

Eulogy for

THE

RABBI JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK

RAV

Delivered by Dr. Norman Lamm

April 25, 1993

*This publication
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♦ ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן ♦

אני לנו כי נפלה עטרת ראשנו!

הספד מר

לע"נ מורנו ורבנו

רבן של כל בית ישראל

מרח הגאון האדיר

ר' יוסף דוב הלוי סולובייצ'יק זצ"ל

יום ראשון ד' אייר תשנ"ג אחת עשרה לפנה"ס

בישיבתנו הקדושה באנלם למפורט



HESPED MAR

IN MEMORY OF THE RAV

MARAN HAGAON

HaRAV JOSEPH DOV HALEVI SOLOVEITCHIK זצ"ל

THE TEACHER OF ALL ISRAEL

SUNDAY, APRIL 25, 1993, 11AM

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

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NEW YORK CITY

שר וגדול נפל היום הזה בישראל

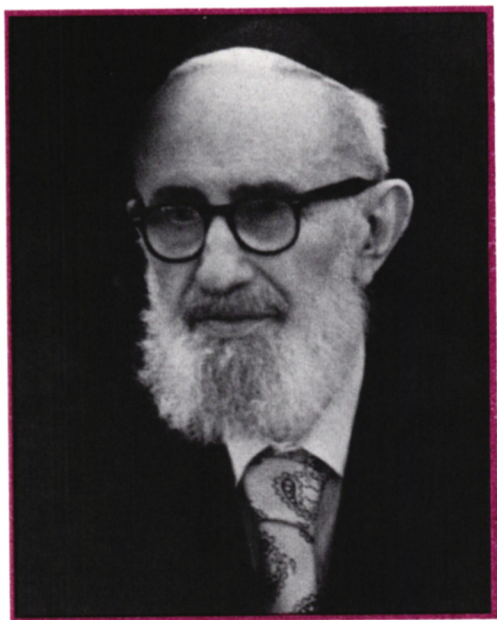
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RABBI JOSEPH B. SOLOVEITCHIK

1993

"A great prince in Israel has fallen today"
(II Samuel 3:38)

A prince of Torah and a leader of Israel



Surely, such a prince and such a giant, who became a legend in his own lifetime, deserves an appropriate eulogy.

I therefore begin with a confession: I feel uncomfortable and totally inadequate in the role of one delivering a eulogy for my *rebbe*, the Rav. Only one person could possibly have done justice to this task, and that is—the Rav himself; everyone and anyone else remains a *maspid she'lo ke'halakhah*—"one who eulogizes without authorization." Nevertheless, we owe it to him to try our best. And so I ask your—and his—forgiveness at the very outset.

The Rav departed from us on the exact same day that, 17 years ago, we lost Dr. Samuel Belkin *z.l.*, the late President of Yeshiva University, and the Rav eulogized him from this very podium on the day that he himself would be interred, *erev* the last days of Pesach. He referred to him then in the words of the Hagadah, as *arami oved*, a “wandering Aramean,” and paraphrased that as a “wandering Litvak,” who as a youngster was forced from his native town and took the wanderer’s staff to these shores all by himself.

Unlike Dr. Belkin, the Rav was not a wandering Aramean. He was not orphaned at an early age. On the contrary, he had the advantage of a stable, aristocratic home, of encouraging and even doting parents. He was heir, at birth, to a distinguished lineage—the *bet ha-Rav*, that of R. Moshe, R. Hayyim Brisker, the *Bet Halevi*, the *Netziv*, back to R. Hayyim Volozhiner.

His genius was recognized while he was still in the crib. At age 6, his father had hired a *melamed* to come to the house to teach him. The tutor was a Lubavitcher Hasid who taught him *Tanya* without asking leave of his parents. He learned it so well, that his father was shocked and fired the *melamed*. . . (His affection for Habad, however, would remain with him to the end.) He then became a disciple of his own father—demanding, challenging, and critical, yet approving and proud.

At the age of 10 he presented his father with his written Torah *hiddushim*. His father was so impressed that he showed it to his father, R. Hayyim Brisker, who was so impressed that he sent it to his *dayyan*, R. Simcha Zelig. And, of course, he prophesied greatness for his precocious grandson.

The Rav’s development continued unimpeded, and fulfilled and exceeded the hopes of father and grandfather.

The former Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Avraham Shapira *shlita*, told me the following story to which he was a personal witness.

When the Rav came to visit Israel, the one and only time during his life, in 1935, it was the last year of the life of the elder Rav Kook. The Rav spoke at several places—at Mercaz Harav, at the

Harry Fischel Institute, and at several other yeshivot. At every *sheur* that he gave, Rav Kook's son, R. Zvi Yehuda, attended and listened attentively.

