

GUEST EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

Rambam in *Sefer ha-Mitsvot* defines the mitsva of *talmud Torah* as follows:

We are commanded to learn Torah and to teach it; this is called *talmud Torah*. Thus it is written, “You shall teach your children” (Deut. 6:7), and the Sifrei (Deut. 34) explains: “‘Your children’ – these are your students, because students are called your children.” (Positive Commandment 11)

For more than fifty years, the focus of *morenu ve-rabbenu* ha-Rav Aharon Lichtenstein’s life has been the teaching of Torah to his thousands of “children.” His primary emphasis has been on teaching *hav-vayot de-Abbaye ve-Rava* and imparting to his students the Brisker methodology of Talmudic analysis. However, R. Lichtenstein has also put considerable efforts into addressing the major religious and ethical issues facing a believing Jew in the modern age. His perspective is unique and profound, not only because he is perhaps the only living *gadol ba-Torah* with a deep knowledge of the Western canon, but also because of his breathtaking ability to analyze a problem and understand the complexities of the issues at hand. R. Lichtenstein himself has said that the main lesson he learned in his years at Harvard was that life and people are complex.

This insistence on looking beyond simple and pat answers to the dilemmas facing a contemporary religious Jew distinguishes all of his theological and philosophical writings. He has written important essays on the relationship between ethics and Halakha, religious humanism, the ideology of Hesder, faith, Talmudic methodology, and many other topics. Most of these essays have been collected in the two volumes of *Leaves of Faith, Varieties of Jewish Experience*, and the forthcoming *Ruah Aviv*, as well as in the many adaptations of his lectures published by his disciples.

This special edition of *Tradition* is a first attempt to present before the public a wide-ranging scholarly analysis of R. Lichtenstein’s various philosophical writings, as well as the thousands of oral discourses he has delivered over the years, primarily at Yeshivat Har Etzion. Of course, as with any collection dealing with a major thinker, this volume cannot encompass the full range of his thought and contributions, but we hope that it touches on many of the major themes.

TRADITION

The volume opens with a brief intellectual biography of R. Lichtenstein written by Rabbi Shlomo Zuckier and Rabbi Shalom Carmy, focusing not only on his thought but also on his life and leadership, both in America and in Israel.

The next four essays address broad topics in R. Lichtenstein's thought. Dr. Shlomo Fischer argues that, while R. Lichtenstein finds spiritual value in engagement with Western culture, he is emphatically not a liberal thinker who places the individual and his/her rights as the point of departure and as the end of political organization. Rather, he believes in the people of Israel as an organic entity possessed of a clear identity and vocation, and of the human being as possessing a *telos* or purpose. For R. Lichtenstein, particularistic Jewish spiritual ends rest upon a foundation of universalistic moral and religious attainments. Therefore, according to Fischer, R. Lichtenstein is best described as a religious humanist, and Fischer demonstrates at length how this impacts on R. Lichtenstein's perspectives on contemporary Religious Zionist thought.

From an ethical and historical perspective, Professor Adam Ferziger discusses the status of the "other" in the thought of R. Lichtenstein, with a particular focus on non-Orthodox Jews. He argues that, going beyond the position of his mentor Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, R. Lichtenstein recognizes the spiritual integrity of non-Orthodox Jews and is uncomfortable with exclusionary definitions of Judaism that reject major portions of the Jewish people. Borrowing a phrase from R. Lichtenstein, Professor Ferziger refers to this as an acceptance of "fragmentary Judaism," and he proposes that R. Lichtenstein's thought on this issue developed over time.

Dr. Yoel Finkelman addresses the question of the methodology R. Lichtenstein uses in his theological and philosophical writings. He argues that focal points of R. Lichtenstein's thinking are the ability to see the complexity of the issues at hand, to empathize with and attempt to understand dissenting opinions, and the capacity to maintain a respectful tone of conversation and dialogue. Some of these qualities are an extension of the Brisker methodology he uses in analyzing disparate Talmudic opinions, and they are sorely missing in contemporary Jewish discourse.

R. Nathaniel Helfgot discusses the impact of R. Soloveitchik on R. Lichtenstein and also notes the areas where there is a divergence in thought and practice between the two most important rabbinic figures in American Modern Orthodoxy. R. Helfgot focuses on their respective approaches to Torah study, which both naturally place at the pinnacle of the religious experience, the role of the *posek* and community leader,

engagement with the world at large, Torah and *hokhma*, Religious Zionism and the relationship to non-Orthodox Jews.

The next two essays examine R. Lichtenstein's contributions to the methodology of *talmud Torah*. Rabbi Daniel Wolf explores R. Lichtenstein's role in the further development of the Brisker methodology, which R. Lichtenstein regards as the pinnacle of Talmudic learning. According to R. Wolf, R. Lichtenstein pioneered the effort to translate traditional modes of thinking into modern terminology, expanded the canon of Brisker *lomdus*, emphasized the topic as opposed to the local text in explicating a page of Talmud, and demonstrated his creativity in *talmud Torah* by drawing comparisons between *sugyot* which on the surface are unrelated. All these innovations speak to R. Lichtenstein's role as a creator of "*hiddush be-veit ha-midrash*."

