



# NEWS

## Yeshiva University

JOEL JABLONSKI CAMPUS

500 West 185th Street (at Amsterdam Avenue),  
New York, New York 10033-3201

(212) 960-5285 • 960-5488 • Telex 220883 TAUR • Fax (212) 960-0043

Sam Hartstein, Director of Public Relations • Home Phone (212) 795-8619

Contact: Bruce Bobbins  
(212) 960-5488-W  
(908) 574-2942-H

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RABBI JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK, MAJOR JEWISH PHILOSOPHER  
AND LONG-TIME PROFESSOR OF TALMUD AT YESHIVA UNIVERSITY'S  
AFFILIATED RABBI ISAAC ELCHANAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY,  
IS DEAD AT 90

Theologian, Teacher and Author Known as 'The Rav'  
Ordained Some 2,000 Rabbis

Funeral services for Rabbi Dr. Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the renowned philosopher, theologian, author, and teacher, who ordained some 2,000 rabbis in his more than 40 years at Yeshiva University's affiliated Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) in New York City, will be held Sunday, April 11, 10:30 a.m. at the Maimonides School in Brookline, MA.

Rabbi Soloveitchik, the world's foremost authority and leading exponent of Halakha (Jewish law) and known simply and universally as "The Rav," an affectionate Hebrew name for teacher, died at the age of 90 Thursday, April 8, 1993 of heart failure in his Brookline home.

For nearly a half century, Rabbi Soloveitchik served as spiritual mentor and Senior Professor of Talmud on the RIETS faculty, as Leib Merkin Distinguished Professor of Talmud and Jewish Philosophy.

--more--

## Add One--SOLOVEITCHIK

Equally at home in the works of Shakespeare, Kant, and the laws of nature, as with the deep-welled springs of Jewish tradition and learning, Rabbi Soloveitchik wove together concepts of Jewish and Western scholarship, forging innovative and creative approaches to man's place in relation to God and to the scheme of the universe.

### A TRADITION NURTURED IN EUROPE

From the moment he succeeded his father, Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik, as professor of Talmud at RIETS in 1941, Dr. Joseph Ber Soloveitchik made a dynamic impact on the development of Orthodox Judaism in America, instilling thousands of Jews with his intellectual creativity and his approaches and applications of Jewish laws, customs, and individual and communal awareness.

Born in Pruzhan, Poland, on February 27, 1903, Dr. Soloveitchik was the scion of a family with a tradition of Jewish scholarship. His maternal grandfather was the Gaon (sage) Rabbi Eliyahu Feinstein, renowned Rav of Pruzhan.

His paternal grandfather, Rabbi Haym Soloveitchik, lived in Brisk, Poland, and was known as the "Brisker Rav" (the Rabbi from Brisk).

### LIFE IN EUROPE

As a child in Poland, young Joseph Soloveitchik received the equivalent of a gymnasium (high school) education from several tutors.

--more--

Add Two--SOLOVEITCHIK

He spent his childhood in Khoslavitch, a White Russian town, where his father, Rav Moshe, served as rabbi. He studied in the local cheder (Hebrew school) under the tutelage of an elderly Habad Hasid (Hassidic Jew belonging to the "Lubavitch" sect). But his mother, a learned daughter of a rabbinic scholar, was displeased with the inadequacy of young Joseph's education. His parents then began to supervise his Jewish and secular education.

At the age of 12, Joseph Soloveitchik was already being trained in the "Brisker" method by his father and was studying Maimonides' Mishneh Torah. His mother introduced to him the writings of Ibsen, Pushkin, and Bialik, in addition to other secular writers.

He enrolled at the University of Berlin in 1925 at the age of 22 and studied physics and mathematics. It was there that he studied philosophy under the direction of Heinrich Maier. In 1931 he earned his Ph.D. degree in philosophy. His dissertation dealt with the epistemology and metaphysics of the neo-Kantian Jewish philosopher, Hermann Cohen.

That same year, he married Tonya Lewit, a recipient of a Ph.D. degree in education from the University of Jena. In 1932, together with his wife and new-born child, Dr. Soloveitchik emigrated to America to accept the post of Chief Rabbi of Boston, a position which he held until his death.

