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***Yokhed ve-tsiber: Individual Expression and Communal Responsibility in a Yiddish Droshe* by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik**

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Yokhed ve-tsiber: Individual Expression and Communal Responsibility
in a Yiddish *Droshe* by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*

Ariel Evan Mayse

For Menachem L.
My teacher, my friend

A thread of *hasidut* is buried deep within me,
-- Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, 1955¹

I. Introduction

The legacy of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (1903-1993) casts a long shadow over twentieth-century Jewish thought.² Known simply as “the Rav” in many Orthodox circles, Soloveitchik was an important figure in the shaping of American Orthodoxy.³ He was born in 1903 into a family of rabbinic elites in Pruzhany (now, Belarus) that developed an innovative and highly conceptual approach to Talmudic scholarship.⁴ Soloveitchik was educated privately and steeped in the world of rabbinic study, but his intellectual quest led him beyond the rabbinate of Eastern Europe. He studied philosophy in Berlin, writing his doctorate on the philosophy of Hermann Cohen (1842-1918), and shortly thereafter he moved to Boston. Soloveitchik then began lecturing at Yeshiva University in New York in 1941, where he taught and ordained thousands of students across the decades.

¹I wish to thank Marc Caplan, Sunny Yudkoff, Saul Noam Zaritt, and Arthur Green, together with the anonymous reader, for providing critical feedback and insightful comments.

Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Community, Covenant and Commitment: Selected Letters and Communications*, ed. Nathaniel Helfgot (Jersey City: KTAV Publishing House, 2005), 291.

² See Avinoam Rosenak and Naftali Rotenberg, ed., *Rabbi in the New World: The Influence of Rabbi J. B. Soloveitchik on Culture, Education and Jewish Thought* (Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute, 2010) [Hebrew]; *Sefer Yovel Likhvod Morenu ha-Gaon Rabbi Yosef Dov ha-Levi Soloveitchik* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook; New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1984), 2 vols.; and Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Hoboken, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1999), 2 vols.

³ See Adam S. Ferziger, *Beyond Sectarianism: The Realignment of American Orthodox Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 118-135. Soloveitchik’s intellectual and social influence extended to Israel through his writings and through students like Aharon Lichtenstein (also his son-in-law), David Hartman and Shlomo Riskin. See David Hartman, *Love and Terror in the God Encounter: The Theological Legacy of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Volume 1* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004); and Shimon Gershon Rosenberg, *Faith Shattered and Restored: Judaism in the Postmodern Age*, ed. Zohar Maor (Maggid Books, 2017), esp. 152-172.

⁴ See Yosef Blau, ed., *Lomdut: The Conceptual Approach to Jewish Learning* (New York: The Michael Scharf Publication Trust of the Yeshiva University Press, 2006); and Norman Solomon, *The Analytic Movement: Hayyim Soloveitchik and His Circle* (Atlanta: University of South Florida Press, 1993).

Soloveitchik is remembered as a scholar, a teacher, and a theological presence—an idealized role model as much as a practical influence. His disciples and interpreters characterize his intellectual project in a striking variety of ways.⁵ To some, Soloveitchik was a fiercely Orthodox leader who fought against secularization and reform. For others, he represents a modern intellectual whose religious works are saturated with philosophical creativity. All of these characterizations of Soloveitchik’s life and project are at least partly correct. These conflicts were aspects of his persona that he himself cultivated. Soloveitchik saw himself as the last exponent of his way of life, a lone figure in a rabbinic tradition whose vision of the past was riven with anxiety, tension and discontinuity.⁶

The present essay explores a critical dialectic in Soloveitchik’s work that offers a conceptual window into the author’s fragmented and multi-layered thought: the tension between individual autonomy and communal responsibility. This theme appears frequently in Soloveitchik’s writings, but it is the central concern of a little-studied essay called “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*” (“The Individual and the Collective”). The undated work was delivered as a *droshe* (sermon) on his father’s *yortsayt* (the anniversary of his death), probably at some point in the 1950s.⁷ Unlike many other Yiddish homilies and lectures, which were translated, edited, and published in Hebrew—sometimes by Soloveitchik himself—this particular work was preserved in Yiddish and first published in a recent volume of Soloveitchik’s Yiddish writings called *Droshe un ksovim*.⁸

The *droshe* pivots upon what Soloveitchik describes as a perennial tension between the private, inner life of the individual and his place within the broader community. Soloveitchik’s work is grounded in the idiom of rabbinic *halakhah*, and the title immediately frames the question in terms of the classical distinction between communal obligations (*khoves hatsiber*) and private religious duties (*khoves hayokhed*). Soloveitchik later links these to *reshus horabim* and *reshus hayokhed*, concepts in rabbinic discourse regarding public and private space. His reading of the dialectic between *yokhed* and *tsiber*, however, is deeply rooted in modern political and existential dilemmas.⁹

Must an individual compromise his intellectual and spiritual uniqueness in order to become a full member of a public society? And how, if at all, may the private person

⁵ For an overview, see Lawrence Kaplan, “Revisionism and the Rav: The Struggle for the Soul of Modern Orthodoxy,” *Judaism* 48.3 (1999): 290-311; Shaul Magid, “‘And They Created Him in Their Image’: David Hartman’s Soloveitchik and the Battle for a Teachers Legacy,” *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* 21.2 (2003): 134-139. In this way, Soloveitchik’s image is not unlike that of the famed Vilna Gaon. See Eliyahu Stern, *The Genius: Elijah of Vilna and the Making of Modern Judaism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013), esp. 1-12.

⁶ William Kolbrener, *The Last Rabbi: Joseph Soloveitchik and Talmudic Tradition* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 1-13.

⁷ On these lectures, see Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav*, vol. 1, 57-58.

⁸ Joseph B Soloveitchik, *Yiddish Drashos and Writings (Drashos un Ksovim)*, ed. by David E. Fishman (Jersey City: Ktav Publishing House, 2009).

⁹ See, in particular, Leora Batnitzky, *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), esp. 4; and Tyler Burge, “Individualism and Self-Knowledge,” *The Journal of Philosophy* 85.11 (1988): 649-663; David Sorkin, *The Transformation of German Jewry 1780-1840* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1999), esp. 17; Olga Litvak, *Haskalah: The Romantic Movement in Judaism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012), esp. 10-21.

balance the ideal of self-actualization through creativity and innovation with a commitment to the collective?¹⁰ Soloveitchik's essay investigates these questions, culminating in fierce critique of the apathetic and utilitarian approach to *yeshivah* education in modern American.

Close attention to Soloveitchik's *droshe* and its language reveals a mélange of textual and philosophical influences. The attempt to bring together a wide variety of sources—and languages—was a key part of Soloveitchik's rhetorical style, and this sermonic approach is particularly visible in his Yiddish homilies. The potential to blend different intellectual and linguistic currents is, of course, a characteristic shared by many languages—including Hebrew and English. But the feature of Yiddish often described as “component-consciousness” makes Soloveitchik's signature fusion of disparate philosophical, theological, and cultural threads immediately apparent in his Yiddish works.¹¹

The Yiddish writings in *Droshe un ksovim* represent an ideal case study for interrogating Soloveitchik's wider intellectual and religious commitments through the disparate components fused together in his language. Scholarship on Soloveitchik's teachings has tended to focus exclusively on his Hebrew or English works rather than his Yiddish writings. The present essay attempts to redress this glaring lacuna, tracing Soloveitchik's style and exploring the nuances of intellectual legacy through the lens of an important Yiddish homily.

II. *Yokhed ve-Tsiber*: Style and Language

Soloveitchik's Yiddish works are important because they capture a lesser-known period of his thought and intellectual development. In keeping with the traditions of the Brisk rabbinic dynasty to which he was the heir, Soloveitchik published few works during his lifetime. Little writing appeared in the two decades that followed a brief flurry of literary activity in the 1940s and early 1950s. Many of the previously unpublished homilies in *Droshe un ksovim* were written by Soloveitchik himself during this under-represented midpoint of his career.¹² This differentiates the Yiddish texts from many

¹⁰ For an insightful exploration of these themes in the writings of one of Soloveitchik's contemporaries, see Yaakov Elman, “Autonomy and Its Discontents: A Meditation on *Pahad Yitshak*,” *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* 47, no. 2 (2014): 7-40. See also Martin D. Yaffe, “Autonomy, Community, Authority: Hermann Cohen, Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss,” *Autonomy and Community: The Individual and the Community in Jewish Philosophical Thought*, ed. Daniel H. Frank (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 143-160.

¹¹ See Max Weinreich, *History of the Yiddish Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), vol. 2, 656-657; and Janet Hadda, “*Komponentn Visikayt* and the Complexities of Yiddish Translation,” *Judaism* 52,1-2 (2003): 85-94.

