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***DIVREI HA-RAV VE-DIVREI HA-TALMID  
VE-DIVREI HA-RAV: THE IMPACT OF RABBI  
JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK'S THOUGHT ON  
THAT OF R. AHARON LICHTENSTEIN***

**INTRODUCTION**

**E**ven from a superficial perusal of the writings of Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, and from listening to any of his public lectures or shiurim, it is clear that the Torah, methodology, world view, and perspective of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav, had a massive and decisive impact on his thought, faith, methodology, career path, and teachings.

The Rav's ideas and insights are cited hundreds of times in R. Lichtenstein's various printed essays in Jewish thought, as well as in his published halakhic shiurim and summaries of shiurim published by his students in the last decade. The citations cut across areas of Tanakh, Lamdanut, Halakha, Jewish thought, and contemporary events and include many stories and anecdotes. They are presented as authoritative and decisive in most contexts. The Rav has often been cited both in oral presentations and in print by R. Lichtenstein as one of his three primary mentors,<sup>1</sup> (alongside R. Aharon Soloveichik and R. Yitzchok Hutner) and his

To *Mori ve-Rabbi*, with abiding love and respect.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Aharon Lichtenstein, "The Source of Faith is Faith Itself," *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 2 (Jersey City: Ktav, 2004), 364, and Chaim Sabato, *Mevakshei Panekha* (Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, 2011), 244.

parents. At the same time, R. Lichtenstein clearly identified the Rav as the rebbe who had the greatest impact and the one who stands out as *rebbe muvhak*. Moreover, R. Lichtenstein's methodology in learning, *pesak halakha*, approach to life, and *hashkafat olam* is deeply rooted and derivative of the teachings of his father-in-law. R. Lichtenstein sat at the feet of the Rav in his daily shiur for seven years at the prime of the Rav's career in the 1950's. He subsequently interacted with him as a close family member and an ongoing student for many decades. In addition, during his years in the daily shiur, R. Lichtenstein was chosen to deliver the *bazara shiur* for the Rav's Talmud class. Moreover, it was during the decades of the 50's and 60's that the Rav was most actively involved in the public sphere and R. Lichtenstein was often turned to as a confidante and intimate discussant. These intense and long-running experiences and daily contact profoundly shaped the thought and approach of R. Lichtenstein. In short, the Rav was the towering figure and lodestar that shaped R. Lichtenstein's course in life. In addition, on a practical level, there are many Torah insights of the Rav, as well as anecdotes related to the Rav, that are known to the public only through the writings and public lectures of R. Lichtenstein. Moreover, as R. Lichtenstein entered into the inner circle of the Rav's family and life (he married the Rav's daughter, Dr. Tovah Soloveitchik in 1961), he became for the Rav a confidante whose views and perspective were sought after, and whose editorial and writing skills as well as erudition were employed and deployed.

Three examples of this from two different decades of the Rav's public life demonstrate this point. In the early 1960's the Rav was intimately involved in crafting the response of the Jewish community to the Catholic Church's reexamination of its doctrines towards other religions at the Vatican Council II. He was invited, with other scholars, such as Rabbis Samuel Belkin, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and Louis Finkelstein, to help shape the document that would eventually emerge as *Nostra Aetate*, outlining the Catholic Church's approach to the Jewish People and Judaism. During these deliberations the Rav brought R. Lichtenstein in to participate in the discussions and comment on the drafts of the memos that the organized Jewish community would share with the Vatican representatives. In fact, I was privileged during the course of my research for the edited volume of the Rav's letters and public communications, *Community, Covenant and Commitment* that I published in 2005,<sup>2</sup> to see one of those original memos with R. Lichtenstein's handwritten edits and

<sup>2</sup> Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, ed. Nathaniel Helfgot (Jersey City, Ktav Publishing House for the Toras HaRov Foundation, 2005).

## TRADITION

comments that was shared with me by the family of R. Marc Tannenbaum, the coordinator of the Jewish community's efforts at that time.

Two more famous examples relate to the two published volumes of the celebrated *yahrtzeit* shiurim of the Rav<sup>3</sup> that were edited and rendered into elegant modern rabbinic Hebrew by R. Lichtenstein, as well as the publication of the *Kuntres Avodat Yom ha-Kippurim*,<sup>4</sup> which were entirely based upon R. Lichtenstein's notes from the summer of 1964, and were authorized and approved by the Rav himself as the authentic version of his Torah on this area of *lamdanut*.<sup>5</sup>

In the subsequent pages I would like to briefly outline some of the specific areas that the Rav's perspective, methodology, and insights shaped R. Lichtenstein's outlook. At the same time, the essay will note areas of divergence or differences in emphasis, where the disciple took a different path from his revered mentor. In the end, R. Lichtenstein was shaped and guided by the Rav but he remained an independent thinker and student, as the Rav himself consistently expressed was his desire for all of his *talmidim*.

The essay is not an exhaustive treatment of the full breadth of the influence and impact of the Rav's thinking and personality on R. Lichtenstein, but a modest attempt to sketch out some essential elements of the profound relationship between the thought of the master and the disciple who himself became a master to so many eager disciples.

### 1. Talmudic Study and Lamdanut

While both the Rav and R. Lichtenstein read and published on a wide range of topics in Bible, Jewish thought and philosophy, their passion of passions was and remained classical Talmud Torah, primarily in the world of Talmudic study, through the prism of conceptual analysis. The yeoman's share of their intellectual energy, time, and creativity went into their daily shiurim, the mastery of the entire Talmudic corpus, and the education of students into the wonderful world of the sea of Talmud.

R. Lichtenstein, has for many decades, been recognized as one of the contemporary masters (if not *the* master in the eyes of his close students and acolytes) of the Brisker method, that wonderful, rich, and creative analytical method of Talmud study regnant in the world of the Lithuanian

<sup>3</sup> Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Shiurim le-Zekher Abba Mari* (Jerusalem, Mechon Yerushalayim) Vol. 1 (1983), Vol. 2 (1985).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Kuntres Avodat Yom ha-Kippurim* (Jerusalem: Mekhon Yerushalayim, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> See the introductory note of the Rav to the *Kuntres on Yom Kippur*.

yeshivot over the last century and in their spiritual descendants in the Haredi, Modern Orthodox, and Religious Zionist worlds. R. Lichtenstein displays a total control and intimacy with the entire corpus of *Torah she-beAl Peh* coupled with a sharp analytical mind, an outstanding ability to systematize and organize material in a clear and concise manner, and great pedagogical skills in teaching that methodology to students. This has made him one of the most sought after *maggidei shiur* in the world, whose Torah was imbibed and whose shiur, whether on the novice level or the more advanced shiurim he gave to senior students over five decades, was a destination for all those seekers of *Torah be-iyyun* in the Modern Orthodox and Religious Zionist world and even beyond. The series of *Shiurei Rav Aharon Lichtenstein* published in Israel by Yeshivat Har Etzion over the last decade, on various tractates of the Talmud, has been a best seller, with numerous printings.

