

Irving Greenberg
and
Aharon Lichtenstein

The Commentator (1966)

Dr. Greenberg Discusses Orthodoxy, YU, Viet Nam, & Sex

Editor's Note: The following is the fourth in a series of articles about YU—its schools, faculty, and students. This particular article, written by Freshman Harold Goldberg who has been working on this since September, is a crucial article for all to consider.

Dr. Irving Greenberg is an associate professor of history at Yeshiva College, and is also currently serving as rabbi at the Riverdale Jewish Center in The Bronx, New York. Dr. Greenberg earned a B.A. from Brooklyn College in 1953, an M.A. from Harvard in 1954, and a Ph.D. from Harvard in 1959. Ordained from the Beth Joseph Theological Seminary in 1953, he taught American History at Tel-Aviv University in 1961-62 on a Fulbright scholarship.

What do you believe is the essential element in Jewish theology?

The covenant idea, the belief that an infinite G-d is concerned for man and will enter into a personal relationship with him.

The Noahic covenant implies that instead of destroying man each time that he sins, G-d will work with man, whatever his actions. G-d seems to have sanctioned man's freedom and accepted the fact that he tends to sin. Man's evil tendency suggests the need for at least one group to continually fulfill man's potential for living according to G-d's will, to continually testify that G-d exists. Ideally, the Jews perform this function by accepting the covenants of Abraham and Moses — by fulfilling their *halachic* obligations to man and G-d. We must testify to ourselves, to non-religious Jews and to gentiles.

I believe that the definition of a Jew is one who takes the covenant idea seriously, who struggles to find its validity in his own life. It doesn't matter to me whether one calls himself Reform, Conservative or Orthodox. However, I identify with Orthodoxy. Although too many Orthodox Jews

merely accept the covenant doctrines and do not attempt to find their relevance to modern life, I still think that Orthodoxy has the largest number of people who do take the covenant idea seriously.

Do you feel that the categories, "Reform," "Conservative," and "Orthodox" have any meaning?

The main reality in these categories is an institutional one. But too often the three classifications only blind one's vision. Today Judaism intellectually is shattered in a thousand different directions, and when we admit this, we'll be able to begin struggling with the real problems facing the American Jewish community. These classifications make it seem that any problem which arises can be neatly fit into three boxes, each one representing a denominational view. But this is just not true.

What is the primary problem facing today's Orthodox community?

Orthodoxy refuses to come out of the East European ghetto psychologically. In the ghetto, Orthodoxy floated off into its own world and it is still living there. Furthermore, Orthodoxy refuses to show sympathy to those who respond authentically to the fact that Orthodoxy has lost all connection with modern life. Conservative and Reform have taken the risk and dealt seriously with the problem of Judaism's relevancy to modern life, but I believe that they came up with the wrong answers.

Orthodox Jews inherit the notion that Judaism entirely transcends the temporal, that Judaism should be independent of local culture. We've come to think that a relationship with the Divine means separation from current or everyday life.

But on the contrary, our acceptance of the Mosaic covenant and of Jewish law is tantamount to the belief that G-d intervenes in the temporal, and that we can experience infinite values in a concrete, worldly experience. Thus, Jewish history is a history of human responses to the Divine approach — to Torah, Prophetic and Tal-

mudic values and *mitzvot*. Some of these human responses have lead Jews to experience their *Zelem Elohim* and some have not.

The central issue in Judaism today is this: What are the concrete experiences that can lead us to an experience with G-d?

Ideally, how does Orthodox Judaism believe that Jews can experience the Divine?

Orthodoxy believes that the Divine can be experienced through the observance of every *halachah*. Yet, Orthodoxy has escaped into the purely ritualistic realm of *halachah*, has homogenized *halachah* and has made a routine out of it. I think that the basis of Orthodoxy's escape is the belief that Torah cannot stand up to the challenge of contemporary civilization. Thus, our withdrawal from society is a means of "saving" G-d or covering up his "weakness." This attitude reflects our cowardice, for G-d and His Torah have enough vitality to live in any situation. Our desire to withdraw is an indication of our unwillingness to admit that our beliefs are shallow. One with a religious attitude would not ignore America, but would question why we were brought here, and how we can utilize America for the realization of Jewish personal and social ideals.

Orthodoxy should not unrealistically deny that conditions have changed, but should explore what meaning many of the *mitzvot* can have for us today. The willingness to explore is the valid component of certain Conservative approaches, but I often disagree with the Conservative application of this principle. Too many times the Conservative movement changes *halachah* because popular opinion demands the change. I believe that changes in *halachah* should not be the result of popular opinion, but the result of deliberate consideration by the *gadolim*.

How can Orthodoxy—*halachic* Judaism—become relevant in America?

Orthodoxy must undertake three tasks. First, we must recognize that a democratic

society not only liberates us from persecution, but can also energize us. In the past we had to survive among barbarians. The premium that we paid for survival was the perversion of the idea of the Chosen People; we came to think of ourselves as inherently better than others. But our one unique characteristic is an obligation to live in a holy manner by observing commandments, to set an example.

The pressure of the ghetto is now removed, and democratic America can eliminate our superiority complex and return us to our ideals of human equality and social justice. We should not necessarily accept a new America, but at least we should explore its attitudes and integrate those that illuminate and deepen our traditional Jewish framework. For example, we should recognize that it is our religious responsibility to participate in the current civil rights struggle.

Secondly, Orthodoxy must train a body of scholars in the new fields of study, especially in Biblical criticism.

We should acknowledge a debt to Biblical critics. They have shown that the Torah is not timeless, but has elements in common with the temporal experience of the ancient Near East. This does not undermine our faith because the Jewish idea of a holy life is the proper utilization of the temporal. However, contemporary scholarship denies G-d and sees only the temporal qualities of the ancient Jew. We need Jewish scholars who assume that man can relate to G-d. This type of Jewish scholarship would illuminate our understanding of the ancient Jew, it would enable us to understand the exact point of meeting between the Divine and the temporal. We would be able to see how the ancient Jew utilized the temporal in a Divine manner.

Denying either the Divine or the temporal is no answer to the questions raised by Biblical scholarship. We need to understand

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Rogosin Founds Center For Jewish Ethics; Rav Soloveitchik Slated To Play Major Role

One of the nation's most generous philanthropists, Israel Rogosin, has contributed \$1,000,000 to YU for establishment of a Center for Ethics and Values. The Center will concentrate on teaching and research into the history, philosophy, and practical application of Jewish Ethics. Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik will play a key role in the Center as an authority on *Halachah*.

The center will attempt to develop a group of authorities who will disseminate knowledge of ethical principles to school children

cial ethics, and many other areas. It will also study and popularize the works of Jewish ethical philosophers.

Israel Rogosin is the founder and chairman of Beaunit Corporation, one of the nation's leading

textile firms. Mr. Rogosin was born in Lithuania and emigrated at age seven. He started working at 13 and soon assumed responsibility for a small mill in Brooklyn. He merged it with several others to form Beaunit in 1921.

Letters To The Editor

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mixed activities at Yeshiva — and I believe they do exist — have little to do with functions like the Dean's Reception (insofar as "dates" are, or must be, brought to them).

Let me expand upon these two

devil" — hence, one of the familiar "justifications" of Yeshiva University itself. But there comes a point where what is done is so objectionable that it is better to leave people to the devil; at least the sinners know that they are sinning. And so we find the other *vetshint* openly saying that it is in

Dr. Leibowitz Investigates New Insights Into Bible

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Dr. Leibowitz contends, are valid and legitimate approaches to Judaism.

Through her sheets, radio broadcasts, and lectures, "Nehama" (as she is often called) has become a

household name in Israel.

Letter to Kibbutznik

One *kibbutznik* (from *Daganah*, a non-religious settlement) during the War of Independence wrote an urgent letter to which, of course, Dr. Leibowitz replied at once. However, it was not soon enough. The boy was killed by Arabs while guarding the relief column enroute to Jerusalem. Another young correspondent during World War II wrote to Dr. Leibowitz apologizing for the lateness of his work. It just so happened that his ship had been torpedoed!

Still another telling incident of the wide scope of people who find close Bible study a rewarding ex-

Dr. Greenberg Discusses Orthodoxy; Says Orthodoxy Withdraws From Society

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take Biblical scholarship in order to more fully understand our own revelation. We should be committed by faith to the Torah as Divine revelation, but what we mean by "Divine revelation" may be less external or mechanical than many Jews now think.

The third main task confronting Orthodoxy is a thorough re-examination of the *Shulchan Orach*. The purpose of *halachah* is to transform the mundane into the holy by the utilization of the *halachah* which applies to any given experience. But today, there are some experiences which *halachah* doesn't cover adequately, and we are unwilling to apply many *halachot* that deal with contemporary problems. The *Poskim* aren't meeting their responsibility in updating and fully applying our law codes. This inaction represents a denial of one of the basic tenets of Judaism: that our tradition may be applied to any situation. In short, the *halachah* has broken down.

What are some major contemporary problems to which we could apply *halachic* principles and laws, but don't?

Two such problems are the war in Viet Nam and the American attitude toward the welfare of our society.

Instead of taking the *halachic* outlook on war seriously, the bulk of today's Orthodox Jews back President Johnson's policy with the un-Jewish tendency to "render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's."

Only Jews are bound to observe *halachah*, to base their views and actions about the Viet Nam war upon *halachah*. But in the spirit of a democratic society, we can suggest that others accept our attitudes and follow our actions.

