

## Review Essay

*Soloveitchik's Children: Irving Greenberg, David Hartman, Jonathan Sacks, and the Future of Jewish Theology in America* by Daniel Ross Goodman, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2023), 304 pp.

**By: STEVEN GOTLIB**

### Who Are Soloveitchik's Children?

Like the Heavenly Torah, the Rav's Torah—his teachings, his lessons, his example—is now with us. His true philosophical and theological successors—like the Almighty's true partners in the act of creation—are not those who have been mere passive recipients of his Torah, but those who have chosen to partner with him (which has often involved struggling and contending with him) in the creation of new worlds. Greenberg, Hartman, and Sacks have not been mere passive recipients of the Rav's Torah, but dynamic partners with him—active interpreters of his teachings, true successors to Rabbi Soloveitchik... It is now up to us—the children of Rabbis Greenberg, Hartman, and Sacks, and the grandchildren of Rabbi Soloveitchik—to continue through our own powers of creative interpretation, to partner with the Almighty, with our fellow Jews, and with all those who care about the worlds of religious learning and the Jewish mission of *tikkun olam*, and to create our own worlds without end. (p. 162)<sup>1</sup>

Daniel Ross Goodman, *Soloveitchik's Children*

Rav Joseph B. Soloveitchik was considered the guiding light of Modern Orthodoxy. Indeed, “Ashkenazi Orthodox Jews in the Jewish diaspora who do not consider themselves ultra-Orthodox owe much of their religious intellectual respectability to Soloveitchik.”<sup>2</sup> Students of Soloveitchik, however, find themselves occupying vastly different points on the

<sup>1</sup> All in-text citations are from Goodman's book.

<sup>2</sup> Heshey Zelcer and Mark Zelcer, *The Philosophy of Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Abington: Routledge, 2021), p. x.

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Orthodox spectrum. With debates raging over which camps best embody his vision, the appearance of a book like *Soloveitchik's Children* is unsurprising. Unfortunately, Goodman's attempt to clear things up only further muddies the water, beginning with his "central thesis:"

Greenberg, Hartman, and Sacks have carried forth Soloveitchik's legacy in its entirety while simultaneously transforming it. Through their creative transformations and adaptations of their teacher's thought, they have been able to convey Soloveitchik's vision to the next generation and in this way have been even more faithful to their master than had they been more passive recipients of his thought. Indeed, the latter approach would have been the antithesis of what Soloveitchik desired in a disciple (4).

An immediate challenge to Goodman's thesis is that, as we shall see, it is hard to call *any* of those three thinkers, disciples of Soloveitchik in a meaningful sense. It is therefore hard to take Goodman's claim seriously, even with his clarification that they are specifically "heirs to the philosophical (although not Talmudic and halakhic) legacy of Soloveitchik" (3).<sup>3</sup> Surely, though, Soloveitchik had many students. Why deny so many of them the right to claim discipleship? Goodman articulates it well:

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<sup>3</sup> In endnotes, Goodman identifies thinkers such as Rabbis Hershel Schachter, Aharon Lichtenstein, Norman Lamm, Mordechai Willig, Hershel Reichman, and Meyer Twersky as such talmudic and halakhic—but apparently not philosophical—heirs of Soloveitchik.

One endnote clarifies that those "less religiously liberal and less philosophically pluralistic" disciples of Soloveitchik are also "among his true, legitimate successors":

Soloveitchik raised up a multitude of disciples, among whom are thousands of religiously conservative students. A number of these students, many of whom are cited often in this volume, have been particularly outstanding innovators (and by no means passive recipients of Soloveitchik's teachings) in their own right... That this volume focuses on Greenberg, Hartman, and Sacks's interpretations and implementations of Soloveitchik's legacy is not meant to detract from the fact that Soloveitchik has other exceptional disciples but to add to our appreciation of the Jewish philosophical and theological range to which Soloveitchik's influence has extended. (274–275 n11)

On Goodman's selective identification of Soloveitchik's heirs, Ferziger wrote as follows:

just as it would be an error to describe Soloveitchik as the heir to his grandfather, the innovative Talmudist Rabbi Hayyim Soloveitchik of Brisk (Brest-Litovsk), and omit the entire Haredi branch of his family, it is misleading to present Greenberg, Hartman, and Sacks as children to the relative exclusion of others. The fact that some may have done the same in the opposite direction does not make it justified. The same richness of materials

This book stakes the claim that Greenberg, Hartman, and Sacks can all be considered “legitimate” disciples of Soloveitchik. What is at stake here is significant, for in large sectors of Orthodoxy, these thinkers, for various reasons—especially Greenberg and Hartman—are not considered to be so (on account of their alleged radicalness, an issue this book delves into in some depth). This is an important question, because in Jewish theology the importance of discipleship, and the legitimacy thereof, is almost (if not just as much of) a critical issue as it is in Jewish law. The strength and enduring value of a theologian’s thought rests on the strength and value of his or her ideas. The ideas of Greenberg, Hartman, and Sacks are undoubtedly very appealing to many contemporary Jews. But just because their ideas are appealing to some does not ipso facto render their thought legitimate Orthodox theology. In order for their theologies to be considered legitimate, it must be demonstrated that their thought is grounded firmly in Orthodox theological precedent. And in order for disciples to be considered legitimate heirs of a master, it is necessary to show the extent to which their thought is a continuation of, rather than a departure from, the thought of their teacher. (6)

*Soloveitchik’s Children*, then, is less about Soloveitchik as much as legitimizing Greenberg and Hartman within Orthodoxy.<sup>4</sup> Professor Adam

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and sharp analysis that characterize Goodman’s learned work could have nourished a more balanced presentation that would celebrate the broad range of influences and interpretations inspired by this unique figure. Such a narrative would certainly highlight the profound ways all three have drawn from and set out to challenge their mentor’s approach, while acknowledging that “no two children are alike” and that not all directions chosen by children meet with their parents’ approval.

