

*Yirat Shamayim*  
*The Awe, Reverence,*  
*and Fear of God*

EDITED BY  
Marc D. Stern

Robert S. Hirt, Series Editor

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## **THE ORTHODOX FORUM**

The Orthodox Forum, initially convened by Dr. Norman Lamm, Chancellor of Yeshiva University, meets each year to consider major issues of concern to the Jewish community. Forum participants from throughout the world, including academicians in both Jewish and secular fields, rabbis, rashei yeshivah, Jewish educators, and Jewish communal professionals, gather in conference as a think tank to discuss and critique each other's original papers, examining different aspects of a central theme. The purpose of the Forum is to create and disseminate a new and vibrant Torah literature addressing the critical issues facing Jewry today.

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# 2

## *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* and the Roots of the Musar Controversy

*Elyakim Krumbein*

### **BACKGROUND**

The historic dispute over the Musar movement focused on issues not necessarily related to *musar*, but to the movement. In the heat of argument, the critics would find fault with the perceived sectarianism of the Musar practitioners, their alleged condescending attitude, self-righteous bearing, and so forth. Through the fog of vituperation then prevailing, I wish to try and retrospectively discern the more essential differences of opinion.

A famous exchange which took place in Volozhin has Reb Hayyim Brisker rejecting Reb Itzele Blazer's overtures to institute *musar* in the preeminent Lithuanian yeshiva. Castor oil is for sick people, said Reb Hayyim. *Musar* is castor oil for the spiritually sick, but we in Volozhin are, thank God, perfectly healthy. Learning Torah



itself promotes spiritual health and vigor, and is the natural and normally recommended preventive of ethical malaise. *Musar*, on the other hand, is like a medicine: unnecessary for healthy people, and worse, potentially hazardous to them.<sup>1</sup>

Reb Hayyim's argument is open to various objections. One could question whether the self-confident assertion that "in Volozhin we are healthy" was true, by the standards of Reb Hayyim himself. But our focus is another issue: is *musar* really the religious equivalent of a barely palatable medicine? Reb Itzele, apparently taking Reb Hayyim's pointed metaphor to heart, later said: "For my part, *musar* isn't castor oil for the ill. It's the oxygen we breathe."<sup>2</sup> Similar sentiments surface in the words of a student at Slobodka, who recounts that *musar* study "aroused my youthful imagination and enchanted with the mysterious charm of transcendental sanctity. Hundreds of ecstatic youths with soulful enthusiasm chanting the *Mesilat Yesharim*...at these times the heart would swell with the wonderful sadness, and it was good to press oneself together with all those youths of fiery countenance and kindled souls."<sup>3</sup> The writer obviously does not consider *musar* study a "castor oil" experience. Would Reb Hayyim dismiss him as an addict?

Clearly we are faced with a fundamental difference of opinion, as to what constitutes a healthy religious life. It is perhaps analogous to how people differ in their definition of a physically healthy lifestyle. One may think that a life lived normally by modern standards, is presumably healthy, as long as no unusual risks are incurred (no smoking, regular check-ups, etc.). Routine, worthwhile activity is by nature health-inducing, whereas constant attention to health is superfluous, and in fact, such attention is a sign of abnormality or obsession. People of the holistic turn, however, feel that attention to health is a major focus of salubrious living, and that watchfulness is not a foreign burden foisted on our routine, but an integral and integrating factor. This analogy may give us the feel of the argument, but faced with such a controversy between *gedolei Yisrael*, we are in need of further explication. In this connection, two major frames of reference suggest themselves: ideological and educational.

If the debate is ideological, then the obvious background would

be Rav Hayyim of Volozhin's doctrine of "Torah for Torah's sake," expounded in his classic *Nefesh ha-Hayyim*. According to this Volozhin theory, as interpreted in Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm's landmark study,<sup>4</sup> Torah learning is the supreme value of Judaism, the Divine service par excellence. Torah as a value is clearly differentiated from *yirat shamayim*, which enjoys secondary standing. The importance of *yirat shamayim* is defined by its status as a prerequisite for Torah. Specifically, personal piety was deemed to be the "storehouse" of Torah, a fact which dictates the time to be invested in it. One may actively engage in acquiring piety per se only insofar as necessary "for the preservation and survival of the grain of Torah." Practically speaking, this normally translates into five minutes of *musar* for an entire day of study.<sup>5</sup> The position that *lomdei Torah* hardly need to pay attention to their piety was reaffirmed by that other great ideologue of Volozhin, the Netziv.<sup>6</sup>

But can a program of Talmudic exclusivity, particularly in our day, truly claim *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* as its foundation? The fascinating thing is that already in the nineteenth century, the Musarnikim saw their approach as stemming from *Nefesh ha-Hayyim*. The spiritual parentage of Rav Yisrael Salanter purportedly extended through Rav Zundel of Salant, to his mentor Rav Hayyim of Volozhin, and upward to the Vilna Gaon. But Rabbi Lamm critiques these claims, asserting that neither the Gaon nor Rav Hayyim can be seen as precursors of the Musar movement.<sup>7</sup> In any event, an appreciation of the issue requires delving into the book's structure and content. This is one direction I will explore.

Of course, irrespective of *Nefesh ha-Hayyim*, the Musarnikim certainly had other sources for their approach, among the classical Jewish ethical writers. *Hovot ha-Levavot*, for example, dwelt on moral perfection as an independent, and even paramount, value. In the preface to his work, he tells of a sage who was asked about an unusual point of divorce law. The rabbi reacted with amazement that his questioner had time to "to think of unusual cases that do not elevate your observance and faith, and do not perfect your character traits." Six hundred years later the broadside was seconded by Ramhal in his introduction to *Mesilat Yesharim*. Ramhal put no stock in the

supposition that learning Torah is by definition a reliable and sufficient source of spiritual wellbeing: “From where will this wisdom [of moral perfection] come to a man’s heart, if he doesn’t seek it?” Indeed, it appears that since being advanced by Rabbenu Bahye, no one in the history of the traditional rabbinic literature ever rebutted this straightforward argument. No one, that is, until Rav Hayyim of Volozhin did so directly and in no uncertain terms. But we will return later to the nature of this rebuttal.<sup>8</sup>

Until here we have seen the Musar controversy as an ideological issue. But the sources seem to indicate that a major part of the debate lies outside of ideology. Unlike the luminaries of Volozhin, many of the first-rank rabbis of Lithuania that opposed the Musar movement, appeared to accept Ramhal’s view on the importance of attention to piety in its own right, albeit without granting it primacy. It is likely that the Vilna Gaon’s known reverence for *Mesilat Yesharim* and its author commanded their respect, and cast a shadow on his disciple’s reservations regarding the use of *musar* literature.<sup>9</sup> The protests of this group at times sound exaggerated and disproportionate, even confused.<sup>10</sup> The impression is that their equilibrium was disturbed, that they were somehow caught off-balance, because the protagonists had defined the terms of the debate in a way that was unfamiliar. Ideological disputation was not the issue; education was.

In other words, the question was not the relative importance of various values and what one ought to do with one’s time. For all agreed that the growth and shaping of the religious person is a critical issue. They disagreed, rather, about how to advance toward that goal. What is the educational *method* that promotes this growth? Can people shape themselves, and how? Traditional Lithuania preferred not to discuss this. It had heretofore scarcely probed its assumptions on the matter, but was now compelled by the Musar proponents to examine it in greater depth.

