

Rabbi Wurzburger, Editor Emeritus of *Tradition*, recently published *Ethics of Responsibility: Pluralistic Approaches to Covenantal Ethics*.

RAV JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK AS *POSEK* OF POST-MODERN ORTHODOXY

In the circles of what is labelled “Modern Orthodoxy” or “Centrist Orthodoxy,” Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *z.t.l.* is referred to as “*the Rav*.” This appellation is not merely a sign of respect and reverence accorded a charismatic luminary, the mentor of generations of Rabbis, academicians and communal leaders, but it also attests to his role as *the* authority figure of those segments of the Orthodox community which see no conflict between commitment to Torah and full participation in scientific and cultural activities of modern society.

To the popular mind, unfortunately, “Modern Orthodoxy” represents a movement which is characterized by willingness to make all sorts of concessions to modernity at the expense of genuine religious commitment. It is perceived as a “moderate” brand of halakhic Judaism which lacks the fervor and passion associated with the *Haredi* community.

In this misinterpretation of the ideology of “Modern Orthodoxy,” the adjective “modern” is treated as a modifier rather than as an attribute. To illustrate this distinction, there are all kinds of presidents: popular or unpopular, dynamic or passive, honest or corrupt. In these cases, the adjective functions as an attribute, characterizing a president. But when we speak of a past president, an honorary president, or a dead president, we are no longer dealing with presidents; the adjective does not merely add a qualification to the noun, but completely modifies the meaning of the noun. Similarly, it is widely taken for granted that “Modern Orthodoxy” is not really an authentic form of Orthodoxy, but a hybrid of an illicit union between modernity and Orthodoxy, a kind of oxymoron. Its oppo-

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nents ridicule it as a compromise designed to facilitate entry into a modern lifestyle by offering less stringent interpretations of halakha and even condoning laxity in religious observance.

Because the term "Modern Orthodoxy" has acquired such a pejorative meaning, Rabbi Norman Lamm has proposed that we replace it with "Centrist Orthodoxy."¹ In my opinion, "Post-Modern Orthodoxy" would be the most appropriate designation for a movement which stands not for evasion or accommodation but for uncompromising confrontation of modernity.

It is this type of halakhic Judaism which can invoke the spiritual authority of the Rav, who never wavered in his demand for scrupulous adherence to halakha. His aim was not to make halakhic observance more convenient. On the contrary, in many areas, such as *hilkhot avelut*, the construction of *eruvim* in cities, refusal to grant a *shetar mekhirah* authorizing non-Jewish workers to operate Jewish factories or commercial establishments on Shabbat, the Rav has consistently issued rulings that surpass in stringency those of right-wing authorities. He was especially particular in observing all the Brisker stringencies pertaining to the writing of *shetarot*. I recall spending close to two hours with the Rav on writing a simple *shetar pruzbul*. As opposed to other poskim, he did not condone the signing of a *ketuva* before *shekia* when the actual *huppa* would take place *ben hashemashot*. Similarly, he did not permit the scheduling of weddings *ben hashemashot*, even when this would have been more convenient for the concerned parties. For that matter, he was opposed to the modernization of synagogue services. He even objected to announcements of pages during *hazarat hashatz*, the composition of prayers for special occasions, and the recital of invocations, because they smacked of the attempt to dilute traditional Jewish approaches with prevailing American practices.

The Rav's traditionalism can also be discerned in his emphasis upon what he called *messora ma'asit* (established practice). Once a halakhic practice was agreed upon, it could no longer be modified by reliance on opinions which had previously been rejected.² This respect for established norms manifested itself in his aversion to utilizing even newly discovered manuscripts of Rishonim for halakhic purposes.³

Notwithstanding the Rav's traditionalism, I disagree with Moshe Sokol's and David Singer's⁴ contention that the Rav, for all his philosophical brilliance and his extensive scientific knowledge, really cannot be invoked as an authority figure for Modern Orthodoxy, since in his halakhic decision-making he operates exclusively

with traditional methods and does not permit philosophical ideas or the findings of modern textual scholarship to impinge upon the formation of his halakhic rulings. They claim that his halakhic positions and methodologies do not differ basically from those of other *poskim*, who have insulated themselves against modernity. The traditional nature of his halakhic reasoning is also evidenced by the fact that his vast Talmudic erudition and the profundity and originality of his scholarship is widely admired even by many of the leading figures of the *Haredi* community (“right-wing” Orthodoxy), which demands total isolation from modern, secular culture.

