

Future of Creativity  
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## THE FUTURE OF CREATIVITY IN JEWISH LAW AND THOUGHT

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We Jews are a very creative people. About 8 weeks ago, the week before Pesach, I was in Beijing, China, at a "cultural exchange," the first in history, between fifteen Chinese scholars and nine Jews. It was a marvelous, mind blowing event. And in the private talks we had after the formal lectures were delivered, one of the Chinese scholars asked, "We Chinese know very little about you Jews. Tell me; other than the three greatest Jews whom all of us know about, who are the heroes of Jewish history?" We asked him, "Who are the three greatest Jews whom everyone knows about?" He shrugged his shoulders and said, "obviously, Marx, Einstein, and Kissinger." We all laughed, and the perplexed Chinese did not know why. Later on I concluded that we ought not to have laughed. If you asked a typical American Jew, he would say: "Marx, Einstein, and Freud." The point is that all three, all four actually — Marx, Einstein, Freud, and Kissinger — were highly creative people. (Certainly that was so subjectively, even though objectively at least one of them was highly destructive.) That is my theme — Creativity. And I shall focus tonight not on general creativity, not on Jews who were creative for the rest of mankind, but specifically on Jewish spiritual, intellectual, and religious creativity.

This is so very appropriate for the tenth Yahrzeit of the memory of that dearly beloved Jamie a"h. I do remember him as a brilliant student in Camp Morasha. He was an extraordinary young man. I also know that when he was much younger, really a little boy, he would walk around with the New York Times, and while everyone else was involved with childish pranks and activities, he would be reading either the editorial page or the stock market page. I'm told by members of the family that when he was even younger than that he published a little newspaper that went to the family in which he discussed politics. He certainly was a very creative young man.

We have been told that the Book of Ruth was prominent in his life and thought. It occurs to me that the cardinal event of the Book of Ruth is that Ruth converts to Judaism. This, after all, is what the whole book is all about. Why does she convert? We are not told in the Book of Ruth. The Sages filled in the gaps in many ways, but the text says nothing. What light does the text shed on why she converted? Only one reason. She saw Naomi and she said, "If this is what Jewishness produces, then I want to be a Jew. Where you go, I will go. Where you sleep, I will sleep. Where you die, I will die. Your G-d is my G-d," and so on. She was a role model.

Jamie a"h too was a splendid role model for younger people as to how to be serious at the same time that you experience *joie de vivre*; and for older

people, he was not only a role model but a reproach. If he could accomplish that much in 32 years, then what about us who often do not do that in 64 or 96 years? May what Chaim Menachem accomplished in his all too brief sojourn in his *chaim*, in his life, be a *menachem*, a source of consolation and comfort for his parents, his sisters, and all his family.

Creativity requires, as a condition precedent, freedom — both internal and external, both political and spiritual. Where freedom does not prevail, creativity cannot flourish. Authoritarianism is inimical to creativity. At the same time, total freedom, in the sense of a complete absence of discipline, of restraint of any kind, is not an environment that is conducive to creativity. For instance, a sculptor must have the freedom and the right to express his personality, his ideas, his ideals, and his criticism in his art. But if there are no rules, no internal norms, no aesthetic standards which he accepts, no artistic tradition that is the context of his work even only to rebel against it, then there is neither creativity nor art.

True creativity means working out of freedom within certain restricting parameters, whether artistic, legal, moral, or spiritual. Therefore, with regard to Jewish creativity, I shall confine myself this evening to the universe of those who voluntarily accept upon themselves the discipline and restraint of Torah and Halakha. I therefore do not accept such peculiar and misnamed phenomena as "creative services" as illustrations of creativity. They may be aesthetically innovative or pleasing but Jewishly creative they are not. By the same token, I do not accept as examples of Halakhic creativity such spurious *heterim* as driving to shul on Shabbat, patrilinealism, "alternate sexual lifestyles" — all of which, incidentally, have been paraded before the public as halakhically justified and as examples of courageous halakhic creativity. Such is the latest grotesque "creative adaptation" of Halakha as unrepentant and publicly assertive homosexual Rabbis, (or: pulpit pederasts).

