

R. Soloveitchik and R. Shubow: A Eulogy Rediscovered, a Friendship Reexamined
Addendum: Text and Context by R. Mayer Twersky

By: JONAH STEINMETZ

Preface: Rediscovery as Redemption¹

Everything requires redemption and deliverance: the historical community, the individual, nature, and the entire world—all beg for redemption and repair. Even man's thoughts, his ideas, his reflections, his ideals, and his feelings require redemption.²

Occasionally, an idea remains forlorn and anonymous within systems of thought, until its redeemer arrives and extricates it from its solitude and desolation to freedom and puts it in the center. Just as the redeemer, for whom we all wait, will lift the poor nation up out of the dumps, so is the spiritual redeemer sent to repair the idea and establish it in its glory and splendor.³

In 1969, R. Joseph Shalom Shubow died at the age of seventy. From 1933 until the end of his life, he was the spiritual leader of Temple B'nai Moshe, a Conservative synagogue in Brighton, Massachusetts. A short time after the death of R. Shubow, an eloquent and stirring eulogy was delivered by

¹ Thank you to my good friend, R. Jacob Sasson, for locating the text of the eulogy, sharing it with me, and assisting me throughout this project. We also appreciate Mrs. Vivian Rabin's graciousness in sharing this and still more material about her grandfather, R. Shubow. Thank you to Mrs. Atarah Twersky for granting permission to publish this text. A special thank you to my *rebbeim*, R. Hershel Schachter and R. Mayer Twersky, for their support, encouragement, and assistance in bringing this project to fruition. In particular, R. Twersky's scrupulous proofreading and wise insights were characteristically invaluable.

² "Ra'ayonot al ha-Tefillah," *Isb ha-Halakhah – Galuy ve-Nistar*, p. 239, translation my own. See also, R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Worship of the Heart*, ed. Shalom Carmy (Ktav Publishing House: 2003), p. 144. See also R. Mayer Twersky, "Towards a Philosophy of Halachah," *Jewish Action* (Fall, 2003).

³ *Ra'ayonot*, *ibid.*; *Worship*, *ibid.*

Rabbi Jonah Steinmetz is a fellow in the Wexner Kollel Elyon at Yeshiva University and the director of Asicha Seminars, an online learning program for women.

a dear friend of thirty-five years.⁴ This friend felt such a close bond with the deceased that he proclaimed that he belonged to the group of people who “loved him.”⁵ This friend was R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik.

Fortunately, the eulogy was transcribed.⁶ Unfortunately, the text was never widely publicized.⁷ As such, the thoughts, ideas, feelings, and *divrei Torah* expressed therein were “forlorn and anonymous,” lost in “solitude and desolation.”

In December 2020, however, these ideas were redeemed. With a blend of human effort and divine assistance, R. Jacob Sasson acquired a scanned copy of the transcription from R. Shubow’s granddaughter, Mrs. Vivian Rabin.⁸

I received the transcript from R. Sasson and studied it. In reading the eulogy, I was immediately and continuously struck by the familiarity of so many of the ideas and *divrei Torah* that the Rav expressed in this forum. The speech dovetails seamlessly with various critical passages in the Rav’s oeuvre. In the ensuing days, I typed the eulogy, made some minor edits to the punctuation and syntax, cited sources, and cross-referenced works in which the Rav expressed similar ideas. The product is the annotated edition of R. Soloveitchik’s eulogy for R. Joseph Shubow that follows this preface.

The goal in publishing this project is twofold. First, the citations and cross-references serve as a testament to the Rav’s consistent, holistic approach to Torah thought. His *shiurim*, speeches, and eulogies were not crafted in a vacuum. The themes, ideas, and approaches therein flow organically from the Rav’s pure Torah personality—God-given, nurtured by

⁴ The transcript of the eulogy is undated. As indicated by the text, the eulogy was delivered during the *sheloshim* period, on the opening night of *Selibot*. In 1969, this was Saturday night, September 6/23 Elul 5729. There is no indication that the Rav delivered any prior eulogies.

⁵ See text of eulogy below.

⁶ The transcription is attributed to Menachem Weinberg, R. Yair Kahn, and Ronnie Ziegler.

⁷ As conveyed by Mrs. Rabin (email correspondence, Jan. 13, 2021), members of the Shubow family were unaware of the transcript’s existence until 2005. Multiple members of the Soloveitchik family had never seen the transcript, nor had they known the eulogy occurred.

⁸ Mrs. Rabin was more than eager to share this and much more material about her grandfather with R. Sasson and me. The Rabins are committed Orthodox Jews, with Orthodox children who live in Israel. Their family story, as relayed in brief in an email from Mrs. Rabin to R. Sasson, is a moving one. R. Ahron Rakeffet-Rothkoff relayed this story along with the abovementioned story of rediscovery in a lecture posted on YUTorah.org on Jan. 14, 2021 (<https://tinyurl.com/Rakeffet-Shubow-Family>, beginning at 6:20).

his illustrious ancestors, and honed through years of ceaseless toil. The Rav's *divrei Torah* should be viewed in this light.

Additionally, the presentation of the eulogy in this format will benefit the reader by providing an opening to pivotal sentences, crucial paragraphs, and ultimately, foundational monographs crafted by the Rav. The hope is that, in studying this eulogy and perusing the notes, the reader will be intrigued and inspired by the profundity and vastness of the Rav's words, be motivated to open his books, and be drawn further into the world of the Rav.

The final section of this project is the afterword, titled, "Friendship in the Balance." There, I will provide the background upon which the Rav and R. Shubow's relationship must be viewed. Critical lines of this eulogy will be juxtaposed with other words the Rav shared about R. Shubow and the concept of friendship. There is much to glean from this relationship. I pray the reader finds this section both informative and inspirational.

The Eulogy:
אך בצלם יתהלך איש
*Eulogy for Rabbi Shubon*⁹

Tonight, in the *Selichos* service, we will usher in the season of penitence, *teshuvah*, the *yemei ha-besed ve-ha-rahamim*, the days of *besed* and bountiful mercy. The observance of *Rosh Hashanah* commemorates not a historical but a metaphysical event—creation of man. In short, *Rosh Hashanah* is dedicated to the paradox called man.

This evening, on which man begins to emerge from anonymity and to approach his Maker in order to account for his being man, was chosen by me as the evening of remembrance and appreciation of a great, distinguished friend.

Let me say that my address about Rabbi Shubow, my portrayal of him, will be centered about a short verse in *Tehillim*, "אך בצלם יתהלך איש".¹⁰

Judaism was intrigued by the phenomenon [of] man. Since ever, our prophets, sages and scholars have studied man, tried to penetrate into the bottomless abyss called human consciousness; they were curious to find out what makes such a complex being. What causes his rise to the stars and his fall into unknown depths; what grants him sanctity and what makes him desecrate the sanctity and embrace profanity; what gives him courage to defy the environment and conquer; what brings forth his cowardice and timidity?¹¹ Particularly, our scholars were interested in the man-God confrontation and in the dialogue between finite, mortal, wretched man and infinite, eternal and omnipotent King of the universe.¹² Why, did

⁹ To preserve the authentic feel of the Rav's oral presentation, I elected to maintain his Lithuanian-Ashkenazic pronunciation, utilizing a phonetic rather than academic method of transliteration.

¹⁰ Psalms 39:7.

¹¹ Regarding man's desire to "conquer," see "U-Vikashtem mi-Sham," in *Ish ha-Halakhab – Galuy ve-Nistar*, p. 155; Eng., *And From There You Shall Seek*, p. 44):

God created humanity as male and female and He commanded them to master the world: "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). How can a human being master the world, or even some part of it, if not by grasping the laws of nature and using them for man's benefit? Scientific progress is part of man's destiny in the world that the Creator of the universe fashioned for us.

For more on man's charge to, desire for, and achievement of "conquer" and scientific advancement, see Soloveitchik, R. Joseph B., *The Lonely Man of Faith*, (Doubleday, 2006), pp. 11-14, 16-19, 95-97.

¹² See *Lonely Man of Faith*, p. 76 (footnote):

they ask, is man a restless being always on the go—never satisfied, never at peace?¹³ What is he questing for? The digest of their philosophy of man was formulated in a four-word sentence: the verse, אַךְ בַּצֶּלֶם יִתְהַלֵּךְ אָדָם, “Man walks around with an image.” This sentence grants us an insight into the nature of man.

Judaism spoke of two personae abiding in every individual, two men residing paradoxically in every man.

Each individual is to his friends, acquaintances in particular and to his environment in general, a *homo revelatus*, a being like anybody else, accessible, comprehensible, knowable, who presents no enigma at all. The individual reveals himself to others through the word, or speech. Whatever he says reflects his specific bent, his personalistic make, his essence. Man is foremost a *medaber*, a being whom God has endowed with the capacity to communicate with others and to make himself known. God taught man not to remain in anonymity, to reveal himself to the world, to introduce himself to his fellow man, to act in accordance with societal standards, to express himself in a lingo which is comprehensible to his acquaintances, to act logically, consistently, to belong to society and mingle with his contemporaries, exchange words, ideas, quarrel or concur with them.¹⁴ In

Man’s dialectical seesawing between the cosmic and the covenantal experience of God is reflected in the benediction formula in which we address God in both second and third person. See Nahmanides, Exodus 15:26, and R. Shlomo b. Aderet, *Responsa*, V, 52.

¹³ Regarding the restlessness of man, see R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Majesty and Humility,” *Tradition* vol. 17, no. 2 (1978), p. 27:

First, man is cosmic through his intellectual involvement. His intellectual curiosity is of cosmic, universal dimensions. He wants to know, not only about the things that are close to him as, for example, the flowering bush in his backyard, but also about things far removed from him, things and events millions of light years away. Human cosmic inquisitiveness borders almost on the arrogant. Man is restless because he has not yet resolved the *mysterium magnum* of the cosmic drama.