When Rabbi Shapira asked R. Zvi Yehuda why he was doing so, he answered as follows: His father received Rabbi Soloveitchik and they "talked in learning." When Rabbi Soloveitchik left, the elder Rav Kook told his son that the experience of speaking with Reb Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik reminded him of his earliest years when he was a student at the Yeshiva of Volozhin, during the time that Rabbi Soloveitchik's grandfather, Reb Hayyim Soloveitchik, first started to give *sheurim*. I believe, Rav Kook said, that the power of genius of the grandfather now resides with the grandson—and therefore, he said to his son, you should not miss a single *sheur* by Reb Yoshe Ber Soloveitchik.

But if, unlike Dr. Belkin, the Rav was not a wandering Aramean, then we may say of him that he embodied another passage in the Hagadah: "Know full well that your seed shall be a stranger in a land not their own," (Gen. 15:13) that Avraham's children will be strangers in another land. He was not a "wandering Aramean" but a "lonely Abrahamite," a lonely Litvak, and this loneliness was one of the most painful and enduring characteristics of his inner life. This giant who was at home in every discipline, a master of an astounding variety of branches of wisdom, familiar with almost every significant area of human intellectual creativity, felt, ultimately, like a stranger dwelling in another's land. He somehow did not fit into any of the conventional categories. His genius was such that the loneliness attendant upon it could not be avoided—a fact which caused him no end of emotional anguish, yet gave us the gift of his phenomenal, creative originality. He was both destined and condemned to greatness and its consequences.

This sense of loneliness, isolation, and differentness had a number of different sources, all of which reinforced each other. One of them was emotional and began quite early in his life. The Rav poignantly describes (in his *Uvikashtem Misham*) his early experiences of fear of the world, of social detachment, his feelings of being mocked and rejected and friendless. The

only friend he had was—the Rambam and, as he grew older, all the other giants of the Talmudic tradition whom he encountered in his learning. The Rav identifies this as more than imagination and fantasy but as a profound experience—the experience of the tradition of the Oral Law. Yet, the sense of social loneliness and emotional solitude was not dissipated.

Indeed, that was the way he was brought up: he was taught to hide his emotions. He was never kissed by his father. He had no real friends in his childhood or youth and no truly intimate comrades in his adulthood.

This sense of alienation was not only a psychological and social factor in the various roles the Rav played in life; it was also central to his whole conception of life. His most characteristic form of analysis in his philosophic essays and oral discourses was the setting up of typological conflicts, of theoretical antitheses: Adam I and Adam II; *Ish ha-Halakhah* and *Ish ha-Elohim*; the covenant of fate and the covenant of destiny; majesty and humility. . . And, ultimately, conflict and dissonance make for alienation and loneliness.

This philosophical approach stems from two sources. One was his attempt, probably developed in his days in Berlin, to defend Judaism from the encroachments of a self-confident and aggressive natural science and equally arrogant then-modern philosophy. To counter them, he adopted the Neo-Kantian view in which there is a distinct chasm that separates the natural order of objectivity, quantification, and determinism (at least on a macro scale), from the internal human realm of the subjective, qualitative, and passionate where freedom reigns.

The second source is, I believe, the *hashkafah* of his Mitnagdic forbear, R. Hayyim Volozhiner, who saw the world and all existence as multi-layered and plural, as reflected in the Halakhah with its multiple judgments as in the Mishna of Ten Degrees of Sanctity, as against the Hasidic view of a monistic and unified world, one which blurred distinctions and sought to overcome contraries.

Thus, for instance, Rav Kook, strongly influenced by the Hasidic side of his lineage, saw underlying unity beyond all phenomena

of fragmentation and opposition, while the Rav's view was anything but harmonistic. He saw not wholeness but conflict, chaos, and confrontation in the very warp and woof of life. Man was constantly beset by a torn soul and a shattered spirit, by painful paradoxes, bedeviled by dualities, and each day was forced to make choices, often fateful ones, in the confrontation of savage contraries, of the jarring clash of claims and counter-claims in both conception and conduct.

Both these sources—the neo-Kantian and the thought of R. Hayyim Volozhin—see fundamental disunity and a fractionation of experience in the world.

Such a vision of contradiction and incongruity leads inexorably to anxiety and tension and restlessness, to a denial of existential comfort and spiritual security. It results in *loneliness*—the Rav truly was “The lonely Man of Faith”—and this philosophically articulated loneliness with its depth crises becomes enduring and especially poignant when superimposed on a natural tendency to solitude and feelings of being a stranger in a foreign land.

