"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."
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The battle of Torah

By BENJAMIN BALINT

T is no understatement to claim 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 enthrallement: "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, stupefied 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 "naive" 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 naiveté 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 Talmiditch 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 imperfect 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 leaves 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 andumbles 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 if you hold and who holds you. I spring from the pages into your arms.

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