--more--

Add Three--SOLOVEITCHIK

Bred in a tradition that emphasized the intellectual rather than the pastoral function of a rabbi, Dr. Soloveitchik dedicated his life to the pursuit of education.

In 1937, he founded the Maimonides School, the first Hebrew day school in New England. Starting yeshivot during the 1930's was a pioneering task, particularly outside New York City.

Together with his wife, Tonya, Dr. Soloveitchik worked hard to ensure the survival of the new-born institution. He maintained a life-long interest in the school's developments.

During his early years in Boston, Dr. Soloveitchik organized a kollel (study group) to help meet the needs of older students. he also began to deliver regular shiurim (lectures) to members of the kollel.

When he succeeded his father as professor of Talmud at RIETS in 1941, Dr. Soloveitchik became the spiritual mentor of a majority of today's Orthodox rabbis. A short time later, he also began teaching philosophy at Yeshiva University's Bernard Revel Graduate School.

In 1952, Dr. Soloveitchik began to conduct shiurim (Talmudic discourses) regularly at Congregation Moriah in Manhattan. What began as a small, weekly, gathering for laymen at the synagogue every Tuesday evening soon became a meeting point for thousands of individuals from all parts of the New York area. The Congregation was forced to expand its quarters to accommodate the overflowing crowds.

The weekly shiurim continued for some 30 years.

--more--

Add Four--SOLOVEITCHIK BIO SKETCH

DECLINES CHIEF RABBINATE POSITION IN ISRAEL

In 1959, Dr. Soloveitchik declined an invitation to succeed Rabbi Isaac Herzog, the Chief Rabbi of Israel, who had just died.

Although he was urged repeatedly to succeed Rabbi Herzog, Dr. Soloveitchik decided to remain in America. Speaking of that decision, he told the Jewish Advocate in a 1964 interview:

"One of the reasons why I did not accept the post of Chief Rabbi of Israel--and the offer was made to me several times--was that I was afraid to be an officer of the state. A rabbinate linked up with a state cannot be completely free. I admire the rabbis in Israel for their courage in standing up for the problems there and displaying an almost superhuman heroism. However, the mere fact that from time to time Halakhic (Jewish-legal) problems are discussed as political issues at Cabinet meetings is an infringement on the sovereignty of the rabbinate."

PROBLEM: PUTTING THE ORAL TRADITION ON PAPER

Dr. Soloveitchik has spent an entire lifetime teaching the Talmud, the Oral Tradition. The problem for many of his students, however, has been that the "Rav" has insisted on keeping his lectures within the confines of the Oral Tradition. He has been reluctant to publish his essays, and the task of transcribing Dr. Soloveitchik's lectures and Shiurim has been left to his students.

AN AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR

Three essays that the "Rav" did publish were "Halakhic Man" in Talpioth, in 1944; "Confrontation" in Tradition, Vol. 6, in 1964; and the "Lonely Man of Faith" in Tradition in 1965.

Add Five--SOLOVEITCHIK BIO SKETCH

In 1964, Dr. Soloveitchik published a major essay in Tradition, the official organ of the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), the leading organization of Orthodox rabbis in America. It was at the RCA that he served as chairman of its Halakha (Jewish law) Commission.

In the essay, Dr. Soloveitchik set forth a formula for cooperation and understanding among religions in the United States. He emphasized that interreligious cooperation and understanding among the major faiths can flourish in a democratic society only when there is a recognition of one another's "distinctiveness and individuality" as a religious community.

In a major and controversial article published in the Kansas City Jewish Chronicle in 1964, Dr. Soloveitchik wrote of men and women sitting together in the synagogue:

"Clearly, the presence of women among men, or of men among women, which often evokes a certain frivolity in the group, either in spirit or in behavior, can contribute little to sanctification or to the deepening of religious feeling." He called for a battle against the "christianization of the synagogue."

In the article, Dr. Soloveitchik outlined what he called Orthodoxy's three tasks: "1) To conduct a program of education through the oral and the written word; 2) To morally support those individual laymen and rabbis who often give themselves in self-sanctification to a battle for the sanctity of the synagogue; 3) That orthodox organizations should undertake to build synagogues in the suburbs and new communities where Jews are settling."