I will note here that, unlike Ferziger, my primary issue with Goodman’s project is not his selection of disciples who are known to be particularly liberal and pluralistic, but his assumption that Sacks, Hartman, and Greenberg can accurately be considered disciples of Soloveitchik in the first place by Goodman’s definition.

We will later explore whether Goodman’s move of separating Rav Soloveitchik’s philosophical disciples from his halakhic and talmudic ones is legitimate or if such a division is artificial.

<sup>4</sup> This is something that Goodman has a vested interest in as a graduate of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah with a strong relationship with Greenberg in particular. As he wrote in the book’s preface,

Rabbi Dr. Yitz Greenberg was remarkably open in discussing many aspects of his thought and theology with me at various stages of my research and writing. I was enormously fortunate to have been able to study with him while in rabbinical school, and I consider the relationship I have with him

Ferziger suggests in his review that Goodman’s attempt to situate his three protagonists’ thought within that of Soloveitchik is clearly “intended to set the stage moving forward for greater engagement of Orthodox Jews who venerate the Soloveitchik tradition with their ideas.”<sup>5</sup> It is worthwhile, then, to examine the case Goodman makes for these thinkers legitimately continuing Soloveitchik’s legacy.

### Jonathan Sacks

Rabbi Lord Sacks, *ḥt”l*, never studied with Soloveitchik. In fact, the two only met each other twice.<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Sacks acknowledged Soloveitchik as one of his “two great initial inspirations,” but immediately then reflected on his “own personal teacher,” Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch. Sacks reflected that it was from Rabinovitch that he “learned what is the life of Torah” and that Rabinovitch “was a man who used every single thing that happened to him in his life, as an occasion to learn and live Torah.”<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere, Sacks referred to Rabinovitch as “the greatest teacher of our generation” and frequently referred to him, not Soloveitchik, as “The Rav.”<sup>8</sup>

Despite Sacks’ identification with Rabinovitch over Soloveitchik, Goodman argues for “the predominance of Soloveitchik’s influence in the areas of philosophy and theology” (7). He identifies Soloveitchik particularly influencing Sacks “in his synthesis of the best of what has been said in the world of secular thought with the authoritative voice of tradition found in Jewish thought; in his deep and substantive engagement

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—one of the greatest Jewish theologians of our time—to be one of the greatest blessings of my life. (xi)

Readers must therefore ask whether they are reading an objective analysis of Soloveitchik and his closest disciples or whether they are reading a student’s attempt to help his own beloved teacher find legitimacy in a movement that largely turned its back on him.

<sup>5</sup> A. S. Ferziger, “Daniel Ross Goodman: Soloveitchik’s Children: Irving Greenberg, David Hartman, Jonathan Sacks, and the Future of Jewish Theology in America,” *Contemporary Jewry* 44, 463–467 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12397-024-09550-0>.

<sup>6</sup> Sacks recounts both meetings here: [media.rabbisacks.org/20211010200426/Issue-36-Sept-1993-Hesped-in-honour-of-Rav-Yosef-Soloveitchik.pdf](https://media.rabbisacks.org/20211010200426/Issue-36-Sept-1993-Hesped-in-honour-of-Rav-Yosef-Soloveitchik.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Sacks on his Personal Rebbe, Rabbi Nachum Rabinovitch, <https://rabbisacks.org/videos/rabbi-sacks-on-his-personal-rebbe-rabbi-nachum-rabinovitch-jinsider/>

<sup>8</sup> As Modern Orthodox readers know, this is a title typically reserved for Soloveitchik. Sacks’ use of it for Rabinovitch implies that Rabinovitch holds for Sacks the same position Soloveitchik held for his students.

with Christian thinkers and non-Jewish philosophers; in the lack of otherworldliness in his thought; in his esteeming of life as Judaism's (and God's) primary attribute; in his own brand of philosophical and theological creativity; and in his exemplification of the Torah U-Madda philosophy" (25). However, these areas are very prevalent in the writings of Rabinovitch as well as Soloveitchik.<sup>9</sup>

Why, then, include Sacks as one of Soloveitchik's top disciples? One answer might be that Goodman genuinely reads Soloveitchik's influence throughout Sacks' writing. There are surely many references and allusions, so Goodman feels comfortable identifying Sacks as a disciple "by virtue of his consistent, career-long engagement with Soloveitchik's thought" (25). It is not impossible to come to Goodman's conclusion that Sacks "absorbed many of Soloveitchik's key teachings and has applied them—and, in some cases, has expanded upon them—in his own work... He wrestled with Soloveitchik, contended with him, learned from him, praised him, criticized him, and ultimately embraced him—if not completely, then at least as reverentially, and in some ways even more devotedly, as have Greenberg and Hartman" (27). This might well be the case, and scholars of Sacks should be encouraged to determine that for themselves.

