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On Haym Soloveitchik's "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodox Society": A Response

Dr. Haym Soloveitchik has opened a window to ourselves, the religious world in which we were raised and which is currently fading from contemporary Jewish life. The significance of the recent and current changes in that world, and of Dr. Soloveitchik's treatment of them, can be easily measured by the intensity of discussion his article has generated among Orthodox Jews of all varieties. The discussion below results from the same impulses that moved Dr. Soloveitchik in his article—to know and understand ourselves.¹

There is little to question in Dr. Soloveitchik's description of where we are in the 1990s. But one can certainly question certain aspects of Dr. Soloveitchik's discussion of *how* we arrived at where we are. The process according to Dr. Soloveitchik starts with the disintegration of the shtetl, followed by the mass migration from Eastern Europe throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Associated with the demise of the shtetl is the end of the mimetic religious life which can be learned by simply participating in it.² Whereas the shtetl came to its absolute end in the destruction of World War II, the decline of mimetic observant religiosity has not been so abrupt, but has become sufficiently accomplished in recent years to prompt Dr. Soloveitchik's description of the phenomenon. The decline of the shtetl, according

to Dr. Soloveitchik, contributed to decline of mimetic religiosity in two ways. First, the loss of society as educator naturally sends people back to more primary sources for instruction and guidance—the books of traditional rabbinic learning. Attendant to this return to the books is the discovery of a variety of options in the observance of the *mitzvot*, resulting in a crisis of confidence in exactly how to serve God in deed—since the common practice of society no longer serves as a reliable guide. This crisis of confidence has two consequences: (i) the tendency to punctilious observance of the commandments as delineated in the books on the Halakhah (and, for the uninitiated, halakhic handbooks), and to convert *humrot* in the Law to normative positions of the Law, and (ii) a shift in religious authority from the family and local rabbinate to the academic, institutional masters of the book, the *rashei yeshivot*. The second way in which the demise of the shtetl contributed to the new emphasis on the details of the *mitzvot*, at the expense of the mimetic way, is the end of the shtetl culture as a distinctive way of life. The embourgeoisement of religious Jewish culture and the end of the religiosity of material self-denial, what Dr. Soloveitchik has referred to as “the thousand year struggle of the soul with the flesh” (p. 81), have produced the need for distinctiveness that heretofore had been taken for granted. As religious Jews became more integrated into modern Western lifestyles, the options for distinctiveness narrowed to an emphasis on the literal details of the commandments, on the exact performance of the *mitzvot*.

Generally, these processes are understood as following an inexorable pattern, as though what happened had to happen, given the disintegration of the shtetl and the consequent migrations of Jews away from Eastern Europe. Also, Dr. Soloveitchik's view³ is that the processes of change in the haredi and Modern Orthodox communities are roughly the same, except that the changes first take place in the haredi community in more intense form and then are diffused to the Modern Orthodox community in an essentially similar, but less intense, cultural climate. But Dr. Soloveitchik has underestimated and/or omitted a number of important considerations relevant to the process of this change. The dynamic within the Modern Orthodox community was quite different, especially in light of the ideological and propogandic preaching of the haredi community to the Modern Orthodox.

Indeed, no consideration is given to the fact that the haredim actively and successfully exported their process of change to mimetically religious Jewish society. At the beginning of the endnotes, Dr. Soloveitchik refers to discussing the “ideological climate” elsewhere. But, as we shall see, it is simply too artificial to view ideology as

mere background "climate", as not intimately involved in and directly attempting to fashion the course of the new religiosity.

