

## Centrist Orthodoxy - A Cheshbon Ha-nefesh

### Part 1: The Complexity of Experience

#### THE SHIFT TO THE RIGHT

As we gather today to discuss educational and communal directions for Centrist Orthodoxy, we find that type of Orthodoxy increasingly under attack. While the possibility of attack from both right and left is endemic to centrism by virtue of its dual exposure, the nature and extent of criticism varies. At present, I believe, particularly insofar as the Right is concerned, it is perceived by attackers and defenders alike as being particularly intensive, broad in scope, covering a wide range of thought and activity, and penetrating in depth. It consists not just of carping criticism, sniping with regard to one feature or another, but rather of a radical critique, questioning the fundamental legitimacy and validity of the basic Centrist position.

This phenomenon, the so-called "shift to the right," is, in certain respects, general. The crisis of faith and experience engendered with the spiritual vacuity of modernism has resulted in the polarization of the Western world, and has issued in the growth of hedonistic individualism on the one hand, and largely authoritarian spiritualism on the other. Within the religious world, again broadly speaking, this development has been accompanied by the quest for the rock-ribbed certainty of purism and a concomitant rejection of what many perceive to be the middling and muddling compromises of centrism.

The popularity and bellicosity of Christian fundamentalist political organizations, for instance, would have been unthinkable a generation ago. Islamic fundamentalism, to take another example, has spread like wildfire in countries once deemed by largely secular historians to be inexorably on the road to religious modernization. At another level, as many Jews in the United States particularly and lamentably have learned, cults have become the craze of many who have found no other egress from this spiritual desert.

Nevertheless, we are and should be inclined to treat the specific Jewish, or, if you will, American Jewish situation in its own terms. We are "believers and children of believers," and as such are guided by Chazal's dictum that "Ein mazal le-Yisrael:" the Jewish experience is not determined and therefore cannot be fully understood by reference to astrological forces, or, to take the modern counterpart, by historical causation or sociological categories. We are guided by the declaration, both command and promise, enunciated in

Parashat Lekh Lekha (Bereishit 17:1): "I am Kel Shad-dai; walk before Me and be wholehearted." The Ramban cites Ibn Ezra's and Rav Shemuel Ha-naggid's interpretation of the name "Shad-dai:" "This is from the root sh.d.d., meaning Victor and Prevailer over the hosts of heaven." The Ramban then comments:

"Therefore, He now told Avraham that He is the Powerful One, the Victor who will prevail over [Avraham's] constellation of birth so that he will have a son, and thus there will be a covenant between Him and his seed forever, meaning that 'the portion of the Eternal is His people' (Devarim 32:9), and that He will lead them at His own will, as they will not be under the rule of a star or constellation."

Hence, we strive to interpret events affecting Knesset Yisrael with an eye to their specific elements.

Moreover, we are not just dispassionate observers trying to understand the passing scene. We are measurably affected by the flow of events, either being directly under siege, or, on another level, the potential victims of the erosion of the terra firma upon which we presumably stand. Consequently, we are pressed not only to understand, but to respond. And responses vary.

The process of the shift to the right, especially with respect to the younger generation, is for many fraught with pain and a sense of almost bitter irony. Parents who sacrificed so much in order to maintain Shabbat observance or to establish and support day schools at a time when none of these were the vogue, suddenly find that their homes are not kosher enough or their Kiddush cups not large enough. Analogously, at the professional level, educators who pioneered in the Five Towns or Johannesburg when these were, from a Torah standpoint, literally deserts, are chagrined to discover that their very students now regard them with a jaundiced and condescending eye.

In some, the pain is assuaged by acceptance, their response being that of the Titans who were superseded by the Olympians in Keats' "Hyperion:" "The first in beauty should be first in might." To most, however, the pain leads to understandable if, in many respects, pitiable anger.

#### **THE NEED FOR SOULSEARCHING**

But beyond the psychological reactions, there is a moral response. The challenge posed by the Right confronts us with the need to engage in cheshbon hanefesh, soulsearching, a spiritual accounting - to examine not only who is "first in beauty," but whether, in the light of basic sources, historical precedent and spiritual sensitivity, Centrism is beautiful at all.

Whatever the origin of this process, I, for one, feel that such an opportunity should be welcomed. I must confess that I am not quite up to the level of self-examination of my good friend, the Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Sha'alvim, R. Meir Schlesinger. He once told me that, just as R. Yisrael Salanter had submitted that he would not continue the Mussar movement for a single day, were he not convinced that it needed to be founded on that very day, so too he - Rav Meir - would not maintain the framework of Hesder at all, were he not ready to innovate it had it not existed. My own feeling is that at certain points one needs to establish the parameters and direction of his spiritual identity and proceed from there, without bringing basic premises into perpetual question.

Nevertheless, I do agree that periodic reassessment is fully warranted. The Rambam (Hilkhos Teshuva 2:6) says that although there is a mitzva of teshuva (repentance) year round, during the Ten Days of Repentance there is a special obligation to repent. Many have asked what is the difference between these two obligations, the general mitzva of teshuva and the specific mitzva during the Ten Days of Repentance? I once suggested that, while generally one relates to specific sins within the context of his spiritual existence, between Rosh Ha-shana and Yom Kippur the obligation is to examine that existence proper.

I am afraid it has been more than a year since we last collectively effected such a re-evaluation. And I believe we are still paying the price for the moral smugness and ideological complacency which gripped us during the period, relatively speaking, of our hegemony. If we are now pressed to reassess our position, we should not hesitate to pick up the gauntlet. An honest and courageous cheshbon ha-nefesh can only help us in every way.

That cheshbon ha-nefesh should clearly have two components. Let me cite briefly from a volume to which I shall have occasion to refer later as well. Near the beginning of the chapter "Hebraism and Hellenism" in his book Culture and Anarchy (1869), Matthew Arnold quotes a maxim of a contemporary of his, Bishop Wilson, who says, "First, never go against the best light you have; second, take care that your light be not darkness." Cheshbon ha-nefesh does indeed entail an examination of the light by which we walk and, concomitantly, an analysis of just how well, just how persistently, we do inwalk by the light which we profess to be guiding us.

#### **COMMONALITIES AND DIFFERENCES WITH THE RIGHT**

Let us begin with the examination of the light. What indeed are the hallmarks of so-called Centrist

Orthodoxy, and in what respect does it differ from its Rightist critics?