Rabbi Yaakov Beasley discusses R. Lichtenstein's approach to and emphasis on the study of Tanakh. He points out that many years prior to the "literary-theological" revolution in Orthodox Bible study, R. Lichtenstein advocated just such an approach. He notes the impact of Ramban on R. Lichtenstein and his willingness to treat our great spiritual ancestors as real people, while all the time relating to Tanakh as sacred *devar Hashem*.

Halakha and public policy are the topics of the following two articles. Professor Alan Jotkowitz discusses the relationship between R. Lichtenstein's ethical thinking and his halakhic decision-making, using abortion as a test case. In his various writings, R. Lichtenstein discusses methodological issues in *pesak* and how human and social values impact on the practical Halakha. In perhaps his most famous essay, "Does Judaism Recognize an Ethic Independent of Halakha?," he analyzes the interaction between natural law, ethics, and Halakha, and Prof. Jotkowitz applies this thinking to his unique position on abortion.

Rabbi Yair Kahn and Dr. Kalman Neuman analyze an exchange of letters between R. Lichtenstein and Rav Avraham Sylvetsky (grandson-in-law of Rabbi Avraham Shapira) at the time of the disengagement to gain insight into his approach to *Hilkhos Tsibbur*. R. Lichtenstein strongly held that soldiers should not disobey orders during the disengagement and, like R. Soloveitchik, accepted the halakhic possibility of relinquishing parts of the Land of Israel in exchange for peace. In their essay, the authors try to ascertain how R. Lichtenstein feels Halakha should impact on the political functioning of a modern State.

R. Lichtenstein's approach to faith is the topic of the next section. It opens with a reprint of R. Lichtenstein's brief essay, "The Source of Faith

is Faith Itself.” Dr. Aaron Segal then analyzes this essay from a philosophical and epistemological perspective, utilizing the methods of analytic philosophy. Segal develops a new approach to understanding R. Lichtenstein’s primary argument regarding faith in God and its relationship to faith in one’s mentors, specifically mentors one chooses for their character and humility in *avodat Hashem*.

In his response to Segal, R. Shalom Carmy distinguishes between Descartes’ foundationalism, which tries to prove religion starting from ground zero, and the justification of faith as lived, which is rooted in each individual’s life story. He notes how R. Lichtenstein’s very personal essay presents a three-stage chronological development. Furthermore, it is formulated in terms of a personal relationship with God, rather than in terms of abstract assent to certain propositions. The fact that R. Lichtenstein begins with a “substratum of faith” also explains his interest in certain questions and problems rather than others.

R. Lichtenstein is renowned for his advocacy of the study of the humanities for their spiritual value. R. Shalom Carmy explores R. Lichtenstein’s essays on general literature, with a focus on R. Lichtenstein’s doctorate on Henry More. The doctorate addresses the relationship between morality and religion, as well as the role of intellectual endeavor in religious life. In addition, R. Carmy outlines the Steiner problem, the fact that cultured individuals are capable of horrendous evil. R. Carmy perceptively discusses why his mentor prizes the humanities over the sciences. Finally, R. Carmy situates R. Lichtenstein’s thought in the context of his life’s work and communal role.

Rabbi Jeffrey Saks discusses the importance of the humanities, particularly English literature, in the thought of R. Lichtenstein. Through a careful and systematic reading of R. Lichtenstein’s written work, Saks shows how literature as a “spiritual complement” can enhance one’s religious personality. Culture – “the best that has been thought and said,” in the words of Mathew Arnold – “can inform and irradiate our spiritual being by rounding out its cardinal Torah component... by expanding our spiritual and intellectual horizons through exposure to other areas of potential religious import.” Saks ends his article with a bibliography of R. Lichtenstein’s works on the role of literature in religious life.

While the other contributions analyze R. Lichtenstein’s thought, Rabbi Hillel Goldberg closes this volume with a personal vignette from a student’s perspective. He portrays how his teacher served as a model for students some fifty years ago, and contact with such a great personality had a transformative effect on many – sentiments richly

shared by numerous others who have had the privilege of studying under R. Lichtenstein.

It should be obvious to our readers that this is not a usual collection of articles dedicated to the thought of an important intellectual figure. We readily admit that there is a lack of critical distance, primarily due to the fact that many of the essays were written by disciples of R. Lichtenstein. We also recognize another factor, namely, that many of the pieces were written not simply as an intellectual exercise, but rather as an expression of gratitude to a man many consider their spiritual father (in the sense of the Rambam quoted above). Notwithstanding these sentiments, we trust that this volume will lead to an increased appreciation and understanding of the thought of *morenu ve-rabbenu*, and will serve as an introduction to his thought and works for those who have not had the privilege to study with him.

Yitzchak Blau
Alan Jotkowitz
Reuven Ziegler