¹⁴ The Rav considers communication to be the prime method of creating connection, camaraderie, and community. See “*mi-Ma’amakim*,” *Divrei Hagut ve-Ha’arakhah*, p. 124, my translation):

The Lord created Eve, another human being; two individuals, lonely and helpless in their solitude, meet, and the first community is formed. However, the community can be born only through the act of dialogue... From within the fog, the miraculous word rises and shines forth; Adam suddenly begins to talk—“And Adam said.” He turns to Eve and, with an opening remark, two human beings, closed within themselves and isolated, are opened, and the two of them burst out in admiration of one another.

short, each individual is a rational stereotype figure both in his hour of glory and at the hour of defeat, while rising to the stars and while plunging into unfathomable depths. אך בצלם. Man projects an image; he is evaluated by society, classified and labeled as such. The image which one casts upon the screen of public life is what theology would call *homo revelatus*. No mystery, no enigma, no question. The *tzelem* is known to everybody.¹⁵

However, in each individual resides also a *homo absconditus*, a numinous person. There is a man hiding whom the crowd never meets, whom friends and acquaintances never come across, whom even the members of his own household—wife, son, daughter, grandchildren—are not aware of; man who dwells in the deep, inaccessible recesses of the human soul; man who like his Creator, א-ל מסתתר בשפירי חביון, resides in the abyss of unknowability and incommunicability.¹⁶ *Homo absconditus* is afraid to expose [himself] to the appraising cynical eye of the public. He never steps out of the shadows; remains a stranger to the external world. Man, incommunicative, mute, and always himself, never trying to be somebody else.¹⁷

See also R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Confrontation,” *Tradition*, vol. 6, no. 2 (Spring-Summer, 1964), pp. 14-15. See also R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “The Community,” *Tradition*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Spring 1978), pp. 15-16, where the Rav stresses the importance of recognition, even with simple words of greeting, in forming a community.

¹⁵ See *Rashi*, *Radak*, *Ibn Ezra*, and *Malbim* (on *Tebillim* 39:7) who offer alternative approaches to the word “צלם” as connoting “darkness” or “the shadow of death.” See, however, the first explanation of *Ibn Ezra* and the third explanation of *Radak* which align with the Rav’s approach.

¹⁶ Here, the Rav hints that man’s “personalistic dualism” is an outgrowth or humanly mirroring of his perception of the dual nature of God’s interaction with him; it is a function of *tzelem Elokim*. *Homo absconditus* mirrors *deus absconditus*. *Homo revelatus* mirrors *deus revelatus*. See the Rav’s eulogy for the Talner Rebbe, R. Meshulam Zusha Twersky, “*ba-Rav she-Hotamo Kedushah ve-Ahavah*,” in *Divrei Hagut*, p. 207). Elsewhere, the Rav notes that the Creator’s dualism finds expression also in His world and man’s experience of it. See *Ish ha-Halakhah*, p. 18.

¹⁷ This theme of the inner, hidden personality (*homo absconditus*) and the outer, revealed image (*homo revelatus*) finds expression in numerous places in the Rav’s writing. For a most poignant example, see “*ba-Rav she-Hotamo Kedushah ve-Ahavah*,” *Divrei Hagut*, p. 207. See also the Rav’s eulogy for R. Zev Gold (*be-Seter u-be-Gahuy*, *ibid.*, pp. 169-173). See also “Confrontation,” p. 16:

In spite of our sociability and outer-directed nature, we remain strangers to each other. Our feelings of sympathy and love for our confronter are rooted in the surface personality and they do not reach into the inner recesses of our depth personality which never leaves its ontological seclusion and never becomes involved in a communal existence.

Man walks with the image. In every individual, you find the *tzelem*, public man, social man, a man like anybody else, who differs in neither dress nor in mannerism, nor in speech, action and conduct from his fellowman. The individuality [is] destroyed under the pressures of society, which likes uniformity and dislikes uniqueness, resents being different or being oneself. The image of man [is] universalized, standardized, all distinctive features leveled off, *gleichgeschaltet* (in German).¹⁸ *Tzelem* is the man who acts and talks like ten million other individuals. Yet בצלם יתהלך איש, behind every *tzelem*, depersonalized, de-individualized man, trails the unknown *ish*, the singular self, who is different from others, who speaks not in clichés, if he does speak at all. Uncommunicative, silent, shy, hiding in the *kodesh ha-kodashim*, *sanctum sanctorum* of the human personality,¹⁹ who in his withdrawal from hustle and bustle of society, from the busy, fretful world of imitation, emulation, standardization and institutionalization, came near the “ground” of his own existence, diligently examining himself, listening to the voice which cries in the wilderness of the human personality and remaining himself.

The whole idea of *teshuvah*, repentance, rebirth, renewal, spiritual redemption, the faith in man’s ability to rise proudly to new heights after having fallen to the lowest state of being, the certitude with which we believe that man will someday—ביום ההוא—purge himself of evil and iniquity without appealing to any other redeemer, the confidence we have

See also R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “A Tribute to the Rebbitzin of Talne,” *Tradition*, vol. 17, no. 2 (Spring 1978), p. 74.

¹⁸ The online German-English dictionary, *Langenscheidt*, translates “*gleichgeschaltet*” as “brought into line; forcibly made to conform.”

¹⁹ In *Pleitat Sofreiheim* (p. 174), the Rav shares that he learned from his father, R. Moshe Soloveitchik, that the holier the emotion, the more privately it must be held. This, he compared to the *kodesh ha-kodashim* (*sanctum sanctorum*), the most holy of areas in the Temple, which was consequently the most private and inaccessible area therein.

First, from my youth I was taught to restrain my feelings and not to demonstrate that which occurs in my [personal] emotional world. My father, of blessed memory, would say, “The holier and the more intimate the feeling, the greater hiding in the depths it demands.” The inner chambers, within which man activates and highlights that which happens inside of him, must be separated as the *kodesh kodashim* (*sanctum sanctorum*; holy of holies) of the person, “and the curtain shall separate for you between the holy and the holy of holies” (Exodus 26:33).

The reader is advised to see the continuation of the Rav’s words, describing his father’s intense, inspiring fulfillment of his own mandate for privacy and intimacy.

in the sinner that he could, if he only willed so, confront the Almighty—all this optimism is nurtured by the Judaic philosophy of personalistic dualism, of *ish* and *tzelem*, that there is more to the human personality than that which is visible to the eye; that behind every *homo revelatus* lurks from the ontic depths a *homo absconditus* who winks to and fascinates us like a star beyond the uncharted lanes of the heavens, a מסתתר בשפירי הביון, who has never sinned, never been involved in the fall of man, who has never been contaminated by evil and corruption. The *tzelem* sins, transgresses, the *ish* never.²⁰

Tonight I will make an attempt to portray, not to eulogize. The function of a *hesped* is, if we should paraphrase Spinoza, not to cry or grieve; neither to extol or to criticize, neither to employ words of apology to or point an accusing finger at someone, not to tell what is known or to repeat the obvious, but to portray the unknown, to reveal the hidden, to expose whatever is occult in man.²¹ You understand, therefore, that I will not be

²⁰ This stands in stark contrast to the Christian theory of original sin. See “*Gaon ve-Anavah*,” *Divrei Hagut*, p. 211 where the Rav attacks the Christian theology more explicitly, and thoroughly treats the Jewish perspective. For the original English version, see R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Majesty and Humility,” *Tradition* vol. 17, no. 2 (1978).

²¹ See *Pleitat Sofreibem* (p. 139) and “A Tribute to the Rebbitzin of Talne,” pp. 1-2. Ostensibly, this Spinozian view of the eulogy as divorced from mournful crying stands in stark contrast to the Talmud’s statement, “*agra de-bespeda dahuyeh*, the reward for [delivering a] eulogy [is earned by] causing the listeners to raise their voices [in crying]” (Bavli, *Berachot* 6b; see also *Rasbi*, *ibid.*). In fact, the Rav stresses this goal of the eulogy in “A Tribute to the Rebbitzin of Talne,” p. 1.

The *hesped* (funeral oration), an ancient Biblical institution, pursues a two-fold objective. It seeks, first of all, to make people weep. “*Agra de-bespeda dahuyeh*, the merit of a funeral oration is in raising the voice.” The Halakhah did not like to see the dead interred in silent indifference. It wanted to hear the shriek of despair and to see the hot tear washing away human cruelty and toughness. “And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah and to weep for her.”

After calling this to my attention, R. Mayer Twersky explained that the timing of this eulogy accounts for this curious comment. The first of the two primary objectives—to elicit mournful crying—is limited to the initial eulogy. The *halakhab* limits the mourner to three days of crying (Talmud Bavli, *Moed Katan* 27b; Rambam, *Hilkebot Aveilut* 13:11; *Shulhan Arukh*, *YD* 394:1). Subsequent tears are considered excessive indulgence in mourning. (For more on the balance between halakhically mandated mourning and excessive despair, see Soloveitchik, R. Joseph B., *Out of the Whirlwind*, ed. David Shatz, Joel Wolowelsky, Reuven Ziegler (NY: Ktav 2003) pp. 31-7.) Whereas the initial eulogy—in conjunction with the funeral and burial—is primarily focused on the objective of eliciting tears, here the Rav is reflecting on the goal of a eulogy delivered at a later point.

concerned with Joseph Shalom Shubow as *tzelem*, with the public image of Joseph Shalom Shubow as spiritual leader, as orator and preacher, as champion of many humane and worthy causes, as generous benefactor, et cetera, for Rabbi Shubow as *homo revelatus* is well known to you, in fact, to the entire American Jewish community. I have very little to add to the known, familiar and popular image of Rabbi Shubow.