What differentiates the approach of Rav Soloveitchik from that of *Haredi poskim* and makes him the authority figure of so-called “Modern Orthodoxy” is his endorsement of secular studies, including philosophy, his espousal of religious Zionism, and his pioneering of intensive Jewish education for women. Although these policies are not logically connected, they are closely related to each other, because they arise from the conviction that a *Torat Hayyim* addresses the realities of the world rather than seeks an escape from them. It is this religious philosophy, which engenders a unique approach to halakha, which has made him into the *posek par excellence* of Modern Orthodoxy.

The Rav’s objection to the employment of modern historic and textual scholarship to ascertain the meaning of halakha reflects not naive traditionalism but highly sophisticated post-modern critical thought. He insists that halakha operate with its own unique canons of interpretation. According to R. Soloveitchik, scientific methods are appropriate only for the explanation of natural phenomena but have no place in the quest for the understanding of the normative and cognitive concepts of halakha, which imposes its own *a priori* categories, which differ from those appropriate in the realm of science. It is for this reason that the Rav completely ignores Bible criticism and eschews the “positive historical” approach of the “Science of Judaism.”

Whole-hearted endorsement of traditional halakahic methodology and concomitant rejection of historicism is, however, fully compatible with a positive attitude towards some values of modernity. The Rav always insisted that historic contingencies have no bearing upon the halakhic process. In his view, halakha represented an *a priori* system of ideas and concepts to be applied to empirical realities. When Rav Soloveitchik looks upon the study of sciences and the development of technology as religiously desirable, it cannot be said that he reads the value system of the Enlightenment⁵ into the

halakhic tradition. After all, he unequivocally opposes many of the most fundamental tenets of the Enlightenment. Thus he rejects its belief that religion lacks cognitive significance and that its function is to manifest itself in the realms of feeling and actions rather than to concern itself with dogmas or articles of faith pertaining to theoretical beliefs.⁶ Similarly, he categorically rejects the Enlightenment conception of the superiority of natural religion over the various revealed religions.⁷ For the Rav, halakha represents not a human construct designed to relate to Transcendence, but a divinely revealed cognitive approach to God and the world. He denies the fundamental premisses of liberal religion, because on epistemological grounds he maintains that human efforts to search for God are doomed to failure⁸ and that man can find Him only when overwhelmed by His Presence. He stresses the primacy not of the religious experience but of halakha. The Rav's rejection of natural theology, while similar to Karl Barth's position, arises from his conviction that halakha is not merely a normative discipline, but must provide the foundation for Jewish philosophy.⁹ Such an orientation is diametrically opposed to the ethos of the Enlightenment, which, as Kant formulated it, constitutes "man's exodus from self-incurred tutelage."¹⁰

Since the Rav stresses heteronomous divine Revelation rather than the autonomy of human reason and conscience, his notion of Adam I, the "man of majesty," is not a concession to modernity but an authentic interpretation of the Jewish value system. Those who follow in the footsteps of Rambam, need not expound the Jewish tradition in conformity with the quietistic and pietistic mindset of European Orthodoxy.

It must, however, be emphasized that for the Rav the endorsement of scientific methods is strictly limited to the realm of Adam I, whose function it is to harness the world of nature for the benefit of humanity. But causal explanations are irrelevant in the domain of Adam II, who can overcome his existential loneliness only through the establishment of a "covenantal community," enabling him to relate to transcendence.

The Rav's approach is reminiscent of the Kantian dichotomy between science and ethics. According to Kant, determinism, while indispensable to the perception of phenomena, renders impossible the moral "ought". He therefore regarded freedom as an indispensable postulate of ethics. Similarly, Rav Soloveitchik insists that it is totally illicit to "explain" (in reality, explain away) religious phenomena by application of methods which are legitimate only with respect to the concerns of Adam I.