1. With regard to the dynamic of change in the Modern Orthodox community, Dr. Soloveitchik seems to have ignored a large segment of observant Jews, who certainly are a part of the discussion. I refer to East European Jews (such as my own family) who began arriving in the United States shortly before and after World War I. These Jews are discussed explicitly only on pp. 89–90, in the context of their adjustment to American life, the institutions they created, and their sense of Jewish identity. But there is no explicit discussion of the religious life of those Jews in this group who remained loyal to the tradition; thus, they seem to have been identified with those mimetic Jews who came after World War II. But their experiences, and their views of themselves and of the American cultural landscape, say in the 1950s, were quite different from those who arrived later. These were people who lived in, for example, Williamsburg, Crown Heights, Flatbush, Borough Park, and (in smaller numbers) Far Rockaway. There were others in New York City and throughout the United States whose children I met in the yeshivot, but the communities I mentioned contained the relatively large concentrations of Jews with whom I was most familiar. Those who arrived around World War I lost many Jews to assimilation (partial or total), but the self-knowledge of the observant Jews, among whom I was raised, was secure and vibrant. Their great loyalty to and sacrifice for the tradition was expressed in their steadfastness to Sabbath observance through the Depression. And beyond the Depression, the economy in good times was inhospitable to Sabbath observance and, yet, these Jews remained loyal. They were high school educated (which meant quite a bit then) and integrated into American life. They conducted themselves with the classical Jewish sense of *yosher* and *menschlichkeit*. They may not have literally conformed to haredi standards of dress, but they maintained its spirit; their comportment and demeanor were certainly modest (as was much of the American social landscape), in keeping with the old tradition. And they were fully conscious of having passed the test of loyalty to *Shabbat*, *kasbrut*, and daily prayer. They may have been born into the tradition, but in the United States they certainly required no great inner impulse to abandon it. The "melting pot" invited them to leave the Old World, culturally as well as physically, as it welcomed them with open arms. The norm was that they view the tradition as irrelevant, but they chose to affirm the meaning and viability of the tradition in a new time and place. And they were fully aware that their loyalty to the tradition was not the product of social and/or cultural inertia, but, rather, it expressed a

value judgment on the tradition. Most important, their sense of religious excellence remained focused on the *mensch* within—what they used to refer to as the "fifth volume of the *Shulhan 'Arukh*".

Therefore, Dr. Soloveitchik's claim (middle paragraph, p. 71), that the choice to live by the commandments must lead to an emphasis on *regula*, did not apply to them. They did not even begin to participate in the emphasis on details of the Halakhah, and especially *humrot* (pp. 72–73), until the beginning, maybe even the middle, of the 1960s. Throughout the 1950s, they derided the new *humrot* that were appearing, whether their source was the yeshivot or the pre-existing practice of the newly arrived Hungarian Hasidim. The issue of *humrot* was quite trivial to them, considering that they and their parents prevailed in their loyalty to the tradition all those years in an economy predicated on a six-day work week which included *Shabbat*, in contrast to the post-World War II economy which became increasingly predicated on a five-day work week, thereby allowing for more Sabbath observance than ever before. Furthermore, the whole discussion (pp. 74–82) on the need for distinctiveness in the context of the embourgeoisement of the *haredim* did not apply to these Jews. They had been middle-class for so long. Certainly, they made more money from the 1950s onward, and were accepted to a wider variety of universities and entered more professions. But these people remained loyal as before, and their success vindicated their belief in an observant Jewish life as well as in the American system. I do not think that more (proportionately) were lost to the tradition from these Jews after World War II than before World War II. Whatever adjustments they made to modern life in the new world were done well before World War II. And the same comments apply to their psychological requirement of distinctiveness. They certainly had no profound need to distinguish themselves in their practice since they knew they followed the tradition; thus they did not require the distinctiveness of presumed meticulous performance to establish their self-integrity. For them, the mimetic way more than sufficed.

Finally, the Modern Orthodox did not go through any crisis of confidence and sense of loss of authenticity until the late 1970s and the early 1980s (I will describe the process below). Moreover, the position of the Modern Orthodox within the Jewish community seemed to soar in the 1960s, starting with the relief of the pressures of the American melting pot and culminating with Israel's victory in the Six Day War. One has to remember that the Six Day War was taken as full vindication of mimetic Judaism's support of the State of Israel. I was at the University of Minnesota from 1966–1970, and it was very "cool" to be not only Jewish but Modern Orthodox. One

might say that the “do your own thing” of the 1960s and the rejection of the melting pot by the Blacks in the late 1960s–early 1970s removed the hesitancy of students to wear *kippot* on college campuses, but it was the victory of the Six Day War that provided the positive impetus to do so. Thus, with nearly all of these Jews, whatever “crisis of confidence” they may have endured came much later, and the process was not just a delayed parallel to the situation in the *haredi* yeshivot.