This traditional lack of probing had actually dovetailed and fostered an educational approach of sorts, an approach that held that people will grow as spiritual beings as a tree grows tall, quite naturally and automatically, thanks to the surroundings of home and community. This idea seems to be reflected in Reb Hayyim Brisker’s

argument about “health.” Laissez-faire, as in the economic theory, works in education as well. How much more so in the environment of the yeshiva, saturated as it was with health-inducing Torah. The function of *musar*, when needed, is only to learn how to perform certain commandments (i.e., those of the heart). But as for the growth of the person, that is a natural process, not something that needs conscious intervention.

The claim of the Musar movement was that the method had crippled the product. The tyranny of the old approach resulted in inferior piety and ethics. Learning *musar* must be conceived not as an ordinary mitzvah, but as character-building. Spiritual growth is a spiritual obligation, and it requires direct and detailed strategy. It is not to be left to hopeful chance, or anticipated as a by-product of Halakha-oriented study. Nor is it sufficient to study books that will tell me what I ought to do, think, or feel; a person must develop his own personalized program. Original insight is to be encouraged, along with experiential techniques meant to bridge the gap between the text and the inner personality.<sup>11</sup>

It would be fair to say that the idea of higher yeshiva education in our time more closely follows the ideal of Volozhin than Slobodka. Fundamentally, the study of Gemara and cognate sources is not only the main occupation, but our preoccupation. The learned *talmid hakham* is the object of our aspirations. Yeshivot may engage *Tanakh* and Jewish thought in an ancillary manner, but *tikkun* of the self as an art, or as an object of systematic study, remains foreign, and is left to the initiative of the student. This despite our adoption of certain external trappings which bear the stamp of the Musar movement: notably the widespread institution of *sihot* on various occasions, and the attempt to create emotional experiences of various kinds. The idea of a person “molding himself” in the course of his yeshiva career may be often touted, but this, too, tends to be little more than an external trapping. For aside from exhortations to invest maximal time and effort in learning Torah and prayer, the technique of this molding is hardly addressed. For all intents, as educators we are staunch believers in the magic of Torah.

I, too, believe in it. But at the same time, I recognize its

limitations. I suggest that we are wrong to put so many of our eggs in the Torah-study basket alone. The magic doesn't work for everyone in the same way, nor to the same extent.

The present study of *Nefesh Ha-Hayyim* is meant to raise the question: Assuming that Volozhin is our point of departure, and that we desire to speak from within that hoary tradition – what are the limits of Talmudic exclusivity?

Our inquiry will deal separately with the two aspects mentioned above: ideology and education. The role of *Nefesh Ha-Hayyim* (henceforth: NH) relates directly to the first of these, but it figures also in the second. For the book is, among other things, an educational effort. Therefore, after looking closely at the content, we will consider NH's historic impact. Was it really the credo on which generations of Lithuanian *talmidei hakhamim* were reared? I believe that the answer to this question may have something to say to us in the here and now.

Each of these two discussions will be followed by remarks, which will try to weave threads of application to the modern scene. The research as well as the remarks will be necessarily brief, and will not do justice to the subject. I do hope that my effort will catalyze further thinking.

### **IDENTIFYING THE STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE OF NEFESH HA-HAYYIM**

Any proposal to examine the *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* must take Rabbi Lamm's definitive study as its starting-point. My modest treatment, offered here as by a *talmid ha-dan be-karka*, will variously either restate work already done by him, extrapolate from it, or pose alternative interpretations. In the interest of fluency, I will not always specify which of the three is happening, leaving that for the interested reader to determine.

We will start off with a seeming contradiction between Rav Hayyim's assertion, on the one hand, that more than a few minutes of *musar* and *yira* per day constitutes *bitul Torah*, and the very nature of his book on the other. How NH could be learned, or for

that matter written, on a budget of five minutes a day, is indeed a question which asks itself. If studying NH is a presumably legitimate occupation, are there grounds to discourage serious study of the Tanya?<sup>12</sup> Throughout the paper, I will continue to refer to this enigmatic stricture, if only to clarify that I am not trying to evade the issue. For unfortunately, I cannot here promise a good answer to these questions. But I raise them at the outset in order to broach a motif, namely, the presence of paradoxes and dialectical tensions in NH. I believe that awareness of this complexity is important for students, and certainly for educators, who see NH as a source of guidance. What is the book's essence? Rabbi Lamm<sup>13</sup> writes that it is a "theological tract," and an "ethico-kabbalistic work." "The amount of ethical material in the book is, indeed, insufficient to qualify the *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* as a *musar* work." As for the book's purpose, this is revealed in the last part (part 4), which extols Torah study above all other values. The major purpose was to encourage students in the pursuit of scholarship, and "to structure the values of Judaism so that the study of the Torah is revealed as the highest and loftiest of all these values."

I suggest that a fuller evaluation of NH's essence and purpose may be somewhat more complex. In this regard, an important source is the book's introduction, written by the author's son Rav Yitzhak, who was entrusted with its publication. He repeatedly articulates his father's aims, in a way obviously inspired by Rav Hayyim's solemn admonitions. It is impossible to detect the primacy of Torah study in his words. Torah is surely there in its traditional centrality, but alongside other values, and not noticeably superior. In addition, the introduction most certainly does sound like the programmatic declaration of a *musar* work. "Perhaps I will merit by the grace of Heaven," prayed Rav Hayyim, "that my words in these *kuntresim* will be accepted, to root *yirat Hashem*, Torah and pure worship in the hearts of the straight of heart who seek the ways of God." The triad, Torah, *avoda*, and *yira* appears a second time in the introduction in a similar context, and a variation towards the end, Torah, *avoda*, and *tefila* – once again without establishing an order of priority. Reading

the son's introduction without foreknowledge sets up the unsuspecting reader for a surprising and unprecedented phenomenon: a *musar* book that polemicizes against *musar* books.

Further examination of the introduction yields additional evidence of complications in Rav Hayyim's ethical approach. The topics of discussion are briefly and accurately set out there as mentioned above: Torah, *avoda*, *yira*, and prayer. Where has *gemilut hasadim* – one of the three bastions of religious life according to the Rabbis – disappeared to? Does its absence indicate its de-emphasis in Rav Hayyim's educational theory? Judging from Rav Yitzhak's biographical statements, the answer is clearly negative. The son reports that Rav Hayyim habitually chastised him for his indifference to the suffering of others. "Thus did he always say to me: 'That man was not created for his own self at all, but only to benefit others as much as he has the power to do.'" Devotion to others is then crucially significant ("only"), even granting some hyperbole. Torah is of course centrally important; but the center appears to be a more crowded place than we might think. Or perhaps we should think in terms of congruent "centers" relating to different spheres of life or philosophy? Logical constructs don't alleviate our confusion as to the practical ramifications of all this. What are we now to make of Rav Hayyim's five-minute rule? Interestingly, Rav Yitzhak has an arresting definition of the yeshiva of Volozhin itself, the great institution whose banner was *Torah lishma*: "And he built a great house of learning on three pillars: Torah, *avoda*, and *gemilut hasadim*."

Another detail deserves attention. The title "*Nefesh ha-Hayyim*" was Rav Yitzhak's choice; Rav Hayyim himself did not name the book. This is of course highly irregular, and the probable explanation is that Rav Hayyim did not write it as a unified, integrated book to begin with, but as a collection of tracts, which Rav Hayyim called *kuntresim*, each having its own focus. Of course they are inter-related, and each is part of the author's over-all worldview. There is comprehensiveness in the *kuntresim*, when viewed together. I do not doubt for a moment that the author himself conceived their juxtaposition into a combined presentation. But if I am right about the primary integrity of each *kuntres* unto itself, then the perception that Rav

Hayyim is mainly structuring the values of Judaism so that Torah comes out on top, is less compelling, tempered by the individual focus of each *kuntres*. Prayer is not only a rung in the ladder whose summit is Torah, but first of all an end in itself.