Judaism longs desperately for peace, and the prophetic vision sees peace as the only basis of any redeemed world order. But the real task today is to avoid sweeping moralisms and get down to the specifics about how to wage peace.

As I mentioned before, the essence of *halachah* seeks to realize

the Divine in concrete human situations. In perfecting the world, we may unavoidably collaborate with the evil in reality until that evil is overcome. This is necessary, but, in turn, we have to participate in the world without accepting it as it is. Thus, sin and purity are inextricably mixed and every step toward the kingdom of G-d may involve treading down some ideals. This anti-utopian quality of *halachah* enables the Torah not to abandon the secular realm to Satan or Caesar. We, therefore, avoid pacifism because it would pave the way for the triumph of evil incarnate. Instead, we must embrace the necessary policies, even if they are morally ambiguous, even if they have negative side effects. Specifically, we cannot *a priori* exclude war as a policy, but must judge its validity in specific cases.

The Rambam defines war as necessary when the enemy seeks to annihilate Jews. Talmudic and post-Talmudic sources go farther. They say that forces which seek to destroy man's dignity and spiritual needs may be opposed with the same vigor as the forces which seek to destroy man physically. In recent times, the *Chofetz Chaim* ruled that kill the laws of Sabbath, Yom Kippur and other restrictions which are waived to save a life in danger may be waived to save a man from spiritual annihilation.

In order to determine whether war is "necessary," the *halachist* must be well versed in the given military-political situation. Certain aggressive forms of Communism might be judged as intent on the spiritual annihilation of man. But this is precisely the nub of our judgment on Viet Nam. We must judge whether Ho Chi Minh works a basic denial of human life

and dignity on his people, or whether there is a possibility that his government is the best possible one in this situation.

We must determine if a neutralist or Titoist solution is possible. If so, this would not be considered as a necessary war. On the other hand, if containment of an aggressive Communism is necessary here, the war can be justified and accepted (without whitewashing its moral shortcomings).

It follows that we must bend all our efforts to secure a full airing of the issues by the administration. Jews and other religious groups should make it clear to the administration that they are prepared to grapple with the real issues and do not demand a purist, flag-waving justification.

If the war is found to be justified, we would be open to the elements of evil, but we must seek to minimize them. There is great resistance among all clergymen to getting involved in operational details of a war situation, yet it may be here that the greatest saving of human lives can be achieved. For a simple order to win a war frequently leads to unlimited excess. Once informed, we must descend to the political marketplace and demand those specific policies of our government which best preserve the dignity and life of the Vietnamese.

Halachah requires serious peace attempts before any war is prosecuted. Here, too, clergymen must be informed before they can decide whether the U.S.'s recent peace efforts were adequate, whether the Administration's apparent unwillingness to negotiate with the Viet Cong was based upon strategy considerations or upon a fear of domestic and political reprisals.

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Soviet Jewry News — In Brief —

The Soviet news agency Novosti reported that Jews had sufficient *matzoh* this year, and many American newspapers printed this report. Neglected was the fact that to obtain *matzoh*, Jews were required to put their names on a list as "Jewish believers" (potentially self-incriminating and dangerous in the USSR). Even this "privilege" was limited to a number of larger cities.

Throughout the world, except in the USSR, *seder* rituals were changed this year. A fourth piece of *matzoh* was added to the *seder* service as *Lechem Oni*, the bread of affliction of Soviet Jewry. In many homes an empty chair was placed at the *seder* table to symbolize the fact that most Russian Jews had no *seder* table.

Carnegie International Center, NYC, March 18:

A tribunal of distinguished "jurors" received reports and took testimony from eye witnesses in an effort to evaluate the present status of Soviet anti-Semitism. Bayard Rustin, civil rights leader, was chairman of the panel which included: John C. Bennet, president, Union Theological Seminary; Floyd McKissick, executive director, CORE; Telford Taylor, chief U.S. prosecutor, Nuremberg war crimes trials, and professor of law at Columbia University; and Norman Thomas, veteran Socialist leader.

Such witnesses as Rabbi Israel Miller, Thurston Davis, editor of the Catholic magazine, *America*, and author Meyer Levin testified before the group. Both the witnesses and prepared studies portrayed a harrowing picture of Soviet Jewish life. Father T. N. Davis (leading Jesuit journalist), told of visiting the chief Rabbis of Moscow and Leningrad: "One pos-

sible key to the plight of the Jew in the Soviet Union," he said, "lies in what was to us the ominous activity of the lay committeemen who surround the few aging Rabbis. It is difficult to believe that these laymen are not government agents. . . Their attitudes of fear and servility prevents necessary initiatives that would help to solve the problems that face Judaism. . . Some of them actually told us: 'If you say anything, say only what is favorable.'"

United Nations, March 16

The UN Human Rights Commission voted through a draft convention dealing with religious intolerance, which specifically mentions anti-Semitism by name. This convention is expected to be completed next year, which would end a now 6-year attempt by the Soviets to block its completion.

New York:

Maurice Friedberg, professor of Slavic languages at Indiana University, presents an astute analysis of different strategies of bringing pressures to bear on the Soviet Union on the problem of Soviet Jews ("Defending Soviet Jews: Placards or Memoranda" *Midstream*, Sept., 1965). He observes that the approach of Nahum Goldmann (president of the World Jewish Cong.) advocating "quiet diplomacy and negotiation" is inapplicable in dealing with the Soviet Union and must be savored in favor of vigorous, responsible public protest.

Philadelphia, April 17

At the two-day meeting of the American Jewish Conference on Soviet Jewry, Prof. Erich Goldhagen, director of the Institute of East European Jewish Affairs at Brandeis University predicted that in 10 to 15 years it would be im-

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Letters To The Editor

Social Science Majors Increase

According to a report issued by the Office of the Registrar, interest in the social sciences is rising sharply among Yeshiva College students. The rising trend began in 1964, when 39% of the students majored in the social sciences. The figure now is over 43%. However, Professor Morris Silverman, registrar,

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took over the dating habits of Yeshiva students, as well as the extent of the "vacuum" which would be formed in the absence of the Dean's Reception.

Derech To Courting

*2. This brings me to my central contention: if there really is a *derech* to courting, I believe it is folly to look for it in mass, organized, mixed affairs. Whether these affairs are offensive or not from a Jewish point of view, they are a waste of time from the point of view of creating meaningful relationships between men and women.

out the pretensions of a "date," and to work together on projects of Jewish content, and of lasting significance. Insofar as Yeshiva University fails to provide meaningful activities of this kind (activities whose social function is played down to a whisper), Yeshiva will have failed to show a *derech* to anything.

Mark Steiner
Oxford, England.

Bnei Akiva

To the Editor:
In the last issue of THE COM-

Viet Nam

To the Editor:

Having been a member of the Yeshiva delegation to Washington, I feel compelled to answer Carl Ann-Fisch, whose letter you recently published (Vol. #53, No. 3). Though I don't question her right to oppose American policy, or to voice opposition to our support of it, I object to her reading into our statement things that aren't there, and I intend also to point out other fallacies in her letter.

Firstly, she makes much ado of our "representing loyal Americans

cates simply support of American policy — the maintenance of U.S. troops in Vietnam to guarantee her integrity. Nowhere in that statement do we extend a blanket agreement for every facet of that policy, i.e. the conduct of the war, etc., as her letter accuses us of doing.

Opposes War

Thirdly, her letter implies opposition to the war, for which we are quoted as saying "no loyal American can be opposed to this position." A rereading of that letter will show that the "position" referred to is not the war, as her letter would have us think, but the

Speedreading

With speedreading training, most students would be able to read 1,000 words per minute, some as much as 4,000 words per minute.

The ACS Affiliate Chapter has a complete assembly on file of graduate school catalogs. These will be placed in the chemistry department office (M412) shortly, as an aid to the student body.

ute. These claims were made by a representative of the Dan Ro speedreading company at a demonstration in 440 Furst Hall.

He defined "normal" speed as 250-300 words per minute, and guaranteed at least a doubling of reading speed on completion of the course. Charge for the 22 sessions, two per week, would be \$115.

Dr. Greenberg On Judaism And Halachah

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If the peace efforts were limited by political consideration, Jews and other religious groups should have exposed them as inadequate. I believe that religious groups have more influence than they think, and if we pledge to the Administration that we will not campaign on generalizations but in the political arena, we can insure the Administration that it will not suffer political losses if it seriously explores the chance of peace with the National Liberation Front, even if such exploration falls through.

The *halachah* demands that one risk the *possibility*, but not the probability of losing his life in order to save another's. Should the present crises escalate to a potentially nuclear one, we would be in a different *halachic* category, and would seriously have to review our stand. However, I do not think that we are now in a potential nuclear situation. Thus, religion's task is to think concretely, accepting the moral ambiguities, rather than give vague, idealistic preaching.

Although *halachah* requires the full sharing of responsibility by the entire society in the time of a necessary war, the moral objector is still exempt. Contrary to present American law, the *Rambam* recognizes the legitimacy of objecting to a specific war without being opposed to war in general. I think

though, it didn't seem to matter a whole lot at the time."

"But weren't you scared? I mean, you didn't even know if you both felt the same way about abortion."

"Well, I guess I was a little nervous, all right. Cause I didn't even know if she was powerful, intelligent, giving or aesthetic."

