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## *From the Pages of Tradition*

### RABBI JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK ON THE BRISKER METHOD

*In 1959, on the occasion of the passing of his uncle, R. Yitshak Ze'ev (Reb Velvel) Soloveitchik, the Brisker Rav, in Jerusalem, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik delivered a eulogy in New York.<sup>1</sup> In the hesped, a tour de force which lasted a number of hours, the Rav took the opportunity to sketch a portrait not just of Reb Velvel (b. 1886), but of Brisker lomdus in toto, as exemplified by his uncle, his father R. Moshe (1876-1941), and the progenitor of the methodology, his grandfather R. Hayyim Brisker.*

*The eulogy, delivered in Yiddish, was published in Hebrew in Ha-Do'ar 42:39 (9 Tishrei 5724/September 27, 1963), pp. 752-9, as "Ma Dodekh miDod."<sup>2</sup> The essay was later printed (with a few additional footnotes) in BeSod haYahid ve-haYahad, ed. Pinchas H. Peli (Jerusalem: Orot, 1976), pp. 189-254, as well as in Divrei Hagut ve-Ha'arakha (Jerusalem: WZO, 1982), pp. 57-97. The following is my translation of the section in which the Rav enumerates some specific characteristics of his grandfather's method. The translation corresponds to pp. 230-5 of the beSod HaYahid version, and pp. 82-5 of Divrei Hagut.*

*As is well known, Reb Hayyim (1853-1918) brought about a revolution in the study of Talmud, marked by rigorous and sophisticated analysis, conceptual precision and categorization, and intellectual boldness. The so-called Brisker derekh, or method, was adopted by yeshivot throughout Europe, and later throughout the world, and is the predominant style of study in use today.<sup>3</sup> Reb Hayyim's innovation, it has been said, did for Torah study what Copernicus did for astronomy—that is, a complete realignment of focus and emphasis.<sup>4</sup>*

*The eulogy followed a well-established pattern, used time and again by the Rav, of developing typologies through halakhic metaphors to express thereby the uniqueness of the deceased.<sup>5</sup> In our case, the formulation of such a typology introduces the reader to "Rosh haShana Man" and "Yom Kippur Man." Each personality type is associated with a different category of divine revelation: Rosh haShana is grand, public revelation a la "And*

*the Lord will manifest Himself to them, and his arrows shall flash like lightning; my Lord shall sound the shofar and advance in a stormy tempest” (Zekharya 9:14; quoted in the conclusion of the shofrot section of Rosh haShana prayers), whereas Yom Kippur is inward and private. The Rav then explained that Moses was the prototypical Ish Yom haKippurim, while Aaron serves as the paradigm of the Ish Rosh haShana. Within this framework, the Rav sheds light on his uncle’s personality by explaining how Reb Velvel, like Moses, was a “Yom Kippur Man,” reserved and private.*

*Later, the Rav utilizes a halakhic metaphor to describe the nature of the intimacy of Reb Hayyim and his sons’ relationship with the Torah, by drawing a distinction between eirusin (engagement or betrothal) and nisui’n (marriage). In the former, bride and groom are still merely engaged—closely bound, but still independent people. In the latter, however, they are brought into true unity, giving themselves over completely unto each other. Many talmidei hakhamim are betrothed to the Torah, but very few (Reb Hayyim and sons among them) have been truly wed to the Torah—reveling in the intimacy of that relationship, and benefiting from the direct and immediate knowledge of Torah (as only a beloved spouse truly understands his or her mate) to forge new and creative levels of study and understanding.<sup>6</sup>*

*According to the Rav, this intimate insight is the necessary prerequisite which allows the champions of the Brisker methodology to envision halakhic phenomena in abstract conceptual terms, which then serve as the building blocks of deeply sophisticated and highly creative Torah innovation. In this way, R. Hayyim was able to elevate virtually untouched sugyot such as tefilla and berakhot from the domain of ba’alei batim to the subject of talmidei hakhamim. Or, as the Rav pointed out: Before R. Hayyim, [the study of] issur ve-heter was about pots and pans—R. Hayyim succeeded in placing it within a pure ideational framework.<sup>7</sup>*