Yet, paradoxically, in practice he made strenuous efforts to overcome these dichotomies, to heal the wounds of the sundering of experience and even of existence itself, to achieve the unity of man with himself, with nature, with society, and with the divine Master of the Universe—even though he knew that such attempts were ultimately doomed to frustration. Hence, his efforts to bridge the worlds of emotion and reason, of Halakhah and Agadah, of Hasidism and Mitnagdism. Perhaps the very attempt to achieve unity and wholeness reflected his penchant for peace—a goal he valued and cherished—although he knew that in reality disharmony and the pain of inexorable conflict and contradiction controlled.

Thus, for instance, in the area of Jewish thought, where his fertile mind reigned supreme, he was a stranger amongst those who worked in Jewish philosophy. For he came to it from another world—one of greatness in Torah and mastery of Halakhah as well as the classics of both general and Jewish philosophy; and his assumptions and aspirations and insights were de-

rived from the Halakhah, rather than seeing Halakhah as irrelevant to Jewish philosophy. Thus, for example, the Rav's reconciliation of the differing viewpoints of Maimonides and Nahmanides as regards the obligation to pray, whether its source was rabbinic or in Torah law, became the source of his teaching on the "depth crisis" of everyday life. Amongst such Jewish thinkers, he remained a *ger*, a stranger and alien in a foreign land. The Rav was a lonely Litvak.

Similarly, he was a master *darshan* endowed with a richness of homiletic ingenuity combined with charismatic rhetorical prowess and stellar oratory—undoubtedly the greatest *darshan* of our, or even several, generations. Yet he had no peer, no companion, no friend in this area too. The kind of *derush* that even the best of them practiced was not his home, not his way. He could be as ingenious—and more so—than the cleverest of them, with a sense of timing and drama that was astounding, but his uniqueness lay in his synthesis of both Halakhah and Jewish thought in homiletic guise rather than the conventional *derush*. Here too he was a *ger*, and the world of the other *baalei derush* was for him "a land not their own." It was not his home.

Even in Halakhah, where he was our generation's undisputed master, he still was a stranger in a foreign land. Other great scholars were also gifted thinkers capable of incisive insights, but he alone—in addition to his cognitive supremacy, his dazzling halakhic definitions, and his brilliant formulations—had a broader scope by virtue of his wider knowledge and his exposure to other modes of reasoning, which helped him in his halakhic creativity, so that he was singular amongst the giants of Halakhah of our time. Thus, his quality as a "lonely Litvak" expressed itself as well in his defiance of convention in dress and demeanor. He simply refused to conform to standards imposed from without, whether intellectually or in the form of stylistic niceties.

How did the Rav as a "lonely man of faith" overcome these bouts of loneliness, given his conception of dialectic and conflict as inscribed in human nature and existence itself?

First of all, his early emotional and social loneliness became bearable when he found fulfillment in his domestic life. Anyone who was privileged to visit with him and the late Rebbitzin in their home in Roxbury could tell immediately that for the Rav, his home was a haven—and a heaven. Do we not recall the bitter tears he shed at his eulogy for her?

The second way, in response to his existential loneliness, was spiritual. This man whose goal was never mere peace or happiness but truth, was able to assuage his feelings of being a stranger in a foreign land by his deep and unshakeable faith. The “lonely Abrahamite” knew not only the anguish of alienation inflicted upon Abraham’s children, but he also knew the secret of our ancient forefather—that of “You found his heart faithful to You” (Neh. 9:8): a faithful heart, a heart of faith.

How does faith overcome the loneliness of the stranger, the alien, the *ger*? Perhaps by understanding that none is more lonely, so to speak, than the One Who Is Without Peer Himself! Man’s loneliness and Israel’s loneliness as “a nation which dwells alone” (Nu. 23:9) are both reflections of the divine loneliness. Even as He is One, the unsurpassably and ineffably One, so is He incomparably alone—He has no peer (Dt. 4:35); and does not such absolute and transcendent *aloneness* imply, from a human perspective, unparalleled and unimaginable *loneliness*?

The Almighty reaches out to His human creatures, seeking, as it were, the spiritual companionship of humans: the commandment of loving God can be understood by the talmudic dictum that “the Holy One, blessed be He, desires the prayers of the righteous”; and man eases his own pitiful terrestrial solitude by linking his loneliness to the majestic loneliness of the Divine. So does loneliness join loneliness, and out of this encounter is born the divine-human companionship, nourished by divine grace and human faith. Bonds of friendship are created, as man gratefully acknowledges God as “my Beloved,” and God regards the lonely Abrahamite as “Abraham My Friend.”

Such exultation came to the Rav during prayer. During these precious moments and hours, suffused with the purest faith,

the Rav found both the truth and the peace to which he devoted his life, as his riven soul was healed and unified. Recall his moving description, in his article "Majesty and Humility" (in *Tradition*, v. 17 (1978), p.33), of his experience of prayer when his late wife, o.b.m., lay dying in the hospital. Reread so many other of his famous essays where he bares his soul and reveals the depths and heights of his pure faith as expressed in prayer and the companionship of the Master of the Universe.