"Yeah, and what about sexual involvement? She might have gone back and told the whole dorm so far as you know."

"Well, that was the chance we had to take back then."

"Boy, I'll bet it was a real drag, not knowing a thing about her, Grandpa. What ever happened to the old girl, anyway?"

"She's out in the kitchen, sonny. I been married to that old gal for 36 years. Damn, I wish we were compatible."

that this would be in order now. Nor need we fear the results. It is a mark of the security and commitment of the democratic society that only it could afford to allow such dissent. We desperately need sincere rebuttal and challenge because we should be aware of the tentative reeds on which we base our judgment; of the ambiguity of our stands and of the inescapable evil side effects that may flow.

Two Functions

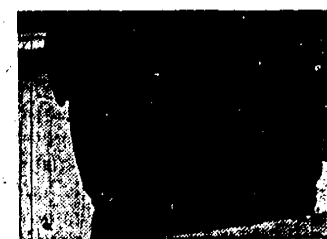
Drawing on its historical tradition, Judaism can see two functions for itself today concerning the present attitude in America toward the welfare of society. One function is the prophetic-messianic role. That is, to pose a radical alternative to current behavior and warn of serious punishment if obedience does not follow. The second role of Judaism is that of healing and reconciliation. Of embracing the qualities of goodness and value which are in the status quo; of working soberly within the existing conditions for limited and gradual change; of healing and soothing the inescapable inequities and existential evils of sorrow and death which no reform can ever cure. Today the gradualism and sobriety have their spokesmen, but they are so steeped in complacency in the face of serious problems that it is time to take up the prophetic theme again. Basic to the prophetic framework is the requirement that

brew, and Yiddish to the young is prohibited by the authorities. He said that within the last year the number of synagogues had shrunk from 95 to 62, and that there were only 40 to 50 Rabbis, with an average age of 65.

Washington D.C., April 16

69 United States Senators issued a statement asking that the "three million Jews of the Soviet Union be allowed to live creatively and in dignity as Jews."

The Senators maintained that "Jews, alone among all Soviet ethnic groups, are forbidden schools and other institutions of Jewish learning." The statement said that the Soviet government had accepted "the principle of the reunification of broken families, and we strongly support the plea that the Soviet government translate this principle into practice for tens of thousands of Soviet Jews who want to emigrate."



Professor Maurice Baudin addresses Le Cercle Français on topics of French literature. At right, Dr. Peterson addresses the Chem Club.

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School of Science, addressed chemistry and physics students during Club Hour.

Dr. Petersen stressed the failure of logic in dealing with the dichotomy between the atoms of chemical experience and the wave-for of matter, the forte of physics which blurs mass into a probability distribution. Quantum mechanics deals with the problem by assign-

Jews possess a social conscience and exercise it.

The central moral principle of the Torah is the belief that man is created in the image of G-d, and this implies that any act or policy which humiliates or "shrinks" a person is an act of desecration of the Divine image. Belittling man drives the Divine presence out of the world. Thus, Jews are required to eliminate those conditions — physical or psychological — that humiliate people.

Before a man can live a spiritual life, he must be able to satisfy his bodily needs. The *Rambam* says, "The well-being of the soul undoubtedly comes first in rank, but the well being of the body, which involves the government of the state and the establishment of the best relations among men, is first in nature and time. The well being of the soul can only be obtained after that of the body is secured. The well being of the body is only possible when man has all his wants supplied."

Poverty

Thus, Jews must stand for an increased war on poverty. It has been estimated that it would take \$10 billion to lift all the families now under the poverty level over the threshold. Even though it would be \$10 billion that would repay itself a thousand times over, we have only a \$1 billion program against poverty. It is our religious duty to involve ourselves in politics

and speak up for an increased poverty program.

Although material well being necessary for leading a spiritual life, present day America has taught us poignantly that material well being does not itself insure acceptance of spiritual values. On one hand, the great amount of leisure time in America allows for creativity and craftsmanship which modern, mechanized work — especially in factory settings — does not provide. Yet, most Americans do not utilize their time for personal fulfillment.

Controls

Manufacturers are increasing turning people into mere uncontrollable consumers to take in the ongoing flow of goods. The producers break down traditional impulse controls with a constant flow of hidden and open persuasive techniques, with stimulation, provocation, by sex or by fear. This is especially effective on children. In Erich Fromm's analysis, people feel more and more dependent on irrational consumption for their worth and no longer see the self as worthy for its own sake. Eventually, people sink into a state of psychological helplessness.

The solution to irrational consumption and the resulting spiritual emptiness is not asceticism, but purposive impulse control, where one is in control enough to decide what he wants, to choose his own

Mr. Sager, helps the audience and the debaters scale the intellectual planes of any topic.

Though forensic competition is

examining any topic and aids the power of communication based on sound thought. Verbal facility is useful in all walks of life.

tive effort which brings results.

Doubtless, the membership of each Council must share in its record. Yet, neither diplomat nor

it did not actively decline to lead.

Where did each Council go? What record did it leave? The

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Rabbi Greenberg States Views On Sex . . .

(Continued from page nine)

in pure impulse. Man cannot seek deep human relationships, intellectual rewards, creation and enjoyment when he is manipulated into what others want for him. Rather, man must make his own choices. This is the very heart of Judaism, for without freedom man cannot be a servant of G-d.

America also needs self-control on a national level in order to plan ahead for its own citizens. Once society has learned to control its passion for consumption, it could give buying power to Appalachia, to the chronic poor and to the Negro. In raising these groups' standard of living, there would be an opportunity to teach impulse control to them and thus give them the chance to experience their own spirituality.

Thus, to help eliminate material and spiritual poverty, Jews are obligated to proclaim the value of self control, for nothing but self control can destroy America's consumption ethos, which causes our indifference to poverty and psychological wandering. Through serious federal regulation of honesty in business and advertising, Jews must demand that the manipulators be mastered, for they cause the consumption ethos. In short, Jews must offer a merciless critique of the materialism, suggest ethic and complacency of our age, and we must equally vigorously assert the positive value of self control.

The belief in restrictions for business need not suggest that the ideal political philosophy in the Jewish view is Socialism. Private property is legitimized by the Torah, but it is not supreme. Social values remain most important, and private property is legitimate only so long as it meets certain

social obligations. In today's industrial context, the *Poskim* should creatively apply the *halachic* principle that private property must justify itself to public needs. We should involve ourselves in specific contemporary problems, for our law can be effective in and should be utilized in every historical context that Jews find themselves.

In the past, Jewish law utilized radical methods to insure human dignity. For instance, the sabbatical and jubilee years brought about redistribution of land and wealth to equalize possession and prevent permanent impoverishment. Similarly, today we should not fear, but welcome serious government intervention when it contributes to the public welfare. In short, I believe that our belief both in the supremacy of human values and private property suggests that we Jews in America should strive for a type of welfare capitalism.

What is one main experience which *halachah* doesn't adequately cover?

Sex. *Tanach* doesn't look upon sex as an evil; the prohibition of *negia* is based upon a technical *halachah*—that a girl is in a state of *hidah* until she performs *vilah* in the *mikvah*. The fact that unmarried girls are not permitted to go to the *mikvah* reflects the reaction of *Poskim* in the Middle Ages to the looseness of morals of many, who, having gone to the *mikvah*, felt free to do anything. If the tradition felt that sex itself were wrong, we should not have associated sex with the holy *mitzvah* of *mikvah*. Instead, we would view celibacy as a higher state of holiness, as it is viewed in the Catholic tradition.

Today the *Poskim* should recognize that there is nothing wrong with sex per se, and should pro-

mulgate a new value system and corresponding new *halachot* about sex. The basis of the new value system should be the concept that experiencing a woman as a *zelem Elokim* is a *mitzvah* just as much as praying in *Shul*. The *Poskim* should teach people that the depth of one's sexual relationship should reflect the depth of his encounter. Sex has come to be considered as a secular activity only because the *Poskim* have abdicated their responsibility in examining its true meaning.

Sex is a religious activity and we abuse it by ignoring it. No value system is free of its practical problems and this new value system might lead to an increased tendency by some to violate *halachah*. But still, this new approach to sex, even with its problems, would be much better than our present suppression of such a deep and meaningful activity. Indeed, I believe that more people would end up observing, for they would see relevance and rationale in the new *halachic* categories.

Is Yeshiva University meeting its responsibility of educating an intelligent American Jewish laity?

I think that YU is primarily turning out secularly oriented students who are overlaid with an abundant practice of orthodox ritual. In short, the student's values are not spiritual ones.

In my history classes we plot charts outlining the progress of history. The Middle Ages is invariably considered one of the lower points. This is because students have absorbed the Enlightenment philosophers' view of history that pervades contemporary secular society. The Enlightenment viewed a religious age, such as the Middle Ages, as inferior. Another Enlightenment attitude in our society, and in YU students is the belief that science will ultimately solve all of man's problems.

Boys who keep *Shabbat* still measure a person by how much money he makes. Yet, *Shabbat* is supposed to teach us the intrinsic values of existence independent of what we can make or produce. In other words, the YU student doesn't take the principle out of the *halachah*; he draws few implications from *halachah* as far as human behavior and attitudes are concerned.

Many of the students believe

that they are wrong in undertaking secular studies. But secular activity is not wrong if one brings to it a religious attitude—an attempt to transform it into a religious activity.