The plausibility of Rav Yitzhak's programmatic definition of NH, as contained in his preface, is borne out at the beginning of the unnumbered part of the work. This added section, which is inserted between parts 3 and 4, opens thus: "Pleasant reader! Here I have guided you with God's help in the paths of truth, in order to show you the way to go assuredly, so that you may train yourself bit by bit by order of the aforementioned levels... You will see for yourself that the more you habituate yourself to each of these levels, your heart will increase in purity." For all appearances, Rav Hayyim is summarizing the bottom-line of all that has gone before. He does so in a way that confirms that didactic (*musar!*) aim which Rav Yitzhak articulated.

But the import of these lines goes further. The placement of this section between parts 3 and 4 is noteworthy. Rabbi Lamm understands the section as a preface to part 4,<sup>14</sup> which is in keeping with his general viewpoint – that the whole book leads up to part 4. But my examination has found that only once, in passing, is the existence of part 4 indicated in the inserted section itself. Considering its content, it is at least as reasonable to see the section as a collection of admonitions needed by the reader who is serious about the program previously advanced. That is, as an afterword to parts 1 through 3. There is a sense of completeness after the first three parts. The feeling pervades that an integrated approach has been delineated, and now that the practitioners have been instructed in *asé tov*, it is time to add some words of caution. This sense of completeness is what renders Rav Hayyim's opening formulation of part 4 comprehensible: "I *also* would like to discuss, in writing, the greatness of the obligation of Torah study."

In other words, structurally speaking, part 4 is not the naturally anticipated apex of the work, as read consecutively. In retrospect, it is the *unanticipated* apex. It is by no means a separate, loosely-related appendage; but its appearance at a point where the reader feels that



all has been said, gives Rav Hayyim's claims for Torah the ironic power of paradox. You the reader must think that matters have come full circle, Rav Hayyim is saying, and how wrong you are. For the grand finale is still before us – the full weight of the truest expression of the whole world of Divine service. That I have left for last.

Now the primacy of Torah in NH is indisputable and unprecedented, and I do not claim to wholly understand its lack of mention in Rav Yitzhak's introduction, or in his citations of his father. But I believe that there is an inference to be drawn from this absence and from the other observations above: NH holds that *avodat Hashem*, in the broad sense, is the primary and all-encompassing value, not Torah. Torah indeed reigns supreme, because it is the *avodat Hashem* par excellence. Torah is paramount, for this is how God wants us to express our piety.

This premise impels us to ask again: what, in the final analysis, is the relationship between parts 1 through 3 and part 4? Surely, as stated before, the order of parts shows the supremacy of the last: as important as other values are, Torah is incomparably greater. Yet it is hard to deny that the structure does something else as well. The first three parts are there not only to be the foil of scholarship; they are obviously there to provide its necessary basis, in ethics, psychology, and mystical theology. Here is the philosophical infrastructure of which Rav Hayyim expects and assumes knowledge and understanding, and to which he posits the reader's sincere and firm commitment, so that there be a platform for his ultimate, most cherished aim.

It would have been possible to argue that Torah's supremacy is totally unconnected to a personal identification with the multi-faceted world of *avodat Hashem*, and that scholarship may be divorced from an understanding of that world which is detailed, systematic, existentially profound and deeply experienced. It is not possible to argue that such is the position of Rav Hayyim of Volozhin. To him, the presence of Divinity and its human impresses – awe, humility, responsibility, purification – are the atmosphere, the backdrop, and the axioms, without which the devotion to Torah would have been the sheer intellection which, according to Rav Hayyim (as Rabbi Lamm points out),<sup>15</sup> it isn't. Rav Hayyim had to lay down – in the

first three parts – the basic and detailed apparatus that defines the religious aspirations of the Jew, before he could argue that Torah is their ultimate consummation. Indeed, these aspirations must be in place, before Torah can *be* their ultimate consummation.

Without the first three parts of NH, the fourth would have been inconceivable. The first parts present the domain over which Torah reigns. But this rulership is nurturing, not despotic. Torah cannot by its greatness claim the right to ignore all else, smugly invoking Rav Hayyim's assertion that the very learning is *devekut* by definition, even when unaware of it.

The discussion in part 4 of the *devekut* inherent in learning refers to King David's elation at the thought "that literally each word of Torah that I learn, it all came out of, and even now comes out of, Your mouth." Hence Rav Hayyim prescribes self-purification before learning, in order to achieve this cleaving to "His Word and Will." His assumption is that the reader seeks and values *devekut*. He is not speaking to one who is experientially indifferent to *devekut*, and would love to hear that learning supersedes it.

The ways used by Rav Hayyim to motivate his audience clearly assume that a person has an over-arching spiritual life and spiritual concerns, and that Torah ought to, and does, carry on a dialogue with these, in a manner that parallels Torah's dialogue with the cosmos. He tries to inculcate *Torah lishma* with a broad-canvassed panegyric on Torah's sanctity, mystical preeminence, its power to fantastically elevate the learner, and to maintain the cosmic effluence. He means to integrate these considerations into the motivation of the learner, cultivating his scholarship in quantity and quality. We conclude that the infrastructure laid in the first three parts is the indispensable foundation of the fourth.<sup>16</sup>

### **YIRA AND LISHMA: THEIR RELATIONSHIP IN NEFESH HA-HAYYIM**

I wish to turn from structural interpretation of NH's purpose, and view the work's complexity through a different lens. We will consider two major concerns of Rav Hayyim of Volozhin, which are germane to the way and the spirit in which Torah should be learned. One is

*yira*, a general value that has a connection to Torah as NH discusses. The second issue is *lishma*, and its definition regarding learning. We will ask, what is the relationship between these two topics in NH?

We shall begin with *yira*. Rav Hayyim concedes, and insists, that *yira* is necessary for Torah. It is the storehouse, without which Torah has no place. The amount of Torah that may be learned is commensurate with the room one has prepared in advance.<sup>17</sup> But what does this mean? Why can't one learn simply out of belief that this is the right thing to do, even without fear of God?

For one thing, there is a factual interdependence between Torah and awe. Torah is grasped intellectually, but in keeping with its celestial nature, it "refuses" to be learned, or retained, without *yira*. Indeed, God himself will not dispense Torah if the precondition has not been met. This exceeds rationality; *yira* and success in learning are connected here out of ethical considerations. God's Torah demands allegiance to God, and this translates into God-fearing.

Were we to restrict the association of Torah and *yira* to this conditional level, we could easily understand NH's five-minute rule. For defining their conjunction in this way, we basically leave the two distinct. It may be possible to satisfy the demand for homage to the Source of Torah with a telling, brief, preliminary gesture. In effect, Rav Hayyim would then be instituting what Rabbi Lamm calls a "Dissociation Principle" to govern the practical management of the two ideals. This requires that *yira* be tended within strict and defined limits, in no way intruding into the domain of Torah, which claims the lion's share of time. *Yira* is to be conceived merely as one *mitzvah* among many. True, it is distinguished by being a *me'akev* (impediment) of sorts vis-à-vis Torah; but its connection to Torah is non-essential, to the point which facilitates its practical "dissociation" from it.

At this stage we need to raise the second issue – *lishma*. This is because *lishma*, as the intention and motivation which ought to govern the act, reflects its essential nature. The Dissociation Principle would require that the *lishma* of Torah have nothing to do with fear. And indeed, NH's pivotal part 4, chapter 3, gives us the cognitive definition of *lishma*, which is a distinctive feature of Rav Hayyim's

approach. Had the *lishma* attending Torah been of a devotional-religious nature, we would have been hard-put to decouple Torah from *yira*.