2. With regard to the ideological polemic of the *haredi* community, Dr. Soloveitchik presents (p. 94ff) a theoretical construct of the process of the shift of religious authority: it starts with a crisis in self-confidence within the mimetic religiosity, which must turn to some external source for the solution—in this case, books, from which submission to the authorities on books, the *rashei yeshivah*, is but a natural consequence. Of course, there is another possibility, that the process goes in exactly the opposite direction, i.e., that the yeshivot want to establish themselves as the final authority in religious life and therefore seek to shift the grounds of religiosity to their turf, i.e., to the books. Thus they consciously sought to create a crisis of confidence in mimetic religiosity.⁴ And I know from personal experience that in certain areas this second possibility was certainly the reality. I finished the last three years of high school at Yeshiva Rabbi Jacob Joseph on the Lower East Side of Manhattan from 1953–1956, spent three years at Yeshiva Ner Israel in Baltimore from 1956–1959, and one year at the Mirrer Yeshiva in Brooklyn, 1959–1960.⁵ These schools had few *haredi* students. Most students were from the Modern Orthodox families I described above, and they included students from non-*haredi* families who arrived in the States after World War II. In short, most of us came from mimetic Orthodoxy, with no crisis whatsoever about their way of life.

But from the moment we entered these yeshivot, the *haredi* *rebbe'im* attacked this way of life, both in a positive and negative way. The positive consisted of the constant extolling of the *gedolim/rashei yeshivah* as religious authorities, and the model of *ben torah* as they formulated it. The negative consisted of the denigration of the American rabbinate and Yeshiva University, and the *bitul* of American *hu'alei batim*. The proportion of positive to negative depended on the individual *rebbe*, how much the older students accepted it and therefore made it the dominant atmosphere. No question, there were *rebbe'im* who almost exclusively emphasized excellence in learning and whose deep piety was natural, not self-consciously ideological. But the extreme ideological *haredi* *rebbe'im* were unremitting. Their attack against college always centered on the Rav, Rabbi Joseph B.

Soloveitchik; but since they could not criticize *him*, as he was a living counterexample to everything they said, they aimed their polemics instead at Yeshiva University and the rabbis who emerged from there. In those days the polemic was unrestrained but not overly successful. Thus I am not convinced that Dr. Soloveitchik's description of the new authority of the *nasbei yeshivah* is accurate when applied to the Modern Orthodox community. For the occurrence of the crisis of confidence in the Modern Orthodox community depended on the receptivity of that community to the ideological claims of the very existence of a crisis in mimetic religiosity.

But, ultimately, the haredim became successful. In the 1970s, amidst the growing tensions between Jews and Blacks, under the impact of the collapse of American culture due to the social revolutions of the 60s and the fiasco of Vietnam, with the emerging realization on the part of American Jews of the extent of their silence during the Holocaust, and during the cultural assault against Western civilization as such, the haredi ideology began to strike serious roots and receive a more serious hearing in the Modern Orthodox community. Surprisingly, the major aspect of haredi success was not considered at all by Dr. Soloveitchik. The haredim had a program all along, and the students who stayed with them became their army. They sat and learned in the yeshivot and/or went out and became educators. They taught mostly in Torah Umesorah day schools populated by mimetically religious Jews. Moreover, they took full advantage of the new opportunities, including the growing phenomenon of school busing, to achieve racial integration, to expand and develop the day school movement in the United States. These educators brought the haredi polemic and ideology into the very heart of the Modern Orthodox community. Since the haredi educators were American born and were raised in better material circumstances, they rarely attacked the *ha'alei batim*. Rather, they emphasized the positive, co-opted the *ha'alei batim*, and introduced them to the religious authorities of *their* world. The focus on books as Dr. Soloveitchik describes it was definitely secondary. When the haredi teachers began influencing the parents, who had not been so religiously involved prior to their children attending school, they directed *these* people to the handbooks. As Dr. Soloveitchik pointed out, the length of time spent in religious educational institutions had grown beyond what it had ever been. The mass audience of Modern Orthodox students were now exposed through their teens and beyond to haredi influence. Even those who attended Yeshiva University arrived with a new background and mindset. Thus, the crossover from mimetic to books was not a natural development in the Modern Orthodox community. The crisis of

confidence was now successfully brought to the Modern Orthodox by the *haredim*. Their crisis of confidence, as described by Dr. Soloveitchik, with their solution. And it was brought not to my and Dr. Soloveitchik's generation, but to those that followed. It is important to note that this occurred both in the United States and Israel through the populating of Modern Orthodox Bnei Akiva schools with *haredi* teachers, although the dynamic in Israel was probably quite different.

