

## OUR READERS RESPOND

### “FACING THE TRUTHS OF HISTORY”

#### The Pursuit of Truth

TO THE EDITOR:

Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter’s “Facing the Truths of History” (*The Torah u-Madda Journal* 8 [1998-1999]: 200-73) was a masterful and all-inclusive farewell for his editorship. His enumeration of the efforts of the revisionist school was a comprehensive summary of what has for some years been bothering many about popular Jewish writing, editing, and publishing. Nevertheless, and while I agree most forcefully with Rabbi Schacter’s conclusions, one wonders whether he may have been unduly harsh to the point of view of such editors and their publications. Perhaps he has deprived them of a possible philosophical justification, one drawn not only from within Jewish tradition, but from the very nature of history, or even that of truth itself.

The thought that there are many “truths” may be distasteful, but it runs across not only historical research but our basic legal institutions as well. In several of his published works and lectures, retired Israeli Supreme Court Justice Menachem Elon has presented an analysis of the concept of “judicial truth” as only one of many kinds of “truth” with which we grapple. Starting with an acknowledgment of Jewish law’s extreme emphasis on seeking truth to its ultimate (*ha-emet la-amitto*), he has called attention to the fact that there are nevertheless instances in which we specifically seek a “truth” that is not necessarily what all would call the “objective” or “scientific” truth. Illustrating this principle in a recent lecture, he cited a case of a matrimonial dispute where both wife and husband claimed that her child had been fathered by a third party. Both parties (as well as the third party who claimed paternity) wanted DNA testing on the child, but the Supreme Court refused to permit it. The child, they held, had the benefit of a *hezkat kashrut*, a presumption of legitimacy, based on the fact that it was born while the husband and wife were married. The court would not permit an agreement

of the parties to deprive the child of this presumption. (The court went on to hold that the third party could nonetheless accept a financial obligation voluntarily which the court would enforce, and therefore support payments would be coerced from him.)

For Justice Elon, this was a case where judicial truth might not be the same as scientific or “objective” truth. The same principle is known to lawyers who abide by the “law of the case” applicable to one specific set of parties even where other decisions would reach a different result. Similarly, courts have refused, often to the grievous detriment of one of the parties, to reopen settled cases on the basis of new evidence, however compelling it may be, on the thought that once the decision has enunciated the “truth,” that is what we must accept.

There are other examples where truths vary in the face of different needs. A parent might tell a young child something about an ill relative; an adult or rabbi might tell a fatally ill person something different from the scientific truth. Situational differences, or varying ages or stages of development, often create a variation in what we consider true and correct. In fact, in much of education, as children develop, we give them slightly more sophisticated versions of things they had learned before. History teachers have described the teaching of history as “circular,” for we teach something in elementary school, revise it in high school, and again in college or graduate school. Surely we would not accuse the elementary school teacher of falsification.

Our own memories do the same, as many studies have shown and as any trial lawyer can document. What we remember as the “truth” may vary, be influenced by, or deviate from an objective reality.

In the face of that, it may not be so surprising to find that strong religious leaders are willing to fashion for didactic purposes their own versions of historical truth. The only difficulty with such an approach is that there will come a point where no one will have access to anything which resembles objective truth or fact. At that point, who will know just what should be told to the public? We would then have a situation where only, perhaps, the editors at the presses would know the real historical events, and they would determine what should be told to the general public. It does not take much effort to reject that idea and procedure. Rabbi Schacter is to be thanked for setting out the problem as elegantly as he did.

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## TO THE EDITOR:

In response to Rabbi Dr. Schacter's scholarly and compelling article in volume 8 of *The Torah u-Madda Journal*, I would like to make a few observations concerning the place of history in certain circles of the Orthodox community.

Rabbi Dr. Schacter observes that "The truth is that historical 'truth,' *per se*, as an independent value in and of itself, has not fared well in Jewish tradition" (p. 202). He quotes an irate reader of *Yated Neeman* who castigated the journal for printing that Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler זצ"ל read *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a youngster. This reader suggests that as *benei Torah* who are "*modeh al ha-emet*"—the truth, the seal of the Almighty, our greatest pride and possession—the newspaper editors should retract the story and "ensure that no such errors occur in the future." In other words, *modeh al ha-emet* means that one must deny or at least suppress historical truth for the higher good of *emunah, Torah and yir'at shamayim!* The sheer ludicrousness and outright absurdity of this suggestion is mind-boggling. But the question that must be posed in view of this, not atypical, exhortation is—why this disdain for history as a legitimate discipline worthy of the attention of *benei Torah*?