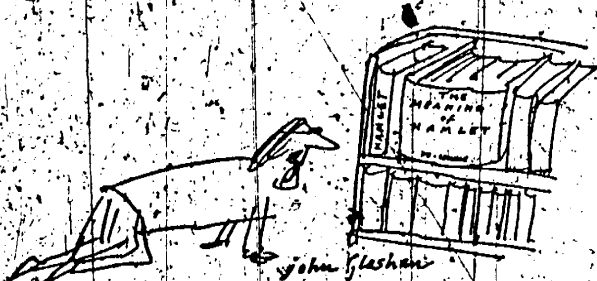
Too many of those who leave YU or withdraw psychologically and intellectually from it are not the ones who can't take the double program. All too frequently, they are the students who are ethically and religiously most sensitive, and who are, therefore, affronted by the system. The best students are selected out of the system.

What do you think of YU's expansion as a university?

I believe that the center of gravity is shifting from the religious divisions and the college to the University. Yeshiva College is definitely a cultural backwater. Furthermore, in the University's new schools there is not even an attempt at some form of double program. But the fact is that we need people with an Orthodox outlook to study the academic and professional disciplines. For instance, we need people to study the new medical knowledge.

Yeshiva College would need courage to recruit students who show interest and ability in the new programs needed—such as a re-examination of the *Shulchan Orach* and Biblical criticism. But so far, it hasn't shown the courage. The insistence on sticking to routine academic interests can lead to interesting ironies. When I, for one, sought to shift my field of concentration from American intellectual history to recent Jewish intellectual history, it was made clear to me that I should stick to American history, a field that raises relatively few intellectual problems for today's Orthodox Jews.

I recognize that there are good reasons for the expansion of the University. The standards and prestige of YU are raised all around. It is easier to get money for YC. Judaism should serve the community. But YU's expansion should not steer it away from its purpose in creating an undergraduate collegiate division. Dr. Revel, the founder of YC, said, "The goal of education, according to Judaism, is the preparation of man for, and his dedication to, his duties as a member of his family, country and faith."



A John Glasman view of Shakespeare. Glasman's new book "Speak Up You Tiny Fool" will be published on these shores for the first time this spring. In honor of this, he contributed three Shakespearean cartoons to the Stratford Collection at the American Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Connecticut, whose repertory currently offers "Twelfth Night," "Julius Caesar," "Macbeth," "Henry IV, Part II," and "T. S. Eliot's 'Murder in The Cathedral'."

Greenberg Clarifies And Defends His Views

To The Editor:

I should like to respond to a number of the criticisms of the interview with me published in the last issue of THE COMMENTATOR, and to reply to some of the questions posed to me. Finally, I would like to comment on the reaction to the interview.

The purpose of the interview was not to give an overall, rounded view on all questions, but, in response to the interviewer's questions, to point out the possibility of a position operating with the classic halachic framework that would be willing to relate symbolically and sympathetically to the modern experience and shape it with the categories of halachah. I sought to show that our current weakness is not in Torah but in ourselves. If we had the courage to recognize our own weaknesses and study our full tradition, its fullest relevance and depth would emerge again.

Contrary to the impression created by the furor, the affirmation that the covenant of G-d and Israel as expressed and lived in halachah is the central strand of

"Do to the interests of the questions asked, the interview gives the impression that I believe that the crucial area for our consideration is our relationship with the general society. . . . Actually I believe that the internal problems are the decisive and crucial issues for survival and relevance."

Judaism; the plea that we stop escaping our present situation but instead "experience infinite values in a (our) concrete worldly experience"; the attempt to indicate possible applications of halachic principles to current problems (Vietnam, social welfare, etc.) — i.e., the bulk of the article, constituting 70% of the text, is unexceptionable and is, in fact, agreed with by a number of Roshai Yeshiva in principle, if not in specifics of judgment in each case.

This was an attempt to respond to Rav J. B. Soloveitchik's call in his superb *Ish Hakalchah*: "Halachah says that any religiosity which restricts itself to a side corner of a group, sect, or party, and becomes the portion of a specially privileged group alone — its gains are outweighed by its losses." (*Talpor*, Vol. 1, 3-4, p. 679, my translation.)

"The service of G-d, according to the conception of halachah, is fulfilled (in addition to learning Torah) in the realization of its fundamentals in the real world. . . . The longing of the soul of the ish hakalchah is for the perfection of the world in the Kingdom of lovingkindness (*chesed*) and justice (*zedek*) — the realization of the a priori ideal creation called Torah or Halachah in the precincts of actual life."

"The halachah is not enclosed within the fortress walls of the house of worship, but penetrates in all corners of life. The marketplace, the street, the factories, stores, a person's house, meeting houses, houses of celebration (*batul mishnah*) etc. etc. are the scene of the life of religion. . . . The true Mikdash is the area of daily life for there is where halachah is realized. *Gedolei Yisroel*, the men of halachah, shine in their ethical glory and illumine ethically their society." (*Ibid.*, p. 709.)

"Rav Chaim Brysker was asked: what is the calling of the Babbi? Rav Chaim answered: To protest the neglect of the lonely and abandoned; to protect the dignity of the poor and to save the exploited from the exploiters." (*Ibid.*, p. 708.) (Note: Let me make it absolutely clear that I do not imply that Rav Soloveitchik is involved with or identified with anything said in the interviews. G-d forbid that his name be associated with anything that has been so besmirched or attacked. I cite *Ish Hakalchah* only as the classic intellectual source for the call to apply halachah to contemporary situations.)

I further presume that my comments on Yeshiva University are legitimate and I only regret that they have not been stated more publicly and forcefully by those circles that should lead the effort for YU's religious destiny. I would appeal to those who have been diverted by the "secational" issues and have closed their minds to the interview to at least reread the above parts and ponder them. I do not merely seek to justify myself, but feel that these ideas deserve a hearing and should not be overshadowed by side issues.

1. On Orthodoxy, Conservative And Reform

Let me respond to the three main questions posed to me: The point of this section was that the three categories no longer neatly exhaust reality and that not every religious response can be dismissed by fitting it into a pigeon hole. Granted that in Orthodox, the growingly influential leadership and laity are committed to halachah, while such elements are far more peripheral in Reform and Conservative.

But we must recognize that there are individual Jews who call themselves other names who accept halachah or are seeking to rediscover it for themselves. More important, we must learn to take seriously these questions that bothered or motivated these groups, even as we reject their answers. For their questions are real questions, tormenting most Jews in the modern world, and only when we take them seriously will we begin to answer them. (We tend to simply dismiss, but see Rav Kook's understanding of the "chutpah" of our generation in *Iker Hatzon*, Essay "Hador," and other sources.)

Nor should ideas be ignored simply if labeled Conservative or Reform. They should be judged on their merits as measured by a rich and complex understanding of the classic halachic tradition. I would concede that I exaggerated by ignoring the differential Orthodox obedience to halachah, but I did so in the belief that we are far too self-congratulatory and fail to recognize how, in our own quiet way, we work out our own equivalents — "leaving out" or neglecting many halachot.

Certainly the ideal Jew keeps all the mitzvot (this is what I mean by "taking the covenant seriously"). But of how many people can we say he struggles to keep the covenant? The entire section (and interview) was said in the spirit of Rav Yisroel Salanter's dictum: "Before I learned Mussar, I criticized the world and justified myself; when I learned Mussar, I criticized the world and criticized myself, after learning Mussar, I justified the world and criticized myself."

I am convinced that such a self-criticism and justification of the world (leaving out our self-righteousness and empathetically understanding our fellow man's motivations) would increase our own religious depth and our influence on others.

2. On Revelation—And Bible Criticism

On this I specifically reject the liberal religious solution to the conflict of criticism and faith which answers that Torah is merely the product of humans "inspired by G-d." (Cf. at the end of Question 3: "Jewish history is a history of human responses to the Divine approach — to Torah, Prophetic and Talmudic values and mitzvot.")

Nor have I any desire to make Judaism merely an ethical system. We are elected — chosen — by G-d, whether we like it or not — and indeed, amazingly enough, whether we live up to it or not. But contemporary Biblical scholarship (Wellhausen has been dead now for a long time) has enriched our understanding of the meaning of Tanach — and this despite its secular, humanist bias. I anticipate an even greater enrichment when we develop our own Biblical scholarship by men who believe that G-d does communicate with man but who will not work from an apologetic or stereotyped base.

(Historical Note: Nor does this even mean using any one "modern" method solely. Some years back in a Pinchas Churgin Memorial Lecture, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein pointed to the possible uses of the techniques of literary criticism — such as New Criticism — for deepening our insight into Torah. In 1962, when I returned from Israel, I suggested bringing Rav Yehoshua Bachrach here to teach Bible. Rav Bachrach has developed a moving and insightful systematic shita of using Midrashim and traditional commentaries to capture the existential meaning of Tanach. But as he lacked academic credentials and responsibility, he was not invited.)

Still we cannot blink that the Torah has been placed in the setting of the ancient Near East by contemporary scholarship. My comment that Divine revelation "may be

(italics added) less external or mechanical than many Jews think" simply means that I believe we can legitimately move from the assertion that the Torah was given totally without reference to the actual human situation in which it was given. (I am fully aware that there is a legitimate stream of thought that holds the above view.)