Furthermore, while the *teshuvah* movement had little impact on the *haredi* yeshivot, it had a far greater impact on the mimetic communities than Dr. Soloveitchik is willing to concede (n. 19). Most of the young people impacted by this movement were attracted by *haredi* outreach efforts but lived in predominantly mimetic communities. The large numbers of these people were significant; and it was this group that fed the tremendous expansion of the day school movement—whether the children became part of it as a result of their parents already being *ba'ale teshuvah*, or whether the *teshuvah* of the parents was an outgrowth of their interaction with the day school movement. Now, these people certainly were reliant on books, having had no, or having forgotten their, mimetic religious upbringing, but their sense of religious authority was already more directed to the *haredi* orbit than to the Modern Orthodox one. And they definitely contributed to undermining the authority of the modern American rabbinate. These *ba'ale teshuvah* kept pointing to their halakhic handbooks, and no rabbi was going to undermine their faith in the books that were helping them "return" to Judaism.

A final, more subtle, aspect of this emerging phenomenon was the almost exclusive authority of the *Mishnah Berurah* in the yeshivot. Here was an accessible book which gave the impression of being the last word, and which could replace the mimetic society as the primary educator of the Halakhah in daily life. In fact, it became a major tool in undermining the confidence of mimetic Modern Orthodox Jews in the local American rabbinate. For when students returned to their communities, they now knew the last word as well as (better than, in their own eyes) their local rabbis. I saw both ends of this process—in the yeshivot and in the communities. An indication of the new mode of thinking lay in the distinction between the prevailing approach in Ner Israel among the students and the *rebbe'im*, on one hand, and R. Jacob I. Ruderman, the *rosh yeshivah*, on the other. Everyone would nearly always cite the *Mishnah Berurah* as the last word, unless one of the *rebbe'im* found that his own study of the *Shulhan 'Arukh* and its commentaries absolutely left him no choice but to disagree. But I once saw Rabbi Ruderman answer a query by ruminating aloud, citing three *teshuvot* one way and three the other,

then pausing to think, telling the questioner what to do, and finally asking, "what does the *Mishnah Berurah* say?" One cannot create a theory on the basis of only one example, but this striking incident crystallizes what I had experienced throughout those years in the yeshiva.

3. Another aspect of the haredi polemic ignored by Dr. Soloveitchik is his discussion (pp. 84-86) of how the haredi record of the past is recast to reflect the present, in order that the haredi present be seen as an authentic continuation of the past. Dr. Soloveitchik simply remarks on the existence of "darker aspects" to such a retelling of history, refers the reader (n. 63) to R. Berel Wein as a possible example of this phenomenon, and then launches into a three paragraph analysis on comparing such re-creation of the past with teaching a child moral imperatives in the guise of factual truths, such as, that crime does not pay and that honesty is the best policy. The discussion endows the phenomenon with the childlike innocence of a pre-literate folk culture at the same time that we are supposedly speaking of an adult religiously mature culture. Which is it? Are we really discussing anthropology here,⁶ or are we speaking of an ideologically oriented manipulation of the written word—especially in a society where the written word is presumably the only word? When the absolutely known truth is edited, when the original words of authors are expurgated, are we discussing a phenomenon which is to be described in terms of whether crime does or does not pay? Does Dr. Soloveitchik apply such categories to the editing, after World War II, of the speech the Belzer rebbe delivered in Hungary just prior to his departure for Israel in January 1944?⁷ If an editor publishes an edition of the commentary by R. Yehudah ha-Hasid to be followed by his own hand with a subsequent expurgated edition, is that simply a dark aspect?⁸ If an English translation of the *Mo'adim ha-Halakhah* excises mention of the establishment of the State of Israel as a consideration in a halakhic question, is this merely a dark aspect in the lack of fealty to the truth?⁹ This last case is extremely frightening because it means that we are facing not only expurgated histories, but also expurgated Halakhah.