The dichotomy between Adam I and Adam II, which in the Rav's view arises from the very ontological nature of man, mirrors the conflict which the Rav personally experienced with his move to Berlin. Reminiscing about his student days, the Rav once remarked to me: "You have no idea how enormously difficult it was for me to move from the world of R. Hayyim to that of Berlin University. Even my children cannot appreciate it, because they already found a paved road. But my generation was challenged to become pioneers."

It was out of this tension that Rav Soloveitchik developed a formula which enabled him to encounter the value system of modernity while remaining fully committed to traditional halakhic methodology. To apply scientific methods or the tools of modern historic scholarship to halakha would do violence to the integrity of the system. Those who insist upon applying historic scholarship to the analysis of halakha commit the "genetic fallacy." In the Rav's view, halakha must encounter reality by imposing upon it its own autonomous set of *a priori* categories, which are completely independent of scientific or historic factors.

It is, however, one thing to affirm that halakhic concepts are *a priori*, and another to maintain that subjective factors play no role in halakhic decision-making. As a matter of fact, Rav Soloveitchik always emphasized that halakhic decision-making is not purely mechanical but highly creative. A *posek* is not a computer. It is therefore inevitable that like every one else's, the Rav's halakhic rulings, especially the perception and assessment of the realities to which halakhic *a priori* notions are to be applied, reflect to some extent his personal philosophical convictions. From his perspective, human creativity and initiative in science and technology are not merely legitimate but eminently desirable, because they reflect the dignity conferred upon creatures bearing the divine image.¹¹

This stance is usually rejected by the so called "yeshiva world," which assigns religious significance to creativity only insofar as it is directly and immediately related to the field of Torah. R. Hayyim of Volozhin makes the point that while human beings are mandated to imitate the creativity of the Creator, this emulation is possible only in the exercise of spiritual creativity. This is in keeping with Kabbalistic doctrines which affirm that only Torah study and observance of the Commandments create new spiritual worlds in the higher regions of being and are instrumental in helping bring about the reunification of God with the *Shekhina*.¹² In the view of the classical yeshiva world, science and technology do not qualify as genuine creativity, since they rely exclusively on purely natural processes. The

Rav objects to this denigration of “secular” activities and contends that scientific and technological creativity also constitutes an intrinsically valuable mode of imitating the divine Creator.

It is against this background that we can appreciate the Rav’s enthusiasm for scientific and philosophical studies. Whereas in the Yeshiva world, secular studies are condoned only to the extent necessary to making a living, the Rav endowed them with intrinsic value, because they enable human beings to realize the ideals of Adam I. This explains why he encouraged many of his disciples to pursue graduate studies in secular fields.

The Rav’s *z.t.l.* endorsement of Religious Zionism is also closely related to his belief that taking the initiative in ameliorating natural, economic, social or political conditions, far from being a usurpation of divine prerogatives, represents a religiously mandated activity of becoming partners with God in the process of Creation.¹³ This position is radically different from that prevailing in the *Haredi* community. Although they may not be quite as extreme as the *Neturei Karta*, who refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of the State of Israel, the rest of the *Haredi* community, nevertheless, is not prepared to ascribe any religious value to the existence of a sovereign Jewish state in the pre-Messianic era. While reconciling themselves to the recognition of Israel as a *de facto* reality, they cannot view as a religious desideratum a Jewish state that came into being as a result of political activity and not through supernatural intervention. In their opinion, reliance on human initiatives to establish a “secular” Jewish state cannot be reconciled with belief in God the Redeemer, who would restore the Jewish people to its national homeland when the process of catharsis was completed and Israel would become worthy of the Redemption.