Here did the Rav, in his most intimate and private moments, reveal the true dimensions of his spiritual *Gestalt* by dint of his profound faith. He was no longer a stranger, no longer an alien, no longer the lonely Litvak.

Finally, he was able to abolish or at least moderate both forms of his loneliness intellectually—and that, in a paradoxical manner: He found peace and tranquility—on the battlefield of Halakhah during his *sheurim* here at Yeshiva! Often, the Sages speak of halakhic debate as the "give and take" of Halakhah, *massa umattan*, which is also the term for—business. It is a negotiation in the coin of ideas. But often they speak of a rougher kind of dialogue, as halakhic contention, *esek ba-Halakhah*, which refers not to a commercial analogy, but to strife, battles, as in Gen. 26:20, "they contended with him," referring to a struggle over the wells. That was the Rav's kind of *sheur*! That is what I think of when I recite the daily blessing, *la-asok be'divrei Torah*, "to engage in the study of Torah". . . Engaged in a war of wits with his own students, parrying ideas and interpretations, entering the fray between Rashi and Tosafot, between Rambam and Ramban—and Ramban with the Baal Hamaor—and trying to resolve their differences in a manner typical of the Brisker *derekh* which he inherited and then modified and perfected, he found his peace and his companionship.

Permit me to relate a story that throws light on other aspects of the Rav's character. It was my second year in his *sheur*, and I was intimidated and in awe of him as was every other *talmid*—that is, almost everyone else. There was one student, the youngest and one of the brightest, who was clearly the least frightened or awed. The Rav had been developing one line of

thought for two or three weeks, when this *talmid* casually said, "But *Rebbe*, the Hiddushei Ha-Ran says such-and-such which contradicts your whole argument." The Rav was stunned, held his head in his hands for three agonizingly long minutes while all of us were silent, then pulled out a sheet of papers from his breast pocket, crossed out page after page, said that we should forget everything he had said, and announced that the *sheur* was over and he would see us the next day.

I learned two things from this remarkable episode. First, we were overwhelmed by his astounding intellectual honesty. With his mind, he could easily have wormed his way out of the dilemma, manipulated a text here and an argument there, maybe insulted an obstreperous student, and rescued his theory and his ego. *But the Rav did nothing of the sort!* He taught, by example, the overarching goal of all Torah study as the search for Truth. That search for Truth was of the essence of his activity in Torah, and we witnessed it in action. He encouraged independent thinking by his pupils as a way to ensure his own search for the truth of Torah. The Rav was authoritative, but not authoritarian. No "musar shmuess"—no lecture in ethics—could have so successfully inculcated in us respect for the truth at all costs.

The second lesson came with the anti-climax to the story. The very next day, it was a Wednesday, the Rav walked into class with a broad, happy grin on his face, held out his copy of the Hiddushei Ha-Ran, and said to the *talmid*, "Here—now read it *correctly!*" The Rav had been right all along. . .

What we learned was a secret of his greatness and success as a teacher, namely, his attention to preparation. I always thought that there was a vast difference between his formal, public *derashot* and his *sheurim* in class. The former were finished, polished, conceptually and oratorically complete products, a joy to behold, each of them a marvel of architectonics. The *sheurim* he gave in class were of an altogether different genre. They were dynamic and stormy, as he formulated ideas, experimenting with a variety of arguments, testing, advocating and discarding, proving and disproving, as he brought us into his circle of creativity and forced us to think as he thinks and thus learn his methodology in practice. A *sheur* by the Rav was always a no-

holds-barred contest, a halakhic free-for-all, an open-ended process instead of a predetermined lecture.

Well, this incident proved otherwise. The Rav actually pulled out of his breast pocket his hand-written notes for this *sheur*! We were confounded: It was all prepared in advance! Yet his greatness was that, on the one hand, he prepared assiduously for every *sheur*, leaving as little as possible to chance. On the other hand, despite this thorough preparation, the *sheur* indeed was open-ended, because he listened carefully to any serious challenge by even the youngest of his students and was ready to concede an error. **And all through this, so successful was he in engaging us in the act of creation, that we never realized that he had thought it all out ahead of time!** Attending his class, I always felt, was like being present at the moment of genesis, like witnessing the act of Creation in all its raw and primordial drama, as conceptual galaxies emerged from the chaos of objections and difficulties, as mountains collided and separated, “as he uprooted mountains and crushed them together” (as the Talmudic phrase has it), until, finally, a clear and pellucid light shone upon us, bringing forth new and exciting worlds. He combined preparation and openness, determination and freedom, the fixed and the fluid. What a master pedagogue!