Until this point all seems to fit nicely. The problem arises when NH teaches the student on what he ought to meditate, in order to express and arouse *yira*. Awe of the Divine can be aroused by different trains of thought – what will NH’s prescription be? For instance, the Rambam in the second chapter of *Yesodei ha-Torah* follows the path of contemplating God’s works, elaborating on this in the following chapters. Important *musar* works that, like NH, rely heavily on Kabbala, build on the Zohar’s formulation: fear based on God’s being “master and ruler, root of all the worlds, before Whom all is as naught.” Rav Eliyahu de Vidas in *Reshit Hokhma* (*Shaar ha-Yira*, chapter 1) starts from this point and elaborates at great length, eventually arriving at *yirat het* and *yirat ha-onesh*. These ideas and feelings are not related directly to the act of learning Torah. NH could well have used them, in view of the “dissociation” of Torah from *yira*.

But it appears that Rav Hayyim, who unlike the *musar* books puts Torah at the pinnacle of *avodat Hashem*, is neither able nor willing to dissociate study cleanly from *yira*. This is true, precisely and paradoxically, *because* of the preeminence of Torah. As Etkes noted, the preparatory stage creates a state of consciousness that must serve as a framework for study.<sup>18</sup> How else can we understand the teaching (chapter 6) that in order to arouse *yirat shamayim* before learning, “he should intend to cleave to God in his learning of Torah, that is – cleaving with all his powers to the word of God in Halakha... for He and His Will are one?” The unsurpassed spirituality of Torah should be acknowledged before learning; and its awareness should be kept alive subliminally, *while* learning (see below). The content of this fear-contemplation is not mainly about God. It is about Torah, and about its learning, which is here presented as an awe-inspiring act.

Rabbi Lamm correctly observes that the above-quoted words of NH represent part of the definition of *lishma*. But textually, this wasn’t their aim; the context is God-fearing as a desired prologue to learning. The subtle shift from *yira* to *lishma* means that *yira*, rather than being a separate precondition, is part of the ideal intention,

motivation, and feeling that fuel the act itself. This is borne out also by NH's stated concern that "the *yira* not be extinguished from his heart during learning," a concern that sanctions short intermissions from study. To connect *yira* with *lishma* is tantamount to flouting the Dissociation Principle. Etkes, impressed by this aspect of Rav Hayyim's thought, seems to be oblivious of any tendency towards dissociation. He credits Rav Hayyim with the innovation of *integrating devekut* in Torah study, his "substantive discussion" of this point going well beyond the views attributed to the Vilna Gaon.<sup>19</sup>

And yet chapter 3 contrarily hammers away at the intellectual pole, repeatedly declaring that the *lishma* and "love of Torah itself" is reducible to cognition: *haino le-hosif lekah u-filpul* ("that is – to gain knowledge and dialectic understanding"). Each such statement is another tug at the seam which holds the soul of the pious learner together. This cognitive exclusivity indeed demands "dissociation" from *yira*. It ignores, as a matter of adamant principle, any connection to the learner's desire to "cleave to the word of God," or to commit himself to practically fulfill what he is studying (another intention which NH recommends to arouse *yira*).

In fact, the utter severance from devotional intentions is what saves the cognitive *lishma* of chapter 3 from a fatal flaw: triviality. After all, *lishma* is a spiritual challenge – one should not only perform, but also *intend*. But what is so difficult about study "for the sake of intellectual comprehension?" True, it may not be particularly challenging for us. But for the pious scholar Rav Hayyim is cultivating, it most certainly is. For in order to devote all his intellectual capacity to the task, he must surrender his religious passions, and confine himself to the *ratio*. He must humbly recognize that the "thing itself" is incomparably grander than the human capacity to touch that grandeur, let alone bask in it.

*Lishma* in NH is, then, a bi-polar affair. The tension between chapters 3 and 6 is unmistakable. Rav Hayyim, and the ideal student of Torah, must walk a tightrope, balancing the unobstructed intellectual act of cognition with the awareness of its mystical and religious moment.

Applying this tension practically requires a psychological move-

ment of oscillation, of *ratzo vashov*, between the attitude prior to and surrounding learning, and the mind-set adopted in the act of study itself. The first is devotional, the second cognitive. The stages are dissociated on the level of active consciousness, but nevertheless enmeshed. The awe and adulation are inspired first, by considering the significance of the cognition about to commence. Then, during the stage of intellectual study, the awe and adulation should persist subliminally, and study actually deepens them. This kind of *ratzo vashov* is a typical hallmark of NH.<sup>20</sup>

### **TALMUDIC EXCLUSIVITY: A GENUINE IMPLEMENTATION OF NH?**

Analyzing NH is intriguing to me, but I will have to desist, or else we won't get to deal with the ramifications. Recall our question: Is NH a reasonable authority for Talmudic exclusivity, particularly in modern education?

Assuming my analysis to be correct, then imputing Talmudic exclusivity to NH is simplistic. The core of the personality that Rav Hayyim envisioned is piety. This piety is no simple matter; it is intelligent, systematically well-informed, complex, and actively interested in its own further development. It is this piety that fuels the constant preoccupation with Torah study. Using NH to propagate Torah study while blithely side-stepping serious doubts as to whether the core is there is unfounded to say the least.

But forget the theory, the observer may say. When it comes to brass tacks, NH's overwhelming concern is that we sit and learn. Aren't the quantitative guidelines, the allotting of mere minutes to religious contemplation, evidence enough of that?

But this is misguided. I agree to set aside all the question marks we raised about these strictures, at least for argument's sake. Still, I believe that we should not be led astray. These limitations were intended for a particular, elitist group. Rabbi Lamm showed that NH in general was meant for *anshei ha-yeshiva*, and not for the general public, since only very sophisticated students could deal adequately with the book's difficult kabalistic concepts and theory.<sup>21</sup> In light of our remarks we may add, that only a very special type could rise

to the finely-tuned ethical challenges posed by NH. Rav Hayyim declares at the beginning of part 4 that he will quote from the Zohar at length, even though “all these passages are widely known.” The group, to whom these esoteric citations were “widely known,” is certainly not the run-of-the-mill. What sufficed for students of this caliber to arouse and sustain the devotional mind-set is by no means a general model for us.

Something else should be kept in mind. All of Rav Hayyim’s discussion in part 4 has no bearing on prayer; limitation of this sphere is not mentioned (though we may safely assume that Rav Hayyim would oppose Hasidic extremism on this score). *Tefilah* in NH is a major avenue of spiritual growth, recommended for intensive attention and effort. The *lamdan* of part 4 has presumably assimilated the previous parts. If he is putting them into practice, profoundly turning towards the Divine thrice daily, then his conscious devotional life is strongly anchored. NH’s assertions that a few minutes of *yirat shamayim* suffice, and that learning Torah actually deepens it, were made in this context. The burden of proof is upon him who would extend these assumptions to other realities.