Besides, the institutionalized human being who reflects the image of the society into which he was integrated, whose code he accepted, whose language, no matter how beautifully he masters it, he speaks, whose cliché and stereotype he uses, however skillfully, never attracted my attention. I always feel bored with institutionalized man, with *homo revelatus*. He cannot tell me anything new, since I know more about him than he knows about himself. Let me be specific, frank and outspoken. Tonight, I want to undertake the almost impossible task to penetrate into what mystics of old used to call the lightsome darkness and naught of numinous man, *homo absconditus*, the hidden Shubow. I would like to venture into parts unknown and unexplored where man is wholly himself, where he does not imitate or emulate, where he is free, for no one interferes with his freedom, where he is unique and singular. In a word, I want to gain an insight into the unknown Rabbi Shubow, into a soul which hardly communicated with anybody, into a Rabbi Shubow who rose proudly above institutions he represented, above the rabbinate and the Zionists, above his temple and congregation. As a matter of fact, a glimpse into the hidden personality will help us grasp better the public Rabbi Shubow whom so many misunderstood.

What are the basic attributes of the human personality of *homo absconditus*? The psalmist enumerated three of them. ותחסרהו מעט מאלהים וכבוד והדר תעטרנהו, “Yet Thou hast made him but little lower than angels and hast crowned him with glory and honor.”²² Of course, the translation of “*kavod*” meaning glory and “*badar*” as honor is wrong. *Kavod*, in Hebrew, has the connotation of majesty, kingship, power, might. The idiom *kavod malkhus* is very common in classical Hebrew—ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו,

At this juncture, it is inappropriate to focus on tearful mourning, thus the Rav exclusively stresses the second of the two objectives. (The Rav’s eulogy for the Talne Rebbitzin was also delivered at the conclusion of the *sheloshim*, and yet he mentions both objectives. The above explanation, of course, accounts for the Rav’s exclusive focus on the second objective in his eulogy for R. Shubow without demanding that he consistently ignore the first objective in other, similar orations.)

²² Psalms 8:6.

בהראותו את עושר כבוד מלכותו ולקחתם לכם—and it always has the connotation of majesty.²³ Of course “*badar*” in Hebrew is not honor but beauty: ביום הראשון פרי עץ הדר, “On the first day you shall take the fruit of goodly trees,”²⁴ הדר הכרמל, “the beauty and grandeur of Mount Carmel.”²⁵ The substitution of honor for beauty would completely distort these verses.

In other words, the verse ותחסרהו מעט מאלהים וכבוד והדר תעטרהו should be rendered in English: “Yet Thou hast made him but little lower than the angels and hast crowned him with majesty and beauty.”²⁶

Let us analyze these three adjectives carefully. There is *majestas* to the inner human personality, there is kingship to man. Public man, *homo revelatus*, may be a slave, downtrodden, humiliated, humbled and persecuted. *Homo absconditus* איש is a king. Rabbi Shubow was certainly a majestic figure. Let me explain what I understand under majesty. The Hebrew term *kavod* sheds a light upon the semantics of *majestas*. כבוד (*kavod*) and כבד (*koved*) are derived from the same root. A majestic person is a weighty person; there is impact (*gravitas*) to his personality.²⁷ He cannot be ignored, forgotten or simply dismissed from one’s mind. One must take cognizance of his presence. When he says something people listen, regardless of whether they agree or disagree with what was said. There is vigor and strength to his personality, determination and tenacity to his will. Some people are faceless, weak, they lack majesty. You do not notice them; they make no lasting impression upon those whom they meet. Once you turn your face you forget them. They are people without inner vigor and strength. Majestic man impresses himself upon your memory, for he radiates a strange power that pulls you. One must gravitate toward them. Majestic man, as I said before, cannot be ignored. You either like or dislike him. He leaves no room for neutrality.

²³ See *Loneley Man of Faith*, p. 14, footnote. There, the Rav notes that “כבוד” can connote “dignity” in addition to “majesty.”

²⁴ Leviticus 23:40.

²⁵ See also *Malbim (Tebillim, ibid.; and Tebillim 104:1, Be’urei ha-Milot)*.

²⁶ See *Loneley Man of Faith* (pp. 14-9).

²⁷ See *Yemei ha-Zikaron* (p. 20) where the Rav notes that “כבוד” is rooted in “כבד” (translation my own):

In short: *kavod* is considered an indecent trait when the feeling is identified as “honor”... [S]ince within greatness is contained a feeling of superiority... However, on the other hand, when “*kavod*” is connected with what its etymological root of “כבד” implies... when the feeling [is one of] the heavy yoke of [performing] a mission on behalf of the leader, [a feeling] that the man-agent is full and overflowing with longings, love, and loyalty for something great and noble—that is a Godly trait.

Rabbi Shubow possessed majesty—you simply could not shove him aside. I remember—and my memory goes back to 1935—I came to South Station to meet Rabbi Gordon, the dean of Lomza Yeshiva.²⁸ Rabbi Shubow, just out of the Institute of Religion, also came to meet Rabbi Gordon, who was a distant relative of his.²⁹ I was confronted suddenly with a Rabbi who was the antithesis of myself. He looked vigorous, had the physique of an athlete, elegant in his movements. I was frail and clumsy. He was radiating self-assurance, I suffered from insecurity; he was bold, I was shy; he liked the crowd, I was afraid of people; he possessed an admirable fluency [of] speech and an almost boundless vocabulary, his rhetoric was unmatched, I spoke haltingly and my treasure of logoi words was a limited one; he liked to raise the curtain and expose his inner world to the masses, I preferred, when overcome by emotions, to pull down the curtain; his cultural frame of reference was secular, positivist, and pragmatic, a frame of reference which the America of William James, John Dewey and others have formed, mine was halakhic, metaphysical and certainly non-utilitarian, a frame of reference forged by Maimonides and the Gaon of Vilna.

Nevertheless, there was something irresistible in that young athlete, something which I could not explain to myself. I was both intrigued by and frightened by him. His whole figure [and] personality was so strange and alien to me and yet it pulled me like the earth pulls the ripe apple on the tree. Our relationship was established at first sight. I simply could not reject his offer of friendship. He had inner strength, *majestas*, *malkebns*. He was a dominating figure (not domineering).

Majestic man has very strong convictions, unwavering and inflexible commitments. Majestic man has no doubts, no problems; he is never perplexed, never confused. He hates compromise; he insists upon the full

²⁸ R. Yechiel Mordechai Gordon (d. 1965) was *Rosh Yeshiva* of the Lomza yeshiva. In 1935, while in America on a fundraising trip, he decided to postpone his return to Poland, given the worsening conditions for the Jews there. R. Gordon ultimately waited out the years of World War II in America, working with the Vaad Hatzalah to save lives overseas. Lomza was all but razed to the ground in the first days of war in September 1939. While the Yeshiva building and R. Gordon's house initially remained intact, eventually, the vast majority of students were murdered and much of his family suffered the same horrific fate. See "The True Lomza" in Wolpin, Nisson, *The Torah Personality* (Mesorah Publications, 1980), pp. 52-66.

²⁹ R. Shubow received ordination from the Jewish Institute of Religion in 1933. See Shubow, Justin, "Shubow, Joseph Shalom," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik, second edition, vol. 18, Macmillan Reference USA, 2007, pp. 528-9 (also available online at the Jewish Virtual Library).

implementation of his plan, his blueprint.³⁰ So was Rabbi Shubow, because he possessed *majestas homini*, the majesty which God granted man if the latter is deserving.

Majestic man must willy-nilly make friends and enemies alike. What is characteristic is the strange fact that even the enemy moves in the orbit of majestic man. He can never forget injured pride and demotion from power for which majestic man is responsible. Many times, his opponents came to me requesting a *bazmanah le-din Torah*, I should summon Rabbi Shubow before a Rabbinical court. I used to say to them: Forget him, dismiss him from your mind; why do you keep thinking about him day and night? Of course, it was very hard to shake off the majestic man.

Some accused Rabbi Shubow of being arrogant.³¹ The charge is false. Those people who hurled this charge at him did not know what arrogance means. Rabbi Shubow was combative but never abrasive, he was firm, at times inflexible, but he never displayed arrogance. The arrogant person knows no limits, crosses all boundaries, has no respect for and is not impressed by greatness, he never recognizes that somebody knows more than he, lives a saintlier life than he. The arrogant person never acts in deference to anyone. In short, he does not understand the verse *את ד' א' תירא לרבנות ת"ה*.³² He is in no need of a *rebbe*. The traditional Jewish intimate relationship between *talmid* and *rav*, pupil and teacher, is the criterion by which you may distinguish between majestic man and arrogant man. Majestic man is combative, ready to fight in defense of his conviction or viewpoint. However, he knows where majestic pride must terminate and be superseded by majestic humility. He knows when majestic argumentativeness must come to an end and be replaced by majestic obedience and subordination. For majestic man knows both the art of intellectual combat and the art of intellectual surrender. Arrogant man must always win; majestic man can lose gallantly with a smile on his face. Rabbi Shubow, majestic man who radiated vigor and strength, who could argue so well with so much tenacity and passion, could also bow to a decision or even a request by one who, in his opinion, was a distinguished scholar and

³⁰ See *Loneley Man of Faith* (pp. 15-6), where the Rav describes dignified man's life as "intelligent, planned, and majestic."

³¹ See Herman J. Obermayer, *Soldiering for Freedom: A GI's Account of World War II*, (Texas A&M University Press, 2005) pp. 46-7.

³² See Talmud Bavli, *Pesahim* 22b; *Kiddushin* 57a; *Bava Kama* 41b; *Bekhorot* 6b.

teacher. His admiration for teachers, for a *rav*, was boundless. His admiration, for instance, for Dr. Wolfson bordered on adoration;³³ his devotion to other scholars was moving. Of course, he hated fraud, intellectual make-believe; he was at times ruthless in condemning what he considered a phony or a bogus. (Even though he was not always right, his guess most of the time was correct.) However, when he met with genuine greatness, majestic man gracefully bowed in recognition of an authority which he never defied.