We can move to the recognition that it was given to Moshe and Israel in a particular time and setting and its imagery or conceptual material may be expressed in that language and cultural context. On this, compare Rambam's far more radical suggestion in his *Moreh Neuchim*, Friedlander translation, pp. 322 ff.) The Torah's eternal message is not dimmed by this insight but the problem of parallels for evolution and science etc. can certainly be handled more effectively.

In addition, I believe that we need generations of our own scholarship to explore and illuminate the entire Tanach. Nor need we block such scholarship a priori from encountering the theories of contemporary scholarship and evidence. Many of the questions raised by Bible critics were touched upon or even treated by Chazal, etc. We may grapple with these questions again. (Rav Chaim Heller a.d. did significant work in this whole area.) There will be time enough to evaluate whether this new scholarship will give us acceptable conclusions or even will deepen our faith. I believe that we can be disciplined enough to reject conclusions that do not meet our tests of validity when, and if, this becomes necessary.

3. On Sex

This is the one area, I feel, where the sensational interpretations, although incorrect, had some color on the basis of the language. I regret this. This answer — as a number of others — is a summary of a much larger essay in preparation, which cites sources and treats the question in great detail. (Incidentally this essay is a matter of public record, having been made at Yavneh convention in 1964. Parts of it were discussed in my class in 1964 on "Ethical Thought in the 19th Century.")

I read the interview in the context of my longer essay and failed to detect the possible misinterpretations it could be fitted to. I regret this very much, not only because it clearly hurt me, but because it gave such an excellent handle to those who wish to prevent consideration of the issues raised. And, of course, it drove off supporters who really agree with my basic theses.

It may sound naive, but it seems to me that at Yeshiva University one has a right to assume that discussion of sex assumes a marital state. But granting the language, it appears to me that there is a grave moral obligation to check and ascertain the author's true meaning in such a case rather than to seize upon the most damaging possibility and use it to attempt to destroy someone.

I must take the blame for not having clarified the language. However, since premarital interpretation is wrong, the whole shor became a case of *shefich damim*. I can only stand in wonder at the morality of not even making a phone call to check. I hope that in so doing, the people involved have directly violated the example laid down in Shabbat 127b, where there was a threat physical presumption of sexual immorality, but the people correctly were *dan l'kal chas* and without even asking! But let me get to a brief synopsis of my thesis.

I believe that there are two strands to the experience of sex within the halachic framework. Rabbi Meir experienced midah as the separation which restored the freshness and desirability of the woman to her husband when they come together. (Cf. Talmud B., Niddah 31b.) Rabbi Eliezer, keeping the same halachot, experienced sex *donah k'mo shekafa shed*, as an almost demonic experience. (Cf. especially the second and third interpretations of this phrase quoted in the *Mechaber* in *Orach Chayim*, siman 240, se'if 8.) I think we can see these two themes in the halachic experience. (Cf. possibly the language of the *Mechaber* and the *Ramah* in *Even Ha Ezer*, siman 28, se'if 2.)

Although we are fond of dismissing Christianity as anti-the body and rejecting sex, I believe that the negative attitudes have won out in our own thinking. We have become to view sex not just with respect but with shame. How else can we understand the almost universal shunning of this topic in the public or private YU curriculum? (The *Atchot Midekah* seminar given by one man at YU is a notable and honorable exception as

far as shunning is concerned.) The failure to deal with it directly seems to fall to live up to the Talmud's principle "Torah ha' u'llimud ani tioroch." (Cf. *Berachot* II, 62a.)

The whole furor about pre-marital sex seemed to imply that after marriage there is no problem of halachic observance. But, as is well-known, mikvah and taharat hamishpachah are the most widely neglected mitzvot of all the daily life mitzvot. Since these do not involve the financial sacrifice of keeping Shabbat or the social difficulty of keeping kashruth, we should ask ourselves: Why are these mitzvot so neglected? My thesis is that it is because Western civilization has focused on sex as a) a narcotic in an advanced human condition and b) as a form of untrammeled self-expression (even without reciprocity).

On these two grounds, I believe that we could fight quite successfully and indicate the ultimate failure of such an ethic to give meaning or satisfaction in life. But contemporary divinity has also stressed sex as an expression of the communication and love in a husband-wife relationship with particular emphasis on a new mutuality and significance for the woman. Here is

"It may sound naive, but it seems to me that at YU one has a right to assume that a discussion of sex assumes a marital state."

where we have failed for we have not related the halachah to such a concern. Yet dialogue and communication on all levels — including but not exclusively or necessarily, the sexual — is what is involved in expressing the *selem elokim* of another person. If *dmot elokim* is the *kal gadol* batorah (cf. Dr. Samuel Belkin's *In His Image*), then recognizing it and respecting it as a positive act.

Therefore, we should reemphasize (or rediscover) the positive strand in halachah the strand expressed so beautifully by Tanach's use of sexual imagery as the allegory of the highest relationship of G-d and Israel — and shift the emphasis to the positive value of sex as a mode (among many) of encounter rather than as exploitation. Thus, Kadesh, at'mechah b'mutar lach would come to mean not merely that our separation makes us different but that our permitted sexual relationship, b'kudushah, is different — more reciprocal, more tender. (This I take to be the intention of the halachot in *Orach Chayim*, *Sifman* 240, especially se'if 2, 3, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, 15.)

Calling such sexual relationship a religious act is quite legitimate. To cite only one source among many, Rav Yaakov Emden in his *Siddur* (see *Hanhagot*, *Leyl Shabbos*, *Siddur*, p. 158) says: Know that (sexual) union done properly, at the proper time, with proper intention is a holy and elevated matter. Let not a man think that in union there is something shameful or twisted, G-d forbid, G-d forbid. For union is called *yediah* "to know" . . . and it is self-evident that if there were not in this matter great holiness, the Presence of G-d (*Shchinah*) is with them."

Might such a shift in focus lead to shift in halachic stress? If there would be sufficient halachic authority (admittedly, in itself, a highly debatable issue) it might be conceivable. For one, the justification of Rav's verbal endearments (cf. *Berachot* 62a) might be expanded on the grounds that wife's expectations are higher in our society and more would be needed to please her. The focus of the halachic concern might be more balanced between fear of innocent actions leading to violations and the concern to preserve conjugal love as a value in holiness. This would have to be done carefully weighing the compelling values in a halachic situation. Of course, the focus on a positive attitude raises the danger of increased violations of the requirements of *prishut*. But, I believe, on balance, many more would observe and be influenced by halachah in a crucial area of life itself. And not to be flippant, even those who sin might well have a criteria for restraint or reduction in sinning.

Some may argue that such distinctions would legitimate sinning but I would note the example of Rabbi Yisroel Salanter who when he could not get a man to keep his store closed on Shabbat, worked on him and persuaded him to at least not keep records. (Continued on page nine)

perative, a course which we are obligated to follow.

Dr. Greenberg laments our failure, and no doubt, from his perspective we have failed, as did our "East-European forbears," not only failed of achievement, but failed even to undertake our mission.

structive paradox, one in which the relevance of Torah would ultimately depend on the ability of its host culture to provide suitable outlets for Torah values. We should honestly recognize that as worthy, as certain social and political objectives may be, the moral duplicity adhering to the methods and motivations of organizations

Rabbi Akiva's students died *minai shelo nahagu kavod zeh lach*. It is very tragic to note that many people at the Yeshiva have chosen this season to publicly insult and attack a teacher and rabbi. This letter is not written in defense of the article (interview with Dr. Greenberg) that started all the furor (I do not find myself in

ally attack and by means of author and article serves no constructive purpose and is behavior unbecoming a "ben torah."

I believe that this article was sincere attempt to discuss pertinent questions and offer answers to pressing problems. Was the professor not competent to give an opinion on such matters? Perhaps

Student Criticism Spurs Dr. Greenberg's Answer

(Continued from page 8)

of his transactions. Moreover, I think we underestimate the vacuity of much of modern life. We do not appreciate how much people would undertake or sacrifice for something that gives them direction, purpose and value in life. This is preeminently the power of *halachah*. We should tap it fully.

Let me also add that which I consider to be the greatest correction needed by the interview. Due to the interests of the questions asked, the interview gives the impression that I believe that the crucial area for our consideration is our relationships with the general society. (Actually the interview did not purport to be a balanced presentation of all my views.) But for the record, let me say that actually I believe that the internal problems are the decisive and crucial issues for survival and relevance.

I believe that it is the challenge of the meaning for our destiny of the European holocaust; the challenge of the Messianic implications of the rebirth of Israel (with the exception of Rabbi Solovitchik's *Kol Dodi Dojek* we have been simply inadequate to the unbelievable magnitude of the Divine in a hidden way in our time; the need for sanctification and relating religious experience to the daily life and experience of the Jew in America and Israel, especially the experience of affluence and freedom; the moral crisis of the plight of Soviet Jewry and our reaction to it; the desperately needed overhaul of Jewish education and the revival of *musar*, ethics and religious experience — these will ultimately decide our success or failure.

Never has a generation been so starved for spiritual nourishment, for a healing mission of Torah. Perhaps we have improved and strengthened, but surely we have not been up to the scope of the need. However, I believe that the internal issues are linked to the general community issues. If we drop our siege mentality, if we shift from mere preservation of our tradition to an attempt to apply it and explore it in every way, if we have the courage to ask the modern questions so that the Torah will give us the ans-

wers to the questions which bother us, I believe the resultant revival would not be content to turn in word but would reach out to our fellow Jews and the world in its plentitude and love and desire to serve as G-d's witnesses.