Broadly speaking, of course, our common purpose is identical: universally - "to mend the world under God's kingship;" nationally - to realize our destiny as "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation;" personally - to prepare for the tripartite examination described in the gemara (Shabbat 31a): "Did you deal faithfully? Did you set fixed times for Torah study? Did you anticipate redemption?" And it is important that we bear this community of purpose very much in mind.

When all is said and done, we should recognize and realize that what we share with the Rightist community far, far outweighs whatever divides us - although, in the nature of things, the focus within the community is upon the divisive element. I sometimes have the feeling that, with regard to perceiving that community, we are often somewhat remiss.

Ernst Simon, a professor of philosophy of education at the Hebrew University and a colleague of the Rav's in Berlin, once remarked with reference to the dilemma of a religious professor in Jerusalem (remember, this is years back), that "The people you can talk to, you can't daven with, and the people with whom you can daven, you can't talk." For benei Torah, of course, the shared universe of Talmudic discourse, of havayot de-Abbaye ve-Rava, serves as a great cementing force, transcending these values. But even amongst them, many in our camp no doubt find it easier to talk, perhaps even to work, with an intelligent secular colleague than with a Karliner chassid, forgetting that the pleasantries attendant upon passing the time of day cannot compare with a shared vision of eternity. Surely we need to recognize, and the point can hardly be overemphasized, that our basic affinity is with those - past, present or future - to whom tzelem Elokim, malkhut shamayim and avodat Hashem (the divine image, the Kingdom of Heaven, and the service of God) are the basic categories of human existence.

Nevertheless, important differences clearly do exist, and these relate to substance as well as to style, to strategy no less than to tactics. While an abstract eschatological vision may be common, its specific content may vary, and quite significantly. While the ideal of "a holy nation" animates us all, its definition is far from agreed. And if we all labor with an eye to certain ultimate questions, we may - and do - differ greatly with regard to the weight to be assigned to them respectively.

If pressed to define the primary area of difference between the various Torah communities, I presume we would get different replies depending upon whether the question were posed in the Diaspora or in Eretz Yisrael. In Galut, the litmus test probably still is the attitude to

secular culture; in Eretz Yisrael, the attitude towards the state. Both are, however, clearly major issues here and there, and I would like to deal seriatim with each and then to analyze their common denominator.

#### **SHAKING OUR CONFIDENCE IN GENERAL CULTURE**

Starting with the question of general culture, I wrote a brief essay in the 1960's ("A Consideration of General Studies from a Torah Point of View," Gesher vol. 1 [1963], reprinted in S. Carmy, ed., The Torah U'Mada Reader [NY, 1985]) setting forth my position with respect to the validity and value of such culture and its relation to the dual problems of bittul Torah (taking time from Torah study) and potentially pernicious influences. In certain respects, the piece is unquestionably and clearly dated. I stated as a fact, for instance, that the problem is generally perceived as concerning boys but not girls, because, after all, gedolei Yisrael did not hesitate to send their daughters to college. Indeed, looking back to that time, one recalls that, quite apart from the obvious instance of the Rav, the daughter of mori ve-rabi R. Hutner z"l received a doctorate, as did the daughter of R. Aharon Kotler. At least one of R. Moshe Feinstein's daughters went to college and, if R. Ruderman's and R. Kaminetzky's did not - I do not recall offhand - it was surely not out of principle. Today, of course, no self-respecting Beis Ya'akov girl, be her father a haberdasher or a programmer, would risk attending college, lest her prospects for a shidduch be impaired.

Nevertheless, in conceptual and axiological terms, the fundamental problematic remains pretty much the same. That being the case, I want to stress one point. The piece was published at a time when I was fairly fresh out of graduate school and still engaged in a modicum of collegiate teaching. After moving to Eretz Yisrael, I heard occasional rumors that, now being firmly established in an institution wholly devoted to Torah, I had recanted.

I freely admit that, during the intervening years, confidence in culture - culture in Arnold's sense, "the study of perfection" - has been generally shaken, and this for at least three reasons. First, high culture, "the best that has been thought and said in the world," as Arnold defined literature (in "Literature and Science," Discourses in America, 1885), is less cherished than it once was. Interest in the humanities has waned, both within academia and outside of it, as the focus has shifted to more pragmatic and technological areas. Not only have priorities changed, but to most people the kind of spirit which animated an Arnold to posit literary culture as the "one dam restraining the flood-tide of barbarian anarchy," now seems hopelessly naive.

Second, the impact of the Holocaust has had a further eroding effect, perhaps paradoxically so. We were then, around 1960, much closer in time to the events. But, perhaps for that very reason, they were much less on our minds. This consciousness of that terrible era and, I might add parenthetically, the mini-industry which has lamentably grown up around it, has posed the terrible and terrifying question raised by one of the most literate men of our generation, George Steiner, in the preface to his book *Language and Silence*:

"We come after. We know now that a man can read Goethe or Rilke in the evening, then he can play Bach and Schubert and go to his day's work at Auschwitz in the morning. To say that he has read them without understanding, or that his ear is gross, is cant. In what way does this knowledge bear on literature and society, on the hope, grown almost axiomatic, from the time of Plato to that of Matthew Arnold, that culture is a humanizing force, that the energies of the spirit are transferable to those of conduct?"

Third, as contemporary culture has moved perceptibly away from our own mores, increasingly vulgarized and inundated by permissiveness, hedonism, eroticism and violence, the need for distancing or possibly insulating ourselves from it and, by extension, from secular culture generally, has been felt more keenly. At a time when the penumbra of Victorian modesty still hovered over America, when, say, an actress of Ingrid Bergmann's stature did not dare for decades to set foot on America's shores because of an extramarital affair with an Italian director, it was easier to ply the virtues of general culture than in today's climate of almost total hefkert (licentiousness) in the media.

#### **THE COMPLEXITY OF EXPERIENCE**

Nevertheless, I wish to reiterate emphatically that I continue to subscribe wholeheartedly to the central thesis of that early essay: the affirmation that, properly approached and balanced (and the caveats are there; there is need for much care and much caution), general culture can be a genuinely ennobling and enriching force.

I am not talking, mind you, about going to college per se (in Eretz Yisrael, even going to high school is an issue). Much of what now passes in many places for collegiate education is little more than sophisticated plumbing - at most, sharpening the mind and entitling its owner to a sheepskin and a union card, but barely affecting the spirit, barely touching the soul. I am talking about spiritual value of general education, not just education for the sake of earning a living. In this respect, my fundamental position, the affirmative position, has not changed.

