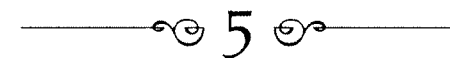


growing popularity of *hillulot* is related to the fact that they allow the expression of piety on the part of people who no longer adhere to all the rabbinic-based strictures of traditional Jewish life.<sup>58</sup> In addition, both of these religious orientations have their social correlates, while also pointing to modes of interrelation between the individual and his or her social setting. The first mode, consisting of pragmatic adherence to tradition, hints at the primacy of current social expectations over ideological commitment in shaping individual behavior. The second points to relations of dependency,<sup>59</sup> and reliance on authority, in seeking an anchor in contemporary society.

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<sup>58</sup> S. Deshen, "Political Ethnicity and Cultural Ethnicity in Israel during the 1960's," in *Urban Ethnicity*, ed. A. Cohen, ASA Monograph 12 (London: Tavistock, 1974), 281-309. Much of the developing understanding of the meanings of hagiolatry among Jews in North Africa has grown out of clues based on field studies carried out in Israel.

<sup>59</sup> Y. Bilu, "Dreams and the Wishes of the Saint," in *Judaism Viewed from Within and from Without: Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. H. E. Goldberg (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), 285-313.



## *The Hazon Ish: Haredi Critic of Traditional Orthodoxy*

LAWRENCE KAPLAN

### I

At the conclusion of Chaim Grade's great novel *The Yeshiva*, the novel's two major protagonists, the fierce, brooding Musarist Tsemakh Atlas and the young tempestuous, passionate *ex-ben-torah* and would-be poet and author Chaikl Vilner, go to the Vilna train station to bid farewell to their mentor, the radiant and serene rabbinic scholar, Rabbi Avraham-Shaye Kosover, who is leaving Vilna for the land of Israel. The novel ends with Tsemakh Atlas and Chaikl Vilner looking thoughtfully at the departing train carrying Rabbi Avraham-Shaye Kosover away from them.

The platform was now overrun with people waiting for another train. Reb Tsemakh Atlas and Chaikl Vilner still stood beside each other in the crowd; they were like an older brother with a younger one. They stood like two trees at the roadside on the edge of a town, while on the horizon a dense forest sways and rustles. But the two trees are always sad and pensive because the man who lived near them and watched over them has gone off into the wide world and will return no more, return no more. Reb Tsemakh Atlas and Chaikl Vilner realized that many other trials awaited them in life, but both had a feeling that all their struggles would be illuminated by

Of course, Chaikl Vilner is Chaim Grade himself and Rabbi Avraham-Shaye Kosover, the author of *Maḥazeh Abraham*, (*The Vision of Avraham*), is the famed rabbinic scholar Rabbi Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz of Kossov (1878-1953), better known by the title of the massive series of works of rabbinic scholarship he authored, *Ḥazon Ish*. As Chaikl Vilner was the student of Rabbi Avraham-Shaye Kosover for many years, so Chaim Grade was the student of the *Ḥazon Ish*. And as Chaikl Vilner at the novel's end senses that all his future struggles will be illuminated by Reb Avraham-Shaye, so, in fact, the image of the *Ḥazon Ish* accompanied Chaim Grade throughout his long and productive literary career, to the extent that he memorialized him both in this novel and in a number of poems.<sup>2</sup>

But the radiance of the *Ḥazon Ish* (or his not-so-fictional counterpart Reb Avraham-Shaye) has not only illuminated the paths of the fictional Tsemakh Atlas and Chaikl Vilner and the latter's alter ego, the real Chaim Grade; rather, his writings, his teaching, and above all his persona are a dominant presence and constitute a guiding light for many religious Jews today. In particular, the *Ḥazon Ish* is seen—and rightfully so—as the spiritual godfather of the present day *Haredi* (non-Zionist Orthodox) community in Israel and is revered and venerated by its members as the ultimate exemplar of learning and saintliness. The term “charisma” is much used and abused, but with reference to the impact the personality of the *Ḥazon Ish* made and continues to make on this

<sup>1</sup> *The Yeshiva*, trans. Curt Leviant (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1977), 2:393.

<sup>2</sup> See the three poems “Elegye afn Khazoyn-Ish,” “Omed ho-Eysh,” and “A Keyver in Bney-Brak,” in *Af mayn Veg tsu dir* (Tel Aviv: Y. L. Peretz, 1969), 36-55. (This is a bilingual anthology of Grade's poems with the Yiddish originals and Hebrew translations on facing pages.) It is worth noting that Grade wrote these three poems and *The Yeshiva* AFTER the death of the *Ḥazon Ish*. Indeed, Grade never visited Israel after World War II until after the *Ḥazon Ish* died. Grade later related, Professor David Fishman informs me, that he felt that had he gone to Israel he would have to meet with the *Ḥazon Ish*, but such a meeting would have been too difficult an experience. Either the *Ḥazon Ish* would have been greatly pained by seeing his former student transformed into a secular Jewish writer—the *Ḥazon Ish*, of course, knew about Grade's break with traditional Judaism and his subsequent literary career, but knowing is not the same as seeing—or Grade would have been impelled, out of respect for and loyalty to his former teacher, to return to traditional Judaism. Neither alternative, Grade concluded, was acceptable to him.

community, it is certainly well deserved.<sup>3</sup> The *Ḥazon Ish*—except for a brief period during World War I—never held any official position. He was neither a Rav nor a *rosh Yeshiva*, nor a member of any rabbinical or communal organization. Nevertheless, shortly after he arrived in the land of Israel in 1933 and certainly by the end of World War II, he emerged as the unchallenged and unrivalled leader and authority of the *Haredi* community, an unofficial “position” he occupied until his death. He attained this position solely by virtue of his great personal erudition and scholarship, of his intellectual and spiritual power, of his piety, integrity, and humanity. Unyielding and unbending on what he considered to be matters of principle, a self-declared extremist on matters of religion and faith,<sup>4</sup> the *Ḥazon Ish*, at the same time, in his personal dealings with individuals displayed great charm, sensitivity, thoughtfulness,

<sup>3</sup> This, of course, emerges from all the biographies of the *Ḥazon Ish* and the various studies of the *Haredi* community. In this connection, I heard recently that it is exceptionally difficult and expensive to obtain a burial plot in the cemetery where the *Ḥazon Ish* is buried, since so many people wish to have the merit and honor of being buried in ground sanctified, as it were, by his mortal remains.

<sup>4</sup> See the *Ḥazon Ish*'s well-known essay in praise of extremism in *Pe'er ha-dor*, vol. 1, ed. Shlomo Kohen (Bnei Brak: Nešah, 1966), 292-94. It is striking that Shimon Finkelman in his biography, *The Chazon Ish* (New York: Mesorah, 1989), 218-219, translates *kishoniyyut*, “extremism,” as “absolute commitment.” Moreover, while he does translate *kishoniyyim* as “extremists,” he revealingly puts quotation marks not to be found in the original text around the word. Obviously, Finkelman either personally feels uncomfortable with the notion of extremism or is concerned about the possible negative impact this very sharp and forthright praise of extremism on the part of the *Ḥazon Ish* might have upon the reader. It is, of course, very clear what the *Ḥazon Ish* would have to say about Finkelman's unacknowledged watering down of his views.

It should be noted, however, that on many important issues the *Ḥazon Ish* adopted what might be considered a “moderate” stance and opposed positions that he evidently considered to be “overly” extremist. For example, he pours withering scorn on the view that it is a halakhic obligation to secede from “*Kenesset Israel*,” the autonomous Jewish community in the land of Israel during the Mandatory period. See *Qoves iggerot Ḥazon Ish* (Collected Letters of the *Ḥazon Ish*) ed. Rabbi Shmuel Greineman, vol. 3 (Bnei Brak: Greineman, 1990), 129-34 (letters 111 and 112). (For historical background regarding this issue, see Menahem Friedman, *Hevrah ve-dat* [Society and Religion] [Jerusalem: Yad Yishak Ben-Zvi, 1978], 185-213.) Cf. as well the famous and oft-quoted statement of the *Ḥazon Ish* (*Yoreh de'ah, siman 13*) that in the absence nowadays of visible and miraculous divine providence, nonbelievers do not fall into the halakhic category of heretics, indeed, that that category lacks any contemporary practical relevance. Rather, the *Ḥazon Ish* concludes, “It is incumbent upon us to draw them [the nonbelievers] to us with bonds of love, so that the light of truth will illuminate their ways to whatever degree possible.”

and modesty. Perhaps it is this special blend of humility and forcefulness that accounts for the fascination the personality of the Hazon Ish exerted on all who knew him, whether they identified with him ideologically or not.

Recently two individuals who as young people knew the Hazon Ish personally related to me their own memories of him. A well-known Israeli bookseller rather pointedly contrasted the breadth and vision of the Hazon Ish with the narrowness and conventionality of his rabbinic successors in the Haredi community, however great their traditional talmudic scholarship may be.<sup>5</sup> Sarah Meyers of Chicago, the daughter of the well-known philanthropist Mr. Bernard Meyers, who provided the Hazon Ish with a home in Bnei Brak—for which the Hazon Ish insisted on paying taxes and upkeep<sup>6</sup>—recalled the Hazon Ish's warmth, saintliness, integrity, and unremitting devotion to study. "My father helped support a number of prominent rabbinic scholars," Ms. Meyers related. "The other rabbinic scholars would, at times, utilize some of the funds he provided them to take—with his understanding, of course—a vacation in Switzerland or to spend a weekend at the beach in Netanya. And why not? But never the Hazon Ish."

We are fortunate in having much material to draw on in delineating both the ideology and personality of the Hazon Ish. In addition to his massive, strictly halakhic writings, which, however, at times contain some striking general theological or ideological observations,<sup>7</sup> his collected letters<sup>8</sup> and his brief but concentrated work *Emunah u-bitahon*<sup>9</sup> provide us with a vivid picture of his religious world-view and, perhaps even more important, allow us to hear his distinctive and highly individual voice. There are several collections of his teachings by his

<sup>5</sup> Since the bookseller has both personal and economic connections with the Haredi community, he wishes, understandably, to remain anonymous.

