

On The Rov: Writings and Essays

Ed. Note: The following is an in-depth analysis of two books in which are incorporated shiurim and drashot of Rav Soloveitchik. It will be presented in two parts the first consisting of background material for the second, which will be the actual analysis of these two works. The second part will be published, please G-d, in our November issue.

Al-Hateshuva (On Repentance); From the oral discourse of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik; Written and edited by Dr. Pinchas H. Peli (Published by the Torah Education Department of the World Zionist Organization; Jerusalem, 1975). /Heb/.

Chamesh D'rashot by /Rabbi/ Joseph B. Soloveitchik; Translation by: /Rabbi/ David Telzner (Machon Tal Orot; Jerusalem, 1974). /Heb/.

I wish to preface this two part review of the **Rov** with the following:

My first major interest in the **Rov** began as a student of Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, principal at **Ramaz School**. From 1971 onward I have attended the **Rov's** annual **Teshuva D'rashot** and other occasional talks. As a student last year at **Beit Hamidrash Le'torah** (Jerusalem Torah College), under the guidance of Rabbi Dr. Aaron Rakaffet-Rothkoff my general interest developed into a concerned penetration of the thought of Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik, his treatment of reality in the framework of historical perspective and the relationship of his **Teshuva** thesis — with its concentration on **Halakha** — to the concept of **Geula** as a component in the entity of **M'dinat-Yisrael**.

Here at Yeshiva. I am privileged to

I am obviously referring to one of our **Roshei-Yeshiva**, **Horav Hagaon Yosef Dov Ha'levi Soloveitchik** (*shlita*). Recently, two books have appeared in Hebrew relating Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik's current (or quite recent) trend of thought. Peli, once a student of Rav Soloveitchik, presents, in book-form, his notes, previously serialized in *Panim el Panim*, of Rav Soloveitchik's *Lecutes on Teshuva*, while Telznr, formerly active in the R.Z.A., presents the *Drashot*, homiletical talks, Rav Soloveitchik delivered before the Religious Zionists of America.

I believe these two books merit not only indepth reading, but also a special review.

The **Rov** as he is affectionately called in Modern-Orthodox circles, is not known for publishing a great deal; There is a certain reluctance on his part to appear in print. He wrote doctoral dissertation at the University of Berlin (in 1931) on Hermann Cohen's philosophy. Cohen was one of the most distinguished European philosophers of recent times and was considered the founder of the

neo-Kantian school of thought as well as an eminent Jew who, after being alienated, found his way back to Judaism. While this first scholarly piece by the **Rov** is not a real indicator of his future intellectual interests, it creates, his general dialectical approach.

Hence, *the Rov* has himself published very little. In *Tradition* (vol. 6, No. 2) 1964 he first appeared in English, his essay "Confrontation" dealing with the sensitive issue that faced world Jewry then, — in which the American Religious Establishment was particularly involved — the issue of Dialogue. here *the Rov* deals with all the people walk, each on in the name of his god, and we shall walk in the name of our Lord, and we shall walk in the name of our Lord, our G-d forever and ever."

Subsequently, *the Rov* contributed a searching analysis of the religious experience in *Tradition* (vol. 7, No. 2) 1965, entitled: "The Lonely Man of Faith," in which he deal with Man, and not G-d, as the center of Creation. Here, for the English-reading public, *the Rov* deals essentially with the basic points he raised in his magnum opus, *Ish-Hahalacha*. It is

identity is for man a unique station in nature and renders him "dominion over the works of Thy hands," "crowning him" with glory and with honor. But the *raison d'etre* of humanity requires further elaboration. Man "is receptive and beholds the world in its original dimentions" but he is also blessed with the mandate to be a "creative agent of G-d." The "man of Faith" is dignified by means of his disciplined way of life. Through his sense of duty, this Man also attains the dynamic power and zest to create, to develop, to enhance. This man, as a Jewish personification, is the *Ish-Hahahaha*. But why must the "Man of Faith" be lonely? **The Rov** quotes the Psalmist: "out of depths I have called thee, Oh G-d"; when one is aware of Hashem, he sees how low he is and this awareness causes him to struggle and strive. Each man has his own pace to tread; to be sure, however, man lives in a "Composite" and needs a partner.