*What is particularly interesting in the eulogy is the Rav’s treatment and analysis of what he enumerates as ten characteristics of the Brisker method, and more specifically, the exemplar of the method—Halakhic Man. In this way, the eulogy serves as a parallel text to the Rav’s monumental essay of the same name. The highly personal nature of the eulogy, however, lends insight into the Rav’s conception of this typological personality in that here the Rav is explicitly describing his uncle, father, and grandfather as paradigmatic halakhic men.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, “Ma Dodekh miDod” was published almost twenty years after the first appearance of Halakhic Man<sup>9</sup>—and therefore may be the product of a more mature perspective. In all cases, the material in the eulogy is an important supplement to our understanding of what is arguably the Rav’s most significant work.*

*Another crucial point of interest is the Rav's presentation of Halakhic Man (here) as an expression of his vision of the ideal educator. If we are to take the model provided to heart, a rebbe must (at least) aspire to be authentic, original, self-critical, precise, completely immersed in Torah and dedicated to his students, and (above all) intellectually honest. This raises many implications for the state of education in our community today. Insofar as we attempt to utilize the Brisker methodology in our schools (often incorporating components even in early grades), we must bear in mind that the Rav is adjuring us that the method is not merely a technique or a jargon: hilukim and hakirot, heftsa and gavra, etc.—which are certainly components—but must be the educative outcome of a princely personality, the very extension of a halakhic man himself. I believe that this raises some serious questions for education (teacher training not least among them!) that all who engage in this method ought to be asking.*

*However, the Rav himself seems to be aware of the challenges of meeting such a tall order.<sup>10</sup> In what is perhaps his most deeply personal piece of writing, "Al Ahavat haTorah veGeulat Nefesh haDor" ("On the Love of Torah and Redemption of the Soul of the Generation," untranslated), the Rav writes:*

*Orthodox youth have discovered the Torah through scholastic forms of thought, intellectual contact, and cold logic. However, they have not merited to discover her [the Torah] through a living, heart-pounding, invigorating sense of perception. They know the Torah as an idea, but do not directly encounter her as a "reality," perceptible to "taste, sight and touch." Because many of them lack this "Torah-perception," their world view (hashkafa) of Judaism becomes distorted . . .*

*In one word, they are confounded on the pathways of Judaism, and this perplexity is the result of unsophisticated perspectives and experiences. Halakha is two-sided . . . the first is intellectual, but ultimately it is experiential.<sup>11</sup>*

*Our educational philosophy and theory of practice must focus upon what the Rav went on to term this "bold and lofty dialectic" in which intellectual study passes over into and is preserved and fulfilled by experiential Torah.<sup>12</sup> Paradoxically, however, if we will endeavor to teach Brisker Torah, our success will in no small way be measured by our ability to—as the Rav said—first "open the [experiential] Torah of the heart as a prerequisite to the Torah of the mind."<sup>13</sup>*

**“THE COMMANDMENT OF THE LORD IS LUCID,  
ENLIGHTENING THE EYES” [Ps. 19:9]**

This is the innovation of Reb Hayyim in the world of the halakha and Torah study (*lamdanut*). The results of this new method are many, and impossible to [fully] enumerate. [Nevertheless,] we shall attempt to enumerate only a few here:

1. The Halakhic Man of R. Hayyim’s school casts a bright light on each and every subject that he deals with. The truth revealed to him radiates splendor. There is a truth that is reticent, and there is a truth which reveals her face unto man. Before the *shiurim* of R. Hayyim, R. Moshe and R. Yitshak Ze’ev, the students were perplexed on the pathways of the halakha, not knowing where to turn or what to seek. They could not see the paved path nor the prepared road, but were trapped in a vicious cycle, unable to free themselves from it. When R. Hayyim or his sons would conclude their *shiurim*, the situation had entirely changed. Suddenly, great light shone forth. The perplexity disappeared, the [crooked] roads lay straight before them, and the [vicious] cycle was broken. The students were liberated.<sup>14</sup> Everything became so simple, so clear, so elementary, so much so that they wondered why they themselves hadn’t explained the [heretofore unclear] position of the Rambam or statement of *Tosafot* as had their *rabbeim*. Why, they would ask, hadn’t they themselves grasped the central point of the matter?<sup>15</sup> But their teachers had not innovated anything at all, they merely removed the veil from the pretty face of the halakha, and all became enchanted by her beauty. To what can this be compared? To someone suddenly awoken in the middle of the night, unable to grasp his surroundings. For a brief moment he has lost his bearings. It seems as if the bed is askew, and he is spread across its width, grasping hither and non in the dark as if the door, which has always been just on the other side of the bed, is now right on top of him. All of the furnishings in the room have become distorted and unreal! Suddenly he finds the light switch, flicks it, and bright light floods the room. All becomes normal as he regains his bearings. He wonders why he had been unable to picture the room and its furnishings [in the dark]? Why had the picture become distorted when now all is so clear and simple?<sup>16</sup>