### **NEFESH HA-HAYYIM’S IMPACT AT VOLOZHIN**

The Musar movement traced its lineage from the *Gra*, to Rav Hayyim of Volozhin, through Rav Zundel of Salant, to Rav Yisrael Salanter. Modern scholars take differing views of this claimed pedigree. We saw that Rabbi Lamm rejects the claim about the Gaon and Rav Hayyim. He believes that Rav Hayyim’s heritage was most exemplified by the Yeshiva of Volozhin itself, where *musar* was not studied. But Rabbi Lamm does not dispute Rav Zundel’s role in the creation of the Musar Movement, which is indeed hard to deny. Yet Rav Zundel was an eminent and devoted disciple of Rav Hayyim. According to Etkes, Rav Zundel personified “the educational ideal of the Volozhin Yeshiva.”<sup>22</sup> Is it conceivable that his interest in *musar* is not grounded in the tradition received from his master? In any event, Etkes describes the Musar movement as issuing from the teachings of previous generations – the final stage in a line of incremental development. These conflicting opinions are of course a reflection

of the original paradox: great Talmudic scholars and men of truth, each claiming to be the genuine carriers of the tradition of Volozhin, while taking such opposing viewpoints. I wish to suggest a perspective on this paradox. The perspective is based on a consideration of the impact of NH on subsequent generations.

NH was very popular during the half-century after its appearance. The evidence for this is repeated publication, by the 1870s, seven editions had seen light.<sup>23</sup> How remarkable, therefore, is the ensuing precipitous decline. Sometime in the course of the 1870s, publication of NH ceased being worthwhile, and the work was never again printed in Europe. This, despite the fact that the Volozhin Yeshiva was at the height of its vitality under the leadership of the Netziv, and continued thus until the yeshiva was closed in 1892. Moreover, the yeshiva movement of which Volozhin was the engine flowered as never before, continuing to be the pride of East European Jewry, and maintaining its vigor for another fifty years after that. This whole institutional proliferation ignored its supposed charter and blueprint. The progeny showed no interest in the detailed, complex vision of the founding father. We possess a good number of detailed personal memoirs and chronicles of life in Volozhin during the 1880s and 1890s. *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* is nowhere to be found. To the observer, this is akin to imagining that *Orot* would become passé at *Merkaz ha-Rav*. No less an erudite and eclectic student of Volozhin than Rav Barukh Epstein, nephew of the Netziv, evinces a striking ignorance of the contents of NH, the alleged bible of *mitnagdut*.<sup>24</sup>

Not only do the chronicles ignore NH itself, but their account of the existential posture at Volozhin is often at loggerheads with the work's spirit and message. There is no record of the general student body of Volozhin, during the period in question, devoting any fixed time at all to meditation on religious fear. In the reminiscences of Zalman Epstein, we learn that at Volozhin they "learned Torah, Gemara and *rishonim*, not out of *yirat shamayim*, and not because it is a *mitzvah*, but because it is a thing of substance, science, wisdom, a matter of great value...and the mind finds it so satisfying."<sup>25</sup> He further informs us that "our master Eliyahu of Vilna was renowned in Volozhin not as a *hasid*, as he was called in Vilna, but only as



Gaon... [The average Volozhiner] was no longer zealous, benighted, over-pious. This was now a strength that was revealed, open, alive and ready for growth and progress – no longer that petrified, stiff strength of the old Jewish quarter.”<sup>26</sup> Ephraim Movshitzki tells us that “our spiritual lives were democratic. We knew no voice of authority or command. We studied Torah, we studied wisdom, no one interfered with us and our growth was prodigious.”<sup>27</sup>

The exciting spirit of intellectual freedom, along with the shedding of the pious pressure of the Gaon’s image as *hasid*,<sup>28</sup> were quite a way off from NH’s insistence on fear as the storehouse of Torah. Rav Hayyim’s disciples had conscientiously recorded his oral teachings on all the religious issues later discussed in the NH, and more – such as dealing with the *yetzer hara* of impure thoughts, of eating for satisfying the appetite, of conceit.<sup>29</sup> By the last quarter of the century, Volozhin had brushed these topics aside. The personal moral issues which concerned the students of Volozhin in Rav Hayyim’s day, largely due to the master’s influence, had vanished with hardly a trace. The aim of personal growth based purely on intellectual effort bred in Volozhin an atmosphere reminiscent in some ways of a university – a parallel which was not lost on the student body. The *yeshiva*-man was described as “esteeming his own value, the value of his name, and his learning, no less than did the European university student.”<sup>30</sup> The popularity of the Brisker method first taught at Volozhin was to no small extent related to its being perceived as measuring up favorably by modern scientific standards.<sup>31</sup>

The development of prayer at Volozhin is likewise instructive. Its importance in NH is mirrored in the disciples’ reports, as could be expected.<sup>32</sup> Rav Zundel wrote out a summary of NH’s teachings on prayer for his own use.<sup>33</sup> But the later personal memoirs once again reflect the subsequent abandonment of nonintellectual endeavor in Volozhin. One student claimed that *shaharit* lasted no more than twenty minutes. This is contradicted by others, but in any event it appears that *tefila* was not accorded special importance.<sup>34</sup> Even the prayers on the High Holy Days left no impression on the chroniclers, and they were apparently of no special moment. The men of Volozhin were there to grow in learning, and for them there was no

other type of elitism. As Stampfer puts it, “the difference between the yeshiva and society at large was not in the intensity of religious life, but in the intensive Torah study.”<sup>35</sup>

What emerges is a subtle but unmistakable shift in emphasis and educational attitude which took place in Volozhin in the course of its existence, and which is reflected in the virtual abandonment of NH and many of its teachings. Rav Hayyim envisioned his corps of scholars as an elite not only in their learning, but also in their religiosity. The development of their piety was important to him, perhaps centrally. Under the Netziv, hardly any attention was paid to this. It stands to reason that Rav Zundel of Salant, the “ethical ideal of Volozhin” in its earlier days, would have been somewhat uncomfortable there in the 1880s. In any event, one scholar who did cultivate his religiosity was subject to social strain during this period: “They couldn’t accept me completely, because in their view I behaved with excessive piety and abstinence.” The scholar’s name was Avraham Yitzhak Kook.<sup>36</sup>

Rav Hayyim was able to speak to his audience in the language of piety and mysticism, because this was part of the discourse of the Lithuanian milieu, while it reverberated from the confrontation with Hasidism. Hasidism did not claim a mass following in Lithuania, but it had gained the attention of a thoughtful elite. It had succeeded in setting the agenda of the issues to be discussed: the relationship of piety and learning, the value of *devekut* and how it is achieved, the significance of religious practice in terms of the now-familiar kabbalistic lore and concepts.

But as the nineteenth century proceeded, the cultural climate was overtaken by the presence of Haskala, and this became the new context in which Volozhin continued to champion its devotion to Torah. Its student body was then challenged by new issues, whose relatedness to the world of divinity was more indirect: personal growth and creativity, free intellectual inquiry, Torah learning as an enlightened pursuit, the need to address the social needs of the time. Like the *maskilim*, the *talmidim* of Volozhin had discovered the potential of an inner life no longer ridden with contradictions, as the ethical literature had taught, and not rent by the opposition

of upper and lower worlds.<sup>37</sup> The soul was now the home of natural forces, “healthy” and innocent, that needed nurturing, guidance and development to the fullest. In Volozhin this discovery was all the more breathtaking, for it seemed to have the consent of the highest religious authority: the custodians of the tradition of the Gaon of Vilna himself, whose heritage had been appropriately refurbished, as we have seen. NH’s message had been reduced to the paramount importance of learning. Absorbing this idea alone did not require one to actually open the book.

Thus, when it came to pass that *musar* was rejected in Volozhin by leaders and student body alike, they based themselves on their claim to “health.” This had relatively little to do with NH. With its spiritual agenda now largely irrelevant, the components of NH’s complex outlook could no longer be held together. These elements dispersed almost centrifugally. Torah flourished in Volozhin; the Musar movement saw NH as an important *musar* source. Fractions of Rav Hayyim’s legacy were thus preserved. But NH’s role as a unique, ideological cornerstone, had become a thing of the past.