I believe that one possible reason for the wholesale rejection of the serious study of history and for declaring it *bittul Torah*, is the other worldly stance of certain factions. This antipathy to historical analysis may be explained in light of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's brilliant exposition of the philosophy of Halakhah as articulated in his *magnum opus, Ish ha-Halakhah (Halakhic Man)*.

Rabbi Soloveitchik draws a distinction between two diverse and irreconcilable types, the *ish ha-da'at* (cognitive man, a scientific type) and the *ish ha-dat (homo religiosus)*. The *ish ha-halakhah*, halakhic man, resembles cognitive man in that halakhic man is bound to this world. This is true by virtue of Judaism's myriad and detailed rules and regulations, which direct man's devotional energies away from the metaphysical and toward the physical realm. As such, the principles of Halakhah all but incarcerate halakhic man within the mundane world, where he must implement the supreme values of his religion.

The *homo religiosus*, on the other hand, desires to escape the earthly bonds and elevate himself to a higher, transcendental sphere. *Ish ha-dat* yearns for a refined, purified existence leading him beyond tangible

reality. He is, to use Max Weber's classification, committed to "world flight," rejecting not just the values of this world, as the *ish ha-halakhah* does, but repudiating this world *per se*. About this attitude Rabbi Soloveitchik writes, "He (*homo religiosus*) attempts to extricate himself from the narrow straits of empirical existence and merge into the wide spaces of . . . transcendental existence" (*Halakhic Man* [Philadelphia, 1983], 66). Furthermore, *ish ha-dat* tends to "[blur] forms and boundaries, toward the confusion of domains entirely aflame with the holy fire of wonder, yearning to scale transcendental heights in order to attain mystical union" (Ibid.). Indeed, upon closer inspection, *homo religiosus* turns out to be *homo Christianis*.

For this kind of mystical seeker, history has no value. In fact, it is an anathema, the antithesis of his spiritual preoccupation. History clarifies and delineates the past and its salient events in order to provide a road map for the sojourner in this world. *Homo religiosus* is not concerned with historical truth because he is not concerned with this world and its chronicles. He is focused on a vague and otherworldly future.

I suggest further that the aforementioned mystical, otherworldly orientation can result in socially unacceptable and morally questionable behavior. This too is a consequence of the transcendental quest that typifies the *homo religiosus*. The Rav writes of a "dualism" so prevalent in other religions. That "dualism" or bifurcated existence distinguishes between the man "who stands before the Lord in an atmosphere suffused with heavenly solemnity and the man driving a hard bargain with his fellow in the marketplace" (p. 92). This dichotomy is alien to halakhic man. Halakhic man, who does not aspire to heavenly transcendence "seek[ing] to soar upon the wings of some abstract, mysterious spirituality" (Ibid.), does not compartmentalize his day—the synagogue as earthly *ecclesia* and the marketplace as the domain of temporal existence. *Ish ha-halakhah* brings the divine into his everyday dealings on this earth through strict adherence to Torah laws and values. Thus, he must evince the same nomian behavior in the marketplace that he employs in the synagogue. His life is not bifurcated. It is a continuum based on Torah and *mizvot*.

*Halakhah* transcends history. But the manipulation of history for ideological aims is clearly not sanctioned. The centrality of *emet*—truth—in Jewish life and thought is axiomatic.

In point of fact, *emet* is the seal of the *Ribbono Shel Olam*. A popular Yiddish saying succinctly characterizes the essence of truth holding that "*a halber emes iz a gantser lign!*" (A half-truth is a full lie!). If we are to

be *modeh al ha-emet*, as indeed we should be, the truth must be absolute and free of revisionism. Even, and especially, if that revisionism is purportedly *le-shem Shamayim*.