So awesome was his performance as both a thinker and a teacher, that emerging from an encounter with the Rav, whether publicly or privately, in a class or in an article, in Halakhah or in Jewish thought, it was impossible to avoid feelings of grave inadequacy, a vast inferiority. Each of us would think: How could I ever attain such depths, such heights of content or style, of thought or language? In students, that usually resulted in hero-worship; in colleagues and contemporaries—it often evenuated in envy and even enmity.

It is a measure of the Rav's character that he was not spoiled by our adulation, and he ignored the slurs against him; never, publicly or privately, did he mention them. Giants pay no attention to such slings and arrows.

Whenver I think back to the Rav as a *maggid sheur* I recall the fascinating tale recorded in *Pirkei de'R. Eliezer* (chap.2):

R. Eliezer comes to Jerusalem where he meets his rebbe, R. Yohanan b. Zakkai. The latter invites his pupil to “say Torah,” and he declines, explaining that he has derived all his Torah from R. Yohanan b. Zakkai and therefore has nothing to tell *him*. But, replies R. Yohanan b. Zakkai, you **can** do so; indeed, you can produce new Torah thoughts, such as were beyond what was received at Sinai! Sensitive to the fact that R. Eliezer is shy about displaying originality in the presence of his teacher, R. Yohanan b. Zakkai stands outside the study hall:

R. Eliezer sat and expounded, his face as bright as the sun, with rays of light shining forth as they had from Moses’ face [after he God had appeared to him]; no one knew whether it was day or night. [Finally,] R. Yohanan came up behind him and kissed him on his head, saying to him: “Happy are you, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that such a one as this one has issued from your loins.” Said Horkenos, R. Eliezer’s father: “...He ought not have said that, but rather: ‘Happy am I that such a one has issued from my loins.’”

Similarly, the Rav’s Torah was a revelation of Torah in its own right. There was something radiant about him, his vigor, his dynamism, as the original analyses and pursuit of truth and creative gestures poured forth from him in such triumphant excitement. Moreover, as a *rebbe* or teacher, he was simply unsurpassed. His gift for explanation, for elucidating a difficult concept or controversy or text, was that of sheer genius; who could compare to him? Happy are the Patriarchs of our people, happy are his father and grandfather *zikhronam liverakhah*—and happiest of all are we, we who had the good fortune to study under him. How sad I am for our younger students who did not and will never be so privileged; at best they can get only a reflection of his greatness at second hand.

What kind of person was the Rav?

Despite his no-nonsense attitude while teaching, he was a man of sensitivity and graciousness. It would not be a mistake to say

that he was, in the best sense of the word, a gentleman. He might have been a terror in the classroom, but he was attentive and polite and accepting and warm outside the *sheur*. Above all, he possessed great kindness and he was a *baal tzedakah*, a charitable person.

He was also very vigorous. In the days of his strength, his *yemei ha'aliyah*, he never walked; he ran. It is almost as if his body was rushing to keep up with the flow of his ideas. Vigor, dynamism, vibrancy dominated his being, from his "lomdus" to his gait.

Above all, the Rav was a man of independence. He was a true heir of his great-great-grandfather, R. Hayyim Volozhiner, who held that in Torah study you must go after the truth no matter who stands in your way; respect no person and accept no authority but your own healthy reason. So, the Rav was his own man, and often went against the grain of accepted truths and conventional opinion. Once, after a particularly original *sheur*, a stranger who was not used to such unusual independent creativity, asked him, "But Rabbi Soloveitchik, what is your source?" He answered, "a clear and logical mind". . .

He was an independent thinker not only in his Halakha and his philosophy but also in his communal leadership. He had great respect for some of his peers—eminent *Rabbanim* and *Rashei Yeshivot* of the generation—but he did not allow that respect to intimidate him. He rejected fanaticism or zealotry as well as small-mindedness, even as he deplored lack of faith. He was not afraid to be in the minority, and refused to be cowed by pressure of the majority. He was horrified by extremism and overzealousness as well as superficiality and phoniness in communal policy-making almost as much as he contemptuously dismissed them in "learning." And if he sometimes seemed to waver in setting policy or rendering a decision in communal matters, it was because he saw all sides of an argument and was loathe to offend or hurt even ideological opponents.

Thus, for instance, almost alone amongst contemporary *Ge-dolei Torah* (talmudic authorities), he viewed the emergence of the State of Israel as evidence of divine grace; he saw its appearance as opening a new chapter in Jewish history, one in

which we enter the world stage once again. He was not afraid—despite the opinions of the majority of Roshei Yeshiva and his own distinguished family members—to identify with the goals and aspirations of Religious Zionism.