While the first essay "Confrontation" implores the Jewish People to hold steadfast to their faith, not to *chalila* barter their religious weltanschauung for "cosmetic" changes (advocated by non-Jews) — "The Lonely Man of Faith" is a portrayal of the Nature and Destiny of the Divinely - imbued Man who is struggling in this highly technological age, not only to create materially but primarily to be spiritually create, to establish his identity in this "computer period" as well as to enrich it, giving *rasion d'etre* to the existence of religion and its devotees in our so-called secular world, urging Israel to be creative and to give relevance to its mission.

This brings us to the **Rov's** magnum opus, "Ish-Hahlacha". For the Jew, the only viable possibility is an authentic



Here at Yeshiva, I am privileged to see and hear the **Rov** more than casually ...And I wish the **Rov**: "**Orech yamin biminah, osher v'chavod Bismolah**".

It is out of great respect to the consentiously elected dean of Modern Orthodoxy that I deal with the **Rov** and his thought — **Bedchilu u'richimu -k'tal-mid lifnei rabo!**

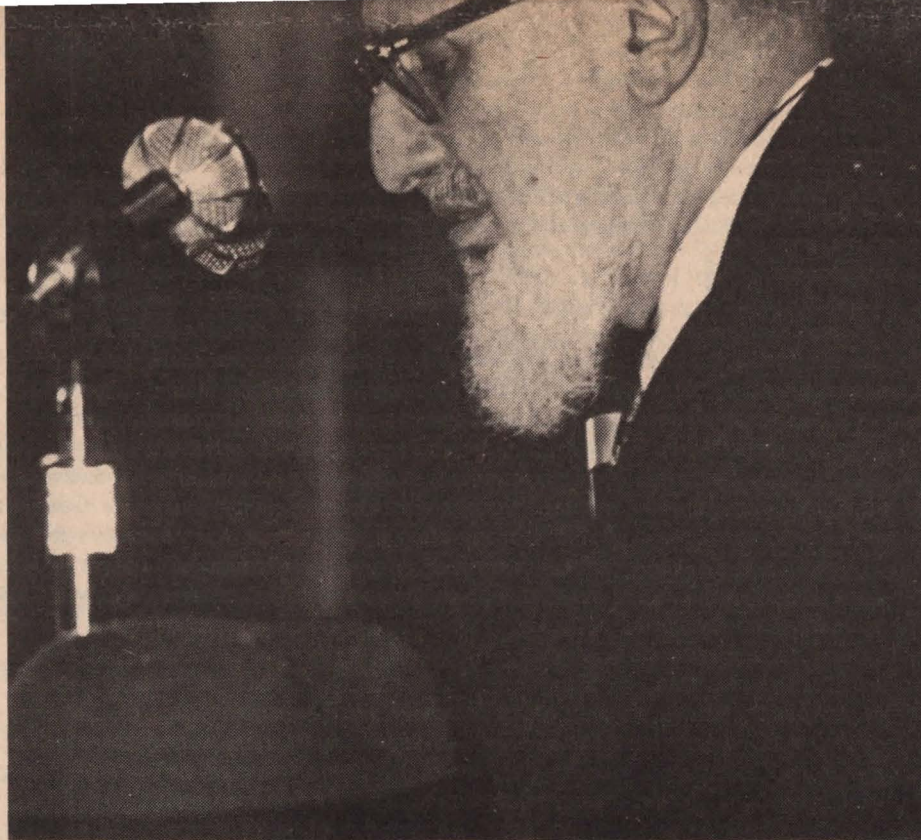
While I gained from many people, I alone am to be kept responsible for the ideas expressed.

J.C.K.

Of late, there is a resurgence of *Hashkafa* literature. Various books by the *Chofetz-Chaim* (Commentary on *Siddur*, *Pirkei-Avot*, etc.) are being reproduced in Hebrew and in English.

Also, the classical books (ie. Halevi's *Kuzari*, Ibn-Pekudda's *Chovot-Halevaot* and Luzzato's *Mesilat Yesharim*) are gaining new critical editions and there seems to be widespread desire in translations and annotated versions. Particularly following the Yom-Kippur War, a great interest developed in the thought of Rav Kook. Even the Israeli press echoes this excitement. **Haaretz**, for years the organ of the secular thinker began publishing extensive articles on Rav Kook and his teachings: Ma'riv and Yediot Achronot, in their traditional journalistic manner, tried to uncover the source of attraction for the youth and discover the renewed potent in present times and Hatzofe which carries a special series (edited by: Rabbi M.Z. Neriyah) and features weekly iyunim in his thought.