<sup>6</sup> See Finkelman, *The Chazon Ish*, 63f.

<sup>7</sup> See the many theological and ideological statements culled from his halakhic writings to be found in the anthologies cited in note 10. Cf. R. Yisḥak Hutner, *Iggerot u-mikhtavim* (Jerusalem, 1981), 71-74, for an analysis of the link between the halakhic and theological elements in the Hazon Ish's famous ruling concerning milking on the Sabbath.

<sup>8</sup> *Qoves iggerot* (many reprints). While much of the material found in vol. 3 has already appeared in the anthologies cited in note 10 and the biographies cited in note 11, the volume does contain, as far as I have been able to determine, a good deal of highly interesting, hitherto unpublished material as well.

<sup>9</sup> (Faith and Trust) (Bnei Brak, 1954), and reprinted many times.

collections draw primarily on the letters and *Emunah u-bitahon*, they also contain a fair amount of uncollected and unpublished material. There are also a number of extensive biographies of the Hazon Ish, in both Hebrew and English.<sup>11</sup> These biographies are hagiographical and consequently indiscriminating in nature, but they do contain a good deal of otherwise unavailable primary material, provide helpful historical context, and, if used with critical care and caution, can often prove illuminating. Finally, as mentioned earlier, we have the marvelous portrait of the Hazon Ish in Grade's *The Yeshiva*. Grade's portrait dovetails beautifully with what we know of the Hazon Ish from both his own writings and the more conventional biographies, and it serves to bring the Hazon Ish to life in a way the more conventional and uncritical biographies cannot hope to equal.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, it provides us with much personal data that those worshipful biographies omit, no doubt deliberately, the Hazon Ish's unhappy married life, for example.<sup>13</sup>

## II

The Hazon Ish grew up in the milieu of east European Orthodoxy as that Orthodoxy had crystallized in the late nineteenth and early

<sup>10</sup> *Hit'orerut* (Awakening) (Bnei Brak: Greineman, 1989); *Liquṭ dinim ve-hanhagot mi-Maran he-Hazon Ish*, (Anthology of Rulings and Practices of Our Teacher the Hazon Ish) vol. 1, compiled by Rabbi Meir Greineman (Bnei Brak: Greineman, 1988); *Orhot Ish* (Jerusalem: Greineman, 1989).

<sup>11</sup> Kohen, *Pe'er ha-dor*; Aharon Sorasky, *He-Hazon Ish be-dorotav* (The Hazon Ish in His Times) (Bnei Brak: Yad He-Hazon Ish, 1984); Finkelman, *The Chazon Ish*. As Finkelman indicates (p.8), his biography draws heavily upon the two Hebrew biographies, and, indeed, as he does not indicate, is, in many places, little more than an abridged English paraphrase of these works. I have, nevertheless, referred to Finkelman's biography wherever possible because of its ready availability.

<sup>12</sup> A full comparison of the portrait of the Hazon Ish painted by Grade both with his spiritual profile as reconstructed from his own writings and with the various hagiographical portraits found in the standard biographies would make a fascinating study. Meanwhile, compare *The Yeshiva*, 2:143, 190, and 190f. with *Emunah u-bitahon*, . 40-43, 16f., and 5f., respectively.

<sup>13</sup> The recently published personal recollection of the Hazon Ish by Hayyim Koltitz, *He-Hozeh mi-Liṭa: Perakim be-Hayyei he-Hazon Ish* (The Visionary from Lithuania: Chapters in the Life of the Hazon Ish) (Jerusalem: Rubin Mass, 1990), though it also tends to hagiography, does, unlike the standard biographies, speak openly about the Hazon Ish's troubled marriage. While most of Koltitz's discussion of this matter (pp. 41-46) seems to be based on Grade, he reveals new important information, not found in Grade, concerning the more intimate side of the Hazon Ish's marriage (see p. 61).

twentieth centuries. More specifically, he grew up in the spiritual climate of Lithuanian Mitnaggedism. His father was a prominent Lithuanian Rav, and many of his ancestors from both his paternal and maternal sides were leading members of the Lithuanian rabbinic elite.<sup>14</sup>

Scholars have examined how traditional east European Jewish society in the nineteenth century under the multiple challenges of modernization—Haskalah, secularism, nationalism, and so on—transformed itself and emerged as a self-conscious Orthodox movement.<sup>15</sup> The rise and efflorescence of the great central Lithuanian yeshivas, first Volozhin and later Ponovezh, Slobodka, Telz, Mir, and many others; the development of new methods of analytic talmudic scholarship in those yeshivas, pioneered by R. Ḥayyim Soloveitchik and others; the spread of the Musar movement under the guidance of R. Yisrael Salanter and his followers, a movement which at first sought to direct itself to the community as a whole, but later turned its attention to the yeshivas; the publication of such rabbinic journals as *Ha-Tevunah* and orthodox newspapers as *Ha-Levanon*; and the founding of a wide variety of rabbinic and communal organizations culminating in Agudat Yisrael—all these developments are well known and have been extensively studied. It was this Orthodoxy, more specifically, the Lithuanian Mitnaggedic branch of that Orthodoxy, that formed and shaped the personality and thought of the Ḥazon Ish. And yet, as the title of my essay indicates, the Ḥazon Ish, in my view, developed and maintained a dialectical relationship with that Orthodoxy, in particular with Lithuanian Mitnaggedism. While in many respects he deepened and intensified the already existing and ongoing trends and tendencies in east European Orthodoxy, in other respects he developed a rather subtle, oftentimes more implicit than explicit, but nevertheless powerful and far-reaching critique of that Orthodoxy. What emerges from an examination of the Ḥazon Ish's writings is that the Ḥazon Ish felt—though he never put it that way—that east European Orthodoxy—and again, more specifically, late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Lithuanian Mitnaggedism—in the laudable battle it waged against the forces of modernity had, perhaps unwittingly, absorbed many of modernity's values, in particular the value of self-affirmation and the many different guises it assumes: self-expression, autonomy, personal creativity, and so on.

<sup>14</sup> On the family background of the Ḥazon Ish, see *Pe'er ha-dor*, 27-65.

<sup>15</sup> See the many studies of Jacob Katz, Gershon Bacon, Immanuel Etkes, Ehud Luz, Joseph Salmon, Eli Schweid, Shaul Stampfer, and others on this subject.

Let us, however, before we present the more fundamental critique, begin with some externals. The Ḥazon Ish once noted that the Gerer Rebbe, R. Abraham Mordecai Alter, criticized the students of Lithuanian yeshivas for three things: 1) they wore short jackets, following the modern fashion; 2) they were clean-shaven until they got married; and 3) they married at a late age. And the Ḥazon Ish commented that no valid response can be made to these three criticisms; rather, all the explanations and rationalizations offered for justifying such behavior are forced and lack any basis.<sup>16</sup> Of course, that the Gerer Rebbe, the leader of Polish Ḥasidism, would level such criticisms against Lithuanian yeshiva students is not surprising. But that the Ḥazon Ish, who after all, as we have seen, emerged from the midst of the Lithuanian Mitnaggedic tradition and was one of its outstanding rabbinic representatives, would endorse them is significant. Nor was this endorsement just a casual comment on the part of the Ḥazon Ish. Rather, throughout his writings he emphasizes the importance of wearing traditional rabbinic garments,<sup>17</sup> forcefully sets forth his opposition to using shavers and depilatories,<sup>18</sup> and stresses the need for marriage at an early age, preferable between the ages of 18 and 20 as mandated by the Sages.<sup>19</sup> We are, of course, dealing here with externals, and yet, as all historians, sociologists, and anthropologists know, externals ought never be underestimated, particularly in connection with the phenomenon of acculturation. Nor, in endorsing the Gerer Rebbe's criticisms, was the Ḥazon Ish just finding fault with the behavior of Lithuanian yeshiva students. Rather he was also, if only by implication, criticizing the great *rashei yeshivah* of such outstanding Lithuanian yeshivas as Mir, Slobodka, and Kletzk who, at least tacitly, lent their approval to their students' behavior. As we shall see immediately, his criticisms of the leadership and philosophy of the Lithuanian yeshivas went much deeper than questions of clothing, beards, and the average age of marriage, as important as such matters might be.

Let us turn to the issue of Torah study. In the late nineteenth century, R. Ḥayyim Soloveitchik developed a new, innovative method of Talmudic study, variously known as *havanah*, *ḥaqirah*, or *hegyon*, which

<sup>16</sup> *Pe'er ha-dor*, 250 n. 31.

<sup>17</sup> *Dinim ve-hanhagot*, 34; *Qoveš iggerot*, 1:178 (letter 196).

<sup>18</sup> See Rabbi Moshe Werner, *Hadrus Ponim Zokon*, 2nd ed. (New York: Moshe Wiener, 1978), 16, 17, 19, 34f., 40, 56, 304-307, 349-51; *Qoveš iggerot*, 1:179 (letters 197f.).

<sup>19</sup> *Qoveš iggerot*, 2:123f. (letter 135).

was highly abstract, conceptual, and analytic in character.<sup>20</sup> This method became the rage in all the yeshivas and swept all before it.<sup>21</sup> It has been shown that although the Hazon Ish in his early halakhic works often-times engaged in this mode of abstract analysis and classification à la Rav Hayyim, he gradually moved away from it and adopted a much more text-centered and *peshat*-oriented approach.<sup>22</sup> Why? and of what significance was such a move? In order to arrive at a possible and, I trust, plausible answer to these questions, let us first place the analytic approach in its proper historic context and seek to determine the source of its appeal.