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### **Rav Soloveitchik**

TO THE EDITOR:

Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter, in his article, “Facing the Truths of History”, places Rabbi Hershel Schachter, “one of the Rav’s most illustrious students,” in the midst of the heated argument over the Rav’s attitude to secular studies (pp. 218-22).

The author’s point of departure is a vignette found in R. Hershel Schachter’s article, “*Mi-Peninei Rabbenu z”l*” (*Beit Yizhak* 28 [1996]: 26). There Rabbi Schachter summarizes a conversation that Rabbi Morton J. Summer, former Director of Jewish Education at the Max Stern Division of Communal Services of Yeshiva University, had with Professor Anna Krakowsky (1916-1998), former professor of French Literature at Stern College for Women and a first cousin of the Rav *z”l*.

Prof. Krakowsky reported that Rabbi Soloveitchik’s departure from Warsaw to Berlin and his enrollment in the University of Berlin were related to a government draft notice issued for the young Joseph Soloveitchik to enter the Polish army. All efforts to remove his name from the draft rolls had been unsuccessful.

In a personal interview on January 17, 2000, Dr. Summer related to me that Prof. Krakowsky had told him, “the army was knocking on the doors of the Soloveitchik home for Berel.” Therefore, explained Prof. Krakowsky, in 1926 the decision was made for the young Soloveitchik to leave Poland, where he studied Torah with his father, in order to study at the University of Berlin. It was the urgency of the draft that prompted him to move to the University of Berlin, rather than continue his secular

studies at the Free Polish University in Warsaw, where he had been a student since 1924.

Rabbi Dr. Aaron Rakeffet interviewed family members concerning the Krakowsky account and they corroborated Prof. Krakowsky's statement (See *The Rav: the World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* [Ktav, 1999], vol. 1, 68, n.11).

In a conversation with me on February 15, 2000, Rabbi Hershel Schachter confirmed that Prof. Krakowsky's explanation, as presented by Rabbi Summer, was exactly what he was trying to convey in the *Beit Yizhak* article. Rabbi Schachter emphasized to me that he knew that the Rav had attended the Free University of Poland as of 1924. Therefore, Rabbi Jacob Schachter's charge that the *Beit Yizhak* article had attributed "the Rav's attendance at that German university solely to his need to escape the draft, and not to his and his father's genuine desire that he broaden his secular knowledge," and that the article thereby "simply misrepresents the position of both of them with regard to the value of those disciplines," does not accurately reflect Rabbi Hershel Schachter's intentions.

Following the lead of Rabbi Shlomo H. Pick of Bar-Ilan University (*BDD* 6[1998]: 34-35), Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter argues that "the Rav had another opportunity available to him to escape the draft, i.e., to take a position as a *rosh yeshivah* at Yeshivat Rabbenu Yitzchak Elchanan in New York City. He could have thus maintained his involvement in full-time Torah study while at the same time avoiding the clutches of the Polish army." The basis for positing this New York alternative is a letter written in 1926 by the Rav's great uncle, Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan, that describes a visit of his to the Soloveitchik home in Warsaw. The letter indicated that a position at RIETS was available for the Rav.

However, an analysis of Rabbi Bar-Ilan's letter indicates that the New York alternative was rejected as a means to avoid the draft for the following reasons:

1. Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik was unhappy with the position offered to the Rav by Rabbi Shlomo Polachek, the *Rosh ha-Yeshivah* at RIETS. Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan writes that "Rav Moshe Soloveitchik was insulted by the letter [of invitation to RIETS]. Since Rabbi Polachek wrote that he did not know in which class he [Rabbi Soloveitchik] would be lecturing, he feared that they would give him the lower classes and not the higher ones." R. Moshe considered the offer inappropriate, considering the vast talmudic knowledge and abilities of the Rav. For this reason alone, the alternative was not considered a viable means of escaping the draft.

2. The Rav and his father had already made the decision for the Rav to avoid the draft by continuing his secular education at the University of Berlin; in fact, he was already registered at the university. The alternative from RIETS came too late to be considered. Reversal of a decision made by both father and son, after careful analysis of the options available, was psychologically improbable.