Another possibility is that Goodman wanted to include Sacks as a teacher who meant much to him personally. Goodman explicitly considered Sacks to be "my teacher, guide, and role model for many years in my life's journey through Jewish thought and theology—a lighthouse illuminating the way for all ships (including mine) seeking to find their ports" (xii). Goodman even dedicated *Soloveitchik's Children* to Sacks.

The least charitable possibility is that Sacks' presence is due to his position as a household name within Modern Orthodoxy. It is possible, though unlikely, to read Sacks' inclusion as an attempt to grant further legitimacy to the more radical positions of Greenberg and Hartman.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the recent volume, *Pathways to Their Hearts*.

<sup>10</sup> This would be rather disingenuous given that Sacks explicitly questioned whether either of them could accurately be considered Orthodox:

More radically [than Eliezer Berkovitz], David Hartman (b. 1931) has sketched a complete philosophy of Judaism "in terms of a covenantal anthropology that encourages human initiative and freedom and that is predicated on belief in human adequacy." More radically still, Irving Greenberg (b. 1933) has outlined a post-Holocaust Judaism in which the very terms of covenant have been rendered "voluntary." Greenberg speaks of a "third era" in Jewish history, marked by religious pluralism and "holy secularity." These thinkers are modern in a thoroughgoing sense. For they believe that Judaism is itself transformed in its encounter with modernity. To be sure,

Regardless of which reason is correct, it is clear that Sacks (by his own admission) was not a disciple of Soloveitchik in the way Goodman argues.

### David Hartman

Hartman studied in Soloveitchik's *shiur* at Yeshiva University and received rabbinic ordination from him. Goodman admits that Hartman “strayed the most from his teacher on matters of halakhah and Jewish praxis” out of the three thinkers but that he “stayed the most methodologically similar to Soloveitchik in terms of his commitment to working within rabbinic sources in order to formulate responses to theological dilemmas” (22).

Hartman came to champion an approach in which halakhah “should be engaged as an open-ended educational framework rather than a binding normative one”<sup>11</sup> and admitted that this understanding “would undoubtedly lead to fundamental reinterpretations of the sources ... and to an evolution of halakha itself.”<sup>12</sup> When faced with a Kohen who fell in love with a convert, Hartman recounted that

My response was immediate, drawn from a clear moral intuition. I felt compelled by this middle-aged man who had finally found a woman he loved and wanted to start a family with. Refusing marriage

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they seek to stay within the rabbinic tradition. But they believe that the tradition itself contains resources for change, and that it has in fact changed with each confrontation with a new social and intellectual order. But it is precisely here that the question arises: can Orthodoxy be modern in this sense and still be Orthodoxy? (Jonathan Sacks, *Tradition in an Untraditional Age: Essays on Modern Jewish Thought* (New Milford: Maggid, 2023), 114–115.

Regarding Greenberg in particular, Darren Kleinberg notes that

While Sacks went to great lengths to make the case that there is great latitude within the Orthodox community, Greenberg was left on the outside looking in. In what is a tellingly implicit statement in the book, Sacks never referred to Greenberg by the title rabbi; something he did for every other “mainstream” Orthodox rabbi. In this act of omission, Sacks subtly placed Greenberg in a separate group from centrist Orthodox figures such as David J. Bleich, Norman Lamm, and Joseph B. Soloveitchik, each of whom is referred to by the title “rabbi” every time they are mentioned in the book [*One People?*] and in their listing in the index. (Darren Kleinberg, “For and Against: A Consideration of David Hartman and Jonathan Sacks in Relation to Irving Greenberg” in Shmuly Yanklowitz, ed., *A Torah Giant: The Intellectual Legacy of Rabbi Dr. Irving (Yitz) Greenberg* (Brooklyn: Ktav Publishing House, 2018), 178–179.

<sup>11</sup> David Hartman with Charlie Buckholtz, *The God Who Hates Lies: Confronting & Rethinking Jewish Tradition* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2014), 50.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

seemed to cause him pain unjustly. Moreover, I could not in good conscience allow the incoherent, morally problematic designation of Susan [the convert] as promiscuous to permeate the way I thought about her or influence my decision in this most delicate and meaningful moment of her life. The notion of telling these two very serious Jewish seekers that they must deny themselves the happiness of marriage because of this now-obscure, ancient principle seemed unacceptable as the ground for destroying their dream to build a new life. I told Peter [the Kohen] that I would be honored to perform the wedding.<sup>13</sup>

This absolute abandonment of traditional sources in favor of moral intuition undercuts Goodman's argument that Hartman stayed methodologically similar to Soloveitchik. Hartman acknowledged that Soloveitchik "would have disagreed in the strongest possible terms with my decision." Indeed, Soloveitchik "would not have seen it as a joyous occasion, but one of mourning for the loss of something far greater than the love of two people. I can say this confidently because he once described, in a lecture, his response when a parallel case had come before him."<sup>14</sup> Hartman felt that "notwithstanding [Soloveitchik's] profound influence on me and my profound gratitude to him as a student, I must part company with a view of halakha that takes it out of history and out of human experience."<sup>15</sup>

A more direct articulation of Hartman's split from Soloveitchik can be found elsewhere:

One of the primary voices with which I have grappled in my shift in focus from defender to critic of halakha has been that of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. He was, and to some extent will always remain, my master who taught me everything I know about Judaism. At the same time, as the years passed and my thinking evolved to flesh out, in increasing scope and detail... I became more critical of his emphasis on formalist abstraction, self-abnegation, and halakhic stasis.