Add Six--SOLOVEITCHIK BIO SKETCH

He concluded the article with the statement, "We have not yet lost the battle, for we have not yet begun to fight."

In 1985, Dr. Soloveitchik received the National Jewish Book Award for his work Halakhic Man (Jewish Publication Society), which was translated into English by Dr. Lawrence Kaplan, a professor at McGill University in Montreal. The work was a profile of the idealized man who conducts his life according to Jewish law.

A SPOKESMAN FOR ORTHODOXY

In an interview in 1964, Dr. Soloveitchik indicated that the major Orthodox organizations were, at the time, considering the establishment of a separate agency to deal with the non-Jewish communities on a religious level. He proposed that under such a setup, any organization wishing to join the new agency would "have to agree that any statements dealing with non-Jewish bodies at the religious level must be channelled through the agency."

Regarding the separation of synagogue and state, he maintained in a 1964 interview with the Jewish Advocate that the "union of Synagogue and State in Israel has not worked to the advantage of the religious community there." He explained that he advocated the separation "not for the sake of religious liberty, but for pragmatic reasons."

In 1972, in his annual speech to the Rabbinical Council of America, Dr. Soloveitchik offered an optimistic assessment of the future of Orthodox Judaism. "No matter how great the past was," he said, "we are expecting the future to be greater, more beautiful."

--more--

Add Seven--SOLOVEITCHIK BIO SKETCH

"RAV'S" LECTURES--PUTTING THEM ON PAPER

Scholars have attempted to print transcripts and reconstructions of many of the "Rav's" lectures.

In 1974, Yeshiva University published A Conspectus of the Public Lectures of Rabbi Joseph Dov Soloveitchik.

In 1979, the "Rav's" student, Rabbi Abraham Besdin, a noted author and lecturer, published Reflections of the Rav: Lessons in Jewish Thought Adapted from Lectures of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.

In 1982, the late Professor Pinchas Peli of Jerusalem wrote a lengthy essay on the "Rav" in the November issue of Midstream titled "Soloveitchik from an Israeli Perspective."

In that same issue, Dr. Hillel Goldberg, then a lecturer in Modern Jewish Thought at the Hebrew University School for Overseas Students, wrote of "Soloveitchik's Lonely Quest."

In 1983, five addresses by Dr. Soloveitchik to the Conventions of the Mizrahi Religious Zionist Movement during the period of 1962-1967 were published in a book The Rav Speaks.

Also in 1983, a book in Hebrew titled Classes in Memory of My Father, My Teacher was printed in Jerusalem, consisting of reconstructions of Dr. Soloveitchik's shiurim as well as his father's. An accompanying volume was published in 1985.

In 1984, Kibbitz Chidushei Torah, a compilation of shiurim by Dr. Soloveitchik and his father, was published.

--more--



Add Eight--SOLOVEITCHIK

In 1984, a Jubilee Volume honoring Dr. Soloveitchik, Sefer HaYovel, was published by Mosad Harav Kook in Jerusalem and Yeshiva University Press in New York City. The two-volume work was edited by Dr. Norman Lamm, president of Yeshiva University, and Rabbi Shaul Israeli and Dr. Yitzchak Raphael. More than 80 noted authors, including Yeshiva University graduates, faculty members, and roshei yeshiva, contributed essays in Hebrew to the 1,400 page volume.

Also in 1984, Professor Peli edited On Repentance: The Thought and Oral Discourses of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (Paulist Press). Peli's work marked the first time an English version of a Hebrew text--based on transcriptions of the "Rav's" Yom Kippur discourses on repentance in New York City over a 12 year period--was being printed. Peli's earlier work on the "Rav" was a Hebrew version of the Repentance text published in 1975.

In 1985, the Yeshiva University Hagadda featured a special essay by Dr. Soloveitchik regarding the holiday of Passover.

In 1986, the inaugural edition of Beit Yosef Shaul--a journal of studies in Halakhah issued by the Joseph and Caroline Gruss Kollel Elyon (post-graduate Kollel Program) of Yeshiva University's affiliated Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary--featured six guest commentaries by the "Rav."