Quite the contrary, my personal experience over the last two decades has only reinforced an awareness of the spiritual significance of "the best that has been thought and said in the world." For what is it that such culture offers us? In relation to art - profound expressions of the creative spirit, an awareness of structure and its interaction with substance and, consequently, the ability to organize and present ideas; in relation to life - the ability to understand, appreciate, and confront our personal, communal, and cosmic context, sensitivity to the human condition and some assistance in coping with it; in relation to both - a literary consciousness which enables us to transcend our own milieu and to place it in a broader perspective. Above all, culture instills in us a sense of the moral, psychological, and metaphysical complexity of human life.

A good friend of mine had a nephew who attended Harvard Business School. After he graduated, his uncle asked him: "Tell me, what did you learn?" He replied, "I learned that you can only make money with other people's money." The uncle's response was, "If that's the case, you got a good education."

If I were pressed to encapsulate what I learned in graduate school, my answer would be: the complexity of experience. "The rest is commentary - go and study." With respect to the whole range of points enumerated above, I say again that my life experience, in the States or in Eretz Yisrael, within the public or the private sphere, has only sharpened my awareness of the importance of these qualities.

These elements - particularly the last - constitute, if you will, Centrist virtues. Centrism is as much a temper as an ideology, as much a mode of sensibility as a lifestyle. It is of its very essence to shy away from simplistic and one-sided approaches, of its very fabric to strive to encompass and encounter reality in its complexity and, with that encounter, to seek the unity which transcends the diversity.

If confronted by the question posed in Arnold's sonnet "To a Friend" (1848) - "Who prop, thou ask'st, in these bad days, my mind?" - I imagine none of us would give his reply:

... But be his  
My special thanks, whose even-balanced soul,  
From first youth tested up to extreme old age,  
Business could not make dull, nor passion wild;  
Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole;  
The mellow glory of the Attic stage,  
Singer of sweet Colonus, and its child.

We do not have that kind of relationship to

Sophocles. But we do, we ought, share the overriding desire to see life steadily and see it whole. And it is indeed true that, to that end, Sophocles, among others, is helpful. I am in no way intimating that that vision of life cannot be attained otherwise, or that one cannot be a yerei shamayim or a talmid chakham without it. I am generally opposed to positing a single mold as the sole model for avodat Hashem, and I submit that, were it up to me, one could receive semikha from Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan even if, like R. Akiva Eiger, he did not have a B.A.

But, speaking for myself, I can emphatically state that my general education has contributed much to my personal development. I know that my understanding of Tanakh would be far shallower in every respect without it. I know that it has greatly enhanced my perception of life in Eretz Yisrael. I know that it has enriched my religious experience. I know that when my father was stricken blind, Milton's profoundly religious sonnet on his blindness ("When I Consider How My Light Is Spent," 1655) and its magnificent conclusion, "They also serve who only stand and wait," stood me in excellent stead. I also know - and this has at times been a most painful discovery - that many of these elements are sadly lacking among the contemners of culture on the Right.

Psychological sensitivity is grossly deficient. Just recall, if you attended the funeral of a great rabbi, how abstract, repetitive, and inane the eulogies were. When R. Aharon Kotler z"l passed away, there was what was considered at that time a huge funeral downtown. There was a long row of eulogizers - rashei yeshiva and rabbis - but the only person who began to give an insight into the fire which animated that giant was Irving Bunim, a layman. When one's psychological sensitivity is lacking, the result is that much of Torah - whole parshiyot and personalities in Chumash - are simply misread, in the sense of "gilui panim ba-Torah she-lo kehalakha," with a marvelous tradition of midrashim often distorted beyond recognition.

Historical sensibility is, at best, greatly constricted, and the mandate of "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations" (Devarim 32:7), which, as the Chatam Sofer pointed out, addresses itself to the reading and understanding of history, is largely ignored. This constriction has several ramifications. At one level, it limits the ability to understand properly many texts and contexts of Torah; at another, it jades the awareness of historical challenges - of which Zionism is perhaps the most prominent - and the responsibility to participate in the historical process at a public as opposed to the private level; at a third, there is often simply a distortion of reality.

This hit me so much in the face about ten years ago.



I was asked to coordinate a program (run by Yad Avi Ha-yishuv in conjunction with several kollels in Yerushalayim) to train rabbis who would serve in the Diaspora for a period of time. So I decided to bring all the students together for a day of study at which they or their roshei yeshiva would give shiurim revolving around a certain idea. Since they wanted to go out and become community leaders, I suggested that the conference deal with the topic of leadership.

I met with one of the students, a fellow who was considered a bastion of his kollel, and he said to me, "I don't understand - what is there to discuss? Why should we be wasting a day to deal with such a topic?" I asked, "Don't you think this is important for someone who is going to become a rabbi and a leader?" He replied, "It's very simple. You want to know what a leader is? A leader is someone who acts like the Chazon Ish." So I asked, "Is that the only model of Jewish leadership?" He said, "Certainly." I responded, "Do you think that Moshe Rabbeinu spent his day exactly like the Chazon Ish?" He said, "Surely." I countered, "Well, there are verses in the Torah that tell us about his activities..." He answered that those verses, apparently, were all before Parashat Yitro, but after Yitro - he was just like the Chazon Ish. I continued, "What about the Rambam?" He said, "Surely. How could it be otherwise? How else would the Rambam spend his day?" I answered, "With regard to the Rambam, there are clear records; he tells us in his letters how he spent his time. Surely the Chazon Ish would never have spent his time treating the sultan's concubines in various harems..." But that passed him by completely.

Finally, the lack of historical sensitivity often produces the shortsighted use of power in dealing with the secular community for which the overall religious world in Eretz Yisrael today pays such a heavy toll.

This brings us to the last point I mentioned before, the question of more simplistic, as opposed to complex, perceptions of the human condition. An uncultured approach often tends to be superficial and simplistic - I say again, not that it must be; I am far from suggesting, God forbid, that whoever has not received the kind of exposure I am talking about must, of necessity, think in these terms, but the tendency is there - and this, as opposed to what can emerge within a more centrist context.

