

Yeshivat Chovevei Torah: Is It Orthodox?

AN EXPOSÉ ON A THREAT TO HALACHIC JUDAISM

By Yisroel Lichter

INTRODUCTION

Rav Mordechai Gifter, *zt"l*, the Telzer Rosh Yeshiva, would often say that the word "Orthodox" is a Greek term that really has no meaning to us. He always felt more comfortable describing Torah-observant Jews as Torah Jews.

Nevertheless, the term "Orthodox" has come to connote Jews who are Torah-observant according to the accepted norms of the *Shulchan Aruch* and its interpretation by the great *poskim*, halachic decisors, throughout the generations.

Over the past years, there has been an emerging threat to Orthodox Judaism that has been gaining power and momentum. It is a "Yeshiva" that professes to be "Orthodox" but, in fact, deviates from normative Orthodox thought, *halacha* and practice as accepted by Rabbonim and Poskim from across the spectrum of Orthodoxy.

The Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah (YCT) based in Manhattan, has slowly been placing "Rabbis" in communities across the United States.

Although by and large, *Yated* readers will rarely, if ever, daven in their synagogues,

nor will they have much to do with their communities, we would be making a mistake of historic proportions to ignore their actions as they try to conquer Modern/Centrist Orthodox pulpits across the country.

Indeed, we have been surprised that a spirited, *halachic* and ideological battle has not been waged from within the walls of Yeshiva University (RIETS) and the Rabbinical Council of American (RCA), perhaps the two organizations whose constituents would be most affected by YCT's continued growth. In addition, publications which serve that community have been surprisingly quiet about this new organization that has hijacked the title "Orthodox" to describe its affiliation.

In recent months, our concern has been aroused by numerous statements issued by YCT leaders and YCT rabbis. This is not an organization in which one or two rabbis have inadvertently made mistakes. Rather, it is a bold organization that seeks to assume the name "Orthodox," thereby connoting fidelity to *halacha*, while openly adapting and advocating precepts that are wholly unorthodox and even anti-Orthodox.

Their transgressions span many areas but are particularly egregious regarding issues pertaining to pluralism, interfaith

relationships and Bible criticism, *r"l*.

The *Yated* has examined reams of documents on public record about some of YCT's activities over the past couple of years. Suffice it to say that even a fraction of the documents on record make it sufficiently clear that YCT is far beyond the pale of Orthodoxy. In fact, this writer feels that YCT is a greater threat to Orthodoxy than Reform and Conservative due to their constant refrain that they are "Orthodox" while they espouse positions that are decidedly unorthodox and even anti-Orthodox. Whereas it is clear to Orthodox Jews that Reform and Conservative approaches have no relationship to authentic Judaism, that position is not as clear vis-à-vis YCT because of the pains they take to assume the label of Orthodoxy.

The purpose of this article is to set forth some of the statements and practices of their leaders, founders and "Rosh Yeshiva," as well as some of their "*musmachim*," and let our readers judge whether this aberration has any true connection with normative Orthodox Judaism.

WHAT IS YESHIVAT CHOVEVEI TORAH?

There is no better way to find out what YCT is than through its very own self-

description, taken from its website:

We at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School (YCT) believe that the future of Orthodoxy depends on our becoming a movement that expands outward non-dogmatically and cooperatively to encompass the needs of the larger Jewish community and the world. For this vision to succeed, we require a new breed of leaders – rabbis who are open, non-judgmental, knowledgeable, empathetic, and eager to transform Orthodoxy into a movement that meaningfully and respectfully interacts with all Jews, regardless of affiliation, commitment, or background. YCT is the only institution committed to training and placing open Modern Orthodox rabbis. We seek the best and the brightest that Modern Orthodoxy has to offer. Each student accepted into our family is chosen through a rigorous process that employs the highest academic standards and scrutinizes every applicant's character, make-up and overall ability to perform and excel as a leader of the Jewish community. Our Modern Orthodox rabbinical school cultivates a love of Torah, a philosophy of inclusiveness, and a passion for leadership. The entire curriculum is taught at the highest levels

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of academic excellence by leading scholars and talmidei chachamim. Upon ordination, each graduate commits to serving in the rabbinate.

There are a number of ambiguous terms in this carefully worded mission statement that require clarification. What exactly does “expanding outward non-dogmatically” mean?

In a religious sense and in *halachic* terms, what is the meaning of “a new breed of leaders – rabbis who are open, non-judgmental, knowledgeable, empathetic, eager to transform Orthodoxy into a movement that meaningfully and respectfully interacts with all Jews, regardless of affiliation, commitment or background?”

Lastly, what is it that YCT dislikes about the present Rabbinic leaders that has caused them to undertake the bold step of breeding “new leaders”?

Even more importantly, what is this “interaction with Jews of all affiliations?” Is it a new term for *kiruv rechokim*? Has YCT decided to join Ohr Somayach, Aish HaTorah and the other capable *kiruv* programs or is it something totally different?