### EMULATING VOLOZHIN?

We set out to discuss the limits of Talmudic exclusivity. But at the heart of this quest, our study points to a related, more fundamental issue – namely, what is the *meaning* of this exclusivity? I know that this formulation raises problems. First of all, the very question assumes the existence of such meaning. Secondly, it creates an internal contradiction. If exclusivity of Talmud study has meaning, then clearing a space for that meaning must mitigate the exclusivity. Many of our above observations are simply manifestations of this anomaly. They also demonstrate its reality, to my mind.

The rationale of Torah learning, certainly in its intensive form, is not transparent; it requires explanation. Whoever learns Torah with devotion and consistency will always ask himself why. His devotion will ultimately be a function of the soundness and the conviction of the personal answer that he gives himself. We have seen that at Volozhin, very different answers were given in the course of time. Since at all stages, it is the same Torah that was avidly studied, I think

it clear that the different answers were not directly derived from the four cubits of Halakha alone. They were born of different intellectual worldviews and different spiritual climates. The answers that learners supply themselves today will also be based on their experience. But in any case, the centrality and power of Torah requires an explanation that touches the depths of identity, personality and outlook.

How is the precise answer of concern to us as educators? Is it any of our business? Or have we done our job by seeing to it that learning goes on, whatever may lie behind it? The choice is ours. We can lunge into this issue with all seriousness, as did Rav Hayyim of Volozhin. Alternatively, we can opt to give it a light touch, as was apparently done in other periods. We would then be relying on the existential reality of the times. We would implicitly call upon the current climate of ideas to supply students with core values and character traits on which Torah learning will build. This may well have been done at one point in Volozhin; are we willing to sign on to this platform today?

We see someone using his impressive intellect for the sake of advanced Torah achievement. Do we need to ask what is going on inside him? Are we witnessing the healthy ambition of a century ago? Or perhaps a single-minded self-absorption, inspired by the utter totality of modern commercialism and consumerism? Can we today trust the facade of a happily learning yeshiva student, and assume that his inner reality is likewise unencumbered with emptiness, doubt, or repressed religious crisis? By any remote chance, is he essentially finding refuge in Talmud study, while his inner self is being gnawed away by the post-modernist obliteration of depth in all its forms? Can we today ignore the possibility that the Torah study is a compulsive immersion, which reflects a need – already noted in *Mesilat Yesharim* – to avoid confronting the self? Or may we safely assume that even if it is *hamaor she-ba* (“the light within”), Torah will straighten out everything? These queries are unavoidable. If we today adopt the approach of the Netziv and Reb Hayyim Brisker, it will have to be because we feel about our *zeitgeist* the way they felt about theirs; not only basically unthreatened by it, but by and large impressed by its positive potential for matters of the spirit.

But if we decide, as I believe we should, that the shaping of personality today needs to be addressed directly and with greater sophistication and seriousness, we will of course be faced with the tremendous problem of implementation. As sons of our tradition, we would naturally turn to its wellsprings. But having done so, we realize that from an overall perspective, the quality and quantity of traditional source material in this area compares poorly with the prodigious efforts of our most brilliant halakhic minds. Beyond this, the whole subject of spiritual development is intensely personal. Can today's student find common ground with materials that were created mostly before the advent of modernity?

Perhaps we can turn again to the author of *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* for some guidance. We may draw inspiration from his ability to recast traditional concerns in the language and style of thought of his contemporary readers. His use of dialectic tension in the realm of religious and ethical practice is also a valuable precedent, uniquely suited to modern needs. This feature of NH sets it apart from much of the output of other *musar* writers, who in their drive to inspire, are not infrequently monolithic and tend to oversimplification.

There is a great need for specific educational approaches, curricula and resources that can make the idea of guided spiritual growth, which develops the person's whole and not just his mind, palpable and accessible in our day. If the primary sources are to speak to us, we are in need of mediation. This is a truly daunting challenge, and in truth, only a concerted and collective effort will be equal to it.

### TOWARD A CURRICULUM ABOUT GROWTH

This concluding section presents some thoughts on what the elements of a *musar* curriculum might be.<sup>38</sup> At the outset, I ought to re-emphasize something which is implicit in our above discussions. *Musar*, as is well known, has always been about *yirat shamayim*. But what is "fear?" Is it not an emotional contraction, or from the rational standpoint – a gesture of judicious withdrawal? And if so, what do *musar* and *yirat shamayim* have to do with the expansive and upward-reaching concept of "growth," touted in the title of this section? Nevertheless, as I wrote in the background section, and

as serious study of the literature (including NH) clarifies, *musar* conceives of *yira* in its broad sense as connected to the essential personality, Jewishly and humanly. Its most noble function is to be the leavening of meaningful intellectual search and existential ferment. It constantly reminds us that concern with growth is not a luxury-pastime for the bored and idle, but an ongoing spiritual obligation which compels and holds us to account.

I will open with some general considerations that may serve as guidelines for a *musar* curriculum. There must be pervasive openness and respect for the student's viewpoints and inclinations. *Musar* in our time is a call, not a rebuke. Responding to the call is a personal matter of individual choice. We must also be willing to introduce tension into the subject matter. Differences among various sources should be learned, in an atmosphere of free discussion. Conflicts within the ethical ideal, as for example, between different *middot* or deeper existential conflicts, should also be discussed. As in other areas of study, airing controversies is a catalyst for interest and a vehicle of personal identification.

What constitutes relevant source material? I advocate a broad approach. The three most classic *musar* sources – *Hovot Ha-Levavot*, *Mesilat Yesharim*, and *Sha'arei Teshuva* exist today in accessible translation, as does Rav Salanter's *Ohr Yisrael*.<sup>39</sup> The second-generation *Musar* movement writings, such as emanated from Slobodka and Telshe, represent a change of style which attempted to expand the range of approaches beyond the stern emphases of Rav Yisrael. But the purism that would confine *musar* study to the formulæ and texts that reigned in the classic Lithuanian *Musar* movement is today unwarranted. Habad, Breslav, and Hasidut in general should be accessed. The writings of Rav Kook and Rav Soloveitchik are also an important resource, though translating them into terms practically meaningful for young people is a challenging task.<sup>40</sup> Of the two, Rav Kook devoted much more attention to precise approaches to *musar* issues. Many of his ideas constitute a rebuttal of those of Rav Yisrael Salanter and his school. Exploration of such controversies is a fruitful topic in its own right, which broadens the range of options within the domain of spiritual growth.

Jewish ethics has a general, humanistic component, and therefore non-traditional texts – classical and modern-day writers, humanistic and cognitive psychologists, and so on – are relevant. In fact, when teaching a modern audience, I think it is crucial that issues of ethical growth be brought to bear on all the various types of intellectual encounter, and all the distinct languages of discourse, which inevitably confront and influence us. All of these are facets of the modern personality. Confining our consideration to the tongue of tradition is a prescription for lop-sided, unwholesome growth. Hence, the teacher and curriculum planner should selectively use his knowledge of relevant outside sources.

The curriculum itself must first have a clear idea of what it means by *musar*. I would favor a broad definition: the branch of Torah that teaches a person how to be and how to live, as opposed to how to behave in a given situation, which is the focus of Halakha.<sup>41</sup> Behavior is only one aspect of life, and it doesn't necessarily involve the cultivation of religious imperatives such as faith and *yirat shamayim*. *Musar* concentrates on personal spiritual concerns such as emotional life, character traits, and the setting of goals. Teaching these areas is not only a matter of theory and concepts, but also practical skills.