3. There is a third possibility, not found in Rabbi Bar-Ilan's letter, as to why the RIETS alternative was rejected. The relationship between the Rav and his father was not only that of father and son, but of *rebbei* and *talmid*. To leave Europe and go to America would have meant that *rebbei* and *talmid* would not see each other, even were the draft no longer a threat. In the year 1926, superjet service was not available. Living in New York meant breaking the tie between teacher and disciple. Berlin and Warsaw were a train ride apart, and visits between father and son, *rebbei* and *talmid*, would be possible.

Rabbi Hershel Schachter concludes his vignette about the Rav's leaving for Berlin with the words, וע' ברכת שמואל סוף מס' קדושין ("See the wording of *Birkat Shemuel* [R. Barukh Ber Leibowitz]") without elaborating on this reference. *Birkat Shemuel* is a strongly anti-secular study responsum by a foremost disciple of Rabbi Ḥayyim Soloveitchik, the Rav's grandfather. Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter asks, "Is it even remotely conceivable that Rav Barukh Ber Leibowitz, the author of that work, would ever have sent a son of his who needed to escape the draft in Poland to study secular subjects in the university under any circumstances, even with the greatest reluctance? What is the point of introducing this position here?" The answer, however, is to be found in Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter's own words.

Rabbi Hershel Schachter, in a discussion on October 4, 1999, related to me that his citation of *Birkat Shemuel* was meant only to show the contrast between what Rabbi Barukh Ber would have done were he faced with sending his son to the army and what Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik decided for his son. R. Barukh Ber Leibowitz writes as follows:

אבוא לברר לפני כתר"ה בענין אם מותר לישראל ליתן את בנו לגימנזיות, אבאר  
 לו תחילה פסק בשם מו"ר זיע"א ששאל אחד אם מותר לו בכדי שניצל מלכת  
 אל מלחמה בזה שיעבוד בהזימסטבה (קאנצעלאריע) ויהי' שם חלול שבת  
 של כתיבה והורה לו להיתר, ושאל לו השני אם מותר לו ע"י שניצל עי"ז  
 מלכת אל המלחמה ללכת בהגימנזיה ולא התיר לו, יען כי זה האיסור הוא  
 מטעם מינות ואסור להתרפאות בזה, ואנו עד מפי עד שהעיד רבנו הגאון האמיתי  
 הצדיק רשכבה"ג מרן ר' חיים עוזר שליט"א ששמע מפי רבי הדברים כהוייתן  
 (ברכת שמואל על מסכת קדושין, חלק ראשון, סימן כ"ז)

Rabbi Leibowitz cites Rabbi Ḥayyim Soloveitchik's halakhic decisions in two areas. R. Ḥayyim permitted a Jew to work in a consulate in order to avoid a wartime draft, even though the job might have required that he violate the Shabbat. Yet he prohibited attending university to avoid this same draft. The point of Rabbi Hershel Schachter's citing of *Birkat Shemuel* is to advise us that Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik and the Rav did not follow the halakhic decision of their father and grandfather.

No doubt, the misunderstanding of Rabbi Schachter's vignette is due to the fact that Rabbi Schachter did not elaborate on the *Birkat Shemuel* responsum. In addition, when he wrote

מאחר שהוכרח לעזוב את מקום אביו, ממילא החליטו שמתמא כבר כדאי  
דבר בעדו לנסוע לברלין וליכנס שמה לאוניברסיטה, אבל לולא הדוחק של  
סכנת הפריזיוו לא היו מתאמצים כל כך בדבר שילמד לימודי חול באוניברסיטה

(“Once he had to abandon his father's home, it was decided that it would presumably be worthwhile for him to go to Berlin and enter the university there. But were it not for the draft, no great effort would have been invested to have him pursue secular studies at the university”), it led others to conjecture that “to pursue secular studies at the university” refers to *any* university. However, from what has been put forth in this letter, it is obvious that Rabbi Hershel Schachter wished to convey that were it not for the draft, no great effort would have been invested to have him pursue secular studies at the University of Berlin, rather than at the Free University of Poland.

I hope that I have added a new dimension of understanding in the on-going endeavor of “Facing the Truths of History” with regard to the life of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *z”l*.

