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**Community, Covenant and Commitment:
Contemporary Problems in Light of the Writings of
Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik**

This article relates contemporary issues, with a focus on Israeli society, at the intersection of Halakhah, *machshava*, and public policy, to the published letters and articles of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. The topics include: relations with non-Orthodox and non-Jewish religious organizations, the role of the Chief Rabbinate in the State of Israel, adoption of foundlings, Talmud study for women, and the nature of “spirituality” in Judaism.

I. Introduction

Community, Covenant and Commitment is the title of a book¹ of letters on public policy and communal halakhic decisions written by the Rav, as Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik was known to his students.² This paper points out how the Rav’s

1 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Community, Covenant and Commitment: Letters and Manuscripts of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, ed. Nathaniel Helfgot (Ktav Publishing, 2002).

2 The Rav, *z”tl*, was Rosh Hayeshiva of Yeshivat Rabeinu Yitzchak Elchanan, affiliated with Yeshiva University, and the spiritual and halakhic leader of the Rabbinical Council of America, many of whose members received ordination from him. He was born in 1903, in Poland, to Rabbi Moshe and Pesia (née Feinstein), and was the grandson of Rav Haim Soloveitchik, widely known as Reb Chaim Brisker who was on the faculty of the Volozhin Yeshiva before moving to Brisk (Brest-Litovsky, Lithuania). With his father, the Rav studied and developed novel approaches to elucidate halakhic concepts in a wide range of talmudic *sugyot*. In 1932, a year after marrying Tonya Lewit, who died in 1967, he received a Ph.D. degree from the University of Berlin for his thesis on philosophy and metaphysics. In that same year, he and his family emigrated to the United States and led the Rabbinical Organization of Boston, where, together with his wife, he also founded the first Jewish day school in New England. On his father’s death in 1941, the Rav took his place as Rosh Yeshiva at Yeshivat Rabeinu Yitzchak Elchanan, which led to his communal and intellectual leadership at the national level. Some two thousand rabbis received their ordination from him, and he was the author of definitive works on Halakhah and Jewish thought. He passed away in 1993. Eulogies were published in the volume *Man of Halacha, Man of Faith*, ed. R. Menachem Genack (Ktav Publishers, 1998), with an review-essay written by S.A. Safran in *Journal of Torah and Scholarship (B.D.D.)*, 9 (1999): 99.

B.D.D. 22, December 2009

approach to halakhically related “public policy” may shed light on contemporary issues that are relevant to both the Orthodox and the general Jewish community in Israel. The contemporary religious scene in Israel is not, of course, one in which the Rav’s thought has had a major, direct influence. However, new opportunities continue to present themselves. Compared with the small number of volumes and articles published by the Rav himself, various individuals and groups are now active in publishing his ideas – sometimes in primary form, sometimes in secondary form; the Rav’s learning and thought may now reach a wider public than ever before. These publications will disseminate more information, and may increase the *kavod* paid to the Rav. However, what is less clear is whether all this will increase – to use a term that he employed – the *koved* (weight or influence) of the Rav’s teachings on contemporary religious society in Israel.³ Personal *kavod*, as the Rav taught us, should never be a goal, while *koved* proves that one’s efforts have not been in vain.

This article presents, in the Rav’s own words where possible, some of his ideas and pronouncements related to issues at the intersection of Halakhah, *machshava*, and public policy. Particular emphasis is placed on issues that, while raised over fifty years ago, are still relevant, particularly to religious society in Israel. Indeed, the Rav’s influence was much greater in the United States, where he lived, and one should not expect Israeli religious and communal leaders to be bound to or even aware of his teachings. This paper, therefore, does not discuss the Rav’s influence at the broad, sociological level in a practical or historical sense. Instead, it focuses on the question in a more philosophical vein, and asks: To what extent are contemporary religious mores consistent with his ideas and values? While it is true that times have changed, much can be learned from the methodology that the Rav used to reach his decisions. Despite the fact that many of his decisions, guidelines, and insights may still be relevant, it is up to the readers to draw their own conclusions regarding the applicability of the Rav’s teachings to specific contemporary issues.

The Rav was aware that not all his students absorbed or resonated with his philosophical teachings; some of his remarks on this are summarized in the next section. This may be one reason that public policy approaches by current religious leaders often seem not to echo the Rav’s hashkafic or halakhic voice. Specific issues dealt with by the Rav (many of which can be found in note 1) are then

3 There are several exceptions of course, the most notable of which is Yeshivat Har Etzion, under the leadership of the Rav’s son-in-law and student, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein.

discussed – in a philosophical rather than a practical manner – and related to contemporary problems within the religious community: the relation of the Orthodox religious community to the “religious other” (be they Jewish or Gentile), the role of the Chief Rabbinate in Israel, the adoption of foundlings in the United States, women’s Talmud studies, and spirituality and its role in halakhic Judaism. Other letters in note 1 deal with public issues such as a voluntary draft of rabbinical students at Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan of Yeshiva University to serve as chaplains in the American army during the height of the Korean War, interfaith chapels at universities, a new curriculum for training rabbis, the incorporation of humane methods for animal handling during *shechita*, and Orthodox participation in a translation of the Bible that included representatives from other streams of Judaism. In addition, there are also several letters that deal with philosophical topics from a more personal perspective, including a poignant description⁴ of how the Rav’s “world collapsed” after his wife’s death.

II. The Rav’s Influence: Success and Failures

The Rav was fascinated by the talmudic dictum in tractate Megilah 19a: מגילה נקראת ספר ונקראת איגרת and explained the idea⁵ behind this dual classification: the *megilah* is a historical account of events that happened long ago (איגרת), but at the same time it is a timeless book, with a message for every generation (ספר). The published letters in the volume reviewed here, as well as stories⁶ about the Rav, function in a similar, dual role: they provide historical insight, as well as a message that has a more generic and lasting meaning.

To put into perspective those issues where the Rav felt that his influence was lacking, it is important to point out those areas in which his innovative powers were appreciated. In an article⁷ that focuses on the Rav’s originality, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein states:

Any objective description of the Rav as a *gadol* in the world of “learning” begins perforce by referring to his place within the Brisker tradition – begins,

4 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, see n. 1 above, p. 228.