...Ultimately, I have found Soloveitchik's halakhic "heroism"—the moment of *Akedah*-like self-sacrifice in which individual perspective is suspended and personal intuition is subjected to the objective divine will of halakhic tradition—to be masochistic and tragic... not heroism but cruelty.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>14</sup> Hartman, 131. The lecture referred to can be found here: [https://www.torahweb.org/torah/special/2019/ryds\\_rietsalumni.html](https://www.torahweb.org/torah/special/2019/ryds_rietsalumni.html)

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 155.

<sup>16</sup> David Hartman, *From Defender to Critic: The Search for a New Jewish Self* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2012), xv–xvi.

This is not only a different halakhic methodology, but different philosophy and even theology. It is hard to find any connection between Hartman and Soloveitchik outside of the former's affirmation that Soloveitchik "was, and to some extent will always remain, my master." His usage of "to some extent" indicates that even Hartman felt the connection weaken significantly.

Goodman, not oblivious to this, writes that "seeing the various ways in which [Hartman] diverged from Soloveitchik, what must be remembered is that had Soloveitchik not urged Hartman to go to graduate school to study philosophy, it is possible that Hartman would have never broken with Soloveitchik on any matter at all" (24). This, however, seems to contradict Goodman's own definition of what constitutes legitimate discipleship.<sup>17</sup>

### Irving "Yitz" Greenberg<sup>18</sup>

Like Sacks, Greenberg was never a formal student of Soloveitchik's. Greenberg met Soloveitchik after his ordination from Novardok, first as a graduate student in Boston and later a junior faculty member of Yeshiva University. So, like Hartman, there was a genuine relationship to be sure. Goodman writes that "Soloveitchik was a formative—and perhaps the most critical—Jewish influence upon Greenberg" (14).

Many of Greenberg's positions certainly seem to stem from his understanding of Soloveitchik. See, for example, his lengthy explanation for engaging in broad interfaith efforts:

In 1967, I was invited to participate in a major Jewish-Christian dialogue conference, organized by the Synagogue Council of America... By then, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the great intellectual and spiritual leader of modern Orthodoxy, had written an essay on dialogue titled "Confrontation." At first glance, the statement negated serious Jewish theological conversation with Christians. However, in matters of social action and societal justice, there was room

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<sup>17</sup> A *reductio ad absurdum* of this is to claim, for example, that Louis Jacobs was a disciple of Rav Dessler throughout his long rabbinic career since the two were at one point teacher/student and Jacobs recounts the inspiration of Dessler in his autobiography.

<sup>18</sup> In many ways, Rabbi Yitz Greenberg is a personal hero of mine. The work he has done for Klal Yisrael and his voluminous writings have done much to inspire me not only in my halakhic observance but also in developing my personal religious identity. I echo every kind word that Goodman wrote about him in *Soloveitchik's Children* and pray that he continues to offer his voice to the Jewish people for many more years.



for dialogue and joint action between Jews and Christians... I went to see Rabbi Soloveitchik to clear away his objections to myself. First, I said: Rebbe, you taught me that in the halakhic worldview, life is spiritually seamless. But then there is no real distinction between areas of social action and theology/doctrine. After a moment's pause, he said: Greenberg, you are right.

(To me, the implication was that if dialogue was permitted in matters of social concern, then it was permitted in all areas. I judged "Confrontation" to be a piece of "Marrano writing" [that is to say, the surface words conveyed one message while the substantive depth expressed a very different meaning]. The presumed policy ruling was predicated on a distinction that contradicted one of Soloveitchik's fundamental teachings: that *halakhab* regulates all life because all areas of life are intrinsically religious. In my reading, "Confrontation" gave the appearance of prohibiting dialogue; this released the pressure on Soloveitchik from the ultra-Orthodox/yeshivah world that was totally opposed to any joint conversation. But in its actual policy implications, Soloveitchik's statement opened the door to significant areas of joint learning and exchange.)<sup>19</sup>

This is a clear example of Greenberg basing himself on Soloveitchik's thought and transforming it in his own direction. As Goodman explains, "Greenberg took Soloveitchik's big-picture ideas and ran with them, further than his teacher was comfortable with, motivated in part by Greenberg's own belief that it was now necessary to articulate truths about the Jewish vision of life that had yet to be expressed adequately, and in part by his feeling that Soloveitchik had not followed his own methodologies and accentuation of larger, broader conceptualizations to their logical conclusions" (20).