R. Lichtenstein, nurtured on the Brisker method at the feet of his rebbe, the Rav, continued the paths that were blazed by his father-in-law and shared both the methodology and many of the Rav's insights with his students. From the 1960's through 1971 at YU (the year he and his family emigrated to Israel) and in the 1970's and 1980's at Yeshivat Har Etzion, R. Lichtenstein's shiur was viewed by many of the top students as the first and best stepping stone and preparation to enter the world of *lamdanut*. For many students at YU in the 1960's and for the American students at Yeshivat Har Etzion in subsequent decades, studying in R. Lichtenstein's shiur was seen as a critical stage in preparing to enter the Rav's shiur. After the Rav's retirement, in 1986, for many, the pinnacle of learning Talmud *be-iyyun* became the four ells of R. Lichtenstein's shiur in Alon Shvut or his weekly shiur in Jerusalem. At the same time, in recent years, a number of students of the Rav and R. Lichtenstein have noted important differences between the Rav's methodology and that of R. Lichtenstein in their approach and presentation in their daily Talmud classes. R. Elyakim Krumbein, a prominent student of both the Rav and R. Lichtenstein, has written a number of important essays outlining the development of the Brisker methodology in the teaching and methodology of R. Lichtenstein.<sup>6</sup> In doing so, Krumbein has noted some of the

<sup>6</sup> See "From Reb Hayyim and the Rav to *Shi'urei Rav Aharon* – The Evolution of a Tradition of Learning," in *Lomdut: The Conceptual Approach to Jewish Learning*, ed. Yosef Blau (Jersey City, Ktav, 2006), 229-297; "*Peritsat Derekh' be-Tehumei Kodashim ve-Toharot*," *Maalin ba-Kodesh* 1 (1999) and "*Al 'Shi'urei ha-Rav Aharon Lichtenstein-Dina de-Garmi*," *Alon Shvut* (158), 115-128. Translated and adapted into English and published as "On Rav Lichtenstein's Methodology of Learning," *Alei Etzion* 12 (*Shevat*, 5764), 23-46.

## TRADITION

major differences in focus and method between the founder of the Brisker analytical school, Rabbi Hayyim Soloveitchik, and his grandson, the Rav, and R. Lichtenstein. A number of these points have been highlighted by another noted student of both the Rav and R. Lichtenstein, R. Shalom Carmy. In an important review essay, R. Carmy notes that Krumbein's analysis yields the conclusion that a careful study of the writings of the Rav and R. Aharon uncovers a crucial development in which the Rav's intellectual agenda shifts in the following manner:

From the conventional approach, in which analysis is triggered by a local difficulty in the text of Gemara or Rambam to a more comprehensive vision, for which a broad range of logical or textual data provokes curiosity, and success is measured not by resolving the original problems, but by the formulation of a theoretical perspective, naturally expressed in Brisker vocabulary, that uncovers the deep structure of the halachic area under discussion.<sup>7</sup>

R. Carmy goes on to elaborate on this basic distinction by describing the actual mechanics of the daily shiur experience in the respective classrooms of these two giants:

In the daily shiurim I heard from the Rav, the usual point of departure was the text itself, usually the Gemara, a phrase in Rashi or Rambam's codification. As far as I recall, the Rav did not typically begin with the *chakirah*; he did not commence by posing conceptual alternatives about the laws that would then be confirmed or refuted by the textual data. The *chakirah* emerged because his attempts to subject the text to a close reading seemed to invite it. To the average student, the opening discussion did not offer a clear idea of where the shiur was headed, i.e. what organizing principles we would arrive at by the end of the treatment. There were the memorable times when the Rav re-entered the classroom a day or two after delivering an impressive and authoritative presentation, only to reopen the subject from the beginning. Sometimes the trigger for renewed examination was some phrase in a Rishon that he had overlooked the first time around; often, however, he was driven by the conviction that there was more to the subject or to the text than he had succeeded in exhausting earlier. Occasionally, as the hours passed, and the Rav laboriously produced one formulation after the other, only to reject each one in turn, he gave the impression that he was groping in the dark as much as his

<sup>7</sup> Shalom Carmy, "Something New in Beit Hamidrash," *Jewish Action* 64:3 (2004), Special Section.

students, but that being infinitely better informed, intelligent and persevering, he would manage to find his way anew in spite of all obstacles.

Part of this display was almost certainly pedagogical. It is a tribute to the Rav's acting skills that when, after two or three hours of struggle, he finally recollected that he had discussed something pertinent to the matter with his father, and then triumphantly employed that insight to elucidate the problems facing us; one often did not catch on that he must have known this point all along. Of course it would have been less labor-intensive had he given us "the answer" right at the outset, but doing so would have denied us the opportunity to experience the *yegiah*, the strenuousness of Torah, first-hand (well, maybe second-hand).

In contrast, R. Carmy notes that R. Lichtenstein's *shiurim* were different in tone and substance:

I believed that Rav Lichtenstein's *shiur* had trained me to think in a different way. My friends and I took pride in sorting out the various logical "possibilities" afforded by the *sugya*—the more the merrier—and then investigating the manifestation of these possible positions in the Rishonim.

Against this background, the Rav's approach appeared powerfully intuitive, while Rav Lichtenstein's seemed to proffer a more systematic overview of the material. The average student sometimes had the sense that the Rav's prosecution of the *shiur* was driven by occult motives invisible to us. One did not encounter the same obscurity with Rav Lichtenstein...

In retrospect, Rav Lichtenstein's distinctive mode of presentation is important for three reasons. First, it objectifies the halachic analysis that appears relatively subjective in the form given to it by the Rav. The Rav's method, as I perceived it, leaps with intuitive genius from a localized reading to the status of a general principle. Such an insight is, of course, vulnerable to verification or falsification as the reader tests it against other relevant statements in the corpus. Acquiring the comprehensiveness required to confirm conclusively the validity of the theory is a prolonged affair; meanwhile one's perspective is constrained by its point of origin in the consciousness of the theorist. The more detached survey of possible answers I discovered in Rav Lichtenstein's lectures confronts the student with a range of conceptual options from the very beginning of his, or her, interpretive undertaking. The student who is not a genius has more reason for confidence that his efforts bring him closer to truth.

## TRADITION

Second, this approach captures an essential element of indeterminateness inherent to the systematic application of the Brisker method. The method purports to disclose principles underlying the text; yet when you have finished analyzing it, the text is not fully exhausted; it remains intractably richer than the analysis, hence irreducible to one conceptual grid. It is precisely for that reason that the Rav so frequently, and so dramatically, produced, one after the other, differing approaches to the same material. Where the statements interpreted are exceptionally terse, there is always the possibility of multiple reconstructions; where a Rishon is discursive (think of a typical passage in Ramban's *Milhamot*), the existence of separate strands of analysis is almost compulsory. In moving from the initial stages of the Gemara's inquiry (the *hava amina*) to the conclusion, the conceptual framework also alters. Unless one wishes to take one possible construction as normative, and to dismiss the value of earlier stages in the *sugya*, the result of a Brisk-oriented investigation is a field of possible interpretations, some of which take on central importance in comprehending the whole, while more peripheral themes can still be heard as undertones, so to speak. For the Rav's audience, this truth was conveyed through a series of perspectives, with one construction replacing the other, sometimes better, always different. In Rav Lichtenstein's analysis, the student encounters the potential plurality of approaches to the *sugya*, not consecutively, but in immediate simultaneity. Such an education better equips you to apply this aspect of learning on your own.

Lastly, the bibliographical explosion of the past few decades— even if we limit ourselves to the publication of new manuscripts of Rishonim— confronts the contemporary *lamdan* with an expanded range of opinions and formulations. The Rav, accustomed to the intense scrutiny of time-tested works, continued to concentrate on the classics, occasionally warning that browsing through piles of new books and making lists of their contents ran the risk of shallowness. And yet these old-new books cannot be denied their place in the *beit hamidrash*. The kind of synoptic analysis embodied in Rav Lichtenstein's *shiurim* does not sacrifice the core Rishonim, whose ideas have always enjoyed attention, while incorporating material not previously subjected to careful study, including significant late medieval Ashkenazic works like Raviah and Ravan.