5 Arnold Lustiger, *Derashot Harav: Selected Lectures of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Ohr Publishing, 2003), p. 161.

6 See, for example, Rabbi Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Ktav Publishers, 1999); Rabbi Herschel Shachter, *Nefesh Harav* (Jerusalem: Reshit, 1994); Rabbi Menachem D. Genack (ed.), *Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik: Man of Halacha, Man of Faith* (Ktav Publishers, 1998).

7 Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, “The Rav at Jubilee: An Appreciation,” published in *Man of Halacha, Man of Faith*, ed. R. Menachem Genack (Ktav Publishers, 1998), pp. 48-51.

that is, by positing that in this sphere, he has not so much innovated a course as pursued one....

This is, of course, stated without the slightest trace of deprecation. By definition, genuine methodological innovation in any field is unusual – all the more so in the Torah world, so oriented to *mesorah*.... Moreover, excessively frequent sharp methodological shifts, are, from an overall perspective, not only unlikely but undesirable....

If the Rav did not found a tradition, he certainly proved himself ... a remarkable *me-chadesh*.... At its most electric, however, it enlarged the bounds of the halachic empire by enriching its lexicon with fresh concepts. Ideas such as the *safek of tarti de-satri* – doubt resulting from unresolved tension of conflicting elements rather than lack of knowledge – or of *mitzvot* whose *kiyuum* is inwardly experiential, although their implementation entails a normatively mandated physical act, may perhaps be retrospectively traced to some inchoate precedents. Unquestionably, however, as developed concepts, they bear the Rav's stamp and it was he who implanted them within the Torah world.

And yet, at bottom, the Rav's achievement in the realm of halacha, remarkable as it was, bore fruit within a familiar field, one Reb Hayim had tilled and sown.... The situation is quite different with respect to the sphere of *machshava*. The areas of experience explored, the mode and level of inquiry, the resources employed, the problems formulated, above all, the ideas and emotions expressed – these indeed, constitute, conjunctively a new departure.... None, however, even remotely approached the range and depth, the subtlety and complexity of his *machshava*. And it was truly his – neither an extension nor an expansion of an existing defined tradition, but genuine innovation.

Rav Lichtenstein goes on to outline the Rav's particular contribution at the interface of Halakhah and *machshava* – a philosophy of Halakhah, and his view of *taamei-hamitzvot* that focuses on the **what** rather than the **why**. In other words, the Rav felt that asking about the motivation of the Creator was meaningless – He needs nothing and is affected by nothing. However, asking what the performance of a *mitzvah* means to an individual – what mood, feelings, and actions it inspires – is not only desirable, but essential if one's religious experience is to be complete.

However, the Rav himself was aware of his limitations, and, in a lecture on Jewish Education in 1975, he said:⁸

I am not modest; I am far from being modest. I know that I am a good teacher. I can teach halacha. I can explain the most abstract concepts. I can popularize the most complex talmudic debate and break it down into its component parts. I can explain and elucidate abstract ideas.

...I used to study with my students the halachot pertaining to the Yomim Noraim. From time to time I would reach out for the aggadah or for philosophical ideas.... If necessary, I would also introduce a modern idiom.... All these tricks I know.

But one trick I have not mastered. One thing I cannot do to perfection is to tell my students how I felt on Rosh Hashanah and Yom ha-Kippurim when I was their age. The emotions I experienced and not what I knew about it.... How I lived it.... I can tell them about it but I cannot pass on my experiences to them!

In a talk⁹ to the faculty of the Yeshiva University School of Social Work in 1974, he elaborated on this theme and pointed out specific deficiencies of his followers. One might ask whether Jewish life would have been different in the United States or even in Israel had the Rav been more successful. For example, I surmise that had the Rav's hashkafic teachings been more widely studied and internalized, some Jewish leaders might have reacted differently to various events; for example, public statements that directly correlate tragic events, sometimes of enormous magnitude, to lapses in observance, would not have been made. In the 1974 lecture,¹⁰ the Rav decries the immaturity of some religious individuals:

When it comes to the transmission and passing of experiences I feel so inadequate. Sometimes it drives me to despair. It is very hard. I will tell you frankly, the American *ben torah* or good yeshiva student has achieved great heights on the intellectual level. However, experientially he is simply immature. ... They act like children and experience religion like children. As a result, Jewish youth is inclined and very disposed to accept extremist views. They do this to such an extent that my own students examine my *zizit* to see whether they are long enough! The youth is extremely pious, but

8 Rabbi Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Ktav Publishers, 1999), Vol. 2, p. 177.

9 Ibid, p. 238.

10 Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, n. 7 above, pp. 48-51.

also very inconsiderate.... Why? Because they have no experience.... This is why they accept all types of fanaticism and superstition. Sometimes, they are even ready to do things which border on the immoral. They lack the experiential component of religion and simply substitute obscurantism [supposition to enlightenment or the spread of knowledge or to make something obscure] for it. I have never seen such obscurantism as I see among some of my students today. After all, I come from the ghetto. Yet I have never seen so much naive and uncritical commitment to people and ideas as I see in America.

I am very helpless in this regard. How can I convey experiences to my students?

My students are my products as far as *lomdus* is concerned [the Rav gave *smicha* to 2000 rabbis and taught countless others both in his *shiurim* in New York and in Boston].... However, somehow there is a reservation in their minds regarding my philosophical viewpoint.... My ideas are too radical for them.... All extremism, fanaticism and obscurantism come from a lack of security. A person who is secure cannot be an extremist. He uses his mind and his heart in a normal fashion. I am not so interested in finding the cause of this problem but rather its therapy.... How can we change it? I do not know.

The biographical volume by Rabbi A. Rakeffet-Rothkoff¹² relates a story in the name of Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein: “In a moment of striking candor, when my colleague Rav Yehuda Amital [¹³co-Rosh Yeshiva at Har Etzion] first visited these shores [USA] ... the Rav commented to him: ‘You know, I have devoted *talmidim*.... If I were to announce a *shiur* at two o’clock in the morning, they would come en bloc. And yet, deep in their hearts, they think I’m an apikorus.’”