2. The Torah study (*lamdanut*) of this school must be authentic, original, bearing the impression of the noetic creation of the thinker. The purpose of study is the conquest of content and new ideas. He must cast his novellae in his own [original] forms, impressing his own thought upon them.<sup>17</sup> The introduction of borrowed logical considera-

tions, the use of coins minted by other *bakhmei Yisrael*, the repetition of ideas and Torah novellae which float in the air and are known by every *yeshiva* student—wrapping himself in a *tallit* which is not his own,<sup>18</sup> which he neither wove nor embroidered, gathering scattered opinions from the world of learning like fallen leaves on an autumn day in a thick forest, with no effort to find a manner of frank and individual self-expression—all these are foreign to the creative and true methodology of R. Hayyim.

3. This method of creating pure constructs does not differentiate between primary and secondary, between general and specific, everything—from beginning to end—is crucial. Even if the learner is sure of the genuineness of his thought process, in its image and form, even if he senses that he is on the straight path, eyeing lights in the distance—he dare not rest if even the most minuscule detail cannot fit within his general conceptual framework. Like a mathematician, who will neither be calm nor at rest until each intellectual jot and tittle finds its proper place in the formula, nor will he pacify himself with vain consolations, as if to say: The principles [of the mathematical formula] are ordered and true, who cares about the details?! The same restlessness plagues the Torah scholar when a matter is murky or questionable, he is disturbed if even the smallest detail is still unclear.<sup>19</sup> Even the smallest iota will stymie and invalidate the whole [Talmudic equation]. There is one and the same law for a physical Torah scroll and conceptual Torah thoughts alike.<sup>20</sup>

4. The Halakhic Man's conscience is highly vigilant. He is self-critical, neither deceiving himself nor blinding [honest] insight. If he is at all uncertain of the veracity of his reasoning, even though others may appreciate [his logic], he will blot it from his writing and speak not of it to another. Truth is his guiding light.<sup>21</sup> He fools no man, he loves his teachers, honors his colleagues, and adores his students—but he loves truth above all. A sharp sense of responsibility [to truth] accompanies the scholar in every place and at all times. Oftentimes R. Hayyim would amend his novellae. O, how strict he was with the smallest detail, and how he trembled lest he said something imprecise.<sup>22</sup>

5. Absolute devotion to Torah, and the ability to utterly focus on it by day and night, are the dual conditions to actualize this method. Halakhic Man is committed with his entire heart and soul to Torah and halakhic reasoning, and is not distracted from them even while occupied with other matters.<sup>23</sup> The [Torah] inquiries tug at him, the questions trouble him, the subject enchants and entices him. His entire spirit and soul are immersed in halakhic reasoning, and he does not become

distracted for even one moment. The comment of Maimonides [*Mishne Torah Teshuva* 10:3] regarding the love of God applies equally to Torah study:

What is the love of God that is befitting? It is to love the Eternal with a great and exceeding love, so strong that one's soul shall be knit up with the love of God, and one should be continually enraptured by it, like a love-sick individual, whose mind is at no time free from his passion for a particular woman, the thought of her filling his heart at all times, when sitting down or rising up, when he is eating or drinking. [Even intenser should be the love of God in the hearts of those who love Him. And this love should continually possess them, even as He commanded us in the phrase, "with all your heart and with all your soul." (*Deuteronomy* 6:5)] . . .<sup>24</sup>

R. Hayyim of Brisk and his great sons, my father and master and my uncle, of blessed memories, fulfilled this command in their unbounded love for Torah. Many times, while they would be walking on their way, speaking with acquaintances, resting on the couch or eating—they would suddenly cry out in excitement: "Our master's words are resolved!"<sup>25</sup> The light had flashed, and they grasped the truth in all her glory. Such revelation is the result of incredible concentration on a subject and all-embracing dedication to the discipline of halakha.