“Our Modern Orthodox rabbinical school cultivates a love of Torah, a philosophy of inclusiveness, and a passion for leadership.” What is the nature of this inclusiveness? What and who exactly is being included? How are they being included? These are some of the questions begging for answers upon reading the mission statement.

The answer does not seem very difficult to discern from YCT’s own published

statements, along with statements made by its founder and Dean, Rabbi Avi Weiss and its Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Dov Linzer.

YCT’s graduates and students have also written and published material both in the printed media and in cyber-space that give us a clear indication of the meaning of these words.

In the following pages, we will quote from the words of YCT’s faculty members and we will determine whether these words represent Orthodoxy; whether these ideas are in consonance with *halachic* Judaism as dictated by the *Shulchan Aruch* and the great *poskim* throughout the generations; including those that follow the *halachic* and *hashkafic* opinion of the preeminent Modern Orthodox Torah authority, Rav Yosef Dov (Joseph B.) Soloveitchik, Rosh Yeshiva of RIETS. Is this Orthodoxy or a pseudo-Conservative approach? Do YCT’s claims of fidelity to *halacha* have any truth? How does YCT define the term *halacha*?

WHAT YESHIVAT CHOVEVEI TORAH LEADERS SAY:

Rabbi Avi Weiss, dean and founder of YCT, in an essay on “Open Orthodoxy” writes, “As a modern orthodox rabbi, I profess an unequivocal commitment to the truth, validity and eternal applicability of the Halakic system. No less than my brethren of the Orthodox Right, I believe in Torah mi-Sinai, the law given by God at Sinai, to which the Jewish people committed itself. Torah mi-Sinai is a form of heteronomous law, a structure of law that operates independent of any individual, imposing its standards and guidelines.”

In the same article Rabbi Weiss writes, “Orthodox Jewry should adopt elements of the Reform and Reconstructionist universalistic agenda of *tikkun olam*, “repair of the world.” At the turn of the twentieth century, one prominent Orthodox rabbi declared that Orthodox Jews would do well to learn from Conservative Jews how to give *tzedaka* (charity) and how to show respect for rabbis.”

Rabbi Weiss continues, “Modern Orthodoxy is open to secular studies and views other than those of their rabbis; open to non-Jews and less observant Jews;... open to contact with Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist movements...”

After reading this we are left wondering what Rabbi Weiss meant by “unequivocal commitment to the truth, validity and eternal applicability of the Halakic system”! We would like to know which Halachic authority, from across the spectrum of Orthodoxy, would validate such an approach. We will discuss this at length when analyzing YCT’s approach to pluralism.

In an article that in part takes issue with the views of Rabbi David Hollander, former president of the RCA and a tireless advocate in demanding the integrity of Orthodoxy and having no Rabbinic cooperation or recognition for Conservative and Reform approaches, Rabbi Weiss writes, “[Rabbi] Hollander, for example, shows no recognition of the positive things that are happening in Conservative and Reform Judaism. After all, there does exist a yearning for G-d amongst adherents of these movements. When entering their rabbinic seminaries and synagogues one does find people who are studying Torah, gathering for prayer and observing the commandments-- even if the specific ways in which these spiritual expressions are achieved do not meet

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Orthodox standards.”

Rabbi Weiss is well aware that every Orthodox Jew—Rabbi Hollander included—is fully committed to reaching out to Jews who through no fault of their own grew up in Reform or Conservative modes of observance. *Halacha*, however, takes issue with recognizing them as an organization; recognizing their seminaries and synagogues which by their very *raison d’être* and philosophy deny *Torah Min Hashomayim*. If Rabbi Weiss considers the teachings in their Rabbinic seminaries “positive things,” he has betrayed his very own statement of attesting to his adherence “to the eternal applicability of the Halakic system.”

From these statements alone we begin to understand what YCT’s “open Orthodoxy” is all about; we get a picture from Rabbi Weiss’s writings and the actions and writings of those in his organization that belies Rabbi Weiss’s assertion that he believes in

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the "validity and eternal applicability of the Halachic system."

The Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah is Rabbi Dov Linzer. Rabbi Linzer has made pronouncements that appear even more problematic than those of Rabbi Weiss. In YCT's Torah journal entitled Milin Havivin, Linzer writes, 'Should we be bending the halakhah to conform to our modern notions of egalitarianism?' is a reasonable question to ask and a hard one to answer." (Rabbi Linzer in Milin Havivin/ YCT Torah Journal Vol. 1 p. 36.)

"Should we be bending halacha?" Is halacha pliable silly putty that is bendable at will? Who is the "we" referenced by Rabbi Linzer? Bending halacha to "conform to modern notions" seems far more like a Conservative and Reform practice than an Orthodox one. Yet this statement is from a Rosh Yeshiva of a Yeshiva whose Dean claims, "Unequivocal commitment to the truth, validity and eternal applicability of the Halachic system"!

In his next sentence Rabbi Linzer writes, "An honest answer requires finding within the Talmud voices that articulate those same values that are driving us."