Among these new thought-provoking books, are two quite recent volumes which claim to reflect the teachings and represent the *Hashkafa* of one who epitomizes in his person the *Torah-Umada* synthesis idea of our Yeshiva (the "*Ish Ha'halacha*" who is fully integrated in society.



the meaning of Creation, stating the ambivalence the Jew faces regarding the changing of attitude and emphasized the exclusiveness of the eternal bond between G-d and His servant Jacob. As was bound to occur, his position had far-reaching repercussions on future developments; this articulation of approach was seen as the source of guidance by the Orthodox Rabbinate, the R.C.A., when it resolved its open willingness to entertain discussion "focused on temporal aspects of life," nevertheless clear on its inability to "join-in" on theological matters. As if quoting *the Rov*, the Rabbis finally established the verse from *Micha* (IV,5) to be their position in the Confrontation - "Let

his understanding that as **Creation** is, through continued Divine Providence and Omnipotence, a continuing process, so *Halacha* continues, intellectually and not necessarily practically - to imply continued "creativity." This creativity originates in *Hashem*, who is **Master of Creation and Creativity**. Based on the two accounts of the creation of man, the incongruity of which is not attributed to two different sources but lies in the duality of man, *the Rov* points out that man (adam) is charged with two tasks: "to fill the earth and subdue it" and "to cultivate it, and to keep it." The Eternal places man in the world "to be 'man', to be himself ... to discover his identity..." This

only viable possibility, in an authentic manner, for Creativity, is through *Halacha*. *The Rov* tried to interpret the meaning and explain the substance of the **Halachic content** and its **impact**. As one who learned the **Halachic Codes** with his grandfather, **Reb Chaim** of Brisk, as well as with his father, **Rav Moshe Soloveitchik**, *the Rov* has a vast amount of knowledge and insight into **Halacha** and its processes. Utilizing this information, *the Rov* fuses the technical Halachic prescription with the psychological and philosophical perception of a thinker. Thus, *the Rov* relates the Halachic system to the basic realities of human life. He conforms to the times in that he develops a unique terminology of Halacha for the modern student of Halacha. The Halacha, containing in itself a way of life, maintains *the Rov's* thesis of inherent creation and development. Nevertheless, *the Rov* states that the Halachic Personality is firmly attached to the concept of "*Torah Lishma*" Halacha is not only a means; it is also a goal in itself. Therefore, he cannot tolerate compromises in the application of Halacha. Halacha is a totality and must be safeguarded from those who might intend to change it or abuse it — either way making it meaningless.

Viewing reality from the vantage point of an **Ish-halacha**, *the Rov* maintains a positive attitude toward the State of Israel. He observes that it is a unique G-d-given phenomenon, the establishment of which he believes is a historical process of tremendous importance.

These two elements, **Teshuva** and **Geula**, as reflected in two new books containing *the Rov's* "*Torah*" and philosophical approach, will be reviewed in the second part of this installment. In this part we dealt with *the Rov's weltanschauung*, composing the background of our next analysis.

Lashon of Yamim Noraim Discussed

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the Day of Atonement, and not as *Yom Kapparah*, the Day of Forgiveness. He explained that, in all holidays, the name reflects the *mitzvah* of main concern to that holiday (e.g. *Chag Hamatzot* — to eat *matzah*, *Sukkot* — to build and dwell in them, etc). If we were to call the holiday *Yom Kapparah*, we would imply that G-d has to do something, which in fact He does. *Hashem* offers us the opportunity to do *t'shuvah*; it is a present from G-d. But whereas *Kapparah* is done by G-d, *kippur*, atonement, is an act of man. Only when man does *t'shuvah* will G-d forgive him. Thus, the name of the holiday is *Yom Hakippurim* — the emphasis is on man and the attention is focused on his actions.