6. This method does not need verbosity, prefaces or multiple examples, with no need to dally about the subject at hand. It strikes right to the root of the matter, using [only] two or three words. By emphasizing just one word in the language of the *sugya*, all questions evaporate, difficulties are solved and doubts resolved. My uncle, R. Yitshak Ze'ev, said of his father, our great teacher, while eulogizing him, that with the wave of a hand, R. Hayyim illuminated the students' eyes in the manner of [R. Yohanan, who miraculously] "exposed his arm and light shone forth."<sup>26</sup> The language is precise, hypotheses are crisp and clean, the phraseology is artistic. The study is pure and pristine, deficiencies invalid, excess removed. There is no need for a library, on the bookshelf are the basics and no more. [Only] the betrothed sends gift-bearing messengers to his in-laws' home in honor of his bride. [In marriage, however,] man and wife need no messengers, intermediaries, interpreters or outsiders.<sup>27</sup> Their contact and dealings occur with no side-stepping. There is no need for elongated *shiurim*. We learn the page of Talmud, explaining the explicit, and explicating the esoteric hidden between the lines.<sup>28</sup>

7. The Halakhic Man does not attempt to resolve all questions.

He neither rejoices in answers, nor is he pained by the queries. Man's role is to understand. When he understands the difficulty and the inexplicable complexities—that is enough! Halakhic Man does not waste his spiritual energies for naught, [attempting to] answer unanswerable questions or unsolvable riddles. Wherever there is the faintest halakhic presence, [his] finger is there on the pulse of the halakha, diagnosing that which can [legitimately] be said, and that which must remain enigmatic and unutterable.<sup>29</sup>

8. Halakhic Man will never utter a convoluted or fabricated idea. R. Hayyim said of his son R. Yitshak Ze'ev that he never even conceived an unclear thought. The simple understanding (*peshat*) is his guiding light.

9. He extends his control over language and form. The most fundamental and central idea is the act of simplification. [Halakhic Man] enslaves the word to its true meaning, the form to the content, the terminology to the method.<sup>30</sup> He becomes possessor of the Torah, doing with it as he will. R. Yehoshua declared this when he stood on his feet [and exclaimed to God regarding the Torah that] “it is not in heaven!” [*Deuteronomy* 30:12].<sup>31</sup> Halakhic Man rules and reigns in the kingdom of the halakha.<sup>32</sup>

10. Halakhic Man is an outstanding pedagogue, with fantastic ability to make [Torah] understood. Both young and old depend on him. He is capable of teaching *Nega'im* and *Ohalot*<sup>33</sup> to the most advanced sages, while being able to teach a section of Bible to young school-children—all with the same charming modesty. His students admire him, for they have only one, irreplaceable teacher, and he is entirely dedicated to them with all his heart and soul.<sup>34</sup>

So too, my uncle and my father and master, of blessed memories, who received the method of my grandfather, R. Hayyim, in all its breadth and depth, its glory and splendor, became one with Torah. The Torah was wed to and bound intimately with them—through this was their uniqueness expressed. My father died in the month of *Shevat* 5701 (3 *Shevat*/January 31, 1941), my uncle, of blessed memory, remained the singular, unparalleled figure of Torah-royalty in his generation. The Torah was his child bride, he was madly in love with her. A silent dialogue, like husband and wife, existed between them. He [intuitively] sensed her very being, and perceived the very depths of her heart.

There were many *gedolim* in this generation, but none like R. Yitshak Ze'ev—utterly unique in his time!

NOTES

This essay, part of a larger work-in-progress on the goals of education for Modern Orthodoxy, benefited from comments by Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, Rabbi David Ebner, and Daniel Marom.