Apparently, "honesty" to him is not looking into the Torah without *negios* to seek what the Torah is teaching us, but rather trying to "find things" that "articulate the same values that are driving us." As if there was no halachic system that teaches us how to rule from the Talmud right on through the *poskim*, as if we were meant to twist halacha to conform with the philosophy we have imbibed from the majority culture.

Another of Rabbi Linzer's written

statements warrant mention here. In the Jerusalem Report Magazine November 2004 edition, Rabbi Linzer in a signed article wrote, "As an Orthodox Jew, I have to struggle not just with G-d's presence in the world, but with His commandments as

the death penalty for one who... [engages in toeiva], the inability of a woman to terminate a failed marriage—to pretend that these are not profound problems or that they are consistent with G-d's goodness is, for me, not an option. I choose to take the path of Yisrael, to face these problems and to struggle with them..."

Did Rabbi Linzer, forget that which every

right to "second-guess" or question those mitzvos whose reasons are not immediately apparent?

Did he forget the words of the Gemara and Shulchan Aruch that explicitly state, "After a bitter occurrence, we bless G-d as the True Judge, affirming that He is correct in what He does (Berachos 54:a and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 222:2)"

Perhaps he overlooked the daily morning proclamation in our Siddur which we make each morning: "Who among the supernal beings or the terrestrial beings can say to You [G-d], 'What are You doing?'"

It is clear that he made this statement despite his knowledge of the above. This is why the "Open Orthodoxy" of YCT is not Orthodox but resembles something akin to a new "Conservative light" movement.

YESHIVAT CHOVEVEI TORAH POSITIONS ON PLURALISM

YCT's position on Pluralism is perhaps one of its most problematic.

In 1956, eleven of the most prominent Roshei Yeshiva in America issued a *Psak Din halachically* prohibiting Orthodox Rabbis from joining Rabbinic Organizations that are also comprised of Reform and Conservative Rabbis, such as the New York Board of Rabbis and the Synagogue Council of America. The *Psak* was signed by the following Torah giants: Rav Avrohom Joffen, Rav Avrohom Kalmanowitz, Rav Aharon Kotler, Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Gedaliah Schorr, Rav Chaim Mordechai Katz, Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky, Rav Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman, Rav Yitzchok Hutner, Rav Menachem Yosef Zaks, and Rav Dovid Lipschitz.

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פסק דין

בעוה"ת, כאשר נשאלנו סכמה רבנים במדינה ומכמה תניכי וסוסמכי השיבות אם מותר להשתתף ולהיות חבר ב"ניו יארק בארד אוו ראבייס" וכמו כן במוסדות דומים לזה בשאר עיירות, אשר הם מורכבים יחד עם "ראבייס" הרעפורטים והקונסרבטיבים.

והנה בהתאספנו יחד לברר הענין יצא מאתנו כי אסור על פי דין תוה"ק להיות חבר ולהשתתף בארגון כזה.

כמו כן נשאלנו אם מותר להשתתף ולהיות חבר ב"סינגוג קאונסל באמריקא" אשר הוא מורכב ג"כ עם ארגוני הרפורטים והקונסרבטיבים. ויצא מאתנו כי אסור ע"פ דין תוה"ק להשתתף עמהם כן בתור יהודי כן בתור גוש ארגון צבורי.

והשי"ת ירחם עמו ויגדיר פרצותינו ונוכה להרמת קרן תוה"ק וישראל.

ולראיה חתמנו יום ה' פ' כי תשא ה"י אדר תשפ"ז פה ניו יארק.

אברהם יפה	אברהם קאלמאנאוויץ	אהרן קוטלר	משה פיינשטיין
נד"י שארר	מ"ס מרדכי קאטן	יעקב קמנצקי	יעקב יצחק הלוי רודרמן
יצחק הוטנר	מנחם יוסף זקס	דוד ליפשיץ	

well. Some of these do not seem to square with a good, just G-d. The command to destroy Amalek and the Canaanite nations,

simple knows? Did he forget the words in the Torah on which Rashi (Bamidbar 19:2) cites the Chazal that we have no

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This *psak* prohibited all Rabbinic collaboration with Rabbis of non-Orthodox movements.

Although the preeminent Modern Orthodox Torah sage, Rav Yosef B. Soloveitchik, permitted collaboration in issues not relevant to religion, such as social services, and advocacy on behalf of the State of Israel, he unequivocally opposed any religious, spiritual or theological dialogue.