To add to R. Carmy's trenchant analysis, three more elements need to be emphasized.

1. R. Lichtenstein, in contrast to the Rav, often explicitly delineated his methodological steps and goals in the course of the regular *shiurim*.

Moreover, for two decades R. Lichtenstein offered a weekly class in Talmudic methodology at Yeshivat Har Etzion so that younger students could be initiated in clear and systematic ways, through exposure to selected *sugyot*, in the types of questions and issues at the core of analytical learning. In doing so, R. Lichtenstein emphasized the pedagogical element in his teaching in a concrete and deliberate fashion, far beyond what the Rav normally did in his class.

2. R. Carmy references the fact that the Rav's approach felt more "subjective" while R. Lichtenstein's had the flavor of a more "objective" analysis. This phenomenon expressed itself in the recurring drama of the Rav revisiting the same sugya, days or weeks or years later and offering an entirely different approach to the same material. The Rav was a dynamo in the daily shiur, (and in his preparation for them) examining afresh the Gemara and Rishonim. This method often yielded brilliant *hiddushim* and a plethora of new insights, and an excitement and enthusiasm that dazzled and overwhelmed. In contrast, R. Lichtenstein's shiurim were more methodical, sketching out in precise terms the possibilities, various readings, and differences that emerged from them. This methodology led to a greater consistency and uniformity in approaching any given sugya. One who had heard R. Lichtenstein deliver a shiur on the niceties on *li-shemah be-gittin* at YU in the late 1960's and returned to hear the shiurim at Yeshivat Har Etzion in the 1990's would have heard a similar analysis of the topic, both in form and content, with the addition of other proofs or inferences from talmudic passages or comments of Rishonim that had been gleaned from thirty years of continued learning.
3. The final element that is not mentioned in R. Carmy's essay (but does find expression in those of R. Krumbein) is a critical piece of R. Lichtenstein's methodology.

In contrast to the Rav, R. Lichtenstein consistently emphasized the importance of opening each new sugya by dividing the questions that needed to be resolved into primary versus secondary and tertiary questions. Primary questions deal with fundamental notions as to the nature of the law or phenomenon in question, its source, scope, and depth. Secondary questions (the resolutions of which might often yield insights into the primary issues as well) were those related to contradictions with other texts, or textual difficulties or coherence. It was, R. Lichtenstein, taught critically important to recognize the conceptual primacy of the first type of questions and the need to answer them comprehensively if one wanted to have control of the topic at hand and to achieve profound understanding of the halakhic topic at hand.

## 2. Role of *Posek* and Communal Leader

In his celebrated eulogy for the Rav, delivered in 1993, R. Lichtenstein noted that, while the Rav's primary area of endeavor was in the world of theoretical *talmud Torah*, on occasion he would leave that realm and engage seriously and thoughtfully in the world of *pesak halakha* and practical direction to those who sought his counsel.<sup>8</sup> In his formal capacity as the head of the Halakha commission of the RCA, the Rav was the final word on many important communal matters for the world of Modern Orthodoxy and the Modern Orthodox rabbinate. In addition, the Rav was often consulted on halakhic matters by leaders in the Orthodox Union, the Young Israel movement, and other organizations. Moreover, many day school principals and communal officials who had studied at his feet would often turn for halakhic rulings. With the publication of *Community, Covenant and Commitment* in 2005, the Jewish world was able to examine some of the Rav's lengthy response on important issues such as the propriety of a forced draft of Jewish chaplains into the United States armed forces and participation in various interfaith programs. In addition, over the last two decades, hundreds of *piskei halakha* offered by the Rav to students in his class and to rabbis who sought his counsel have been shared with the public by close students and others who have published works based on the teachings of R. Soloveitchik. R. Lichtenstein, in a later essay,<sup>9</sup> noted that a key component of the Rav's methodology in halakhic quandaries that touched on human concerns was the importance of fully using categories such as *kevod ha-beriyot* human dignity, and avoidance of *hillul Hashem* – desecration of God's name – in navigating the various tensions between the sources. In addition, to formal *pesak halakha*, the Rav also guided the Modern Orthodox community in the more murky areas of public policy. These included his celebrated perspectives on interfaith relations, defense of *shebita* in the United States, interaction with the heterodox movements, approaches to the State of Israel and Zionism, territorial compromise, the role of the Mizrachi and Mafdal in Israeli politics, educational matters such as intensive *talmud Torah* for girls and women, and interaction with the general culture. While the Rav was in some ways a shy person, who would have preferred to remain in the four cubits of the *beit midrash*, he often went out and played a critical role as communal leader, activists and final arbiter of religious disputes.

<sup>8</sup> Aharon Lichtenstein, "The Rav zt"l in Retrospect: Divrei Hespel," in *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1 (Jersey City: Ktav, 2003), 226-229.

<sup>9</sup> Aharon Lichtenstein, "The Human and Social Factor in Halakha," *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1, 173-175.

The Rav's unchallenged authority and stature in the American Modern Orthodox community on matters of halakha and communal policy during the middle and latter part of the twentieth century has not been matched by any other figure in the Religious Zionist or Modern Orthodox world since the Rav's death in 1993. There is no one in the two decades since that time who has been able to achieve that level of absolute allegiance and authority of the various segments of the American Modern Orthodox community, including R. Lichtenstein. At the same time, it is fair to say that the person who has achieved some level of that overarching stature amongst all factions in the Modern Orthodox world is most likely R. Lichtenstein.

In that context, R. Lichtenstein is very much in the mold of the Rav. Like the Rav, R. Lichtenstein is at heart a man of the Beit Midrash whose first and primary area of love and creativity is in the world of analytical learning of Torah. However, on numerous occasions, Rav Lichtenstein has authored responsa, some published in various journals, as well as many written and oral response to students, heads of organizations, principals of educational institutions, and private individuals who have sought out his halakhic advice and counsel. In addition, R. Lichtenstein has often taken a leading role in important communal debates and issues and expressed his views in public both orally and in print. Already as young man, in his first full length essay, entitled "Brother Daniel and the Jewish Fraternity," published in *Judaism* in 1963,<sup>10</sup> R. Lichtenstein entered the list on a contemporary issue of great significance- the contentious issue of "Who is a Jew?."

In subsequent years and decades R. Lichtenstein gave guidance and direction to many students as well as the general community on many diverse and critical issues. These included protesting on behalf of non-Jews suffering in Biafra and addressing the propriety of having student evaluations of instructors at Yeshiva College. R. Lichtenstein forcefully served as a conservative counterweight to the more liberal approaches that were espoused in the 1960's and 1970's by prominent colleagues in the Modern Orthodox world such as R. Dr. Yitz Greenberg. He continued to play that role in responding to some of the perspectives adopted by progressive thinkers such as R. Dr. David Hartman ז"ל, Dr. Tamar Ross, or R. Dr. Benny Lau in the 1980's, 1990's and 2000's.

<sup>10</sup> Aharon Lichtenstein, "Brother Daniel and the Jewish Fraternity," *Judaism* 12:3 (Summer 1963), 260-280, reprinted in *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 2 (Jersey City, Ktav, 2004), 57-83.