¹² See Fishman's description of these significant manuscripts as an unmediated window into the author's thought in Soloveitchik, *Droshe and Writings*, 13; and cf. Daniel Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts and Textual Theory: Methodologies of Textual Scholarship and Editorial Practice in the Study of Jewish Mysticism*, second revised edition (Jerusalem and Los Angeles: Magnes Press, Cherub Press, 2013), 7

other essays or lectures from these years that were reconstructed based on his students' notes.¹³

These homilies offer a remarkable lens into Soloveitchik's Yiddish style. Although the original oral sermon likely differed from the written versions, these textual artifacts bespeak the rich idiom of Soloveitchik's spoken homily.¹⁴ His choice to write these homilies in the original did not reflect a religious commitment to preserve the language.¹⁵ "I am not a Yiddishist," wrote Soloveitchik in a 1961 article, "who believes that the language alone stands for an absolute value."¹⁶ He argued that no language is essentially holy, though he emphasized that Yiddish has attained a certain degree of holiness its many centuries of use in sacred study.¹⁷ Yiddish remained Soloveitchik's primary language of instruction, however, for nearly thirty years after his arrival in America.¹⁸ He continued to deliver lectures in Yiddish into his later years, and, in some sense, Soloveitchik's fusion of sources was most readily expressed in his native tongue.¹⁹

Most important for the purposes of this essay, Soloveitchik's Yiddish reveals the complex of religious and cultural influences that infused the rabbi's theology. Soloveitchik's distinctively pluralistic language blends together echoes of Hasidism, German philosophy, modern romanticism, Lithuanian Talmudic law, and medieval Jewish thought.²⁰ This sort of conceptual and linguistic hybridity is neither unique to Soloveitchik

¹³ The volumes published in the "Me-Otzar hoRav" series (KTAV Publishing House), in which the *Drashos un Ksovim* appears, include compendia based on student's notes, unpublished manuscripts, and translations. These works are complemented by others like the compilations of Herschel Reichman, assembled from notes and published as *Reshimot Shi'urim* on various Talmudic tractates.

¹⁴ See the remarks of Julius Berman in his preface to Soloveitchik, *Droshes and Writings*, 10. The editors' introduction to Soloveitchik's *Shiurim le-Zekher Abba Mari* (second edition, 2002), 8-9, note that the written texts were produced first and served as the basis for the oral lectures.

¹⁵ See also Joshua A. Fishman, "The Holiness of Yiddish: Who Says Yiddish is Holy and Why?," *Language Policy* 1, no. 2 (2002): 123-141.

¹⁶ Soloveitchik, *Droshes and Writings*, 321. See b. Megillah 26b; and *Shi'urim le-Zekher Abba Mari*, vol. 1, 196-197. It is worth remembering this article published shortly after Soloveitchik's decision to switch the language of instruction in his Talmud lecture from Yiddish to English.

¹⁷ See Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1991) 47. The notion that one's deeds may sanctify aspects of the world (from land to language) is particularly common in Soloveitchik's early works, representing his critique of German Idealism as well as a marked departure from the traditions of Lithuanian piety. See Allan Nadler, "Soloveitchik's Halakhic Man: Not a Mithnagged," *Modern Judaism* 13.2 (1993): 119-147.

¹⁸ Audio recordings of Soloveitchik's classes and lectures, some of which are in Yiddish, are available here: <http://www.yutorah.org/rabbi-joseph-b-soloveitchik>. For a video, see the following: https://youtu.be/OF_TYYULmls.

¹⁹ Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav*, vol. 1, 45, and cf. 74 n. 48.

²⁰ For an insightful reading of Lithuanian Talmud scholarship, including that of Soloveitchik's family, as a response to modernity, see Paul Nahme, "Wissen und Lomdus: Idealism, Modernity, and History in some Nineteenth-Century Rabbinic and Philosophical Responses to the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*," *Harvard Theological Review* 110.3 (2017): 393-420; and Chaim Saiman, "Legal Theology: The Turn to Conceptualism in Nineteenth-Century Jewish Law," *Journal of Law and Religion* 21.1 (2006): 39-100.

nor to Yiddish, but it is one reason that Soloveitchik is so difficult to read in Yiddish. His use of a rabbinic idiom is also what makes his writing, arguably, so interesting.

Many Yiddish writers privileged *loshn-koydesh*, but Soloveitchik's sermons are filled with technical rabbinic phrases and *posek-loshn*. When Soloveitchik writes in Yiddish, as when he speaks or writes in English, it is not quite recognizable as the language of other speakers: it is de-territorialized by his erudition, his intellectual migrations, and perhaps also by his personal sense of isolation from other Yiddish (or English) speakers.²¹ In this sense, we shall see that Soloveitchik's self-fashioning as the "lonely man of faith" is embodied in the particulars of his language as well as his specific philosophical teachings.

III. The Eternal Antinomy

Soloveitchik was a dynamic thinker, more confessional than systematic, and dialectical framings were an important part of his rhetorical style. Moreover, unresolved tensions—and contradictions—surface when his writings and teachings across the years are compared with one another.²² Many of Soloveitchik's teachings on the interface of the individual and the community describe the relationship as a fraught binary characterized by ongoing stress, conflict and apprehension.²³ Such unresolved polarities are a hallmark of Soloveitchik's philosophy. In "*Yokhed ve-tsiber*, however, the dialectic between the individual and community tilts toward resolution. In the Yiddish *droshe*, Soloveitchik argues that the individual may only achieve the height of self-creation through imitating God's everlasting love through ethical obligation, kindness, and compassion toward the community.

"*Yokhed ve-tsiber*" begins with an argument that may rightly be described as the homily's intellectual cornerstone: issues of political structure and governance are, at heart, religious questions of ethical and spiritual concern. Speaking from amid the fresh trauma of the Holocaust and the cataclysmic rubble of the Second World War, Soloveitchik suggests that the twentieth-century is soaked with blood because politicians have forgotten that social formation turns on moral and religious questions.²⁴ He then notes that all political orders must deal with the problem of how to reconcile individual self-expression vis-à-vis the demands of the collective, and Soloveitchik claims that most forms of government err in emphasizing the value of one at the expense of the other:

²¹ I wish to thank Marc Caplan for his help in formulating this critical point.

²² Yoel Finkelman, "Theology with Fissures: Contradictions in Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Theological Writings," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 13, no. 3 (2014): 399-421; cf. Marvin Fox, "The Unity and Structure of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Thought," *Tradition* 24, no. 2 (1989): 44-65.

²³ See Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "The Community," *Tradition* 17, no. 2 (1978): 7-24. See also Pinchas H. Peli, *On Repentance: The Thought and Oral Discourses of Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik* (Jason Aronson, Inc., 1996), 97-125, esp. 114-115; Chaim Navon, "Individual and Community in the Thought of Rabbi Soloveitchik," *Emunot ve-De'ot be-Mishnat ha-GRID Soloveitchik*, ed. Meir Kohen (Jerusalem: Maoz Family, 2011), 63-75 (Hebrew); and Gerald J. (Ya'akov) Blidstein, *Society and Self: On the Writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (New York: Orthodox Union Press; Jersey City, NJ: KTAV Publishing House, 2012).

²⁴ See Soloveitchik, "*Yokhed ve-tsiber*," 207.

Either one naively believes, together with the French [authors of the] *Encyclopaedia*,²⁵ in the idea of social contract, or [one maintains] that the state is actually the creator and the carrier of cultural awareness (*kultur bavustzayn*); the individual is only visible in the background of the group, and must therefore serve it [i.e. the collective].²⁶

Soloveitchik illustrates the perennial dichotomy of individual freedom and communal obligation with the example of liberal democracy and the absolutism of the modern nation-state. The former grants unfettered privilege to the value of personal self-fulfillment, a liberty restrained only by the individual's voluntary acceptance of the "social contract." Absolutist governments, including Fascist and Communist regimes, represent the opposite extreme. These are systems of governance in which the individual is totally effaced before the needs of the authoritarian nation-state or the proletariat collective.

The author's subtle warning against becoming subsumed within a political community reflects the rise—and fall—of authoritarian regimes of all stripes throughout the twentieth-century.²⁷ Though in this *droshe* Soloveitchik describes America as infused with the ideals of personal liberty found in the writings of French thinkers like Rousseau, Montesquieu and Voltaire,²⁸ this homily—dating from the 1950s—was likely delivered amid the second Red Scare. During the infamous McCarthy hearings and the cultural foment left in their wake, the issues of individual autonomy, collective obligation, and communal coherence were dragged into the public spotlight in a most tawdry manner. This political context makes it particularly interesting to see Soloveitchik struggling to present a coherent vision of how individual freedom may coexist together with ethical obligation toward the community or the collective.

The Talmudic sages, argues Soloveitchik, framed the tension between personal autonomy and communal responsibility in terms that differ significantly from twentieth-century political discourse. He claims that the rabbis describe the question as pivoting upon a dialectic, an "eternal antinomy" (*eybike antinomiye*) of *emes* and *sholem*. These two poles, roughly translated as "truth" and "peace," may appear to be deadlocked in fundamental opposition, but Soloveitchik argues that rabbinic sources have them existing simultaneously in the human soul as well as in society at large.²⁹ *Emes* and *sholem* may endure in this state, says Soloveitchik, because they are rooted in divine attributes.

²⁵ Referring to the *Encyclopaedia, or a Systematic Dictionary of the Sciences, Arts, and Craft* (*Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*), published between 1751 and 1772.

²⁶ Soloveitchik, "Yokhed ve-tsiber," 208.

²⁷ See also the comments of Rabbi Naftali Tsevi Berlin (1816-1893) in his *Ha'amek Davar* to Gen. 11. This Lithuanian rabbinic leader was a colleague of Soloveitchik's great-grandfather, and his comment was likely known to Soloveitchik.