He wrote an article in the newspaper, *The Morgen Journal* outlining his opinion on this vitally important matter:

“With regards to our problem within (the Jewish community), however, our spiritual-religious interests, such as Jewish education, synagogues, councils of rabbis, where unity is expressed through spiritual-ideological collectivism as a Torah community, it is my opinion, that Orthodoxy cannot and should not unite with such groups which deny the fundamentals of our Weltanschauung. It is impossible for me to comprehend, for example, how Orthodox Rabbis, who spend their best years in Yeshivoth and absorbed the spirit of the Oral Law and its tradition, for which Rabbi Akiba, Maimonides, Reb Moshe Iserlis, The Gaon of Vilna, Reb Chaim Brisker and other Jewish sages are the pillars upon which their spiritual world rests, can join with spiritual leaders for whom all this is worthless. A rabbinical organization is not a professional fraternity, which fights for the economic interests of the rabbi. It is an ideological entity where members work for one purpose and for one ideal. The fundamental difference in ideology and in observance makes such

a unity impossible. From the point of view of the Torah, we find the difference between Orthodoxy and Reform Judaism much greater than that which separated the Pharisees from the Sadducees in the days of the Second Commonwealth, and between the Karaites and traditionalists in the Gaonic era. Has Jewish history ever recorded an instance of a joint Community Council or a joint Rabbinical Council which consisted of Karaites and Torah-true Jews? In internal problems, where the unity of Israel is based upon the concept of Edah (congregation), it is halakhically more advisable and practically wiser not to unite with reform or semi-reform movements. Too much harmony and peace can cause confusion of the minds and will erase outwardly the boundaries between Orthodox and other movements.”

What is YCT's approach to pluralism; to collaboration and cooperation with Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist clergy and movements?

Rabbi Saul Berman, current Director of Continuing Rabbinic Education at YCT, and former director of the [thankfully defunct] Edah organization has written, “Non-Orthodox denominations are realities that make positive contributions to the preservation and growth of Jewish identity. While we profoundly and irreconcilably differ on many theological and halachic matters, we should maximize our cooperation with them, attempt to achieve mutual strengthening through the relationship, and strive to maintain the

unity of the Jewish people.”

Rabbi Berman also writes, “When [certain rabbanim] favored Orthodoxy working alongside Reform in common community organizations, they saw the divine command of ahavat Yisrael as applying to all Jews.”

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He is clearly insinuating that Rav Aharon Kotler, Rav Moshe Feinstein, and all of the Roshei Yeshiva who unequivocally prohibited collaboration with these movements were lacking in the requisite *Ahavas Yisroel!* He also implies that Rabbi Soloveichik's love of his fellow Jews was incomplete. Does Rabbi Berman really believe that he and his sympathizers have a monopoly on *Ahavas Yisroel?*

Kotler, Rav Moshe Feinstein, and all of the Roshei Yeshiva who unequivocally prohibited collaboration with these movements were lacking in the requisite *Ahavas Yisroel!* He also implies that Rabbi Soloveitchik's love of his fellow Jews was incomplete. Does Rabbi Berman really believe that he and his sympathizers have a monopoly on *Ahavas Yisroel?*

Now we can progress to reading some news reports about YCT's activities and those of its graduates so that our readers can be the judges; we will ask our readers

to assess if YCT and the conduct of their ordained Rabbis bear any resemblance to Orthodox Judaism?

In YCT's own new letter, (Spring 2006) there is a report describing some of the school's latest activities. They report on the “Interseminary Dialogue, Dialogue between members of Reform and Conservative seminaries as well as Christian theological students.”

This is a quote: *The conference room was packed with future rabbis, ministers, educators, and priests poring over a passage by the Chasidic master Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev... This scene is replicated approximately once a month, when the Interseminary Dialogue Group meets. The group is convened by the Louis I. Weinstock Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), in partnership with eight Jewish seminaries in the New York area: the St. Joseph Seminary, the General Theological Seminary, Hebrew Union College [the Reform seminary], Union Theological Seminary, and the Academy for Jewish Religion. YCT has participated in this group since the yeshiva's inception.*

Each year, the group picks a general topic of conversation. The schools take turns leading text studies focusing on a subtopic of the current year's theme, allowing each seminary to share what its faith tradition says on the given topic. The text study is followed by smaller conversations in which participants share their reactions to the texts based on their religious perspectives... The Interseminary Dialogue Group allows all of us to learn about other faith traditions

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... [Ploni], a fourth-year student at YCT, recently participated in the *Interseminary Dialogue*... [H]e said, "It was so interesting to learn about how different religious groups deal with the same issue..."

This writer is completely heartbroken that he is forced to cite these horrible quotes, quotes that should fill any Jew—who even remotely cares about *kvod shomayim* and *chillul Hashem*, and most of all who is outraged at the blatant *Ziuf Hatorah*--with horror and a deep sense of sadness.

Nevertheless, in order to better understand this absolutely audacious assault on Orthodox Judaism with its blatant attempt to grab pulpits across the United States and Canada, the wider Orthodox community must be made aware of their own statements and be asked to judge: is YCT an Orthodox seminary? Can their graduates be classified as Orthodox Rabbis?

Unfortunately, YCT's strategy of misleading the lay leadership of these synagogues by labeling themselves Orthodox, and even better, "Open Orthodox" has already met with a degree of success.

YCT's fall 2004 Newsletter had the following report written by a student.

