

THE RAV

“The Idea of a Yeshiva University”

*An Excerpt from a Drasha of
Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchick zt”l*

The following essay is an edited transcript of the second part of a drasha delivered by Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchick zt”l on April 12, 1970 at a S’mita luncheon held at Yeshiva University. The first part of the drasha was an exposition on the revelation to Moses after the Golden Calf, and the third part was devoted to the Rav’s misgivings and fears regarding decisions taken by Yeshiva’s Administration in response to various crises they were facing at the time. The second part of the drasha is a vigorous presentation of the role of Yeshiva University in American Jewish life. Minor changes of style and syntax have been incorporated into the text in order to facilitate the reader’s understanding. However, the basic oral presentation and style has been retained. This essay was transcribed by a young Musmach of RIETS and verified for accuracy by a number of prominent Mechanchim.

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complete my twenty-ninth year as a teacher here. The Yeshiva has accomplished something which is unknown in Jewish annals since the Golden Era in Spain; namely, the combination of a *talmid chacham* with an academician, a person trained

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questioning – and that is exactly what all *musmachei ha-Yeshiva* have. I can testify that the level of the *shiurim* delivered at the Yeshiva reached great heights which no other Yeshiva delivered here in America, or in *Eretz Yisroel* attained. There are boys in our institution who are committed to Torah, *bekol libam u-vekhof nafsham*, with a fire and a passion which is unmatched in the history of yeshivas. When I see sometimes, I am reminded of Bialik’s *Ha-Masmid*. They are bright and sharp, and their precision and skill are simply admirable. I can tell you that I sit up studying days and nights sometimes. Many a time my son finds me asleep over the Gemara and it is late in the evening – Why? It is not so much my diligence, but I am afraid of my pupils. If I come into the class unprepared, they will tear me apart, and it happens quite often. At the same time, as far as modern education is concerned, they are academically well trained on par with any boys from Harvard, Yale, or

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and women not only live Jewish lives, but think in Torah categories and talk the language of the Torah, and are committed to our tradition, is due directly or indirectly to our yeshiva. Could I ever have dreamt twenty-five

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Yeshiva University is an institution which has been opposed and challenged for a long, long time. This opposition is a result of the uniqueness it has in its singular contribution to American Jewish Life. You will ask me, in what does this uniqueness express itself? The uniqueness is an idea; if you wish, it is faith; if you wish, it consists of an adventure. What is it? The three words, "It is possible" which is the motto of Yeshiva. What is possible? To be a Jew,

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a loyal committed Jew, living a Jewish life, to be a *talmid chacham*, a scholar, a Jew committed to *Torah she-be'al peh*, and *Torah she-bichtav*, a Jew committed to the past, present and future of Jewish history, a Jew committed to the eschatological vision of *acharit ha-yamim* and, at the same time, to be a member of modern society, a useful member trained in all skills, able to live in the midst of modern society, not to retreat, but to take pride in the singularity and uniqueness of Judaism. It is that idea that the Yeshiva has proclaimed in three words, "It is possible," and it is to that motto that we especially cling now.

I have been a teacher at Yeshiva for twenty-nine years. Next May, I will

scientifically in all the technological skills. I lived many years in Germany and you probably have heard about the revolution which R. Samson Raphael Hirsch precipitated there (he was followed by R. Azriel Hildersheimer *zt"l*) and it was a very interesting accomplishment. However, the accomplishment consisted of combining academic training with piety. I had a professor at the University of Berlin, Oigen Mitvoch, who was an *ehrlicher yid*. He used to come on Tish'ah B'av to the Oriental Seminar at the University of Berlin (and Berlin was not New York) in sneakers! Yes, in Germany I witnessed the combination of merger of academic modern training with piety, with legal observance.

However, what the Yeshiva did is something else. The Yeshiva was more ambitious and more bold. It had proclaimed the higher goal, the combination of academic modern training with *lomdus*, with rigorous scholarship at the highest level. The alumnus of the Yeshiva, whether he is a rabbi or a merchant, a lawyer or a doctor, is a *talmid chacham* in the sense (and I am very careful and cautious about my statement) that he is interested in *Kezos* or a *Rambam*, in a *Hiddeshei Rabbenu Hayyim Halevi*. He has the curiosity. The sign of a scholar is not so much the amount of knowledge he has, but the inquisitiveness, the curiosity, the quest, the interest, the commitment. I saw many scholars with almost unlimited erudition but I have always doubted their scholarship; they were similar to that the Ramban called, *chamor nosay seforim* -- a donkey loaded with lots of books. The real criterion of a scholar is commitment, curiosity, inquisitiveness, a restlessness in exploration, steady

often. At the same time, as far as modern education is concerned, they are academically well trained on par with any boys from Harvard, Yale, or Columbia. And, in addition to scholarship and knowledge, they have a sense a commitment to *Klal Yisrael* the likes of which is hard to find.