²⁸ See also Barry Alan Shain, *The Myth of American Individualism: The Protestant Origins of American Political Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

²⁹ Soloveitchik underscores the coexistence of *emes* and *sholem* as essential to what he calls *hashkafas hayahadus*, or the all-encompassing worldview presented by classical Jewish sources. This term seems to borrow from the German notion of *Weltanschauung*, appearing elsewhere in Soloveitchik's works as *hashkafat 'olam* or *tefifat 'olam*.

The rabbinic ideal of *emes* is taken by Soloveitchik to represent the individual's uncompromising quest for self-fulfillment and personal authenticity: "Yokhed—individuality (*individualitet*)—means a spiritual existence of being-other (*andersh-zayn*)... as a reality (*realitet*), an individual form (*geshtalt*) which comes into the world only once."³⁰ The individual's self-understanding as a singular being propels him to actualize this singular potential. For this reason, individuals driven by *emes* simply cannot agree with each other, since "... one's opinion (*shite*) is a part of one's individuality. Just as one's personality is individual, so too is his opinion."³¹ Intellectual beliefs, suggests Soloveitchik, are as indivisible from the holistic self as one's character traits.

The formulation also highlights Soloveitchik's particular Yiddish idiom. His use of the word *individu'alitet*, rather than the more common *eygnart* or *eygnartik*, seems to gesture toward his rootedness in discussions of the nature of the individual (often *Individuum*) in modern philosophical discourse.³² The word "personality" (*perzenlekhkeyt*), following the German *Persönlichkeit* as found in writings of Fichte, Hegel, and Cohen, connotes far more than specific behavioral attributes. Perhaps better rendered as "personhood," *Persönlichkeit* variously refers to the abstract fullness of an individual's moral world or the infinite personhood of the individual.³³ But a reader—or listener—alert to the components of Soloveitchik's idiom might equally underline the rabbinic term *shite*. This deployment of a recognizably Talmudic word, rather than *meynung* or even the *loshn-koydesh* term *deye*, is similarly idiosyncratic. Soloveitchik's Yiddish, like his homiletical theology, weaves together German philosophy and rabbinic *lomdus* and interprets them in light of one another.

"The ideal of *emes* is defiled," writes Soloveitchik, "when *sholem* seizes the upper hand and the individual begins to give up (*mevater*) his principles—his ideology."³⁴ Pure *emes* brooks no moderation, and striving for authenticity requires one to hold fast even in the face of "disagreement or friction" (*makhloykes un raybung*).³⁵ This call to individual self-actualization is deeply ingrained in the human condition, but is balanced by an opposing force that stirs people to compromise and live together within a communal fabric. "An agreement (*heskem*) is always compromise (*pshore*)," says Soloveitchik

³⁰ Soloveitchik, "Yokhed ve-tsiber," 208.

³¹ Soloveitchik, "Yokhed ve-tsiber," 209.

³² See Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason: Out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995) esp. 165-177.

³³ See David Ciavatta, "The Unreflective Bonds of Intimacy: Hegel on Familial Ties and the Modern Person," *The Philosophical Forum* 37, no. 2 (2006): esp. 153-154; T. I. Oisermann, "Hegels Lehre von der dialektischen Identität und das Problem der Persönlichkeit," *Hegel-Jahrbuch Meisenheim* (1979): 109-117; and James Dodd, "Husserl and Kant on Persönlichkeit," *Santalka: Filosofija, Komunikacija* 17, no. 3 (2009): 29. For a comment by Hegel on the necessity of surrendering one's personality in love for the other, see Stephen Houlgate, "Religion, Morality and Forgiveness in Hegel's Philosophy," *Philosophy and Religion in German Idealism*, ed. William Desmond, Ernst-Otto Onnasch and Paul Cruysberghs, (Dordrecht and Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2004), 92.

³⁴ Soloveitchik, "Yokhed ve-tsiber," 209.

³⁵ Soloveitchik, "Yokhed ve-tsiber," 209.

unabashedly.³⁶ But individuals do so, claims Soloveitchik, “because people are political (*mentshn zaynen medini'im*), social beings; they cannot live in absolute isolation and eternal conflict.”³⁷

The statement, which employs a curious plural Hebrew adjective-cum-noun, recalls Maimonides’s reinterpretation of an Aristotelian doctrine: “man is political by nature” (*ha-adam medini ba-teva*).³⁸ Aristotle’s point, which is linked to human language, accents the positive importance of the individual participating in the life of the city-state. Maimonides, however, portrays the goal of the polis as facilitating the individual’s philosophical and contemplative investigation. Soloveitchik’s treatment, though closer to that of Maimonides, will present a different order of values.

The seeming irreconcilability of *emes* and *sholem* brings Soloveitchik to a theological quandary: How can a *coincidentia oppositorum* exist among the divine attributes? In answer, he turns to a well-known Midrash regarding whether or not humanity should be created.³⁹ *Khesed* (“loving-kindness”) and *tsedek* (“righteousness”) claim that mankind will be capable of nearly unbounded goodness, whereas *emes* and *sholem* argue that mankind will produce nothing but strife and deceit. Turning the Midrash on its side, Soloveitchik argues that the angels are pessimistic about humanity’s future because they believe—erroneously, it turns out—that *emes* and *sholem* cannot coexist:

If *emes* wins, a person becomes an uncompromising individual (*yokhed*) who opposes the community. If, by contrast, *sholem* [is victorious], then a person begins to leave his private domain (*reshus hayokhed*) and enters the public arena (*reshus horabim*), becoming a compromiser (*bal-pshore*) and giving up his *emes*.⁴⁰

Seeking new philosophical and existential significance in ideas found throughout Talmudic literature is characteristic of Soloveitchik’s sermons and *yortsayt* lectures.⁴¹ Here the interdiction of carrying objects from one realm to another is interpreted as gesturing toward the angels’ dichotomous vision. One who values compromise and community above all cannot achieve self-actualization. By contrast, an individual who seeks only *emes*, privileging the development of his *perzenlekhkeyt* and inner world, cannot join a meaningful community.

According to this lithe rereading of the rabbinic tradition, *emes* and *sholem* argue against mankind’s creation because they cannot coexist. Should, the Midrash asks, the

³⁶ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 209.

³⁷ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 209.

³⁸ Maimonides, *Guide*, II:40, according to ibn Tibbon’s translation. See Aristotle, *Politics* 1.1253a. and cf. idem, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ch. 10.; see Menachem Lorberbaum, *Politics and the Limits of Law: Secularizing the Political in Medieval Jewish Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), esp. 19-41; and Moshe Halbertal, *Maimonides; Life and Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 161-162.

³⁹ Bereshit Rabbah 8:5.

⁴⁰ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 210.

⁴¹ On the Sabbath, one may not carry an object from one domain to another (e.g. private to public) without establishing an ‘*eruv*’ to enclose them within a single expansive “private” space. See m. Shabbat 1:1, and 11:1.

human being be formed as a hardened individualist whose strict, uncompromising vision of truth and judgment “pierces the mountain” (*yikoyv hodin es he-har*)? Or should the ideal human being be a “pursuer of peace” (*roydef sholem*), willing to compromise his individual vision in order to weave himself into the fabric of a unified society?⁴² The answer to this ultimate question is rooted in Soloveitchik’s vision of God’s dialectical attributes and the gift of qualities to humanity.

IV. *Der Yokhed u-Meyukhed: Compassion and Creation*

The key to overcoming the seemingly insoluble dialectic between individual liberty and communal obligation, described earlier as an “eternal antimony,” is rooted in the capacity of the human being to mirror the Divine. God is described as “abundant of love and truth” (*rav hesed ve-emes*) in the famous theophany before Moses in Ex. 34:6, and Soloveitchik frequently underscores that both *emes* and *hesed* are divine attributes that coexist in a state of perennial—by fructifying—tension.⁴³ Emulating this dialectic is, argues Soloveitchik, a foremost mode of *imitatio dei*:

It appears that the Master of the World bestowed a *modus vivendi* upon people so that they would not need to sacrifice (*makriv zayn*) the *emes* for *sholem*, nor the opposite. There is a way to realize both godly attributes, and the secret lies hidden in the other two attributes of *tsedek* and *khesed*—or, better yet, in *khesed* through which *tsedek* is effected.⁴⁴

The enduring dialectic between the arch-attributes of *sholem* and *emes* drives the ethical obligations of one human being to another as compassion (*khesed*) is expressed in moral behavior (*tsedek*). An individual who achieves this balance may imitate God’s limitless beneficence, since, as we shall see, the outpouring of love in the human soul mirrors the constant flow of divine vitality into the cosmos.

Maimonides, says Soloveitchik, describes God’s *emes* as “identical with existence” (*identish mit metsiyes*). Translating *metsiyes* as *virklekhkayt* (“reality”), Soloveitchik claims that “absolute *emes* is the essence (*esents*) and substance (*tokhn*) of absolute reality.”⁴⁵ This description of God as the “absolute *emes*” is rooted in medieval philosophy, but it goes far beyond Maimonides’ formulation in the opening lines of *Mishneh Torah* or ibn Tibbon’s translation of the *Guide of the Perplexed*. In Soloveitchik’s hands, these terms are enriched with modern philosophical resonance; he summons them out of

⁴² Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 210. These Talmudic expressions appear in a *sugya* exploring whether rabbinic law should prize adherence to strict judgment or compromise in jurisprudential procedure; see b. Sanhedrin 6b.