Perhaps the most significant area where he diverged from other *Gedolim* and followed an independent way was with regard to secular studies, to Torah Umadda. The Rav was an intellectual Colossus astride the various continents of human intellectual achievement and all forms of Jewish thought. Culturally and psychologically as well as intellectually, this made him a loner amongst the halakhic authorities of this century. How many pre-eminent Halakhists in the world, after all, have read Greek philosophy in Greek, and German philosophy in German, and the Vatican's document on the Jews in Latin? A Ph.D. from the University of Berlin in mathematics and especially philosophy, he took these disciplines seriously, not as an inconsequential academic flirtation or a superficial cultural ornamentation, or as a way of impressing benighted and naive American Jewish students who did not know better. There is no doubt where his priorities lay—obviously, in Torah—but he did not regard *Madda* as a *de facto* compromise. The Rav believed that the great thinkers of mankind had truths to teach to all of us, truths which were not necessarily invalid or unimportant because they derived from non-sacred sources. Moreover, the language of philosophy was for him the way that the ideas and ideals of Torah can best be communicated to cultured people, it is Torah expressed universally; and he held as well that his philosophic studies helped him enormously in the formulation of halakhic ideas.

The Rav had no use for the currently popular transcendent parochialism that considers whole areas of human knowledge and creativity as outside the pale. We must guard, therefore, against any revisionism, any attempts to misinterpret the Rav's work in both worlds, akin to the distortion that has been perpetrated on the ideas of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch. The Rav was not a *lamdan* who **happened** to have and use a smattering of general culture, and he was certainly not a philosopher who **happened** to be a *talmid hakham*, a Torah scholar. He was who he was, and he was not a simple man. We must accept him on his terms, as

a highly complicated, profound, and broad-minded personality, and we must be thankful for him. Certain burgeoning revisionisms may well attempt to disguise and distort the Rav's uniqueness by trivializing one or the other aspect of his rich personality and work, but they must be confronted at once. When the late R. Yehezkel Abramski eulogized R. Hayyim Brisker, he quoted the Talmudic eulogy, "If a fire has blazed up among the cedars, what shall the hyssop do," and interpreted that as: after the giants have been taken from us, who knows what the dwarfs who follow them will do to their teachings. . .

The Rav was exceedingly loyal to our Yeshiva. Thus, when some 14-15 years ago we faced the threat of bankruptcy, I asked him to help rescue the Yeshiva, and he immediately accepted. At a meeting in the late Herbert Tenzer's office in 1978 he appeared at a critical meeting of our leaders and read to them his confession of gratitude to Yeshiva University. He spoke of how much Yeshiva meant to him, how it afforded him a platform, how critical it was in whatever he had attained in his life, how much it meant to his family.

It was he who gave *semikhah* to some 2000 rabbis and thus influenced hundreds of thousands of Jews in America and throughout the world. And he graciously allowed us to name the Semikhah Program the Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik Center for Rabbinic Studies, because he knew it would help the Yeshiva. He was, indeed, the *ruah hayyim* of the Yeshiva.

Additionally, the Rav refused to isolate himself in an ivory tower. He sought contact with ordinary Jews—whom he **never** disdained. This practical turn of mind and interest served him well. Thus, the Rav functioned not only as a *Rosh Yeshiva* but also as a *Rav*, as a Rabbi for ordinary Boston *baalebatim*. As such, he was in contact with the realities of American Jewish life, and as a result his halakhic decisions and communal policies were leavened by an intimate awareness of their lives and loves, their needs and limitations and aspirations, their strengths and their weaknesses. His *rabbanut* in Boston was the perfect counterpoint for his life as *Rosh Yeshiva* in Manhattan, and protected him from making decisions that were appropriate,

perhaps, for the high ideals of a yeshiva but not for *amkha*, for ordinary laymen. He dominated the ivory tower; it did not dominate him.

The Rav was deeply devoted to his family. Just as his father was *his* teacher, so did he teach his three children—and he treated his daughters the same as his son. He was fortunate to have brilliant children, illustrious sons-in-law, and gifted grandchildren; all are involved, in one way or another, in the world of Torah, many of them educated at Yeshiva and some teaching here.

But most important to us—his students and their students and the thousands who came under his or his students' influence—is what he meant to us as our *Rebbe*.

Despite the austere majesty and the irrepressible dynamism of his *sheurim*, and despite the fear of coming to a class of the Rav unprepared, we intuitively knew that we had a friend—a father, an older brother—in him. We invited him to our weddings, and later to our children's weddings; and he came. We consulted him on our personal as well as rabbinic problems; and he listened and advised. We presented our halakhic inquiries; and he taught us “the way in which they shall follow,” as God said to Abraham regarding his descendants.