Significantly, so dominant was the quietistic streak in traditional circles that the devotees of the Hatam Sofer opposed any involvement in the political arena, even for the limited purpose of improving the socio-political conditions of Diaspora Jewry. It was argued that if God really wanted the Jewish people to enjoy more rights and more tolerable conditions, He did not need the assistance of the Jewish community to accomplish this and there was no point in petitioning the rulers of the various nations for better conditions. With religious faith being equated with such a sense of total dependence upon God that all human efforts were dismissed as essentially inconsequential, one could hardly expect sympathy for the Zionist revolution, which, instead of merely passively awaiting the arrival of the Messiah, insisted upon human initiatives leading eventually to the

birth of a Jewish state.¹⁴

Although the Rav's advocacy of Religious Zionism is closely connected with his conception of Adam I, it would, of course, have been possible for him to follow in the footsteps of a R. Samson Raphael Hirsch and endorse human initiatives in general, while insisting that the return to a national Jewish homeland had to await the Messianic Redemption. He could have chosen the course charted by the German Agudat Yisrael, which enthusiastically subscribed to the ideal of *Torah im Derekh Eretz* while maintaining all-out opposition to Zionism. As a matter of fact, it was only after his arrival in the United States that he left Aguda and identified with Mizrachi, of which he subsequently became the leading ideologist.

The Rav shared with Yitzchak Breuer the conviction that the time had arrived when Torah ideals (especially those relating to Adam I) could best be realized by building a Jewish society in *Eretz Yisrael*. As opposed to Breuer, who developed and transformed the Hirschian doctrine of *Torah im Derekh Eretz* into that of *Torah im Derekh Eretz Yisrael*, the Rav's approach to the building of a Jewish state was completely devoid of Messianic overtones but focused upon the material and spiritual needs of the Jewish people and the obligation to do whatever is in one's power to ameliorate their conditions.¹⁵ Similarly, the absence of Messianic motifs prevented the Rav from subscribing to the Gush Emunim philosophy, which of late has made such inroads into Mizrachi circles.

This realistic approach to the State of Israel was responsible for his reluctance to authorize the recital of *Hallel* on *Yom Ha'atzmaut* and *Yom Yerushalayim*. If the chapters of *Tehillim* which comprised *Hallel* were to be recited, he recommended saying them some time after *Kaddish Titkabel* and not immediately following the *Shemone Esre* as is customary on *Yom Tov* or *Rosh Hodesh*.

The Rav's commitment to Religious Zionism was possible only because he opposed the secessionist tendencies which Yitzchak Breuer had inherited from his grandfather, Samson Raphael Hirsch. Breuer disapproved of membership in the Zionist movement and, for that matter, frowned upon any association with groups which were not totally committed to the ideals of halakhic Judaism. The Rav maintained that halakha demands a sense of identification with all Jews, regardless of their religious convictions or practices.

Although the rise of Hitler may have strengthened the Rav's conviction that Jews formed a community of fate¹⁶ and not merely one of faith, opposition to total separation from non-observant segments of the Jewish community was a long standing family tradition,

which can be traced back to Netziv.¹⁷ The Rav frequently referred to the example of his illustrious grandfather, R. Hayyim of Brisk, who, on a Yom Kippur evening before *Kol Nidrei*, asked the community to desecrate the holiness of Yom Kippur in order to gather the funds needed to save the life of a follower of the Bund from execution. The fact that this "Bundist" was an atheist and an opponent of halakhic Judaism had no bearing upon the requirement to concern oneself with the fate of every Jew.

In his insistence that failure to observe halakha does not affect one's status as a full fledged member of the Jewish people, the Rav went so far as to urge kohanim who were not Sabbath observers to participate in *Birkat Kohanim*. According to his ruling, only transgressions of prohibitions specifically governing kohanim, but not violation of other halakhic norms, (with the exception of homicide) disqualify a kohen from *dukhening*.