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### *Mizvot ha-Shalom*

TO THE EDITOR:

Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter, in his article “Facing the Truths of History,” takes us on a tour of instances of contemporary Orthodox writing which distort or falsify the past. He writes of recent biographies of *gedolim* that

they actually make statements that are not true. In fact, these non-truths fall into a number of different categories: (1) overt falsification and distortion; (2) simple naive acceptance of hearsay evidence as fact without bothering to verify its accuracy . . . ; (3) simple carelessness, historical incompetence or poor research skills on the part of those not trained as historians (p. 214).

In citing material to document this point, Rabbi Schacter makes reference to the second edition of the *Sefer Mizvot ha-Shalom* by Rabbi Joseph D. Epstein, *shlita*. Regarding a letter by Rabbi Elya Meir Bloch that was printed in the first edition, Rabbi Schacter remarks: “How striking, however, is the fact that, when this book was reprinted in 1987, this letter was left out” (p. 225).

I would suggest that an understanding of Rabbi Epstein’s life, his writings, and his place in the history of Jewish religious literature of the post-Holocaust period would clarify this matter greatly. An acquaintance with the circumstances of the first publication of *Mizvot ha-Shalom*, together with a closer examination of the text, leads to the conclusion that this deletion in the second edition is neither a falsification or distortion of the past, nor the result of carelessness or poor research.

Rabbi Joseph Epstein was one of the most prominent students in the Mirrer Yeshiva at the outbreak of World War II in 1939. He travelled with others from the Mirrer Yeshiva as they fled Hitler across Russia to Japan and finally to Shanghai, where they stayed for the duration of the war. Rabbi Epstein was part of the yeshivah’s administration during their travails in this period. When he finally came to the United States after the war, he was appointed librarian of Yeshiva University’s Talmudical Academy in Brooklyn (BTA). This appointment gave him ample time to write major articles for the *Enzyklopediyah Talmudit*. He was also able to compose his masterful works, including *Mizvot ha-Shalom*, *Mizvot ha-Bayit*, *Mizvat ha-Ezah*, *Mizvot ha-Musar*, and *Ozar ha-Iggeret*.

Rabbi Epstein’s greatness in both scholarship and piety is attested to by

the *haskamot* to his works written by such *gedolei ha-Torah* as Dayyan Yechezkel Abramsky, R. Moshe Feinstein, R. Avraham Joffen, R. Yechezkel Sarnow, R. Elazar Menachem Shach, R. Chaim Lev Smulevitz, and R. Shlomo Yosef Zevin. R. Yitzchak Hutner's letters, appended to several of R. Epstein's *sefarim*, would also give the reader an appreciation of the latter's mastery of talmudic literature and his place in the history of Jewish scholarship.

When the first edition of *Mizvot ha-Shalom* was published, the unsold inventory, which represented most of the extant copies, was kept in Rabbi Epstein's garage. As it turned out, the *sefer* came to the attention of some misguided people who were particularly upset with Rabbi Epstein's association of Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Bloch with *Yom ha-Azmaut*. They proceeded to burn the first edition of *Mizvot ha-Shalom* in Rabbi Epstein's garage. Subsequently, the perpetrators of this dastardly act were found and brought to a *Satmar Bet Din*. Financial restitution was then made to Rabbi Epstein. However, the *sefer* thereafter remained out of print.

Seventeen years after this event, in 1986, Rabbi Chaim Wasserman of the Young Israel of Passaic, New Jersey, lamented that *Mizvot ha-Shalom* was out of print and explained to me what had happened. R. Wasserman had attended BTA and had come under the influence of Rabbi Epstein, particularly in the study of Halakhah using the *sugya* approach. I offered to finance the re-publication of *Mizvot ha-Shalom*, and Rabbi Wasserman put me in touch with Rabbi Epstein.

In the course of re-editing the *sefer*, Rabbi Epstein advised me that, in view of the book burning of the first edition, he wanted to make a deletion. His wife was sick and infirm at the time, and, fearful of another confrontation with hot headed extremists, had asked to have the deletions made. Rabbi Epstein acceded to her wishes.