This gives a case for Greenberg's discipleship but also reveals a key weakness in Goodman's argument. Greenberg clearly notes that "one of Soloveitchik's fundamental teachings" was that "all areas of life are intrinsically religious." To properly unpack that, we can use two quotes from Greenberg that Goodman brings to solidify Greenberg as a disciple:

For Greenberg, Soloveitchik "modeled a true openness to modern culture and how one could learn from it and use its categories to find the deeper meaning in every aspect of Torah... No one had ever articulated for me, as he did, the poetry, spirituality, and profoundly

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<sup>19</sup> Irving Greenberg, *For the Sake of Heaven and Earth: The New Encounter Between Judaism and Christianity* (Philadelphia: JPS, 2004), 12–13. It should be noted that some take Greenberg's account here with a grain of salt. See, for example, this piece by Ira Bedzow: <https://www.torahmusings.com/2015/08/symposium-on-open-orthodoxy-iii/>

intellectual dimensions of the tradition. He encouraged me to pursue my secular studies and to find religious insight and explanatory paradigms for my spiritual explorations. I loved that man” (15).

“In [Soloveitchik’s] analysis, the halacha became more than the sum of its thousands of observances and details. It was a system by which to live humanly, a way to seize life whole, a confrontation with the dilemmas and anxieties of existence... Under the light of his illumination, every detail—even those that appeared obscure or mechanical—turned out to be an articulation of a psychological or moral state or an attempt to induce the individual to give deeply human responses to life situations” (19).

These quotes, from Greenberg himself, point to an important aspect of Soloveitchik’s worldview—that there is no distinction between religious philosophy and halakhah.<sup>20</sup> Goodman explains that this helped Greenberg to “see patterns and meanings and to understand Judaism is

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<sup>20</sup> In a *Tradition* article reviewing *The Halakhic Mind*, none other than a young Rabbi Sacks noted that such distinctions were not appropriate when discussing Soloveitchik:

*The Halakhic Mind* is not a prologue to *Ish ha-Halakhah* alone, but to an entire program, a new kind of Jewish philosophy. This would undertake to gather the entire corpus of objectified Jewish spirituality—Biblical text, halakhic literature, liturgy, mysticism, and so on—and seek its subjective correlative... There is thus every reason to suppose that R. Soloveitchik has been faithful to the call he issued in those early years, and that his “philosophy” is to be found as much in his analysis of texts as in his more overtly philosophical statements.

In his eulogy for Soloveitchik, Sacks articulates this well:

[Soloveitchik] said, “In the past, Jewish philosophy—*machsbevet Yisrael*—and halakhah were two different things. They were disconnected.” “In truth,” he said, “they are only one thing and that one thing is—halakhah.” The only way you can rethink Jewishly and construct a Jewish philosophy, is out of *halakhah*. He gave me one example. He said, “You have read Professor A.J. Heschel’s book called *The Sabbath?*” I said, “Yes.” He said, “It’s a beautiful book, isn’t it?” I said, “Yes.” And he said, “What does he call Shabbat?—a sanctuary in time. This is an idea of a poet. It’s a lovely idea. But what is Shabbat,” he said, “is *lamed-tet melakhot*, it is the thirty-nine categories of work and their *toladot*, and it is out of that *halakhah* and not of poetry that you have to construct a theory of Shabbat.” (Jonathan Sacks, “A Hespel in Honor of Rav Yosef Soloveitchik” in *Memories of a Giant: Eulogies in Memory of Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Urim Publications, 2003), 286–287.)

In their book, *The Philosophy of Joseph B. Soloveitchik*, Heshey and Mark Zelcer go to great length to argue how this vision of Jewish philosophy coming from Halakhah remained fundamental within Soloveitchik’s broader thought.

not just a series of laws and rituals but a sophisticated body of thought and way of life with a *vision*, an overarching set of values that shape the laws and rituals” (20). He further acknowledged it in writing that “Soloveitchik argued in *Halakhic Mind* and elsewhere that a philosophy of Judaism must be constructed out of nothing else other than halakhah. In other words, there are, and can be, no external subjective values that shape Jewish philosophy and Jewish law—the values with which the rules are constructed must come from the rules themselves” (28).

This raises an important question Goodman must contend with: If he understood that Soloveitchik’s worldview did not distinguish between the philosophical and the halakhic, why split up Soloveitchik’s disciples into “philosophical disciples” and “talmudic/halakhic disciples” when the Rav himself would never have made such a distinction?

One possibility is that this would point towards other thinkers being as much, if not more significant, disciples of Soloveitchik than the three Goodman utilizes. Having established why it is hard to count Sacks and Hartman as disciples within Goodman’s premises, it is informative for us to compare Greenberg with two of Soloveitchik’s most distinguished students.

### Herschel Schachter

Rav Hershel Schachter is a Rosh Yeshivah and Rosh Kollel at Yeshiva University’s Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, where he is known as one of Soloveitchik’s closest and most accomplished students.<sup>21</sup> He has compiled several volumes of Soloveitchik’s teachings and is widely considered an authority on the subject, albeit not necessarily an unbiased one. Ferziger has noted that “critics complain that through his own publications and lectures, Schachter has sought to deemphasize his mentor’s numerous variances from the ideological norms of traditionalist Haredi Orthodoxy.”<sup>22</sup> Yet he also notes that Schachter

defends [Soloveitchik] for sanctioning Talmudic studies for women, and he also rules—again in the name of his teacher—that women could serve as Orthodox synagogue officers (but not as president). Thus, from the point of view of institutional affiliation, the constituency that looks to him as a religious authority, for significant ideological stands, and even for the education that he has provided for

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<sup>21</sup> Full disclosure: I had the privilege of learning in Rav Schachter’s kollel while in rabbinical school at RIETS. I would not consider myself a disciple of his in any way, but I have benefited tremendously from him as a teacher and *posek*.