"YCT Student Joins American Jewish World Service on Delegation To El Salvador

"[My] recent visit to El Salvador with 25 rabbinical students from six seminaries, including HUC (New York and California), JTS, the UJ, RRC, and Chovevei Torah. The second part of our mission related to exploring pluralism with future leaders of American Jewry of all denominations in the context of prayer, Torah study,

dialogue, planning of future social action projects, and leisure. As a student of YCT, I wanted to represent the 5 of my rabbinical school and movement. At the same time, I wished to explore the values and behavioral boundaries of other students in a respectful, celebratory manner. Additionally, during the course of our stay, we grew to respect the contours of each other's beliefs and practices, and to use those differences to become mutually enriched."

The St. Louis Jewish Light and Anglo Jewish newspaper, has the following report outlining the activities of YCT, graduate, (Class of 2004) Rabbi Avi Katz Orlow.

The article, headlined, "Congregations Join for Torah Study, written by Jill Kassander, says, "Generally it is each to their own when it comes to observing Jewish holidays. That is, each congregation

If YCT is an Orthodox Yeshiva why is its faculty full of Reform and Conservative Rabbis?

plans its own celebrations and members usually attend the programs at their own synagogues. Yet, the great Jewish commentator Rashi described the Jewish people coming together "like one person with one heart" when we stood at Mt. Sinai. This year the St. Louis Jewish community has an opportunity to feel what it is like to come together as one to celebrate the giving of the Torah. An evening of interdenominational Torah study for the entire community in honor of Shavuot is being sponsored by Bais Abraham Congregation,

Central Reform Congregation, Shaare Zedek Synagogue and St. Louis Hillel at Washington University.

"People open their minds and hearts to get a fuller picture of what Torah is all about. They are open to investigating a different perspective from their own," said Rabbi Avi Katz Orlow.

Teachers will include: Dr. Wendy Love Anderson, Rabbi Mark Fasman, Rabbi Randy Fleisher, Rabbi Avi Katz Orlow, Rabbi Hyim Shafner, Phyllis Shapiro and Rabbi Susan Talve.

Later, we will hear more about Rabbi Orlow when discussing his approach to practices which the Torah labels *Toeiva*.

Then there is the open, unabashed pluralism of YCT graduate, (Class of 2005) Rabbi Darren Kleinberg, Rabbi of the Kidma congregation in Phoenix, Arizona.

In September 2006, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah graduate Rabbi Darren Kleinberg organized a screening of "Sentenced to Marriage" in conjunction with his shul Kidma and the Phoenix Jewish Film Festival. The film is described as "a shocking documentary [that] exposes the Kafkaesque process of divorce for women in Israel where secular law does not exist, and divorce is dealt with according to archaic and fundamentalist orthodox Jewish law." [T]he film was shown at a Conservative synagogue. Afterwards there was a discussion panel of three rabbis that included Rabbi Kleinberg [with] Conservative and Reform [clergy].

YCT Rabbis have also been involved in interdenominational activity on behalf of Palestinian Human rights... They have joined with the radical organization, Rabbis for Human Rights, to protest the abuse of the Palestinians at the hand of the Israelis.

A report on a gathering of Rabbis for

Human Rights stated, "It was, perhaps, partly a fear of human rights being used as cudgel against Israel that accounted for a vast under-representation of Orthodox rabbis at the event. Of some 300 registrants, only a handful were Orthodox. A conversation among Orthodox participants — virtually all of them affiliated with Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, a centrist Orthodox seminary — focused on how to draw more Orthodox rabbis into human rights work."

A flyer was distributed at a rally (Wash, DC, April 13, 2002) on behalf of the Palestinians. "We are rabbinical and cantorial students from the Jewish Theological Seminary (Conservative), Hebrew Union College (Reform), Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College, the University of Judaism, the Academy of Jewish Religion and the Aleph Alliance... We cannot ignore the suffering that Israel has caused the Palestinian people during the thirty-five year occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. And we believe that the American Jewish community must acknowledge Israel's mistakes and recognize the humanity and the pain of the Palestinians. What are we to do when loyalty to the Jewish State demands an abnegation of this fundamental principle?"

Another question that cries out for an answer is, if YCT is an Orthodox Yeshiva why is its faculty full of Reform and Conservative Rabbis? Just one sample of a YCT faculty member's credentials: Teacher of the History of *Halacha*: Rabbi Jonathan Milgram, whose bio on the YCT website sets forth: "Rabbi Milgram is Assistant Professor of Talmud and Rabbinics at The Jewish Theological Seminary and specializes in lower and higher criticism of

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the Babylonian Talmud and the intersection between these studies and the historical development of Jewish law.”

Yes, you have seen right. YCT's teacher of the History of Halacha is a professor at the Jewish Theological Seminary, the flagship school of the Conservative movement. His specialty is “lower and higher criticism” of the Babylonian Talmud. We will not venture what “criticism” of the Babylonian Talmud means for fear that finding out might require rending our garments.