Even without having known these historical details concerning the re-publication of the second edition, a careful reader of the *sefer* would find, on page 604, exactly where the deletion of Rabbi Bloch's letter occurs, the words "*lo nigmar*," "not completed." These words were inserted by Rabbi Epstein precisely so that the reader would be aware that something is missing. Furthermore, on page 673, where the Table of Contents of the original edition is reprinted, one would note something odd. Specifically, the last section of the book, titled *Hithabberut le-Hote'im*, is demarcated as pages 588-612, with all subtitles of each section included. The text of the second edition, however, ends on page 604! If, when editing the second edition, Rabbi Epstein had wanted to

cover up the deletion, would he have inserted “*lo nigmar*” on page 604 and included the original Table of Contents on p. 673, which could lead a reader to peruse the titles of the missing sections?

On page 225 of his article, Rabbi Schacter writes that omitting reference to Rabbi Bloch’s participation in a community-wide celebration of *Yom ha-Azmaut* has no justification. Rabbi Epstein was delighted at the chance to republish the *sefer*, as one can see from his opening remarks in the second edition (titled “*La-hoza’ah ha-sheniyyah*”). But he also respected his wife’s wishes and did not want to risk encountering physical violence a second time. In short, one familiar with the particular circumstances of the Epstein family and the fate of the first edition, would in no way conclude that the deletion had no justification.

Finally, in response to Rabbi Schacter’s statement that the omission is supportive of a particular position on the issue of *Yom ha-Azmaut* (p. 230), I refer the reader to Rabbi Epstein’s footnote on page 605 of the first edition, where he explains his reason for inserting Rabbi Bloch’s letter. Rabbi Epstein is not taking sides on an issue—rather, he is discussing the nature of *maḥloket* and the proper way to engage in it.

How unfortunate for us, the Jewish people, that the first edition of this elegant and magnificent work on the concept of *shalom* should itself suffer the violence of book burning. Perhaps this illustrates the main theme of Rabbi Schacter’s article. Nevertheless, his reference to the second edition of *Mizvot ha-Shalom* is a grave mistake, an unwarranted aspersion on the intellectual integrity of one of the greatest and most pious scholars of our generation. Indeed, I hope that this letter will bring a greater recognition of an under-appreciated *gadol* of our times.

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[Editor’s Note: Copies of Rabbi Epstein’s *sefer* may be obtained from Mr. Parkoff by calling 973-470-8312.]

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### The Letters of Rav Weinberg

TO THE EDITOR:

Your distinguished journal is to be complimented on the learned and courageous piece by Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter, "Facing the Truths of History." The issue that Rabbi Schacter raises in this masterful article is not only historiographical but also theological, since it involves the nettlesome issue of how traditional believers can reckon with the findings of historical scholarship that is so intellectually honest that it challenges our religiously based preconceptions. Or, to ask the question from the opposite direction, how can the truths uncovered by such research enter the bloodstream of a community of faith in a way that does not compromise either?

As difficult as this issue is to face and to resolve, it is more costly not to face it. For the stance of fideism that the latter course inevitably reinforces progressively weakens the capacity of the tradition to answer critiques from the larger culture and requires a degree of intellectual isolation that is impossible for most Jews to attain. Ironically, the insistence on that stance of isolation is itself, at the least, a narrowing of the very tradition it aims to conserve and requires the dubious notion that *emet* and *emunah* can be at odds.

It is not hard to imagine why Jews committed to a posture of fideism and isolationism would take special umbrage at the article of Professor Marc Shapiro showing that a *posek* of the stature of Rabbi Yehiel Ya'akov Weinberg had a long and deep friendship with a Talmud scholar at a Reform seminary (*The Torah u-Madda Journal* 7(1997): 105-21). That Rabbi Weinberg might have been embarrassed by the publication of his correspondence with Professor Samuel Atlas is, of course, possible, and the image of Rabbi Schacter's begging *mehilah* at the former's grave is highly moving.

But I doubt that I am alone in finding the revelation of the friendship itself to be moving testimony to the simple fact, forgotten or denied by ideologues of all stripes, that in real life, human relationships transcend even the most sublime belief systems and provide bonds of connection among Jews that prove more durable than their theological differences. It is good for Orthodox Jews committed to *ahavat yisrael* and to Jewish unity to know that there was a time when a revered halakhic authority could have a deep friendship with a learned talmudist in a Reform seminary.