What piqued my interest in creativity, (in Hebrew: *chiddush*) is a perceived diminished Jewish creativity of the last two centuries, since that incomparable burst of spiritual energy which gave birth to the Hasidic and Musar movements. To see the picture properly, there has unquestionably been some very very fine creativity in Judaism during this period. A few examples: Reb Chaim Brisker's revolutionary development of a new Halakhic methodology which has conquered the Talmudic world ever since; Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsh's "Torah Im Derech Eretz"; Rabbis Reines in Lithuania and Revel in America in fostering Torah U'madda; Rabbi Meir Shapiro, the founder of Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, in his novel and creative idea of the Daf Yomi. We can go on and on. But somehow one feels that in 200 years more could and should have been done in a creative manner to bolster Torah and Judaism.

This relative aridity or lack of originality or sufficient originality was obviously an angry reaction against the 18th century Haskala — the Enlightenment and its attendant Reform movement which, in the name of creativity and the lust for change, wreaked havoc with the traditional Jewish world, religiously and communally. More fundamentally, this withdrawal from creativity was a



kind of defensive response to modernity as such. The emerging prominence of the natural sciences along with the acceleration of technology brought with it a growing esteem for creativity and originality and, in many cases, led to the triumphalism of modernity. And with this arrogance of modernity comes the worship or apotheosis of change. There was thus a really legitimate fear that the entire corpus of Torah and the Mesorah, the tradition, is imperiled by the demand for change for its own sake — an attitude that underlies so much of modern consciousness.

Consider our contemporary cultural psychology. Our technological society is based on the need for change, the desire for the new. Every year we have to have a new toothpaste, a new model car, a new kind of computer; even if it serves no valid purpose, it has to be new. At one time, a few years ago, we had moveable shields over the car's headlights. There was no reason for it, but it was new, and the technological imperative is really a quest for what is new. In the academic world, scientific grants and even PhD's in humanities are given for the creation of new ideas, only new ideas, not for remembering or celebrating what others created. So we live in a society which worships the new, and not only the new, but the *newest*.

Interestingly, when we meet each other what is the first thing we say? — "How are you" and "What's new." Now that says something about all of us. "What's new" — as if all that is old is *passe*, it is dated and no longer of interest to me. A great French thinker, Jacques Maritain, referred to this worship of modernity, of the newest, as *chronolatry* — the idolatry of the *chronos*, of time. This is something which is utterly nonsensical as well as dangerous. Someone once said that he who marries the spirit of the age will soon find himself a widower. In religion, the mindless pursuit of novelty, of fads, of the desire to be "with it," is poisonous. Not only does it ignore tradition and history but it despairs of the search for any enduring truth, something which lasts through all the changes and vicissitudes of life.

Trendiness in religion makes for phoniness in religion. This *chronolatry*, what I like to call *neophilia*, (neo from "new," *phil* from "love" — the love of the new) evokes an equal and opposite reaction, what I call, *neophobia* — the fear of the new. With Reform and Haskala and secular Zionism and secularism in the last one or two hundred years championing the new and the revolutionary, we Orthodox naturally tended to the opposite direction — the rejection of all that is new, of all that is *chadash* or *chidush*. As *neophilia* became the dogma of the non-religious, so we became *neophobic*.

From this vantage point, we can appreciate the famous slogan of the great "Chatam Sofer," a couple of hundred years ago, which has become the war cry of Hungarian Orthodoxy, *chadash asur min hatorah*, "All that is new is forbidden by the Torah." Indeed, both his slogan and his policy have dominated much of even non-Hungarian Orthodoxy in our times. However, this repudiation of *chiddush*, of the new and the creative, is limited only to *chiddush be'dat*, the attempt to change religion as Reform tried to change religion. It is not at all meant to reflect on the phenomenon of *chiddush* itself in Halakha because,



after all, the Chatam Sofer himself became great not because he said *chadash asur min hatorah*, but because he was a great *mechadesh*. He was very creative. And he was the one who had the credentials to say that creativity should be limited to within Halakha instead of on Halakha.