⁴³ The list of divine characteristics given in Ex. 34:6-7 is commonly known as the “thirteen attributes of compassion” and is recited as a part of the liturgy on fast days, certain holidays and other times of favor and reflection.

⁴⁴ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 211.

⁴⁵ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 211. Cf. Jean-Paul Sartre, “Existentialism and Humanism,” in *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Meridian, 1975), 349.

Maimonides' medieval context and into the world of Kantian metaphysics and German Idealism.

The concept of *virklikh* (Ger. *Wirklich*) as the “real” or “actual” is an important watchword for Kant, for whom it is connected to experience and sensation, as well as for Hermann Cohen, who links it to the ethical thrust of existence.⁴⁶ Soloveitchik's use of *esents* may link to the concept of “essence” (Ger. *Wesen*)—an object's deepest core that radiates through its “appearance” (Ger. *Erscheinung*)—that plays a critical role in Hegel's influential *Science of Logic* (1813).⁴⁷ Finally, Soloveitchik's use of *emes* seems to draw upon its near-synonym of *vor* (also *vorhayt* or *vorhaftik*), which, like the German *Wahr*, may refer to the “real” or “reality” in addition to “truth”; such an understanding of truth as linked to reality is key for Hermann Cohen.⁴⁸ Building on the traditions of Maimonides, Soloveitchik draws the works of Kant, Hegel, and Cohen into his richly infused Yiddish through philosophical terminologies that illuminate his reading of the medieval Jewish sources. This linguistic hybridization roots the ancient polarity of *yokhed ve-tsiber* in a distinctly modern debate over the nature of the cosmos and the individual's place therein.

God is the ultimate *yokhed*—singular, and unified—the appearance of the cosmos as a separate existence defined by multiplicity. “There is no other existence (*eksistents*) other than the godly (*di getlekhe*),” claims Soloveitchik, “... It is laughable to claim that there is a separate form of reality that also exists.”⁴⁹ He argues that this understanding of the limitless Divine is a cornerstone of Judaism, one with which all Jewish theologians have engaged. Some, like Isaac Luria or Shneur Zalman of Liady (the founder of Chabad Hasidism) discussed the question of God's presence in the cosmos explicitly. Other Jewish thinkers such as Maimonides, the Vilna Gaon, and Hayyim of Volozhin were more circumspect in their treatment, but Soloveitchik claims that all express of the same sacred truth. Invoking a formulation found in the Zohar, he states unequivocally: “The only reality is the divine, the eternal ‘I will be that which I will be’ (*Ehyeh asher Ehyeh*), filling all the worlds and surrounding all the worlds.”⁵⁰ Divine unity is expressed not only by the indivisibility of attributes, but in the fact that God's immanent presence is revealed through the cosmos.

⁴⁶ See Soloveitchik, “Das reine Denken und die Seinskonstituierung bei Hermann Cohen,” Ph.D. Dissertation, The University of Berlin, 1932, 99-110.

⁴⁷ See Georg W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 337-505; and Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 258-296. A correlate term appears in Soloveitchik's Hebrew writings as *mahut*; see *Divrei Hagut ve-Ha'arakhah* (Jerusalem: Ha-histadrut, 1981), 67, 171.

⁴⁸ See Hermann Cohen, *Religion of Reason: Out of the Sources of Judaism*, trans. Simon Kaplan (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995), 500-501; and cf. *ibid.*, 44; and Martin Jaffe, “Liturgy and Ethics: Hermann Cohen and Franz Rosenzweig on the Day of Atonement,” *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 7.2 (1979): 221; and Alexander Altmann, “Theology in Twentieth-Century German Jewry,” *The Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook* 1.1 (1956), 194, suggesting that in the collapse of Hegelian metaphysics, “Hermann Cohen arose, and it is in no small measure due to his influence that twentieth-century Jewish theology in Germany emancipated itself from a sterile Historicism and recovered the almost lost domain of the Absolute, of Truth and faith in the Truth.”

⁴⁹ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 212.

⁵⁰ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 212.

This description of God as a sacred force that unites all being reveals the impact of Hasidism on Soloveitchik's theology.⁵¹ In particular, his claim that "There is no other existence (*eksistents*) other than the godly (*di getlekhe*)" recalls the pithy summary of Hasidic theology by an early Chabad thinker: "all is God" (*alts iz Got*).⁵² Indeed, Soloveitchik's presentation mirrors the vision of divine unity described in Shneur Zalman's major theological opus (*Likkutei Amarim—Tanya*).⁵³ Such influence is by no means unexpected; Soloveitchik admitted to being well-versed in the teachings of Chabad, a particular Lithuanian form of Hasidism:

What do I know about Habad? I know quite a bit, since as a child I had a *melamed* who was a Habad hasid.... Even today, I still know sections of the *Tanya* by heart, especially the *Sha'ar ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah*, dealing with faith and the attributes of the Almighty... if not for my Habad *melamed*, I would today be lacking an entire dimension of knowledge. Many of my *drashot* are based upon the knowledge imparted to me by the *melamed*.⁵⁴

"*Yokhed ve-tsiber*" is indeed such a *droshe*, a sermon in which Chabad theology converses with German philosophy and Lithuanian rabbinic culture. But the resultant expansive vision of God as encompassing all reality and existence—a "*yokhed u-meyuhad*," in Soloveitchik's formulation—leads to a theological conundrum: If God is everywhere, how can we speak of the cosmos as filled with individuals? And, if God's inviolate and necessary existence is predicated upon nothing, why create such a world in the first place?⁵⁵

Creation, argues Soloveitchik, was an act of love rather than necessity.⁵⁶ This emphasis on divine love represents a subtle departure from Maimonides, for whom Creation was first and foremost an act of divine will.⁵⁷ It is also a rare moment in

⁵¹ See Elliot R. Wolfson, "Eternal Duration and Temporal Comprehension: The Influence of Habad on Joseph B. Soloveitchik," *The Value of the Particular: Lessons from Judaism and the Modern Jewish Experience, Festschrift for Steven T. Katz on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Michael Zank and Ingrid Anderson (Leiden and Boston, 2015), 195-238; and Dov Schwartz, *Religion or Halakha: The Philosophy of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 146-193.

⁵² See Louis Jacobs, *Seeker of Unity* (London: Vallentine-Mitchell, 1966), 159.

⁵³ See Mayse, "Sacred Writ," 134-140.

⁵⁴ Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav*, vol. 1, 147,

⁵⁵ See Arthur Green, "God's Need for Man: A Unitive Approach to the Writings of Abraham Joshua Heschel," *Modern Judaism* 35.3 (2015): 247-261.

⁵⁶ Lurking behind this suggestion is the Midrash in which God saw that the world could not endure by means of strict judgment alone, and therefore fashioned it by means of love as well; see Bereishit Rabbah 12:15, and Rashi's reworking of this tradition in comments to Gen. 1:1.

⁵⁷ Cf. Maimonides *Guide*, III:51-54; and Warren Zev Harvey, "Notions of Divine and Human Love in Jewish Thought: An Interview with Warren Zev Harvey," *University of Toronto Journal of Jewish Thought* 3 (2013), unpaginated (<http://tjtt.cjs.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Interview-with-Warren-Zev-Harvey-Vol.-3.pdf>).

Soloveitchik's theology that focuses on God's love for humanity.⁵⁸ His writings abound with descriptions of the worshipper's yearning for the Divine, often patterned on Maimonides' account of the soul's longing for God in the tenth chapter of *Hilkhot Teshuvah*. Soloveitchik's works are deeply infused by the austere God of the rationalist philosophers, and references to divine love—for the world and for humanity—are sparse.⁵⁹ In this Yiddish sermon, however, the exegetical arc is driven by passionate descriptions of God's love.

The emphasis on love is further accented by Soloveitchik's account of creation as a divine gift in which God invited the cosmos, including humanity, to join with divine existence and become infused with divine *emes*. The rabbinic Midrash about the conflict *khesed* and *emes*, noted above, concludes with God "casting *emes* to the ground" and creating human beings despite their mendacity. Soloveitchik reads this moment in a positive light, suggesting that *emes* was delivered unto the cosmos in order to grace the world with vitality:

The godly *emes* is like an eternal, inexhaustible spring, flowing in all directions, from which enlivening, crystal-clear water endlessly bursts forth. The world imbibes the spring water of God's reality (*metsiyes*) and herein consists of its existence.⁶⁰

This ceaseless river of *emes*, of God's essential vitality, courses into the human being and enfolds him, "in His absolute, unending, eternal and singular existence."⁶¹ The individual, suffused by the ever-flowing source of being, is drawn out of his private existence; he transcends the boundaries of the self and joins with the cosmic community that is rooted in God's singular reality.

Returning to Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, Soloveitchik explains that the attribute of *khesed* refers to the generative and boundless overflow of spiritual vitality.⁶² The result, he argues, bridges the dialectic between the individual and the community without forcing either pole into submission:

Khesed means an individual existence that does not preclude that of the other. Just the opposite: [*khesed*] draws the other near, taking him into its intimate, ontic (*antishn*) circle of unending *khesed*. *Khesed* means spreading out (Revelation),⁶³ when a secret reality, hidden and concealed in the shadows of [one's] privacy

⁵⁸ See Maimonides, *Guide*, I:65.