The curriculum itself would have three parts. A prologue would clarify the idea of ethical and spiritual progress as a distinct religious desideratum. From there we arrive at the other two parts: *musar* as a field of study, and as a discipline. I will here briefly comment on each of the parts. Conveying the importance of working on the self requires thoughtful adaptation of classic sources and exploitation of more modern ones. The classic literature discusses this issue, but today we must deal with an inner resistance which asks, "I think I'm basically alright, why should I change?" or "What will I gain from change?" Countering this attitude requires working from a wide variety of perspectives. One could discuss the moral perils of ignoring personality development, or the halakhic obligation involved, or the idea that the aim is not to change but to grow and maximize potential. Other themes which belong in this grouping are (1) the massive

assault on man's moral self in our day,<sup>42</sup> and (2) the relationship of work with the self to other elements of spiritual life.<sup>43</sup>

The prologue is followed by the stage of study. The general objective of this stage is knowledge and understanding. I emphasize this aim, and distinguish it from the third element, which is practical. Practice without study risks slipping into the type of mindless emotionalism which is often popularly associated with *musar*, but which in the long run is likely to sabotage any meaningful effort. The objects of study are the issues, resources and techniques relevant to personal spiritual progress. Time should be devoted to discussion of the ethical ideal: to what ought one to aspire?<sup>44</sup> An objective examination or sampling of important writings could be used to demonstrate different concerns, definitions, and approaches. One may also consider using the historic framework as an organizing principle.<sup>45</sup>

Lastly, we arrive at the discipline. Students should be practically exposed to a variety of techniques, with the aim that some should be habituated. Explication of the techniques may be found in works written to our own day.<sup>46</sup> It can be said that all *musar* practice consists of variations on the three elements of study, introspection, and resolution. The last two are the ones in which modern Orthodox Jews have little experience. This suggests the following formula as a goal and criterion for measuring our progress:

(1) The student should know how to engage in introspection, and how to use his introspection to undertake resolutions and to monitor his work, his difficulties and reactions.

(2) The student should feel at home with these practices, and be motivated to engage in them.

Lastly, despite having divided the elements of the curriculum schematically into three and despite the logical progression, it is not a good idea to leave the third practical component until having dealt adequately with the first two. Parts two and three should be done concurrently, either by alternating between them or by allotting time for both in a given session.



## NOTES

1. The exchange has been often quoted, for example in *Seridei Eish* (below note 2). For a parallel usage of this metaphor by Reb Hayyim Brisker, see Shulamit Soloveitchik Meiselman, *The Soloveitchik Heritage* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1995), p.110.
2. Yehiel Yaakov Weinberg, "Reb Yitzhak Blazer," *Seridei Eish* part 4 (Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1977), p. 309.
3. Quoted in Shaul Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshiva ha-Lita'it be-Hit'havuta* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 2005), p. 285. The testimony's credibility is enhanced by its context (the author's clandestine "cutting" of the Musar session in favor of the local library).
4. Normann Lamm, *Torah for Torah's Sake* (Hoboken: Ktav, 1989)
5. *Nefesh ha-Hayyim*, part 4, chapters 7–9; *Ruah Hayyim on Avot*, 1:1. See Lamm, *Torah*, pp. 278–80, 290–93. I concur with Rabbi Lamm that Nefesh Ha-Hayyim's stated position differs from the program of the Musar movement. But his similar statement about the Vilna Gaon I find a bit too sweeping. See Immanuel Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter and the Mussar Movement* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1993), pp. 17–29. The Gaon attached independent importance to ethical perfection, and its encouragement is a perennial topic of his. Furthermore, the Gaon appears not to have placed quantitative strictures on *musar* study. Finally, the Gaon recommended *musar* literature for this purpose, whereas his disciple is on record as discouraging such books, trying to restrict *musar* study to sources of Hazal. More on this see below (note 9).
6. Hanna Ketz (Kehat), *Mishnat ha-Netziv*, (Jerusalem, 1990), pp.129–33.
7. Lamm, *Torah*, pp.290–93.
8. Dov Katz in *Pulmus ha-Musar* (Jerusalem: Weiss, 1972), pp.317–57, has a different ideological picture of the debate. He thinks that the root is the ancient controversy whether *mitzvot* are meant to elevate man, or whether their only aim is fulfilling the Divine will (see *Guide to the Perplexed*, part III, chapter 26). I fail to see why this is necessarily so. Witness that some of Katz's illustrations of the latter viewpoint, such as *Yesod ve-Shoresh ha-Avoda* and *Reshit Hokhma*, are classic *musar* works.
9. On the Gaon see Betzalel Landau, *Ha-Gaon he-Hasid mi-Vilna* (Jerusalem: Sifriyati, 1967), p.122, p.179. Whereas the Gaon "admired" *Mesilat Yesharim* and studied it often, Rav Hayyim Volozhiner stated that the *musar* literature was more suited to "householders," and that scholars ought to turn to Hazal directly for edification (Etkes, Rabbi Israel Salanter, 52). But the evidence on Rav Hayyim's attitude is inconsistent. Compare Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshiva*, p. 56, note 106.
10. See some representative examples in Katz, *Pulmus*, pp.64–66, 104–12.
11. For further elucidation of this point see Elyakim Krumbein, *Musar for Moderns* (Hoboken: Ktav, 2005), pp.86–89.
12. (a) Rabbi Lamm writes about Rav Hayyim's attitude to *musar* texts, whose success is measured by their self-annihilation: once they have aroused the student to study Torah, they become superfluous (Lamm, *Torah*, p. 289). But I doubt that Rav Hayyim would apply this principle to his own NH. The matter of tension and paradox within

NH is addressed somewhat by Rabbi Lamm (p.307), but he basically attributes clear-cut consistency to the work. Here I will try to develop an alternate view.

(b) In his response to me, Rabbi Lamm writes that this paradox need not concern us. Writing a defense of Torah is part of Torah, and Rav Hayyim felt that Torah was under attack and had to be defended. Taking up his comment, it may be that when I grapple with this paradox, it is because I view the theology and piety that the work exudes not merely as a defense of pure Torah learning, but as a necessary component of the Torah personality that Rav Hayyim wanted to develop. The problematic would then hinge on how we read NH, which is the crux of the argument about to unfold.

13. Lamm, *Torah*, p.59.
14. Lamm, *Torah*, pp.61–62.
15. Lamm, *Torah*, pp.238–44.
16. Rabbi Lamm wrote to me that while Rav Hayyim's son revered his father tremendously, he may have consciously or unconsciously injected his own views into the introduction to the book. I would add, however, that Rav Yitzhak's portrait actually quotes his father's words, though one might still argue that his own inclinations dictated the weight he ascribed to those citations. Rabbi Lamm further adduced Rav Hayyim's assertion that *avoda* and *gemilut hasadim* must be done in accordance with Torah, which is a sign of the latter's relative superiority. This is elaborated further in *Torah* (pp. 164–65): Rav Hayyim says that since Revelation, Torah is the source of all religion, hence *avoda* and *hesed* derive their legitimacy from it alone. But this ideological statement on the source of their validity does not necessarily impact on the degree of *practical* exclusivity claimed by Torah itself at their expense. I emphasize again, that I seek to give the introduction its due, without denying the centrality of Torah in Rav Hayyim's worldview.
17. NH, part 4, chaps. 4–9.
18. Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter*, pp.40–41. Etkes also notes the instructive parallel between Rav Hayyim's instructions regarding learning, and the preparations for prayer as taught in Hasidism.
19. Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter*, p. 55.
20. I will mention one other case in point. As we have seen, the first three parts map out a program and a philosophy of extraordinary spirituality. The effort required in following this regimen can be warranted only on the supposition that success is important, and that the resulting achievement is enviable. Yet for fear that the practitioner become conceited, NH inserts the additional section, which proclaims that it is all just a "*mitzvah min ha-muvhar*." The main thing is the act itself, and Rav Hayyim even goes to the extreme of claiming that prayer is mainly an oral obligation, the inner correlate being a mere recommendation (a very extreme and unusual halakhic position). After this "put-down," who would bother working hard to increase his "purity of the heart?" Yet this is just what NH teaches: to prize excellence when it comes to working at it, and to belittle its luster after achieving it.
21. Lamm, *Torah*, p. 72.

