

"This year, notwithstanding the general economic difficulties in Israel, we are pleased to have witnessed a substantial growth in the number of students enrolled in the various programs affiliated with the Herzog College, for a total of nearly 1,600 students," according to **Dr. Shmuel Wygoda**, Director of the Herzog College.

Stella K. Abraham Beit Midrash for Women

The Herzog College is proud to announce the accreditation of the Stella K. Abraham Beit Midrash for Women at Migdal Oz. The accreditation, granted by the Ministry of Education, allows women at the Beit Midrash to enroll in a four-year program of intensive study of Jewish sources along with pedagogic training, culminating in a Bachelor of Education degree.

Study at the Stella K. Abraham Beit Midrash includes rigorous courses in Talmud, Tanach, Jewish Philosophy, Halacha and Jewish History. An advanced group of women is taught by *Rosh Yeshiva* **Harav Aharon Lichtenstein**. There are currently 119 women in the Beit Midrash for Women, including 17 from the United States who are fully integrated with their Israeli counterparts. **Esti Rosenberg**, Director of the Beit Midrash, recently returned from a trip to the United States where she met and interviewed potential students for next year.

Summer Study Days in Tanach

Over 2,000 participants from throughout the country, as well as Jewish educators from Europe and North America, attended the annual summer Study Days in Tanach held at the Herzog College on June 21-24. The program offered a choice of 120 *shiurim* covering all 24 books of Tanach and related pedagogic topics, delivered by top Herzog College lecturers, as well as a choice of 11 Tanach-based *tiyulim*. The cable network "Techelet" filmed 15 of the classes which were screened on their "Beit Midrash" Program.

Tanach Study Days in the U.S.

"Imitation is the greatest form of flattery" goes the old adage and it was certainly true this past June in Teaneck, NJ. Taking the model of the annual Study Days in Tanach of the Herzog College, **Rabbi Nati Helfgot** '81, *Ram* at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah Rabbinical School, coordinated a similar program, sponsored by Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and held at the Maayanot Yeshiva High School Campus in Teaneck, NJ on June 25-26. Prominent Yeshivat Har Etzion and Herzog College faculty, including **Rav Yoel Bin-Nun**, **Rav Menachem Leibtag**, as well as other outstanding teachers of Tanach from both the U.S. and Israel, delivered over 55 *shiurim* during the course of the two days. Close to 270 people, including many educators from throughout the country, participated in this unique event, to be held on an annual basis.

"Responses and feedback to the program have been overwhelming and reflect the strong desire for serious and sophisticated Tanach learning in the spirit and with the methodologies that have come to be associated with the Yeshiva and Herzog College in the last two decades," stated Rabbi Helfgot.

Barbara Freedman, *Limudei Kodesh* Coordinator in the elementary school and teacher in the elementary and high schools of the Hebrew Academy of Montreal, (mother of Har Etzion alumnus, Avidan '97-'98, '01 PC) writes:

"The Study Days in Tanach at the Herzog College were an outstanding educational and spiritual experience. It was a *zechut* to be able to study Tanach with some of the top *rabbeim* and women scholars of our times. The opportunity to be surrounded by students of all ages and from many different places, all united in the pursuit of *limud Torah* was an extraordinary spiritual experience. It was "*me'ein olam haba*". I had heard about the Study Days a number of years ago, and always dreamed of being able to attend them. Last year, *Baruch Hashem*, I was in Israel at the right time to participate. I also had the privilege of attending the study program at Chovevei Torah in Teaneck. The Study Days have enriched my own learning and my teaching abilities. I was also energized and renewed in my love of learning and teaching Torah."



Stella K. Abraham Beit Midrash for Women in Migdal Oz



Advanced class with Harav Lichtenstein in Migdal Oz



Buses arrived from throughout Israel



Shiur with Rav Yoel Bin-Nun in the Alon Shevut synagogue



A tent was set up on the Yeshiva campus to accommodate the unprecedented number of participants

The battle of Torah

By **BENJAMIN BALINT**

In contrast with the tradition of Christian autobiography, which wends its way from Augustine's *Confessions* through Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* to C. S. Lewis's *Surprised by Joy*, Jewish history is relatively devoid of religious memoir-making. In a new book to which he has given the Whitmanesque title *Leaves of Faith*, Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, co-rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Etzion since 1971, is no exception to the rule. His book (to be followed shortly by a second volume) is not an account of his life, but a collection of essays, some appearing for the first time, on the styles, goals, challenges, and exemplars of traditional Jewish learning. Yet it is best read as a deeply – if indirectly – personal offering; a memoir of a subtler kind.

The man revealed in its pages is not only one of the ablest practitioners of Torah study and, fortunately for us, among its most fluent expositors, but also one of its most passionate lovers. To begin with, Lichtenstein loves Torah in its pure and ideal state, unfettered from halachic decision-making, and he delivers here a defense of the intensely abstract "Brisker" style of learning – a conceptual approach that employs its analytical categories and distinctions to resolve apparent contradictions.

"Torah that is perceived as grounded upon rational principles and marked by consistency and coherence," Lichtenstein writes, "is nobler than one that is a potpourri of practical directives."