⁵⁹ Notable exceptions to include Soloveitchik's "Kol Dodi Dofek," and "Confrontation," but these essays reflect a particular political and theological agenda. Cf. David Hartman, *Love and Terror*, 163-165, 186.

⁶⁰ Soloveitchik, "Yokhed ve-tsiber," 215.

⁶¹ Soloveitchik, "Yokhed ve-tsiber," 212.

⁶² See Maimonides, *Guide*, III:53; *ibid*, II:11-12; and, for an important antecedent, Shlomo Pines, "On the Term *Ruhaniyyut* and Its Origin, and on Judah Ha-Levi's Doctrine," *Tarbiz* 57 (1988): 511-534 [Hebrew].

⁶³ This word appears in English in the manuscript.

(*yekhides*), reveals itself in all of its splendor for others, allowing them to enter its private domain (*reshus hayokhed*).⁶⁴

God's creation of the world represents the moment in which alterity became possible.⁶⁵ And yet, Soloveitchik emphasizes that the cosmos does exist not as a separate entity, but as a distributary whose life-force remains connected to the mighty, unending river of God's vitality. This stream flows from the innermost depths of the sublimely unified Divine (*Der Yokhed*) and gushes into the heart of the individual (*yokhed*).

This endless moment of intimate communion eclipses the distinctions between them. God's *emes* is "ontic" (Ger. *Ontisch*), says Soloveitchik in a term plucked from German philosophy, implying that the divine vitality is the true reality of the cosmos rather than an externally-imposed phenomenon. It is into this river of vital ontic being that the one must plunge in the attempt to span the rift between self-creation and personal autonomy on one hand, and, on the other, the individual's obligations toward his community, society, and the world at large.

V. The Poetics of Divine Unity

Soloveitchik's effort to illustrate his theological arguments with natural images and experiences, a sustained characteristic of "*Yokhed ve-tsiber*," represents a noteworthy point of style that distinguishes this work from his other writings. For example, in this sermon Soloveitchik compares the flow of godly compassion that illuminates the individual—but does not eclipse his personal existence—to the light of the sun; this image draws upon those found in classical texts of Chabad Hasidism, revealing another nearly-unmistakable point of influence upon his thought.⁶⁶ Soloveitchik also describes God as manifest through the aesthetic perfection of the natural world. In paying mindful attention to birds, flowers, and other natural phenomena, says Soloveitchik, the flow of God's vitality becomes visible:

The tulip blossoms in Spring, the rose in June, the aster, the magnolia and the chrysanthemum, in Autumn; I mark the constellations of stars with their regularity, the setting of the sun with its dusky twilight, when the remaining (*iberike*) colors of the specter are absorbed, and only the red shine reaches me. I see the regularity of the animals in the jungle, which all go to the river to drink for the night; putting hand to foot, I hear the beat of my existence; the summer birds buzz and fly from flower to flower, the flowers bend to the sun, the wind blows and brings seed

⁶⁴ Soloveitchik, "*Yokhed ve-tsiber*," 215.

⁶⁵ See Seymour Kessler, "Soloveitchik and Levinas: Pathways to the Other," *Judaism* 51, no. 4 (2002): 440-457.

⁶⁶ Soloveitchik, "*Yokhed ve-tsiber*," 216-217; and *Likkutei Amarim—Tanya, sha'ar ha-yihud va-he-emunah*, ch. 4, fol. 79b: "The [divine] vitality conceals itself within the body of the created being, as if the created were an individual entity and not the expansion of vitality and spiritual energy, like the ray of light from the sun... although it truly is not an individual entity, like the overflowing radiance of the sun, nevertheless this itself [reveals] the majesty of the omnipotent blessed Holy One—the vitality and spiritual energy that flows from the divine spirit is tempered and concealed, so that the individual's personal existence is not totally negated."

(*zriye*) to the far steppes, and in the Spring the fields awaken—in my ears, the call: “the One of abundant *khesed* and *emes*.” This is the eternal godly existence...⁶⁷

The compassionate, ever-present hand of God is revealed through the mathematical constancy of the stars, the passage of time, and the instinctual movement of the animals. Only through appreciating the cosmic symphony of creation, beautiful in its aesthetic complexity as well as its scientific regularity, can the individual worshipper (the *yokhed*) understand his existence as one particular manifestation of divine unity.

Such poetic appreciation of the physical world is quite uncommon in Soloveitchik’s works.⁶⁸ This fact makes its presence in this Yiddish *droshe* both significant and curious, especially as such poetic reflections bespeak the scientific, philosophical, and rabbinic amalgam of languages that characterize our text. Elsewhere, such as the following passage from the 1944 Hebrew “*Ish ha-Halakhah*” (later published in English as *Halakhic Man*), his descriptions of humanity’s relationship to nature subsume aesthetic observation beneath the categorical imperatives of Jewish law:

When halakhic man comes across a spring bubbling quietly, he already possesses a fixed, a priori relationship with this real phenomenon: the complex of laws regarding the halakhic construct of a spring... Halakhic man is not overly curious, and he is not particularly concerned with cognizing the spring as it is in itself. Rather, he desires to coordinate the a priori concept with the a posteriori phenomenon.

When halakhic man looks to the western horizon and sees the fading rays of the setting sun or to the eastern horizon and sees the first light of dawn and the glowing rays of the rising sun, he knows that this sunset or sunrise imposes upon him anew obligations and commandments...

It is not anything transcendent that creates holiness but rather the visible reality—the regular cycle of the natural order.⁶⁹

Passages like this emphasize the intricate complexities of *halakha* as the totalizing epistemology through which the individual encounters—and experiences—the world as a whole. Sunsets are to be appreciated only as triggers of legal obligation; God’s immanence is visible in the commandments linked to these physical events, not their aesthetic majesty. Holiness is formally generated as the worshipper confronts physical reality and, through the power of the law, brings each phenomenon into alignment with its ideal. Such is Soloveitchik’s paean to the centrality of *halakha*.

⁶⁷ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 217. This passage calls to mind Itzik Manger’s comments in “*Der litvak un di landshaft*,” *Shriftn in proze* (Tel Aviv: Y. L. Peretz Farlag, 1980), 185-189, on Lithuanian Yiddish writers’ unique appreciation for the beauty of nature precisely because such beauty is so fragile and infrequent in their native land.

⁶⁸ See Gad Freudenthal, “Maimonides on the Knowability of the Heavens and of Their Mover (Guide 2: 24),” *Aleph: Historical Studies in Science and Judaism* 8.1 (2008): 151-157.

⁶⁹ Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 20-21.

In Soloveitchik's Yiddish *droshe*, however, the worshipper contemplates the rhythms of nature as beautiful expressions of God's existence and love.⁷⁰ Awestruck recognition of God's majesty, of the fact that "the whole earth is filled with His glory" (Isa. 6:3), should stir the individual to prayer and whip him into a state of fiery passion (*hislayvus*).⁷¹ Nature reminds Soloveitchik's "halakhic man" to submit to the yoke of the commandments, even as he is filled with the radiance of his own creative autonomy. But in *Yokhed ve-Tsibbur*, Soloveitchik describes the individual worshiper as becoming filled with an overwhelming ecstasy in the face of God's resplendent majesty.

When comparing the passages from the Yiddish *droshe* and the Hebrew work *Halakhic Man*, as above, it is tempting to suggest that Soloveitchik's spirit soars more freely in his native language. But I suspect that there is a deeper ideological crevasse between this Yiddish *droshe* and his works extolling the power of *halakha*. Soloveitchik first published his Hebrew essay "*Ish ha-Halakha*" in a rather obscure American Orthodox rabbinic journal, intended for a very different audience than that of emotionally-driven public Yiddish addresses rooted in *aggadah* rather than the intricate details of Jewish legal discourse. The association of Yiddish with emotionalism and/or femininity (and Hebrew or *loshn-koydesh* with masculinity and rationalism) is, of course, a common essentialist trope.⁷² In the case of Soloveitchik, however, there does seem to be a critical distinction between his modes of expression in these two languages.

Loshn-koydesh was, for Soloveitchik, the language of *halakha*; his Talmudic novella were published exclusively in Hebrew, including those originally delivered in Yiddish.⁷³ Soloveitchik interprets *halakha* itself as representing a kind of self-sufficient language, one composed of what he identified as unique symbols, values, metaphors, first principles, and praxis.⁷⁴ The Yiddish *droshe* "Yokhed ve-tsiber" represents an entirely different aspect of Soloveitchik's theology, one in which the individual's private spiritual life and his commitment to the community are sparked by appreciation God expressed in the natural beauty of the world.

⁷⁰ Cf. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, "Immanence and Transcendence: Comments on *Birkat Yotzer Or*," *Worship of the Heart: Essays on Jewish Prayer* (Jersey City: KTAV Publishing House, 2003), 122-132.

⁷¹ Soloveitchik, "*Yokhed ve-tsiber*," 217. The term *hislayvus* is commonly used in Hasidic sources to describe ecstatic fervor. The verse Isa. 6:3 is often cited as proof-text for God's immanence in all aspects of the cosmos.

⁷² See Naomi Seidman, *A Marriage Made in Heaven: The Sexual Politics of Hebrew and Yiddish* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), esp. 1-39.