## TRADITION

R. Lichtenstein played crucial roles in helping shape the educational direction and specific policies of various institutions both here and in Israel and became a leading theoretician and spokesman for the ideology of the Hesder yeshiva movement and the ideology of Torah u-Madda. He was consulted for guidance on halakhic issues confronting the refusenik community in Russia in the 1980's and for guidance on issues of contraception and postponing having children. R. Lichtenstein forcefully expressed his opposition to extremism in the Religious Zionist community in the aftermath of the discovery of a Jewish Underground, the Baruch Goldstein massacre, and the assassination of Prime Minister Rabin, as well as raising a voice of moral conscience during the Lebanon War and the tragedy of Sabra and Shatilla. He went on record supporting the basic principles of the Neeman Commission on Conversion and other efforts to address the crisis of conversion and *yobasin* issues in the Jewish people. R. Lichtenstein was a leading halakhic authority who gave direction on women's expanding role in ritual matters such as women's Megilla readings in leading Modern Orthodox seminaries such as Midreshet Lindenbaum and Migdal Oz and communal leadership roles such as *yoatsot halakha*. In recent years he has been a major voice expressing principled opposition to some of the more neo-Hasidic and spiritualist trends that many in the Religious Zionist yeshiva world have adopted under the influence of the thought of Rav Shagar z"l.

Finally, it is important to note that R. Lichtenstein enhanced and expanded discussion of key elements in *pesika* that find expression in the thought of the Rav. At the core of both these giants, of course, is total fidelity to the binding nature of halakha, respect for the halakhic process and *hakhmei ha-masorah*, rigorous research of the relevant halakhic sources and an ethic of surrender to the results of honest halakhic inquiry, even when they present us with difficult and wrenching decisions. At the same time, in addressing issues of communal and personal *pesak*, the Rav would reference the important categories of "*kevod ha-beriyot*," human dignity, and the broader category of human considerations including desire for "*shalom*," the avoidance of physical and psychological suffering and broader ethical considerations as central to the halakhic discussion at hand. In one essay, R. Lichtenstein approvingly cites an anecdote regarding the Rogosin Institute for Jewish Ethics begun by Yeshiva University in the mid 1960's:

One of its primary projects... entailed... analyzing *teshuvot* in which the ethical moment figured prominently, either by dint of topic or by impetus of the response. I recall vividly how the Rav appeared at one of the opening

sessions and enthusiastically recounted how R. Lippa Mirrer had gone to great lengths in order to overcome *prima facie* considerations which had seemed to portend an almost certain *issur* for the wife of a *kohen*.<sup>11</sup>

These sentiments and emphasis play an even larger role in the writings and public lectures of R. Lichtenstein. Over the course of the last thirty years, R. Lichtenstein has been one of the most outspoken members of the rabbinic mainstream who has consistently championed these factors as critical elements in good *pesikat halakha* and reflective of the tools that the great *posekim* in every generation used and internalized. It is R. Lichtenstein who has written thirty-, forty-, and sixty-page detailed essays on issues such as “The Human and Social Factor in Halakha,”<sup>12</sup> “Does Judaism Recognize an Ethic Outside of Halakha?”<sup>13</sup> “*Mah Enosh*: Reflections on Humanism and Judaism,”<sup>14</sup> (an entire lengthy section devoted to the issues of the use of factors such as *kevod ha-beriyot* and *shalom* in the halakhic decision making process), “Halakha and Halakhim as the Foundation of Ethics” [in Hebrew],<sup>15</sup> “Being Frum and Being Good: On the Relationship Between Religion and Morality,”<sup>16</sup> and many other essays on other topics that also treat these important elements in interpretation of Halakha and its adjudication. To cite just two sources amongst many:

The parameters of ethics and its truths have an important role to play in understanding halakha and defining its boundaries. Of course a Jew must be ready to answer the call “I am here” if the command to “offer him up as an offering” is thrust upon him. However, prior to unsheathing the sword, he is permitted, and even obligated to clarify, to the best of his ability if indeed this is what he actually has been commanded... to the extent that there is a need and room for halachic exegesis, and this must be clarified – a sensitive and insightful conscience is one of the factors that shape the decision making process. Just as Maimonides in his day, consciously, was assisted by a particular metaphysical approach to the world in order to plumb the depths of the meaning of Biblical verses, so too one

<sup>11</sup> *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 1, 173.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 159-188.

<sup>13</sup> *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 2 (Jersey City: Ktav, 2004), 19-60.

<sup>14</sup> *The Torah U-Madda Journal*, Vol. 14 (2006), 1-61.

<sup>15</sup> In the volume *Arakhim be-Mivhan Milhama* (Jerusalem: Yeshivat Har Etzion, 1985), 13-24.

<sup>16</sup> A lecture adapted for publication by Reuven Ziegler, printed in *By His Light* (Alon Shevut: Yeshivat Har Etzion, 2002), 101-133.

## TRADITION

can make use of an ethical perspective in order to understand the content of halakha and at times, to outline its parameters.”<sup>17</sup>

And in numerous essays over the years, R. Lichtenstein has expressed, with his customary caveats and limitations, a mild critique that contemporary *posekim* have not more consistently used the concepts of *kevod ha-beriyot*, *shalom*, and broader ethical concerns in addressing certain communal issues that have come to the fore. In the context of the critique of a certain “conservatism” that has sometimes come to dominate halakhic discourse, he has also challenged the excessive use in some circles of the concern for slippery slopes as he wrote close to a decade ago:

How truly slippery is the slope? What innovation is likely, and how likely is to generate which kind of pressures? Second, we shall need to examine at what cost—whether in the form of personal alienation of certain constituencies or in the impairment or possible dilution of spiritual life—the presumed security of an ultra-conservative stance is being attained.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Engagement with the World

One of the central tenets that the Rav articulated throughout his life was the charge for the human being to be fully engaged with the world and improve it, help conquer disease and poverty and participate fully in redeeming the brutish existence that is part of our biological reality. The Rav’s celebrated description of Adam I, the human being as portrayed in the opening chapter of Genesis, as being “majestic,” describes the individual as religiously charged to harness the natural order and contribute to the betterment of the world and the endowing the human world with dignity. Expanding and extending those themes, the Rav often spoke of the importance of the Jew not living isolated from the world or Orthodoxy becoming a “sect,” isolated from the woof and warp of the pulsating reality around him. In a number of contexts the Rav spoke of a 14<sup>th</sup> Ani Maamin, the affirmation that the Torah Jew can flourish and exist and contribute in the context of any society and is not simply consigned to be creature of the ghetto. In two letters from the early 1960’s, describing his affiliation with the Mizrahi movement, the Rav writes:

<sup>17</sup> *Arakhim be-Mivhan Milhama*, 20-21.

<sup>18</sup> Aharon Lichtenstein, “Formulating Responses in an Egalitarian Age,” in *Varieties of Jewish Experience* (Jersey City: Ktav, 2011), 252.

*Nathaniel Helfgot*

I cannot join any group or association that has emblazoned on its banner the call: “Separate from the vast world and go into dark caves and set yourselves apart from the rest of the Jewish people and the world... This retreat from battle is the beginning of defeat and reflects a lack of faith in the eternity of Judaism and its ability to dominate the new world with its powerful currents and changing forms...”