Majestic man is not only vigorous and tenacious but courageous as well. No matter how much he likes the plaudits and the approval of the crowd, he has the stamina to antagonize it and to alienate the very people whose friendship he sought. Majestic man is brave. So was Rabbi Shubow. He could champion the most unpopular cause if he felt that society were wrong. He could also defend an individual whom society indicted on hearsay and condemned on false evidence without a due process of law. I myself owe him an eternal gratitude for coming to my help at a time when I was lonely, the victim of a slanderous campaign conducted by a group which was out to destroy me physically and spiritually. He wrote a series of fiery articles in the style of Zola's *J'accuse* which cleaned the air and saved my honor and dignity.³⁴ Of course, later my enemies of old became my most intimate friends. Yes, my friends. He possessed majesty, he em-

³³ Dr. Harry Austryn Wolfson (d. 1974) was an outstanding scholar of history and philosophy. A professor at Harvard for about fifty years, Dr. Wolfson was also the first chairman of a Judaic Studies center in America. See R. Dr. Isadore Twersky, "Harry Austryn Wolfson, 1887-1974," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 95:2 (1975), pp. 181-3; see also Lewis Feuer, "Recollections of Harry Austryn Wolfson," *American Jewish Archives*, 28:1 (1976), pp. 25-50.

³⁴ In the late 1930s, certain disdainful individuals set out to unseat the Rav. They launched a vicious campaign, hurling baseless allegations at the Rav, attempting to publicly shame him. See, for example, *Jewish Advocate*, August 29, 1941, pp. 4-5. See also *Ha-Pardes*, vol. 16, no. 12 (March 1943), pp. 15-18 for an incomplete yet informative description of the tension. The preface to R. Shubow's article in *Ha-Pardes*, vol. 17, no. 10 (quoted below) presents a more comprehensive account of the buildup. See also *The Commentator*, Dec. 2, 1942, vol. 9 issue 4. The case caught the attention of the attorney general who enlisted Judge A. K. Cohen's services in investigating the charges. After an exhaustive probe, not only was the Rav found innocent, but he was described in magnanimous terms of praise in the judge's decision. In an article in *Ha-Pardes*, R. Shubow recorded the decision which fully exonerated the Rav from all charges. See *Ha-Pardes*, vol. 17, no. 10 (January 1944), pp. 23-27. See also *The Commentator*, Dec. 2, 1942, vol. 9, issue 4 where it is reported that R. Shubow's piece was recorded and "later read, corrected and approved by the judge."

anated spiritual vigor, he was a brave comrade-in-arms. He had guts. Verily, there was something of the lion in him; both in his appearance and also in his stout heart. גור אריה יהודה, “Judah is a lion’s whelp.”³⁵

The second characteristic of man is *hadar*, beauty. וכבוד והדר תעטרהו. Man is the most handsome being on earth. His straight walk, curved forehead, well-proportioned body, expressive eyes, lovely face, soft movements, and so on and so forth, represent not only external physical but inner beauty as well, the beauty of *homo absconditus*, of the I who is bashful, shy, and timid and most of the time uncommunicative. Judaism paid a lot of attention to looks, to appearance. The Torah always spoke with great understanding of the handsome man and the good-looking woman. The Torah, portraying Rachel, says: ורחל היתה יפת תואר ויפת מראה, “But Rachel was of beautiful form and fair to look upon.”³⁶ When the Torah tells us the story of Joseph, she will always depict him not only as a dreamer, visionary, as a person with sweep, imagination and clairvoyance, but also as a handsome man of an impressive appearance “And Joseph was of beautiful form, and pleasant to look upon...”³⁷ and particularly of his irresistible charm. People liked him almost compulsively. וימצא יוסף חן בעיניו, “And Joseph found favor in his sight and he ministered unto him...”³⁸ ויתן חנו בעיני שר בית הסוהר, “And he gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison.”³⁹

I must say that Rabbi Shubow combined strength and majesty of Judah the lion—גור אריה יהודה—with the disarming charm of Joseph—בן פורת עלי עין—the handsome son who was like the blossoming plant by the spring-well. I mentioned before that he had a hold on people; one had to like him. Some even loved him. I belong to the second group. He had a therapeutic effect upon my shifting moods and quickly alternating states of mind. He used to dispel gloom, alleviate pain of sorrow and bring me a message of light and life. Whenever I saw him, he elicited a smile from me. There was something comforting, soothing and healing in his *homo absconditus*; there was joy, enthusiasm and also a child in that Judah the lion and Joseph the charmer, בן פורת עלי עין.

Of course, many people again accused Rabbi Shubow of being a showman, of being an actor, of caressing his own words, of gloating over his own rhetoric. Let me be frank and honest; he was indeed a great showman, if you please, a born actor, an esthete from head to toe. He himself

³⁵ Genesis 49:9.

³⁶ Ibid. 29:17.

³⁷ Ibid. 39:6.

³⁸ Ibid. 39:4,6.

³⁹ Ibid. 39:21.

was a *yefeh to'ar vi-yefeh mar'eh*, handsome; his dark-complexioned mobile face, his eyes which could shoot fire at times of indignation and wrath but also could look at you with soft tender expression of friendship, his clear enunciation, the ability to modulate his voice from the thunder of angry Jupiter to the whisper of love, his colorful vocabulary, his agile movements, his leap, reminiscent of the tiger, into an argument, his innate love for the beautiful, his responsiveness to anything lovely and pleasing—all these traits were enhanced by the excellent classical humanistic education he received—I repeat all those traits and qualities when added up are bound to make a showman of [the] first order. He was it, he loved it and enjoyed it.⁴⁰

I will ask you a simple question: Is a developed sense for beauty intrinsically evil; is an exalted sensitivity to the beautiful, to the lovely, sinful, is the esthetic experience corrupt in itself, is the vision of the artist something to be ashamed of, should all kinds of acting be rejected, all shows banned?

The answer to this question is as follows: *Yabadus* knows of two kinds of beauty: 1) *הוד והדר*, dignified beauty, and 2) what *hakhmei kabbalah* call “נוגה”, the shining, vulgar beauty. *Yabadus* knows of Rachel, Sarah, Esther—who personified *הוד והדר*, noble beauty, and *Yabadus* is also aware of Eve, Delilah, Avshalom, Na’amah—who were fair to look upon, of pleasing appearance and handsome. Yet the beauty they displayed did represent not an impressionable soul, a sensitive personality hiding behind a beautiful face, not a spiritual ecstasy which breaks through barriers of a private world into the outer world, but a spiritual desolation and aridity, intellectual emptiness and soullessness. In a word, there is redeemed beauty which transcends the physical and vulgar, and there is unredeemed beauty which betrays baseness and meanness.⁴¹ What is the redeeming

⁴⁰ It should be noted that the Rav felt that “drama is an integral part of communication” (as heard from R. Hershel Schachter; see also his *Nefesh ha-Rav* (1994), p. 31). Showmanship and acting—not in the sense of insincere posturing, but rather in the sense of dramatic, effective communication—are not skills to be frowned upon or scorned, but to be harnessed and directed towards the goal of passing on the *mesorah*.

⁴¹ The Rav discusses the distinction between redeemed beauty and unredeemed beauty in “*ha-Rav she-Hotamo Kedushah ve-Ahavah*,” *Divrei Hagut*, pp. 208-9:

Na’ama, the embodiment of beauty which lacks sanctity, and which is unrefined, is, according to the *Medrash*, not as much an individual as an idea; not simply a real person but a symbol of unrefined beauty. As such, she appears in the Biblical drama in many disguises: sometimes she is Delilah who seduces Shimshon, another time she is called Tamar who corrupts the

dimension of beauty? What purges the artist of his vulgarity? What cleanses the esthete of the falsity and treachery of a Delilah, and what liberates the *schongeist*⁴² from the magnetic seductive power of Eve? The experience of *hesed*, kindness, the nobility of heart, the sympathetic experience, the readiness to help the needy, the compassionate soul which shares in the grief of strangers, the soul that cries with the widow and rejoices with the bride. In Hebrew, the word “*tov*” has a double connotation. It signifies goodness, kindness, *tov lev*, and it is also the standard noun or adjective for beauty or a pleasing appearance. ויראו בני האלהים את בנות הנהגה, האדם כי טובות הנהגה, “And the sons of the mighty saw that the daughters of man are fair.”⁴³ וירא א' כי טוב lends itself to a double interpretation: God saw that the world is pleasing, beautiful, or that the world is morally good. The commentators could never agree on the precise translation.⁴⁴

In short, the Hebrew mind linked beauty with goodness, handsomeness with *caritas*, a pleasing appearance with *hesed*, and showmanship with lovingkindness. The beauty is redeemed הודו והדר. Wherever beauty joins up with egocentricity, selfishness, indifference to pain of others, insensitivity to suffering—beauty remains a vulgar experience displaying cruelty and animality. Many of Hitler’s henchmen were accomplished musicians.⁴⁵ Man should love beauty but at the same time think of his fellow with a great, passionate love.

prince. She is cast as a princess or queen who cause damage to no end to the holy nation, the kingdom of priests...

See also R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Confrontation,” *Tradition*, vol. 6 no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1964), pp. 7-9; and *Chumash Mesoras HaRav*, ed. Arnold Lustiger (OU Press: 2014), pp. 168-9 (*Devarim* 21:11); and R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Festival of Freedom*, ed. Wolowelsky and Ziegler (Ktav: 2006), pp. 17-18.

⁴² Translated as “aesthete” by Langenscheidt.

⁴³ Genesis 6:2.

⁴⁴ See commentaries to Genesis 1:4, for example.