The emphasis upon the nationalistic dimension of Jewishness comes also to the fore in the Rav's frequent references to the halakhic opinion that any one who loses his life because of his Jewishness is regarded as having died *al kiddush haShem*. He regarded this as precedent for his belief that any one who gives up his life in the defense of the State of Israel should be viewed as having died *al kiddush haShem*.¹⁸

It was because of his solicitude for the material and spiritual well-being of every Jew that despite his insistence that a mehitza was an absolute halakhic requirement, the Rav occasionally permitted rabbis to accept pulpits in synagogues which flouted this norm. His leniency was due to his belief that the presence of a dedicated rabbi was likely to result in the raising of religious standards (e.g., establishment of day schools, *kashrut*, *taharat ha-Mishpaha*, etc.). I vividly recall the Rav's address to a Rabbinical Council convention where he discussed the dilemma facing the *posek* who is torn between the prohibition against worshiping in a synagogue which violates halakhic standards and the responsibility to prevent the total assimilation of a Jewish community. The Rav cited this as an illustration of the difficulties inherent in the *Derekh ha-Benoni*, a philosophy of moderation, which, unlike extremist positions, must mediate between a plurality of conflicting values and obligations.

The emphasis placed upon the ethnic and nationalistic components of Jewish identity inspired the Rav's interpretation of the meaning and implications of the *B'rit Avraham* and the *B'rit Mitzrayim* which established the Jewish community of fate.¹⁹ These covenants mandate a sense of solidarity and kinship among all the

members of the Jewish Covenantal community of fate and affirm the need to recognize the centrality of *Eretz Yisrael* for the destiny of the Jewish people. Since these covenants preceded the community of faith established by the Sinaitic Covenant and constitute integral and indispensable components of the Jewish faith, we must not limit our concern to the protection of the interests of the religious sector. We should aim not merely at the preservation of isolated religious enclaves, but at the creation of a society which will foster loyalty to Torah on the part of the entire Jewish people.²⁰ The Torah is addressed not to a religious elite but to the entire Jewish people.

The importance the Rav attached to the *B'rit Avraham* also explains his refusal to concur with the famous *issur* (prohibition) banning participation in the Synagogue Council of America and the New York Board of Rabbis, which was issued by a group of prominent *roshei yeshiva*.

To be sure, the Rav could not have harbored the slightest sympathy for Jewish religious movements which deviated from halakhic norms. His conception of Judaism was so halakha-centered that he denied any Jewish religious significance to purely subjective attempts to reach out for Transcendence. Moreover, his followers in Boston did not belong to the interdenominational Rabbinical Association or to The Associated Synagogues, a lay body consisting of some Orthodox and a large number of Conservative and Reform congregations. He went so far as to rule that one should not worship in a Conservative synagogue, even when there was no other opportunity to listen to the sounding of the *shofar*. What prevented the Rav from joining other *roshei yeshiva* in demanding withdrawal from interdenominational umbrella groups was his fear that leaving organizations in which Orthodoxy had participated for many years would be a divisive move at a time when Jewish unity was so essential. Although ideally he would have preferred that these umbrella groups would not have come into existence, his ideological considerations were subordinated to his overriding concern for the welfare of the Jewish people and the security of the State of Israel. He therefore did not object to the participation of Orthodox organizations in the Synagogue Council of America, as long its functions were limited to representing the total Jewish community to governmental agencies or non-Jewish denominations (*kelappei butz*).

There are some revisionist accounts of the Rav's attitude to the Synagogue Council. It has been reported that while the Rav opposed the continued membership of Orthodox groups, the Rabbinical Council refused to abide by his instructions. To point out

the absurdity of this claim, one need only take into consideration the indisputable fact that as the chairman of its halakha commission, the Rav was the unchallenged halakhic authority of the Rabbinical Council of America. I cannot help but be amused by fanciful accounts of the Rav's views on the issue. I vividly recall a session with the Rav and the late Rabbi Klavan, when we mapped strategy to prevent the Union from seceding from the Synagogue Council.

The Rav's opposition to moves which threatened the unity of the Jewish community also manifested itself in his attitudes towards non-Orthodox groups. He counselled against denying Conservative or Reform Rabbis the right to use communal *mikva'ot* for conversions. Moreover, he once instructed me that Reform conversions that were accompanied by circumcision and immersion in a *mikve* had to be treated as a *safek giyur*. (Accordingly, a *get* would be required to dissolve a marriage in which one of the partners previously underwent a Conservative or Reform conversion which conformed to the requirement of *mila* and *tevila*.)