My teacher, the noted contemporary rabbinic scholar and theologian R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, in describing the great intellectual power of his grandfather, Rav Hayyim, has written, "Were it not for him, Torah would have been forgotten from Israel"<sup>23</sup> Of course, this statement is no doubt partially—and perhaps more than partially—motivated by pardonable family pride. And yet, Rabbi Soloveitchik is, at the same time, making, if in a rather exaggerated and hyperbolic manner, a serious historical point.

Rabbi Soloveitchik has had the occasion to explain orally that many talented east European and more specifically Lithuanian yeshiva students were drawn to the new, expansive, and highly attractive external and secular intellectual horizons that opened up before them in the modern world. Was there anything in traditional Jewish learning, in traditional talmudic scholarship that could compete, could hold its own, with the excitement, the intellectual challenges of the humanities, the sciences, philosophy, and all? The analytic approach, Rabbi Soloveitchik

<sup>20</sup> On the analytic method of the school of R. Hayyim Soloveitchik, see R. Shlomo Yosef Zevin, *Ishim ve-shitot* (Men and Methods) (Tel Aviv: A. Tsiuni, 1966); the various studies of N. Solomon, "Hilluq and Haqirah: A Study in the Method of the Lithuanian Talmudists," *Dine Israel* 4 (1973): lxix–cvi; "Definition and Classification in the Works of the Lithuanian Halakhists," *Dine Israel*, 6 (1975), LXIII–CIII: "Concepts of Zeh Neheneh . . . in the Analytic School," *The Jewish Law Annual* 3 (1980), 49–62; R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Mah dodekh mi-dod," in *Be-Sod ha-yahid ve-ha-yahad* (Jerusalem: Orot, 1970), 212–35; and Yishak Adler, *Iyyun be-lomduṭ* (New York: Composition by Beit Sh'ar Press, 1989).

<sup>21</sup> See Rabbi Henoah Eigis, Introduction to *Marḥeshet*, cited by R. Zevin, *Ishim ve-Shitot*, 195f.; Rabbi Prof. Samuel Bialoblocki, "R. Iṣele mi-Ponevezh," in *Eym le-masoret* (Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University, 1971), 259. See note 35 below.

<sup>22</sup> See Zevin, "Hazon Ish," *Ishim ve-shitot*, 316. The biography of the Hazon Ish, *Pe'er ha-dor*, 273f., lifts the entire analysis of Rabbi Zevin, almost word for word, attributing it to anonymous "knowledgeable observers" ("*yod'ei davar*")!

<sup>23</sup> "Mah dodekh mi-dod," 213.

argues, answered this need. It provided the yeshiva students with a new, exciting method of talmudic study that encouraged conceptual creativity and innovation, that allowed a student's intellectual powers full range of expression, and that was as demanding, as rigorous as any discipline the secular world had to offer. Only a method of talmudic study like that of R. Hayyim, a method that was the intellectual equal of secular disciplines, stood a chance of keeping the most intellectually talented of east European Jewish youth within the confines of the *bet midrash*. Indeed, then, were it not for Rav Hayyim, Torah would surely have been forgotten from Israel!

Of course, the fact that Rabbi Soloveitchik is one of the towering rabbinic scholars of our age does not necessarily mean that we have to accept his historical judgments. However, this particular historical claim of Rabbi Soloveitchik is supported by such other knowledgeable rabbinic observers as Rabbi Isser Unterman<sup>24</sup> as well as by such outstanding contemporary historians of the Lithuanian yeshiva world as Professor Mordecai Breuer<sup>25</sup> and would seem to be well founded.

It should be noted that Rabbi Soloveitchik himself is, of course, a modern halakhic thinker, perhaps the outstanding modern halakhic thinker of our time. And for him the greatness of his grandfather's method is precisely the scope it allows for *yeṣirah* and *hiddush*, for conceptual creativity and innovation. Moreover, for Rabbi Soloveitchik, this method of Talmudic study ultimately turns out to be one of the major means whereby one reconciles the rational religious consciousness, with its emphasis on self-expression and intellectual autonomy, and the revealed religious consciousness, with its emphasis on self-abnegation and submission to external authority.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> R. Isser Yehudah Unterman, "Torah Maḥzeret el Akhsanya Shelah," in *Sefer ha-Yovel le-Rav Shimon Shkop* (Jubilee Volume for Rav S. Shkop) (Vilna, 1937), 12–20. Rabbi Unterman recalls, "The students felt the wonderful delight of creative activity, and this was as vital for them as air for breathing . . . Some thought that this method [of R. Hayyim] served as protection against the attractive power of secular Haskalah."

<sup>25</sup> Mordecai Breuer, "Tradition and Change in European Yeshivot: Seventeenth–Nineteenth Centuries" (paper presented at the conference "Tradition and Crisis Revisited: Jewish Society and Thought on the Threshold of Modernity," Center for Jewish Studies of Harvard University, October 1988).

<sup>26</sup> See his essays "Ish ha-halakhah," (Man of the Law), in *Ish ha-halakhah: Galui ve-Nistar* (Halakhic Man: Revealed and Concealed) (Jerusalem: Alpha, 1979), II-II3 (repr. from *Talpiyyot* 1/3-4 [1944]: 651-735) (=Halakhic Man, trans. Lawrence Kaplan [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983]); "Mah dodekh mi-dod;" "U-bikashtem mi-sham," *Ha-Darom* 47 (1978): 1-83. Cf. my essay, "Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Philosophy of Halakhah," *Jewish Law Annual* 7 (1987): 139–97. I discuss

It is precisely at this point that we are ready to return to the Hazon Ish. For if R. Soloveitchik is one of the great MODERN halakhic thinkers of our time, the Hazon Ish was one of the century's great ANTIMODERN halakhic thinkers. Therefore, so I would argue, if it is precisely the innovative, creative, and expressive aspect of Rav Hayyim's approach that made this approach so popular to begin with and so attractive to his grandson, it is this very same aspect that made this approach so suspect to the Hazon Ish. For the Hazon Ish, this approach was too innovative, too creative, too expressive. The Hazon was very wary of *hiddush*. As he oftentimes had the occasion to state, "*Hiddush* is alien to my nature."<sup>27</sup> Or, as he wrote on another occasion, "One should not innovate (*le-haddesh ha-devarim*) but search out (*le-vakkesh ha-devarim*)."<sup>28</sup> Of course, the Hazon Ish could not dismiss the time-honored role of *hiddush* in Talmudic studies. However, *hiddush*, for him, does not mean conceptual creativity or innovation, but rather the clarification that derives from diligent study.<sup>29</sup>

In this connection it is worthwhile to examine the critical glosses of the Hazon Ish on R. Hayyim Soloveitchik's *Hiddushim al ha-Rambam* (Novellae on Maimonides), the work which is generally viewed as the quintessential embodiment of the analytic method.<sup>30</sup> A full comparison of the varying approaches of Rav Hayyim and Hazon Ish is beyond the scope of this paper. We may, however, note the following. The Hazon Ish in his glosses never resorts to the type of conceptual terminology that typifies the analytic approach. He opposes a number of Rav Hayyim's conceptual distinctions as being overly subtle and unfounded.<sup>31</sup> Above all, he consistently and firmly opposes what he views as attempts on the

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these matters further in two as yet unpublished essays, "Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik as a Modern Halakhic Thinker" and "From Freedom to Necessity and Back Again: Man's Religious Odyssey in the Thought of Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik."

<sup>27</sup> *Hazon Ish, Shev'it, siman 7.*

<sup>28</sup> *Hazon Ish, Likkutei Sanhedrin, siman 22.*

<sup>29</sup> *Qoveš iggerot 1:28f.* (letter 4). In offering this definition, the Hazon Ish bases himself on a statement of R. Hayyim of Volozhin. For an analysis of the educational philosophy of R. Hayyim Volozhin, see Norman Lamm, *Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah's Sake in the Thought of Rav Hayyim Volozhin and His Contemporaries* (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1989), 28-31. See note 58.

<sup>30</sup> In most of the recent reprints of *Hiddushei Rabbeynu Hayyim ha-Levi, the Gilyonot he-Hazon Ish* (Marginalia of the Hazon Ish) may be found appended at the back.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example, *Gilyonot*, II, on *Hilkhot Tefillin* I:l, s.v. *ve-nireh de-be-sefer torah*.

part of Rav Hayyim to read certain concepts and ideas into the Rambam or the gemara which are not stated clearly therein.<sup>32</sup>

One may argue, of course, that in his opposition to the analytic method and his espousal of a more rigorously impersonal, text-centered, *peshaṭ* approach, the Hazon Ish was just adhering to good scientific methodology.<sup>33</sup> But, as I have sought to indicate, there is a more fundamental ideological point being made here, if only by implication.<sup>34</sup> For the Hazon Ish, the analytic approach allows too much room for self-expression, for the play of the individual's own intellectual powers unconstrained by the discipline of the text. In this respect, though the analytic approach may be an admirable attempt at making talmudic study more attractive and exciting to the student, it concedes too much to the modern temper, to the modern emphasis on the self and its intellectual autonomy, even if it is a self engaged in exercising its intellectual autonomy in the realm of traditional talmudic scholarship.<sup>35</sup> It is striking

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<sup>32</sup> See, for example, *ibid.*, I, on *Hilkhot Tefillin* I:l, s.v. *ve-nireh de-mi-shum hakhi*; *ibid.* 8, on *Hilkhot Ma'akhalot Assurot* 4:3, s.v. *ve-ha-nireh lomar, de-be-emet*; *ibid.* 12, on *Hilkhot Ma'aseh ha-Korbanot* 10:12, s.v. *ve-hinneḥ be-sof perek bet*; and *ibid.* 14, on *Hilkhot 'Avodat Yom ha-Kippurim* 5:31, s.v. *ve-nireh be-da'at ha-Rambam*.