⁴⁵ See *Festival of Freedom*, pp. 17-18:

Let me... relate to you a small incident which took place in Vilna during the German occupation. I have heard that there was a Gestapo officer there who was an accomplished musician, an expert on Beethoven and Mozart. He was also an expert in killing children. He particularly liked to engage in both of his hobbies simultaneously. While he sat at a piano or organ in the courtyard of the Gestapo headquarters in Vilna, the Gestapo officers used to line up little babies and children. Ambidextrous, he played Beethoven’s *Moonlight Sonata* with his right hand, while the left hand was busy shooting innocent babies, one by one... As a matter of fact, if you investigate the background of Hitler and his entourage, which consisted of psychopaths and maniacs, you will find among them many people with a developed sense

And Rabbi Shubow achieved the synthesis of beauty and *hesed*, lovingkindness. Indeed, he was a showman! But what did he show? A loving kindness for his people and for humanity in general. His heart was commodious enough to share in the loneliness of the orphan, the desolation of the widow, the humiliation of the destitute person. Of course he was an actor. But in whose defense did he act, if not in the defense of the Jewish people against anyone who attempted to traduce and malign them?⁴⁶ What did this showman show if not boundless *hesed*? He was a benefactor in dimensions defying human imagination. Our Rabbis speak of two kinds of *hesed*—גמילות חסדים בממונו וגמילות חסדים בגופו—*hesed* exercised through giving away money to the needy and poor and *hesed* which is implemented through a physical effort like nursing the sick, comforting the mourner, helping the old, attending to the needs of the incapacitated.⁴⁷ Rabbi Shubow did not spare either money or physical effort to help, to alleviate, to comfort and soothe. Whom didn't he help? *Meshulachim, rabbanim, rebbeim*, strange exotic people as well as old friends. He extended help and assistance by digging into his own pocket or by knocking on the doors of other charitable Jews.⁴⁸ His chaplaincy in the United States Army and his sojourn in Germany in 1945 and '46 became a legend among survivors of the camps and the refugees and has been so recorded in memoirs of some of the *she'eiris ha-pleitah*.⁴⁹ What didn't he do for those unfortunate brethren of ours? Provided them with food, clothing, shelter, fought with the occupation authorities and demanded that they treat those shadows and moving skeletons with dignity and considerateness. He stole food from the mess halls and brought it to the camps because rations which the survivors received were unsatisfactory. One of his colleagues told me: The greatest miracle that happened is the fact that Rabbi Shubow was not

of beauty: accomplished musicians, art critics, and the like. They loved beauty and had succumbed to beauty. But they also liked spilling blood, particularly Jewish blood. Somehow, beauty did not protect them from murder.

⁴⁶ For example, see Afterword, n61.

⁴⁷ See Talmud Bavli, *Sukkah* 49b.

⁴⁸ As reported by Mrs. Vivian Rabin (personal correspondence).

⁴⁹ R. Shubow served as a U.S. Army Chaplain in Europe from 1943 to 1946. See afterword, below. For records of his great acts of kindness there, see Michael Feldberg, "The day is short and the task is great: reports from Jewish military chaplains in Europe, 1945-1947," *American Jewish History*, vol. 91, no. 3-4 (2003), p. 607; and Alex Grobman, *Rekindling the Flame: American Jewish Chaplains and the Survivors of European Jewry, 1944-1948* (Wayne State University Press, 1993), p. 29; and Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence After the Holocaust, 1945-1962* (NYU Press, 2009), p. 154.

court-martialed for disobedience and “theft.” Yes, he was an esthete, an actor; but one that acted out of his חסד experience. Yes, he was a showman; but he exhibited *hesed*. His beauty was redeemed, cleansed, purged and hallowed. Noble beauty. וכבוד והדר תעטרנהו. He was crowned with majesty and beauty. In accordance with the old equation of כי טוב—beautiful and good, handsome and kind. He had a right to act and show.

Let me record here another instance of Rabbi Shubow’s kindness and loyalty to me I’ll never forget. When my private little world was destroyed and I found myself sitting on a pile of ashes and smoldering debris, submerged in rootless desolation and numbness [such that] I could [not] even cry out in despair and grief, Shubow emerged like a friend and comrade. On that cursed evening on which she was taken away from me, Shubow came immediately to my home where the hostess, dead, took up the center of the parlor. He sat down beside the *aron*, the whole night reciting *Tebillim*, not being able to hide his tears. I sat with him dozing and waking up time after time to his rhythmic recital. He spent the night with me. Whenever in the sick anguish of my heart, in speechless incommunicable sorrow, I think of that black, dreadful, weird night, I see Joseph Shubow.

At the conclusion, there is a third attribute which lends distinction and singularity to man, namely, the angelic quality in man, ותחסרהו מעט מאלהים, “Thou hast made him just a little less than angels.” What does this attribute convey to us?

There is a strange question in Biblical Hebrew. The term “*keruv*” is related to a certain class of angels. וישכן מקדם לגן עדן את הכרובים ואת להט, *החרב המתהפכת*, “And He placed at the east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the flaming sword.”⁵⁰ On the other hand, “*keruv*” refers also to a child. Our sages, in commenting upon the verse in Exodus, ועשית שניים כרובים זהב מקשה תעשה אותם משני קצות הכפורת, “And thou shalt make two cherubim of gold,” remarked that the term cherubim in this context is to be understood as the likeness of two children.⁵¹ The term cherub denoting a child’s face is a derivative from the Arabic. In short, angel and child are identical.

Yes, man possesses an angelic quality, man must at certain times act, laugh, rejoice, grieve, cry, beg, pray, dream like a child. If man matures completely, intellectually, emotionally, if soul, mind, will, sentiment ripen and reach the stage of adulthood abandoning the angel or the child along the highway they travel to maturity, man loses one of the basic attributes of humanity, and the image is impaired. No matter how high a man rises,

⁵⁰ Genesis 3:24.

⁵¹ Exodus 25:18. See *Rashi, Ibn Ezra*, and the other commentators there.

however mature the intellect becomes, however sophisticated one is, regardless of the thorough, complex training one received, however sharp, analytical and comprehensive his mind is, the non-critical, naïve, miserable and at the same time happy child must never be forsaken. He must never die with the arrival of adulthood.⁵² Man must be able to give sometimes friendship unselfishly; the adult is too practical to do things which don't benefit him. The mature person is pragmatic, too self-centered. What he does must make sense; friendship is at times nonsensical from a utilitarian viewpoint. *אהבה שאינה תלויה בדבר* is not sanctioned by a mature mind. But what is a man if he cannot give friendship, devotion? In such situations, the child in man takes over the controls; he, the child, not the adult, is capable of giving unselfish loyalty. The adult cannot admire greatness totally, without any limitation, or condemn iniquity and injustice without any reservations. The mature mind is analytical, is skeptical by its very nature. In greatness, he will always find smallness; in the genius, dullness; in the beautiful, ugly spots; in the saintly, hypocrisy; in the noble, meanness. In a word, the adult is too much of a cynic to admire without "buts," to love with a great excessive and "mad" love. In order to do all this, one must turn into a child. The same goes for faith. The modern adult does not know of faith. He is too technologically minded, too scientifically oriented, too practical, too much of a narcissist and pleasure addict to be able to make the great leap into the absurd, as Kierkegaard

⁵² See *Pleitat Sofreiheim* (pp. 158-60). The Rav describes the "strange polarity" which exists in the world of Jewish thought. It "sways like a pendulum between adulthood and childhood." The adult must always maintain and sustain the inner child, to truly experience growth and success in the search for greatness and Godliness. There, the Rav continues to describe the concurrent maturity and childlikeness of his father, R. Moshe, and his grandfather R. Chaim. See also the Rav's eulogy for Morris Borkum ("Rabbi Soloveitchik in Tribute to Morris Borkum"):

"My beloved is white and ruddy (*tzach v'adom*) preeminent above ten thousand." ... Can a person combine two prima facie, contradictory attributes, being simultaneously an imaginative youth and a sober-minded old industrialist? Well, the beloved of the Biblical Shulamite apparently did possess these two contradictory qualities. Our sages tell us that the emblem of Abraham had the image of an old couple on the one side and of a young boy and girl on the other. The blend of the maturity, prudence and wisdom of the elderly with the exaltation, enhanced sensitivity and total commitment of the young represented the very core of the philosophy of our patriarch.

I thank my dear friend, R. Ariel Diamond, for calling this eulogy to my attention and sharing his copy with me.

defined the act of faith.⁵³ The commitments of the mature are qualified, his motives pragmatic, his existence anchored in finitude exclusively. He cannot confront God and surrender completely to Him.⁵⁴ Only the child can do it. Only a child has trust unlimited, faith unconditional, peace undisturbed by suspicions. הבן יקיר לי אפרים אם ילד שעשועים כי מדי דברי בו, זכור אזכרנו עוד, “Ephraim is a darling son, a playful child, that is why I love him and have compassion with him.”⁵⁵ God loves Israel because Israel in certain respects has never grown up. כי נער ישראל ואוהבהו.⁵⁶ They quite often act like children with unmitigated ecstasy, with an absurd indomitable faith. Is not our commitment to *Eretz Yisrael* a result of childish thinking? From the viewpoint of the practical adult the (all) [entire] *Yisrael* affair belongs in the realm of adventure. 2,500,000 people took on 100,000,000 Arabs and half a billion Moslems. Quite often, an adult with all his computations and practical consideration loses, and a child, a naïve believer in miracles, wins the race. Yes, the angelic quality in man, the image of man-child is perhaps the most unique grant God gave us. ותחסרהו מעט מאלהים.