Lastly, may I comment on the reaction to my interview. Naturally, I am disappointed. No one likes to be attacked or labeled. However, I am particularly disappointed not only in the failure to check or clarify which is a minimum moral obligation but in the inability to at least say: If such and such is true, then I reject it. Such inability bodes ill for our capacity to open a desperately needed dialogue with ourselves.

There must be leeway to make statements wide of the mark if we are to develop the precise formulation. There must be leeway for exploring views which may ultimately be rejected. The net hysteria generated has done much to foreclose serious consideration of these problems by students who would profit from such consideration. At the same time, it will undoubtedly frighten some people into not speaking up for legitimate viewpoints. Such a result would be tragic at a time when the entire Jewish community is on the brink of a *hirhur*, *teshuvah* because it begins to see the disastrous results of its assimilationist policies. Similarly, we ourselves have built up our strength to the point where we can begin to deal more fully with questions and overcome problems. It says something depressing about a community which places the worst possible construction on a position and thus forecloses encountering it rather than places the best possible construction and learns from it.

Finally, part of the problem seems to be that in our current temper, criticism is identified with rejection. Such unrefined thinking can only dismay us. Rav Yisroel Salanter once said that to be a good Jew, you have to have every *midah* — and its opposite. We have become monochromatic good Jews. We have proven brilliant at standing fast, accepting, obeying.

But there is also a need to right the balance for self-criticism, self-questioning and exploring. We are great at emphasizing the external quality of Torah but much less skilled in bringing it into contemporary situations. But we must learn to do both — not because we reject, but because we affirm. Even the quality of skepticism can be used properly to deepen ourselves and our faith. Orthodoxy — and Yeshiva University — would both be far stronger if there was an open and free discussion, and self-criticism.

When I speak of Orthodoxy and Yeshiva, I speak as an impatient lover, not as an outsider. Only when we care fiercely enough will we stop playing it safe. Only when we stick out our necks and learn new languages and new skills and new insights and even make mistakes — not recklessly but as we try to bring out the *maer she bat Torah* — will men come to believe in our seriousness — and in G-d. Otherwise men will say, "Only people who do not know the facts, or the questions, or the contemporary experience still remain committed." Such an impression destroys the believability of Torah. Courage — intellectual *mesirut nefesh* — can only increase its believability and effectiveness in our lives and in the world.

Reply to Mr. Silver:

I never claimed the *Gedolim* are oblivious to the contemporary situation. I too follow Rabbi Jakobovitz' column regularly and, mirabile dictu, even read some of the *Shaalot U'Tshuvot* in the original tongue. (Incidentally, although I have not done a scientific survey, I would estimate roughly that the entire impressive list is dwarfed by the annual output of scholarship in American colonial history — a topic of purely historical-antiquarian interests).

It's all a matter of how you view the glass — half empty or half full. The sheer range of modern problems is staggering and even a half hearted attempt to deal with them might appear impressive — except by comparison with the problem. (Even here this list may look more impressive than

it is. Thus in education of women, we still do not have a full validation of a responsibility to provide a full Torah program for women; in stock ownerships, the problem of moral responsibility for the company whose shares one owns has not been fully explored; Israel Independence Day debates still focus about Hal with or without a *brachah* rather than the grandeur of the nes.

Sometimes the response has been partial and slow, at times grudging or under the oppression of public opinion. In short much has been done — more in technical and procedural issues, less in the areas of quantitative modern experience, and broader thought and value issues, which are the strongest challenges today. I should also add that a number of *Gedolim* who have sought to apply *halachah* to modern questions such as R. Eliyahu Henkin, *shlita*, and R. Moshe Feinstein, *shlita*, on special issues have been attacked in personal and harassing manner *Karaim*.

By "breakdown of *halachah*" I simply mean that people no longer obey and that even observant Jews may live by other values as they observe certain *mitzvot*, *Mitzvat anashim*, *me omada*. I take these facts to be self evident. Since I believe *halachah* to be the divine vehicle I can only assume that the rest reflect weak leadership in the face of situations in unusual flux.

As for *halachic* "change," I include in this term expansion, adaptation, application, changes of strategy as well as re-evaluation of *halachot*. To their eternal credit and our gain, our historic *Gedolim* have led this process. Naturally I am speaking of using *halachic* norms and this is clearly stated in my answer to question #4 in the interview.

Lastly it was feared that premarital *mikvah* would lead to promiscuity. That is the point that I am making. But the premarital sex should not be interpreted to prove that sex is ever after, per se, is evil but it needs *kiddushin* to be holy. I.e., to be done in *kedushah*.

Dr. Irving Greenberg
Associate Professor
History

Rav Lichtenstein Writes Letter To Dr. Greenberg

Editor's Note: The following is an open letter from Rabbi Aaron Lichtenstein, Rabbi Lichtenstein, Sha'ar Yisroel in RIETS and a former professor of English at Stern College, has semicha from YU and a doctorate from Harvard University. This letter concludes the year's series of discussion on YU and its schools. It will be continued in the fall.

Dear Yitzchak:

It really wasn't very cricket of you to have written and/or superintended your article—text and commentary—for some eight months while leaving barely eight days at year's end for any reply. There is obviously no time now for a full and proper response. So please consider this as just an expression of personal reaction rather than a thorough reply, much less the formulation of an alternative position.

Given the gravity of the issues involved, my opening complaint may seem a bit trivial. In a sense, it is. I mention it, however, because it is peripherally related to a genuinely basic issue. I do not refer to any of the substantive points you've raised but rather to the fundamental posture implicitly assumed throughout the article and explicitly described in its exegesis. As I understand it, you sought, perhaps primarily, not so much to present your own views on a number of issues, but simply to stir up discussion of them, to rescue them from the tundra of obscurity to which a conspiracy of apathy and silence had consigned them. And unless I sorely miss the

"To place the full burden of integrating two worlds upon the individual student is neither fair to him nor in the best interest of Halachic Judaism."

mark, I very much suspect that, despite the furor and the attendant unpleasantness, you think that you've succeeded and that you therefore feel both vindicated and content.

Well, I agree wholeheartedly with the aim—but I take issue with your mode of pursuing it. Basic problems should be discussed. A Torah-Halachic Weltanschauung vis-a-vis contemporary problems does need to be formulated and expressed. The need for such a formulation is great at any yeshiva, simply because since Torah must learn, at the personal level, to integrate their total experience within a Halachic framework, and at a more general plane, to develop genuine Halachic solutions for problems confronting the community at large. At our yeshiva, however, it is paramount. Inasmuch as we do, albeit with varying degrees of enthusiasm, include general culture as part of our students' education, we incur a collective debt to them and to ourselves to help them grasp the relation—be it one of complement, irreconcilable conflict, or fruitful tension—between Torah and a given aspect of *Machshava*. To place the full burden of integrating two worlds upon the individual student is neither fair to him nor in the best general interest of Halachic Judaism. For the simple fact is that in most cases, the student either cannot or will not do it, with the result that, assuming that he remains Orthodox, he either withdraws into a sort of observant secularism—a life largely motivated by secular values although regulated by religious norms—or retreats into a traditional bastion in order to avoid confronting the contemporary world altogether. These alternatives are by no means of equal merit. The first, even if sincere, is a shallow formalism while the second constitutes a genuine path to avoid *hashem*, which, despite its lack of sophistication, I prize most highly. Simplicity and naive faith may lack a certain dimension but, whether or not they take cognizance of contemporary trends, they are of infinite moment. However, as far as meeting the overall challenge of imposing *ma'adot shomayim* upon society and

history, both are clearly deficient. Of course, I oversimplify—there are all sorts of intermediate shadings—but I'm sure you'll recognize these as two directions which a rather substantial number of students are inclined to take.

The need for some authoritative Halachic and philosophic guidance is therefore clear and present. However, precisely because this is so vital and so sensitive an area, handling it requires the greatest possible care. And here I must take issue with both your precept and your practice. You contend that "there must be leeway to make statements wide of the mark if we are to develop the precise formulation. There must be leeway for exploring views which may ultimately be rejected." This is a nice nineteenth century notion and it has a pleasant liberal ring about it. Moreover, within certain limits, it is perfectly valid and thoroughly Jewish. But is it relevant to the present situation and is its supposed manifestation in your article consonant with the proper discharge of our responsibility? Anyone who undertakes to discuss an issue publicly, if he takes that issue seriously, assumes a double obligation: of inquiry and expression. He is morally bound both to come as close as possible to the truth and to be as accurate as possible in communicating that truth. Not just as possible for him. As possible for persons who, given the difficulty or the gravity of the issue, can genuinely be said to be reasonably competent to discuss it. With all due respect, there are matters about which you and I have no business issuing manifestos altogether. And of course the more serious the problem, the greater the responsibility to be precise—or, if need be, to remain silent. Where the reality of error is genuinely regarded as a disaster, its possibility will be neither lightly regarded nor easily dismissed. How much margin for error is allowed on the Gemini flights?

As regards our particular problem, I think this is the crux of the matter. A leading Conservative scholar once told me how he had been struck by the manner in which he observed the *Brisker Ran*, *zatzal*, approach a Halachic question. "Reb Velvel," he said, "pondered a *she'ya* as if it were a medical question." Precisely. His commitment to Halacha and his conviction of its truth was such that any pronouncement concerning any aspect of it assumed the character which medical advice has for a responsible doctor—the same caution, the same aversion to potential error, the same sense that something terribly important is hanging in the balance. We do not, most of us, have this sense. Unfortunately, Halachic realities do not live for us with the visceral vividness of a stomachache. But oughtn't we at least strive for such existential immediacy?