The proper name of the holiday is *Yom Hakippurim*, in the plural, rather than *Yom Kippur*, the name that has been adopted by many secular Jews. What is the meaning of the plural *kippurim*? The *Rov* gives two answers. First, there are different ways of atoning; each person acting in his own way can achieve the same result. The *Chassidim*, following the *Besht* and the *Ba'al Hatanya*, chant, sing, and are engulfed in ecstasy, while the *talmidim* of the *G'ra* devote all their spare time to Torah and

sense encompassing awe and solemnity. On *Yom Hakippurim* a person can merit G-d's forgiveness through any legitimate means of atonement, *kippur*, that is rooted in *halakhah*. Thus, the plural form is employed — to show this concept of a plurality of means of atonement.

Wholesomeness

This is so if the following is also observed. Throughout the year man can do *t'shuvah* on a single action and achieve forgiveness for those specific transgressions for which he has repented. On *Yom Hakippurim*, however, *t'shuvah* isn't based on repentance for specific sins alone; instead, it is a unity, an entire process. Man doesn't change specific actions; rather, he chages himself. The *Rov* refers to this as "*shinui gavra*," a change in the person. This is why, explains the *Rov* Maimonides says that, unlike the rest of the year, man is a "*shav*," a returnee, on *Yom Hakippurim*, since his entire *gavra*, his entire being, has been changed. On *Yom Hakippurim*, we see that there isn't a concept of partial *t'shuvah*. It must be the unique process of wholesomeness in action.

From this, we understand additionally why we use the word *taharah*, purity, when speaking

of *t'shuvah* on *Yom Hakippurim*. After all, why don't we use the verb *l'nakot*, to cleanse? The reason is that cleansing can be partial — a person can wash one part of his body and leave the rest of his body soiled. But *taharah* signifies a complete and total purification. Man must do *t'shuvah* as part of an entire re-dedication to *yahadut*. This concept is also found by *mikvah*; not even a person's finger may remain out of the waters of the ritual bath in order for the im-



mersion to be effective. Similarly, man must immerse himself in the *t'shuvah* process on *Yom Hakippurim*. This is the uniqueness of *Yom Hakippurim* and is why the holiday is known as such.

The *Rov* explains that an additional aspect of *Yom Hakip-*

purim is that, whereas throughout the year, man must do *t'shuvah* on specific actions, this is not the case on *Yom Hakippurim*. Of course, man should repent for those sins of which he is aware on *Yom Hakippurim*, but, as we find in the prayers, there is *Mechilah* on all of our sins if we come to *Hashem* with the intention to purify ourselves fully and completely.

False Testimony

The *Rov* then addressed himself to the second name, *Shabbat Shabbaton* — the Rest Day of Rest Days. The name itself implies some sort of relationship between this day and *Shabbat*. Halakhically, there is a similarity in that one who desecrates both of these days in public is considered to have committed a graver transgression than one who violates them privately. Why is this so? The *Rov* explains that, both in public and private, transgression constitutes two sins: violating a negative command (*lo ta'ashev*) and not fulfilling a positive command (*aseh*). But, a public violation of *Shabbat* or *Yom Hakippurim* is considered as false testimony about the creation of the world. A Jew who observes the *Shabbat* testifies that in six days, *Hashem* created the world

and on the seventh day, He rested. One who publically violates the *Shabbat* testifies falsely, limiting the Eternal account of Creation.

The same is true as far as *Yom Hakippurim* is concerned. It is a day of rest, as is the seventh day of the week. But there is a difference between these two days of rest. *Shabbat* is a day following six days of work: we labor six days in a physical, material - oriented world, the world of creation. *Shabbat* signifies the conclusion of that world. The days of the week signify *Hashem's* divine justice in this world, the seventh day raises us out of our technologically-oriented world, our cosmos of materialism.

Yom Hakippurim is also a day of rest; this one is the *Shabbat* for the spiritual world, signifying an "*olam chesed yibaneh*," a world of mercy that shall be built.

We now understand an important principle that distinguishes *Rosh Hashanah* from *Yom Hakippurim*. The *Rov* asked the public why it is that on *Rosh Hashanah* we have verse of *malchuyot*, whereas on *Yom Hakippurim*, we don't ask *Hashem* to reign over us. The answer which was given, based on a *Ramban* in

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Reflections of an Ex-JSS Student