22. Etkes, *Rabbi Israel Salanter*, part one, chapter 4.
23. Rabbi Lamm (*Torah*, p. 60) enumerates the editions, reporting a Vilna printing in 1874; the next one of which he is aware took place in New York in 1944. Other sources (such as the Bibliography of the Hebrew Book CD and the Hebrew University Library catalog) record a New York edition from the 1920s. No source I consulted, including Winograd's *Otzar ha-Sefer ha-Ivri*, is aware of a European edition after 1874.
24. (a) See his memoirs, *Mekor Barukh*, part 4, chapter 39, section 3. The anecdote quoted there in the name of the Netziv is in fact one of the most memorable and pithy remarks to be found in NH, and is prominently situated there at the beginning of part 4 (chapter 2). It is unlikely that this is a mere accidental lapse, especially considering that the self-same ignorance is exhibited by the student Ephraim Movshitzki, as quoted in Immanuel Etkes and Shlomo Tikoczinski, eds., *Yeshivot Lita Pirkei Zikhronot* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shaza, 2004), p. 129. By the way, the anecdotal version does have a different nuance, not found in NH, it is used as a polemic against lengthy prayer. I believe that this change is in tune with the reappraisal of prayer at Volozhin, which I will mention shortly.  
 (b) Prof. David Berger suggests that the decline in Kabbala study in Lithuania could underlie the decrease in NH's popularity. I agree, but in the course of history, Kabbala heavily influenced the lives of countless people who didn't learn it. To fully appreciate the development, we need to see the larger cultural context, as I will presently argue. The waning of Kabbala in Lithuania after 1850 has been noted by historians; see for example, A. Morgenstern, *Geulah be-Derekh ha-Teva* (Jerusalem, 5757), p. 26 (who has an explanation of his own for the phenomenon).
25. Etkes and Tikoczinski, *Yeshivot Lita*, p. 73.
26. Etkes and Tikoczinski, *Yeshivot Lita*, p. 77. The pious ideology of the "old Jewish quarter" was described expansively in Alan Nadler, *The Faith of the Mithnagdim* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). The contrast between the atmosphere in Volozhin at this time and the ascetic pessimism that permeates Nadler's portrayal is stark indeed. He briefly notes the intellectual snobbery of the yeshiva world beginning from the end of the nineteenth century (p. 164), but does not examine the cultural variation at the root of its appearance at this precise juncture. My thanks to Professor Shaul Stampfer for referring me to this source.
27. Etkes and Tikoczinski, *Yeshivot Lita*, p.125.
28. It is possible to observe a similar metamorphosis regarding Rav Hayyim of Volozhin himself. Virtually all of Rav Barukh Epstein's references to Rav Hayyim, listed in the biographical index of his *Mekor Barukh*, have to do with learning and halakhic decision-making. Compare this Torah-predominance to the picture Rav Yitzhak of Volozhin painted of his father in the preface to NH. On the *Gra* as Gaon and *hasid*, see Immanuel Etkes, *Yahid be-Doro* (Jerusalem: Merkaz Zalman Shazar, 1998), pp. 31–41; Nadler, *Faith*, pp. 88–90.
29. An instructive collection of these writings may be found in the edition of NH edited

- by Yissakhar Dov Rubin (Benei Berak, 5749 (1989), pp. 307–461. For a sampling of the kinds of topics mentioned herein, see pages 350–54, 362–66, 385, 432, 435, 440, 444 (paragraph 118).
30. Etkes and Tikoczinski, *Yeshivot Lita*, p. 72.
  31. Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshiva*, pp. 121–25.
  32. Rubin (ed.), NH, pp. 432–33.
  33. Eliezer Rivlin, *Ha-Tzadik Reb Yosef Zundel mi-Salant ve-Rabotav* (Jerusalem, 1983), pp.54–58.
  34. Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshiva*, p.145.
  35. Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshiva*, p.165.
  36. Stampfer, *Ha-Yeshiva*, p.99.
  37. Compare Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, “*Ish ha-Halakha*,” ed. Pinhas Peli, *Be-Sod ha-Yahid veba-Yahad* (Jerusalem: Orot, 1976; translation mine, E.K.), p. 86: “Halakhic man draws himself a circle in this world and does not move from it. He wishes to purify this world of his, not to escape from it.” A fuller treatment of the Rav’s essay against the backdrop of the realities of Volozhin should be undertaken separately. All of this does not preclude the opposition of most Lithuanian rabbis to secular studies, and to other practical ramifications of Haskala. The new movement can still be credited with the establishment of the ground-rules of the debate, and of the criteria used by its very opponents to build their alternative.
  38. I attempted to deal with many of the following issues in *Musar for Moderns* (throughout), see above note 11. In addition, a teacher’s guide accompanying the book has been prepared by David Debow and is awaiting publication. My notes here will refer to other sources.
  39. Yaakov Feldman’s translations of the first three (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1996, 1996, 1999 respectively) are sensitive to the modern mind-set. (One could contest Rabbi Feldman’s position that the gap between today’s student and the *Mesilat Yesharim* is mainly a matter of how one translates. At any rate, his work is a significant contribution.) *Ohr Yisrael* was translated by Zvi Miller (Southfield: Targum, 2004). A useful and innovative commentary on *Hovot ha-Levavot* is Shlomo Toledano, *Dibbur u-Mahshava* (Jerusalem: Or ha-Ma’arav, 2004).
  40. ATID Foundation has started to develop materials for teachers using the thought of the Rav. These can be found at [www.atid.org/journal/journal05/default.asp](http://www.atid.org/journal/journal05/default.asp). In regard to Rav Kook, special mention should be made of David Avihayil, *Tikkun ha-Middot* (Mitzpe Ramon-Kfar Chabad, 5765), and David Samson and Tzvi Fishman, *The Art of T’shuva* (Jerusalem: Beit Orot, 5759).
  41. I believe this distinction is practically useful, even if conceding that theoretically, one could place “being” and “living” within the province of Halakha. Our definition of *musar* avoids direct connection with the Musar movement.
  42. An extensive treatment of this topic – Jewish and general – appears in Daniel Shalit, *Sefer ha-Kenyon* (Jerusalem, 2004).
  43. In the literature as well as in the Musar movement, there is a tendency to view all of religious life as a *tikkun* of the self. But more balanced or dialectic approaches

are or course tenable. The point is that *musar* can be recognized as vital even if it is one component in a comprehensive lifestyle. This connects with our discussion of NH. See also Rabbi Yaakov Moshe Charlop, *Mei Marom* 1 (Jerusalem, 5732), pp. 64–66.

44. A modern orthodox perspective on this question can be gleaned from several chapters of Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, *By His Light* (Jersey City: Ktav, 2003).
45. The teacher or planner would do well to be acquainted with Yosef Dan, *Safrut ha-Musar ve'ha-Drush* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975), which is an intellectual and historic treatment of the literature prior to the modern period.
46. For an effective introduction, Alan Morinis's first-person account in *Climbing Jacob's Ladder* (Canada: Broadway Books, 2002) is highly recommended.