Centrism at its best encourages a sense of complexity and integration, and this in several respects. First, inasmuch as a person of this orientation looks to the right and to the left, he is molikely to reject the kind of simplistic, black-and-white solutions so appealing to others. Secondly, again by dint of his basic position, it is more complex, because it

encompasses more of reality. It relates to more areas of human life, to larger segments of our communal and personal existence. Third, not only in quantitative terms but qualitatively, a centrist approach is more inclined to perceive shadings and nuances, differences between areas and levels of moral and spiritual reality; more inclined to understand, for instance, what the concept of devar ha-reshut is all about (see lectures #5 and 6 in this series); more inclined to reject the popular myth that the answer to every single problem can be found in the Shulchan Arukh if only one knows how to deal with it. For those who lack a certain exposure, these insights are often more difficult to come by.

There are, in a somewhat related vein, other issues on which we differ because of our differing orientations. For example, subsequent to the God's universal covenants with Adam and Noach, there was a special revelation to the Patriarchs and then to Knesset Yisrael. Is the latter to be regarded as superimposed upon the basic categories of "the image of God," or is it something totally different? The Centrist instinct is to assume - perhaps that both are correct, but anyway - that the sharpening and heightening of the universal spiritual reality is part of what the sanctity of Israel is all about. (See lecture #3.)

Second, in regard to areas of practical halakha, there are differences in how far and how fast one should push in order to arrive at a kind of foolproof practice. How high should the "fence around the Torah" be raised, even when raising it too high has an impact on other values, and even when raising it disregards the impact which it has upon the standing of the kehilla, the basic (and if it is basic, it is in some sense centrist) community as it has existed from generation to generation? The mentality which is totally immersed in certain specifics may often lack the spiritual energy to involve itself in other areas and might not give these considerations sufficient weight. Minutiae are, of course, critical to halakhic thought and experience, and the adherence to standards in their implementation is an essential ingredient of any form of serious Torah commitment. But these need to be viewed, and, within certain limits, defined, with reference to general spiritual and axiological factors.

Here we could deal with specific areas of halakhic decision-making, but whoever is involved knows that much of what today passes muster as yir'at shamayim was thoroughly rejected by the Rishonim. For instance, the Rosh (Sukka 3:13) discusses the definition of an arava, and says that the simple reading of the sugya would indicate that it must grow on the banks of a river (at least according to many opinions). Then he says, "But I have not seen that our rabbis are concerned with this" - and we are dealing with a biblical commandment! His

answer is not, "If that is the case, never mind what our rabbis did - we will be better and wiser," but he suggests what ought to be done.

To take another example, the Kesef Mishneh (Hilkhos Terumos 1:11) discusses the question of whether a gentile's fruits upon which he performed meruach (levelling) in Eretz Yisrael are rabbinically obligated in terumos u-ma'asros (tithes and gifts). Although this is subject to a dispute among Rishonim, the prevalent practice had followed the Rambam's lenient opinion. He then writes about a contemporary rabbi who thought he was being pious by following the stringent opinion of other Rishonim, and persuading others to do the same. The Kesef Mishneh says categorically, God forbid that we should change the long-standing practice of the kehilla, for that it would be disrespectful to our predecessors and present them as sinners, and so on - he is very vigorously opposed.

Here again, we have an issue which to some extent divides us. This might perhaps be extended, but I do want to move on to the second major issue of which I spoke before, and this is the attitude toward Zionism and the State of Israel in general.

[Based on a transcript by Rav Eli Clark.  
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## Centrist Orthodoxy - A Cheshbon Ha-nefesh

### Part 2: "Torah Only" or "Torah And"

[Note: This is the second installment in a three-part series.]

#### ATTITUDES TOWARD ZIONISM

Having quoted myself previously with regard to the question of culture, I will refer you now to another article I wrote, dealing with the topic of attitudes towards Zionism within the American Orthodox community ("Patterns of Contemporary Jewish Hitzdahun: Orthodoxy," in Moshe Davis, ed., World Jewry and the State of Israel [Jerusalem, 1977], pp.183-192). In dealing with the differences between the adherents of and opponents to Zionism within the Torah world, I focused upon several major factors: conceptually, the extent to which man - and all of society collectively - should participate in the historical process; how partial successes, partial developments, half-way houses, if you will, were to be evaluated; how one perceived the specific reality of political Zionism; and to what extent was one ready and willing to work with secularists. All of these, I think, are significant factors in drawing lines between the pros and the cons.

But I think that in our context, another element may be added: in general, to what extent is one interested in the political order, the polis, and specifically, how much significance (if any) does one attach to the issue of Jewish sovereignty in Eretz Yisrael? Here, of course, there is a clear break between Centrists, who, animated by both Rav Kook and Rav Soloveitchik, stress the scope of Halakha and of Torah as pervasive, touching upon every facet of human life, surely in the public sphere no less than the private, and those who are content to restrict themselves within their four cubits and care little for what kind of flag flies above their yeshiva.

Speaking for myself, I am far from going the full route with the official Zionist ideology. I have the privilege of being regarded in America as a bit odd for being a Zionist, and in Eretz Yisrael as being a little odd (at least within our world) for being suspect as not sufficiently Zionist. But, be that as it may, I would not go the full route with Rav Kook; I say freely that there are passages in which he writes of the importance of the State, its accomplishments and achievements, which bewilder me.

I was travelling not long ago with a Member of Knesset who is identified with Gush Emunim. He read a sentence to me, the general tenor of which was that the

"ultimate happiness of man" is somehow the attainment of the State. He asked what I think of this sentence. I answered, "What do I think? It's terrible." We began discussing this further, and he let me in on the secret: this is a sentence from the latter parts of Rav Kook's Orot. As it turned out, this pronouncement was qualified in the very next line. First Rav Kook wrote that in secular, non-Jewish countries, the State is just a tool, but the State of Klal Yisrael becomes an end in itself, a sort of beatitude. In the next sentence, he says that as a result of the State, malkhut Shamayim, the kingdom of God - which is the true "ultimate happiness of man" - is realized. Apparently, there are two levels of man's ultimate happiness.

Nevertheless, I do not share the extent of the significance which he assigns to the State. I have reservations about the degree of emphasis which his disciples, his son among others, have assigned to the gemara in Sanhedrin (98a) which states that the clearest harbinger of the End of Days is when trees bloom and blossom in Eretz Yisrael. I also feel that there is there some excess in not only validating, but evaluating the importance of what, after all, are geo-political, at most socio-economic, considerations.