⁷³ See *Shiurim le-Zekher Abba Mari*, a two-volume collection of *yortsayt* lectures published in Hebrew. For Yiddish sermons published during Soloveitchik's lifetime, see *Fir droshe fun Yosef Dov ha-Levi Soloveitchik* (New York: Mekhon Tal Orot, 1967). Soloveitchik's Yiddish was also preserved in texts otherwise in Hebrew; see *Mi-Peninei ha-Rav*, ed. Hershel Schachter (Brooklyn: Flatbush Beth Hamedrosh: 2001), 47-51.

⁷⁴ This line of thinking is rooted, *inter alia*, in the writings of Frederick Charles von Savigny; see his *Of the Vocation of Our Age for Legislation and Jurisprudence*, trans. Abraham Hayward (London: Littlewood and Co., 1831), 27-28. See also Daniel Rynhold, "The Philosophical Foundations of Soloveitchik's Critique of Interfaith Dialogue," *The Harvard Theological Review* 96.1 (2003): 101-120; and Reuven Kimelman, "Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Abraham Joshua Heschel on Jewish-Christian Relations," *Modern Judaism* 24.3 (2004): 251-271.

Both *Halakhic Man* and “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*” thus focus on God’s immanence, but their emphases diverge sharply. In the former, Soloveitchik asserts that the human being is commanded to bring even mundane elements of existence into the service of God, but brooding over this empowered vision is an inscrutable and transcendent God.⁷⁵ The divine logic governing the *halakha* is unfathomable and immutable, and every knee must ultimately bend to its obligations. “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” by contrast, emphasizes that God’s immanence is manifest in the ever-flowing love and *emes*. “God did not hide away his *emes* in his transcendent mysteries,” writes Soloveitchik, “He lent or gave it to others.” This act of giving is the individual’s *modus vivendi* of imitating the Divine, of mirroring God’s compassion by bestowing the gifts to others. The Yiddish *droshe* is a homiletic excursus on love and compassion, human as well as divine. The *yokhed* becomes integrated into *tsiber* through sharing his inner radiance with the surrounding community.⁷⁶

VI. Human Partnership and the Ethical Turn

To overcome the existential fissure between communal commitment and individual freedom, says Soloveitchik, one must imitate divine grace by opening the heart to others. He identifies this precept as hidden in the rabbinic Midrash recalled above, re-reading the angelic argument over mankind’s nature as pivoting upon the question of the ethical potential of the human being. Through loving-kindness (*khesed*) and compassion, he claims, the individual may embody both divine attributes (*emes* and *sholem*) without compromising either ideal:

A person must become [like God], one who is “abundant of *khesed* and *emes*” (*a rav khesed ve-emes*). Does the human being have *emes*? Surely he does! Had he no *emes*, he could not exist! Existence (*metsiyes*) means taking part in the Master of the World’s *emes*, becoming a partner in the divine reality... Should one repress the precious gift from God, the divine *emes* received from the One who is abundant of *khesed* and *emes*, hiding away within his own existence and holing up in a hidden corner, in his isolated private domain (*reshus hayokhed*) and denying all benefit to others?⁷⁷

It is not enough to be a person of *emes*, whose spiritual and intellectual gifts are cordoned off from all others. One must strive to emulate the pathways of the Divine, projecting *emes* through *khesed* and sharing his portion of God’s essence with others. The worshipper, says Soloveitchik, “must expand the ‘I’ (*oysbreytern dem ikh*)—his

⁷⁵ See, inter alia, Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 32.

⁷⁶ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*”, 216, remarks that God “allows us to become partners (*mishtatef zayn*) in his unending *metsiyes*,” suggesting that each person becomes an active participant in sharing divine compassion. This description of mankind as a partner is mirrored by passages in his early works; see, inter alia, Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 71; and Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Yemei Zikaron* (Jerusalem: 1986), 10-15.

⁷⁷ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 218.

consciousness (*bavustzayn*)⁷⁸—and allow others to take part in his individuality.”⁷⁹ In embodying such kindness and extending the inner *emes* to the community, the individual’s private domain becomes “the property of the public” (*der kinyon fun dem robim*).⁸⁰

The worshipper’s rapturous response to God’s unity spurs him to a higher level of ethical obligation toward others.⁸¹ Soloveitchik often makes this point in “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” but it is particularly of concern in the final third of the *droshe*. He illustrates the idea, in typical style, by means of an unanticipated philosophical interpretation of the a legal concept noted above:

For a person, *khesed* means the overflowing, expansion of the individuality.⁸² He becomes a kind of “mixture of different realms” (*‘eruvey-khatseres*), in which domains (*reshuyes*) that were locked up, isolated, and surrounded by barriers, become fused together into a single realm, as his private personality (*yekhidishe perzenlekhkeyt*) is so rich with blessing that he must pour it forth, transferring something of his *emes*, which he received from the One of abundant *khesed* and *emes*, into another personality, which had not merited to receive the Creator’s effluence in such abundant measure.⁸³

The *eruv-khatseres* enables an individual to carry objects from one realm to another on the Sabbath. This rabbinic institution provides a paradigm, argues Soloveitchik, for what the human being must become: an instrument of connectivity and expansiveness. Rather than a cloistered existence of isolation, the worshipper’s relationship to the Divine must lead him toward giving and sharing of his blessing.

Soloveitchik gives the example of *tsedokeh* as a particularly important practice for expanding the “I,” of stretching the personal and private realm to encompass the needs of the community.⁸⁴ “Possessions and riches,” says Soloveitchik, “are a part of individual existence (*yekhidesdiker eksistents*).”⁸⁵ The economic sphere is also a part of sacred, redeemed existence, but sanctifying this realm requires that one give to others. Holding

⁷⁸ On “consciousness” (Ger. *Bewusstsein*) in Hermann Cohen’s thought, see Soloveitchik, “Das reine Denken,” 52-56.

⁷⁹ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 218.

⁸⁰ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 218.

⁸¹ See also Soloveitchik, “*Etish-moralish zayt*,” 302-303: “The ultimate Will, which prevails upon the everyday, mechanical phenomena such as the ebbing and flowing of the seas, is also revealed through the human being, in his great moments of ethical uplift (*etisher aliyeh*), and it suffers in him in the time of his ethical fall (*etisher yeride*).”

⁸² Underlined in the manuscript, here and below.

⁸³ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 218-219.

⁸⁴ See also Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “*Tsedokeh*,” *Droshe and Writings*, 231: “In addition to the fact that *tsedokeh* is an individual subject (*individuelle ongelegnhayt*), which depends on the individual (*yokhed*), *tsedokeh* is also organized by the community (*kehileh*) which controls the system of *tsedokeh*.”

⁸⁵ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 219.

fast to one's money and using it for small-minded, selfish pursuits sunder the *yokhed's* link to the community and restricts the stream of divine blessing to them both.⁸⁶

This physical act of giving should be filled with religious vitality, since *tsedokeh* cannot produce its full impact if it is distributed in a mechanical or cold manner. This principle, says Soloveitchik, come to us from rabbinic teaching about Moses:

“The blessed Holy One took a fiery coin... and showed it to Moses.”⁸⁷ The cold, unfeeling metal is transformed through a fiery, spiritual act, and *khesed* rises to the surface... the true (*emeser*) act of compassion is founded on the expansion of one's own personality, on including another in one's individual existence. Thus, the correct sympathy, true love, compassion, and pure mercy (*reyne rakhamim*) surfaces automatically.⁸⁸

The moment of empathy between two human beings triggers a process of spiritual, emotional, intellectual uplift. The *halakha* is necessary for expanding the private realm to encompass the community, but the legal obligations are not themselves sufficient for effecting this change: the coin he gives must be aflame with the giver's passion and love.

Soloveitchik thus shows himself to be greatly concerned with the place of ethics in the religious world, intensified by what he saw as the moral decline around him.⁸⁹ In *Halakhic Man* he took great pains to demonstrate that the exegetical freedom and creativity he extolls is not the same as the abject moral subjectivity—and complete “ethical autonomy”—that he fears will emerge from Kantian philosophy taken to its extreme.⁹⁰ Following the critique levied by Hermann Cohen against Kant, Soloveitchik argues that freedom—including the freedom to cultivate one's inner *emes*—*must* sanctify

⁸⁶ Hasidic sources, building upon earlier kabbalistic traditions, often speak of almsgiving as a mode of effecting divine revelation. Building on the Talmudic teaching that one merits to greet *shekhinah* by giving *tsedokeh*, such source uses describe giving to others as ushering for a river of divine love. See b. Bava Batra 10a; *Mevasser Tsedek* (Tsefat: 2010), *re'eh*, 221; Mayse, “Sacred Writ,” 142-146.

⁸⁷ Midrash Tanhuma, *ki tissa*, no. 9, cited by Rashi's comments to Ex. 30:13. The original rabbinic teaching explains that Moses is shown the heavenly coin in order to demonstrate how the offering of a half-shekel may indeed serve as an atonement. Cf. y. Shekalim 1:4; and Tosafot to b. Hullin 42a; and the well-known Hasidic homily in *Ben Porat Yosef* (Jerusalem: 2011), vol. 2, *derashot le-shabbat ha-gadol*, 650.

⁸⁸ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 219-220.

⁸⁹ Indeed, his essay “*Etish-Moralish Zayt*,” *Drosheh and Writings*, 301-306, is devoted entirely to this subject. See also the lament in Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 222: “The worse the surrounding world becomes, the more cynical the culture becomes, the holier and more precious the *emes* becomes.”

