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Tuesday, December 26, 2006, published in the Agudath Chochve College Students newspaper,

"COMMENTATOR" ARTICLE ON THE RAV

I do not recall exactly when it happened – whether it was an extra-curricular gathering, or in the course of a Sheur, or slightly afterwards when he was unwinding -- but this is the gist of his remarks, which were wistful – and revealing of a larger pathos than any of us ever expected.

The Rav said: “why do not my *talmidim* ever think of sending me Rosh Hashanah greetings?”

I was thunder-struck – not only at his felt need for friendship rather than admiration alone, but at my/our sheer indifference to his inner feelings. Why, in our boundless esteem, did we not ever realize that he had a heart and that he was oh so very human, that he experienced the need for approbation not as the intellectual giant he was but as a *basar ve'dam*, as a sentient and sensitive individual

His greatness created a natural distance between him and his disciples, and that was probably the cause of his loneliness. But it was inexcusable for us to be so unconcerned for him as a person, to allow our near apotheosis of him to lead us to near apathy, to imagine him as a perpetual motion machine of great ideas, of fine distinctions, of intellectual creativity – without recognizing him as a person, as a sensitive human whose emotional needs were not that different from our own. Perhaps that is the price one pays for fame and genius – but that is not an excuse for us.

The following year and ever since, until he passed away, I never failed to send him a greeting card for Rosh Hashanah. He always answered - *-always!* – with a handwritten letter of blessings for the New Year.

Here again I confess – in shame – that I merely sent him a *printed card*, whereas he replied in his own handwriting, *personally*. I failed to learn the lesson. I shall always feel the dull presence of guilt.

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There were, in my or our collective experience (as the Rav himself might say, following the *Brisker* form of analysis...) *two* Rabbi Soloveitchiks.

The first was the one we met in class: endlessly creative, unbelievably profound, possessed of a breath-taking breadth, dominating and often domineering, totally absorbed in the *daf* and the *sugya* he was teaching, ruthlessly honest – but usually angry, demanding, intolerant of fools or foolish questions, persistent in molding us into his methodology—in a word, intimidating. After the very first sheur I was

privileged to attend, I never again ate lunch before the sheur – I would not have been able to keep it down...

I used to refer to the Rev's midday as "advection by terrorism".
And the meeting really really works!