But this is a question of degree. Surely, the basic awareness of what malkhut Yisrael, Jewish sovereignty, means - even in its very, very imperfect state - is part of my own being and something which I think needs to animate a person with historical vision and spiritual sensibility. And that which relates to Eretz Yisrael and to the State of Yisrael should, for SPIRITUAL reasons, be close to our heart.

How this translates into practical educational policy, with an eye to the price that sometimes may be paid for this kind of excessive Zionist passion, is something which surely needs to be weighed. Be that as it may, we recognize the significance of the State of Israel, and I believe this is proper. As Centrists, we recognize it because, among other things, we have the capacity for relating to a broader spectrum of Klal Yisrael, and we have what is crucial - the ability to understand the significance of gradual steps, the historical consciousness, a developmental awareness.

I once noted that the law of "the four cups of redemption" at the seder has a dual status. On the one hand, it is all a single mitzva. On the other hand, the gemara (Pesachim 110a) and the Rif say with regard to various laws (such as whether to pronounce a separate blessing on each) that "each one is a mitzva in its own right." If this be true of the cups, it is true likewise of the levels of redemption which those cups represent. Surely, we have been fortunate to witness some measure of "ve-hotzeiti" and "ve-hitzalti" ("I shall remove you" and

"I shall save you"). Although these can be regarded only as first steps in the fulfillment of a larger process, they certainly also have a significance of their own - "each one is a mitva in its own right."

#### **"TORAH ONLY" OR "TORAH AND"**

Both issues that I have mentioned, that of general culture and that of Eretz Yisrael, have in a very real sense - although they are diverse - a common denominator. It may be summed up by the phrase, "Torah ve-," Torah with something else.

Those who would subscribe to a position of "Torah only," in reality are not. The gemara in Yevamot (109b) says: "A person who has nothing but Torah, does not have Torah either," because that Torah is false, it is vacuous, it is invalid. Now, of course, the question is what does one need to have besides Torah? Here there is room for different perceptions.

There is a remarkable comment by Rabbeinu Bachya in his commentary to the Torah. In Parashat Nitzavim, God tells us that "I have presented before you today life and goodness, and death and evil" (Devarim 30:15), followed by the injunction to "choose life" (ibid. v. 19). Naturally, we understand that "life and goodness" refers to Torah, and "death and evil" to something else. Rabbeinu Bachya, however, understands that the entire phrase - "life and goodness and death and evil" - all applies to Torah. There is Torah which is "life and goodness," and Torah which is "death and evil."

In this respect, Rabbeinu Bachya is simply following the tradition of Chazal (Yoma 72b):

"Rava said: Any talmid chakham (scholar) whose inside is not like his outside is not a talmid chakham. Abbaye, and some say Rabba bar Ulla, said: He is called 'loathsome' ...

R. Shemuel bar Nachmani said in the name of R. Yonatan: What is the meaning of the verse (Mishlei 17:16), 'Why is there money in the hand of a fool to purchase wisdom, though he lacks heart (i.e. understanding)?' Woe unto talmidei chakhamim who engage in Torah but have no yir'at Shamayim...

R. Yehoshua ben Levi said: What is the meaning of that which is written (Devarim 4:44), 'This is the Torah which Moshe placed ("sam") before the Children of Israel?' If one is worthy, the Torah becomes for him an elixir of life ('sam chayyim'); if one is not worthy, it becomes for him a potion of death ('sam mita')."

This is analogous to the familiar gemara (Shabbat 31a) about those who have the keys to the inner doors and not to the outer doors, and therefore have no access to

the treasure which lies within. Likewise, there are similar statements in the gemara in Ta'anit and a number of other places about the need for yir'at Shamayim to accompany learn

What clearly emerges from the sources which I have cited and to which I have alluded is the sense that, while one seemingly would feel that Torah alone is sufficient ("Turn it over and turn it over, for everything is in it" - Avot 5:22), nevertheless there is something else which needs to be added. What is that something else? Yir'at shamayim, of course. But perhaps other elements as well.

Some feel that, inasmuch as "Torah is the best merchandise" (in the words of the Yiddish aphorism), why should anyone devote any time at all to anything but the "best merchandise?" In one sense, this notion seems eminently sensible. But do we really conduct ourselves in this way in all areas of life? If someone says he wants a piece of bread and butter, do we tell him, "Fool, why bread and butter? What's more important - bread or butter? Bread! So why take butter on the bread? Take two pieces of bread!" Of course not. But the question is, what is the butter and is there such a thing within this sphere?

#### **THE POSSIBILITY OF INTEGRATION**

I believe that there is an analogue to butter, and there is much to be gained from it - even within the intellectual sphere itself, within learning proper, with reference to spiritual perception. Now, of course - and this cannot be reiterated too strongly - there are all kinds of caveats: the proper balance must be maintained, great care needs to be taken that improper or pernicious influences not seep in, and we must always approach general culture critically, from a Torah perspective. But when that is done, the ability to adumbrate something of general culture into a Torah world clearly exists.

There is a halakhic analogy upon which I would like to draw, by way of indicating what kind of process I think can take place here. Although one must separate challa only from dough made of the five grains, the mishna (Challa 3:7) tells us that if someone makes dough out of wheat flour and rice flour, he must take challa from all the dough, including the rice. The entire lump of dough becomes obligated in challa, even though rice is not one of the five grains. The gemara (Zevachim 78a) explains this on the basis of the law of ta'am ke-ikkar (taste is like substance): since the wheat gives a taste in the rice, the latter has the status of wheat. The Yerushalmi (Challa 1:1) offers a different explanation, based on the law of gereira (dragging). Gereira applies only to wheat and rice - if you make dough out of wheat and potatoes, even though ta'am ke-ikkar would be the

same, there is no such law. When mixed with wheat, only rice - because it is biologically very similar to the cereal grains - can become attached, appended, integrated into the wheat.

So we have here the wheat proper and that which is "nigrar" - appended or incorporated - into the wheat. The same thing, I think, can apply within the spiritual order. There is Torah proper, and there is that which, properly integrated and related, can become "nigrar;" not everything can be "nigrar," but there are things which can be. Here there is "Torah and," but that "and," to the extent that it is related to Torah, is "metzuraf" (attached) to it.