When I came to Boston thirty years ago, I found six young men who were Sabbath observers. The rest did not observe the Sabbath, or observed it also on Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday

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because they were octogenarians. I must tell you that three of those young men are now my brothers-in-law. Now, Boston which was called an *ir hanidahahasas* far as Orthodoxy was concerned is today a stronghold of Orthodox living and questing. In my shul, at Maimonides, the average age of the worshipers is twenty-one! I am the oldest, the oldest in years. I mention Boston simply because I live there, but you will find the same is true in New York, which is a much larger city as well. The fact that thousands of young men

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years ago that a bunch of boys from our yeshiva and other yeshivot would occupy the quarters of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies in New York, the *sanctum sanctorum* of Reform Jewry and make demands boldly and proudly! You will see those "priests" of the *sanctum sanctorum* giving in to those young boys -- and the same thing is happening in Boston. All this is due directly or indirectly to our Yeshiva. It is responsible for the renaissance of Orthodoxy, and I am not exaggerating. For the Yeshiva is not just an institution or a school; it is a movement, an idea, a challenge, it is a faith and an assurance that Torah can blossom and flourish in the Western hemisphere, close to the skyscrapers of New York. The Torah can be cultivated, taught and propagated in all societies and eras, no matter how staggering the task, no matter how powerful the opposition, and no matter how unfriendly the circumstances may be.

If *chas v'shalom*, the Yeshiva will close, not only will we lose a great institution that has changed the face of American Jewry from the top to the bottom, but we will lose an idea, a vision, and a faith. Orthodoxy itself will be lost! Many schools and high schools will close their doors for the simple reason that there will be no inspiration for them to continue. The Yeshiva is the loadstar which our boys and girls of the third, fourth, and fifth generations will follow. If, *chas v'shalom*, disaster will strike and the Yeshiva will cease to exist, then Orthodoxy will be destroyed. Yes, you will have Orthodox groups, "sects" as Dr. Belkin calls them, here and there, but we are not for sectarian Orthodoxy.

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THE RAV

Hundreds Attend SOY Hachnasas Sefer Torah

by Moshe I. Kinderlehrer

We want Orthodoxy to be a popular movement, to infiltrate and penetrate the American Jewish society. We want it to carry the torch of our tradition, of our Torah, proudly and boldly. This type of Orthodoxy will be lost if the Yeshiva will close its portals.

Cynics may poke fun, but, thank God, the American Jew is not a cynic. He is a dreamer, and he is questing for something. The search quite often brings the young man or woman to Yeshiva or Stern College. Let me take this opportunity to tell Mr. [Max] Stern that his contribution to American Jewish education and history is unique and singular, for such an institution as Stern College was unknown throughout the ages, and it saved and saves thousands of girls who come from all parts of the United States. I do not say that Yeshiva is perfect, who is perfect and what is perfect? Only God is perfect. However, its impact on American Jewish Life is stupendous...

Let us understand that the Yeshiva finds itself at the Crossroads of Jewish

Amidst singing, dancing, and *divrei Torah* by various Roshei Yeshiva, SOY held a *Hachnasas Sefer Torah* this past Sunday afternoon, March 20, dedicating a *Sefer Torah* commissioned in the memory of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchick *zt"l* (the Rav), who passed away almost a year ago, on the eighteenth of *Nissan*. The event, which commenced in Weissberg Commons and concluded in the Main *Beit Midrash*, drew over three hundred attendees.

The Torah, which was written in Israel by Rabbi Heshy Pincus, cost approximately twenty-five thousand dollars. The SOY *Sefer Torah* Project was conceived last year, a short month after the Rav's death. To raise money for the project, SOY sent ads early this year to every student on the campus, as well as mailings to all YC/RIETS alumni in the New York-New Jersey area. Signs were also put up in shuls throughout the

According to Lavi Greenspan, SOY President, the response was excellent and greatly exceeded the final cost of the Torah. SOY received over one thousand responses for the commissioning of the Torah. All surplus funds, he explained, went to pay for the this past Sunday's event.

The *Hachnasas Sefer Torah* began a little after twelve noon, with a short introduction by Ephraim Gopin, the Co-Chairman of the SOY *Sefer Torah* Project and the Master of Ceremonies for the occasion. Afterwards, YU President Rabbi Norman Lamm, spoke for fifteen minutes, and Assistant Dean of RIETS Rabbi Bronstein led the gathering in reciting a short *Tehillim*. He was followed by RIETS Dean Rabbi Zevulun Charlop who spoke spiritedly about the Rav's life and linked the Rav's death with *Pesach*, the holiday on which the Rav passed away.

After Rabbi Charlop concluded, SOY Treasurer and Director of the *Sefer Torah*

the *Sefer Torah* Project dedicated to the Rav. Its purpose, he noted, was "to eternalize the Rav with his Torah, through his Torah." He then thanked all those involved in the dedication.

After a short break for *Mincha*, the Rav's brother, Rosh Yeshiva Rav Aaron Soloveitchick, arriving late from the airport, addressed the audience. After his address, in which he recounted stories from his earlier years with the Rav and pointedly described various aspects of his brother's personality, Mashgiach Ruchani Rav Yosef Blau signed the last letters of the *Sefer Torah*.