Rav Soloveitchik's emphasis upon Jewish particularism, which prompted him to attach so much weight to the welfare and security of the State of Israel and of all Jews regardless of their religious orientation, stood in marked contrast to the universalism and outright hostility to Zionism of Hermann Cohen, whose philosophical doctrines he not only analyzed in his Ph.D. dissertation but which also impacted upon the development of his own thought. Cohen's influence is especially noticeable in the *Ish haHalakha* and in the conception of Adam I of "The Lonely Man of Faith," which extoll intellectual, cultural, scientific, technological and political activities as *religious* desiderata. But, despite his admiration for some aspects of neo-Kantianism, the Rav categorically rejected Cohen's uncompromising rationalism and radical universalism, which were utterly incompatible with belief in supernatural Revelation or the affirmation of Jewish particularism.

Notwithstanding these fundamental disagreements concerning the very essence of Judaism, R. Soloveitchik adopted Cohen's thesis that the Rambam's ethical views reflected a Platonic rather than an Aristotelian approach. According to Aristotle, human beings became most God-like through intellectual perfection. Plato, however, maintained that ethical conduct and attainment of virtue constituted *imitatio dei*. This accounts for the centrality of ethics in the Rav's religious philosophy. Throughout his writings he repeatedly makes the point that the Torah is not a metaphysical treatise but the source of normative guidance.

Professor Ravitzki²¹ has advanced some cogent arguments against Cohen's interpretation of Maimonides' ethical views. But for our purposes, this controversy is irrelevant, since it is of interest only to the student of the history of ideas. What matters for us is that, basing himself on the Rambam, the Rav unequivocally declared that striving for ever higher rungs of moral perfection is the pre-eminent approach to *imitatio dei*.

This emphasis upon ethics must be seen not as a concession to modern Jewish thinkers such as Mendelssohn, Luzzatto, Ahad Ha'am and Cohen, but it reflects his affinity for Maimonidean approaches. Unlike Yehudah Halevi, who relegated ethical norms to the domain of social necessities and assigned to the performance of ritual laws the function of cultivating the religious faculty (*Inyan haEloki*), Maimonides stresses the religious significance of ethics. The Rav frequently pointed out that all our ethical norms are grounded in *imitatio dei*. I show elsewhere²² that Rambam himself (in his more mature formulation in the *Mishne Torah*, as opposed to his earlier conception in the *Sefer haMitzvot*) did not go so far; he invoked *imitatio dei* only as proof-text for the cultivation of ethical traits of character but not for performance of ethical actions.

It should also be noted that the Rav had serious doubts whether a purely secular ethics is possible. In this he anticipated the critique of Alistair McIntyre of all post-Enlightenment attempts to found ethics without any reference to a divine source.²³ Moreover, R. Soloveitchik maintained that, at the very most, a purely secular ethics can do justice only to those aspects of human nature which reflect Adam I. But since the ontological nature of human beings also involves Adam II, a purely secular ethics is bound to be inadequate.

Since the Rav maintains that the entire ethical domain is founded upon *imitatio dei*, he was extremely sensitive to ethical demands. Out of ethical principles, he refused to grant a *shetar mekhira* to one of the most important benefactors of his Day School in Boston, who wanted to be able to operate his plants on Shabbat. When questioned why another renowned halakhic authority had no difficulty in arranging a *shetar mekhira* for the same plants, the Rav explained that his refusal was motivated by his concern that enabling industrialists to operate their business on Shabbat by transferring ownership to a non-Jew would make it much more difficult for *shomrei Shabbat* to obtain employment in firms owned by Orthodox Jews.

Even more revealing of the Rav's emphasis upon ethical values is his conviction that in a democratic society which grants equal rights and opportunities to Jews, some of the halakhic provisions

regarding *messira* do not apply. He therefore unequivocally stated that governmental employees must apply the law to Jew and non-Jew alike. His sense of gratitude to America for according Jews full equality also comes to the fore in his positive attitude towards the observance of Thanksgiving as a national holiday.