--MORE--

Add Nine--SOLOVEITCHIK

In 1992, Doubleday Books published Dr. Soloveitchik's landmark essay, The Lonely Man of Faith, which first in the scholarly magazine, Tradition, in 1965.

The basic ideas for that essay were formulated in the "Rav's" lectures in the "Marriage and Family" program of the National Institute of Mental Health Project at Yeshiva University.

#### MAN IN THE NEWS

Throughout his career, Dr. Soloveitchik has caught the eye of the major media organizations as a spokesman for Orthodox Judaism.

Time Magazine, in a 1962 cover story titled "What it Means to Be Jewish," referred to Dr. Soloveitchik as "Orthodoxy's most brilliant interpreter in the U.S."

In the full-page story on Dr. Soloveitchik in 1984, at the time an English translation of the "Rav's" essay, Halakhic Man (1944), and Peli's On Repentance were being published, Time called him "Judaism's most illustrious philosopher."

In 1975, U.S. News and World Report listed him as one of the most influential religious leaders in America, ranking him fifth in a survey, right after Pope Paul IV.

In 1972, the New York Times published a detailed article on Dr. Soloveitchik titled "Rabbi's Rabbi Keeps Law Up to Date."

--more--

Add Ten--SOLOVEITCHIK BIO SKETCH

A NOTED SCHOLAR, LECTURER, AND ROSH YESHIVA

Although his home was in Boston, MA, Rabbi Soloveitchik managed to conduct Talmud classes at RIETS for more than 45 years, shuttling each week to New York by plane, train, and car.

Dr. Soloveitchik would not have received world-wide exposure and national prominence if not for the profound impact of his lectures and shiurim--whether they were at Yeshiva University, Harvard University, or his annual address to the Rabbinical Council of America.

His daily classes at RIETS and his annual public shiurim before the High Holy Days and at the Yahrzeits (anniversaries of death) of his father and wife attracted thousands of attentive rabbis and students--tape recorders and notebooks in hand.

With his shiurim lasting up to four or five hours at a time, Dr. Soloveitchik left his audiences mesmerized, challenging his listeners with tantalizing questions, developing themes, and answering questions he had posed by employing rigorous analysis and conceptualization.

A rosh yeshiva (professor of Talmud) once wrote of Dr. Soloveitchik's shiur: "This [shiur] is analogous to one throwing out a bunch of ribbons and then tying them into a neat, beautiful bow."

THE "BRISK" METHOD

It was the "Rav's" grandfather, "Rav Haym," who founded the "Brisker" method--the rigorous analysis and scientific classification of the Talmud (Gemorah). Rabbi Haym Soloveitchik's son, Rav Moshe, perpetuated the "Brisker" tradition and served as a rabbi and scholar in several East European communities before joining RIETS as a professor of Talmud in 1930.

--more--

## Add Eleven--SOLOVEITCHIK BIO SKETCH

But it was Joseph Soloveitchik, also trained in the "Brisker" method by his father, Rav Moshe, who planted the seeds of the European "Brisker" tradition in America.

### AMERICAN STUDENTS--A NEW BREED

In more than 40 years at RIETS, Dr. Soloveitchik's students have numbered in the thousands and spanned at least two generations. Until the late 1950's, his shiurim were conducted in Yiddish--the language of his parents and grandparents in Europe.

But this was a new generation growing up in the fifties. The children of European immigrants of the early 1900's were studying the Talmud at RIETS in the European tradition, but they were in American classrooms. The "Rav's" shiur (lecture) had to adapt to a new and upcoming generation of a vastly different composition--English-speaking students. Americans.

Dr. Soloveitchik made the adjustment. With a Yiddish accent accompanying his soft-spoken, high-pitched tone, he learned to master the English language, painting portraits of philosophy, theology, mathematics, physics, and Western scholarship with academic and flowery prose.

### RIETS HONORS THE "RAV"

In 1978, Dr. Soloveitchik was appointed to the newly-established Leib Merkin Distinguished Professorial Chair of Talmud and Jewish Philosophy at RIETS. The Chair was established by Hermann Merkin, vice chairman of Yeshiva University's Board of Trustees, in memory of his father.

--MORE--

Add Twelve--SOLOVEITCHIK

In 1983, the rabbinic education component of RIETS was named the Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik Center of Rabbinic Studies.