One area in which the Rav may indeed have had more influence after his death than during his lifetime, is the flux of his halakhic teachings (*lomdut*) into the yeshiva world. While it is true that many members of various *haredi* streams of Judaism attended his public *shiurim* (especially those held in the Rav’s literary and flowing Yiddish), some recent publications may amplify his mark on this large segment of the Orthodox world. Interestingly, a very popular volume of notes on the Rav’s discussions of the *halakhot* of the *chagim*, published by Rabbi

11 The insertions in brackets are my own explanations or comments.

12 Rabbi Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, n. 8 above, Vol. 2, p. 241.

13 The insertions in brackets are my own explanations or comments.

14 Rabbi M. Shirkin, *Harrei Kedem* (Jerusalem, 2000).

M. Shirkin,¹⁴ refers to him as the Chief Rabbi of Boston, but does not mention his role as the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan. The volumes, *Nefesh Harav* and *Me-Peninei Harav*,¹⁵ published by Rabbi Herschel Schechter, a close *talmid* of the Rav and today the head of the *kollel* at Yeshiva University, is very different in its Hebrew style from the literary and philosophical writings of the Rav. Perhaps the “yeshivish” mode of writing will attract a wider audience. It would be ironic if, after so many years, the Rav’s halakhic *chidushim*, if not his *machshava*, were to permeate the yeshiva world more thoroughly than the centrist Orthodoxy with which the Rav was identified.

III. Relationships with the “Religious Other”

While the Rav had good relationships with a variety of Jewish leaders, including those from the yeshiva world¹⁶ as well as some from non-Orthodox streams, he was adamant in the United States of the 1940s and ’50s when it came to not compromising Halakhah, as evidenced by his strong stand against synagogues with mixed pews.¹⁷ He felt that the separation of the sexes was a *halakha d’oraita*, based on the injunction not to worship in the manner of non-Jews, and the statement in the Torah “לא יראה בכ ערות דבר.” He stated that the innovation of **not** separating the sexes during prayer was one of the reforms of early Christianity, and that this was therefore tantamount to “Christianization of our ritual.” On the other hand, the requirement of a physical barrier, a *mechitza*, was *d’rabbanan*, as a fence around the Torah. He told someone who was able to only attend a synagogue with mixed seating that “it was better for him to pray at home both Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and not cross the threshold of that synagogue,” including forgoing the *mitzvah* of hearing the *shofar*.

On one particular occasion, the Rav was put in a difficult personal position because of his strong stand on this issue. It is of current interest to see how he dealt with this, since the interface between the Orthodox and non-Orthodox streams in Israel has not only religious, but also political ramifications. Perhaps these tensions could be reduced if contemporary leaders of the Orthodox establishment in Israel were to deal with these issues as openly but as sensitively as did the Rav, as

15 Rabbi Zvi Schachter, *Nefesh HaRav* (Jerusalem: Reshit, 5744/1994), *Me-Penineh HaRav* (Brooklyn: Flatbush Beth Hamedrosh, 2001).

16 Rabbi Dr. Bernard Rosenberg, in *Memories of a Giant*, ed. M.A. Bierman (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2003), p. 273; Rabbi Zvi Schachter, *Me-Penineh HaRav* (Brooklyn: Flatbush Beth Hamedrosh, 2001), pp. 11-17.

17 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, see n. 1 above, pp. 125-42.

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evidenced in the following story.

Rabbi Joseph Shubow who served as rabbi of a Conservative synagogue in Brighton, MA, was a close friend of the Rav. The Rav was invited to serve as an honorary sponsor of a testimonial dinner in honor of Rabbi and Mrs. Shubow that also marked the dedication of the new Temple building. The Rav wrote in a letter¹⁸ to the president of the synagogue:

Frankly speaking, I was faced with a very unpleasant situation.... I cherish my long association with Rabbi Shubow [Note that he called him Rabbi] and I consider him a dear and distinguished friend whom I hold in great esteem because of his many talents and fine qualities. It is evident that if the dinner were being given only in honor of Rabbi and Mrs. Shubow, I would consider it a privilege to serve as one of the sponsors. [Note he did not say that he would attend; this might have depended on whether or not the dinner was held in the temple.]

On the other hand, however, this reception, to my regret, will also serve as an occasion to celebrate the completion and dedication of the new temple. Let me say unequivocally that I do recognize the importance of this new house of worship for the Jewish population of Brighton as a means of communal organization and unification. [Note he did not say for prayer or *mik-dash me-at* since the Rav disqualified such temples on those grounds.]... Yet, all this does not justify my serving as a sponsor of a dinner at which the dedication of this temple will be celebrated since the latter will, in all probability, have a mixed seating arrangement which is in my opinion not in consonance with our time-honored Law. The requirement for separate pews is almost a truism in our religious code and I have neither the right nor the desire to sanction either by word or by silence a departure from this tradition.... I arrived at the unavoidable conclusion that my role in connection with this affair would prove to be absurd, and so I respectfully decline.

I wish to impress upon you that my words are not to be interpreted in the sense of criticism or censure.... I have never tried to convert others who are committed to a different philosophy to my viewpoint....

In a series of articles in the Yiddish press of 1954, the Rav outlined¹⁹ parameters for interactions between Orthodox and non-Orthodox organizations. These were

18 Soloveitchik, *ibid.*, p. 125.

19 Soloveitchik, *ibid.*, p. 143.

of great practical importance in decisions of the Rabbinical Council of America (the Rabbinical body of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations) in deciding when and how to participate in various interdenominational councils:

First, unity in Israel is a basic principle in Judaism. We have formulated this principle in one sentence: *ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ*.... First, the unity of Jews as members of a spiritual community ... established through the conclusion of the covenant at Mt. Sinai: *ממלכת כהנים וגוי קדוש* What ties the Yemenite water carrier [this was 1954] in the streets of Tel Aviv to the Jews of Boston? A uniform Orach Hayim, the Shema Yisrael, Shabbat, Kol Nidrei night, the Seder night, kashrut, tefillin, the characteristic trait of kindness, the hope and yearning for redemption The Hebrew word *edah*, congregation, is the same as *ed*, witness and *edut* testimony.... It therefore goes without saying that the Jew who erases from his memory this great testimony and destroys the unique collective tradition, breaks the tie which joins him with the Jewish community ... as part of a spiritual Torah entity. Second, unity manifests itself also in our unique political-historical lot as a nation.... No Jew can renounce his part of the unity, which is based upon a fate of loneliness of the Jewish people as a nation ... all are included in one nation, which stands lonesome and in misery in a large and often antagonistic world: *ואני אקה אתכם לי לעם והייתי לכם לא-לקים (שמות 7;6)*. The Hebrew word *am*, nation, is identical to the Hebrew word, *im*, with. Our fate of unity manifests itself through a historical indispensable nation.