<sup>22</sup> Adam S. Ferziger, *Beyond Sectarianism: The Realignment of American Orthodox Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 118.

some of his own children, Schachter is a leader within Modern Orthodoxy and not the Haredi camp.<sup>23</sup>

Ferziger argues that Schachter's support of Modern Orthodoxy can, at least partially, be "attributed to his deep respect for Soloveitchik" and that "[w]hile he certainly has made efforts to describe his teacher as less maverick than others do, Schachter nonetheless remains loyal in areas in which Soloveitchik's departure from the Orthodox norms of his Eastern European roots is unequivocal."<sup>24</sup>

Schachter, in other words, moves to Soloveitchik's right in significant ways while maintaining the core of his mentor's teaching. In Ferziger's words, Schachter is perhaps "dedicated to advancing a hybrid Orthodoxy that is heavily influenced by Haredi ideals but remains situated within a Modern Orthodox milieu that accepts core positions staked out by his teacher, Soloveitchik."<sup>25</sup> This might be seen as an inverse of Greenberg, whose own "hybrid Orthodoxy" operates similarly by integrating progressive as opposed to conservative values. Such language is used explicitly by Darren Kleinberg, who wrote that "to describe [Greenberg] simply as an "Orthodox Jew" would not do justice to the influence of non-Orthodox Judaisms, religions other than Judaism (particularly Protestant Christianity), and those other intellectual traditions that have exerted such a strong influence on both his thought and practice."<sup>26</sup>

Once the divide between Soloveitchik's philosophical and halakhic disciples is removed, then, Schachter has at least as much claim to discipleship as Greenberg within Goodman's framework.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 129. It should perhaps be noted that Cardozo goes beyond many in suggesting that "Modern Orthodoxy did not realize... that Rav Soloveitchik himself was a Haredi, who combined that ideology with religious Zionism and tried very hard to give it a place in the world of philosophy and modernity." Were this description accurate, Schachter would actually be considerably more consistent with Soloveitchik than those examined by Goodman. See <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/the-genius-and-limitations-of-rabbi-joseph-ber-soloveitchik-zl/>.

<sup>26</sup> Darren Kleinberg, "Irving Greenberg's Theology of Hybrid Judaism" in Adam S. Ferziger, Miri Freud-Kandel, and Steven Bayme (eds.), *Yitz Greenberg and Modern Orthodoxy: The Road Not Taken* (Brookline: Academic Studies Press, 2019), 93.

### **Aharon Lichtenstein**

Both Greenberg and Lichtenstein received doctorates from Harvard in non-Jewish subjects and both taught at YU. Unlike Greenberg, Lichtenstein learned under Soloveitchik from high school through ordination and married Soloveitchik's daughter. In terms of both halakhic analysis and philosophy, it is hard to argue that Soloveitchik had a closer student than his son-in-law.

Greenberg recounts how “[s]oon after I arrived, a group of the new faculty, headed by Aharon Lichtenstein, Charles Leibman, and myself, started meeting regularly to discuss issues of Modern Orthodoxy and to consider how to improve Orthodox/Yeshiva education.”<sup>27</sup> A few years later, Greenberg noted “an internal shift underway in Modern Orthodoxy” signaled by an exchange between himself and Lichtenstein on the pages of the *YU Commentator*.<sup>28</sup>

Greenberg was interviewed by the student newspaper and discussed topics like respect for and cooperating with non-Orthodox Jews, embracing new thinking about Biblical studies, and the need for more natural male-female relations amongst other subjects. According to Greenberg, Soloveitchik was unwilling to issue any denunciations, but his “protege, Aharon Lichtenstein, stepped up.”<sup>29</sup>

Greenberg believes that a “close reading of Lichtenstein’s responses shows that he conceded the correctness of my main points” but that Lichtenstein felt that Greenberg’s concerns were “overruled by the heavy losses of Torah loyalties”<sup>30</sup> that Greenberg was being “too cavalier about the high risks” of his approach.<sup>31</sup> This response confirmed to Greenberg that Lichtenstein “and the emerging centrist leadership would not support the exploration” of his views and that a rightward shift had begun, which “took on the form of systematically excluding people like Hartman and me from the conversation. My views became off-limits, and Yeshiva University students and centrist laymen heard only those from the right and

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<sup>27</sup> Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, “Modern Orthodoxy and the Road Not Taken: A Retrospective View” in Ferziger, Freud-Kandel, and Bayme, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 24

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 25. It is unclear whether Lichtenstein was asked to do so by Soloveitchik or acted independently.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 27.

never from the left.” Eventually Modern Orthodoxy “moved steadily toward the Haredi position in most areas of rabbinic adjudication, education, and community policy.”<sup>32</sup>

Greenberg’s understanding of Lichtenstein representing a rightward shift is undermined by the latter’s positions. Ferziger points out that “[t]he approaches that became dominant in YU since their nearly simultaneous departures were certainly patently different from those of Greenberg, but by no means did they reflect Lichtenstein’s either.”<sup>33</sup>