Dr. Soloveitchik clearly knows all this, and clearly wishes to avoid needless controversy. After all, to describe someone or some group as having engaged in censorship is to accuse them of doing so. But R. Shimon Schwab has argued that there is no controversy here. He is of the opinion that such censorship is a necessary aspect of the transmission of the tradition, and therefore the usual negative value judgments associated with the word "censorship" do not apply. R. Schwab's position is that in this situation censorship is not objection-

able, it is even laudable; furthermore, it is not just laudable, it is the only legitimate option. R. Schwab's view has left the innocent paradigms of "crime does not pay" and "honesty is the best policy" far behind. He has given us an articulated ideology of distortive hagiographies:

There is a vast difference between history and storytelling. History must be truthful, otherwise it does not deserve its name. A book of history must report the bad with the good, the ugly with the beautiful, the difficulties and the victories, the guilt and the virtue. Since it is supposed to be truthful, it cannot spare the righteous if he fails, and it cannot skip the virtues of the villain. For such is truth, all is told the way it happened. Only a *navi* mandated by his Divine calling has the ability to report history as it really happened, unbiased and without prejudice.

Suppose one of us today would want to write a history of Orthodox Jewish life in pre-holocaust Germany. There is much to report but not everything is complimentary. Not all the important people were flawless as one would like to believe and not all the mores and lifestyles of this bygone generation were beyond criticism. An historian has no right to take sides. He must report the stark truth and nothing but the truth. Now, if an historian would report truthfully what he witnessed, it would make a lot of people rightfully angry. He would violate the prohibition against spreading Loshon Horah which does not only apply to the living, but also to those who sleep in the dust and cannot defend themselves anymore.

What ethical purpose is served by preserving a realistic historical picture? Nothing but the satisfaction of curiosity. We should tell ourselves and our children the good memories of the good people, their unshakeable faith, their staunch defense of tradition, their life of truth, their impeccable honesty, their boundless charity and their great reverence for Torah and Torah sages. What is gained by pointing out their inadequacies and their contradictions? We want to be inspired by their example and learn from their experience.

When Noah became intoxicated, his two sons Shem and Japhet took a blanket and walked into his tent backwards to cover the nakedness of their father. Their desire was to always remember their father as the *Tzaddik Torum* in spite of his momentary weakness. Rather than write the history of our forebearers, every generation has to put a veil over the human failings of its elders and glorify all the rest which is great and beautiful. That means we have to do without a real history book. We can do without. We do not

need realism, we need *inspiration* from our forefathers in order to pass it on to posterity.¹⁰

I am certain that after R. Schwab's words are carried out, by those who agree with him, to their full conclusion, there will be no restraint of any sort in these matters, even if R. Schwab contemplated or insisted upon such restraint such as deletions from the historical record only, in the spirit of *shev ve-al ta'aseh*. A positive distortion, even for the sake of Heaven, would unquestionably earn the censure of Ps. 101:7 as interpreted in *Sanhedrin* 102b.¹¹ The specific context of R. Schwab's remarks allows that he only meant deletions. R. Jacob J. Schacter also interprets R. Schwab's remarks in this manner.¹² Even if one were to grant legitimacy to deletions in the spirit of R. Schwab's remarks, the problem is that deletions are not guaranteed to remain just that; the context in which they occur might easily render them genuine distortions. In the three deletions presented earlier, only the first is a deletion in the spirit of R. Schwab's remarks.¹³ After all is said, R. Schwab's views remain simply incredible.

4. My own theoretical construct, the result of impressions over the years and recent discussions generated by Dr. Soloveitchik's article, is the following:

(a) Within the "book side" of the book-vs.-mimetic dichotomy, there are roughly two choices. The first is the unflinching return to the primary texts of the Talmud and *Rishonim* in the tradition of the Gaon of Vilna (Gra), which is an open potentially revolutionary movement. It throws open to new examination, in light of primary sources, all laws and customs currently accepted without thought. It is even interested in the precise recovery of the original texts, whether or not the Gra's methodology in textual readings is considered critical by today's standards. And it opened up the entire Tanaitic and Amoraic corpus (e.g., the *Midreshet Halakhot* and the *Talmud Yerushalmi*) to new study. The establishment of a precise text of the Talmud and the new study of the broader talmudic corpus are not necessarily directed to practice, but might ultimately have some influence over it. In practice, new analysis might not, on new grounds, overturn an *issur* which had spread throughout the entire community for generations. But for a broad category of customs, and for new questions, the chips will fall wherever they may. There is no a priori social program, nor an a priori bias either to *kula* or *humrah*. As such, it infuses a new intellectual cutting edge of Talmud study into the very fabric of religious daily life. The second choice in the "book side" of the dichotomy is its return to the authority of books as an instrument of arch-conservative practice and culture. Here there is

definitely a conscious social program, with all the a priori biases and inclinations which come with it.

(b) The "return to the books" in the tradition of the Gra has at least a vision of how "the books" are to influence observance. But, by its very nature, the mimetic religiosity has no ideology nor accompanying polemic. The integrity of mimetic religiosity, its only polemic when it is attacked as inadequate, lies in the very quality of the social religious life it leads. This quality either speaks for itself and carries the day, or it fails. One might wish to say (as is fashionable these days) that it is focused on the bottom line, but my point is that the "bottom" line is the *only* line. Therefore, once it is challenged and forced into debate to hold its own, it is almost doomed from the outset. Similarly, it has no conscious directed program to produce the educators of the next generation. They are expected to emerge, naturally, from the very fabric and nature of a complete mimetic society. But the existence of the complete mimetic society presupposes a certain stability, and that crucial stability has been steadily undermined since the Enlightenment.

(c) Book-based ideological programs are naturally attracted to higher educational institutions, as the receptivity of these institutions to such initiatives, and the benefits of the inroads into these institutions in terms of structure, leadership, authority, and concentrated audience, are sufficiently clear. This is especially valid when, in contrast to hasidic courts, they are the only visible overarching structures of religious leadership in a society where such leadership is exclusively dependent on higher learning. Thus, it is not surprising that the ideologically conservative have been fighting for the heart and soul of the yeshivot for approximately one hundred years.

This theoretical construct was realized as follows. The initiation of the book side of the dichotomy began with the Gra, with his open choice of books as an instrument for a fresh renewal of the tradition. Only some aspects of his program succeeded in the world of study of the yeshivot. Interest in establishing precise versions of the texts and interest in the full range of Tanaitic and Amoraic literature, though, never played a significant role in the yeshivot, save for certain individuals, the most prominent of whom was the Neziv. Nonetheless, the creativity of the yeshivot in the new study was quite real, albeit in other areas. One might ask to what extent the original intellectual level and creative cutting edge is being currently sustained, or is, for that matter, sustainable in principle. More important, what is the relation, if any, of the post-World War II creative level in the yeshivot to the phenomenon discussed by Dr. Soloveitchik. In practical matters, the Gra's open tradition in book learning has been maintained by a

school of *posekim* to our day, as mentioned by Dr. Soloveitchik. But the great irony is that the original movement of the Gra back to the exclusive authority of primary texts was taken over by the ideologically conservative wing of the haredi world.¹⁴ This wing had been fighting for its exclusive authority as part of its battle with the ill winds of change since the mid-nineteenth century. It did not co-opt the potential return to the books from the outset. Indeed, Dr. Soloveitchik's description of the shift of view from '*Arukh ba-Shulhan* to *Mishnah Berurah*' indicates only an intuitive shift in daily practice. But, starting from the end of World War II, with all that the destruction of Eastern European Jewry implied and with increasing common cause with the hasidic movement, the conservative ideological view of book-based religiosity increasingly dominated the haredi world to the point that it is now almost complete. One might say that, at least since World War II, the yeshivot have essentially ceased to be academic institutions and became institutions in the service and shaping of society (see p. 88ff), parallel to precisely the sort of change that American universities are going through in the last few decades. The successful inroads in the mimetic Modern Orthodox society have occurred more recently. But that success was based primarily on the haredim having totally adopted the world of book based religiosity and having fielded an army of educators in the mimetic non-haredi schools in the United States and in Israel, and on the crisis of Western civilization in general, as realized in the last decade.