The conclusion above is very simple. When we are faced with a problem for Jews and Jewish interests toward the world without, ... then all groups and movements must be united. In this area, there may not be any division, because any friction in the Jewish camp may be disastrous for the entire people.... In the crematoria, the ashes of the *hasidim* and the pious Jews were put together with the ashes of the radicals and the atheists.

With regard to our problem within, however, – our spiritual-religious interests such as Jewish education, synagogues, councils of rabbis ... it is my opinion that Orthodoxy cannot and should not unite with such groups which deny the fundamentals of our *weltanschauung* [world-view].... A rabbinical organization is not a professional fraternity, which fights for the economic interests of the rabbi. It is an ideological entity where members work for one purpose and one ideal.... Has Jewish history ever recorded an instance of a joint community council or a joint rabbinical council which consisted of Karaites and Torah-true Jews?... Too much harmony and peace [The Rav

here is referring to problems relating to the concept of *edah*] ... will erase outwardly the boundaries between the Orthodox and other movements.

Note that the Rav deals with the dialectic, in the true Brisker fashion of two *halakhot* (*tsvei dinim*). In his own philosophical terms, his logic is not single valued, but rather multi-valued.²⁰ Both the positive and negative aspects of unity are explored and delineated. While, in Israel, there is perforce cooperation between religious and non-religious factions on various national issues (depending on ideology), it is much more rare to hear the echoes of the Rav's analysis and his recognition of the Jewishness of those who identify or were identified historically with the Jewish people, despite their lack of observance.

The principles outlined here were put to the test when it was proposed that the Rabbinical Council of America, whose Halakhah commission was chaired by the Rav, Rabbi Samuel Belkin, and Rabbi Hayyim Heller, be asked to rule on continued participation by the Council in the Synagogue Council of America, which included non-Orthodox representatives. Another rabbinical organization in Brooklyn issued a prohibition, signed by very prominent Orthodox rabbinical leaders and scholars, forbidding membership by Orthodox groups. The Rav did not join the prohibition, but neither did he explicitly direct the RCA to continue its longstanding affiliation with the Synagogue Council. This had the effect of leaving the status quo in place. In a letter to a prominent Conservative rabbi, the Rav wrote: "However, I strongly disapprove of the method and the manner in which the whole problem has been handled, of the personal and political overtones, of the hysterical climate which has been created and of the unfairness displayed by certain individuals and groups."²¹

A directive that was similar in spirit to the Rav's guidelines for cooperation with non-Orthodox groups was formulated by the Rav with respect to cooperation with the Catholic Church in various interreligious councils. The Rav defined clear parameters for such a dialogue in a letter²² written to the Rabbinical Council of America in 1964:

The Jewish religious tradition expresses itself in a fusion of universalism and singularism. On the one hand, Jews are vitally concerned with the problems affecting the common destiny of man. We consider ourselves members of the universal community charged with the responsibility of promoting progress in all fields, economic, social, scientific and technical.

20 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "The Lonely Man of Faith," *Tradition*, 7 (1965): 2.

21 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, see n. 1 above, p. 155.

22 Soloveitchik, *ibid.*, p. 259.

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As such, we are opposed to a philosophy of isolationism or esotericism which would see the Jews living in a culturally closed society.

On the other hand, we are a distinctive faith community with a unique commitment, singular relationship to our God and a specific way of life. We must never confuse our role as bearers of a particular commitment and destiny with our role as members of the family of man. In the areas of universal concerns, we welcome an exchange of ideas and impressions. Communication among the various communities will greatly contribute towards mutual understanding and will enhance and deepen our knowledge of those universal aspects of man which are relevant to us all. [This seems to extend “*chochma ba-goyim taa-min*” – to general issues and not just technology.]

In the area of faith, religious law, doctrine and ritual.... Our love of and dedication to God are personal and bespeak an intimate relationship which must not be debated with others whose relationship to God has been molded by different historical events and in different terms.

We believe in and are committed to our Maker in a specific manner and we will not question, defend, offer apologetics, analyze or rationalize our faith in dialogues centered about these “private” topics.... We assume that members of other faith communities will feel similarly about their individual religious commitment.

In another context,²³ the Rav noted that each religious community is entitled to feel that its mode and belief is “correct”:

... The act of appraising the worth of one’s particular religious experience on the highest axiological [relating to the study of values] level constitutes the very essence of the transcendental performance.... The *homo religiosus* is convinced that his unique relationship with God is the noblest and finest.... The feeling of axiological equality of all faiths as a component of the individual religious experience is a *contradicto in objecto*. Religious tolerance asserts itself in the knowledge of the existence of a variety and plurality of God-experiences and in the recognition that each individual is entitled to evaluate his great unique performance as the most redeeming and uplifting one. Tolerance has never demanded of the religious personage to eliminate the sense of axiological certainty from his feelings. This is exactly the standpoint of the halacha which maintains that, while it is

23 Soloveitchik, *ibid.*, p. 21.

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forbidden to impose our faith upon others by force, it is our sacred duty to defend our convictions ... even at the expense of our very lives.

(The Rav used this reasoning to urge the Jewish community to ask for its share of foundlings in New York City, as discussed later on.)

The Rav delineated those areas that he deemed improper for dialogue: Judaic monotheism and the Christian idea of the Trinity; the Messianic idea in Judaism and Christianity; the Priest and the Rabbi; the Mass and the Jewish prayer service; and the Jewish attitude to Jesus.

We are ready to enter into dialogue on such topics as War and Peace, Poverty, Freedom, Man's Moral Values.... Civil Rights, which revolve about religious spiritual aspects of our civilization. Discussion within these areas will, of course, be within the framework of our religious outlooks and terminologies.... even our dialogue at a socio-humanitarian level must inevitably be grounded in universal religious categories and values. However, these categories and values, even though religious in nature and Biblical in origin represent the universal and public – not the individual and private – in religion.