Secondly, the concept of "Torah and" suggests that there are other values besides intellection, other human and Jewish goals, that there is a need to supplement, to give an integrated vision of human life. The gemara in Avoda Zara (17b) - I have quoted it many times with reference to Hesder - speaks with great sharpness of someone who engages only in Torah and not in gemilut chasadim (acts of kindness): "It is as if he has no God!" Quite apart from learning - which is a cardinal, central value - there are other areas of human life which need to be dealt with. Surely, the creation and the sustenance of a viable and just society - chesed in the broader sense, as in "The world is built by chesed" (Tehillim 9:3) - needs to be perceived, and this too is a predominantly Centrist perception.

#### **THEORY AND PRACTICE**

Thus, the key issue distinguishing our approach from that of our colleagues on the Right is the question of adopting an attitude of "everything is in it" or appending, balancing, rounding out. With respect to this issue, as I have clearly indicated, I think that we stand on solid ground. We have a position which surely need not be viewed as being the sole position, need not even be regarded historically as being the majority position, but surely a sound, solid, legitimate position. I believe, therefore, that the problem confronting Centrist Orthodoxy today is not, or ought not to be, primarily ideological.

Even if our position is, in certain respects, a minority view, judged by either historical or contemporary reference, this need hardly dismay us. On some issues, there is no question that the kind of the position that I have outlined here has been a minority view. The question of general culture is, after all, quite old, and it is true: this position has been in the minority - a minority in the Rishonim's time and surely so in Eastern Europe. But no one questions that it is legitimate. In other areas, in regard to the fullness of life as opposed to constriction, I think we stand on the



high ground: historically, ours has been the majority view, and those who now speak of a kind of constriction, which is presented to us as an ultimate ideal, represent the minority view.

Be this as it may, I believe that the light by which we walk is a reliable guide - not the sole guide, but a thoroughly legitimate one. Our question, then, is: How well and how faithfully do we, as a community, walk by it? Our problem is not on the conceptual level, but rather on that of implementation - both operational and experiential. We will turn next to this question, the second component of our cheshbon ha-nefesh.

[Based on a transcript by Rav Eli Clark.  
This sicha was originally delivered at a conference of the Educators' Council of America in November 1985.  
It has not been reviewed by Harav Lichtenstein.]

## Centrist Orthodoxy - A Cheshbon Ha-nefesh

### Part 3: Passion, Spirituality, Morality

#### DIALECTICAL TENSION OR TEPID INDIFFERENCE?

In the previous sections of this lecture, I established that the ideology of Centrist Orthodoxy is thoroughly legitimate from a halakhic, hashkafic and historical point of view. To return to Bishop Wilson's question, we can say that the light by which we walk is a reliable guide - not the sole guide, but a thoroughly legitimate one. We must then turn to the second part of his query and ask ourselves: How well and how faithfully do we, as a community, walk by it? Our problem is not on the conceptual level, but rather on that of implementation - both operational and experiential.

Ideally, vibrant centrism should issue from the dialectical tension between diverse and, at times, even divergent values. Centrist Orthodoxy, specifically, can be powerful only when the concern for Torah remains passionate and profound, but is then supplemented by other elements. It can succeed when we can honestly state, by analogy with Byron's statement, "I love not man the less, but nature more," that, in comparison with others, we love not Torah less, but derekh erez - in the full, rich sense of that term - more.

But it is precisely here, I am afraid, that our cheshbon ha-nefesh begins. How much of our centrism indeed derives from dialectical tension, and how much from tepid indifference? Is our commitment to talmud Torah truly as deep as that of the Right, but only modified in practice by the need to pursue other values? Do our students devote as much time and effort to talmud Torah, minus only that needed to acquire culture or build a state? Comparisons aside, let us deal with specific educational issues: what has all the time wasted on television, the inordinate vacations, a system of religious public schools in Israel which shuts down at twelve or at one in the afternoon, to do with culture or Zionism?

Cannot one acquire both, in schools geared to the hilt for maximal Torah achievement? On the contrary, success in talmud Torah on the part of those who maintain a multiple vision requires greater tenacity, more devotion, more diligence, than among devotees of the monochromatic, who speak, in a phrase much beloved by the Right, of producing only "shemen zayit zakh," the purest olive oil. But does that exist?

The children in Centrist summer camps today do not

waste away their summers because they are busy mastering Bach or Euclid. They generally abstain from Torah study because their parents, or the community out of which they spring, do not consider talmud Torah, perhaps Judaism in general, as THAT important. So long as this is the case, we are indeed in serious trouble. The challenge which confronts us is how to build a community which is passionately committed to Torah, but understands the need for "gereira." So far, this has proven to be a difficult and elusive task.

In part, it is the fault of the community whom we, as educators, service; it is less committed, less involved, less engaged. But, we are here at a moment of cheshbon ha-nefesh - is it only that? A man who is a dear and near friend of mine, a maggid shiur in a certain yeshiva, once asked me: "How can a student in my yeshiva can have any respect for the rosh yeshiva, how can he have any commitment to Torah, if every time he walks into the rosh yeshiva's office, he finds him not bent over a gemara, but covering The New York Times?"

Let me take another example, and I hope that the people involved will not take umbrage; we are speaking as friends. You know that the Rabbinical Council of America this year held its fiftieth anniversary celebration in Yerushalayim. I was supposed to address one of the sessions, but because of a mix-up I didn't, and I was glad that I didn't. Do you know why? I got hold of the schedule to see what went on there. In the course of the twelve days of this conference in Eretz Yisrael, there was time to meet with the Prime Minister, President, and Defense Minister; there was time for a fashion show, time to walk the streets of Tel Aviv with some of the mayor's assistants; there was time for all kinds of things. But not one place of Torah was on the itinerary. The organizers' concern was with people who are on the move, in the area of power - the Belzer Rebbe was invited; he is powerful. I say this with pain - these are friends of mine. What is there to say about this?

### **INSTILLING PASSION**

I spoke before about a passionate concern for Torah. The key, indeed, is the passion - passion which is important in its own right as a component of avodat Hashem, and passion which holds the key to the development of other components, in the sense of "Yir'ato kodemet le-chokhmato," where one's yir'at Shamayim is prior to his wisdom. In order to attain that, we as educators should be ready to sacrifice - and even sacrifice considerably - a measure of objective intellectual accomplishment. The sense that, indeed, the words of the Torah "are our life and the length of our days," is far more important than the actual knowledge. Certainly, for so many of our students, who in the first place are not going to become talmidei chakhamim, love of

Torah is far more important than knowledge of Torah.

