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Saturday, August 4, 2007 / 20 Av 5767

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Select Below: **Students, Not Clones**

I agree with Rabbi Marc Angel's observations and concerns about the Orthodox world becoming more monolithic, encouraging deferring to "gedolim" (rabbinic heavyweights) and squelching differences of opinion ("Modern Orthodoxy's 'Cultic' Influence," June 22).

Fortunately, there are institutions in the halachic world that take a different approach. I received my semicha (rabbinic ordination) from the Institute of Traditional Judaism, the rabbinical school of the Union for Traditional Judaism. The rabbis and scholars who teach at ITJ empower students with both knowledge of text, and the tools necessary to parse our tradition. With this guidance, students are always challenged to come to their own conclusions. As one of my teachers put it, "you are our students, not our clones."

To be sure, I often consult with my teachers on issues of halacha, as well as questions of how to understand our sacred texts. When I do so, I have teachers whose goal is to empower me with better understanding. I appreciate their guidance, but feel that it is my sacred obligation to come to my own conclusions rather than deferring to my teachers.

Rabbi Noah Gradofsky
Temple Israel of Long Beach, L.I.

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