From these letters we see that the Rav encouraged a positive attitude toward certain aspects of interdenominational and interreligious dialogue that deal, respectively, with the issues that affected all Jews and concerns that are universal for all peoples. He delineated the boundaries that separate the universal and the particular, or intimate, areas in which the observant Jew remains alone; however, the Rav did not feel that the possible dangers involved should negate all types of discussion and joint action. While there are some individuals in contemporary Orthodoxy who are active participants in dialogue with the “Other,” most religious polemics decry cooperation in a blanket manner, and do not seem to be aware of the guidelines that the Rav suggested.

IV. Chief Rabbinate of Israel

In 1959, Rabbi Herzog, Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of the State of Israel passed away. The three candidates considered to succeed him were Rav Unterman (then Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv), Rav Goren (then Chief Rabbi of the Israel Defense Forces) and the Rav. As one can imagine, there was much politicking – but that is outside the scope of this article. In addition, in 1959, the Rav underwent treatment for cancer. In February 1960, when he returned to active teaching, the Rav withdrew his

candidacy. He elaborated on this in two letters²⁴ – one to Mizrahi leader, Moshe Shapira, and the other to the Chief Rabbi of Petach Tikvah, Rav Katz; both men were strong supporters of his for the position of Chief Rabbi. The Rav's primary reason for withdrawing from the race was based on his conceptual understanding of the role of the Chief Rabbi, and his feeling that he would not be able to change it to his liking.

I hoped that I would be able to separate the technical-political side from the great spiritual work of spreading Torah and knowledge and thinking that I would be able to devote my time and energy to teaching, thinking and contemplation.... However, the recent events in relation to the Chief Rabbinate, the personal as well as party conflicts and clashes have shed new light on the situation.... Therefore, I am forced to concede that in the current climate, I am not appropriate for this position. I am a teacher (*me-lamed*) and my entire world revolves around the four cubits of halacha; I do not want to leave them even if they will give me Solomon's kingdom.

The Rav related a story about his grandfather, Rav Hayim of Brisk, who decided to help some children with their game, in which one child is the horse and the others are the riders. The child chosen to be the horse was crying, since this was not a role he wanted to play. So Reb Hayim volunteered to be the horse. In an interview to the *Yiddish Press* in 1960, the Rav related:

The simplicity and goodness of my grandfather never hurt him. On the contrary, the common people loved him more and more. His word was binding among the masses. The less "official" he was, the greater his influences.... I do not view the rabbinate as an institution and a rabbi as a symbol of that institution.... I hate formalities ... and I dislike formal ceremonies. [My ancestors] ... did not wear the typical rabbinic garb. They never allowed the congregation to wait for them to finish Shemoneh Esreh.... They never signed a document with the title Rabbi after their signature. I was concerned that if I accepted, my personality would be lost in an ocean of formalities, ceremonies, and administrative tasks. As a result, I would lose some of my freedom of thought, speech and action.... The rabbinate and political power [here he refers to the Ministry of Religion] are two different categories. The fact that in Israel, these two things are connected did not appeal to me.... Another thing that bothers me greatly is

24 Soloveitchik, *ibid.*, p. 173.

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the fact that the rabbis have no connection to Jewish educational institutions in Israel. Their opinion is not asked and they do not mix in. Occasionally, we read of a rabbi participating in the dedication of a new building or a graduation ceremony and delivering a *derasha*, but that is the limit of their influence....

I began to convince myself that I would be able to change many things.... I believed I would be able to free myself from an “institutional personality.” I thought that I would be able to retain my “I” (my own identity) and not become a “chief rabbi” with an image, secretaries, cantors and scribes.... [The Rav in the United States did not run an “operation”; he answered his own correspondence, opened the door to visitors, etc.²⁵] I intended to do away with all the ceremonies and formalities of that office. In my naiveté I dreamed that I would be able to democratize the entire rabbinical system in Israel. I would hire rabbis who would not only be active in practical rabbinical areas but who would also act as teachers for the nation [note he does not say only for the religiously committed] and reveal the beauty of Judaism to anyone willing to explore it ... the answer [here he refers to the answer to the question “What is Torah?”] must be given on a high intellectual level in terms understood by all, evoking respect.

One can contrast this vision of the Chief Rabbinate “evoking respect” with the current reality in the State of Israel. This is especially true when it comes to interactions with the non-religious population, especially in such sensitive areas as marriage and divorce. Apparently, the Rav’s pessimistic view of the Chief Rabbinate has not yet led to the changes that the Rav outlined.

The way the current voting system is set up underscores how the chief rabbinate is really a government agency, so it is childish and naive to think that the chief rabbi would be able to act independently. The way it stands now the chief rabbi cannot have any respect for himself, and cannot earn the respect of the rabbinic world.

[ואין כאן מה להאריך]

V. Halakhic Intuition and Analysis in Public Policy: Adoption of Foundlings

A letter written by the Rav in 1950, to the executive director of the American Jewish Congress, on the adoption of foundlings in New York City by Jewish agencies

25 Rabbi Mayer Twersky, “A Glimpse of the Rav,” in *Man of Halacha, Man of Faith*, ed. R. Menachem Genack (Ktav Publishers, 1998), p. 124.

demonstrates how the Rav combined rigorous halakhic thinking, intuition, and moral sensitivity in rendering public policy decisions. While the issue of foundlings itself is not particularly germane to contemporary Israeli society, it is interesting to analyze the approach of the Rav in reaching his decision, and to recall his remarks regarding conversion – a topic of great interest in Israel today. Up to 1950, all foundlings in New York City were dealt with by Catholic and Protestant adoption agencies. The Rav's response²⁶ urged the Jewish agencies to ask for their "share" of these adoptions.

The problem presented to me is charged with both halachic complexity and moral responsibility. On one hand, it touches upon the very foundations of the rules of evidence which are, in the halacha ... abstract and complicated and whose translations into a concrete situation is a very difficult undertaking. On the other hand, the problem affects the future of a helpless infant who, because of social injustice and prejudice, has been abandoned by his mother.

In another letter,²⁷ written in 1951 to the President of Yeshiva University in response to the question of whether the Rabbinical Council of America should draft its members to serve as chaplains in the U.S. army (during the Korean War) or leave this service to Conservative and Reform bodies, the Rav outlined his methodology:

The halakhic inquiry, like any other cognitive theoretical performance, does not start out from the point of absolute zero as to sentimental attitudes and value judgments. There always exists in the mind of the researcher an ethico-axiological [relating to values] background against which the contours of the subject matter in question stand out more clearly. In all fields of human intellectual endeavor there is always an intuitive approach which determines the course and method of the analysis.