⁹⁰ See Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 153, n. 80; and H. J. Paton, *The Categorical Imperative: A Study in Kant's Moral Philosophy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 180-184.

the world.⁹¹ This capacity for self-creation as well as self-transcendence is rooted in the immanent manifestation of *khesed* and *emes* within the human being.⁹²

This discussion of *tsedokeh* as binding the individual to the community is not simply addressed to misers or greedy and callous businessmen, nor is the power of sharing limited to physical coins.⁹³ Soloveitchik argues that a bridge between the *yokhed* and *tsiber* is forged through all acts of giving. He is equally concerned with the fact that scholars, religious intellectuals and spiritually talented individuals may become seduced into obsessing over their own accomplishments or attainments. A teacher who forgets that his inner world must be opened up and given to others, says Soloveitchik, leaves a critical ethical and religious duty unfulfilled.

VII. Master and Disciple: A Relationship of *Khesed* and *Emes*

One final point regarding the ethical core of “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*”, and the array of philosophical sources embedded in its language, requires further comment. The critical imperative to share one’s pecuniary blessings, argues Soloveitchik, pales in comparison to the obligation of sharing the greatest of gifts that God can bestow: *seykhel*.⁹⁴ This central value of intelligence and wisdom, partnered with *emes*, must be compassionately expressed through teaching others. True philosophical flourishing requires these open channels of communication between the individual and the community. To illustrate this point, Soloveitchik invokes the rabbinic ruling that a prophet who refuses to share his message with others is deserving of the death penalty.⁹⁵ He interprets this dire outcome as a consequence of stifling the creative revelation rather than a vindictive divine punishment:

⁹¹ Cohen, *Religion of Reason*, 444, argues that, “Consciousness would have to tear off all the threads that give it its cohesion to be able to abstain from the personal duty of charity. The latter, therefore, becomes the virtue of faithfulness in the first place in regard to one’s own I, and through it to the fellowman. All charity expresses faithfulness to the human community.” And cf. *ibid*, 349, where Cohen claims that, “All deeds of loving-kindness are a recompense, a recompense for God’s love to man, which man has to render to man. This recompense designates the kind of deed of loving-kindness that seizes man’s inner life with more intimacy than all almsgiving.” See also Martin D. Yaffe, “Autonomy, Community, Authority: Hermann Cohen, Carl Schmitt, Leo Strauss,” *Autonomy and Community: The Individual and the Community in Jewish Philosophical Thought*, ed. Daniel H. Frank (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 143-160.

⁹² Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 217, argues that the thirteen attributes of divine compassion were given not for the sake of metaphysical or theological reflection, but as “central tenets of ethical, practical principles” revealed through human deeds. He notes Maimonides’ teaching on this point in *Guide*, I:54, but Soloveitchik is also drawing on the ethos of works like *Tomer Devorah* and *Reshit Hokhmah*, and other key texts of the ethical-kabbalistic tradition of *mussar* literature. Invoking the language of Kabbalah and Hasidism, he says that *hesed* and *emes* (i.e. *gevurah*) are united in *tif’eres*, the first three *sefirot* of the seven lower divine qualities. *Tif’eres* is associated with compassion as well as splendor; see Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 216.

⁹³ See Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 220; and Soloveitchik, “*Etish-moralishe zayt*,” 302.

⁹⁴ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 220.

⁹⁵ m. Sanhedrin 11:5.

Prophecy and creativity (*yetsire*) are the same exact thing (*iz haynu hakh*). All the medieval authorities (*rishoynim*) agree with this—Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Levi, the Rambam, [and so forth]. Creation and revelation of *shekhinah* are the same thing—a flow of *shefa*, a divine matter.⁹⁶ The Master of the World allows all creation to take part in his ontic (*antishn*) *emes*, and the prophet... *emes* must flow from him like a waterfall from a high mountain... When the soul is filled with God’s word, the divine matter flows out of the borders of the individual and gushes toward everyone.⁹⁷

The prophet can no more contain his intellectual insight than a volcano can restrain the lava bubbling up from the earth’s core.⁹⁸ The explosive divine wisdom must come forth, cascading out from the prophet’s inner realm and into the minds and hearts of his listeners. The word *yetsire* may refer to divine creation (like the Yiddish *bashafung*), but Soloveitchik’s consistent emphasis on creativity as the fullest actualization of an individual’s potential—here, and elsewhere in his corpus—suggests that he means to invoke a broader vista of creative élan. In the final pages of “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” Soloveitchik unambiguously declares that the individual must strive to imitate God by breaking down the walls of the self and sharing his religious and intellectual creativity with others.⁹⁹

This point is critical for understanding one of the central motifs of this *droshe*: all Jews, and those who study Torah in particular, may become God’s partner and share an awareness of the divine essence that unites all being. Soloveitchik notes that even a person with a limited connection to Torah—even a single letter of the alphabet—knows something of God’s *emes*.¹⁰⁰ But the more one is invested in religious scholarship, the more one is transformed into an active conduit for the unfolding of God’s compassion. The creative enterprise of textual interpretation and intellectual contemplation, when shared with others, becomes a source of intimate connection with the Divine.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ See Harry Austryn Wolfson, “Hallevi and Maimonides on Prophecy,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 32.4 (1942): 345-370; and idem, “Hallevi and Maimonides on Prophecy (Continued),” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 33.1 (1942): 49-82.

⁹⁷ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 221-222.

⁹⁸ See Maimonides, Guide, II:37. This vision of the prophet as filled with divine vitality that must then come to suffuse the world around him is strikingly reminiscent of the twentieth-century Hasidic sage Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Shapira; see Daniel Reiser, “‘To Rend the Entire Veil’: Prophecy in the Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymous Kalman Shapira of Piazecna and its Renewal in the Twentieth Century,” *Modern Judaism* 34.3 (2014): 334-352. More broadly, see Eliezer Schweid, “‘Prophetic Mysticism’ in Twentieth-Century Jewish Thought,” *Modern Judaism* 14.2 (1994), 193-174.

⁹⁹ Walter S. Wurzburger, “The Centrality of Creativity in the Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik,” *Tradition* 30.4 (1996): 219-228.

¹⁰⁰ Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 222.

¹⁰¹ See Norman Lamm, *Torah Lishmah: Torah for Torah’s Sake in the Works of Rabbi Hayyim of Volozhin and His Contemporaries* (New York and Hoboken: Michael Scharf Publication Trust of the Yeshiva University Press and KTAV Publishing House, 1989).

A community is composed up of individuals who strive for this type of self-fulfillment. If left unchained, this impulse for personal creation leads to a collective made up entirely of self-obsessed, private seekers who care nothing for one another. Soloveitchik's ideal *yokhed* is not driven forward by a pure *Wille zur Macht*, nor does he allow himself to bask in individual glory at the expense of the community.¹⁰² With the biblical prophet as a paradigmatic example, he claims that the *yokhed*-scholar's overflowing soul forces him to contribute to the community.¹⁰³

Western pedagogical models, says Soloveitchik in the concluding paragraphs of "*Yokhed ve-tsiber*," emphasize and reify the distinct individuality of the teacher and student. The goal is to mold and shape the disciple, imbuing him with timeless wisdom that is measured by an objective yardstick. Such has been the intent behind much of the Western approach to education "from Plato to Pestalozzi and Herbart."¹⁰⁴ Jewish education, by contrast, should be the living partnership founded in the communion of master and disciple; this intimate connection emulates the bond between God and the individual human being:

The teacher must give his deepest, hidden and intimate *emes* to the disciple, inviting him—just, as it were, as the Master of the World did with all creation—to take part in his own existence. The student and teacher, are poured into one another through an act of compassion. Just as God is revealed to humanity through nature, and the apocalyptic revelation of *shekhinah* via prophecy, so too is the teacher revealed to the student. He entrusts him with his intimate, quiet 'I', and through this trust they are united with one another. Two souls poured into a single mystical personality.¹⁰⁵

Education transforms the inner essence of the scholar, for in studying Torah he glimpses God's presence and witnesses what Soloveitchik often called "the breath of eternity. The *yokhed* must achieve his personal intellectual contributions, but Soloveitchik notes that a sage cannot possess true *emes* if he remains only "a scholar for himself" (*talmid kkokhem*

¹⁰² See the warning included in Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 164 n. 147, where the author notes that, in the wake of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, "the longing for creation was perverted into the desire for brutal and murderous domination. Such views have brought chaos and disaster to our world, which is drowning in its blood." Cf. Daniel Rynhold and Michael J. Harris, "Modernity and Jewish Orthodoxy: Nietzsche and Soloveitchik on Life-Affirmation, Asceticism, and Repentance," *Harvard Theological Review* 101.2 (2008): 253–284.

¹⁰³ Soloveitchik, "*Yokhed ve-tsiber*," 225.

¹⁰⁴ Soloveitchik, "*Yokhed ve-tsiber*," 222. His offhanded rejection of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) and Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) is curious, given that they set about redefining and reforming the norms of classical Western pedagogy. See Michael Rosenak and Avinoam Rosenak, "Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Aspects of Jewish Educational Philosophy: Explorations in his Philosophical Writings," *Journal of Jewish Education* 75.2 (2009): 114-129.