Rabbi Shubow, in spite of his sophistication, and sophisticated he was indeed, was a wonderful child. The child in him did not vanish with the attainment of intellectual prowess, social maturity, majesty and firmness. On the contrary, the more he matured the oftener came the child to the surface. With the deepening and widening of his erudition the more sensitive he became, the greater the naïveté, the more assertive and articulate his childish dream and faith became. Yes, the child never disappeared; he always saw the world with the wonder and curiosity of a child exploring the woods around the corner. He loved, he was loyal, and he was also frank as a child. ותחסרהו מעט מאלהים וכבוד והדר תעטרהו. His ecstasy was

⁵³ See, however, *Lonely Man of Faith* (pp. 101-2), where the Rav explicitly rejects Kierkegaard’s assumption. R. Mayer Twersky explained that, here, the Rav is borrowing Kierkegaard’s phrase and using it in a different sense. The Rav is contrasting faith with a rationalism constricted by self-centeredness and self-absorption. He borrows Kierkegaard’s term—“leap into the absurd”—using it to explain how, in Judaism, we ultimately do believe in a God whose actions we can describe but whose essence is unfathomable. (See, for example, R. Meir Triebitz, “Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s Lectures on Genesis, VI through IX,” *Hakirah* (Vol. 29, Winter 2021), p. 56.) The Rav does not agree with Kierkegaard’s assumption, as explained in *The Lonely Man of Faith*, but here he adapts and then adopts Kierkegaard’s words to express his understanding.

⁵⁴ See *Lonely Man of Faith* (pp. 97-100).

⁵⁵ *Yirmiyahu* 31:19. The Rav’s translation incorporated the last words of the verse: על כן המו מעי רחם ארחמנו נאום ה’.

⁵⁶ Hosea 11:1. See also *Pleitat Sofreibem*, p. 159.

unmitigated, his devotion total, his faith unshattered; he radiated the majesty of a ripe, mature man and the beauty and tenderness of the ילד שעשועים.

This man of majesty, power, beauty and kindness is gone. היה הי' איש ואינו עוד. It is difficult to imagine Boston without that restless, dynamic, powerful adult-child. Of course, the living will go on living. They will just feel a little lonelier. I shall certainly miss him. *Yebi zikhbro barukh.*

Afterword:

Friendship in the Balance
The Nuanced Nature of Relationships

I. “Like the Earth Pulls the Ripe Apple”

R. Joseph Shalom Shubow (d. 1969) was born in Olita, Lithuania, in 1899. He left Europe for America shortly thereafter and was raised and educated in the greater Boston area.⁵⁷ Upon graduating Boston Latin High School, R. Shubow attended Harvard University, receiving an A.B., A.M., and Ph.D. He was ordained by the Jewish Institute of Religion in 1933, immediately taking the position of founding rabbi at Brighton’s Temple B’nai Moshe. Between 1943 and 1946, R. Shubow served as a U.S. Army chaplain in Europe.⁵⁸ There, he headed rebuilding efforts, led well-attended *Pesach Sedarim*, and labored incessantly on behalf of the frail, vulnerable survivors.⁵⁹ His selfless, critical work overseas—typified, among other things, by the distinction of having performed one of the first marriages of displaced persons—was not only “recorded in memoirs of the remnant survivors,” but was also acknowledged by the American government, with the bestowal of the Bronze Star Medal for bravery.⁶⁰ Aside from these years spent in Europe, R. Shubow led his congregation until his death in 1969.

As the Rav depicts in his eulogy, R. Shubow was a man of strength, conviction, and resolve. On more than one occasion, he took bold, public stands against anti-Semitic figures, calling out their corruption and defending Jewish life and honor.⁶¹ It was this combination of vigor and compassion which so endeared him to the Jews of greater Boston. He was

⁵⁷ “Shubow,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* Rabin notes that her grandfather enlisted in the Army because he was “not content to aid the war effort from the sidelines” (unpublished letter to the editor of *Jewish Action*, Summer 5762/2002). At the time, R. Shubow was married with children, and uprooted from his young family to travel overseas for these three years.

⁵⁹ See the eulogy where the Rav alludes to some of R. Shubow’s brave acts of *hesed*. See also *ibid.*, n49 for more sources describing his chaplaincy.

⁶⁰ The quote is from the Rav (“אך בצלם”, *ibid.*). Rabin (*ibid.*) and *Encyclopaedia Judaica* report the receipt of the medal.

⁶¹ For example, see Stephen H. Norwood, “In Denial: American Universities’ Response to the Third Reich, Past and Present,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, vol. 46 no. 4 (Fall 2011), pp. 501-509. Norwood describes R. Shubow’s encounter with Ernst Hanfstaengl at the Harvard commencement ceremony in 1934.

posthumously classified as belonging to “a small coterie of what can be characterized as community rabbis with which Boston was then blessed.”⁶²

R. Shubow was “well known... in fact, to the entire Jewish community.”⁶³ It was this widespread appreciation of R. Shubow which propelled him to the presidencies of the New England Division of the American Jewish Congress and of the Greater Boston Rabbinical Association, the vice presidency of the Zionist Organization of America, and his selection as a delegate to the 1936 World Jewish Congress in Geneva.⁶⁴ His granddaughter also highlights his close relationship with Speaker of the House John McCormick, which proved “instrumental in securing the United States’ early recognition of the State of Israel in 1948,” along with the mutually held feelings of camaraderie between R. Shubow and Prime Minister of Israel Menachem Begin.⁶⁵

For all his advocacy on behalf of the Jewish people and for his consistent, unapologetic leadership, R. Shubow was an obvious candidate for the Rav’s respect. From the words of the Rav, it seems the friendship took root rather quickly.

His whole figure [and] personality was so strange and alien to me
and yet it pulled me like the earth pulls the ripe apple on the tree.
Our relationship was established at first sight.⁶⁶

This was the Rav’s description of his very first impressions of R. Shubow in 1935. More than two decades later, in a telegram sent to a banquet honoring R. Shubow in 1959, the Rav succinctly summarized the characteristics and experiences which made the former a true friend:

Hanfstaengl, Hitler’s foreign press chief and a “fanatical Antisemite” [sic], was the Harvard *Crimson’s* proposed recipient of an honorary degree, as a sign of “honor appropriate to his high position in the government of a friendly country.”

When Rabbi Joseph Shubow confronted Hanfstaengl in Harvard Yard and demanded to know whether the Nazis planned to exterminate the Jews, campus police brushed him aside and escorted Hanfstaengl to Conant’s house for tea.

See also McLemee, “Administrators Lent Harvard’s Prestige to Nazis, Historian Says,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 26, 2004, p. A15. See also *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (ibid.) for a report of how R. Shubow “famously confronted anti-semitic Jesuit priest, Father Leonard Feeney on the Boston Common.”

⁶² “Rabbi’s Passing Ends Era,” *Jewish Advocate* (Boston, MA), 24 May 2001, p. 18.

⁶³ אך בצלם.

⁶⁴ *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ibid.

⁶⁵ Rabin, ibid.

⁶⁶ אך בצלם.

I have always appreciated your great qualities as a friend. The warmth of your personality, your readiness to help others and your courage and steadfastness in advocating great causes. May the Almighty grant you many years of service to your community and our people.⁶⁷

II. “And So I Respectfully Decline”

The most oft-quoted source depicting the true friendship these two individuals shared is a letter the Rav wrote to Philip Fleischer, president of Temple B’nai Moshe, declining an invitation to join the congregation’s dinner honoring Rabbi and Mrs. Shubow. In this letter, written in 1954, the Rav expresses his deep feelings of friendship and respect for R. Shubow, while refusing to partake in a ceremony celebrating a temple that would feature mixed pews.

Dear Mr. Fleischer,

Please excuse the delay in answering your letter. The reason for my not replying promptly was due to a feeling of reluctance on my part to refuse to serve as an honorary sponsor of a testimonial dinner in honor of Rabbi and Mrs. Shubow and also marking the occasion of the dedication of the new Temple “Bnai Moshe.” Frankly speaking, I was faced with a very unpleasant situation. On the one hand I was eager to accept your invitation. I cherish my long association with Rabbi Shubow and I consider him a dear and distinguished friend whom I hold in great esteem because of his many talents and fine qualities. It is self-evident that if the dinner were being given only in honor of Rabbi and Mrs. Shubow I would consider it a privilege to serve as one of the sponsors.

On the other hand, however, this reception, to my regret, will also serve as an occasion to celebrate the completion and dedication of the new temple. Let me say unequivocally that I do recognize the importance of this new house of worship for the Jewish population of Brighton as a means of communal organization and unification.⁶⁸ I also appreciate the unselfish efforts on the part of the members

⁶⁷ R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, ed. Nathaniel Helfgot (NY: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 2005), p. 125.

⁶⁸ The Rav does not recognize the significance of Temple B’nai Moshe as a house of worship, but rather “as a means of communal organization and unification.” Given that worship was clearly the primary purpose of the institution, the Rav’s silence speaks volumes. For a careful analysis and explanation of the words and tones of the Rav in this letter, the reader is strongly encouraged to see R. Mayer Twersky’s addendum, “Text and Context,” below.

and leaders, which made such an undertaking possible. Their pride in having attained their goal is fully warranted. You in particular have manifested a strong sense of community awareness and devotion to Jewish causes for which you should be congratulated.

Yet, all this does not justify my serving as a sponsor of a dinner at which the dedication of this temple will be celebrated since the latter will, in all probability, have a mixed seating arrangement which is in my opinion not in consonance with our time-honored Law. The requirement for separate pews is almost a truism in our religious code and I have neither the right nor the desire to sanction either by word or by silence a departure from this tradition. My presence at the celebration would be tantamount to a tacit approval of mixed pews, a thing which would greatly disturb my conscience.⁶⁹ Therefore, after I had given the matter considerable thought, I arrived at the unavoidable conclusion that my role in connection with this affair would prove to be absurd, and so I respectfully decline.

I wish to impress upon you that my words are not to be interpreted in the sense of criticism or censure. I am not a preacher by nature, and I have never tried to convert others who are committed to a different philosophy to my viewpoint.⁷⁰ I write this letter with a sense of deep humility, explaining to you my feelings on the matter.