But Lichtenstein loves these practical laws no less, and even looks to them for the very definition of Jewishness: "the Jew is, first and foremost, a summoned being, charged with a mission... and directed by rules."

That the study of halacha is not merely theoretical is likewise of utmost theological significance since, as he explains, it "constitutes an encounter with its magisterially commanding Giver."

It follows that Torah study – this is one of Lichtenstein's pervasive themes – should really be an "experiential as well as intellectual" encounter.

And the experience, he reports, can be thrilling. In his description of what it is to be immersed in "the dialectic thrust and parry" of Talmud, for instance, it is impossible not to sense a lifelong enthrallment: "On every daf [page of Talmud], one feels the freshness of virgin birth, the angular edge of rough terrain plowed and yet unplowed, the beck of meandering paths charted and yet uncharted.... To open a sugya [talmudic passage] is to gain access to a world in ferment. It is to enter a pulsating beit midrash, studded with live protagonists... [and] to be charged by the Sturm und Drang of milhamtah shel Torah [the battle of Torah]."

A large part of the Talmud's loveliness, then, lies precisely in the invigorating, messy turmoil that attends all forms of battle. Lichtenstein sees in the arguments of the Talmud's Abaye and Rava a place where "the excitement of confrontation takes precedence over

the lucidity of exposition, discourse over conclusion, debate over resolution" – a vast terrain of "possibility and conjecture."

Two other kinds of complicating untidiness are central to this book – and to the author's life. The first involves the uneasy relationship between Torah study and secular, Western knowledge. Not surprisingly, Lichtenstein, who earned rabbinic ordination from Yeshiva University and a Ph.D. in literature from Harvard, harbors a profound love of both, and advocates a synthesis of the two.

On the one hand, he considers Torah "the logical groundwork of all truth. Its principles... provide a philosophic framework within which all knowledge attains meaning." He considers "naïve" the notion that truth will emerge from a free clash of ideas, and so insists that any amalgamation ought to begin by recognizing Torah "as the supreme value – in a sense, as the only value."

On the other hand, the opposite naïveté must also be avoided.

"To deny that many fields have been better cultivated by non-Jewish than by Jewish writers is to be stubbornly and unnecessarily chauvinistic. There is nothing in our medieval poetry to rival Dante, and nothing in our modern literature to compare with Kant, and we would do well to admit it."

We should harvest those fields for their moral and spiritual insights, Lichtenstein thinks, just as we should enrich them with our own fertile influence.

The second more politically contentious complication arises from the often uncomfortable association between Torah study and service in Israel's army – another clash of sacred with secular. Here again, in an essay on "The Ideology of Hesder," Lichtenstein develops a powerful case for a synthesis, embodied in his own yeshiva, between these two competing demands, and by extension between the active and contemplative life.

Though he considers army service "alien to the ideal Jewish vision," and worries that it could

cause "the dulling of moral and religious sensitivity," he has no doubt that "the defense of Israel is an ethical and halachic imperative." The resulting compromise – a five-year program that allows students both to serve and to study – represents, for Lichtenstein, "our collective anomaly: a nation with outstretched palm and mailed fist, striving for peace and yet training for war."

Leaves of Faith ends, more or less, with an eloquent evocation and appreciation of one more object of Lichtenstein's enduring adoration: the late Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, his father-in-law and mentor (though this is too weak a word) – "a masterful teacher and brilliant Talmudist who "wonderfully combined the drive for truth and the responsibility to it," and who personified "the fusion of imagination and precision, of energized sweep and rigorous discipline."

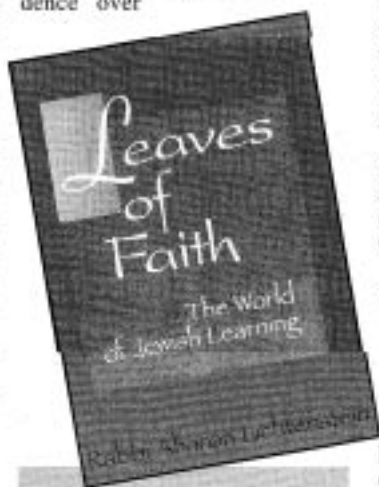
Though it might be cliché to say it, a reader of this impersonal personal book in which the author's immense power and restraint so intriguingly vie with one another on every page cannot help being struck by how aptly these words fit Lichtenstein himself.

In the end, each of the loves Aharon Lichtenstein displays in these essays – of Torah (pristinely coherent and vibrantly chaotic both), of Western literature (he is fond of citing Matthew Arnold's famous admonition to seek "the best that has been thought and said in the world"), of Israel, and of his great teacher – is beautiful and humbling to behold.

Which brings us back to Walt Whitman. In his *Leaves of Grass*, the poet writes something that is true of any book written from the heart, including this one:

*This is no book,
Who touches this, touches a man,
It is I you hold and who holds you,
I spring from the pages into your arms.*

The writer, who studied at Yeshivat Har Etzion for two years, is assistant editor of Commentary.



**Leaves of Faith:
The World of Jewish Learning**
by Aharon Lichtenstein.
Ktav,
268 pp., \$29.50