This is not the only star on the staff. Rabbi Elka B. Abrahamson, another lecturer at the Yeshiva, serves as Director of the Wexner Graduate Fellowship Program. Rabbi Elka Abrahamson is also a member of the faculty of Hebrew Union College, the flagship seminary of Reform Judaism. Yes, a woman with the title “Rabbi”, a Reform, female Rabbi, is teaching young aspiring, ostensibly Orthodox Rabbis at Chovevei Torah the skills required in the Rabbinic field to administer to their congregants.

There is also Rabbi Naomi Kalish, Lecturer in Pastoral Counseling and Rabbi Terry A. Bookman who was ordained rabbi by the Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in New York in 1984. He holds an MA in Hebrew Letters (Hebrew Union College)...

Indeed, at the “Chag Hasemicha” in which Yeshivat Chovevei Torah celebrated the ordination of their students, news reports listed some of the guests: they included, “Rabbi David Ellinson, the president of Hebrew Union College (Reform), Rabbi Joseph Brody, Vice President for student affairs at the Jewish Theological Seminary

(Conservative), and Rabbi Saul Berman of Edah [Today a senior member of YCT faculty]. “All three danced together with the students, the faculty and other guests.”

This is but a sampling of the approach to pluralism of YCT and its graduates. It is clear then that YCT is in complete contempt of *Halacha*, and has made a total mockery of even Rav Soloveitchik's *psak* regarding collaboration with other movements.

We think that Rabbi Avi Weiss's definition of “open to contact with Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist movements...” is pretty clear; just as clear as Rabbi Saul Berman's position that “we should maximize our cooperation with them, attempt to achieve mutual strengthening through the relationship, and strive to maintain the unity of the Jewish people.”

YCT's approach to pluralism is not Orthodox, it is a blatant violation of *Halacha* by any standards. It is therefore clear that YCT is knowingly and unabashedly misleading the public by labeling themselves Orthodox.

YESHIVAT CHOVEVEI TORAH'S POSITION ON INTERFAITH THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE:

Rav Moshe Feinstein, Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 3:43 unequivocally forbade inter-faith dialogue.

Rav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik opposed inter-faith dialogue on religious issues

In Tradition Magazine, the RCA's Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought, Rav Soloveitchik wrote, “In light of this

analysis, it would be reasonable to state that in any confrontation [between the Jewish community and the majority culture,] we must insist upon four basic conditions in order to safeguard our individuality and freedom of action... Second, the logos, the word, in which the multifarious religious experience is expressed does not lend itself to standardization or universalization. The word of faith reflects the intimate, the private, the paradoxically inexpressible cravings of the individual for and his linking up with his Maker. It reflects the numinous character and the strangeness of the act of faith of a particular community which is totally incomprehensible to the man of a different faith community. Hence, it is important that the religious or theological logos should not be employed as the medium of communication between two faith communities whose modes of expression are as unique as their apocalyptic experiences. The confrontation should occur not at a theological but at a mundane human level. There, all of us speak the universal language of modern man.”

Thus, even according to Rav Soloveitchik, religious dialogue with members of other religions was absolutely prohibited.

And YCT's policy and actions regarding religious dialogue?

Here is a report written by a YCT student on March 27, 2006 about an event that took place at YCT's campus in Manhattan.

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“Today, as part of a World Jewish Congress led-delegation, around 30 bishops and two cardinals came to our school [YCT]... Cardinal Lustiger spoke for a little bit, followed by a question and answer sequence.. Lunch, however, rather than ending the event, allowed for mingling among the students and bishops to talk.

cardinals came to our school. The events began with an opening speech by Israel Singer, followed by a speech by Rabbi Avi Weiss, then one by our rosh hayeshiva, Rabbi Dov Linzer, after which, we broke up into small groups and did some text studying of Berakhos 26b, where there is a discussion of the establishing of prayer. After about 45 minutes of that, there were, again, a couple of little speeches, then Cardinal Lustiger spoke for a little bit, followed by a question and answer sequence, which was ended by lunch. Lunch, however, rather than ending the event, allowed for mingling among the students and bishops to talk. One point that was emphasized was that, although Vatican II has been around for forty years, it has only been in the last twenty that Catholic-Jewish relations have really been progressing.”

We wonder how Rabbis Weiss and Linzer, both of whom have frequently called themselves students of Rav Soloveitchik, reconcile this conduct with their mentor's opinion.

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An Exposé on a Threat to Halachic Judaism

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Would Rav Soloveitchik let a Cardinal let alone a *meshumad*, speak to his students?

Here are the words of a YCT student posted on June 18, 2006: "As I sit here collecting my thoughts on the training week of Seminary Summer, a project of Interfaith Worker Justice my mind turns to our final night together... a small group of us gathered around one of the dining room tables and began to have a discussion. The group consisted of two Roman Catholics, one Evangelical Christian, a Quaker, one Methodist and myself, an Orthodox Jew. We sat there together after a week of developing interpersonal relationships and rapport with each other and began to discuss theological issues that divide us and the things that unite us. We sat around that table the entire evening until the sun rose engaged in a frank and honest discussion of many issues around theology including suffering, eschatology, Biblical interpretation, State of Israel... and so many other issues I can not even recall all of them. It was undoubtedly one of the most amazing conversations I have ever been involved in... I have made a significant step towards recognizing that what works for others does not necessarily have to work for me and I can respect the integrity of the other..."