We have not removed ourselves from such a world, nor have we withdrawn into a secluded corner. We are unwilling to become a religious sect that forfeits the general public for the benefit of individuals. We will not build a Noah’s Ark... We do not fear progress in any area of life, since it is our firm conviction that we have the ability to cope and with and redeem it.<sup>19</sup>

R. Lichtenstein expanded on these themes of the Rav and often spoke and wrote on these topics. In his public lectures and *sibot*, he has often spoken about the importance of fully engaging the world around us and making a contribution to enhancing and improving the society that one has been born into. This is part of the ethos that he has expressed as at the forefront of his identification with the Hesder Yeshivot movement and the need for the religious community to participate fully in the defense of the State of Israel. In addition, his educational outlook encourages his graduates to enter into all areas of Israeli and American society where they can leave their mark and enrich and ennoble the society with their talents and contributions, including encouraging talented graduates to take up key posts in the worlds of Torah and general education, politics, the army, social services, medicine and academia.

Reflective of that perspective is this passage from an essay of fairly recent vintage. In tandem with deep commitment to *yirat Shamayim*, R. Lichtenstein wrote:

Involvement (with the world) we do not consider a neutral option, but as part of a sacred challenge, as part of our duty to discharge the universal mandate of *le-ovdah u-leshomrah*, to advance the Divine goal of “He Created the world not to be a waste”... and we both heed and take heart from the authoritative voice of the Rambam: “It is not fitting for a man to engage all his days in anything but matters of wisdom and the development of the world.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Community, Covenant, and Commitment*, 202-204.

<sup>20</sup> “Contemporary Impediments to *Yirat Shamayim*,” *Varieties of Jewish Experience*, 216-217.

#### 4. Torah and *Hokhma*

The Rav was for the entire Modern Orthodox community, in writing and deed, the halakhic giant who stood behind the legitimacy of engaging fully and uncompromisingly with the wide breath of secular knowledge in tandem with deep engagement and study of Torah. As his son-in-law Prof. Yitzchak Twersky ז"ל wrote in his eloquent retrospective on the Rav's life and accomplishments:

There is, in my opinion, no justification for debate or equivocation, concerning the Rav's relation to general culture-philosophy, science and literature...The facts are unmistakable. He achieved sovereign mastery of these fields and used his knowledge selectively, creatively and imaginatively with great philosophical originality and acumen...The record of his dedicated quest for and ongoing use of this knowledge is clear and unambiguous.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, in his public life, he was an advocate of this educational vision for both youth and college age students, as evidenced by his founding, development and support of the Maimonides School in Boston, his role as leading Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshiva University, and far beyond. He often encouraged his top students in the 1940's-1960's to pursue higher educational degrees beyond the walls of Yeshiva University and all his children completed doctorates in their fields of choice. In a speech given to the parents of the Maimonides School on Nov 15, 1971, the Rav gave clear expression to these thoughts:

What do we at Maimonides believe? We believe that the Jewish child is capable of carrying the double load, the universal secular and the Judaic. We believe ...that the child is able to study and comprehend two systems of knowledge and to excel in both...We also believe that the Jewish child is capable of mastering both scientific and Biblio-Talmudic knowledge not only from an educational, technical viewpoint but also from an axiological viewpoint."<sup>22</sup>

Yet, the Rav, except for the occasional comments at a public lecture, never wrote a full apologia for his perspectives on the legitimacy, nay the obligation for the observant Jew to engage in full-throttle study of all of secular

<sup>21</sup> "The Rav," *Tradition* 30:4 (1996), 30.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "This is the Credo Which Guides the Maimonides School," in *Legacy: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Maimonides School: A Special Issue of Kol Rambam* (October, 2003), 2.

wisdom alongside the pursuit of Torah knowledge. It was, as many of his students noted, something the Rav simply took for granted as part of the reality and necessity of *avodat Hashem* in its full manifestation, especially in the context of the modern world in which contemporary Jewry existed.

R. Lichtenstein, following in the footsteps of his father-in-law, was and is a strong advocate of the pursuit of *hokhma* alongside in depth mastery of Torah knowledge. In that context, three elements stand out in contrast to the Rav's contributions in this area. First, as R. Lichtenstein himself joked at a public lecture a number of years back, he, today (the remark was made in the early 1990's) is perceived as "the lone apostle" within the world of Rashei Yeshiva, in advocating for intense study of the humanities and secular wisdom beyond that which is needed for a profession. In many ways this comment is reflective of the changing winds in the cultural context in which the Rav operated in his prime from the late 1940's through the early 1960's and the prime of R. Lichtenstein's career during the 1970's-2000's. During the Rav's prime years, the assumptions of Modern Orthodoxy such as the value of rigorous secular studies and the need to engage the world were taken for granted by many.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the Haredi world in the United States was small and did not yet vigorously advocate a Torah-only perspective to the masses. (To take one small example, at the time of the death of R. Aharon Kotler in 1962, his yeshiva, Beth Medrash Govoha of Lakewood, NJ, numbered some 200 students, a far cry from the thousands that populate its various *battei midrash* today.) Moreover, phenomena such as the post-high school year or two of Torah study in Israeli yeshivot did not yet exist. In contrast, R. Lichtenstein reached his prime years during a period of time when the Haredi community and its ethos grew in importance and assertiveness. Moreover, the setting in Israel within the National Religious community into which R. Lichtenstein moved into in the early 1970's was much less open to intense study of the humanities because of the pressures of army service and a less humanistic, Western perspectives on the nature of education that dominated the thinking of much of Religious Zionist educational and rabbinic leadership. The main divide in Israel between the Religious Zionist community and the Haredi community was about

<sup>23</sup> There were, of course, prominent voices amongst the YU Rashei Yeshiva at that time who were opposed to synthesis and Torah u-Madda, but the dominant ethos of the community, the rabbinate, and the students was one that certainly embraced the core values of Modern Orthodoxy. This was also the golden era for the flourishing and impact of other elite Modern Orthodox thinkers and writers and pulpit rabbis such as R. Dr. Eliezer Berkovits, *z"l*, R. Dr. Walter Wurzburger, *z"l*, R. Dr. Michael Wyschogrod, *z"l*, and *yibbadel le-hayyim*, R. Dr. Norman Lamm.

## TRADITION

service in the Israeli army and identification with the State of Israel, rather than the legitimacy of reading Homer or Milton. Second, and derivative of the first point, it is R. Lichtenstein, and not the Rav, who alongside thinkers such as R. Dr. Norman Lamm and R. Shalom Carmy, wrote trenchant and cogent apologia and vigorous “defenses” of the le-khatehilla pursuit of secular wisdom alongside the intense study of Torah. R. Lichtenstein began this project with an early essay in the mid 1960’s entitled “A Consideration of Synthesis from a Torah Point of View” and continued this with a number of public lectures and speeches in the 1980’s and 1990’s expressing his views on these subjects (some of which were later published in his collected volumes of writings, *Leaves of Faith*) and culminating with his magisterial essay, “Torah and Hokhmah: Confluence and Conflict,” printed in 1997 in the volume *Judaism’s Encounter With Other Cultures*.<sup>24</sup> This was coupled with a number of shorter essays written in Hebrew at the same time such as “*Tova Hokhma Im Nahala*”<sup>25</sup> that have brought these ideas, together with his more than four decades of teaching, to the Religious Zionist Yeshiva world.