1. Reb Velvel died on Yom Kippur night, October 11, 1959, at the time of *Kol Nidrei*, and the eulogy was delivered during *sheloshim* in Yeshiva University's Lamport Auditorium.
2. A word-play on *Shir haShirim* 5:9: "How is your beloved better than another, O fairest of women? How is your beloved better than another, that you adjure us so?" In the context of the eulogy, "*Ma Dodekh miDod*" should be translated as "Who is more beloved than Uncle?"
3. No full-length biography of Reb Hayyim yet exists, and analyses of his method leave something lacking (perhaps because the *derekh* must be experienced to be truly appreciated and understood); see, however, the following: R. Shlomo Yosef Zevin, *Ishim veShitot* (Jerusalem, 1957 [1st ed.]), pp. 43-85; R. Yitzchak Adler, *Lomdus: A Substructural Analysis of Conceptual Talmudic Thought* (New York, 1989); Norman Solomon, *The Analytic Movement: Hayyim Soloveitchik and his Circle* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993); Moshe Wachtfogel, *The Brisker Derech* (Jerusalem, 1993); Shaul Stampfer, *HaYeshiva haLita'it beHithavuta* (Jerusalem: Shazar, 1995), esp. ch. 4; Marc B. Shapiro, "The Brisker Method Reconsidered: Review Essay," *Tradition* 31:3 (Spring 1997), pp. 78-102.
4. The analogy to Copernicus may be more than merely rhetorical, in that there is an unresolved debate as to the influence of the *Haskala* in specific, and secular studies and sciences in general, on the popularity and spread of the Brisker *derekh*. In this eulogy, the Rav compared R. Hayyim's revolution in Torah to that of Galileo and Newton in physics (see *Divrei Hagut*, p. 75). There is no evidence to suspect that R. Hayyim himself was influenced by or exposed to the *Haskala* or general literature, merely that the method he advanced was appealing to many students and followers who may have been. Examples of opposition to the method can be found in the introduction to *Bet Ridbaz*, the responsa of Rabbi Jacob David Wilovsky, and Rabbi Henoch Eegis' introduction to his *Marheshet* (quoted in Zevin, above, p. 195). See also: Lawrence Kaplan "The Hazon Ish: Haredi Critic of Traditional Orthodoxy" in *The Uses of Tradition*, ed. J. Wertheimer (New York: JTS, 1992) esp. pp. 151-7; Solomon, op. cit., pp. 21-34, and Stampfer, op. cit., pp. 112-3, for other examples of opposition.
5. See: Marvin Fox, "The Rav as Maspid" *Tradition* 30:4 (Summer 1996), pp. 164-81. On the Rav's use of typologies in general, see the beginning of Pinchas H. Peli's introduction to *On Repentance* (Jerusalem: Orot, 1980). A fascinating comparison can be drawn by comparing the Rav's eulogy for R. Velvel with that delivered by R. Aharon Kotler, see his *Mishmat Rebi Aharon* (Lakewood, 1988) vol. 3, pp. 219-32.
6. Earlier the Rav had stated (*Divrei Hagut*, pp. 74):  
Halakhic Man, wed to the Torah and cleaving unto it, "sees" halakhic components, "feels" halakhic ideas, as if they were audible, visual, sen-

sual. He not only lives *with halakha*, but lives *the halakha* itself—just as he lives in the physical world of sight, sound, smell, [etc.]—at which point the Torah is revealed to man not merely conceptually . . . but as a pipeline to wisdom, through which flows [Halakhic Man's] intuitive, creative genius.

7. See *Divrei Hagut*, pp. 75-82, and cf. *Halakhic Man*, throughout, but especially pp. 17-29.
8. Of course, we know from the epigraph—"At that moment the image of his father came to him and appeared before him in the window" (*Sota* 36b)—that *Halakhic Man* is implicitly describing his forebears as well.
9. "*Ish haHalakhah*," in *Talpiyot* 1:3-4 (1944), pp. 651-735. Translated by Lawrence Kaplan as *Halakhic Man* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1983).
10. A deeper dimension of this awareness is expressed by the remark of my friend and teacher, R. Shalom Carmy (whose comments have enhanced this article), who wrote of R. Soloveitchik (in a slightly different, yet applicable context ["Of Eagle's Flight and Snail's Pace," *Tradition* 29:1 (Fall 1994), p. 29]):  