Any responsible leeway in erring with respect to momentous issues can only become valid after we have established a reasonably high standard of accuracy as concerns both inquiry and expression—only after, to take up the theme of Arnold's

"Any one who undertakes to discuss an issue publicly, if he takes that issue seriously, assumes a double obligation: of inquiry and expression."

"Hebraism and Hellenism," we have not only gone by the best light we have but taken care that our light be not darkness. I frankly question whether your article—for which the plea is made in your comment—meets this test. Putting the matter in its best possible light, it contained a number of statements which, by your own admission, were, albeit unintentionally, either exaggerated or misleading. To be sure, there was some clarification in your explanation. But is this really the best way to handle problems of crucial importance? Can the initial impact of such an article be easily dismissed? And what of those who, like Browning's grammarian, had "mastered learning's crabbed text" but missed the comment? Let us remember that from a Torah-Halachic point of view, the issues discussed were no piddling matters; and that, on the face of it, substantial

portions of the article therefore contained explosive implications. Let us remember, moreover, that a number of key statements were so vague or misleading that a great many people, neither intelligent nor malicious, regarded your second statement as more of a volte-face than an explanation. If personal friendship and basic decency prevents me from suggesting this interpretation, let the fact remain that a comparison of the two articles could support it—and this is damning enough. How could one know, for instance, that "the definition of a Jew"—perhaps the most crucial statement in your article—does not refer to a

"Basic problems should be discussed. A Torah-Halachic Weltanschauung vis-a-vis contemporary problems does need to be formulated and expressed."

minimal Jew in the Halachic sense (for then it is far too narrow) nor, as you told me orally, to the ideal and maximal Jew (for then it would be too broad), but to (I believe these were your words) "a Jew who deserves to be regarded with respect as a religious person?" From your printed comment I gather a slightly different explanation, that the Jew in question was the ideal Jew after all but that the phrase "taking the covenant seriously" means keeping all the mitzot. I do not question either interpretation nor, honestly, am I concerned about their difference. But I must simply ask: Don't you, in the light of your comment, take away with the left what you give with the right? If your discussion was confined to such Reform and Conservative Jews as keep or at least subscribe to all the mitzot, then isn't your trumpet call to ecumenism and tolerance muted to an appeal for acceptance of a few rabid individuals? I simply point out that it makes for internal inconsistency so that the article was, in this sense, misleading.

Or again, what are we to understand by "the fact that Orthodoxy has lost all (my italics) connection with modern life." I don't ask whether this is true or false. I simply ask what does it mean. Is there, then, no remaining link between ourselves—*you* and I are Orthodox, too—and modern life? The overall position you advocate is itself open to question. We might ponder the wisdom of Fulton Sheen's remark that "the who marries his own age will find himself a widower in the next." By this as it may, however—I do agree with you to a point—can your statement of "presupposed fact stand scrutiny?"

Or, to take another example, doesn't a statement like "democratic America can eliminate our superiority complex and return us to our ideals of human equality and social justice" require—both as an explicitly normative and implicitly historical dictum—a great deal of clarifying amplification? And when you contend that "in short, the halachah has broken down," are you referring to halachah itself or to its scholars and interpreters? Or, if you would contend that the two are identical, doesn't this need to be elucidated? And isn't any breakdown partly a problem of communication?

All of this no doubt strikes you as an unfairly ad hominem argument. It isn't and it certainly isn't meant to be. The point is simply that we must, collectively, develop a much keener sense of responsibility as regards the discussion of Halachic and theological problems. The *nikkud* advises, *the chomah hizharu b'dorotchem*, and anyone who has even had occasion to observe *gedolei yisroel* first-hand—to have *shimush* in the genuine sense—knows the caution with which they approach basic issues. He knows, moreover, that the reticence which you always ascribe to ghettoization, spiritual paralysis, or what have you, is frequently due to a superior sense of responsibility, to *z'hirut*, in the best sense of the word, as the *pasuk* tells us, *ma'net v'chayim b'yad lashon*. Then the proper exercise of language—and I do not say this only as a professor of English—is indeed a matter of supreme importance. It entails both a *bein adam lamakom* and a

bein adam lachavero, an obligation to a reader or listener as well as to truth. By "the proper exercise of language" I do not mean simply the use of clear and logical statements—a la symbolic logic but the evocation of the whole range of effects, implicit as well as explicit, connotative as well as denotative, emotive as well as intellectual, through which language exerts its powerful influence over us. Thus, I take exception not only to the apparent substance of the original section on revelation but to the suggestion implied in the juxtaposition of the two adjectives in the statement that "what we mean by Divine revelation" may be less external or mechanical than many Jews now think. "Are we to assume that external revelation is ipso facto mechanical? Or again, I originally objected not only to the Halachic implications of the section on sex but also to a sentence, like "Tanach doesn't look upon sex as an evil." Is there no suggestion that with Chazal it was different? And doesn't driving this sort of wedge between the two have extremely serious potential? Mind you, I am not suggesting that these nuances were consciously intended. I merely point out that they are there; perhaps by accident rather than design, and that in an article such as this they probably oughtn't be there.

The caution requisite to any responsible discussion of basic issues becomes doubly important when the medium employed is the printed word. *Scripta manent*. There are liberties one may allow oneself in thought or speech which personal discipline should reject in print. There is a finality about publication that, even in age in which publish-or-perish has glittered the scene with so much intellectual trash, make Rav Yosef Ber's comment still apt: "Not all that is thought should be spoken, not all that is spoken should be written and not all that is written should be printed."

I am not unaware of objections which may be raised to this position. It will be argued that it tends to authoritarianism; that it limits popular discussion; that it rests upon an abiding sense of insecurity; that its stress upon caution and responsibility leads to an insistence upon definitive truth which hags valuable tentative insights from the public arena; that it forecloses the whole process of groping discussion through which truth is gradually discovered; that, finally, it stifles not only expression but inquiry inasmuch as it fails to recognize the value of what Keats called "Negative Capability," that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mys-

"The point is simply that we must, collectively, develop a much keener sense of responsibility as regards the discussion of Halachic and theological problems."

teries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason—Coleridge, for instance, would let go by a fine isolated verisimilitude caught from the penetration of a mystery, from being incapable of remitting content with half-knowledge."

These are sound objections but, as regards the popular discussion of basic issues, they are hardly decisive. The exchange of ideas, the dialectical clash of thought and thought which "the century of hope" (as F. S. Marvin dubbed the nineteenth) so admired, is important, but we must be wary of the price. Are we prepared to justify, morally and theologically, the spiritual casualties which may result from statements which are wide of the mark as we grope along toward a hopefully more precise formulation? Perhaps some loss is inevitable no matter which course we pursue, and it's just a question of losing some of the presently committed in exchange for a host of prospective "proslayers." Even if this should be the case, we would be confronted with a formidable moral issue but in any event, every precaution must be made to keep any loss to a minimum. I submit that this involves far more care than I think you are willing to exercise. No doubt, there is such a thing as over-caution; perhaps the reluctance of the Beit

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Rav Lichtenstein Answers Dr. Greenberg's Article

(Continued from page seven)

harassment, to take an example from your field, of Lord Acton, to publish is an instance of it. But the line needs to be drawn far beyond yours. And I do think that there is a basic distinction between discussion and publication. Horace's dictum about waiting nine years between writing and publication may be too severe. But the underlying principle is sound. We would do better to do more tentative groping orally before rushing into print. "Negative capability"—in one sense, it was basic to Rav Chaim's approach ("fun a kashé shatrit men nit")—can be fruitfully exercised in more fluid forms of inquiry and discourse (although even then with caution) before encasing our gropings in the hard cast of print. Before we start "shaking up the kids" (to use a term you've kicked around Yavneh let us remember we are dealing with human lives and

"The caution requisite to any responsible discussion of basic issues becomes doubly important when the medium employed is the printed word."

their spiritual destinies. Were you a medical—rather than, as my Mishneh calls it, a "study"—doctor, would you be as ready to embark so freely on this kind of experimental enterprise?