Let me step back for a moment and try to see our problem against the backdrop of Jewish history and Jewish thought. We begin with a policy against creativity and the insistence upon the preservation and transmission of halakhic knowledge exactly as one received it from his teacher. The protagonists here are two of the greatest names in Jewish history, Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai—who lived just about 1900 or 2000 years ago, and his great student Rabbi Eliezer Ben Hyrkanos known as Rabbi Eliezer Hagadol, “the great Rabbi Eliezer.” We are told about the teacher, Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai. אמרו עליו על רבי יוחנן בן זכאי, מימיו לא אמר דבר שלא שמע מפי רבו מעולם. וכן היה He never said anything that he had not received or heard from his teacher. And his student, Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkanos, carried on the same policy. However, where Rabbi Eliezer clearly is of this opinion, there is real doubt as to whether Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai, the master, held this approach.

The Shabbat we’re going to read the second *perek* of *Pirkei Avot*. We shall read that Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai חמשה תלמידים היו לו לרבי יוחנן בן זכאי. He related his praise of each of his students. When it came to Rabbi Elezer ben Hyrkanos, he said, אליעזר בן הורקנוס בור סוד שאינו מאבד טיפה, he was a cistern lined with lime which was waterproof so that it never lost a drop. And he praised Rabbi Elazar Ben Arakh as a מעין המתגבר — a surging well, always giving fresh water. That means that Rabbi Elazar Ben Hyrkanos rejected any kind of personal creative input. He simply was a man who mastered the entire tradition that he received from his teacher in order to transmit it to the next generation.

Elazar Ben Arakh, however, was the *maayan ha-mitgaber*, the well that always surges new, refreshing water.

A Tanna now tells us that Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai, in comparing these two, said that if all of the sages of Israel would be on one side of the balance and Rabbi Elazar ben Hyrkanos would be on the other, he would outweigh all of them. According to this Tanna, Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai favored carrying on the tradition as it is, without any kind of interference, over creativity.

But Aba Shaul, another Tanna, rejects this position and reverses it. Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai said that if all the sages of Israel were on one side of the balance, including Rabbi E. Hyrkanos, and Rabbi Elazar Ben Arakh was on the other, he would outweigh them. Therefore, the greater virtue is creativity. So we now have 2 conflicting traditions in the name of Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai. They are diametrically opposed: one favors the retentive memory and accurate transmission, and the other — creativity and originality.

Now this dilemma is compounded — perhaps clarified too — by a fascinating tale told in the famous *Pirkei De'Rav Eliezer*: Rabbi Eliezer comes to visit Jerusalem. There he meets his teacher, Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai. The latter is overjoyed to see his student and he says to him, "I'm inviting you to give the *derasha*, to say Torah." He declines to give the *sheur*. He explains: after all, all my Torah I got from you; is it then appropriate for me to speak in front of you when you are the source of everything that I know and every thing that I teach? The teacher would not be deterred. And R. Yochanan ben Zakkai says, "You *can* do it." Listen to these words: אתה יכול לומר דברי תורה יותר "You can say Torah more than was given at Sinai." That's a *chiddush*! You may say that you're only a, בור סוד שאינו מאבד טיפה a cistern that doesn't lose a drop, but I know that you are exceedingly creative. Get up and say something! R. Yochanan Ben Zakkai not only encouraged his student, but he was also a very sensitive man. He knew that Rabbi Eliezer was shy about teaching in the presence of his teacher, so he said to him: you get up and teach and I'll stand outside. And indeed, he got up, went out, stayed at the door of the *Beit Midrash*. The *Pirkei D'Rav Eleazar* reports the following, והיה ר' אליעזר יושב ודורש בפניו מאירות כאור החמה וקרנותיו יוצאות כקרנות של משה ואין אדם יודע אם יום ואם לילה. בא רבי יוחנן מאחוריו ונשקו על ראשו. אמר לו: אשריכם אברהם יצחק ויעקב שיצא זה מחלציכם. אמר הורקנוס: לא כך היה לו לומר, אלא אשרי Rabbi Eliezer sat and lectured. His face shone bright as the sun, and the rays that emanated from his face were as those which shown from the face of Moses. So brilliant was he, so glorious was his visage, that people couldn't tell if it was day or night. When he finished his *sheur*, Rabbi Yochanan came from behind him and kissed him on his head, and said to him: Happy are Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that such a one issued from your loins. However, in the audience was Rabbi Eliezer's father, Hyrkanos, and he said: [R. Yochanan] should not have said that. Instead, he should have said, "Happy am I that I have such a son."