The Lubavitcher Chasidim like to relate that at a certain age, the Ba'al ha-Tanya decided he had to go to Vilna to learn from the Gra. En route, he was met by an older person (the Chasidim denote him as Eliyahu ha-Navi) who asked him, "Where are you going?" He said, "I'm going to Vilna to learn from the Gra." The elder said to him, "You know how to learn somewhat. You don't know how to pray at all. Better go to the Mezeritcher Maggid."

Without passing judgement on this particular encounter, let us ask ourselves: Where does the shoe really hurt in terms of our Centrist community? I submit that, on a competitive basis, we might do better in the area of learning than in the area of prayer. I knew a man who was identified as an Orthodox rabbi but, ideologically, was essentially Conservative. Someone once asked him, "Why don't you go over to the Conservatives?" His response was, "How can you go to the Conservatives? They don't cry at Ne'ila" (the final prayer on Yom Kippur). Let us ask ourselves: Does our Centrist community cry sufficiently at Ne'ila?

It is only by instilling this kind of passion that we can avoid the lapse of centrism into mere compromise. There ARE times when one must compromise, and this itself is an issue between us and the Right: how are we to gauge the qualitative as opposed to the quantitative element? They are the champions of the qualitative, "shemen zayit zakh" - adherents of the position which, in a magnificent sentence in his On Civil Disobedience, Thoreau presented that, "It is not so important that many should be as good as you, as that there be some absolute goodness somewhere; for that will leaven the whole lump." We have a much greater commitment to the quantitative element, to reaching large segments of the community, even if we are only to reach them partially and the accomplishments are limited.

But even if we must, in a certain sense, compromise, it cannot be out of default. I remember years back reading a remark of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and a very perceptive one; he said, "The problem with the Conservatives is not that they compromise - it is that they make a principle out of compromise." We cannot, God forbid, make a principle out of compromise, nor can we lapse into it by default. But if we are to avoid lapsing, then that passionate commitment must be kept burning. It is only when we can attain that, that Centrism as a vibrant and legitimate spiritual force can be sustained. Only by generating profound conviction can we sustain ourselves from within and be inured onslaughts from without: conviction of the overall importance of Torah and of the worth - and there is worth! - of our own interpretation of it.

There are several lines in a poem written in 1921 by an Irish poet, William Butler Yeats, which, as I survey the contemporary scene, often haunt me terribly:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart: the center cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned.  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity.  
("The Second Coming")

I have no use whatsoever, in our context, for the comparative terms "best" and "worst," and I surely do not, with reference to the people I am talking about, present a categorical assertion that they "lack all conviction." But it is beyond question that good people in our camp lack the kind of passion and intensity with which they are being attacked.

Kana'ut (zealotry) is, among us, a dirty word. But I believe we should learn to distinguish between two senses of kana'ut. I mentioned R. Aharon Kotler z"l before. In terms of the objective positions which he maintained, he was far more liberal than his contemporary disciples. But he maintained his positions with a dynamism, a fire, an energy, a passion which is almost incredible. To have seen him simply, as Chazal say, "from behind," was an experience - a dynamo! There was within him a kind of kana'ut, if you will, not for extreme positions, but for HIS positions.

#### **THE NEED FOR SPIRITUALITY**

We must maintain our positions not only with a passionate conviction, but also with spirituality. This, I grant you, is a kind of amorphous quality which some people do not quite know what to make of. It is even, particularly in Eretz Yisrael, regarded within our community with a great deal of suspicion. When you say someone is an "ish ru'ach," a man of spirit, immediately people begin to sniff - presumably he is a leftist, a poet, a bohemian artist or maybe a professor, but surely not one of "our people." However, you know that in Tanakh, it is Yehoshua who is described as an "ish asher ru'ach bo" (Bamidbar 27:18) - this is someone who carried the mantle of Moshe Rabbeinu!

As amorphous and, perhaps, ambiguous as this quality may be, it is a central category; one which admittedly can, at times, be divorced from our particular commitment. I remember years back I was impressed when Alain de Rothschild came to visit the Rav. The Rav spent time with him, a man who was totally removed from the world of Torah u-mitzvot. Afterwards, I asked the Rav,

"How did you find him?" The Rav said, "You know, he's a spiritual person." And it meant something to the Rav.

Here, then, is another quality which sometimes we are lacking in; perhaps it is a danger which a centrist position, with its openness to the world and its multiple engagements, is inherently prone to. The lack of spirituality, however, is very widespread on the Right as well. There is often an excessive focus on wealth and externals even among benei Torah; sometimes when they get together, you would think they were stockbrokers. So, in all communities there is room for a cheshbon ha-nefesh.

#### **DIFFUSION AND DILUTION**

Now, our Rightist critics would contend that I am, in effect, trying to square the circle. At least insofar as the masses are concerned, the lack of either passion or spirituality is no accident, but the inevitable result of interest in the cultural and political orders. To an extent, I agree. Diffusion does entail, almost inevitably, some measure of dilution, and the pure Torah component within a "Torah im derekh eretz" approach is indeed likely to command less single-minded loyalty than the unitary goal pursued by the "shemen zayit zakh."

But are we to start dismissing and rejecting mishnayot in Avot simply because they produce what someone has defined as inferior results? "Excellent is Torah with derekh eretz, for exertion in the both will eliminate the thought of sin" (Avot 2:2). The point of the mishna is precisely that one's commitment to Torah should be of the sort which obtains within a multiple context. Of course, within that context, we need to differentiate between the flour and the Torah: while it is true that "If there is no flour, there is no Torah, and if there is no Torah, there is no flour" (Avot 3:17), this is not a reciprocal relationship, axiologically speaking. The flour subserves the Torah, irrespective of the famous dispute of Rabbeinu Tam and Rabbeinu Elchanan whether Torah or derekh eretz is the primary component (see e.g. Tosafot Yeshanim, Yoma 85b). This dispute revolves around the question as to how one ordinarily is to order his life; but as far as values are concerned, no one could suggest that derekh eretz is primary as opposed to Torah. (See lecture #6 in this series.)

Even if we differentiate between flour and Torah, nevertheless, the substance of this mishna (and several others) is precisely that these need to interact at a public and at a private level. So whatever degree of dilution is the result of subscribing to Chazal's guidance, for that we bear no responsibility and need not trouble our conscience. Rather, the question is whether, beyond this dilution, the inclusion of a measure of secular culture or fealty to a secularly oriented state is corrosive.