In this matter, the Rav was prejudiced in favor of drafting the chaplains, and formulated a lengthy halakhic analysis that related to the possible halakhic violations (in particular, Shabbat observance), that might be required of the chaplains and their permissibility in light of *safek* and circumstances akin to *pikuach nefesh* or *onnes*. In addition, the vacuum created if the Orthodox were not to participate was also a very important factor in the Rav's positive endorsement of the draft of rabbis in the situation presented to him.

26 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, see n. 1 above, p. 11.

27 Soloveitchik, *ibid.*, p. 23.

To resolve the issues surrounding the adoption of foundlings, the Rav employed a similar approach, combining strict halakhic analysis with questions of values. The Rav then delineated four questions that this matter raises:

1. To what extent does the majority of the population determine the status of a foundling?
2. If the evidence based on majority is not conclusive, and there is thus an element of doubtful religious status, should there be a preference to those foundlings found in Jewish neighborhoods, even though the city is predominantly non-Jewish?
3. Is the conversion of a minor permissible? Due to the element of doubt, conversion will be necessary....
4. Is it worthwhile, from the viewpoint of halacha, to insist in the most articulate manner upon our legitimate rights as regards the distribution of foundlings ... when such demands may affect our relationship with certain non-Jewish groups in the community? (This question of public relations constitutes a very important halachic problem.)

To resolve the first three points, the Rav provided a lengthy halakhic analysis of (i) *bitul rov*, (ii) *ruba ke-kulo*, (iii) *birur rov* (which is the relevant aspect for the problem at hand), including the defined and undefined majority (*ruba de-ita kaman* where the probabilities can be expressed mathematically, e.g. the case where nine butcher shops sell kosher meat and one sells non-kosher, and *ruba de-leta kaman*: a *rov* based on a type of generalization, e.g. most animals are not diseased; the Rav called this the law of the qualitative class). In his discussion of the fourth question, the Rav discussed how one should prioritize values vis-à-vis the non-Jewish community, and our moral sense of how to proceed. Note, at the very outset, that he makes it clear that there is more than a strict halakhic determination at stake.

The Rav concluded that both the defined and undefined majorities in New York indicate that the child found is not Jewish; there are more non-Jews than Jews, and one can assume that it is more likely for non-Jewish than Jewish girls to abandon their babies (due both to economic and psychological reasons). However, the evidence of majority is not an ideal determinant of the religious affiliation of the child, and may not be conclusive in halakhic issues of personal status (such as marriage). Even with the argument of majority, the situation is still intrinsically a *safek*. Moreover, in cases of life and death one does not follow the majority of evidence: *ein holchim be-nefashot achar ha-rov*.

The Rav argued that the case before him is indeed a type of *pikuach nefesh*, which is applicable not only to physical danger, but also to extreme spiritual danger such as conversion to another religion.

Death is both a biological and ethico-spiritual phenomenon. One may save a life not only through medical skill but also by extending moral help.... Hence, the majority finds no application in this case.... Most halachic authorities allow one to violate the Sabbath or any other ritual law to save a Jew from apostasy.

Since such a decision may cause misinterpretations, it is important to fix its exact meaning. Protection of the spiritual personality that warrants the usage of the principle of *pikuach nefesh* does not signify prevention of sin.... Only the menace of apostasy, that is, complete forsaking and deserting of the fold ... calls for the application of this principle. [The Rav quoted the Rambam in Hilchot Teshuva 3:9 that *mumar le-khol hatorah kula* is understood also in terms of abandoning the Jewish community.]

The Rav therefore concluded that the *pikuach nefesh* aspects of this case invalidate the use of the majority (noting that even following the majority is doubtful and is merely a recourse). He therefore suggested that the Jewish community theoretically should lay claim to every foundling. However, he recognized that this was absurd in practice, since the interests of the various agencies associated with the different religions are mutually exclusive. As a practical compromise, he concluded that the Jewish agencies ask for a proportion of foundlings commensurate with the proportion of Jews in New York City. Because of the principle of proximity – *kan nimtza kan haya* – preference should be given to children in Jewish districts. But if the ratio of Jews to total population exceeded the number of foundlings found in Jewish districts, the Rav urged that the Jewish adoption agencies insist on the full quota.

The third question of conversion was decided on two principles: first, conversion is a privilege, and we may confer it on others.²⁸ Of course, when the child becomes of age, he/she can cancel the conversion, because compulsory conversion is invalid, even though we assume that, at the time the child is a minor, it is done with their consent. The Rav also discussed another argument²⁹ in favor of adoptive parents deciding on the religion of their child, and concluded that the child should be converted.

Note that the Rav was well aware that conversion must imply a major change in one's religious lifestyle, and in other contexts³⁰ was adamant that conversion be

28 See *Tosafot* on *Ketuvot* 11a.

29 See *Rambam Hilchot Avadim* 8:20.

30 Soloveitchik, *ibid.*, p. 168.

performed in accordance with the Halakhah. It would be interesting to hear how he would have dealt with the problem of adoption by non-observant families. I could not find anywhere in his letter where he mandated that the adoptions be carried out only by observant families. But perhaps this issue was resolved by him in other ways. In any case, the attitude toward the conversion issue and the introduction of children of dubious religious origin into the Jewish people can be contrasted with current attitudes in Israel today. True, the problems are different – in particular, the question dealt with by the Rav concerned foundling infants or very young children. But we can learn from the Rav how to use both halakhic and value-based approaches to resolve such weighty issues.

Finally, the Rav was resolute about the fourth question of relinquishing our rights to these foundlings because of the possibility of bad public relations with the non-Jewish community (engendered by the reaction of their adoption agencies that would thus be denied a fraction of the foundlings). He concluded that the Jewish community should definitely **not** relinquish its claim.

The Jewish religion has never monopolized the media of salvation nor has it identified itself with the intolerant doctrine of religious catholicity. In other words, it never maintained that our faith is destined to become universal in order to save mankind from damnation.... All men who live in accordance with Divine moral standards will share in the transcendental *summum bonum* [highest good] which was promised to God fearing and God loving people: *hasidei umot ha-olam yesh lahem chelek be-olam ha-ba*.