Haredi Judaism is very comfortable with and is very much a part of the current cultural landscape. This landscape is characterized by a performance oriented culture, whether technology or economics, cheerfully uninterested in the conceptualizations, whether of science or capitalism (with all that these two notions imply), which ultimately produce the user friendly tools by which we live. The current cultural climate prefers practice to theory, and ideology to ideas. The universities, once feared for their free philosophical inquiry and heretical views, are tame prep schools for the professions, commerce, and technologies.¹⁵ The cultural landscape also features a loss of belief in the humanistic message of Western, European civilization. Strident ideological critiques of European civilization have emanated from a variety of quarters, whether they be, *le-bavdil*, politically correct deconstruction on the left, extreme conservatism on the right, Afro-American separatism, or Christian and Muslim fundamentalism, to name some obvious examples. The haredi battle with European civilization is over a hundred fifty years old, and they have "kept the faith" all this time. For reasons not directly related to their efforts, their time has come and they are well-prepared to make the most of

it. Thus, observant Judaism, as practiced and preached by the *haredim*, has not functioned in a more supportive general cultural environment since before the Enlightenment. Whether the *haredi* culture will survive the next cultural sea change, when the pendulum will swing in a new direction, remains to be seen. Considering the pace of cultural change of the last fifty years, the challenge will not be far down the road.

The failure of mimetic religiosity lies in the fact that it remains just that, purely mimetic, that it does not produce excellence with programmatic purpose, to continue for another day in a new place. It produces excellence, but excellence for its own sake. The failure of Modern Orthodoxy to claim and hold a non-*haredi* vision of its own, lies in the fact that it did not succeed in the positive work of *bover*,¹⁶ of articulating what exactly is worthwhile in humanistic Western civilization on its own terms, and what of that culture can contribute to our life of the commandments and the service of God.

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The religious core of the phenomenon discussed by Dr. Soloveitchik was intuited, if not fully anticipated with all its social ramifications, by R. Shmuel of Kelme (1797–1868) at least one hundred twenty-five years ago. He was quoted by his son-in-law as follows:

My father, may his memory be blessed, was not from those who [only] ate *yashan*, nor did he [only] eat *mazah shenurab*, and he also walked in polished shoes. And I am from those who restrict themselves to *yashan*, who [only] eat *shenurab*, and I do not walk in polished shoes. And those who follow me might add even more cautionary restrictions than I did. But, in the same way that it is known that I do not compare to my father z"l even as vinegar to wine, so it is possible that those who follow me will not fear Heaven more than I do. And the cause of the matter is as follows . . . my father, may his memory be blessed, whose fear of and trembling from God was as a burning flame, and his piety was exceedingly great, did not need to inspire his fear, and therefore he found it proper not to engage in excessive piety. But we, who do not have the inner flame as he did, may we achieve our goal to be inspired in the fear of God via [accepting upon ourselves] many cautionary restrictions.¹⁷

One hundred twenty-five years ago, a Lithuanian *talmid hakham*, one of the few who lived in accordance with the halakhic practices of the Gaon of Vilna,¹⁸ found in his less accomplished, albeit educat-

ed, father the inner flame of the fear of Heaven and great piety. Because his own external halakhic practice seemed more stringent than that of his father, he felt compelled to justify himself. Today's Orthodox society has no such compulsion, nor do its halakhic practitioners.¹⁹ Very much a part of the contemporary society of the West, Orthodox society no longer sees the family as the embodiment of the standards of moral and religious values, its halakhic emphasis on *kibud av ve-em* notwithstanding. It sees the institutions of higher learning and their leaders (the *rashei yeshivot*), and the halakhic handbooks which summarize the current consensus, as the arbiters of these values and as the social instruments of inculcating them into Orthodox society. It no longer takes its inspiration from the living people of everyday life. Rather, it finds its inspiration in Orthodox ideology, and in idealized hagiographies intended to serve the ideological trends of the current moment. After having occupied a central position in rabbinic Judaism since, at least, R. Bahya b. Pakuda's *Hovot ha-Levavot* (ca. 1100), the "inner flame", though surely claimed to be burning brightly as never before, seems to have become essentially irrelevant.