<sup>33</sup> An acquaintance of mine who has made a careful study of the *Gilyonot* wittily remarked that the Hazon Ish judged Rabbi Hayyim's interpretations of the Rambam by the wrong criterion; he wanted to determine if they were true!

We may add that in his exceptionally comprehensive, text-centered, *peshaṭ* approach, as well as in his avoidance of analytic "*lomdut*," the Hazon Ish may justly be compared to his relative, the great rabbinic scholar of our generation, the late Professor Saul Lieberman. (This, of course, is not to deny the many important differences between their approaches.) It is interesting that the methods of study of both were often compared to that of the Vilna Gaon. For the Hazon Ish, see R. Yeḥiel Yaakov Weinberg, *Seridei esh*, vol. 3 (Jerusalem, 1966), 249. With reference to Professor Lieberman, Professor David Halivni informs me that when Lieberman published his *Tosefet Rishonim*, the venerable Hungarian rabbinic scholar Immanuel Löw, wrote Lieberman a letter in which he said that he could see from *Tosefet Rishonim* that Lieberman possessed a spark of the Gaon. For the Hazon Ish's favorable evaluation of the scholarship of Professor Lieberman, see S. Abramson, "R. Saul Lieberman's Method of Investigating Talmudic Literature" (in Hebrew), in *Le-Zikhron shel Shaul Lieberman* (In Memory of S. Lieberman) (Jerusalem: Israel National Science Academy, 1984), 29.

<sup>34</sup> As to why the Hazon Ish is not more explicit in his criticism of the analytic approach, see note 57 below. It would seem, however, that when discussing matters with his close acquaintances the Hazon Ish was more open in his criticism. See note 39 below.

<sup>35</sup> I would suggest in light of this point, that the Hazon Ish's largely tacit critique of the analytic method differs from the highly explicit critique of this method by such contemporaries as the Ridbaz (R. Jacob David Willowsky) and R. Aryeh Karlin,

that while the key terms that Rabbi Soloveitchik, the great modern halakhic thinker, uses in describing talmudic study are *yeširah* and *hiddush*, conceptual creativity and innovation,<sup>36</sup> the key terms used by the Ḥazon Ish, the great antimodern halakhic thinker, are *sheqeidah*, *yegia*<sup>c</sup>, and *ameilut*, diligent unremitting study, effort, and toil.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, in one letter the Ḥazon Ish writes:

What is required is to study and review the text several times, even without any *hiddush*, and to carefully examine matters in which the intellect, to being with, takes no pleasure, matters which, on the contrary, it finds burdensome. But such toil [*amel*] is the toil of Torah, and all the special qualities [conferred by] the study of the Torah are acquired precisely through this toil. However, after this toil, a new gate of light is opened and the intellect will take endless delight in it.<sup>38</sup>

In a word, what the Ḥazon Ish feels is called for in the area of traditional Jewish learning is not intellectual self-assertion but intellectual submission, submission to the authority of the text. And only such intellectual submission will bring in its wake true intellectual delight.

We would further argue that, for the Ḥazon Ish, this ethic of submission must express itself not only in the area of traditional Torah learning, *talmud torah*, but also, and perhaps primarily, in the area of observance of the commandments, *shemirat ha-miṣvot*. In this respect, the Ḥazon Ish's largely implicit critique of the analytic method of Talmudic scholarship,<sup>39</sup>

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insofar as the critique of the Ḥazon Ish is, paradoxically, more fundamental than those of his contemporaries, for, as we shall see, it derives from a comprehensive world-view. For the critiques of Rabbis Willowsky and Karlin, see the relevant excerpts cited in Louis Jacobs, *A Tree of Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 59f. Interestingly enough, the critiques of both testify, from a hostile standpoint, to the exceptional popularity of the analytic method. See note 21 above.

<sup>36</sup> See the essays referred to in note 26.

<sup>37</sup> A convenient collection of relevant passages may be found in *Orhot Ish*, 63-72. Note as well the frequency of these terms in the writings of R. Hayyim Volozhin. See Lamm, *Torah Lishmah*, 31, 117. See note 29 above, and note 58 below.

<sup>38</sup> *Qoveš iggerot*, 1:26 (letter 2).

<sup>39</sup> After this article was completed and submitted, there appeared a very interesting, albeit rather hagiographical, new portrait of the Ḥazon Ish, *Be-Mehiṣat he-Ḥazon Ish*, (n.p., 1991), by Raphael Halperin. Halperin as a young man was very close to the Ḥazon Ish and many letters in the volumes of *Qoveš iggerot* are addressed to him. Halperin, on the basis of what appears to be personal knowledge, categorically states, "The Ḥazon Ish did not at all approve of the method of logical analysis [of the Talmud] developed in the Lithuanian Yeshivot" (p. 241).

pioneered by R. Hayyim Soloveitchik, dovetails neatly and is of a piece with his more explicit critique of the Lithuanian Musar movement.

Unlike previous Musar ideologies which sought, in the main, to set forth and delineate the religious and pietistic ideals to which a Jew ought to aspire, Lithuanian Musar took for granted the traditional values of study of the Torah and observance of the commandments as those values were understood in the world of east European Orthodoxy. The problem with which Lithuanian Musar was concerned was the gap between theory and practice.<sup>40</sup> It is not that the average Jew did not know what he ought to do—it is that he oftentimes did not do it! Of course, while Lithuanian Musar focused on the internal, psychological obstacles to proper observance, it was clearly formulated against the backdrop and partially in reaction to the general breakdown of tradition in nineteenth-century eastern Europe. In this respect, the Musar movement, as we have already noted, was one of the major means whereby the new, emerging east European Orthodoxy sought to defend itself against the challenges to tradition posed by modernization and secularization. What the Musar movement did, as Emmanuel Etkes has noted, was to develop what is in effect a religious and pietistic psychotherapy based on an astute and penetrating psychology.<sup>41</sup> Without entering here into the details of either

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<sup>40</sup> It should be noted that previous Musar ideologies, for example that of R. Jonah Gerondi, were also concerned with this psychological problem, though, unlike the Lithuanian Musar movement, they did not place it at the center of their interest. See the important observation of Yisrael Ta-Shema in, "Ḥasidut Ashkenaz bi-Sefarad: Rabbenu Yonah Gerondi - Ha-Ish u-Po'alo," *Galut ahar Golah: Mehkarim Mugashim li-Professor Hayyim Beinart* (Ashkenasi Hasidism in Spain: R. Jonah Gerondi—The Man and His Work, in *Exile and Diaspora: Studies in the History of the Jewish People Presented to Professor Haim Beinart*), edited by Aharon Mirsky, Avraham Grossman, and Yoseph Kaplan (Jerusalem: Ben-Zvi Institute, 1988), p.182, note 42.

<sup>41</sup> See Emmanuel Etkes, *R. Yisrael Salanter ve-reishitah shel tenu'at ha-Musar* (R. Y. Salanter and the Beginning of the Musar Movement) (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982). My general characterization of the Musar movement here is based on my own reading of the works of R. Salanter and on the recent studies of Etkes, Silman, Goldberg, and Pachter. See the aforementioned work of Etkes, certainly the best and most rounded study of R. Salanter; Yohanan Silman, "The Psychological Doctrine of R. Yisrael Salanter" (in Hebrew), *Bar-Ilan Annual* II (1978): 288-304; Hillel Goldberg, *R. Israel Salanter: Text, Structure, Idea* (New York: Ktav, 1982); and Mordecai Pachter's important Introduction to his edition of *Kitvei R. Yisrael Salanter* (Writings of R. Y. Salanter) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1972), as well as his major review essay of both Etkes and Goldberg, "R. Yisrael Salanter in a New Light" (in Hebrew), *Tarbis* 53/1 (1984): 621-50. It should be noted that all these works focus on R. Yisrael Salanter and the Musar movement during his lifetime. For recent scholarly studies of the thought of R. Salanter's successors, see Tamar Ross, "Ha-Maḥashvah ha-'iyyunit be-kitvei



the psychology or the psychotherapy, we may just briefly enumerate the methods that Rabbi Yisrael Salanter, the founder of the Musar movement, and his followers devised in order to help the individual overcome the gap between theory and practice: intense study of those areas of Jewish law which were generally neglected by the multitude; study of Musar texts with enthusiasm, with "lips aflame"—the content of the Musar texts was secondary; the cultivation of worldly wisdom in combating the evil instinct; unsparing introspection; and, finally, *protim* or *pe'ules*, the deliberate undergoing of trials "designed to cultivate certain positive character traits or eradicate negative ones."<sup>42</sup> This last method, associated particularly with the radical Novaredok school of Musar, was perhaps the best known of these means, certainly the one which best caught the popular imagination. The anecdote about the Novaredok yeshiva student going into an apothecary to ask for some nails is almost legendary. The point of this self-imposed trial, of course, is to endow the Musarist with the inner strength necessary to withstand and ignore the ridicule of the ignorant and scornful rabble, to give him the opportunity to display his contempt for the opinion of the multitude.

The Hazon Ish was critical of all these Musar techniques, with the, to be expected, exception of the technique of studying those areas of Torah which are generally neglected.<sup>43</sup> He was critical for two reasons. First, he felt that these techniques, unless strictly limited, would take away valu-

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mamshikhav shel R. Yisrael salanter bi-Tenu'at ha-Musar" (The Speculative Teachings of the Successors of R. Y. Salanter) (Ph. D. diss., Hebrew University, 1986); idem, "The Musar Movement and the Hermeneutic Problem in Torah Study" (in Hebrew), *Tarbis* 59/1-2 (1989-1990): 191-214.

<sup>42</sup> David Fishman, "The Musar Movement in Inter-War Poland," in *The Jews of Poland between the Two World Wars*, ed. Yisrael Gutman et al. (Hanover, N.H.: University Presses of New England, 1988), 250. My brief characterization of Novaredok immediately following is based largely on Fishman's essay.