## THE ASCENDANCY OF THE MORAL OVER THE INTELLECTUAL

Secondly - this too is an important question - we must ask ourselves just how is this deficiency to be measured against some of the moral and religious failings currently derivative from the pure pursuit of "shemen zayit zakh:" belligerence, arrogance, self-righteousness, occasional deviousness and chicanery. I very much believe that "shemen zayit zakh" can be produced with humble integrity. I am likewise convinced that "Torah im derekh erez" can be pursued with passion and intensity. But that does not obviate the fact that, within our camp, there is room for improvement. And it is therein that our challenge as educators lies.

Perhaps much of what I have said in relation to culture, quoting Arnold and Yeats and others, seems very rarefied. People may be asking themselves, "What has this to do with us? We have to deal with children in elementary school or high school; this is not our concern." Nevertheless, I have related to culture at its apex, because the kind of vision which is maintained at the pinnacle has an impact, and should have an impact, upon what is done at lower levels. In this respect, the awareness of the evaluation of culture does have practical consequences for whatever level of education we are dealing with.

Granted that, our challenge is to see to it that indeed we maintain our position with depth and with gusto. Given our constituency, of course, we cannot instill many of our students with the optimal level of love of Torah; we know from where they come. But, within our overall community, surely within its leadership, such a level should exist. Woe unto us, if the only choice lies between tepid compromise and arrogant kana'ut.

A couple of years after we moved to Yerushalayim, I was once walking with my family in the Beit Yisrael neighborhood, where R. Isser Zalman used to live. For the most part, it consists of narrow alleys. We came to a corner, and found a merchant stuck there with his car. The question came up as to how to help him get out of where he was; it was a clear case of perika u-te'ina (helping one load or unload his burden). There were some youngsters there from the neighborhood, judging by their looks probably ten or eleven years old. They saw that this fellow who was stuck was not wearing a kippa. So they began a whole pilpul, based on the gemara in Pesachim (113b), about whether they should help him or not. They said, "Well, if he walks around bareheaded, presumably he doesn't separate terumot u-ma'asrot, so he is suspect of eating and selling untithed produce..."

I wrote the Rav a letter at that time, and I told him of the incident; I ended with the comme "Children of

that age from our camp would not have known the gemara. But they would have helped him." The feeling which I had then was: Why, Ribbono shel Olam, must this be our choice? Can't we find children who are going to help him and know the gemara? Do we have to choose? I hope not, I believe not. If forced to choose, however, I would have no doubts where my loyalties lie; I prefer that they know less gemara, but help him.

If I can refer again to my experience over the last several decades, I think that one of the central points which has reinforced itself is the sense, in terms of values, of the ascendancy of the moral over the intellectual - with all the love and commitment that I have to pure learning. But, when all is said and done, you have to be guided not by what you love; you have to be guided by Torah. And the Torah tells us what is good:

"He has told you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: only to do justice, and to love goodness, and to walk modestly with your God." (Micha 6:8)

An entire chapter of Tehillim (mizmor 15) is devoted to this subject:

"A psalm of David.  
Lord, who may sojourn in Your tent, who may dwell on Your holy mountain?  
He who lives without blame, acts justly and speaks the truth in his heart;  
who has no slander upon his tongue, who has never done harm to his fellow, or borne reproach for his acts towards his neighbor;  
for whom a contemptible man is abhorrent, but who honors those who fear the Lord;  
who stands by his oath even when it is to his disadvantage;  
who has never lent money at interest [even to a gentile, explains the gemara], nor accepted a bribe against the innocent.  
The person who acts thus shall never be shaken."

These are the criteria. Chazal similarly inform us:

"[Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai] said to his students: Go out and see what is the good path to which a person should cling... Rabbi Elazar said: A good heart. [Rabbi Yochanan] said to them: I agree with Rabbi Elazar ben Arakh, for his words encompass yours." (Avot 2:9)

If one must choose, surely a good heart is to be preferred.

But I would desperately hope that no such choice confronts us, and that we have the wherewithal, out of



our Centrist perspective, out of our sensitivity to the moral and the intellectual, to the spiritual in every respect, that we have the tools, the desire, the energy and the ability, in spite of all the difficulties - and I know that they are great - that exist in the field, to move towards building the kind of richer Torah reality which can and should animate us.

### **"DO NOT FEAR ANY MAN"**

I was asked to speak today about "Communal Directives for Centrist Orthodoxy." Although I have spoken of the problems of machloket (dispute) and attacks from the Right, I do not think that our primary task is to be fighting the Right, not even to be fending them off. Our primary task is to build within our own world - to build with courage, with conviction, with a sense of our own worth, with a sense that we stand for something important and vital.

That has practical implications at times. There is a prohibition in the Torah (Devarim 1:17) - "Do not fear any man." Of course, this refers specifically to a judge, or, as the gemara (Sanhedrin 6a) says, to a student sitting before his teacher. In a broader sense, however, it has other implications. If an educator has a class or a school and knows that his students need to pursue a particular path - it is in their spiritual interest, in the interest of their growth as benei Torah, yir'ei Shamayim and shomrei mitzvot - but builds for them a different kind of curriculum because he is looking over his shoulder, he too violates the prohibition of "Do not fear any man."

There is no reason why we need to have that fear or that anxiety; we need to have the courage of our convictions, but first we must have the convictions. We need to have them for ourselves, in depth, in richness, and we need them to build upon them.

One of the shibboleths which is constantly thrown around is whether our position is lekhatchila or bedi'aved (ab initio or post facto, i.e. a first or second choice); I hear this all the time in Eretz Yisrael with regard to Hesder. If you ask me: Is our position bedi'aved or lekhatchila? - the answer is that it can be either. If one lapses into it, and certain compromises are made by default, then indeed that is bedi'aved. If it is the result of a rich, meaningful, profound and comprehensive commitment, if it grows out of the dialectical tension of trying to relate to the full gamut of spiritual goals which confronts us, if it is part of an effort to build intensively and extensively a worldview and a reality within our community - then indeed it is in every sense lekhatchila. And those who engage in it "shall go from strength to strength and shall appear before God in Zion" (Tehillim 84:8).

[Based on a transcript by Rav Eli Clark.  
This sicha was originally delivered at a conference of  
the Educators' Council of America in November 1985.  
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