

March 23, 1997

"The Issue"

1. Yeshiva University's major function is that of education; all else is secondary. Its commitment to Modern Orthodoxy goes without saying--it is, indeed, the flagship of Modern Orthodoxy in a fleet that boasts of few other ships, if any at all--but the integrity and proper functioning of Yeshiva University must take precedence over the ephemeral issues that agitate the Modern Orthodox community from time to time.
2. Hence, where there exist legitimate differences of opinion between groups of authentic halakhic authorities--whether they are Roshei Yeshiva or pulpit/community rabbis--Yeshiva University must and will, if at all possible, stay above the fray. It must continue to make it possible for its students to consider all legitimate opinions without introducing divisiveness into the student body, a condition which inevitably distracts students from achieving progress in their education.
3. This policy has come under attack from many quarters as a cop-out by the administration. We are being challenged to "take a stand" on every controversial issue. My answer is that, indeed, there are many issues where it is morally and Jewishly imperative to offer a decisive opinion; but there are an equal number of occasions where the issues are such that they do not require a response from me or the administration. No one ever appointed us (or anyone else, for that matter) as the ultimate decisors for the Modern Orthodox community.
4. Our master, the Rav ר"צ זצ"ל never attempted to answer *all* questions. He was intellectually honest and also communally responsible; thus, he sometimes said, "I don't know," and at other times, "Do what you think is right."
5. Roshei Yeshiva, whether of our or any other yeshiva, are not authorized to decide all issues for the Jewish community or, certainly, to impose their will on others. Individual Jews are bidden to consult their rabbis. The pulpit rabbi may, if he so wishes, consult other rabbis whom he considers more halakhically knowledgeable and/or more sensitive to the realities of the situation and more responsible, and this includes his (former) teachers at the yeshiva he attended. But the answer, if the question is one of individual conduct as opposed to policy for the entire community, must come from one's own rabbi who is his/her halakhic authority.
6. I heard that the late and much lamented R. Shlomo Zalman Auerbach ר"צ זצ"ל, who was considered the leading Israeli *posek* of our generation, when asked for his halakhic opinion in *shul*, would refuse to answer and instructed the questioner to apply to the *rav* of the synagogue or community--the מרא דאתרא. He held, as was always the accepted practice, that the bond between a rabbi and his congregants should not be severed or circumvented by any other authority no matter how eminent.