Personally, I'd like to think Rabbi Weinberg would enjoy having this truth disclosed. But even if this is not the case, by publishing Rabbi Schacter's and Dr. Shapiro's articles, *The Torah u-Madda Journal* has contributed to the advancement of truth. Anyone with an ounce of fairness in him can see that what motivated these scholars was anything but malice toward Torah and the memory of a sage. In the minds of some of us, the image of Rabbi Weinberg has been not at all damaged but enhanced by the dissemination of the truth about this matter.

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TO THE EDITOR:

I want to comment on Rabbi J. J. Schacter's brilliant and moving essay "Facing the Truths of History." The essay dealt, *inter alia*, with the question of whether to publish some of Rabbi Yeḥiel Yaakov Weinberg's letters to Professor Shmuel Atlas. I agree with the upshot of the essay, that these letters should indeed be published, but do not fully understand the conclusion—unless it is an attempt *lazet yedei kol ha-shittot*.

Rabbi Schacter demonstrated conclusively that there was no issue of *Herem de-Rabbenu Gershon*. The Ḥatam Sofer did not want any of his responsa (*teshuvot*) or novellae (*hiddushim*) published. But fortunately for the Torah world, they were. The *personal* relationship between a *gadol ba-Torah* and a first-rate talmudic scholar who happened to be associated with a Reform institution, is not to be confused with the legitimization of that institution, or the stream to which it belongs. The letters teach us a deep moral lesson on how friendship can be maintained by people of opposing ideological views. That sort of *hiddush* is all too necessary for our generation, and such *hiddushim* should indeed be publicized.

Seen in this light, I do not think Rabbi Weinberg *zz"l* would have objected. Political sensitivity is, I believe, here out of place.

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## TO THE EDITOR:

I believe that Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter, in his article, “Facing the Truths of History,” torments himself needlessly for having published Rabbi Yehiel Yaakov Weinberg’s letters revealing his close friendship with Dr. Samuel Atlas of Hebrew Union College. Rabbi Schacter seems particularly disturbed by the arguments set forth in a letter to *The Torah u-Madda Journal* from Rabbi Avraham Abba Weingort (volume 8, 334-36).

Rabbi Weingort’s main argument, however, is based upon Rabbi Weinberg’s expressed objections to publishing a responsum of his without permission. That objection is not relevant here. As Rabbi Weingort himself makes clear, Rabbi Weinberg’s objections to publication of his views was his fear that these would either adversely affect the reputation of the persons mentioned in his responsum, or would offend them. Rabbi Weinberg also wished to avoid being publicly harassed.

Now that more than thirty-five years have gone by since Rabbi Weinberg passed away; more than fifty years have elapsed from the time that many of his letters were written; and most—if not all—of the persons mentioned in those letters have died, this objection falls. On the contrary, Rabbi Weinberg firmly believed that his views were correct and should be held by all. Accordingly, he himself published responsa in his *Seridei Esh* sharply criticizing the extremism, unethical behavior, and hypocrisy in certain leading circles of Orthodox Jewry. Moreover, as is well known, he was a stickler for historical accuracy.

I therefore believe it likely that Rabbi Weinberg would have wanted his views to be known and publicized today. These views could, and do, influence many people. The Talmud itself reveals that Rabbi Yehudah ha-Nasi had an intimate relationship with the Roman pagan Antoninus, although this relationship had been concealed while they were alive (see, e.g., *Avodah Zarah* 10b).

I respectfully suggest that Rabbi Schacter may safely leave this episode alone and go on to make other valuable contributions to Jewish scholarship.

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לכב' העורך:

קראתי בענין רב את מאמרו הנפלא של רב יעקב יוסף שכתר "Facing the Truths of History" ב"תורה ומדע" ורציתי לברך אותו עליו. יש בו בקיאות בתורה על כל גלויה, הבנה עמוקה של חכמת דברי הימים, היכרות קרובה עם כתבי מו"ר הגר"י ווינברג זצ"ל ורגישות יהודית-אנושית מרשימה. הקראתי חלק מן המאמר לבני משפחתי בשבת שובה למען ישמעו ...