¹⁰⁵ Soloveitchik, "*Yokhed ve-tsiber*," 223.

far zikh)—an introverted soul saturated with wisdom that shares nothing with others.¹⁰⁶ Like the illuminated prophet, the rabbi must share his private world with his students.¹⁰⁷

In his Hebrew *Ish ha-Halakhah*, Soloveitchik quotes his grandfather Rabbi Hayyim of Brisk as describing the rabbi's role as follows: "To redress the grievances of those who are abandoned and alone, to protect the dignity of the poor, and to save the oppressed from the hands of his oppressor."¹⁰⁸ We might have expected that Hayyim of Brisk, renowned for his penetrating Talmudic analysis, would define a rabbi as a leader in intellectual and legal realms. But, at least in the younger Soloveitchik's retelling, his presentation of the ideal sage as an ethical model and spokesperson for his community is quite different. Soloveitchik's point in "*Yokhed ve-tsiber*" is even more strident: the teacher must remove the defensive barriers separating him from his students, opening the heart and mind and welcoming the student into his private inner world.

VIII. Thinking Beyond

"*Yokhed ve-tsiber*" concludes with a biting criticism of American yeshiva education.¹⁰⁹ Soloveitchik's disapproval was not meted out against insufficient Talmudic prowess—a common critique of American institutions among Eastern European rabbinic intellectuals—but against a relationship between master and disciple that had become stale and perfunctory.¹¹⁰ This connection had become routinized, a distant and mechanical encounter that offered nothing once the Talmud was closed and the technical discussion was brought to a close.

Integrating the Torah into the fundament of the student's being requires much more from both parties. Disciples must come with an open heart in addition to an open mind, experiencing their studies as a moment of powerful revelation. It also requires teachers to see their role as a spiritual guide who, in becoming vulnerable to the students, allows them to take part in their innermost intellectual and spiritual worlds. Soloveitchik laments, in short, the transformation of Jewishness into Judaism—a way of life and civilization into a religion defined by perfunctory observance. A deeper mode of education requires a different kind of student, a different educational model, a different epistemology than America was willing or able to offer. "*Yokhed ve-tsiber*" represents an attempt to articulate this malaise and offer a partial solution grounded in sources both traditional and modern.

As mentioned earlier, the Yiddish lecture was delivered in honor of the *yortsayt* of the author's father, Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik (1879-1941). Soloveitchik introduces his father near the end of his address, offering the following remarks:

¹⁰⁶ Soloveitchik, "*Yokhed ve-tsiber*," 223.

¹⁰⁷ Shalom Carmy, "'The Heart Pained by the Pain of the People': Rabbinic Leadership in Two Discussions" by R. Joseph B. Soloveitchik," *The Torah U-Madda Journal* 13 (2005): 1-14.

¹⁰⁸ Soloveitchik, *Halakhic Man*, 91. Cf. Daniel Sperber, "'Friendly' Halakha and the Friendly 'Poseq'," *The Edah Journal: A Forum of Modern Orthodox Discourse* 5.2 (2002), online.

¹⁰⁹ The crisis in religious education was one that concerned Soloveitchik. A different side of this appears in his address "Independent Education," in *Drashos and Writings*, 245-252, which tackles the question of ultra-Orthodox education in Israel.

¹¹⁰ See also Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav*, vol. 2, 177-180.

... for him, the Torah did not represent a mere aggregation of knowledge (*sakh ha-kol fun yediyes*), however deep and thorough it may be. Torah became a part of his personality, of his most intimate “I”-awareness.¹¹¹ The entirety of his individual being became infused with the illumination of Torah. The boundaries from his private domain (*reshus ha-yokhed*) could not contain it; [the light] continuously flowed forth from him like a river.¹¹²

Moshe Soloveitchik, thus recast, represents the scholar of Torah par excellence, a person for whom endless years of intensive study have transformed the essence of his being. The illumination of Torah penetrated the innermost chambers of his heart, claimed the younger Soloveitchik, and the light of his scholarship flowed outward to the community like the never-ending spring of divine *khesed*.

But I suspect that in this *droshe* the reader encounters another rabbinic figure, one whose life embodied the dialectic of *yokhed ve-tsiber*: Joseph Soloveitchik himself. William Kolbrener has recently argued that Soloveitchik is best understood as a melancholy figure whose self-formation (and self-representation) vis-à-vis the past is fraught with anxiety, tension and discontinuity.¹¹³ This melancholy, claims Kolbrener, was in part a result of the rupture of the Holocaust, but it also originated in his acute awareness of the vast gulf separating him from the legacy of Talmudic scholarship to which he was the heir.

Kolbrener’s reading is particularly insightful for understanding the latter half of Soloveitchik’s career. The private, inner experience of the individual and his dialectical relationship to the community, described in “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*” with such optimism and confidence, finds rather somber expression in Soloveitchik’s later works such as *The Lonely Man of Faith*.¹¹⁴ There Soloveitchik emphasizes, time after time, that loneliness is intrinsic to the individual’s quest for self-actualization. The necessary step of joining the community requires humility and surrender, and, even so, the alienation of the individual remains inescapable. The person of faith realizes that his religious life and the deeply personal nature of his inner world are incommunicable. He is separated from the community by means of an intractable barrier, an abyss that cannot be crossed with a bridge of words. Such works reveal the influence of European existentialism, and perhaps bespeak Soloveitchik’s response—or challenge—to the writings of Martin Buber and Abraham Joshua Heschel, which were at the apex of their popularity and influence at this

¹¹¹ *Ikh bavustzayn* might also be translated as “I-consciousness,” but Soloveitchik himself uses the term “I-awareness” in a similar context; see *Lonely Man of Faith*, 29.

¹¹² Soloveitchik, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*,” 226.

¹¹³ Kolbrener, *The Last Rabbi*, esp. 4-5.

¹¹⁴ See Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *The Lonely Man of Faith* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2006), esp. 25-27, 35-39, 64-65, 80. Cf. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Redemption, Prayer, Talmud Torah,” *Tradition* 17.2 (1978): 55-72, where he argues that redemption—communal as well as individual—is marked by the return “from the periphery of history to its center.” See also Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “Catharsis,” *Tradition* 17.2 (1978): 38-54.

time.¹¹⁵ Unlike *Lonely Man of Faith*, “*Yokhed ve-tsiber*” is filled with optimistic descriptions of an individual’s deep connections with the community around him, reflecting a relatively youthful Soloveitchik nearing the height of his power.

The Yiddish *droshe* was written in the immediate post-Holocaust, and the collective trauma must have impacted Soloveitchik’s sense that the *yokhed* must step out of his own inward preoccupations, even those of Torah, to be a responsible member of society. He was, at heart, an Eastern European Jew unhappy with individualist America, feeling the call toward collective responsibility in the wake of the Nazi destruction of European Jewry. Like his contemporaries Abraham Joshua Heschel and Menachem Mendel Schneerson, other major intellectuals from the rabbinic elite who were educated in Western Europe on their way out of Poland and Russia, Soloveitchik could easily have remained an intellectual *yokhed* content to follow the life of the mind. But, as with Heschel and Schneerson, the trauma of 1933-1945 compelled otherwise, leading to a renewed sense of moral responsibility to the Jewish people. Soloveitchik’s embrace of Zionism and his emphasis on communal destiny, a radical break with the traditions of his Lithuanian forbearers, may be interpreted as a part of this process as well.¹¹⁶

These intellectual migrations make Soloveitchik’s philosophy every bit as marbled and idiosyncratic as his evocative Yiddish idiom. He was the scion of a venerated rabbinic line, a Yiddish-speaking sage steeped in old-world rabbinic culture who spent most of his intellectual career in the United States. He was at home in the realms of neo-Kantian and Western philosophy as well as the sea of Talmudic discourse, and his Lithuanian scholarship was illuminated by more than a spark of Hasidic piety and rapture. He could have contented himself to pursue his own studies, mastering Talmud and philosophy and fulfilling his own intellectual interests without concern. Soloveitchik moved West to Germany to cultivate his own intellectual life, but somehow that West betrayed him, and the fates of history drew him back into the pull of responsibility for the collective. Like the *yokhed* at the heart of his *droshe*, Soloveitchik himself sought to answer that pull by expanding the boundaries of his private life in an attempt to convey his inner world to the community. These intellectual peregrinations and layered hybrid identity, at once both deeply fragmented and powerfully synthetic, are particularly visible in Soloveitchik’s repercussive Yiddish idiom.

¹¹⁵ See Michael S. Berger, “*U-vikashtem Mi-sham*: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik’s Response to Martin Buber’s Religious Existentialism,” *Modern Judaism* 18.2 (1998): 93-118; and David D. Possen, “J.B. Soloveitchik: Between Neo-Kantianism and Kierkegaardian Existentialism,” *Kierkegaard’s Influence on Theology, Tome III: Catholic and Jewish Theology*, ed. Jon Stewart (Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company 2012), 189-209. See also Soloveitchik’s “*Be-Seter u-ve-Galui*”, in *Divrei Hagut ve-Ha-‘arakhah*, 163-186.

¹¹⁶ See Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “*Kol Dodi Dofek*,” *Divrei Hagut ve-Ha-‘arakhah*, 9-56; Dov Schwartz, “*Kol Dodi Dofek*: A Religious-Zionist Alternative,” *Tradition* 39.3 (2006): 59-72.