painting and music.

History, we are often told, moves in cycles. We have good cause to believe, therefore, that the philosophy of total withdrawal from the modern world and total disparagement of its cultural worth will gradually recede in the Talmudic age unfolding ahead of us. The realization will dawn upon Yeshiva leaders that we dare not abandon the masses, and that we

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cannot rely upon the automatic radiation of Torah dedication to reach them. What is beginning to disturb the equanimity of many Roshei Yeshiva is the discovery that the absence of Orthodox rabbis in smaller communities opens the door to non-Orthodox rabbis to take charge. Disorganized ignorance is difficult enough, but how can one meet organized opposition to the eternal patterns of Jewish observance? Voices are occasionally heard in the inner Yeshiva circles that perhaps just sitting and learning Torah all day and all night will not turn back the tide of anti-Halakhah attitudes instilled by anti-Halakhah spiritual leaders. Acknowledging that Day Schools have tremendous significance in advancing Torah ideals, the Roshei Yeshiva permit their students to work in them, even though almost invariably contact will then be made with many non-Orthodox parents, and certain compromises will follow; for example, it has been accepted that in smaller cities the Day Schools will generally be co-educational, and there may sometimes be public functions where the singing of girls will be heard, where men and women will dine at the same tables, and where even social dancing will be allowed. It is sad to reflect, however, upon the logical inconsistencies that appear: a Rosh Yeshiva will permit his student to teach in a school where the children attend a synagogue without separate seating for men and women, but will not permit his student to take the pulpit in that synagogue. Let us grant nevertheless that the complete isolation has been weakened somewhat, and that we can look forward to a cycle characterized by increasing contact with the big world beyond the walls of the Yeshiva.

Similarly, the *Jewish Observer* recently published a suggestion that the Yeshivot should consider building a four-year college. The reasoning behind the suggestion duplicates rather closely the arguments advanced by the late Dr. Revel, when he opened Yeshiva College, and by the late Rabbi Silber, when he predicted a similar development in the Yeshiva in Chicago. Significantly, these pioneers in senior Yeshiva trailblazing did not argue that every Yeshiva should have a college under its auspices, only that those with a desire to train modern pulpit personalities needed such a college, where the faculty would ac-

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knowledge the spiritual interests of the student body and not, as in most universities, undermine them. In any event, although conceivably not all *Jewish Observer* editors agreed with the bold proposal, publication of this suggestion in those jealously guarded pages may not be a wind of change, but a whisper of a breeze, perhaps?

To add to the signs of reversal in policy among Orthodox extremists we may note that the rabbinical journal *Hapardes*, whose editor is chairman of the Agudat Yisroel Executive Committee, has called for a reappraisal of the status of the professional rabbinate. Several writers have demanded that once again the rabbinical seminaries urge their ordained graduates to enter pulpits, and that the attitudes of the students be directed towards reverence for men who accept the responsibility of Jewish spiritual leadership in various congregations. A highly revered sage in Brooklyn has recommended the idea of attaching young rabbis to old men in the active profession, lest the next generation find itself without men who can carry through the essential functions of Halakhah, such as writing a *Get*, arranging a *Chalitzah*, and supervising a kosher abattoir. Such voices, to be sure, have not harmonized into a powerful chorus for change, but they may introduce key notes in a coming symphony.

The country that has witnessed the glorious music of a new day in Jewry, the land of Israel, has added in the last few years a most challenging development. Dr. Gershon Swimmer of Kfar Haroeh, one of our most brilliant educators, tells of the opposition encountered when the Bnei Akiva Yeshivot were first created as a system of religious high schools with a curriculum combining intensive Talmudic studies and secular subjects. Dr. Swimmer was summoned to Jerusalem by the head of one of the world-renowned rabbinical seminaries and was the object of a long lecture about the harm he and Rabbi Neriah, chief architect of the project, were introducing into religious education. The gist of the argument revolved about the established procedure that a boy who completes an elementary school general program should devote the entire day (and night) of study to Torah subjects exclusively for many years. If he wishes to learn anything of a secular character, let him leave the Yeshiva entirely. Dr.

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Swimmer refused to withdraw from the philosophy of the Bnei Akiva ideal, that a modern Jewish state required men of general cultural attainment and scientific competence who are also deeply rooted in Talmudic profundity. At that time it was Miz-rachi that encouraged the Bnei Akiva viewpoint, and it was the Agudat Yisroel that denounced it. What has happened since then? The recognized rabbinic leadership of Agudat Yisroel is now on record in favor of organizing Chinuch Atzmai high schools, and seeks to establish such schools where secular subjects would be part of the curriculum. Even more, Agudat Yisroel leaders have spoken in complimentary terms about Bnei Akiva high schools, since some of their graduates continued their religious studies at the advanced Yeshivot in Israel and proved themselves as accomplished in Talmudic insight and comprehension as their peers coming up through the schools of an exclusive Talmudic curriculum.

The transformation cannot come too swiftly. Many years of sweat and toil will be needed to recapture from the non-Orthodox sectors of Judaism the vast areas of community life they have swept into their control. One of their mightiest armaments in the field of propaganda is the portrayal of Orthodoxy as reactionary fanaticism. The more pronounced the Orthodox extremism, the more easily can they merchandise their sundry brands of tolerance and goodwill. For the average layman Judaism has become one tremendous discount house, where he can purchase the eternal guarantees of his faith at reduced rates, making the high sacrifices of the observant seem like the wasteful expenditure of means and efforts, especially when the end product is in his eyes an anti-social, uncultured and ill-mannered boor. Yet the easier alternatives grasped by the contemporary Jew, presented in inviting patterns by superb pulpit salesmen, can lead to the ultimate tragedy of disappearance, while even the worst strategic errors of Orthodoxy will not undo its essential pattern for survival. If the goal of Torah is to introduce stability into the character of man, then obviously an interpretation of Torah in terms of flexibility, relativity, frequent variation of philosophy, and relentless revision of ritual defeats the very purpose for which the divine gift was made at Sinai. Experience

has established that the children of a carelessly-garbed travelling *meshullach*, who can tear into a man with a stream of low invective for refusing to contribute, are more likely to uphold their Jewish heritage than the sons of the immaculate gentleman who admires the voice of the Christian tenor in the choir. The unwashed ghettos of Lemberg produced committed Jews; the luxurious apartments of Riverside Drive have added to the forces of assimilation. Yet no progressive Orthodox leader will endorse a return to poverty and filth, any more than he will go along with the reactionary rejection of contemporary culture. To him the challenge of our day is to forge a combination of Torah ideals, practice and learning with the major values of civilization, and he acknowledges frustration when logistically his observant brothers adopt policies injurious to the advances of their mutually revered Torah objectives. The position he takes may be summarized briefly: Only in halakhic Judaism can the truth of the Hebrew faith be found, and those who negate Halakhah negate the survival of that faith. But the genius of the Halakhah can master the realities of every age, without ignoring them or fleeing from them, and can even intensify the glories of its continuous development through the centuries by utilizing the discoveries of science and the established values of the humanities. To make war indiscriminately upon all the expressions of modern culture and to banish in a wholesale sweep all the achievements of secular man merely because they originated in secular arenas is to weaken the effectiveness of the Torah message.

The Roshei Yeshiva of the post-World War II era should embrace this position, before ritualistic and halakhic escalation establishes a *Daat Torah* approach oblivious to the realities *Daat Torah* should include. The refusal to accept the positive values of modern life is the error of retrogression. But in a wilderness, the pillar of fire must "go before them." True, Torah must look inward but it must see outward. The hands of Halakhah should not be tied behind her in bitterness, but should spread before her in constructive affection.