The third point of distinction between the Rav’s perspectives on these topics and that of R. Lichtenstein is the question of emphasis and focus. For the Rav, while the study of literature was important and valuable, he was especially drawn to the study of mathematics and philosophy. And it is those areas that he often directed his students to explore and in many cases to pursue in the context of graduate studies. R. Lichtenstein has remarked on a number of occasions that the Rav had encouraged him to pursue a graduate degree in Mathematics.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, R. Lichtenstein has recounted that when he received his doctorate in literature, the Rav remarked that now he should pursue one in mathematics!

However, R. Lichtenstein did not follow his master’s suggestion in this area. It is the humanities and their broad teaching that form the core of R. Lichtenstein’s focus and passion in the study of Hokhmah. It is these areas where he is most intimately knowledgeable, and which he deploys in broadening his understanding of sacred texts, the human condition and the quest for religious growth and service of God. In addition, as R. Yitzchak Blau noted in conversation, this distinction between the Rav and R. Lichtenstein is manifest clearly in the secular writers that each

<sup>24</sup> Aharon Lichtenstein, “Torah and General Culture: Confluence or Conflict,” in Jacob J. Schacter ed., *Judaism’s Encounter with Other Cultures: Rejection or Integration* (New Jersey, Jason Aronson, 1997), 217-292.

<sup>25</sup> Printed in *Mamlechet Kohanim ve-Goy Kadosh: Essays in Memory of Dani Cohen z”l*, ed. Yehuda Shaviv, (Jerusalem, 1989), 25-44.

<sup>26</sup> As recounted to this author by R. Shalom Carmy.

most frequently cites. The Rav most often cites philosophers such as Karl Barth, Rudolph Otto, Soren Kierkegaard, and Max Scheler, while R. Lichtenstein most frequently references the works of literary and theological figures such as C.S. Lewis, T.S. Elliot, John Milton, and Matthew Arnold.

## 5. Religious Zionism and the State of Israel

During the mid-twentieth century, the Rav was the leading exponent of Religious Zionism in the Orthodox world in the Diaspora. He wrote seminal essays, delivered passionate *derashot* on these themes and associated himself prominently with the Religious Zionist political movement of Mizrachi (later to become the Mafdal). As has been well explicated in a number of essays,<sup>27</sup> the Rav's Zionism was decidedly distinct from that which came to dominate Religious Zionist discourse in Israel during the decades following the Six Day War. In Israel, under the powerful impact of the teachings of R. Avraham Yitzchak Kook, the father, and R. Tzvi Yehuda Kook, the son, Religious Zionism took on a messianic flavor with the rise of the State and the subsequent victories, being seen as reflected of the messianic era, and especially in 1967. The state itself was viewed in terms of "holiness" and the settlement project as a vehicle to bring the ultimate redemption ever closer.

The Rav's attitudes diverged sharply from this ethos. In the Rav's writings and public lectures, there was recognition of the hand of God in the miraculous birth and sustenance of the State of Israel. However, there were no messianic undertones to his perspective and the value of the State was seen in instrumental terms, rather than metaphysical essentialist ones of the manifestation of "God's throne chair in the world" in the celebrated language of R. Kook.

As R. Reuven Ziegler cogently formulated it:

The Rav does not perceive any inherent value in sovereignty, other than fulfilling the specific mitzvah of settling in the land, nor does he assign any inherent spiritual value to the State, seeing it rather as a base pursued during their long exile... Prof. Gerald Blidstein points out that that, unlike Rav Kook, Rav Soloveitchik does not accept the Zionist critique of Diaspora Jewish life. Therefore the Rav sees no need for a renaissance of

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Gerald Blidstein, "On the Jewish People in the Writings of Rav Soloveitchik," in *Exploring the Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, ed. Marc Angel (Hoboken: Ktav, 1997), 307-308 and Aharon Lichtenstein, "Rav Soloveitchik's Approach to Zionism," *Alei Etzion* 14 (2006), 21-37.

## TRADITION

Judaism, nor does he regard the secular Zionist rebellion against religion as a necessary stage in the unfolding of the Jewish essence.<sup>28</sup>

In a symposium close to a decade ago, organized by *Tradition*, and commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the publication of the Rav's *Kol Dodi Dofek*, I noted that there were other themes of classical Religious Zionism that were undeveloped or underdeveloped in the writings of the Rav. These included the notions of Jewish sovereignty as expressing *malkhut yisrael*, the ability to apply Halakha to a broad swath of national issues, the potential to develop a national polity guided by Jewish values, and the fulfillment of the national dimension of becoming a "light unto the nations."<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, practical exhortations for the community or his students to make *aliyya* or the imperative of this step for the Jewish people are almost non-existent from the published writings of the Rav.

R. Lichtenstein too is clearly in the camp of the non-messianic Religious Zionist thinkers of the modern period. Indeed, for a lengthy period, after his *aliyya* to Israel, he was one of the lone voices in the Religious Zionist rabbinic elite in Israel who held to that position. At the same time, one can discern in his writing and lectures that the place of Israel and Religious Zionist thought is more central and more pronounced than in the world of the Rav. Indeed, in the published interviews with R. Lichtenstein conducted by R. Chaim Sabato entitled *Mevakshei Panekha*, R. Lichtenstein candidly stated:

I do not know in what measure [the Rav's] essay *Kol Dodi Dofek* expresses the general attitude that the Rav had towards the State of Israel on a day to day basis. I imagine that R. Zvi Yehudah Kook ז"ל arose each morning "hearing" the State of Israel, "feeling" the State of Israel. The Rav did not arise each morning with that sense... Those who claim that the Rav opposed political Zionism or the Zionist initiative are incorrect. He identified with these projects. However, those who claim that the theological element in [analyzing] the rise of the State of Israel was not dominant in his thinking are correct.

I, specifically, since our *aliyya* to Israel, have more of that element than the Rav had.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *Majesty and Humility: The Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2012), 294.

<sup>29</sup> Nathaniel Helfgot, "On the Shoulders of A Giant: Looking Back, Yet Looking Forward," *Tradition* 39:3 (Fall 2006)

<sup>30</sup> *Mevakshei Panekha*, 187-188.

This difference in emphasis expressed itself first and foremost in the fact that R. Lichtenstein and his wife moved their family to Israel in 1971, giving up on the clear path of career advancement and professional leadership that R. Lichtenstein would have surely played on the American Orthodox scene in the coming decades. Moreover, as R. Ziegler notes, in contrast to the Rav:

R. Aharon Lichtenstein discerns in Israel the possibility of leading a more organic and integrated existence, as opposed to the fragmented nature of life in the Diaspora. Even the mundane aspects of one's life attain social and religious value by contributing to the stability and flourishing of the Jewish state, thereby lending one's life a greater sense of wholeness. Furthermore, without denying the validity or value of Diaspora Jewish life, Rav Lichtenstein views Israel as the epicenter of Jewish life and the locus of the Jewish future. Above all, the sanctity of the land, even when understood in halakhic and not mythological terms lends a special quality to religious observance in the *Eretz Yisrael* and fosters a sense of being nestled within the divine presence.<sup>31</sup>

## **6. Relationship to Secular Jews and Jews of Non-Orthodox Religious Ideologies**

One of the Rav's essential antinomies is that of fate and destiny. In the Rav's categories, the Jewish people are bound up in two covenants, one forged by the crucible of history, past, present and future, irrespective of a shared ideological vision or religious world-view. That is the covenant of fate, of *goral*. The second covenant is that of destiny- of *ye'ud*, in which we share a view of the purpose of life and the destiny to which *am yisrael* is aiming to reach. This covenant is shaped by the covenant forged at Sinai and revolves around commitment to *mitsvot*. The Rav used this distinction in numerous contexts to be a lodestar in guiding public policy for the Orthodox community in the United States and in Israel. For the Rav, all Jews, from the virulent anti-religious Jew to the most extreme Haredi Jew, were bound in a shared experience of Jewish history and identification as part of one national entity. As a result, the Rav advocated cooperation with non-Orthodox Jews and organizations on all matters that affected the national existence of the Jewish people, the State of Israel and local Jewish welfare issues such as fighting anti-Semitism, access to resources for Jewish day schools, maintaining *shebita* as legal and accessible,

<sup>31</sup> *Majesty and Humility*, 295-296.