<sup>43</sup> See *Emunah u-bitahon*, 25f. (3:9), 27f. (3:12), citing R. Salanter's famous *Iggeret Musar*. In his use of R. Salanter's writings, or rather, certain very carefully selected excerpts therefrom, to criticize the Musar ideologies of the twentieth century, the Hazon Ish follows in the path of an already long line of opponents of Musar who sought to distinguish between R. Salanter himself and his successors. See Dov Katz, *Pulmus ha-Musar* (The Musar Controversy) (Jerusalem: Weiss, 1977). (In the same way, critics of Maimonideanism often attempted to distinguish between the views of the Great Eagle himself and those of his "unworthy" disciples who, so the critics claimed, inadvertently or deliberately distorted the teaching of the Master.) It is ironic that R. Salanter's emphasis on the ethical and pietistic significance of intensive Torah study in the *Iggeret Musar*, given the use the Hazon Ish makes of it, may have been designed, at least in part, as a concession to traditional sensibilities. See Silman, "The Psychological Doctrine," 293-95.

able time from the study of Torah.<sup>44</sup> The second reason, however, is more fundamental.

The Hazon Ish was of the opinion that the fundamental Musar approach of working on oneself, of turning inward, in order to develop one's spiritual personality and overcome the obstacles standing in the way of proper observance was fundamentally misguided. Again, we may suggest that the Hazon Ish was suspicious of the focus on, the concern for, the self, even if that focusing, that concern, was for religious purposes. Rather, the Hazon Ish developed what we may term a counter-Musar, based on his own psychology, his own analysis of the human personality.<sup>45</sup> This counter-Musar is the subject of chapter 4 of *Emunah u-bitahon*. At the beginning of the chapter the Hazon Ish states, "At the root [of man's manifold evil traits] there is only . . . one evil trait. This evil trait is allowing one's natural life to flow along its natural course."<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, "The [sole] positive trait is [man's] absolute commitment to give preference to the ethical sensibility over the natural sensibility."<sup>47</sup> Moreover, for the Hazon Ish, man's manifold evil traits—laziness, pride, and so on—and in particular, his fundamental evil trait of "allowing one's natural life to flow along its natural course," stand in the way of his fulfilling not only the commandments between man and man but also the commandments between man and God.<sup>48</sup>

How then can man overcome his fundamental negative trait and cultivate his fundamental positive trait? The Hazon Ish answers:

After we have established that the rectification of one's [evil] traits is necessary for observing both the statutes [between man and God] and the judgments [between man and man], it follows that the method for rectifying those traits is through observing the Halakhah. For though the practical commandments on a superficial level . . . appear easy to perform, those who know the strict requirements of the law [*homer ha-din*] and who have fixed in their heart the love of Halakhah find them exceptionally difficult to observe. . . . For a person who seeks to observe a commandment in all its fine particulars will find himself confronting many awesome trials . . . and he will have to combat his [evil] traits, at times the trait of laziness . . . and,

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<sup>44</sup> This is one of the major points made throughout chapter 3 of *Emunah u-bitahon*. See, for example, 27f. (3:11f.), 30-32 (3:17f.), 37-40 (3:25-27).

<sup>45</sup> See Etkes, *Salanter ve-reishitah*, 346, n. 21. Etkes, however, refers in this note to chapter 3 of *Emunah u-bitahon*, when, in fact, he should refer to BOTH chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>46</sup> *Emunah u-bitahon*, 44 (4:1). Cf. *Qoveš iggerot*, 3:186f. (letter 184).

<sup>47</sup> *Emunah u-bitahon*, 44 (4:1).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 47 (4:5).



at times, [he will suffer] the scorn of others and a thousand such like.<sup>49</sup>

Even more important:

The constant adherence to the precise requirements of the law [*dikduk ha-din*], [which involves struggling] against one's inborn inclinations, accustoms a person to give over the staff of rulership into the possession of understanding and the bridle into the hand of intellect. It strengthens his heart to be constantly aware that he must submit himself to his inner [moral] sensibility and his noble conscience.<sup>50</sup>

Thus for the Hazon Ish it is precisely the DIFFICULTY in observing the commandments, the countless trials involved in their precise performance, the ongoing struggle against one's natural inclinations that their fulfilment calls for, that serve as the means whereby one overcomes negative character traits and develops positive ones.

The Hazon Ish, then, is in agreement with the Novaredok school of Musar that the only means of character improvement is undergoing trials; however, for the Hazon Ish, these trials need not and should not be self-imposed, like Novaredok *pe'ules*, but must be trials that flow from the unremitting struggle to observe the precise, extensive, and exceptionally difficult requirements of the Halakhah. As the Hazon Ish argues—and here it is clear that he has Novaredok in mind though he does not say so explicitly—

One could almost say the precise fulfillment of the law is the only way to rectify one's [evil] traits. For in other respects it is a commandment to keep far away from trials. And a person should not seek out trials in order to train himself in the rectification of his [character] traits; on the contrary, it is an ethical obligation to avoid a situation in which one might be subject to a trial. . . . However, the person who observes the commandments and all their precise details constantly finds himself confronted with trials . . . and he is able to train himself well to incite his good *yešer* against his evil *yešer*; and precisely because he encounters trials at every moment, his [spiritual] ascent is certain and his improvement is assured.<sup>51</sup>

What we have here, then, is an ethos of stringency, of *humrah*. Scholars have discussed to what extent the Hazon Ish was a *maḥmir* or a *meiqil*,

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 48 (4:7).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 48f. (4:8).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 49f. (4:9).

was stringent or lenient, in his halakhic rulings.<sup>52</sup> People oftentimes point to his famous ruling concerning *shi'urim*, concerning the proper determination of halakhic measurements, such as the precise size of a cubit (an *amah*) or a *kezayit*, as an example of the Hazon Ish's halakhic stringency. This ruling requires, for example, that the quantity of wine consumed for *Kiddush* or the amount of matzah consumed on Passover be considerably greater than was previously assumed to be the case.<sup>53</sup> However, the Hazon Ish himself says that this ruling cuts both ways and that he would rely on his view concerning measurements to issue a decision permitting a woman to remarry in a case of doubt (*le-hatir eyshet ish*).<sup>54</sup> But what is important is not whether the Hazon Ish was a *maḥmir* or *meiqil* in this or that halakhic ruling, or even whether in terms of the totality of his halakhic rulings he could be described as a *maḥmir* or a *meiqil*. What is important is that his fundamental world-view involves an ethos of *humrah*. According to this view, one should not seek out *qulot*, leniencies, for it is precisely the DIFFICULTY involved in fulfilling the precise requirements of the Halakhah that enables one to break one's evil character traits.<sup>55</sup> At the same time, we must add, the Hazon Ish would

<sup>52</sup> See Finkelman, *The Chazon Ish*, 104; Shila Raphael, "On the Image of the Gaon R. Shlomo Yosef Zevin," (in Hebrew), *Sinai* 82/1-2 (1977): 4. It should be noted, however, that the well-known *qulot* of the Hazon Ish with reference to the issues of the Sabbatical year (*Qoveš iggerot* 3:108–10 [letter 84]), milking on the Sabbath (*ibid.*, 111f. [letter 86]), and Yom Kippur in Japan (*ibid.*, 2:114 [letter 167]) are all examples of particular, limited, lenient rulings that only slightly offset his fundamentally stringent rulings on these issues.

<sup>53</sup> See Menachem Friedman, "Life Tradition and Book Tradition in the Development of Ultra-Orthodox Judaism," in *Judaism Viewed from Within and from Without*, ed. Harvey Goldberg (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), 237f., 251f. *Idem*, "The Lost *Kiddush* Cup" (this volume).

<sup>54</sup> *Qoveš iggerot* 1:175 (Letter 194). My contention, however, needs to be qualified. While the ruling of the Hazon Ish on the issue of *shi'urim* involves both halakhic leniency as well as stringency, certainly the ACCEPTANCE of his ruling "by almost all of the Haredi community in a relatively short time," as that ruling affects the consumption of wine for *Kiddush* or the consumption of matzah on Passover, is, as Friedman, "Life Tradition," 235–38, correctly argues, an example of that community's movement in the direction of greater stringency. It is also an instance, as Friedman notes, of the triumph of the "book tradition" over the "life tradition" in ultra-Orthodox Judaism. On this last point, see section IV below.

<sup>55</sup> A convenient collection of passages from the Hazon Ish on the importance and vital necessity of *dikduk ha-din* may be found in *Orhot Ish*, 105–13. (For examples of the Hazon Ish's own personal, exceptionally stringent behavior in halakhic matters, see Finkelman, *The Chazon Ish*, 166–72, though, of course, one should not confuse the PRIVATE adoption of personal stringencies with stringency in one's PUBLIC function as

be opposed to seeking out artificial or unnecessary *humrot*.<sup>56</sup> For him, simply observing in a proper fashion the multitude of commandments set forth by the Halakhah in all their fine details and particulars is difficult enough.

In this respect, it is instructive to contrast the view of the Hazon Ish with that of the leading rabbinic decisor (*poseq*) of our generation, the late R. Moshe Feinstein. Rav Moshe was often wont to say that the trouble with Judaism started with the popular saying, “*Siz shver tsu zayn a yid*” (It is difficult to be a Jew). Rather, people ought to say, “It is wonderful to be a Jew.” For the Hazon Ish, however, the whole point of the Halakhah is that it is “*shver tsu zayn a yid*,” it is difficult to be a Jew; and precisely because it is difficult to be a Jew, it is also wonderful to be a Jew.