I always learn from Hayim Soloveitchik far more than I imagine I will at the outset. For he not only gives us his own understanding; he always enables us to go so much further for ourselves, having set us on the right path along which to continue.

Notes

1. See H. Soloveitchik, "Rupture and Reconstruction: The Transformation of Contemporary Orthodoxy," *Tradition* 28:4 (1994), pp. 64-130.
2. The mimetic religious life was such that, for example, *kashrut* was learned in the mother's kitchen, and prayer in the father's synagogue.
3. See his introduction to the endnotes.
4. It is worth noting that attacks on mimetic religiosity, under the rubric *mizvat anashim melumadab* (Is. 29:13), has a venerable history. Here we are speaking of this critique as directed toward a change of religious leadership, from local communal rabbinates to centralized leadership in the yeshivot.
5. I have, unfairly, telescoped my varied experiences at these yeshivot into one composite. Also, I did not include the year 1960-1961 that I spent in the Ramallis Yeshiva Nezah Yisra'el in Brooklyn for two reasons: (i) The yeshiva was not a yeshiva institution in the sense that the others were. It was more of a small *bet midrash* under the direction of the R. Israel Gusman, and had none of the apparatus that characterized the large yeshivot; (ii) Even had it been like the others (indeed, its size grew considerably when the yeshiva moved to Israel), R. Gusman's piety and learning were more reflective of the East European religiosity centered

- on personal piety, learning, and *pesuké* in the Lithuanian tradition, rather than characterized by public leadership in pan-communal organizational frameworks such as those found in other yeshivot.
6. Dr. Soloveitchik's remarks on how people view reality through prisms intended to achieve a view of their universe consistent with their own interests (high) as well as low) might apply as well to primitive tribes or in violent groups founded on racial hatred. Clearly, these are the extreme cases, and they obviously should not serve as a model for our discussion; but Dr. Soloveitchik's discussion fails to clearly distinguish the Israeli case from the general anthropological phenomenon.
 7. See M. Peckarz, *Hassidut Polin* (Jerusalem, 1990), Chapter 13; E. Schweid, *Ben Hurban Li-shu'ah* (Tel Aviv, 1994), Chapter 4.
 8. See *Perushet ha-Torah le-Rabi Yehudah ha-Hasid*, ed. E.S. Lange (Jerusalem, 1975).
 9. See R. Shlomo Yosef Zevin, *Mo'adim ha-Halakkah* (Tel Aviv, 1949), 371; *The Festivals in Halakbab 2* (New York, 1981), 294.
 10. R. Shimon Schwab, *Selected Writings* (Lakewood, 1988), 232–34; also quoted in Jacob J. Schacter, "Haskalah, Secular Studies and the Close of the Yeshiva in Volozhin in 1892", *The Torah u-Madda Journal*, 2(1990): 111.
 11. The Talmud there comments on the debate between Micah b. Yimlah and four hundred prophets as to whether Ahab should go to battle to capture Ramot Gilead (I Kings 22:2–40). The spirit in the Heavenly Court which offered to be a false spirit for the four hundred prophets (v. 21) was that of Navot ha-Yizre'eli. God responds "go, and do so!". The Talmud explains that "go" does not mean to go forth to carry out the mission (that is presumably included in the statement "and do so"). Rather, it means "you are banished from before Me (*zei mi-mohl zati*): 'the teller of lies cannot stand before me' (Psalms 101:7)".
 12. J. Schacter, p. 111f.
 13. For another example of deletion-turned-distortion, see J. Schacter, p. 113, n. 5.
 14. I missed this point on my two readings of the article; a friend pointed it out to me.
 15. To be sure, the universities still offer hedonistic temptation and social acculturation.
 16. In the spirit of *naphub*, *Arot* 5:15. Among the four types of students sitting before the wise, *naphub* is the sieve, the student who collects the finest flour and leaves behind all the rest.
 17. Aryeh Leib Fromkin, *Sefer Toledot Eliyahu* (Vilna, 1900), 7; also quoted in Immanuel Etkes, *Itta bi-Yerushalayim* (Jerusalem, 1991), 27–28.
 18. A.L. Fromkin, pp. 70–71; I. Etkes, p. 27; H. Soloveitchik, p. 111, n. 20(c).
 19. H. Soloveitchik, p. 112 n. 22.