Ferziger then points out how their positions were closer than presented. Lichtenstein eventually “sustained and advanced a stance [on relating to non-Orthodox Jews] that was very close to Greenberg’s 1966 presentation.”<sup>34</sup> Additionally, he “articulated a vision for critical Orthodox Bible scholarship as early as 1962, modeled personally a form of textual analysis that integrated deep awareness of literary factors and that was rooted at least in part in his own academic training, and he gave his imprimatur to the development of the only research and training center in the world that is dedicated exclusively to cultivating and popularizing Orthodox Bible scholarship.”<sup>35</sup>

Ferziger concludes that the debate should “not be understood as a polar struggle between an emergent archetypical deviant and a staunch centrist “mainstream” representative” but instead “highlights two novel and related roads.”<sup>36</sup> In Lichtenstein’s case, the debate demonstrated that “the same figures who were perceived as the conservative guardians of tradition at a previous juncture may turn out in retrospect to have been the catalysts of a fundamental transformation.”<sup>37</sup>

All of the above in addition to Lichtenstein’s stances on Religious Zionism, women’s Torah learning, and the like, make it hard to say that he is less deserving of discipleship than Greenberg and render his exclusion from *Soloveitchik’s Children* puzzling.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Adam S. Ferziger, “The Road Not Taken” and “The One Less Traveled: The Greenberg-Lichtenstein Exchange and Contemporary Orthodoxy” in Ferziger, Freud-Kandel, and Bayme, 260.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 270

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 278

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 287–288

<sup>37</sup> 288.

<sup>38</sup> It is perhaps interesting that in a letter to Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo, Tanya White mentioned in passing that “Rabbi David Hartman, Rabbi Yitz Greenberg and Rav Lichtenstein, to name just a few, were influenced and shaped by the innovative theological framework of [Soloveitchik].” In his response to White,

### Who, Then, Are Soloveitchik's Children?

It is strange that Goodman does not mention Lichtenstein as a philosophical disciple of Soloveitchik, instead relegating him to endnotes as a “talmudic-halakhic” disciple.<sup>39</sup> This absence is likely because Goodman considered Lichtenstein to be a member of “the halakho-centric wing of Soloveitchik’s students” (17) and someone who, according to what Greenberg himself told Goodman, only became Soloveitchik’s best student by being “able to accommodate himself into what Soloveitchik wanted in an ideal student” (18).

This leads to the largest weakness of Goodman’s work—his acknowledgment that Soloveitchik had an ideal model of student which neither Greenberg nor Hartman met. Goodman explicitly writes about how Soloveitchik “was not pleased when his closest students expressed opinions that were not those of their teacher”<sup>40</sup> and even proposes that it was because Greenberg “had never been among Soloveitchik’s primary students in his primary area of intellectual and spiritual pursuit—his Talmud lectures,” that Greenberg had more flexibility than Soloveitchik’s “closer” students. Recalling that Soloveitchik saw religious philosophy and talmudic study/halakhic analysis as one and the same leads to an unfortunate indictment of Goodman’s thesis: perhaps Soloveitchik simply did not view Greenberg or Hartman as close disciples.

Goodman himself further notes that those “who were in his *Gemara shiurim* were considered Soloveitchik’s closest students, and Soloveitchik kept them on a tighter leash ‘hashkafically’ (philosophically).” Hartman did attend Soloveitchik’s talmud lectures, but Greenberg believed that he found similar flexibility because he “was not one of Soloveitchik’s closest students” (18). In other words, Greenberg and Hartman both found that

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Cardozo rejected equating the three because Greenberg and Hartman “moved away from the Rav in striking ways” while Lichtenstein did not. <https://www.crescas.nl/columns/webcolumnlopescardozo/914oz/An-open-letter-to-Rabbi-Cardozo-in-response-to-his-article-on-Rav-Soloveitchik-Rabbi-J.B.-Soloveitchik-and-his-Paradoxical-Influence-An-Answer-to-a-Friend/>.

<sup>39</sup> See <https://yucommentator.org/2018/01/archives-april-27-1961-volume-26-issue-10-consideration-synthesis-torah-point-view/> for just one of many examples of Lichtenstein’s philosophical bent, meeting every one of the criteria that Goodman used to qualify Sacks as a disciple.

<sup>40</sup> Cardozo even quotes a correspondence with Greenberg in which the latter stated that Soloveitchik’s halakhic conservatism was “was compounded by his own lack in encouraging students to go beyond him. He cut them down (as he did Rackman when Rackman went beyond him).”

Soloveitchik was “extremely tolerant of them, listened to them respectfully, told them that perhaps they were going a little too far, but never belittled them and never denounced them” despite their “moving further, philosophically and theologically, than Soloveitchik was comfortable with” (18) precisely because Soloveitchik did NOT consider them to be close students of his.