In sum, we are arguing that the Hazon Ish’s critiques of both the analytic method of Talmudic scholarship and the Musar ideology stem from the same source. For him, to reiterate, the proponents of both the analytic method and the Musar ideology in their praiseworthy efforts to bolster tradition and combat the attractions of modernity tacitly conceded too much to modernity by allowing too great a role for human self-assertion and human autonomy, even within a strictly traditional framework, and by not sufficiently insisting on the absolute submission of the individual to the authority of the tradition in the realm of both study and practice.<sup>57</sup>

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a *poseq*.) It would be worthwhile to establish a typology of the different ethoi of *humrah* found in the Jewish tradition. To limit ourselves to more recent times, we have the kabbalistic ethos of the Shelah, the pietistic ethos of the Ramhal, the psychological ethos of the Hazon Ish, and the more purely halakhic ethos of the contemporary rabbinic scholar, Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch. For some very preliminary but nonetheless suggestive remarks on this matter, see David Horowitz, “R. Moshe Sternbuch’s Halakhic Novellae,” *Tradition* 20/3 (1982): 265–72.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, *Qoveš iggerot*, 2:130 (letter 149), 3:161 (letter 149), 3:169 (letter 155); and Finkelman, *The Chazon Ish*, 171.

<sup>57</sup> One may ask why the Hazon Ish was not more explicit in his criticisms of the analytic method of *lomdut* and the Musar ideology and his ideological basis for those criticisms, and why we have had to tease these views of his from his writings. I would suggest that the Hazon Ish felt very strongly that the Lithuanian yeshivas of his day were the last bulwarks of a tradition under siege, and that the analytic method and Musar ideology were the foundation stones of these yeshivas. One would have to be very careful and circumspect, then, in leveling any critique, lest by overly sharp and explicit remarks about the analytic method or about Musar one would somehow inadvertently weaken these yeshivas and thereby the tradition as a whole. It is striking that when an acquaintance of the Hazon Ish publicly retailed certain criticisms that the Hazon Ish had leveled in private against the Musar movement, the Hazon Ish wrote him a strong letter of rebuke (see *Qoveš iggerot*, 1:152f. [letter 154]). In this letter, written in 1939, the Hazon Ish does not deny that he made

His own method of talmudic study and his own counter-Musar were designed to provide and ensure that requisite degree of submission. In this respect, the ideology of the Hazon Ish must be seen as the Lithuanian Mitnagedic counterpart of similar ideologies of religious submission and heteronomy that were flourishing at that time in the Hasidic world of east European Orthodoxy.<sup>58</sup>

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the critical remarks ascribed to him, but argues that his comments would, in the course of being spread about in public, be distorted, blown out of proportion, and thereby give rise to dissension and discord. In the letter he also refers to a period in his life during World War I when he spent much time with both R. Nosson Ševi Finkel, the *Alter* of Slobodka, and R. Yeruham Levovitz, the *Alter* of Mir, and their disciples, as well as with leading representatives of the Novaredok school of Musar. He states: “A boundless love always existed between us, and they were completely devoted to me. Never would I refrain from [leveling] a sharp critique [of the various Musar ideologies]. And they delighted in this (for true scholars delight more in attempted refutations of their views than they do in support being adduced in favor of their positions) and I would delight in them.” An oft-told story about the Hazon Ish relates that he once attended a Musar discourse of the *Alter* of Slobodka. At the discourse’s conclusion, the *Alter* approached the Hazon Ish and queried, “What is my friend doing here? I thought he was opposed to the Musar doctrine?” The Hazon Ish replied, “True, but I am even more opposed to your opponents!”

Perhaps it was this felt need on the part of the Hazon Ish for a circumspect critique of the analytic method and the Musar ideology that was responsible for his not publishing his critical glosses on *Hiddushei Rabbenu Hayyim* and his work of counter-Musar, *Emunah u-bitahon*, during his lifetime. For the former work makes quite clear his profound disagreement with the analytic method, while the latter is quite openly and forcefully critical about the Musar ideology. The Hazon Ish thus may have felt ambivalent about “going public” with such relatively unambiguous criticisms and therefore allowed these works to remain in manuscript. I have been told that when *Emunah u-bitahon* appeared posthumously, the well-known Musar exponent R. Yehezkel Lewenstein delivered a very forceful address taking sharp issue with the views of the Hazon Ish as expressed therein and defending Musar against his criticisms. Certainly, then, the Musar exponents grasped full well the thrust of the book’s argument and against whom it was directed.

<sup>58</sup> See Mendel Piekarz’s important monograph, *Hasidut Polin: Megammat Ra’ayoniyot beyn Shtetl ha-Milhamot u-bi-Gezerot 1940-1945 (“Ha-Shoah”)* (Ideological Trends of Hasidism in Poland During the Interwar Period and the Holocaust) (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1990), chapters 3 and 4. We would suggest that the Hazon Ish himself, however, saw both his method of Talmud study and his view of the proper relationship between Torah study and Musar as a return to the approaches taken by the Gaon of Vilna and his disciple, R. Hayyim Volozhin; i.e., he saw himself as an upholder of the TRUE Lithuanian Mitnagedic tradition. I have already indicated in note 33 that the similarity between the Hazon Ish’s method of Talmud study and that of the Gaon has often been remarked upon. Moreover, the Hazon Ish bases his view of *hiddush* on a statement of R. Hayyim Volozhin (see note 29 above). That there may be similarities between the Hazon Ish’s views concerning the proper

The above completes our presentation of the Hazon Ish as a critic of traditional Orthodoxy, particularly Lithuanian Mitnaggedism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in the name of his own ethos of submission. In this section, I show how this ethos of submission is a fundamental and central element of the religious world-view of the Hazon Ish, how it keeps reappearing in his writings and determines his stance on a wide variety of issues. I limit myself to the Hazon Ish's views regarding two basic issues, but could easily multiply examples.<sup>59</sup>

First, the Hazon Ish sharply opposed the enactment of any new *taqqanot* (rabbinic ordinances) by the rabbinic authorities of his day. In 1943, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, as part of a series of *taqqanot* on matters of family law, proposed to issue a *taqqanah* modifying the existing Jewish law of inheritance by allowing daughters to inherit along with

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relationship of Musar and Torah study and those of the Gaon and R. Hayyim of Volozhin has not to my knowledge ever been suggested, but a very preliminary and tentative study does point in that direction. The matter requires and deserves further investigation. In any event, it is ironic and revealing that the great upholder of the Mitnaggedic tradition found himself, in the last years of his life, playing, perhaps against his will, the role of a Mitnaggedic Rebbe!

<sup>59</sup> Other issues which ought to be discussed in this connection are the Hazon Ish's attitude toward the Rishonim; his prohibition of the zebu, an animal which appears to have the distinguishing characteristics of kosher animals but which lacks a tradition testifying to its kosher status; his views regarding textual criticism and the use of manuscripts; and his stance on *Da'at Torah*. On the issue of the Hazon Ish's attitude toward *Rishonim*, see the sources collected in *Orhot Ish*, 212–17. But see *Qoveš iggerot*, 3:50f. (letter 22). Cf., as well, Zevin, *Ishim ve-Shi'ot*, 318f. On his prohibition of the Zebu, see *Qoveš iggerot*, 1:115f. (letter 99), 2:87f. (letter 83), and 3:134–37 (letter 113) [= Rabbi Isaac Herzog, *Pesakim u-Ketavim*, Vol. 4 (Jerusalem: Mossad ha-Rav Kook, 1990), 68f.]. For different halakhic perspectives, see R. Isaac Herzog, 59–66; and Rabbi Moses Tendler, *Chavrusa* (March 1985), 3. For a discussion of the Hazon Ish's views on textual criticism and the use of manuscripts, see Zvi Yehuda, "The Hazon Ish on Textual Criticism and Halakhah," *Tradition*, 18/2 (1980): 172–80; Shnayer Z. Leiman, "The Hazon Ish on Textual Criticism and Halakhah: A Rejoinder," *Tradition*, 19/4 (1981): 301–10; and Daniel Sperber, "On the Legitimacy, or Indeed Necessity, of Scientific Disciplines for True 'Learning' of Talmud," paper delivered at the Fourth Conference of the Orthodox Forum of Yeshiva University, November, 1991. Finally, for an analysis of the Hazon Ish's stance on *Da'at Torah*, see my article "Daas Torah: A Modern Conception of Rabbinic Authority," which will appear in a volume of essays on rabbinic authority, edited by Moshe Sokol, to be published by Yeshiva University.

sons.<sup>60</sup> When the Hazon Ish heard of this proposal, he wrote a very strong letter to R. Iser Zalman Melşer condemning the idea. He viewed this proposal as a sign of weakness of faith—more significantly, as a craven type of apologetic stemming from the deep inferiority feelings of the middling believer in the presence of the unbeliever.

And those in our generation who are weak [of faith] capitulate to the heretics and take pleasure in the heretic's approval [of him] by displaying weakness of faith [so that the heretic will think] that he is not a fanatic and is not an unworldly idler, but knows that it is necessary to forgo prohibitions in vital matters and to find permissive rulings [*heterim*] when called for by contemporary life. But the heretic rejoices in his victory and in his heart has but contempt for this counterfeit believer. . . . To our consternation, hearts have been stopped up and instead of displaying strength and fortitude of spirit by firmly maintaining the certain belief that the judgment belongs to God and that we have received [the Halakhah] thus from God, the Master of all, Lord of the earth, there are those of base thought who seek devices to prostrate themselves before heresy and to keep the law in the *Hoshen Mishpat* [on the books], but in practice to conduct themselves like the nations of the world, [to the effect] that the daughter will inherit like the son. They thereby give praise to our enemies [by, in effect, conceding] that indeed the law of inheritance in the Torah does not accord [with the status] of an enlightened people, and this constitutes complete agreement with the abomination of heresy. Woe unto the ears which hear thus!<sup>61</sup>

Of course, the Hazon Ish was criticizing here a controversial *taqqanah*, one which certainly modified the already existing Halakhah in a significant way. But in this letter he goes further and denies the power of the rabbis of his day to issue any type of *taqqanah* at all.