"As I close this short reflection my mind returns to the image of 40 some people reflecting 19 different religious traditions dancing to a Carlebach niggun and collectively working to improve the condition and dignity of hardworking laborers across the country. I do not know if interfaith work is for everyone but the impact and power it has is undeniable in

working towards a more just world..."

Here is another insight into the practice and mind of this same YCT student. "This morning, as all mornings, we began with an interfaith prayer service. I took part in running it this morning and I found it to be a very meaningful experience. Our theme was using our bodies in service of God and different people offered different practices or teachings on the subject. We opened with a silent meditation reflecting on how we individually use our bodies in the act of prayer. An Islamic student proceeded to quote a verse from the Qu'ran and then a Catholic student studying for the priesthood taught us a song in Spanish about joining in the journey towards simultaneously God and liberty. We returned to the Islamic tradition by learning about the role of body position in prayer specifically prostration and then I offered a brief overview of the Jewish perspective of prostration. Another person offered a reflection on body and movement with a prayer and then I led everyone in a niggun (a wordless melody) that spilled into everyone dancing in the traditional Jewish manner. The bulk of the day after the prayer service was spent on learning about each other's different religious faith traditions and what to take with us as we interact with lay people and clergy from many different religions."

OUTRIGHT KEFIRAH ESPOUSED BY YCT RABBIS

We have met Rabbi Darren Kleinberg in an earlier chapter of this essay. Recently Rabbi Avi Weiss, founding Dean of YCT gave a lecture at Kidma, Rabbi Kleinberg's synagogue in Phoenix. Rabbi Weiss hailed Kleinberg as "brilliant in Tanach and Oral

Law,' 'best of the best [of YCT graduates],' and a 'pastoral genius.'"

The following are a number of Rabbi Kleinberg's published articles; let the reader decide if his views represent Orthodoxy.

Rabbi Kleinberg wrote in a Phoenix newspaper, "Possibly the most fascinating aspect of the Torah - and one that distinguishes it from many other sacred texts - is its depiction of G-d as less than perfect. These imperfections are sometime elaborated within the biblical text itself and are sometimes found from within the context of our own lives as readers of the text. And so it must be asked: "Did G-d not know that man would be alone?" Is God not, after all, all-knowing (omniscient)? One answer that has been given to this question is that the Torah is teaching us a lesson that even G-d learns, and therefore, so should we... *Afra lepumei*

Here is another instance of outright *kefirah*. This was printed in the Jewish News of Greater Phoenix:

"This week we read the jarring story of the blasphemer - the mekalel. As my friend and teacher Rabbi Uri Topolosky has suggested, maybe when G-d speaks to Moshe regarding the blasphemer and He tells Moshe to bring all of those who deem the man guilty to place their hands on his head, it is as an appeal for compassion. If these members of the tribe of Dan are so sure he must die for his blasphemy, they must "take it into their own hands." But once G-d, literally and figuratively, "puts it in the people's hands," they are free to make either the wrong or the right decision. And so, "they took the blasphemer out of the camp, pelting him to death with stones." They make the wrong decision." *Afra L'pumei*.

Is this YCT's brand of Orthodoxy? The writer of this *kefirah* and nonsense is the

person dubbed by YCT's dean, "the best of the best [of YCT graduates]". One shudders to think what the worst of the worst must look like. Instead of standing up and saying unequivocally that Kleinberg's words do not reflect YCT's positions, Rabbi Weiss has only praise for him.

Rabbi Zev Farber is a YCT graduate, Rosh Kollel at Atlanta Torah MiTzion in Atlanta, GA. In an article that YCT was not ashamed to publish on its own website he has the audacity to write outright *kefirah* in the interpretation of *Chazal* in the *Gemarah*. In an article that he brazenly titles, "Choosing a Wife - Did Yaakov Get It Right?"

We do not want to sully the pages of the *Yated* with Rabbi Farber's outrageous critique of Yaakov Avinu. Suffice it to say that it is an unforgivable *bizayon* of the *Avos Hakedoshim* and *Imahos Hakedoshos* and the height of Chutzpah, stupidity and ignorance that goes against everything that *Chazal* have taught us about them.

Rabbi Zev Farber, the YCT website tells us, is studying for his *semicha* in *Dayanus* with Rabbi Michael Broyde. Rabbi Broyde is a Dayan on the RCA Beis Din and Rabbi of a Young Israel branch in Atlanta. If that information in the YCT website is accurate, then how can Rabbi Broyde train such a student, a student who unabashedly writes the above? What does this say about the RCA? Are there any minimum standards of *Emunah* in *Divrei Chazal* on how to learn and understand the incidents mentioned in the Torah?

Another painful issue is the attitude that a YCT graduate has to practices that the Torah, unequivocally calls *toeivah*.