This seems to largely defeat Goodman’s project in that it explicitly acknowledges that Soloveitchik not only had an ideal model of student, but also that he went to great effort to ensure that those model students properly represented his views. The fact that he did not do so with the likes of Greenberg and Hartman was very likely because Soloveitchik did not consider them to be his close disciples and therefore did not feel as responsible for their views as he did others.<sup>41</sup>

## Conclusion

Rabbi Nathan Lopes Cardozo described Soloveitchik as “a ‘lonely man of faith’ with no disciples but with many students, each one of whom claimed their own Rav Soloveitchik.” In her response to Cardozo, Tanya White speculated that it was “the tension... between the novelty in the philosophical realm and the conservatism in the Halachic realm that has created the multifaceted interpretations of the Rav’s positions.” *Soloveitchik’s Children* responds to that tension by emphasizing one side of Soloveitchik’s legacy to the exclusion of others.

The selection of Sacks, Hartman, and Greenberg seems to be a rhetorical move employed with the intention of rehabilitating the latter two thinkers for a Modern Orthodox audience that has come to largely ignore their important contributions to Jewish thought. This is a worthwhile end, but Goodman’s means leave much to be desired. His work is revisionist at times, inventing discipleships that seem to have never been rather than exploring those that were.<sup>42</sup> Influence alone (even profound and incontrovertible influence) is not enough to prove discipleship in the way that Goodman defines with the possible exception of Greenberg.

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<sup>41</sup> It was pointed out to me in conversation with a leading Modern Orthodox rabbi that Soloveitchik’s lack of condemnation does not necessarily point towards him regarding Greenberg as a disciple in any meaningful way. Soloveitchik rarely called anyone out by name, with the notable exception of Emmanuel Rackman. It was suggested that this was because Soloveitchik perceived Rackman as an intellectual disciple but NOT others who drifted from his ideal vision.

<sup>42</sup> This seems to be different than the “Rav Revisionism” Lawrence Kaplan wrote of. In that case, Kaplan argued that “the more modern, ‘left wing’ elements of



Those who read *Soloveitchik's Children* as an introduction to and analysis of the thought of Rabbis Jonathan Sacks, David Hartman, and Yitz Greenberg will gain much from the exposure to these fascinating, profound, and legitimately under-appreciated thinkers. Goodman demonstrates a masterful knowledge and understanding of their writings, including how they responded to and adapted the thought of Soloveitchik. As Jonathan Sarna wrote in his approbation, “[a]nyone interested in the thought of Irving Greenberg, David Hartman, and Jonathan Sacks, including their agreements and disagreements with one another, and also with the teacher they revered, Joseph Soloveitchik, should savor this volume—text and notes alike.”

One might argue, though, that Goodman’s framing does the three of them a significant disservice. In analyzing Sacks, Hartman, and Greenberg only in relation to Soloveitchik, their significant contributions to Jewish thought are minimized and they are infantilized as thinkers. Goodman claims that their respective conflicts with Soloveitchik “should not obscure the fact that each of them, in their own ways, was profoundly and incontrovertibly influenced by Soloveitchik’s thought” (50) and insists

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the Modern Orthodox community tend to focus on the more innovative, humanistic, and universal aspects... and minimize the more conservative, authoritarian, and particularist aspects” of Soloveitchik’s thought while the right wing does the opposite. Here Soloveitchik is mostly used as a framing device for the analysis of Greenberg, Hartman, and Sacks. The relationships with Soloveitchik are subject to revision here rather than Soloveitchik himself.

Nonetheless, Goodman’s project is a revisionist one in that it seeks to explicitly align the thought of Greenberg and Hartman with that of Soloveitchik, thus ensuring their legitimacy within Modern Orthodox discourse by association. Making that argument, as opposed to arguing for the merits of their positions in and of themselves, requires revising history to portray both thinkers as closer students of Soloveitchik than they appear to have been.

The subjective nature of Goodman’s project has also been noted by Ferziger in his review of *Soloveitchik's Children*. In his words,

it is clear from the outset that the author’s personal religious vision is front and center. This does not undermine the rigorousness of his research and the richness of the materials from which he draws. Indeed, to a certain degree it is a healthy corrective to the exaggerated self-understandings of objective distance that sometimes inform academic writing. That said, there is a sense from the outset that the author is intent on convincing the reader of the correctness of his grand thesis, and insufficient effort is devoted—despite the remarkable breadth of the footnotes (more than a third of the 300 pages)—to entertaining alternative interpretations or at least to the possibility of modifying his own.

that it is largely “through their divergences from” and “through their creative transformations and adaptations of Soloveitchik’s thought... that their standing as true heirs of Soloveitchik endures” (158). Furthermore, the “barbed criticisms and impassioned disputes that Greenberg, Hartman, and Sacks have had with Soloveitchik service to strengthen, not weaken, their positions as successors of Soloveitchik” (159). Not only does this framing directly contradict Goodman’s earlier claim of legitimacy being determined by “the extent to which their thought is a continuation of, rather than a departure from” Soloveitchik<sup>43</sup> but also ensures that Sacks, Hartman, and Greenberg stay firmly under Soloveitchik’s shadow rather than be allowed to shine as the unique and original thinkers they were in their own rights.

Those hoping to learn about Sacks, Hartman, and Greenberg, then, will find much to enjoy in *Soloveitchik’s Children*. Those hoping to learn about the closest students of Rav Soloveitchik and the relationship he had with them, however, are likely to be disappointed. ❧

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<sup>43</sup> Returning to an earlier footnote’s *reductio ad absurdum*, this move would be tantamount to publishing a book about Louis Jacobs titled “Dessler’s Disciple.”