⁶⁹ Of course, mixed seating is not simply a matter of conscience, nor does the Rav think his opinion is unique or novel. As displayed in his letters and essays on the matter (cited below), the Rav was vehemently opposed to mixed pews in synagogues, stating that the prohibition is Biblical in nature. Elsewhere, the Rav referred to “the *mechitzah* problem” as “the trend of Christianization of the synagogue” and stated that “a synagogue with a mixed seating arrangement forfeits its sanctity and its Halachic status of *mikdash me’at* [a Sanctuary-in-miniature], and is unfit for prayer” (Baruch Litvin, *The Sanctity of the Synagogue* (NY: 1959), p. 110). In the above letter, the Rav’s words are tactfully, brilliantly composed to address a sincere, well-intentioned, yet not halakhically committed Jew in terms to which he will relate. Here, it is worthwhile to quote R. Mayer Twersky’s words from a different context:

My presentation of my grandfather’s (Rav Soloveitchik’s) position is based upon my firsthand knowledge, corroborated and amplified by the accounts of intimates of the Rav. His personalized words of encouragement to rabbis who would not accept his *psak* were later misconstrued as a softening of his *halakhic* stance.

See R. Mayer Twersky, “Torah Perspectives on Women’s Issues,” *TorahWeb.org* (https://www.torahweb.org/torah/special/2003/rtwe_JA_women.html#22), n22. See also R. Twersky’s addendum.

⁷⁰ See R. Twersky’s addendum.

I hope that you realize and fully understand my position and appreciate my hesitance in accepting an honor which would be in direct opposition to my inner convictions.

Please convey my regards to Rabbi and Mrs. Shubow and wish them, on my behalf, many years of joy and happiness.

Sincerely yours,

Joseph Soloveitchik⁷¹

In this note, the Rav conveys his deep, genuine respect for and appreciation of R. Shubow's "talents and fine qualities." On this level, he expresses an authentic desire to attend the ceremony. However, the Rav's strong Halakhic stance against Conservative Judaism's approach to Halakhah and, specifically, their practice of mixed seating is well known.⁷² He feels he has "neither the right nor the desire to sanction either by word or by silence a departure from this tradition." As such, the Rav's conscience will not allow him to join, his emotions notwithstanding.

This letter has been quoted time and again. The stress is often placed on the intimate nature of the Rav's genuine friendship with a dissimilar Conservative rabbi. Most recently, this letter featured prominently in an important discussion covered in the Israeli news. In June 2020, R. Eliezer Melamed attended a rabbinic conference hosted by the *Makor Rishon* newspaper. During this conference, R. Melamed participated in a panel discussion alongside Reform rabbis, including at least one female rabbi. His actions were denounced by his Israeli rabbinic colleagues.⁷³ In response to his critics, R. Melamed published an article defending his approach.⁷⁴ In this context, he cited the Rav's abovementioned letter to Fleischer.

⁷¹ *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, pp. 125-7.

⁷² See R. Soloveitchik, *Community, Covenant and Commitment*, pp. 109-156 and Litvin, *Sanctity*, pp. 109-118, 139-141. Regarding interaction with Conservative Judaism, of course, his stance was strong, but characteristically nuanced. See Soloveitchik, "Confrontation"; see also R. Mayer Twersky, "A Glimpse of the Rav," *Tradition* vol. 30, no. 6 (Summer 1996), pp. 99-101.

⁷³ See Jeremy Sharon, "Senior Religious Zionist Rabbis Denounce Contact with Reform Leaders," *The Jerusalem Post*, Nov. 16, 2020 (<https://www.jpost.com/judaism/senior-religious-zionist-rabbis-denounce-contact-with-reform-leaders-648793>).

⁷⁴ See R. Eliezer Melamed, "Attitude of the Great Sages of the Last Generation to the Reform Community," *Arutz Sheva*, June 28, 2020 (<https://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/282592>).

An enlightening educational fact is Rabbi Soloveitchik's friendship with Conservative Rabbi Joseph Shubow, whom he appreciated for his spiritual work as a Conservative community leader, and did not avoid calling him Rabbi. As part of their friendship, Rabbi Soloveitchik was invited to sponsor and participate in an event honoring Joseph Shubow at the Conservative Temple Bnai Moshe. His letter of reply to the invitation is instructive and worthy of study, and as he wrote, it was written after much thought to accurately express his complex position, which contains deep wisdom, *derekh erez*, precision, good heartedness, and humility. Thus he wrote to Philip Fleischer, [p]resident of Temple Bnai Moshe...

R. Melamed garners support for his collaboration with Reform rabbis from the Rav's letter regarding his personal friendship with a Conservative rabbi. The connection, however, is tenuous. Neither the Rav's letter to Fleischer nor his eulogy imply approval or willingness to collaborate with spiritual representatives of these movements.

Undoubtedly, the Rav's letter describes his genuine feelings of friendship and camaraderie. The warmth and rapport expressed in this letter are emphasized and broadened by the Rav's eulogy for R. Shubow. However, what the juxtaposition of this letter with the Rav's eulogy truly displays is how no feeling—not friendship, loyalty, admiration, or even love—could move the Rav away from the Halakhah. Even the honor of a “friend and comrade” who spent an entire night reciting *Tehillim* next to his wife's corpse cannot shake Halakhic man. Even a “figure [and] personality” who pulled him “like the earth pulls the ripe apple on the tree” could not draw the Rav into a situation which would disturb his conscience. The Rav flatly refused to participate in any event which would lend credence or support to activities which were against his convictions, his deep feelings of camaraderie notwithstanding.

The eulogy for R. Shubow further corroborates this approach. The Rav praises R. Shubow's personality and acts of strength and kindness on behalf of the global Jewish community. He does not profess admiration for or support of his friend's theological, ideological, or halakhic opinions or practices. In short, the Rav relates to R. Shubow's *homo absconditus*—his inner personality, unknown to the common observer—rather than his *homo revelatus* by which he was perceived.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ In fact, one wonders if the Rav was not hinting at this distinction in saying, In a word, I want to gain an insight into the unknown Rabbi Shubow, into a soul which hardly communicated with anybody, **into a Rabbi Shubow who rose proudly above institutions he represented, above the rabbinate and the Zionists, above his temple and congregation.** (אך בצלם), emphasis my own).

Moreover, the juxtaposition of the eulogy to this letter displays the Rav's outstanding ability to balance a deep personal friendship with total, committed rejection of his friend's ideologies. In comparing these sources, the observant reader witnesses the flawless fulfillment of the Torah's mandate for balance in such circumstances. The Rav described this balance eloquently at the end of his eulogy for the Talner Rebbe, R. Meshulam Zusha Twersky.

The medieval man was a zealot; the modern man is a compromiser. Our Torah paid careful attention to the issue of the complementarity between the two aforementioned opposites.⁷⁶

The Rav asserts that when confronted with nuance, the Torah mandates that we avoid the two extremes of zealotry and compromise. The Torah demands we take a balanced approach; we must strive for complementarity, without ever succumbing to the urge to viscerally oppose or to yield. Situations we face are nuanced, often multidimensional. Accordingly, our approach to the situations must be nuanced and multidimensional.

In fully appreciating and enjoying R. Shubow's character while simultaneously rejecting his Conservatism *in toto*, the Rav modeled the balanced approach. With expert finesse and always guided by the Halakhah and tradition, the Rav displayed nuance, equanimity, and concomitant dedication to truth and kindness.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ "Ha-Rav she-Hotamo Kedushah ve-Ahavah," *Divrei Hagut ve-Ha'arakah*, p. 206, translation my own. The Rav continues:

It is self-understood that the perfect complementarity is had only by God alone; man has but the ability to find the relative solution to the issue, according to his temperament and outlook.

⁷⁷ On one level, the Rav's unique ability to deftly maneuver such nuanced situations is yet another iteration of his being an *ish emet* and an *ish ba-halakhah*. In a different context, R. Mayer Twersky described it as such:

Truth and men of truth transcend facile classification and defy superficial stereotyping. The Rav was neither left nor right wing, modern nor ultra-orthodox. He was a man of Torah, truth. Truth, its underlying unity uncompromised, often undergoes a process of diffraction and manifests itself in a variety of guises.

See R. Mayer Twersky, "A Glimpse of the Rav," *Tradition* vol. 30, no. 6 (Summer 1996), p. 98. Neither total denial of R. Shubow's character nor rejection of his friendship would have been Torah-true. As explained above, the Torah sees nuance, addresses complexity, and demands one to strive for complementarity as opposed to complete rejection or compromise.

III. “Let Us Separate, ‘For We Are Brothers’”

In striking the balance between love for the person and rejection of his worldview, the Rav followed in the footsteps of Abraham. The Torah describes how both Abraham and Lot were wealthy, “and the land was not able to bear them, that they should live together.”⁷⁸ The Rav explains,

There was not enough pasture for them, not enough feed, so a quarrel developed. No feud, let alone one between people of higher caliber like Abraham and Lot, is precipitated by a shortage of pastureland. If Abraham and Lot wanted, they could have resolved this problem easily without creating a schism. After all, they had money, and they could have bought more pastureland; surely, there was enough land for sale. But the trouble was that Abraham and Lot could not dwell together *spiritually*. Abraham and Lot did not have their old mutual respect and appreciation. There was no harmony between them.

They could not live *yahdav*, “together.” The word *yahdav* refers to a merger of interests, common commitments, two people joining together, sharing good moments and bad moments. This harmony between teacher and pupil, between uncle and nephew, which had been so perfect before, was somehow affected in Egypt. Lot now had different ideas and different dreams; there was no commensurability between their worldviews. Of course, when people become alienated intellectually, the estrangement finds its expression emotionally. Love turns into antagonism, sometimes into hate, resentment, and protest.⁷⁹

The Rav elaborates that Abraham and Lot were broken up over an ideological incompatibility. It became impossible to live *yahdav*, together, without this antagonism spilling over into the public domain, morphing relatives into bitter adversaries. Abraham could no longer tolerate living together with Lot, but equally feared the possibility of becoming enemies, fraying whatever commonality still bonded them.