And have we not heard from our masters that we are an orphaned generation and are not worthy of enacting any ordinances at all? For [the power to enact ordinances] requires greatness in Torah to an extraordinary degree. We, however, have descended wondrously, and are like laypersons [*hedyotim*]. How then can we be so brazen [*na'iz paneynu*] and obstinate as to claim that we are sages and have the power to declare money ownerless and enact permanent ordinances?<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> On these *taqqanot* of the Chief Rabbinate, see Menahem Elon, *Ha-Mishpat ha-Ivri*, (Hebrew law) (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1973), 2:661–75.

<sup>61</sup> *Qoveš iggerot*, 1:111f. (letter 96).

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

It is this sense of the unworthiness of his generation and of its rabbinic leaders and of their consequent lack of ability to legislate in any way at all that was behind the Hazon Ish's famed opposition to a proposed rabbinic *taqqanah* establishing a fast day in memory of the victims of the Holocaust.<sup>63</sup> When this proposal was put forward, the Hazon Ish set forth his objections to it in a letter that clearly calls to mind his just-cited letter to Rav Isser Zalman.

Establishing a fast for all generations is in the category of a rabbinic commandment—all existing fasts are from the times of the prophets. Dare we, a generation that had best be silent, be so brazen [*na'iz paneynu*] as to even think of establishing matters for generations? This proposal bears witness to a denial on our part of all our sins and our lowly state, at a time when we are mired in our transgressions and iniquities, impoverished and bereft of Torah and *mišvot*. Let us not seek that which is too great for us. Let us examine our paths and repent. This is our obligation, as it is said, "Is this not the fast I desire?" (Isa 58:6).<sup>64</sup>

In response to an argument that the great seventeenth-century rabbinic scholar and decisor the Taz had established the 20th of Sivan as a fast day in commemoration of the Chmielnicki massacres of 1648–1649, the Hazon Ish is reported to have offered two replies: first, this was not a permanent ordinance, and it was, for that reason, not recorded in the Taz's commentary on the *Shulhan Arukh*; and second, the spiritual level of the present generation and its leaders is not as great as that of the Taz and his generation. The Hazon Ish added, "For all we know, succeeding generations may be superior to our own—who are we to establish new ordinances for them?"<sup>65</sup>

Here we arrive at the heart of the Hazon Ish's position. Scholars have noted that the doctrine of "the decline of the generations" (*nitqaṭnu ha-dorot*) has served in traditional Jewish circles as a barrier against halakhic

<sup>63</sup> For a discussion of the Hazon Ish's view as well as the views of others on this question, see Joel Wolowelsky, "Observing Yom Ha-Shoa'," *Tradition* 24/4 (1988): 46-58; Nathanel Helfgot, Letter to the Editor, together with Wolowelsky's comment, *Tradition* 25/2 (1990): 109f.

<sup>64</sup> *Qoveš iggerot*, 1:113f. (letter 97).

<sup>65</sup> Finkelman, *The Chazon Ish*, 174. See, however, Taz, *Orah Hayyim* 516:3. (I am indebted for this reference to Rabbi J. J. Schacter who is currently preparing a major study on the fast of the twentieth of Sivan.) That the Hazon Ish seemed to be unaware of this comment of the Taz is surprising, but as he himself stated once, "it is humanly impossible for anyone nowadays to master completely (*la-da'at al buryan*) all four parts of the *Shulhan Arukh*." See *Qoveš iggerot*, 3:76 (letter 53).

change.<sup>66</sup> But such a doctrine serves only as a barrier against the type of halakhic change which modifies already existing Jewish law, such as the *taqqanah* concerning the inheritance of daughters. For who are we to modify, even through halakhic means, the practices of previous generations that were greater than ours? At the same time, however, this doctrine WOULD allow for such halakhic change as instituting new *taqqanot* which ordain practices arising out of and responding to entirely new situations, such as ordaining a fast in commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust. For the doctrine of the decline of generations implies that if the present generation is inferior to all previous generations, it is superior to all future generations! Therefore, as long as the present generation would not be enacting a *taqqanah* modifying the practice of previous generations, it COULD legislate for all future generations. For the Hazon Ish, however, the course of Jewish history is like a V and the present generation is at the bottommost point, inferior to BOTH past and future generations. It can, therefore, neither modify past practice nor determine future practice. The sole task of the present generation, thus, in his view, is to receive the tradition in its totality from the previous generation, to study it and obey it, to submit to its authority, and to hand on that tradition, unchanged, intact, to the next generation.

This leads us to the second issue. I just stated that for the Hazon Ish the task of the present generation is to submit to the authority of the tradition IN ITS TOTALITY. But for him that totality includes not only the realm of Halakhah but that of aggadah as well. Thus, in a famous letter replying to a correspondent who was apparently critical of certain aggadic statements of the sages, the Hazon Ish begins by saying that it is our obligation to keep far away from speculation [*mehqar*], goes on to say that he just wishes to be a "simple Jew" who is concerned with the "what," not the "why" of Judaism, and climaxes his letter with the remarkable statement: "We recoil upon hearing the casting of doubt on any statement of Hazal, whether Halakhah or aggadah, and view [such critical remarks] as constituting blasphemy, heaven forbid."<sup>67</sup>

<sup>66</sup> For a discussion of some of the sources regarding *nitqaṭnu ha-dorot*, as well as sources expressing contrary tendencies in the Jewish tradition (e.g., "on the shoulders of giants," *halakhah ke-batrai*, etc.), see Norman Lamm, *Torah u-maddah* (Torah u-Maddah: The Encounter of Religious Learning and Worldly Knowledge in the Jewish Tradition), (New York: Jason Aronson, Inc., 1990), 48, 73, 86-103, 106-109. See, particularly, notes 15, 39, 41, and 47 (106-108) for bibliographic references and documentation.

<sup>67</sup> *Qoveš iggerot*, 1:42f. (letter 15). Cf. 3:43 (letter 14), where the Hazon Ish's insistence that all *aggadot* in the Talmud are authoritative results in a rather forced inter-

This insistence on submitting to the authority of the sages in all realms also accounts for the thrust of the fifth—and last complete—chapter of *Emunah u-bitahon*.<sup>68</sup> This chapter bears the title “Imagination and Intellect.” But its true subject is the greatness of previous generations in the realm of theoretical scientific knowledge, indeed, their superiority in that realm to the present generation, though the present generation may surpass previous generations in the sphere of technology. Of course, the point of this chapter is to defend the truth and accuracy of scientific statements of Hazal and the Rishonim. The present generation must not delude itself into imagining that by virtue of its great technological achievements, it surpasses the wisdom of previous generations. Rather, once again, its task is both to acknowledge and to submit to the wisdom and authority of the tradition as handed down to us by previous generations, in the realm of science as well as in all other realms.<sup>69</sup>

In his insistence, then, on the acceptance and submission to the authority of the tradition in its totality, the Hazon Ish makes no concession to modernity at all. Perhaps here we arrive at the critical dividing point between the fundamental stance of the Hazon Ish and that of the previous east European traditional rabbinic scholars whose views he crit-

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pretation on his part of a statement of the Rashba. Contrast this view of the Hazon Ish with the views on aggadah of R. David Ševi Hoffman in his Introduction to his commentary on *Va-Yiqra* and R. Samson Raphael Hirsch in his two Hebrew letters to R. Hille Wechsler, published by Mordecai Breuer in *Ha-Ma'ayan* (Tevet 5736) and translated into English by Joseph Munk in *L'Eylah* no. 27 (Pesach 5749): 30-35. The attempt on the part of R. Yosef Avraham Wolf, the well-known head of the Beth Jacob movement in *Ereš Yisra'el* and confidant of the Hazon Ish, to reconcile the view of the Hazon Ish with that of R. Hoffman—R. Wolf was unaware of the two then unpublished letters of R. Hirsch—in his essay, “Shiluv Emunat Torah she-be-‘al peh be-Hora’ah” in *Ha-Tekufah u-Ba‘ayotehah* (Bnei Brak: Y. A. Wolf, 1981), 125f., is exceptionally strained and singularly unconvincing, as, indeed, is R. Wolf’s entire valiant but quixotic and ultimately misguided attempt to harmonize the Haredi ideology of the Hazon Ish with the *Torah im derekh ereš* ideology of Rabbis Hirsch, Hoffman, and Yehiel Ya‘akov Weinberg. There really are limits as to how far one can go in attempting to square the circle!

<sup>68</sup> pp. 60-67.

<sup>69</sup> In this connection, see as well *Qoveš iggerot*, 2:37f. (letter 24). For a full discussion of this letter and its background, see, *Orhot Ish*, 186f., n. 2. Contrast Norman Lamm, *Torah u-maddah*, 93f. For a very strong statement of the Hazon Ish forbidding the questioning of the historical accuracy of the rabbinic tradition regarding Second Temple chronology, see *Qoveš iggerot*, 1:182 (letter 206). It must in all candor be said that the argument set forth in this letter does not really come to grips with the seriousness of the issue and appears to be an intellectual dodge that is difficult to take seriously.

icized. These scholars, though they resisted the temptations of modernity, though they were acutely aware of its dangers, nevertheless felt its pull, sensed its attractions. They may, therefore, have believed that precisely in order to better combat modernity it was necessary to incorporate some of its external forms or internal values within the framework of tradition. For the Hazon Ish, however, the modern world HELD NO ATTRACTION AT ALL.