As far as Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai is concerned, this passage clearly supports the Tanna (Abba Shaul) in *Pirkei Avot*, who said that Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai favored the, מעין המתגבר, בור סוד over the בור, creativity over simple retentiveness. Perhaps at one point both or either one may have changed his mind. The question is only this — whether Rabbi Eliezer himself, possessed of such enormous creative powers, abandoned his previous conservative approach as a result of this experience, or whether he reverted to his previous idea despite what had happened. Frankly, I find it hard to believe that such a powerful and moving experience in the presence of his teacher and the reaction of his teacher left him unmoved and untouched.

My own feeling is that indeed during this period of the Tannaim there were two points of view, because that was the period when it was forbidden to write or to publish *Torah She'be'al Peh*. The Oral Law went by word of mouth from teacher to student, and therefore accuracy of transmission and absolutely perfect memory without any change was exceedingly important; otherwise, the whole tradition is corrupted. But after the days of Rabbi Yehuda Hanasi,



when it was permitted to write or to publish *Torah She'be'al Peh*, the natural Jewish tendency for creativity came to the fore and, indeed, creativity became a fact of life in the periods of the Amoraim, the Rishonim (the Medieval period), and the Acharonim down to our own day.

Three quick examples: Rabbi Yehoshua of the Talmudic era: *אי אפשר לבית* (המדרש שלא יהיה בו דבר חדש (חגיגה ג' ע"ב)) there's no such a thing as a school without something new, something creative, emerging from it. Torah Judaism without creativity is an oxymoron, a contradiction in terms.

The Middle Ages: Rabbi Yehuda Hechasid of Ashkenazic Jewry — One to whom G-d revealed a new idea, a new idea that he thinks is a true idea, ואינו כותבה and he doesn't write it down and publish it even though he can, is in the category of one who, as it were, גוזל ממי שגילה לו steals from G-d. G-d gave him the idea not for himself alone, but to share it with his fellow Jews. If he doesn't — look whom he's stealing from! (ספר חסידים, מהד' מרגליות). (ירושלים תשי"ז, סי' תק"ל, עמ' שני"ד.)

In the modern period: the Sephardic scholar, *Chida* (R. Chaim Yosef David Azoulay) writes: *דיש זמן לכל חידוש בתורה ולכן נשאר מקום לאחרונים לחדש בתורה. מקום שלא יכלו הראשונים לחדש, אף כי קטנם עבה ממתני האחרונים. וזה "חדשים לבקרים" (נחל אשכול, ורשא תרמ"ט)*. There's a time for every *chiddush* in Torah and therefore, even though we of the later generations are as naught compared to the earlier generations, nevertheless, G-d left it to us to have our own *chiddushim*, our own creativity, and new interpretations.

Let me now go to a period of Jewish history where, interestingly, the whole concept of *chiddush* is rediscussed. During the last couple of centuries, the Lithuanian Mitnagdim, the opponents of Hasidism, took a position on this matter. Nowhere do we find outright opposition to *chiddush* in the manner attributed in the previous sources that I mentioned to Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakai and Rabbi Eliezer Ben Hyrkanos. But we do find amongst Lithuanian *gedolim*, giants of Halakha, a kind of suspiciousness towards creativity even in Halakha itself. Of course, these Lithuanian mitnagdim were themselves giants of Halakha and masters of *chiddush*. But they were very circumspect about creativity overdone and originality overvalued.

For instance, the major ideologist of mitnagdic Jewry and founder of the Yeshiva of Volozhin, R. Chaim Volozhiner, was very wary about *chiddushim*. His son, R. Yitzchak, in the introduction to his father's *Nefesh Hachaim*, writes that every time he had a *chiddush*, whether in Talmud, Rishonim or *teshuvot*, he was afraid to enjoy it, because he always felt suspicious of himself. Maybe my attempt at being creative is not, לאמיתה של תורה part of the search for the truth of Torah. Maybe I'm just trying to be clever and brilliant instead of pursuing the truth. Therefore, מתיגע לסתור דברי עצמו he practiced a kind of intellectual masochism and tried to counteract his own arguments in order to make sure that he wasn't simply trying to be clever and original.