In the YCT Newsletter Summer 2005/ Volume 2 Issue 1 They featured an Alumni Profile interview with Rabbi Avi Katz-

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Orlow. YCT asked him: "What is your most proud accomplishment since you began working at Washington University?"

"During my first year in Hillel, [we] created a meaningful Haggadah for the [people that openly engage in a lifestyle that the Torah calls *Toeiva*] community, which spoke to their understanding of what it means to be liberated. Our Sages teach us that in every generation we must come to see ourselves as having left Egypt's enslavement. The Torah that emerged from these students' serious study of the Haggadah shows their keen awareness of the Sages' teaching and will remain with me for every Pesach to follow."

"In addition, two years ago Keshet [a group comprised of Jews that engage in this conduct] members handed out hamentashen to students on campus. The message was to 'come out for Purim.' Rabbi Orlow explains, 'Esther was a young Jewish woman who closeted her Jewish identity to keep a favored position with the Persian king. When she learned of Haman's plot she revealed her identity and saved her people. It was a very courageous act.' The moral: 'Take a risk and share your identity and speak truth to power,' Rabbi Orlow says. 'It was a wonderful moment any student could join in. Who would think the hamentashen could be a traditional yet current articulation of Jewish life?' He says Keshet members are planning to repeat the event next Purim."

"Rabbi Orlow says. 'Other campus ministries are equally... friendly but at Washington University Hillel has had an opportunity to lead on many things. It's a

safe place for students to explore... [many things]." *Afra L'Pumei.*

CONCLUSION:

From all of the heartbreaking material that we have just read, it is clear that the "Open Orthodoxy" that YCT is teaching and advocating is a deviation from normative Orthodoxy. It clearly has violated numerous *halachic* opinions, including the most lenient, regarding pluralism and interfaith issues, and some have spouted outright *kefira*.

Although it is a "Yeshiva" that touts itself as having "unequivocal commitment to the truth, validity and eternal applicability of the Halakhic system" it has clearly demonstrated that societal norms, "modern notions of egalitarianism" and a desire to tamper with Orthodoxy and *halacha* to fit those norms are its defining factor. YCT has clearly shown that it is not interested in unequivocally seeking what *halacha* says but rather it is determined to find what it deems as *halachic* precedent to fit its social and societal agenda and if it can't, then it will bend or disregard *halacha* while simultaneously doing all within its power to protest that it is a Yeshiva that has fidelity to *halacha*.

For, if YCT admits what they really are; a Yeshiva that does not conform with *halacha*, they have lost their reason to exist.

It is clear that YCT was created to serve as an organization that will finally infiltrate the Orthodox establishment, Orthodox synagogues and implement fashionable social change — in many ways similar to what the early Conservative movement did. (At least the Conservatives had the courage

to say that they were not Orthodox) This is evident by the material presented above as well as its questionable *halachic* practices with regard to women's issues which we have avoided in this present article. (Perhaps we will deal with those in the future).

YCT seems to have unlimited resources, does not charge tuition and even gives financial stipends to its students. It is obviously being funded by those who

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seek to be called Orthodox, but who are interested in *halacha* conforming to their pre-conceived notions of what is right and not the opposite.

In a way, YCT is acting in the tradition of the *Maskilim* of a previous era. Although they are not experiencing the success that the *Maskilim* had with the masses on an individual level, on a communal level, their efforts to conquer pulpits in communities across the United States and Canada is something that should concern every Jew who values *kvod shomayim*.

It was with great reservation and heartache that we undertook to expose to our readers to the terribly destructive conduct of YCT. It is a responsibility that

we undertook with great trepidation. As a Torah newspaper we hesitate to expose and pain our readership by enumerating the terribly distressing things contained within this article.

Nevertheless, after watching YCT develop and spread with barely a peep of public outcry from the Modern / Centrist Orthodox establishment we felt compelled by the injunction of our sages, that state, "*Bemakom she'ein ish, hishtadel lihiyos ish*: In a place where there are no leaders; strive to be a leader (Avos 2-6)."

The wider community must be made aware of this growing threat, this growing attack on the very foundations of our faith that is gathering strength. We hope that this small sampling of items will travel well beyond the natural constituency of *Yated* readers and serve as a point of discussion and most importantly a wake up call for all Jews, Right, Left or Center, who truly care about *kvod shomayim* and the integrity of the *Halachic* system.

— We are well aware that we may be tarred as, lacking in *Ahavat Yisrael*, engaging in *Motzee shem ra*, *lashon harah*, shrill condemnations, being mean spirited etc.

We think the facts speak for themselves. We challenge any person that seriously feels we have erred to deal with the issues and prove that the material mentioned above does not represent a violation of *halacha* as espoused by authentic *halachic* authorities. Those YCT faculty members who purport to call themselves students of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik are challenged to prove that the above conduct would have been sanctioned by Rav Soloveitchik.

No amount of "good", "no amount of "kiruv", "combating assimilation" or any other justifications can rationalize this clear *ziyuf*—forgery of Orthodoxy practiced at YCT.