Ethical considerations also played a major role in his revolutionary ruling that yeshivot had the right to institute a lottery for the chaplaincy,²⁴ compelling rabbis, who were exempted from the draft, to “volunteer” to serve in the armed forces as chaplains. The Rav endorsed this procedure in spite of the fact that it was probable that the chaplain might be forced to desecrate the Sabbath. In support of his opinion, R. Soloveitchik cited halakhic precedents demonstrating that one may embark on religiously worthwhile projects even at the risk that they might lead to serious transgressions of halakhic norms. It is, however, significant that the Rav’s *z.t.l.* solicitude for the welfare of personnel serving in the armed forces prompted him even to endorse sanctions against rabbis refusing to serve in the chaplaincy. His conviction that there was a moral obligation not to abandon Jews in need of rabbinic guidance overrode his reluctance to put observant Jews in a position where they had no choice but to desecrate the Sabbath. He made this ruling in spite of the generally accepted halakhic norm that “one does not encourage an individual to commit a sin in order to benefit another individual.”²⁵

Because of his deep-rooted conviction that Jews have an ethico-religious responsibility to the world at large, the Rav found it necessary to devise a formula to enable Jewish participation in inter-religious consultations and activities without jeopardizing the integrity and uniqueness of the Jewish faith experience. Contrary to widespread misconceptions, his essay “Confrontation” and the guidelines for interfaith discussions were not intended to forestall meaningful exchanges between representatives of Judaism and of other religions. Rabbi Isadore Twersky, the Rav’s son-in-law, told me that at one time the Rav considered an invitation to deliver a lecture at the the Christian-Jewish colloquium held at the Harvard Divinity School. Moreover, the Rav’s classic article “The Lonely Man of Faith” was first presented as an oral lecture at a Catholic seminary in Brighton, Massachusetts. While he looked upon interreligious discussions of purely theological issues as exercises in futility, he approved of discussions devoted to socio-political issues, in spite of the fact that as he noted in a footnote to “Confrontation,”²⁶ for people of faith such issues are not secular concerns but are grounded in theological convictions.

The Rav's sensitivity to ethical concerns also led him to sponsor research to find more humane methods than hoisting and shackling to prepare animals for *shechita*. As a general rule, the Orthodox establishment was concerned only with blocking legislation affecting *shechita*. But the Rav felt that it was irresponsible to ignore the clamor for reducing the pain animals endured prior to *shechita*.

The Rav's sharp reaction to the tragic massacres in Lebanon,²⁷ when large segments of the Jewish community wanted to sweep the problem under the rug, also attests to his extraordinary concern for ethical propriety. It was because of the threat that unless Mafdal pressed for the appointment of an independent investigation commission, he would publicly resign from membership in Mizrachi, that the leadership of Religious Zionism had no choice but to comply with his request.

His extraordinary ethical sensitivity engendered what at first blush strikes us as non-traditional attitudes towards women. Although he never advocated egalitarianism or questioned the halakhic stipulations governing the respective roles of the genders, he emphasized that these distinctions by no means implied an inferior status. Significantly, he interpreted the verse that Eve was to function as Adam's *eizer kenegdo* in the sense that Eve was not simply to function as Adam's helpmeet, but that she was supposed to help him by being *kenegdo*, i.e., complementing Adam by offering opposing perspectives. In a similar vein, the Rav invoked the special dignity of women as an explanation for the halakhic rule disqualifying women from serving as witnesses. He compared their status to that of a king, who, according to Jewish law, is disqualified from serving as a witness because it is incompatible with royal dignity to be subjected to cross-examination. By the same token, he took pains to point out that the reason why *kevod haTzibbur* was invoked as the ground for barring women from receiving an *aliya* reflected not inferior status but the fear that males when hearing the Torah read by an attractive woman might have improper thoughts.

Ethical considerations also prompted the Rav's refusal to participate in granting a *heter me-a rabbanim* to husbands whose wives were unwilling to accept a get. The Rav explained that his policy was based upon the realization that, if the shoe were on the other foot, corresponding procedures would not be available to the wife.

Especially revolutionary was his pioneering of the intensive study of *Gemara* by women. He was convinced that under contemporary conditions, it was necessary to confront the challenge of modernity, and therefore Jewish women must be provided with the