So we have here a kind of intellectual asceticism that arose out of a rigorous intellectual honesty. The Netziv (R. Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin), later the Rosh Yeshiva of Volozhin, takes a similar stance. And the Chazon Ish (R. Abraham

Isaiah Karelitz), a leading representative of the Lithuanian schools in our own days, wrote: אין לנו לחדש דברים שלא נאמרו בגמרא. וגם נרתע אני מדבר של חידוש. “We must not propose anything different from what is found in the Gemara. I, by nature, am very wary about any *chiddush* and I believe that, in general, the simple approach is the true one. Therefore, one should not say anything he has not heard from his teacher.” Despite his evocation on the tannaitic idea that one should not say anything except what he heard from his teacher, he was really reacting against the method of *pilpul*, or casuistry, not against *chiddush* — because he himself was a great *mechadesh*.

Now, all the people I’ve mentioned so far were concerned about creativity in Jewish Law, in Halakha. They did not mention spiritual creativity, the kind we encountered in Hasidism or Musar, at all.

Opposed to this point of view was the Hasidic view. They were very uncomfortable with this Lithuanian distrust of creativity in Halakha and they demanded as well spiritual creativity. Here we deal with a surprising phenomenon: not merely a defense but a celebration of creativity and *chiddush*, and not only in Halakha but in the nature of Jewish religious experience as well. Permit me to offer an example from the founder of the Ger dynasty, Reb Yitzchak Meir, author of the “Chiddushei Ha-Rim,” who says that in every generation new ideas present themselves in interpreting the Torah in accordance with the needs of that generation כפי הצורך. And that is what is meant by the Midrash that things that were not even revealed to Moses were revealed to Rabbi Akiva and his colleagues. Why? Because Rabbi Akiva lived in the second century, the time that the *Beit Hamikdash* was destroyed, the Bar Kochba rebellion had come to grief, when there was a need to have a new blossoming of Torah, a new light of Torah, new interpretations of Torah; greater creativity was needed in the time of Rabbi Akiva even than in the time of Moshe Rabbenu. If that is the case, certainly in our times, says the “Chidushei Ha-Rim,” when we have so much less than Rabbi Akiva had in his days, we are in even greater need of *chiddushim* and greater luminescence of Torah.

We have here a vigorous defense of the Hasidic emphasis on creativity. Creativity is not only permissible; it is mandatory as a way to greater devoutness and religious experience. If the age is impoverished, then we must not step back and close off the channels of creativity but, on the contrary, reinforce creativity because that is what the generation needs.

Now this enchantment with the new is not unprecedented in the history of Jewish thought. When the Talmud tells us we have to have enthusiasm for learning, it says, בכל יום יהיו כחדשים בעיניך, “Every day the words of Torah must be new in your eyes, as if they had just been given at Sinai.” The Zohar is even more emphatic, as well as picturesque. It teaches that just as you don’t wear pajamas during the day, and a business suit at night when you go to sleep, so your *shacharit* and your *maariv* and *mincha*, must each be different from the other. Every prayer in your lifetime, even if the words are identical,



must be "brand new." Each of us must be creative in understanding the words, in putting our own feelings into the words, because *chiddush* is part of *Avodat Hashem*.

This is expanded in later Kabbalah. It reaches its acme in Hasidism with its emphasis on spontaneity and ecstasy. One of the most fertile thinkers in Hasidic history was R. Zadok Hakohen of Lublin, for whom *chiddush* is an expression of human co-creativity with the Almighty. When you create an idea in Torah you join the Ribbono shel Olam as the *Yotzer Bereshit*, as the Creator of the world.

In his *ליקוטי מאמרים* he anticipates the Rav (Rabbi J.B. Soloveitchik) in emphasizing the role of *chiddush* as the expression of human participation, along with the *רבשיע* in the Torah's development: The Saducees, who took the Torah's words *ממחרת השבת* literally, and therefore started the counting of the Omer from the Sunday after Pesach, did so because they believed that the Torah, once given, remained untouchable by man, *ואין מקום לבני ישראל לחדש*, *בה דבר רק כפי הכתוב שניתנה משמים*, ובשמים היא לחדש דבר, ולכן אמרו דעצרת אין יגעת ומצאת, whereas the Pharisees held that Torah requires *יד ביד* that *לא בשמים היא*. In his *Tzidkat Hatzadik* (#227), he avers that *nesnham* — the highest of the triadic soul — is characterized by *chiddush*, it is the creative aspect of the human personality. Thus: *חדו כח הנשמה לנשום רוח ה' חדש בלב בכל עת ע"י חידושי החכמה שבמוחו שמשיג בכל עת רוח חיות חדש*.