He exerted a powerful emotional pull on his students: I know so many, each of whom secretly (and sometimes not so secretly) *knows* that *he* was the Rav's favorite disciple! Who knows?—perhaps all were and, then again, perhaps *none* were. He so profoundly affected the lives of so many of us—in the thousands—and yet he remains somewhat remote, because hardly a one *fully* encompasses all of his diverse areas of expertise, let alone the acuity of his intellect. Those who were his *talmidim* in Halakhah generally were not fully informed or sensitive to his thought, and those who considered themselves his disciples in philosophy hardly appreciated his genius in Halakhah. So, he had many students, and no students... But cannot the same be said of the Rambam—some of whose students followed

his Halakhah, and some his philosophy, and very few, if any at all, both?

The Rav never blurred the distinctions between the roles of Rosh Yeshiva and Hasidic Rebbe. He aspired to have *talmidim*, not *hasidim*—challenging, questioning, independent-minded disciples, not fawning, accepting, unquestioning acolytes. That is why at the same time that he forced us into systematic thinking and molded our *derekh*, our methodology, he also gave us “space,” insisting that we think and decide certain halakhic questions on our own. He lived his interpretation of the injunction in *Pirkei Avot* to proliferate students—literally, “set up many students”—as, “make a great effort to have your students *stand* on their own” and not be permanently tied to your apron-strings. But so great was his personal charisma that many of us ended up as both *talmidim* and *hasidim*...

In II Kings 1 we read of the last moments in the life of the prophet Elijah as he is accompanied by his disciple Elisha. Elijah has been told that he must prepare to be swept up to Heaven in a whirlwind, and so he wishes to take leave of his *talmid*. But three times Elisha refuses to leave his *rebbe*. Elijah casually splits the waters of the Jordan, and teacher and pupil cross the river. Elijah and Elisha continue their conversation—an important one, but not relevant to my point—and then we read: “And it came to pass as they were walking, *walking and talking*, that there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two men, whereupon Elijah was swept up by a whirlwind to heaven.”

I have often wondered about that last, fateful, conversation as the two walked, each to his own destiny, “walking and talking.” What did they talk about, that *Rebbe* and his *talmid*, during that somber but very brief period of time? How I would have wanted to be privy to that incredible conversation! Further, I was always troubled by the peripatetic nature of that conversation, *walking and talking*; why a *walking* discussion, why not seated or standing?

In response, I put myself in Elisha’s position vis-a-vis my own *Rebbe*, and wonder: if I were granted but 10 minutes with the

Rav, both of us certain that this was the last chance to talk before the winds bore him away, what words would pass between us? I would not presume to suggest what he would say to me; but what would I say to him? What last message, last impression, would I want to leave with him?

Two things: First, I would walk with him rather than sit or stand because when walking you do not look at each other; I would be too embarrassed to do that. For I would say to him: Rebbe, forgive us for taking you for granted. You were so much a part of our lives, so permanent a fixture of our intellectual and spiritual experience, that we too often failed to tell you how much you meant to us, as children often neglect to let their parents know how much they love them. We were so engrossed in our own growth that we ignored your feelings. I leave you with a feeling of shame.

Second, we thank you. Our hearts overflow with gratitude to you, our master in Torah and in life itself.

There is not one of us who does not owe you an undying debt of gratitude. You inspired us; we bathed in admiration of your genius, fought to be accepted as *talmidim* in your *sheur*, and were actually proud when you took note of us—even to be singled out for rebuke for a “*kruimer sevor*,” for our intellectual sloth or slovenliness. You were our ideal, our role model, even though we all knew that our natural limitations prevented us from ever reaching your level. We thrilled at the sheer virtuosity of your creativity and the brilliance of your originality in your *sheurim* in which you forced us to join you in bold experiments to dissect a *sugya*, understand a *makhloket Rishonim* (a halakhic dispute among early authorities), propose a solution to a puzzling *Ramban*, and—to be critical of you! You gave shape and direction to our lives. We knew we were in the presence of greatness, that our *Rebbe* was a unique historical phenomenon. And deep down we were secretly frightened at the prospect that some day we would no longer have you with us.

What consolation can make up for our enormous loss? For now that greatness is gone, hijacked from us by history. No more for us the exquisite intellectual delight of his incom-

parable *sheurim*, the esthetic pleasure of discerning the artistic architectonics of his masterful *Yahrzeit derashot*, the edification of his eulogies, the wise counsel we sought from him on matters private or public.