הנושא עליו מדובר (פרסום אגרותיו של הגר"י) נוגע מאד ללבי הואיל והייתי קשור אל מו"ר בכל נימי נפשי. בראש השנה האחרון של חייו הייתי לבד במחיצתו בסנטוריום כבעל תוקע. כשאנשים שאלו אותי איך זה להיות לבד עם הרב ובלי מנין בראש השנה, עניתי להם שכלל לא היינו לבד. כל גדולי ישראל מרבי עקיבא והרמב"ם ועד לגר"א ור"ע הילדסהיימר היו שם. וכך אכן הרגשתי באותם ימים נוראים.

בזמנו הייתי גם קשור לקביעת המצבה ואף התקנו "כרית" על המצבה כדי שאוכל (ככהן!) לראות את מקום הקבר מרחוק. לפי מיטב זכרוני גם המלצתי בזמנו על איזכור שם אמו במצבה, מבחינת "אשרי יולדתו" (וכך, לדעתי, ראוי לעשות בכל הזדמנות מיוחדת ולא רק במי שברך לחולים).

בענין הפרסום של האגרות הנני מזדהה עם דעתו של ידידי הרב ויינגורט במכתבו שהופיע ב"תורה ומדע" כרך 8.

נכון, כפי שכתב הרב שכתר, שהדברים באגרות הודפסו בצורה זו או אחרת, גם בכתביו השונים של הגר"י ווינברג. אך יש הבדל גדול אם אדם מקבל תמונה מאוזנת של אישיות תורנית גדולה לאור עיון מעמיק בכתביו, או אם הוא קורא (לא לומד) אגרת שנכתבה לעתים רק לשעתה והמדגישה נקודה מסוימת מחוץ להקשר הכולל ובדרך לא פרופורציונלית.

שימוש באגרות אישיות לשם תיאור מלא של עולמו הרוחני של גדול בתורה שיכול לשמש מורה דרך בנבוכות העתים הוא רצוי ואף הכרחי, אך פרסום "הזדמנותי" של אגרות "פרטיות" הכוללות התבטאויות אישיות מובהקות הוא בעיני ביותר -- והדרך בה עורך "הפרדס" ואחרים "השתמשו" באגרות הגר"י במאבקהם תוכיח!

נראה לי שפרסום בלתי מבוקר של אגרותיו לא היה לרוחו של מו"ר אלא אם הדבר נעשה במסגרת של הערכה כוללת. ברם, העיסוק המוגבר בתורתו של הגר"י מצד אנשים כמו יהודית בלייד ומרק שפירא (שלא הכירוהו) הוא מקור להתרוממות רוח, ודבריו ההשקפתיים אישיים של הרב שכתר מצטרפים בצורה ייחודית לכל אלה הדובבים את שפתיו והם בודאי הביאו נחת רוח לנשמתו של גאון זה.

**גבריאל חיים כהן**

ירושלים

אוניברסיטת בר-אילן

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**Jacob J. Schacter Responds:**

My sincere thanks to all my correspondents for their thoughtful letters. Their comments, reflections, and criticisms shed light on key aspects of my article and significantly advance the discussion.

I confine myself here to a brief comment about Mr. Parkoff's letter. I regret that I left an impression which may have cast Rabbi Epstein in a negative light. At the same time, readers should note that I was careful to say only that ". . . when this book was reprinted in 1987, this letter [Rabbi Bloch's] was left out" (p. 225), without ever stating that Rabbi Epstein wanted to cover up the deletion. Much more importantly, we should not lose sight of the larger picture. This whole episode clearly *does* belong in any discussion of "facing the truths of history." For, as Mr. Parkoff himself hints in his final paragraph, the circumstances surrounding the deletion illustrate my very point—indeed, they make it even more strongly and forcefully than I did. We now have yet another category of factors contributing to "non-truths" in history in addition to those I mentioned in the article, namely, fear, in this case fear of encountering physical violence, in others perhaps of censure and ostracism. One wonders how many other instances there are where this factor should be considered.

Finally, a correction of my own. On p. 259, n. 85, I misrepresented Rabbi Shaul Shimon Deutsch's comments regarding the closing of the *yeshivah* in Volozhin. I should have stated:

In spite of my article, long held views are hard to give up, even among those who read it. See, for example, Shaul Shimon Deutsch, *Larger Than Life: The Life and Times of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson*, vol. 2 (New York, 1987), 71 and p. 309, n. 2.