Elsewhere, he maintains that the *nesnham yetera*, the "extra soul" that we each get on Shabbat, is not the same old one returning every week, but a brand new one every Shabbat! Hence, Shabbat is not a comfortably familiar ritual, the spiritual equivalent of a pair of old shoes... Rather, it bespeaks spiritual adventurousness, a pioneering drive, a fascination with the unknown and the untried, and readiness to embrace the New as a way to *avodat Hashem*.

What was the rationale of their opponents? The Vilna Gaon, who was the intellectual and spiritual father of the whole school said, as we indicated, that the pursuit of truth and *sevara yesharah* lead you to suspect the specious, false, kind of originality, because sometimes originality is for its own sake rather than for the sake of truth. So his opposition to creativity is purely an insistence upon intellectual honesty and is neither psychological nor ideological.

There is a second element in this fear of *chiddush* and that is the damage Haskala and Reform and secularism and modernity had done. In the Gaon's case this was compounded by the fear of Hasidism. He held that that too showed that one ought not be too receptive to novelty and creativity. Then this defensive posture joins with a psychological inertia, a normal resistance to change that all of us have, and becomes congealed into a kind of conservative mind-set that becomes part of one's whole culture.

However, this critical reassessment of *chiddush* does not translate into an ideology. It was, perhaps, part of the arsenal of traditional Judaism as it confronted a hostile, arrogant, and triumphalist secularism; but it was not absorbed into the warp and woof of Judaism's *Weltanschauung*. At no time





Our Torah is a Torah of truth, not a Torah of authoritarianism. We must never confuse authoritativeness with authoritarianism. A "Torah of truth" requires that we challenge. That's what the *massa u'mattan*, the dialectic of Talmud, is all about. ואין מחניפין לשום אדם A man who has published some of the most wonderful and new editions of the Rishonim has maintained that it took him 20 years to have his new, improved edition accepted in many yeshiva circles. They said: if the old one was good enough for my rebbe, it's good enough for me. We don't say that about making a living; we want to do better than our parents. Why shouldn't it be that way in Torah?

I recall some of my own experiences. A friend of mine, and I were talking, and I gave him an interpretation of a passage in Chumash. I thought it was a very good interpretation. He didn't disprove it. Yet, he said: I can't accept it. I asked why. He said: because what's your source? My source is the Chumash, and I'm giving you an interpretation. But I didn't have the proper authoritative pedigree . . .

I by no means intend to say or imply that all halakhic creativity is disappearing; not at all. My concern is not with the present but with *emerging tendencies* or almost emerging tendencies. My apprehension is based not only upon anecdotal evidence, but also on the supposition that there are multiple causes for the paralysis of creativity. Sometimes — it is fortuitous, pure happenstance. Second, where there is a strong authoritarian environment or bias, creativity is stunted. Third, the reaction against the excesses of novelty, neophilia, and the mindless passion for change give creativity a bad name. There are those who consider — effectively if not openly — that creativity and innovation cannot be contained within the perimeters of Halakha, and sooner or later the pursuit of originality will spill over its legitimate borders and impose itself on Torah itself and operate not within but on Halakha; that *chiddush* in Halakha soon threatens to become a *chiddush* or change of Judaism. I fear that when all other forms of creativity are looked upon askance — not only scientific, psychological, esthetic, and cultural, but even spiritual, on the grounds that any creativity implies change and any change implies a challenge to sacred precedent and authority — then the aversion to creativity must begin to infect the inner life of Halakha as well. As the estimable philosopher, Yogi Berra, used to say, the future ain't what it used to be. If this is what the future holds, then it ain't what it used to be in Jewish life.