The years of his decline have drained us of most of our tears. But with the finality of his passing, we utter a collective sigh to the very heavens, a composite sigh composed of one part of disconsolate *avelut*, of an endless and bottomless sadness; one part of pity for the world, “rachmones” for a world now denied the privilege of presence of the master of Torah of this generation; and one part of a promise to him that neither he nor his *derekh* nor his *hashkafah* will leave our midst or ever be forgot. And that is why I would *walk* with him, walk and talk, because sitting or standing imply an end, no future, stagnation, whereas walking implies something unfinished, a destination still beckoning, a sense of ongoing continuity. Our loyalty to the Rav and his teachings will live as long as we do, as long as our *talmidim* do, as long as this yeshiva exists; it will go on and on. Here, in this yeshiva where he presided as *Rosh Yeshiva* for half a century, his presence will always be palpable, his teachings will endure, and the memory of our master the Gaon, Rabbi Joseph Ber Halevi Soloveitchik, “will not cease from among us and our children forever,” in the words of the book of Esther.

And finally, the sigh contains one part of love. Yes—to this scion of Litvaks for generations, those of emotional restraint who abjured any display of affection as unbecoming ostentation, to this commanding and self-disciplined intellect, we express openly and unabashedly our affection and our love. And so I would conclude my “walk and talk” session with him by saying, “We loved you, Rebbe, and if we felt inhibited and embarrassed to say it to your face, we profess it to you now. We feared you, we admired you, but we loved you as well.”

How appropriate it would have been for the Rav, that living dynamo, to leave this world as Elijah did, carried off to heaven in a whirlwind. . . But alas, that was not granted to him.

When R. Avraham Shapira came here a few years ago to give a *sheur* and he met the Rav for the first time, he kissed him publicly, and whispered to me, as an aside, "it's a mitzvah to kiss a *sefer Torah*."

Nothing lasts forever. Even a Torah scroll does not endure forever. Sometimes, we know of a Torah scroll which was burnt, such as the one consumed together with the martyred R. Hanina ben Teradyon. At other times, a Torah scroll does not have the fortune of such a dramatic end whereupon the parchment burns but the letters fly away to their Source; instead, it is a Torah scroll which wears out, it suffers, withering away slowly, as letter by letter is painfully wrenched away from it, until it is no more. That, because of our sins, was the bitter end to the life of our very own Torah scroll. It was the very thing he feared most, and it happened to him. In the words of Job, "that which I feared has come to pass." Alas!

But we know that even if the Torah *scroll* is gone, the Torah *teaching* of the Rav will always live on with us. I recently heard of something that happened some years ago at the Brisker Yeshiva in Jerusalem, led by Rabbi Dovid Soloveitchik, son of R. Velvel Soloveitchik, *z.t.l.* The details may be fuzzy, but the essential story, I am told, is true.

A very, very old, bent-over man wandered into the yeshiva one day, and sat down and began to learn by himself. Reb Dovid came over and greeted him. The old man asked, "is this the Hebron Yeshiva?" No, answered Reb Dovid, this is the Brisker Yeshiva. At which the old man opened his eyes wide and, in disbelief, asked, *Reb Hayyim lebt noch*, "is then Reb Hayyim still alive?"

It transpired that the old man had studied in Brisk when Reb Hayyim was still alive, and left in 1913. Caught up in the Russian Communist Revolution, he was exiled to a remote area in Georgia, completely cut off from any contact with fellow Jews, especially those from Lithuania. He continued his studies for some 75 years all by himself until the great Soviet emigrations to Israel began. He had just arrived, and that is why, upon encountering the Brisker Yeshiva, he thought that Reb Hayyim was still alive. . .

And, indeed, Reb Hayyim still lives...

And we are here to testify and promise that "*moreinu verabbenu R. Yoshe Ber lebt noch*," our *Rebbe* still lives, and always will, in our midst!

I read someplace that the Gaon of Vilna said that in the World of Truth they await the coming of a *talmid hakham*, who is accompanied to the Heavenly study hall in *Gan Eden*, so that he can deliver a *sheur* and expound his best *hiddushim*. He is given 180 days to prepare this public *derashah*.

Farewell, Rebbe. You always prepared for us, well and meticulously, and you no doubt will do the same now. And when you give your *sheur*, your *derashah*, before the Heavenly Court, with all the great *Gedolei Torah* of the ages in attendance, those who were your closest companions and comrades during the years of your lonely sojourn, remember us—your family and your *talmidim*—even as we shall always remember you; and may your merit and the merit of your Torah and your *hiddushim* protect us and grant health of body and mind and soul, peace—peace above all!—in every way, and love of God, love of Torah, love of the people of Israel, love of others and their love of us, to all of us—your family, your disciples and their disciples, and all of this Yeshiva to which you came half a century ago, which you graced with your greatness of mind and heart, and which was your home and our home together—and in which your presence will always be palpable and from which your memory will never fade.

For you were a blessing to us in your life-time. And *zekher tzadikim liverakhah*, your memory will be a blessing to us forever, until the coming of the Messiah, may he come speedily in our time, Amen.