The Torah was then handed to Dr. Israel Miller, the retiring YU Senior Vice President, for the two block walk to the Main *Beit Midrash*. The procession, led by virtually all the Roshei Yeshiva, danced to music provided by Neshoma Orchestra. The procession, which attracted many strange glances as it made its way up Amsterdam Avenue, took fifteen minutes to reach the Main *Beit Midrash*. Once

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Let us understand that the Yeshiva finds itself at the Crossroads of Jewish America. It reflects the entire, colorful spectrum of the American Jewish community. The boys and girls come from hasidic homes, from working class families, from the homes of professionals, from alienated and assimilated circles. Some come from the homes of *kana'im* while others come from the homes of *goyim gemuri'm* and

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happened to attend a youth conclave [Torah Leadership Seminar] sponsored by the Yeshiva. We do not appreciate how much these youth conclaves sponsored by the Yeshiva have accomplished.

In short, if you want to be acquainted with the heterogeneous American Jewish community, come by the Yeshiva and you will find representation from every nook and corner... The Yeshiva is not only a *makom Torah* where *lomdim* are trained, it is also an *ir miklat*, a refuge haven where young men and women find the *Ribono Shel Olam*.

to every student on the campus, as well as mailings to all YC/RIETS alumni in the New York-New Jersey area. Signs were also put up in shuls throughout the metro area and ads were taken out in *The Commentator* and *Hamevaser*.

Pesach, the holiday on which the Rav passed away.

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The procession, which attracted many strange glances as it made its way up Amsterdam Avenue, took fifteen minutes to reach the Main *Beit Midrash*. Once inside, the Torah was installed in a recently refinished *Aron Kodesh*.

Two Books Commemorate First Yahrzeit of the Rav

by Moshe I. Kinderlehrer

In honor of the first *yahrzeit* of Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, RIETS has published the fourth edition of the *Beis Yosef Shaul* and plans to issue a second *sefer* in the near future.

The *Beis Yosef Shaul*, first distributed at the RIETS Chag HaSemikha dinner two weeks ago, was put out by the Fellows of the Caroline and Joseph S. Gruss Kollel Elyon of RIETS. The volume also bears a second dedication, in memory of Joseph S. Gruss, the namesake of the Kollel, who passed away earlier this year. In the first article of the *sefer*, entitled “HaSofer VeHaparnes,” Rabbi Norman Lamm describes the special nature of the relationship between the Rav and Joseph Gruss.

The *sefer*, which was edited by Rabbi Elchanan Adler, a member of the Gruss Kollel Elyon and a Bible Instructor in JSS, deals almost exclusively with the *chiddushim* of the Rav in the area of *Inyanei Stam* - matters concerning the *Sefer Torah*, *Tefillin*, and *Mezuza*. Contributors to the *sefer* include Rosh Hayeshiva and President Rabbi Lamm, Dean

of RIETS Rabbi Charlop, Rav Schachter, Rav Kahn, and Rav Willig, as well as articles by Rav Aaron Soloveitchik and Rabbi Menachem Genack.

Approved By the Rav

A highlight of this *sefer* is a transcript of the *aggadic* portion of one of the Rav's most celebrated *Yahrzeit drashot*, accompanied by a recently completed Hebrew translation of the *drasha*. The *drasha*, delivered by the Rav in 1959, illustrates the deep connection between a human being and a *Sefer Torah*. It was originally transcribed by the Yiddish journalist, Dr. Hillel Seidman and printed in the Yiddish weekly *Der Yiddishe Voch*. This particular transcription, Rabbi Adler explained, was actually reviewed and approved by the Rav. Rabbi Adler further noted that this particular *drasha* garnered a tremendous amount of attention and discussion at the time the Rav delivered it, and that until now it had never been completely translated. Rabbi Sholom Carmy, currently an Assistant Bible Professor at YC and a student of the Rav, translated the Yiddish transcription into Hebrew.

Four hundred copies of the *sefer*

were given out at the Chag HaSemikha dinner, but the *sefer* was not formally dedicated until this past Sunday's Hachnasas Sefer Torah held by SOY.

The Second Sefer

A second *sefer*, also dedicated to the Rav but unnamed as of yet, is scheduled to be printed by RIETS in the weeks following his *yahrzeit*. Two RIETS *s'micha* students, Abie Shmidman and Jeremy Wieder, former editors of the *Beis Yitchak*, are co-editing the work. It will be a “memorial volume” composed of articles primarily written by students of the Rav.

“The basic aim of the publication,” explained Shmidman, “is to show that the Rav endowed in his *talmidim* a *koach hachiddush*.” In addition to articles by students of the Rav, several of his colleagues have been approached and asked to write for this volume.

The idea for the *sefer* was conceived of shortly after the Rav's death last year. In searching for contributors to the *sefer*, Shmidman noted, “we [the editors] tried to get a sample representation of the students who learned with the Rav throughout the decades.”