## TRADITION

and other general Jewish issues. In contrast, the Rav stated that when it came to the internal issues of halakhic standards on this or that area of Jewish practice, on the issues of “destiny,” we, the Orthodox community must walk our own path and not cooperate on issues of substance (unless we were assured of total control of the field via a veto or other mechanisms). This became the public policy of most Modern Orthodox organizations, even though there were those to both the right and the left who dissented with the Rav’s guidelines.

Rav Lichtenstein in many of his writings reiterated the Rav’s basic approach. And yet, in important nuances he went slightly beyond the Rav’s formulations. In a contribution to a symposium held in the mid 1980’s R. Lichtenstein articulated his vision:

With respect to reducing polarization, I am convinced that the best approach does not call for minimizing difference but rather for maximizing community. Basic ideological differences do exist, and to dismiss or blur them is both irresponsible and anti-halakhic... We can, however, place greater emphasis upon the factors which, without denying difference, transcend it; upon confraternity; upon historical and existential ties, upon *essential components of a shared moral and spiritual vision, upon elements of a common fate and a common destiny* [my emphasis NH]. We should not only concede, but assert that whatever their deviations, other camps include people who are genuinely in search of the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, that secular Jewry, too harbors moral idealism and a commitment to *K’lal Yisrael*.<sup>32</sup>

And in the context of that submission R. Lichtenstein was willing to advocate for an approach later identified with the Neeman commission that tried to tackle the thorny issue of acceptable conversions.

With respect to *geyrut*, we ought at least probe the option of a modus operandi whereby we might recognize conversions that would be effected under the aegis of others, but which, in practice, would be administered according to halakhic guidelines and meet prevalent Orthodox standards.<sup>33</sup>

These broad perspectives crop up again and again in the writings of R. Lichtenstein, and especially intensify in his relationship to the Israeli scene, where the shared bond of existential threat heightens the sense of being in the same boat and the feelings of peoplehood and shared

<sup>32</sup> *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 2, 360.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

national destiny. And two decades after the short comments in a symposium response, R. Lichtenstein wrote a 36-page essay entitled “Beyond the Pale: Reflections Regarding Contemporary Relations With Non-Orthodox Jews,”<sup>34</sup> where these ideas are fully developed and where R. Lichtenstein cautiously lays out the case for rethinking some of the assumptions and practices of the more “conservative” approaches in Orthodoxy to interaction with the non-Orthodox movements. He divides this issue into a number of categories, only two of which will be dealt with here. First is the “prospect of joint pursuit of common Jewish goals – social, political and spiritual, with an eye to advancing a collective aim.” In these areas R. Lichtenstein sees little concern and endorses cooperation and interaction. The second area R. Aharon addresses is more challenging and that relates to the following:

Advisability of extending assistance – manpower, material, moral, and spiritual- to non-Orthodox movements, thus enhancing their stature and entrenching them in the Jewish world, but also intensifying their commitment to *avodat Hashem* on the other...In our world there are those who subscribe to the thesis that under no circumstances is it permissible or advisable to advance the cause of deviationists... However, I find this view wholly untenable, on moral, national and quite frequently halakhic grounds. As I have occasion to stress in various contexts, non-Orthodox movements often provide a modicum of religious guidance, of access to Jewish knowledge and values, of spiritual direction and content. Moreover, they provide it for many beyond our pale and reach. In such situations, the contribution to Jewish life is real and meaningful. Can anyone assert, as our critics claim we hold that it makes no difference whether one is an atheist or a Reform Jew? Worse still some insist upon ascribing to us a preference for the former? But can any responsible Orthodox Jew, genuinely and responsibly concerned about national viability or spiritual vigor confirm this charge?<sup>35</sup>

In the rest of the essay, R. Lichtenstein argues for a nuanced and balanced approach to interaction with the heterodox while recognizing the challenges that inhere when the issues of assertion of power over communal resources, shaping the public climate, and more mundane considerations play a role in the calculations involved in determining some of the nitty-gritty decisions that need to be made on the ground.

<sup>34</sup> Printed in Aharon Lichtenstein, *Varieties of Jewish Experience* (Jersey City: Ktav, 2011), 129-165.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-150.

## 7. Orientation

One of the central aspects that cuts across the essays and teaching of R. Lichtenstein on halakhic, theological, or contemporary political or social topics is the recognition of complexity and nuance. R. Lichtenstein taught generations of students in his classes and the myriad readers of his work to eschew superficial thinking and hasty conclusions. R. Lichtenstein insisted on a rigorous method that pushes the student/reader to appreciate various, sometimes competing perspectives and values in learning a sugya, approaching a *she'eila*, unpacking a contemporary dilemma, or analyzing a Biblical or contemporary figure. This approach which rejects superficiality and celebrates sophisticated, balanced, complex thinking is part of the legacy that the Rav bequeathed to his son-in-law. The Rav, as has been noted by many writers, totally rejected the view of religion as “a paradise,” which puts the human being at ease and solves all of his existential problems. For the Rav, the religious moment is full of dialectical movement, and the tensile balance between competing values. In learning, the Rav, following in the Brisker tradition, attempted to drill down deeply into the core issues, rejecting easy and facile understandings of talmudic principles. The Rav was multi-faceted and complex and believed that Judaism should be conveyed and communicated in that fashion. A major element in R. Lichtenstein’s vigorous commitment to appreciation of complexity is surely rooted in the impact of the Rav’s thought and personality on his thinking.<sup>36</sup>

## 8. *Talmid Muvhak*, Not *Hasid Muvhak*

It is, of course, obvious that in delivering thousands of shiurim over the last fifty years, R. Lichtenstein sometimes differed with a specific interpretation of a line in the Gemara or a Rishon adopted by his illustrious father-in-law. This is standard fare in any rebbe-*talmid* relationship, especially when the *talmid* has achieved his own sense of mastery. It is part of the woof and the warp of the vibrant and pulsating enterprise we call *milhamtah shel Torah*, the thrust and parry of high level Torah study. . The Talmud and subsequent rabbinic literature of the Rishonim and Aharonim are filled with thousands of instances where *talmidim* who reached their own level of competence respectfully and humbly differed

<sup>36</sup> For an expanded discussion of the theme of complexity in R. Lichtenstein’s thought, see my essay “The Complexity of Complexity” in *Ma Ahavti Toratekha* (Alon Shvut: Yeshivat Har Etzion, 2014), 156-160.

with the interpretations of the master. The Rav himself would occasionally differ from an explanation that had been offered by his father or grandfather.