That same year, the Rabbinic Alumni of RIETS dedicated a plaque in honor of the "Rav," listing the names of those who contributed to a special \$1 million campaign drive which was launched years earlier when the University was restructuring its financial obligations.

#### REACHING A MILESTONE

The "Rav's" 80th birthday was celebrated in 1983 with a Yom Iyun (study day) at Bar-Ilan University in Israel. It was attended by prominent academics from all over Israel, including many of his former students, who gathered to hear lectures on various aspects of his philosophy.

Dr. Emanuel Rackman, president of Bar-Ilan, presented a lecture at the Yom Iyun on "The Rav as an Authority on Jewish Law."

Three years later, in 1986, the Educators Council of America convened a major symposium, "The Rav as Torah Educator: Theory and Practice."

#### APPROACHES OF THE "RAV"

Subjects of humility and repentance often were the subjects of Dr. Soloveitchik's lectures and philosophies. He says that the purpose of Halakha is to make men "aware of the Divine," and that it offers possibilities for atonement and forgiveness.

Man, according to Dr. Soloveitchik, is a divided creature consisting of conflicting forces in the eternal quest to understand the mysteries of divinity.

--MORE--

Add Thirteen--SOLOVEITCHIK

In his work The Lonely Man of Faith (1965 & 1992), Dr. Soloveitchik characterizes himself as a "stranger in modern society that is technical-minded, self-centered, self-loving."

He wrote, "My doctrines are not technical...My law cannot be laboratory-tested. What can I say to a functional, utilitarian society?"

In an interview in Present Tense magazine, the "Rav" said: "One grasps the wisdom of the Omnipresent when one understands Halakha." His objective has been to create a unifying religious system of behavior, combining elements of the secular and the religious.

#### MEETING WITH THE "RAV"

When nearly all of Israel's leading statesmen and dignitaries honored Yeshiva University with visits, it had become a ritual for them to have a private session with Dr. Soloveitchik. He has met with Israeli Prime Ministers, from David Ben Gurion, to Golda Meir, to Menachem Begin.

#### ESTABLISHING THE "RITES OF SUMMER"

Ever since he founded the Maimonides School in 1937, Dr. Soloveitchik conducted summer classes there for his students. Since 1980, RIETS has sponsored summer Torah learning programs and kollels (study groups), at which Dr. Soloveitchik often participated.

In the yearly yarchei kallah, (seminars) sponsored by the Rabbinical Council of America, Dr. Soloveitchik has lead hundreds of RCA members, rabbis, and students in a tradition begun in Babylonian days when people from the countryside came to yeshivot to study with Torah sages. The "Rav" also led sessions in Montreal and in Washington.

--MORE--

Add Fourteen-SOLOVEITCHIK

THE IMMEDIATE FAMILY: CONTINUING THE TRADITION

Dr. Soloveitchik is survived by a son, two daughters, a brother, and two sisters. His son, Dr. Haym Soloveitchik, is Professor of Jewish History at Yeshiva University's Bernard Revel Graduate School and a critical historian specializing in medieval Jewish history. A daughter, Dr. Atara Twersky, is a member of the School Committee of the Maimonides School in Brookline, MA. Her husband is Dr. Isadore Twersky, director of the Center for Jewish Studies and Nathan Littauer Professor of Hebrew Literature and Philosophy at Harvard University. He is the scion of a renowned Hasidic dynasty.

Another of the "Rav's" daughters, Tova Lichtenstein of Israel, is married to Dr. Aaron Lichtenstein, a prominent authority on the Talmud and Halakha. He is director of Yeshiva University's Caroline and Joseph S. Gruss Institute in Jerusalem and is rosh yeshiva of Yeshivat Har Etzion, also in Israel.

Dr. Soloveitchik's brother, Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik of Chicago, IL, has been maintaining the family tradition at RIETS since 1985, flying each week to New York to deliver shiurim (Talmudic lectures) at RIETS.

Dr. Soloveitchik's two sisters, Shulamith Meiselman and Anne Gerber, both live in Brookline.

Dr. Soloveitchik has grandchildren in Brookline, MA, and in Israel. His wife, Tonya Soloveitchik, died in 1967.