My question, is: are we beginning to hear a new noise in our Orthodox Jewish world, the noise of mental doors being slammed shut one after the other? Are healthy, vigorous minds being closed tight by their fearful owners? In truth, in some of our circles, anything new is looked upon with dread, and sometimes narrowness is elevated to the level of sacred principle. If this happens then our whole sacred tradition, our whole intellectual *mesorah* from Sinai down, will be challenged and changed as the very act of *chiddush* is considered suspect. If this lurking apprehension of mine is correct, and I dearly hope that it is not, then we are entering a stage where only memory and repetition will be accepted and respected but all creativity, originality, and

innovative thinking will be condemned as dangerous. Should that nightmare come to pass it will signal the triumph of myopia, of know-nothingism, and reduce this incredibly stimulating realm called Halakha, with its intellectual excitement, to rote questions and answers to be cherished only by intellectual robots. It would confirm every negative stereotype of halakhically observant Jews. This kind of reputation, the result of the paralysis of the halakhic mind, will constitute a massive *Chillul Hashem*. It would be an illegitimate restraint of trade in the coin of intellectual authenticity in the marketplace of halakhic ideas.

Do I think this is going to happen? I do not. May it possibly happen? Yes. And it is best to be alert to it. The most seminal thinkers of the halakhic tradition firmly rejected such intellectual cowardice and spiritual rigor mortis and we ought to be proud of that.

Thus Rav Kook, first Chief Rabbi of Israel, wrote with deep conviction and passion about the need to "renew and exalt our thought processes and our logic." The specific form of this novelty, he says "must be felt in all disciplines — in Halakha, in Agadah, in all areas of science and ethics, in our conception of life and in our *Weltanschauung*. I hope you appreciate the indomitable courage it took for Rav Kook to write these words. He was *the* establishment man. Yet, he pleaded for creativity and change and movement. He has been mercilessly criticized for these and similar sentiments as if he had been a kind of heretic in hiding. Yet, he persisted against all the viciousness, the sarcasm, the ingratitude shown to him. It's been a long, long time since such ideas and such courage have been forthcoming from the Chief Rabbinate in Israel, or for that matter anywhere else.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, for whose health we all pray, in a *sicha* published just one year ago, in the *Algemeiner Journal*, expanded on his plea for all scholars, not only great scholars, to publish their *chiddushim*. I have a feeling that he, too, intuited a kind of fear of *chiddush* even in the realm of Halakha, and that is why he wanted his hasidim who are learning to publish.

And, of course, my own Rebbe, "the Rav," Rav Yosef Ber Soloveitchik (z"l,) in his famous *Ish ha-Halakha*, Halachic Man, elaborates on the *chiddush* activity of man as an act of *imitatio dei*, of imitating G-d. G-d is a *mechadesh betuvo bechol yom tamid maasei bereshit*. He didn't just once create, and the world thereafter spins along on its own. Every day He renews creation, He recreates. When man creates a *chiddush* in Halakha he is performing a Divine act of creativity, he is a partner with G-d in the creation of the world. It's a marvelous, wondrous vision of man helping to create worlds by virtue of his mastery and creativity in Halakha. Anyone who has heard a *sheur* of the Rav will know immediately what I'm talking about and what he meant. This, to my mind, is the authentic voice of Judaism on the question of creativity in Halakha and life in general.

I hope, in concluding, that my sounding of an alarm does not mark me as a pessimist. Far from it. I believe with all my heart and all my soul that the time is now ripe for authentic Jewish creativity. As so often has happened



in Jewish history, when the wells of the spirit seem to have dried up, new sources of spiritual refreshment and renaissance open up magically, as it were, manifesting the wondrous workings of the *hashgacha elyona*, of Divine providence. But in order for this to happen we must, all of us, be prepared for it, at least negatively — by not fearing our own creativity, by not jumping to criticize anyone with a new idea, by opening ourselves up to the infinite possibilities of spiritual as well as national redemption by our infinite and creative G-d.

I conclude with a precious story. The lecture I've given you tonight I gave initially in somewhat different form in Jerusalem. My good friend, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, the Rosh Yeshiva of Har Etzion, as well as Yeshiva University's Gruss Institute, was in the audience. After the lecture, he came over to me and said: I was present when once the Rav, (his father-in-law,) gave a *sheur*. He was scintillating. His *chiddushim* were absolutely brilliant. There was one stranger in the audience who was not used to the Rav and was taken aback, and came over to him and said, "But Rabbi Soloveitchik, what is your source?" And the Rav answered, "A clear and logical mind."