In his daily shiurim, R. Lichtenstein often quoted the Rav's interpretation of a *sugya* or concept. This would sometimes be followed up with a question on the approach or an alternative to that specific reading of the Rav. There is nothing remarkable about this phenomenon. It is not the purpose of this brief concluding section to enumerate all of those instances. I will more modestly limit myself to examples of public divergence, either in print or oral presentations in relation to selected issues of *hashkafic* nuances, *pesak halakha* and reading of sources in which R. Lichtenstein parted ways with his rebbe, his mentor, the Rav. The list recorded here is representative and by no means exhaustive.

- a) In describing the Rav's world-affirming approach to sexuality and his rejection of the ascetic approach in Judaism, R. Lichtenstein notes that the Rav attempted to harness the writings of Rambam on sexuality to support that contention. After citation of the relevant passage, R. Lichtenstein, in an act of deep intellectual honesty, notes: "It must be conceded that the attempt is far from convincing, with the reference to the excerpts cited highly selective, bordering on the tendentious."<sup>37</sup>
- b) The Rav was famously opposed to historicization or psychologization of the halakha. In broad terms, R. Lichtenstein too is critical of this approach and has spoken out against formulations in that vein that he felt crossed a line. At the same time, R. Lichtenstein has on occasion expressed a more nuanced approach to issues that the Rav saw in black and white.

In a famous episode in 1975, the Rav strongly denounced a proposal raised by R. Emanuel Rackman, z"l to reevaluating the validity of the talmudic dictum "a woman would always be rather married to anyone (even a scoundrel) than be alone" in the modern context. R. Rackman called on religious authorities to reevaluate the reach of this dictum as a way of addressing the scourge of modern day recalcitrant husbands who did not give their estranged spouses a *get*. The reevaluation of this principle might be an opening to examine the use of halakhic annulment of marriages. The Rav vigorously maintained that this principle, like all *bazakot* of Hazal, was "an ontological statement" about the nature of women, not subject to changing historical factors or changing social mores.

<sup>37</sup> *Varieties of Jewish Experience*, 31.

## TRADITION

R. Lichtenstein in both private conversation with a number of *talmidim* over the decades, including this author and in remarks in public shiurim, noted his disagreement with the Rav's assessment of this *hazaka* (and expressed astonishment at the vehemence of the Rav's opposition at the time) given the clear cut evidence in the Rishonim in *Yevamot* and other places in Shas which clearly indicated that this *hazaka* was not one that applied in all contexts and at all times and in all situations.

- c) The Rav was famously known for his conservatism in matters of liturgy arguing against the formulation of new prayers, and changing the text of accepted prayers (except those changes adopted by the Beit ha-Rav stretching back to the GRA and the scions of the Brisker tradition and those that he himself felt were warranted by halakhic concerns). In 1967, in the aftermath of the Six Day War, a number of rabbinic figures in Israel, including Chief Rabbi of the IDF R. Shlomo Goren, published new versions of the ancient prayer of Nahem that is inserted into the Amidah at Minha time on Tisha be-Av. These newer versions attempted to reflect the new reality that Jerusalem was no longer in Arab hands and that the Old City and the Mekom ha-Mikdash had returned to Jewish sovereignty, with hundreds of thousands of Jews crowding the area (eventually rebuilding the Old City and making it a center of Jewish life once again). The Rav was vigorously opposed to these liturgical changes and argued against any tampering whatsoever with the traditional text. The Rav claimed that Jerusalem remained “desolate and bereft of its inhabitants” as long the actual Temple lay in ruins. R. Lichtenstein disagreed with his rebbe on this issue and argued that the rabbinic injunction that “one should not utter falsehoods before the Lord” trumped the Rav's analytical framework. He thus ruled that one should make a partial change. One should simply delete the sentence that speaks of Jerusalem laying in ruins, bereft of its citizens, and move on to the other sentences of the passage.<sup>38</sup>
- d) The Rav, raised as a youth in the turbulent years that included the Russian revolution and the subsequent Bolshevik rise to power and the Communist suppression of Judaism and freedom, was a staunch anti-Communist. This reflected itself in numerous public writings and lectures including the Rav's support for the American war effort in Vietnam. As the war progressed during the late 1960's, the Rav's brother, R. Aharon Solveichik took a more critical stance to the war effort, eventually labeling it an unjust war. On this issue, R. Lichtenstein,

<sup>38</sup> Cited in Chaim Navon, “Nusah ha-Tefilla Be-Metsiut Mishtanah,” in *Tsohar* 32 (2008).

- sided with his early rebbe and uncle-in-law, R. Aharon in opposition to the views of his father-in-law and *rebbe muvhak*.
- e) A central theme of the Rav's *hashkafat olam* was the notion that Judaism does not primarily confront the issue of human suffering as a metaphysical or speculative dilemma. It does not focus on the "why," but bids the human being to ask "how shall I respond to this challenge?" This theme is elaborated on in the opening section of *Kol Dodi Dofek* as well as a number of the Rav's lectures collected in *Out of the Whirlwind*.<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to note that in a footnote to his essay entitled "The Duties of the Heart and the Response to Suffering,"<sup>40</sup> R. Lichtenstein, after having cited the Rav's summary description of this perspective in the text of the essay, comments that, while the man of destiny described by the Rav in *Kol Dodi Dofek* falls into this category, "as a summary of the approach of *yahadut* in general, however, this strikes me as overly sweeping."<sup>41</sup>
- e) In a number of areas of practical halakha, R. Lichtenstein was more stringent than his father-in-law. Thus, for example, R. Lichtenstein did not adopt the Rav's ruling as to the permissibility of brushing one's teeth on Shabbat nor the more permissive ruling of the Rav regarding shaving during the period of the "Three Weeks."

## CONCLUSION

Over the years, many have noted that the Rav was *sui generis*, a unique figure in Jewish history, a *yahid be-dorot*, as R. Lichtenstein called him. Many students imbibed only partial elements of the Rav's complex teaching, *hashkafat olam*, *derekh ha-limmud*, and philosophical approach and teachings. There were precious few who were able, willing, and fully competent to receive the entire package, and draw from all the wellsprings of this giant of the ages. R. Lichtenstein was one of the few who was able to appreciate and absorb the totality of the Rav's massive learning and

<sup>39</sup> Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Out of the Whirlwind* (Jersey City: Ktav, 2003).

<sup>40</sup> Aharon Lichtenstein, "The Duties of the Heart and Response to Suffering," in *Leaves of Faith*, vol. 2, 117-151.

<sup>41</sup> In a similar vein, R. Lichtenstein has often noted other formulations of the Rav that may be too sweeping. For example, R. Lichtenstein has noted in oral presentations that the Rav's repeated emphasis on "surrender" and sacrifice" as major themes of Judaism were often too sweeping. He added that on occasion he was uncomfortable with the Rav's formulations of this theme. He in fact, noted that after the Rav's brush with mortality and the death of his wife and other close relatives this theme was given less prominence in the Rav's thought and writing. See the fascinating discussion in *Mevakshei Panekha*, 239-240.

## *TRADITION*

teaching, through the blessing of innate talents granted to him by the Ribbono shel Olam, devoted parents, and Rabbeim, hard work, careful study, and close contact with the Rav over the course of four decades.

The force of the Rav's teaching, personality, and guidance shaped and molded his most outstanding student, R. Aharon Lichtenstein, into the unique master that he became. At the same time, R. Lichtenstein retained his own unique perspectives and charted his own path in the Torah world, a path of which we have all been beneficiaries for more than half a century. May he be blessed with many more years of toiling in the vineyard of the Lord and sharing his Torah, wisdom, and guidance with our community.