In the fall of 1952, a famous meeting took place between Ben-Gurion and the Hazon Ish, at the latter’s modest house in Bnei Brak, regarding the issue of *sheirut le’ummi*, compulsory national service for women. Ben-Gurion asked the Hazon Ish how, in his view, religious and secular Jews could live together in harmony. The Hazon Ish replied:

The Talmud states:<sup>70</sup> Two ships are traveling down a river; one is laden, the other is empty, and they meet—if they attempt to pass one another both will sink: the empty ship must back up and allow the laden ship to pass. The ship of the religious Jews, of *Yisra’el Sabba*, which is laden with thousands of years of sanctification of the divine Name, of devotion for the sake of Torah, has encountered in the narrow straits of our era the empty ship of the secularists. There can be no compromise. There can be no harmony. The collision between the ships is inevitable. Therefore, whose ship ought to back up before whose? Should it not be your empty ship before our laden one?<sup>71</sup>

Ben-Gurion, of course, heatedly protested that the ship of the secularists was by no means empty. Be that as it may, the Hazon Ish’s exceptionally sharp and uncompromising comment during this very charged and highly symbolic encounter perfectly encapsulates his perception of the modern world as a whole: an empty ship.

#### IV

The tradition, the authority of which the Hazon Ish, as we have seen, accepted in its entirety was not so much the living tradition of east European Jewry, but the tradition as found in the classic texts of halakhic Judaism, in the teachings and rulings of its great scholars and decisors. It

<sup>70</sup> *Sanh.* 32b.

<sup>71</sup> The story of this meeting between Ben-Gurion and the Hazon Ish has often been retold. My own reconstruction of their conversation is based on Finkelman, *The Chazon Ish*, 238f. and the novel of Haim Be’er, *‘Et ha-Zamir* (The Time of Trimming) (Tel Aviv: Am oved, 1987), 44-46.

was not so much the tradition of the community as it was the tradition as reconstructed by the Ḥazon Ish himself by virtue of his prodigious intellectual powers, of his complete mastery of the totality of rabbinic learning. It follows that though the Ḥazon Ish was opposed to formal halakhic innovation, he was one of the great halakhic innovators of our century; if not through legislation, then through interpretation, or, to be more precise, through a willingness to draw the appropriate halakhic conclusions from his theoretical study and to put these conclusions into practice. In this respect as well, the approach of the Ḥazon Ish, as Professor Menahem Friedman has correctly argued, constitutes a break with that of the traditional world of east European Orthodoxy where the role of the living tradition was so central.<sup>72</sup>

It should be noted that the Ḥazon Ish functioned neither within the framework of that traditional world nor, for that matter, within the framework of the traditional world of the land of Israel of his day. As we indicated earlier, he never served as either a Rav or rosh yeshivah, nor was he ever a member of any rabbinic or communal organization. While he was still in Europe he remained a completely private individual. He spent all his time immersed in study and writing. Although he was a confidant of Rav Ḥayyim Ozer Grodzinski, the great Rav of Vilna, and advised him about a number of matters, the Ḥazon Ish himself never spoke out publicly or took a stand on communal matters or halakhic issues of general concern. People heard about this mysterious figure, a great rabbinic scholar who spent day and night absorbed in learning, but he had no public profile or persona.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> This is the thrust of Friedman "Life Tradition." For a contemporary example of a halakhic figure who openly proclaims the superiority of the "book tradition" over the "life tradition" in Judaism, see the multivolume, *Mo'adim u-Zemanim ha-Shalem* of Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch (Jerusalem: n.p., 1968), in particular the preface to volume 3. In this preface, Rabbi Sternbuch suggests that while the "life tradition" may suffice for the common folk, certainly Torah scholars and *benei torah* ought to conduct themselves solely according to the "book tradition." (Rabbi Sternbuch, of course, does not use those terms.) For a preliminary analysis of the ideology and methodology underlying Rabbi Sternbuch's work, see Horowitz, "Sternbuch's Halakhic Novellae."

<sup>73</sup> See Beruriah David's memoir of her father, R. Yizhak Hutner, in *Sefer ha-zikaron le-Maran Ba'al ha-Pahad Yizhak* (Memorial Volume for R. Yizhak Hutner), (Jerusalem: Gur Aryeh, 1984), 36. Professor Isadore Twersky once commented to me that Chaim Grade's portrait of the Ḥazon Ish in *The Yeshiva* is extraordinarily accurate in all respects except one: Grade, Professor Twersky claimed, exaggerated the prominence of the Ḥazon Ish while still in Europe.

In 1933, the Ḥazon Ish left Vilna for the land of Israel. When he arrived there he did not settle, as might have been expected, in Jerusalem, but rather in the newly formed religious community of Bnei Brak. Why the Ḥazon Ish did not settle in Jerusalem remains something of a mystery. But perhaps one reason for his decision was precisely a desire on his part to function outside an already existing communal framework, a wish to help fashion and shape a new framework.

Soon after the Ḥazon Ish arrived in the land of Israel, he began to speak out forcefully and issue definitive rulings concerning the burning halakhic issues of the day: the proper mode of observance of the Jewish agriculture laws in general (*mišvot ha-teluyot ba-<sup>2</sup>areš*) and the Sabbatical year in particular; the problem of milking on the Sabbath; the determination of the international date line; and, later on, the general question of what ought to be the Ḥaredi attitude to the newly established state of Israel and such related matters as *ḥinukh 'ašma'i*, *sheirut le'ummi*, and others. As I pointed out earlier, the Ḥazon Ish became accepted by the Ḥaredi community solely by virtue of his personal standing, his charisma, his *da'at Torah*. It was a community that he was fashioning and shaping through his rulings, through his teachings, through his unofficial but very real leadership; and despite—perhaps because of—his lack of any official standing, the community looked to him for guidance and direction. His word, then, for that community, was binding and final.

With the end of the Second World War and the destruction of the great Jewish communities of eastern Europe and the living tradition they embodied, the authoritative position of the Ḥazon Ish and the reconstructed halakhic tradition he embodied became even more dominant and even more central within the world of traditional Orthodoxy. A striking symbol of this entire historical process may be found in the passing of the mantle of leadership of the traditional Orthodox Jewish community from Rav Ḥayyim Ozer before the war to the Ḥazon Ish after the war. Rav Ḥayyim Ozer, of course, was a great Talmudic scholar, but, even more, he was preeminently the communal Rav of the great city of Vilna. His standing thus reflected the traditional role of the communal Rav as leader of the Jewish community. To put the matter another way, it was Rav Ḥayyim Ozer's personal charisma and learning, FILTERED THROUGH AND MEDIATED BY his position of communal Rav, that was the source of his great authority. The Ḥazon Ish neither needed nor desired such a filter. His own authority was purely personal, was entirely individual.

In this respect, it is instructive to contrast the Ḥazon Ish not only with his predecessor, Rav Ḥayyim Ozer, but also with a great luminary of an earlier generation to whom he has often been compared—and with much justice—the Gaon of Vilna. Both the Ḥazon Ish and the Gaon of Vilna were private individuals. Neither served as Rav or rosh yeshiva. Both derived their immense authority from their unparalleled Torah learning and—in both cases—unique charisma. But in the time of the Gaon of Vilna, the traditional communal structures were still in place. Therefore, when the challenge of Hasidism arose, the Gaon, working in tandem with the community's lay leaders, lent his immense prestige to the COMMUNAL ban issued against the Hasidim by those lay leaders, acting in their capacity as representatives of the community of Vilna.<sup>74</sup> By contrast, when the Ḥazon Ish spoke out on the issue of *sheirut le'ummi*, he expressed his opposition purely on the basis of his own authority, presenting his view as *da'at Torah*.<sup>75</sup> He was the community.

And yet, and here we come to the final twist of the argument, despite the Ḥazon Ish's immense role in forming and shaping the ethos of the Ḥaredi community,<sup>76</sup> in a certain respect he was a failure. Certainly the full dimensions and implications of the Ḥazon Ish's critique of the traditional world of Lithuanian Mitnaggedism were never really absorbed, much less acted on, by the Ḥaredi community. Despite his criticisms of the analytic method of talmudic scholarship, it is that method which is prevalent in the Ḥaredi yeshivas today, and which was and continues to be espoused by his closest disciples, the late R. Yaakov Kanievsky and the venerable Rabbinic sage R. Eliezer Schach. And despite his criticisms of Lithuanian Musar, the Musar approach, in a rather attenuated form to be sure, is still a force in those yeshivas. Moreover, no individual has

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<sup>74</sup> See S. Dubnow, *Toledot he-Hasidut* (History of Hasidism) (Tel-Aviv: Debir, 1967), 114–17. One ban was signed by the Gaon himself, by the Rav of Vilna, Rav Samuel, and by the *dayyanim*; another ban was signed by Rav Samuel, the *dayyanim*, and the *parnasim*. An examination of the various bans and proclamations against the Hasidim will easily reveal the preeminent role played in the entire episode by the lay leaders of the various communities.

<sup>75</sup> *Qoveš iggerot*, 1:122–126 (letters 111–113); cf. the public announcement of the *da'at Torah* of the Ḥazon Ish on *sheirut le'ummi* in Finkelman, *The Chazon Ish*, 252.

<sup>76</sup> As a striking example of the Ḥazon Ish's deep influence on the Ḥaredi community, we may note that it was he who was the first to enunciate the view which "singles out Zionism explicitly as bearing direct responsibility for the Holocaust," a view which has since acquired the status of almost official dogma in the Ḥaredi community. See Menachem Friedman, "The Ḥaredim and The Holocaust," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, 53 (Winter 1990): 107.

succeeded in achieving the halakhic position and authority of the Ḥazon Ish by virtue of a purely personal charisma. The notion of *da'at Torah* has become almost entirely institutionalized.

Perhaps the vision of the Ḥazon Ish was too austere, his demands too uncompromising. He was calling for a type of self-renunciation of which, paradoxically, only he, with his great intellectual powers and deep piety, with his unyielding extremism, complete commitment and—yes—genuine saintliness, was capable. The ethos of submission is still alive and well and flourishing within the world of traditional Orthodoxy. But, at the same time, the need for self-assertion and some measure of personal autonomy has proved too strong. We cannot all be saints. Most of us, even the great rabbinic scholars among us, occasionally need a weekend at the beach.