The Rav wants more *for* us, and consequently asks more *of* us. Reluctant and disappointed, we summon the popularizers, the politicians, the polemicists, who, with their unfailing affinity for the superficial and the halftrue, bravely try to make him do, and purvey many anecdotes. Rather than blame the Rav for demanding too much of us, we would do well to rouse ourselves to take full advantage of what he offers us.
11. "*Al Ahavat haTorah veGeulat Nefesh haDor*" in *BeSod haYahid ve-ha-Yahad*, pp. 407-8. See a similar sentiment expressed in *On Repentance*, pp. 149-50.
12. Cf. Israel Scheffler's discussion of "the veracity of knowing" in his *In Praise of the Cognitive Emotions* (New York: Routledge, 1991), esp. pp. 3-17. See also various writings of Prof. Seymour Fox on the necessity for an educational philosophy deeply grounded in a well-articulated, explicit theory of education and "theory of practice," i.e., the description of how a specific conception of a particular subject matter can and should be applied to the practice of teaching that subject matter. See his address to the 12th World Congress of Jewish Studies (1997), "From Theory to Practice in Jewish Education" and especially his "Towards a General Theory of Jewish Education" in *The Future of the American Jewish Community*, ed. David Sidorsky (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 260-70.
13. *Divrei Hagut*, p. 75. See also the Rav's eulogy for his in-law, R. Meshulam Zusha Twersky, "Engaging the Heart and Teaching the Mind," in *Reflections of the Rav*, ed. Abraham R. Besdin (Jerusalem: WZO, 1979), pp. 160-8, in which these two tasks are each taken up by a different personality, one by the "king-teacher" and one by the "saint-teacher" although one senses that in his description of the Halakhic Man that he is describing a unified personality that must be capable of engaging in both.
14. See the Rav's description of how the student "is uplifted and carried along by refreshing and enlightening waves," in *On Repentance*, p. 151. The late Chief Rabbi of Israel, R. Isser Yehuda Unterman, had written that "the students [of R. Hayyim] felt the wonderful delight of creative activity, and

- this was as vital for them as air for breathing” (cited in Kaplan, “*Hazon Ish*,” op. cit., p. 153, note 24).
15. We are reminded of Emerson’s remark: “In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty,” in his “Self-Reliance,” *Essays, 1st Series*. See also: R. Hershel Schachter, *Nefesh haRav* (Jerusalem: Reishit Yerushalayim, 1994), pp. 8-9.
  16. Here the Rav is describing the paradox of Brisker *lomdus*: deep profundity which (ex post facto) appears self-evident. For an elaboration on this, see: Mayer Twersky, “A Glimpse of the Rav” *Tradition* 30:4 (Summer 1996), pp. 84-7. Compare this as well with Plato’s metaphor of the cave in *The Republic*, Book VII.
  17. Cf. Walter S. Wurzburger, “The Centrality of Creativity in the Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik” *Tradition* 30:4 (Summer 1996), pp. 219-228, and (generally) part II of *Halakhic Man*, “His Creative Capacity,” pp. 99-137.
  18. A rabbinic image indicating a lack of intellectual creativity or (more severely) implying intellectual plagiarism.
  19. The story is related that when R. Hayyim was being considered for a post at the yeshiva in Volozhin (around 1880) he delivered a model *shiur* in *Yevamot*. In the middle of his presentation (which was attended by many senior *rabbanim*) he suddenly recalled a comment of the Rambam in *Hilkhot Melakhim* which contradicted the basic premise of his *shiur*. Intellectual honesty mandated that he abort the *shiur* immediately, despite the fact that he was (for all intents and purposes) in the middle of a job interview! As the story goes, he received the position precisely because he demonstrated such acute and modest integrity; see: Stanley Boylan, “Learning With the Rav,” *Tradition* 30:4 (Summer 1996), p. 144, note 7; and *Nefesh haRav*, pp. 10-11 (esp. note 10 there). Similar stories are told of R. Yisrael Salanter and R. Shlomo Zalman Aurebach.
  20. That is, just as only one missing letter will invalidate the entire Torah scroll from ritual use [*Menahot* 30a; Maimonides, *Mishne Torah Tefillin* 1:2], so too the smallest incorrect detail ruins an otherwise elaborate Torah insight or discourse. It is possible to suggest that concern for precision in the smallest details—*kotso shel yud*—is a fulfillment of *imatatio Dei*, in that we are told that God himself (as it were) sat tying crowns on the letters of the Torah, so that future sages would be enabled to deduce “mounds and mounds of *halakhot*” (*Menahot* 29b). For an elaboration on this topic, see: Chaim Eisen, “Mosheh Rabbeinu and Rabbi Akiva: Two Dimensions of Torah,” *Jewish Thought* 1:2 (1991), pp. 67-124.
  21. Later in the eulogy, the Rav elaborates on the trait of truth as central and critical to the personality and method of halakhic men, see: *Divrei Hagut*, esp. pp. 86-8.
  22. See the remarks of R. Hayyim’s sons on the exhaustive and constant review and revision that he would invest in his novellae, in the introduction (first page, unpaginated, second paragraph) to *Hiddushei Rabbeinu Hayyim haLevi al haRambam* (Warsaw, 1936 [1st ed.]).
  23. Cf. “On the Love of Torah: Impromptu Remarks at a Siyyum” in *Shiurei haRav*, ed. Joseph Epstein (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1994), pp. 181-5.
  24. Trans. by Isadore Twersky, *A Maimonides Reader* (West Orange, NJ:

- Behrman House, 1972), p. 84. R. Soloveitchik cites only the first part of the quotation in the Hebrew text. Cf. Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* III, ch. 51.
25. That is, while apparently chatting with the acquaintance or snacking on the couch, their minds were truly engaged in trying to resolve an apparent contradiction in the words of *rabbeinu*, i.e. Maimonides. Upon reaching the insight, they would almost involuntarily cry out—“*Eureka!*”—that they had arrived at the solution.
  26. The Talmud (*Berakhot* 5b) relates that R. Yohanan, upon visiting his ill pupil R. Elazar in a darkened room, “exposed his arm and light shone forth.” This reference is particularly rich, because R. Yohanan (and R. Hayyim by analogy) saves the student not from mere rational confusion, but from existential despair.
  27. Here the Rav has returned to the metaphor (mentioned above in introduction) of the sage who is wed to the Torah, instead of merely betrothed. See: *Divrei Hagut*, pp. 71-4.
  28. The Rav stated that his father had taught him to “read between the lines” of the Talmud and codes. See: *Nefesh haRav*, p. 15, note 18.
  29. In the Hebrew, the Rav uses a talmudic metaphor from *Avoda Zara* 50b: *Let nagar ve-lo bar nagar di-farkinah*, figuratively meaning that there is no scholar capable of answering the question (or, more literally, no craftsman crafty enough).
  30. On the Rav’s philosophy of language, see: Binyamin Ish-Shalom, “Language as a Religious Category in the Thought of Rabbi Soloveitchik” (Hebrew) in *Sefer haYovel laRav Mordekhai Breuer* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1992), pp. 799-821. See also: *Nefesh haRav*, p. 18, on the Rav’s notion of the unique terminology of halakha, and p. 29, on his emphasis on concise and precise use of language.
  31. The Talmud (*Bava Metsia* 59b) relates that in a debate regarding the ritual purity of a certain oven (*tanur shel akhna’i*), R. Eleazar brought proof for his position from a heavenly voice (*bat kol*), to which R. Yehoshua responded: “[The Torah] is not in heaven” and heavenly intervention (as it were) is not a factor in determining halakha, which is wholly given over to the domain of the Jewish people and her sages.
  32. Cf. the Rav’s description of the “king-teacher” in “Engaging the Heart and Teaching the Mind,” op. cit.
  33. Considered among the most complex tractates in the Talmud.
  34. The Rav’s dedication and devotion to his students and the preparation of his *shiurim* are legendary. See: *Nefesh haRav*, pp. 27-31, where R. Schachter poignantly describes these traits, and ascribes them to the Rav’s deep sense of responsibility primarily to the *mesora* itself—and his role as its emissary in creating a meaningful encounter and bond between students and the *mesora*. It was for this reason that he was famous for breaking the canon of what was typically taught in *yeshivot*—introducing the instruction of theretofore untaught tractates and subjects as an expression of his belief that a genuine encounter with Torah must embrace the entire corpus of tradition. See also: *Halakhic Man*, pp. 24-5.