In light of the foregoing, I might add that I was a bit taken aback by your reaction to criticism of your article. You express shock that people denounced it without consulting you for an interpretation, and suggest that their failure to be alarmed z'chuth was tantamount to shifchat damim. These are strong words with which to denounce your critics. (By the way, have you phoned them all to be sure they were accurately quoted and that you have the authorized interpretation of their remarks?) But is this stance of pained martyrdom and pious shock really in order? Exception was taken by various readers to certain views which the article, as just about everyone—not only k'na'im—understood it, seemed clearly to espouse. In the minds of many, if not most, readers, no alternative interpretations even suggested themselves. But even if some alternative did seem barely possible, was one bound to accept it rather than criticize the clear and palpable sense? Must one engage in all sorts of intellectual tergiversation rather than criticize views which he considers objectionable and harmful? You argue that you should have been consulted. Perhaps, but that would only have enlightened a few callers (after all, there would then have been no public clarification) and left the article, as generally understood, intact. Of course, wherever some doubt existed—and remember that for many none did—no personal judgment upon you ought to have been passed without clarification. Whether or not an author has special and superior authority to interpret his works (literary critics have debated the point heatedly) certainly no moral judgment of him as a person can disregard his interpretation. But as long as the article seemed plainly to

were referring to premarital sex. When I first read the section, I thought that, although I disagreed with it, I at least understood it. I did not think, as did many, that you were advocating premarital sexual relations. I know you too well and regard you too highly to have considered this. I rather thought that you felt that various other forms of erotic activity (need I enumerate them?) common to the modern American scene should be permitted if not encouraged. Now that my mistakes have been corrected, however, I confess that I don't understand the tenor of your discussion altogether. "Today," you tell us, "the poskim should recognize that there is nothing wrong with sex per se, and should promulgate a new value system and corresponding new halachot about sex." With reference to a marital situation, I am at a loss to understand the statement and its implications. Is it conceivable that poskim, by and large, have heretofore not recognized "that there is nothing wrong with sex per se"? Were they so obtuse as to overlook the fact that even when conjugation is impossible, onah, periodic marital relations, is obligatory mid'oraita? Indeed, if one should betroth a woman on the condition that he not be bound by this obligation, the kiddushin is valid, but the stipulation is void inasmuch as it violates a Halachic precept so that he is a shasheh al mah shekasav batorah. And did most of them forget, for instance, that the Halacha specifically singled out shabbat and yom tov, periods of holiness, as occasions on which the mitzvah of onah must be especially observed, inasmuch as this would constitute a mode of their proper celebration? Did not most rishonim hold that a husband who wishes to leave on a day must first "remember" his wife sexually, even if this involves transgressing the halacha of yirsha samuch l'esev? Or, to take another example, did not the Rambam

"Given all the pressures for latitudinarianism, we cannot afford to relax our efforts to maintain the integrity of Torah and Halachah."

hold that a woman's simple statement that she finds her husband sexually incompatible is sufficient ground for compelling him to divorce her?

No doubt, within the Halachic framework different attitudes towards the subject of sex have, in the course of time, developed. Some poskim have been more positive than others. This is both inevitable and desirable. However, in this area as in others, the objective character of Halacha sets certain limits within which differences then prevail. It defines, roughly, the ends of the spectrum. And I think that it would clearly exclude the notion that there is something "wrong with sex per se" at one end as it would exclude very different, romantic excesses at the other. The gemara in Erubin pretty much speaks for itself. "Rav Bruna said in the name of Rav, 'whoever sleeps in a room in which dwell a man and his wife, of him the posuk says, "The wives of my people you have driven out of the home of her (sic) pleasures;'"

It would have been rather difficult therefore for anyone to have construed your original remarks as referring to marital relations as this would have left you fighting a straw man. (The thesis against which you argue in your clarification is rather different; those remarks I understand perfectly, and, I might add, I've thought about this myself). Similarly, with regard to the "new halachot" which you want promulgated. Leaving aside the question as to whether and how this can be done, once one learned that you were referring to a marital state, it became difficult to see just which changes were desired. Even after your clarification, I'm still not too sure. I surmise that you are referring to a few nebulous halachot—they are not set down as definitive norms—concerning modes of approach to coitus, or, that you are thinking, not of revising old halachot but rather of establishing new ones, in hitherto uncharted territory. In either case, the problem would be primarily one of attitude and hashkafah, of stress and focus, rather

than psak in the narrower sense of the word. Within the existing Halachic framework, concerning marital life, there is little in the way of absolute norms which could be changed so as to produce the sort of axiological shift you advocate or which could really widen acceptance of the Halachic approach in this area. Do you seriously believe that it is the content of a couple of halachot which deters people from observing taharat hamishpacha? Is there anything in hilchot niddah that can be changed (assuming that the basic concept would be retained) so as to wipe away a popular objection? Isn't it the basic concept

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rather than any of the Halachic details which people resist?

Anyone reading the original article, which is much vaguer than the comment and with almost no hint of the thrust of the latter, would naturally have assumed that the hue and cry about new halachot had to involve significant departures in the area in which departures could make a real difference—the premarital. Rather than angrily attack your readers, then, I thought you better recognize that they read it honestly as it seemed to read and simply clarify your position without charging them with your figurative crucifixion. From the tone and substance of the article, I think it is clear that you know much of it was controversial. So why the surprise over the ensuing controversy? You "rocked the boat"—to use one of your expressions—and wonder that there are waves. You set out "to shake up the kids" and wonder that they've reacted. Perhaps some of the reaction was a bit intemperate, although, if pressed, one could perhaps make out a case for what Edgell Rickword called "the value of 'negative' emotions." But to the extent that the intemperance was based upon misunderstanding, let's recognize that the onus was not primarily the reader's and take it from there.

We come back once more to the question for responsibility. Perhaps I oughtn't to have harped on it at such length but I think an appreciation of it is crucial to any meaningful public discussion of basic Halachic issues. As to the substantive problems touched on in your article, there is much which, had time and space permitted, I would have liked—even after the clarification—to discuss. As you well know, there are substantial portions with which I am in general agreement. The appeal for more intensive and extensive application of Halacha to the social and political realm is very much in place, and I am inclined to agree with most of the specific positions you take in this area, especially as regards poverty and consumption. I also think that your diagnosis of the current state of YU is generally sound, although, if past discussions are any index, I would disagree with your remedies. On the other hand, there is much which I must reject. I omit mention of your discussion of revelation because, although I would have reservations concerning things you've said about this on other occasions, I'm not precisely sure of what you mean here. But there are other points. The implied thesis which I believe you have made explicit on other occasions, that whatever areas of Halacha are not relevant to the contemporary scene are, broadly speaking, not relevant at all, is wholly untenable. I believe—again, in the light of previous discussions—that I would challenge your analysis of the extent and the mode of the insufficient application of Halacha in certain areas, as well as, and more crucially, the reasons for this and therefore the remedies for it. Furthermore, I suspect that you greatly overestimate the extent to which the "right" liberal solutions could be arrived at by increased Halachic effort and that you correspondingly underestimate the possible real conflict between traditional and mod-

ern values. Also, I would take strong issue with even the clarified version of your section on sex—not so much because of its specific attitude towards sex itself, as because of a much more basic question: a misconception of the nature of the relation between kodesh and chol. The two are related and integrated but they are hardly identical. Havadalah, no less than Kiddush, is a basic mitzvah.

Then, there are a few matters of tactics or emphasis. While agreeing that we need to place greater stress upon the social and political application of Halacha especially as regards Eretz Yisrael, I do not think that we should immerse ourselves in American society to the extent you seem to advocate. Our primary goal must be the more selfish, yes selfish—one of surviving as a viable tradition; and I simply cannot buy your thesis that this can be better done by much greater involvement in American political life. The concept of priorities and of an axiological hierarchy must be our guiding principle. I would similarly disagree with your tactical approach towards Conservative and Reform Judaism. (I speak now of your clarifying statement, the apparent import of the original statement I reject entirely). Of course, I agree that there are individual Reform and Conservative Jews whose religious experience, viewed as a subjective phenomenon, must be regarded seriously as a genuine striving for kedusha which therefore has value. For that matter, the same is true of many Christians, Moslems, or others, for whom their religion serves as a vehicle for attaining a measure of spiritual fulfillment. However, if we shift the discussion to another plane and ask what is the objective character of Conservatism or Reform as readings of the Torah as God's revealed word and of the tradition derived therefrom, the answer is that it is wholly invalid. In dealing with this area, therefore, we need to stress two points concurrently: that the subjective experience of non-Orthodox Jews may have genuine religious content and value but that their interpretation of the Torah is in error and must be rejected outright. I take it that you think the second point, while perhaps correct, should now be discussed, if at all, *sotto voce*, but that we must trumpet forth the first fortissimo. My own position is—and I have stated in my shiur—that, dif-

"Our primary goal must be more selfish—one of surviving as a viable tradition; and I simply cannot buy your thesis that this can be better done by greater involvement in American political life."

ficult as it may sometimes be, we need to stress both, the second no less vociferously than the first. Given all the pressures for latitudinarianism, we cannot afford to relax our efforts to maintain the integrity of Torah and Halacha.

Finally, I must really object to the strident tone of much of the critique of contemporary Orthodoxy and some of its Halachic leaders. In this respect, the article—as well as other Cassandra-like public denunciations you've made on other occasions—seems strangely out of keeping with your citing Rav Yisroel Salanter, about justifying the world and criticizing oneself. Aren't those fellow Orthodox Jews part of the world?

But all this requires full discussion and I must come back to my original point. It can't really be done in a working week. I've merely ticked off areas of agreement or disagreement, rather than defined attitudes. Perhaps when time permits and my thinking on some of these problems has ripened, od' chazov lamod. In the meantime, I hope that you'll read this as it was written—not as an attempt to castigate or excoriate but as a plea, albeit at times a pungent plea, for a more careful and more responsible approach to the public discussion of basic Halachic and theological issues.

With best personal wishes,
Sincerely,
Aharon

"The appeal for the intensive and extensive application of Halachah to the social and political realm is very much in place."

present what you yourself subsequently described as objectionable position, I don't see why its critics should be faulted.

Of course, "at YU one has a right to assume a marital state"—except when the context clearly dictates otherwise. The opening paragraph of that section speaks of "a girl" rather than a woman (again, connotation is important), and it explicitly discusses a supposed prohibition against unmarried girls undergoing t'filah. Moreover, is the fuss and fanfare only made as long as one assumed that you