If the feud comes out in the public, I will have to debate you in the open; we will be locked in an ideological struggle. I will preach righteousness and justice, and you will preach something else. I will preach faith in one God, and you will preach idolatry. I will lose all the sentiments and emotions I have for you. If we want to save some

⁷⁸ Genesis 13:6.

⁷⁹ R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Abraham's Journey*, ed. David Shatz, Joel B. Wolowelsky, and Reuven Ziegler (NY: Ktav, 2008), p. 122.

of what I feel for you as an *ah le-tzarab*, a brother in time of need, — even though you are no longer my *ah le-de'ab*, a brother of like mind—let us separate immediately, “for we are brothers.”⁸⁰

Abraham, realizing the entirety of his relationship with his nephew was in jeopardy over their ideological differences, decided to salvage what he could, as opposed to squandering the bond completely. With precision and balance, Abraham drew a line between *ah le-tzarab* and *ah le-de'ab*. Abraham and Lot were no longer ideologically compatible. They simply could not be *ahim le-de'ab*, brothers of like mind. However, with extreme finesse, Abraham charts another path. He elects not to sever ties with Lot completely, but rather to strike a balance. A likeminded brother, he cannot be, but a friend—in the most utilitarian sense⁸¹—and a helping hand in a time of need, he will always be.

Even between two people who share the same religious beliefs and commitments, disparities are an endemic, necessary feature of the friendship experience. In his monumental essay, “Confrontation,” the Rav explains that ideological differences and incongruities are not a rarity, but rather a staple in relationships.

[I]n all personal unions such as marriage, friendship, or comradeship, however strong the bonds uniting two individuals, the *modi existentiae* remain totally unique and hence, incongruous, at both levels, the ontological and the experiential. The hope of finding a personal existential equation of two human beings is rooted in the dangerous and false notion that human existences are abstract magnitudes subject to the simple mathematical processes... In fact, the closer two individuals get to know each other, the more aware they become of the metaphysical distance separating them. Each one exists in a singular manner, completely absorbed in his individual awareness which is egocentric and exclusive. The sun of existence rises with the birth of one's self-awareness and sets with its termination. It is beyond the experiential power of an individual to visualize an existence preceding or following his.⁸²

Accordingly, friendship, camaraderie, and all interpersonal relationships contain, by design, incongruities. Disagreement, difference, and metaphysical distance are organic byproducts of the formation of relationships. The job of a friend, comrade, or spouse is to aim for complementarity, to balance that which brings the two together and that which

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 123-4.

⁸¹ See *The Lonely Man of Faith*, p. 66.

⁸² “Confrontation,” p. 15.

keeps them apart, achieving a harmonious togetherness, even with the acknowledgment of distinctness.

To strike such a balance requires greatness. The Rav, in all his wisdom, righteousness, and self-awareness, was great enough to forge a true friendship—a friendship filled with respect, loyalty, and even love—without ever sacrificing the truth that is *Halakhab*. It takes true greatness to walk such a fine line; to refuse without rejecting; to decline without deriding; to forego without forsaking. In short, the Rav would never allow ideological differences to uproot his friendship with R. Shubow; and he would never allow friendship to uproot his ideological convictions.

Too often, ideological differences—and sadly, at times, issues of significantly less importance—lead to rejection, derision, and contempt. The Rav, however, maintained a relationship built on mutual respect, admiration, and love, without sacrificing on sacrosanct ideological and halakhic values. In so doing, the Rav modeled nuanced balance—a sign of true greatness from which we have much to learn.

Addendum
Text and Context
Rabbi Mayer Twersky⁸³

I.

כה תאמר לבית יעקב ותגיד לבני ישראל. לבית יעקב - אלו הנשים, תאמר להן בלשון רכה. ותגיד לבני ישראל - עונשין ודקדוקין פרש לזכרים. דברים הקשין כגידין. (שמות יט:ג, עם פירש"י ע"פ דברי המכילתא וגמ' שבת פ"ז)

In offering the Torah to the Jewish people, *ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* instructs *Moshe Rabeinu* to speak gently to the women, but forcefully to the men, exposing them to the exacting requirements of Torah. An accurate, effective representation of Torah perforce varies, both in tone and substance, depending upon the audience.

שאלו שאילה זו לעילא מרבי תנחום דמן נוי: מהו לכבות בוצינא דנורא מקמי באישא בשבתא? כו' ולענין שאילה דשאלנא קדמיכון: נר קרויה נר, ונשמתו של אדם קרויה נר, מוטב תכבה נר של בשר ודם מפני נרו של הקדוש ברוך הוא. (שבת ל')

The *halakhah* that *pikuah nefesh* overrides *Shabbos* (and virtually all other *mitzvoth*) requires a *ge'irat ha-katuv*; it is derived from "והי בהם ולא שימות בהם". And yet, R. Tanhum, speaking in front of a popular audience including unlearned people, makes no mention of this. Instead, as *Rashi* explains, R. Tanhum beautifully casts the *halakhah* in *aggadic* terms, more readily accessible to his entire audience. Of course, the *aggadic* dimension is part of Torah, and R. Tanhum is thus accurately presenting the *halakhah*. The master teacher judiciously selects the level and dimension of Torah most appropriate for his audience.

This halakhic-pedagogic principle governs how a *rebbe* teaches, and, consequently, by extension, how a *talmid* strives to understand and process his *rebbe's* word. In other words, focusing now on the written word, an accurate understanding of text—its emphases, formulations, omissions, etc.—is only possible in context.

⁸³ Rabbi Mayer Twersky is a Rosh Yeshiva at RIETS and holds the Leib Merkin Distinguished Chair in Talmud and Jewish Philosophy.

This text-context perspective is crucial to the study of the Rov's letter (reproduced above), as well as some of his other writings.⁸⁴ The Rov זצ"ל was, inter alia, a masterful pedagogue and communicator, who interacted with a wide array of groups and individuals. Very much attuned to his audience, he selected the dimension and dialect of Torah most appropriate to them.

In his letter, the Rov could have simply responded, "I decline your invitation because to do otherwise would be *assur al pi din*." But such a response would certainly not have resonated and would have risked alienating his correspondent. Thus, the Rov faced the challenge of articulating his halakhic commitment without unnecessarily alienating a sincere, well-meaning, but untutored and non-observant Jew.

Yet, all this does not justify my serving as a sponsor of a dinner at which the dedication of this temple will be celebrated since the latter will, in all probability, have a mixed seating arrangement which is in my opinion not in consonance with our time-honored Law. The requirement for separate pews is almost a truism in our religious code and I have neither the right nor the desire to sanction either by word or by silence a departure from this tradition. My presence at the celebration would be tantamount to a tacit approval of mixed pews, a thing which would greatly disturb my conscience.

The Rov expressed his commitment in universal yet Torah-valid categories ("my conscience"). As the Rov depicts in his monograph, *u-Vi-kashtem mi-Sham*, one of the ways man searches for (and, thus serves) God is by heeding the call of conscience.

There are four realms in which man seeks the image of the Creator as reflected in creation, [which includes] ... the depths of his spiritual existence... the call of conscience...⁸⁵

Thus it is unquestionably truthful and, at times, contextually most effective, to attribute one's halakhic commitment to conscience.

II.

משלי שלמה בן דוד מלך ישראל (משלי א:א)
כי הלומד בספר צריך לידע מיהו מחברו, כי אם יהיה המחבר גדול בחכמה,
בודאי יהיו בספרו חכמות גדולות, וכן ביראה וכן בתורה. (ביאור הגר"א, שם)

⁸⁴ For instance, "Confrontation." The essay's apparent difficulties or incongruities fade when its context is properly understood. *Vi-od haẓon la-moed, bi-siyata di-Shmaya*.

⁸⁵ Rav Soloveitchik, "And From There You Shall Seek," p. 7

The author's persona—his commitments, erudition, subtlety of mind, precision of expression, etc.—is a major and defining element of textual context.

The authorial context, always relevant, is especially critical in appreciating the following excerpts from the Rov's letter.

I wish to impress upon you that my words are not to be interpreted in the sense of criticism or censure. I am not a preacher by nature, and I have never tried to convert others who are committed to a different philosophy to my viewpoint. I write this letter with a sense of deep humility, explaining to you my feelings on the matter.

The Rov shares a deliberate decision which accorded with his natural disposition. A firm believer in the absolute truth of Torah, the Rov nonetheless felt that the most effective way to present and represent Torah to an uncommitted audience was to teach, not preach; disseminate, not demand; inspire, not insist. Hence, "I have never tried to convert others who are committed to a different philosophy to my viewpoint."

Another excerpt:

Yet, all this does not justify my serving as a sponsor of a dinner at which the dedication of this temple will be celebrated since the latter will, in all probability, have a mixed seating arrangement which is in my opinion not in consonance with our time-honored Law.

The normative halakhic practice—not merely the Rov's opinion—unequivocally prohibits mixed pews. However, whether this *halakha* is *d'oraita* or *d'rabanan* is not explicitly indicated. Against this background the Rov writes that "a mixed seating arrangement which is in my opinion not in consonance with our time-honored Law"—i.e., in my opinion, this unequivocal prohibition is *min ha-Torah*. The Torah has been transmitted from generation to generation throughout the millennia, hence the adjective time-honored, judiciously selected for its universal resonance. (CF. *Devarim* 32:17 where idol worship is critiqued and rejected as **לא שערום אבותיכם**, a practice alien to our ancestors—i.e., against time-honored tradition!) ❧