However, as we noted previously, the Rav felt that each group maintained the right to put its own religion and practice at the apex of its hierarchy of values.

To yield to the demands ... that all doubtful cases be placed in non-Jewish homes is tantamount not only to self-abasement as humans but also to a cardinal violation of the fundamentals of halacha and tradition.... Such a renunciation would be an admission of a feeling of inferiority and skepticism concerning the worth of our great and ancient faith.

VI. Talmud Study for Women

The Rav founded the Maimonides School in Boston, the first all Jewish day school in New England in 1937 – something unheard of in “out of town” America at that time. He and his wife guided the school for many years. In 1953, the Rav was asked by a director of the New York Board of Jewish Education regarding Talmud

instruction for elementary and high school age girls. The Rav responded:³¹

It would be a regrettable oversight on our part if we were to arrange separate Hebrew courses for girls. Not only is the teaching of Torah *she-be-al peh* to girls permissible but it is nowadays an absolute imperative. This policy of discrimination between the sexes as to subject matter and method of instruction which is still advocated by certain groups within our Orthodox community has contributed greatly to the deterioration and downfall of traditional Judaism. Boys and girls alike should be introduced to the inner halls of Torah *she-be-al peh*.

The Rav argued that it was imperative to include Torah *she-be-al peh* (Talmud study along with the commentaries) as part of the education of girls and women, since their general education at that time far exceeded what was taught in the past.³² The Rav also gave the introductory lecture of a new Talmud program for women at Stern College in the 1970s.³³ It is important to note that while the Rav felt that such study was “imperative,” this does not mean that the formal halakhic requirement of Talmud Torah was itself egalitarian. Since that time, it is true that some institutions in Israel and abroad have included Talmud in their curricula for girls and women. However, the *mamlachti-dati* school system in Israel does not require Talmud studies for girls; it would be interesting to know the reaction of the Ministry of Education to a request for a five-unit matriculation exam (*bagrut*) in Talmud in one of the religious girls’ schools.

To put this opinion into perspective, we note that the Rav was strongly opposed to changes in synagogue etiquette and prayer services, even at the expense of the perception that this “excludes” women from these public (and in some cases, non-essential) aspects of Judaism. His reasoning has been published elsewhere,³⁴ and will not be discussed here.

VII. Spirituality

In additions to public issues such as conversion, the Rabbinate, and women’s Jewish education – all of which were discussed to some extent some fifty years ago –

31 Soloveitchik, *ibid.*, pp. 171-72.

32 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, see n. 1 above, p. 23.

33 Rabbi Mayer Twersky, see n. 25 above, pp. 110-13, and Rabbi Zvi Schachter, *Me-Peninei HaRav* (Brooklyn: Flatbush Beth Hamedrosh, 2001), p. 214.

34 Schachter, *ibid.*, p. 183; see also the article by A. Frimer and D. Frimer in *Tradition*, 32(2) (1998): 5 for a discussion of the Rav’s position on women’s prayer groups.

contemporary non-*haredi* (*dati-leumi*) religious society has been concerned with the issue of “spirituality” in Judaism. In some cases, this goes along with a less rigorous intellectual approach to talmudic studies, a de-emphasis of the universal aspects of Judaism, and a lack of openness to the ideas and teachings of the outside world. As mentioned above, the Rav was very concerned,³⁵ with the implications of Halakhah on the spiritual development of people, and is well known for his analyses of several *mitzvot* in terms of *kiyum she-balev*, notwithstanding the emphasis in Halakhah on the objective act, *maaseh hamitzva*. However, a series of essays on the Book of Genesis, published in book form³⁶ and entitled *The Emergence of Ethical Man*, indicates that the Rav felt that “spirituality” is not other-worldly, since it is a trait that cannot be divorced from the physico-chemical and biological nature of humans.³⁷

Our task now is to investigate the cogency of the almost dogmatic assertion that the Bible proclaimed the separateness of man from nature and his otherness.

It is certain that the fathers of the Church and also the Jewish medieval scholars believed that the Bible preached this doctrine.... Yet, the consensus of many, however great and distinguished, does not prove the truth or falseness of a particular belief. I have always felt that due to some erroneous conception, we have actually misunderstood the Judaic anthropology and read into the Biblical text ideas which stem from an alien source.... The sooner Biblical texts are placed in their proper setting – namely, the Oral Tradition with its almost endless religious awareness – the clearer and more certain I am that Judaism does not accent unreservedly the theory of man’s isolationism and separatism within the natural order of things.

In these essays, the Rav uses the text of Genesis as well as the Halakhah to formulate the view that man is fundamentally an organic being, subject to the same processes as other living things. The imagery of the Bible associates humans with plants and animals, and the halakhic view of death emphasizes its finality and tragedy. People

35 <http://www.hazofe.co.il/web/newsnew/katava6.asp?Modul=24&id=57007&Word=&gilayon=3091&mador=136>. For an alternative discussion that contrasts the scientist and the humanist and the Talmud scholar with the religious personality, see S.A. Safran, “Methodologies Common to Science and Halakhah,” *B.D.D: Journal of Torah and Scholarship* 3 (1996): 5.

36 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Emergence of Ethical Man* (Ktav Publishing, 2005).

37 Soloveitchik, *ibid.*, p. 6.

do differ from animals in that they are aware of themselves, and are informed regarding their own biological tendencies.³⁸

Man yields to his natural instinct not only because he is driven by biochemical forces to such behavior, but also because he is motivated.

Personality emerges from the hidden recesses of a nature-existence.... Yet personality may evolve in two opposite directions: the demonic-orgiastic and the ethical.... The ethical personality is not transcendental. It only reconsiders its own status in a normative light, conceiving the natural law as identical with the moral law. Man encounters nature, separates himself from his environment in order to merge with it again. Yet his subsequent merger is an ethical free performance.³⁹

Consistent with this philosophy, the Rav rarely dealt with ethereal, mystical concepts; when he did quote the kabbalistic literature, he interpreted it in philosophical or ethical terms. He did not refer to some “other” existence or world to which those concepts were to relate. Finally, we should remember that the Rav’s primary vocation was as a Rosh Yeshiva; he delivered three lengthy Talmud classes a week at Yeshiva University, another at the Moriah Synagogue in New York, and yet another on Sunday morning in Boston. In his essay *The Halachic Mind*,⁴⁰ the Rav explained that Judaism gives preference to the objective and normative act – *mitzvot ma-siyot* – instead of valuing purely spiritual ceremonies. Nevertheless, this scion of Brisk felt that there was “more” than just the cold performance of *mitzvot*, important as they (and all their technical aspects) may be. This “more” was not other-worldly, but rooted in one’s personality, outlook, and emotions. In the final letter published in *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, the Rav wrote:⁴¹

The modern Jew is in dire need of religious experience, of a great ecstasy in living as a Jew and “being involved” in Jewishness. No matter how committed the contemporary Jew is, he is completely unaware of the emotional dimension of the religious act. The lack of warmth and joy in observing the law and practicing Judaism is appalling. He is mostly either over-intellectualized and too sophisticated or superficial and utilitarian in his relationship to the Almighty.

38 Soloveitchik, *ibid.*, p. 74.

39 Soloveitchik, *ibid.*, p. 144.

40 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Halachic Mind* (London: Seth Press, 1986), p. 88.

41 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, see n. 1 above, p. 337.

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As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the Rav felt that these emotional qualities were much more difficult to transmit to his students. A eulogy written by Rav Menachem Genack, the rabbinic CEO of the OU Kashrut Division and a close *talmid* of the Rav, relates the following story:⁴²

One summer, the Rav gave a few *shiurim* on *Likkutei Torah* by Rav Shneur Zalman of Ladi, founder of Lubavitch Hasidism. He said it was important to study *Likkutei Torah* in order to properly appreciate the grandeur of Rosh Hashana. When he sensed that some of us were resistant to learning the Hasidic work, the Rav related an apocryphal story, “Between two Mountains,” written by the classical Hebrew author, Y.L. Peretz.

The story described the encounter of the Rav’s great grandfather, Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (the Beit haLevi for whom the Rav was named) and the Bialyer Rebbe, a former *talmid* of his who had become a Hasidic Rebbe. The Bialyer Rebbe ... had cajoled his master, the Beit haLevi, to come to visit at a gathering of the Rebbe’s followers. As Peretz tells the story, the song and warmth of the Hasidim melted the outside snow and caused the trees to bloom and the birds to chirp. The cold Russian winter twilight had been transformed through the ecstasy of the Hasidim into a bright spring day. As sunset approached, the Beit haLevi – who had a profound and analytical mind and was devoid of undisciplined emotion – looked at his watch and interrupted the song to remind the assembly that it was getting late and it was time to *daven Mincha*. Suddenly, the glorious spring faded and reverted to the cold winter. The Rav then looked at me [young Rabbi Genack] and said “That’s you.” To the Rav, it was important to communicate both the logic and the passion of the Torah.

It is worthwhile to consider whether today’s “spiritual” movements, even within the *dati-leumi* community – with an emphasis on external appearance and ceremony, certainty about the eschatological significance of the present-day State of Israel, and distance from the secular world – are consistent with the Rav’s emphasis on the universal aspects of Judaism and his views of religious experience.

The religious significance of the State of Israel was addressed by the Rav in various forums, and his classic essay, *Kol Dodi Dofek*, outlines in detail his unique view of religious Zionism. The creation of the State of Israel was viewed by him as a “miracle,” but one whose purpose was to challenge the Jewish people to develop

42 Rabbi Menachem D. Genack, n. 25 above, p. 214.

it properly. “He refrained from attributing messianic or apocalyptic meaning to its establishment and successes.”⁴³ With respect to negotiations regarding the territories captured in the 1967 war, the Rav “insisted that the future of the territories should be determined by those who are its properly constituted authorities, in terms of the best long-term interests of the Jewish people, with the least danger to human life. Only those who are politically and militarily informed, and whose lives depend upon that decision, have the right to make that decision.”⁴⁴ Remarks the Rav made in a recording of his *Tshuva Drasha* of 1967 addressed these points in an emphatic manner. In addition, the Rav, in a Brisker vein, argues that putting territorial decisions, which are considered life-threatening issues, in the hands of military and political professionals is halakhically mandated.

The personal aspects of spirituality were also addressed by the Rav, who emphasized that religious fervor derives from – but is not limited to – the intellectual and objective aspects of Judaism.⁴⁵

However, the religious experience is not the primary gesture. It is only secondary. The point of departure must never be the inner subjective experience, no matter how redemptive it is, no matter how colorful it is, no matter how therapeutic it is, no matter how substantial its impact upon the total personality of man. The objective act does not symbolically express or interpret the experience.... The reverse is true. The experience interprets the act.

This kind of experience follows the deed instead of preceding it. To pray, and following prayer, to engage in a dance or a song, is acceptable. However, to dance in order to pray is futile, because no one will ever pray.

VIII. Conclusions

In accord with the Brisker dialectic tradition, in which several, seemingly mutually exclusive, aspects of a situation can coexist, the Rav had a multidimensional and nuanced view of community affairs or practical Halakhah. He was able to look at various sides of an issue and delineate the circumstances under which one or another of seemingly opposing views should be followed. In addition, questions of Jewish and halakhic values and even emotions provided a backdrop against which he

43 Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, n. 1 above, Introduction, p. xxvii.

44 Rabbi Dr. Bernard Rosenberg, n. 25 above, p. 249.

45 See Rabbi David Schreiber, *Nora 'ot Harav* (New York, 2005), Vol. 15, pp. 133-35 and Vol. 10 (1999), pp. 89-95.

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based his decisions. We might conclude that his general approach went “*me-klal le-prat*,” from the general to the particular – from the position of the Jew as a member of the human race to the Jew as a member of a unique religious community. The Rav was adamant that one must preserve the particular and all of its halakhic ramifications. But the particular did not obscure the universal. Serious study of both the approach and conclusions of the Rav regarding public policy issues, although raised many years ago, may inform and redirect both the lay and rabbinic leadership in Israel, and help heal some of the rifts within society.⁴⁶

46 I am grateful to Z. Frimer, A. Lustiger, J. Rapps, and M. Safran for useful comments, and to Y. Babkoff for a conversation that stimulated some of the ideas presented here.