

THE SPIRIT OF THE RABBINATE

A Collection of *Chag HaSemikhab* Addresses
Delivered by Rabbi Norman Lamm

RABBI ISAAC ELCHANAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

New York, 5770

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Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm has earned renown as a premier philosopher and intellectual in the Jewish community. Through his unquenchable commitment to Torah study and Torah values, his scholarship has added structure to our ideology and served as a bulwark for our faith.

It is my pleasure to present nine of Dr. Lamm's hundreds of profound and eloquent public lectures. We have compiled within this booklet Dr. Lamm's keynote addresses from the *Chagei HaSemikhah* from 1981 until 2006 and an earlier presentation delivered in Manchester, England in 1968 at the Anglo-Jewish Preachers Conference.

Throughout my tenure as President of Yeshiva University, Dr. Lamm has constantly stood as a source of personal inspiration for me. I hope that this collection of some of his insights will bring his elegant thoughts and elegant language to more of his students.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading 'Richard M. Joel'.

Richard M. Joel

THE LAMM HERITAGE

An Enduring Legacy for Chancellor Norman Lamm

The story of Yeshiva University is inextricably linked to the life and work of our Chancellor, Norman Lamm. In tribute to Chancellor Lamm, we have established The Lamm Heritage, a multifaceted set of initiatives bearing his name and serving as an enduring imprint of his legacy of scholarly, spiritual and leadership contributions to Yeshiva University and to the world Jewish community.

Yad Norman Lamm

In order to recognize Dr. Lamm's lasting contributions to YU, we will establish Yad Norman Lamm, a physical space dedicated to telling the story of the "Lamm Years" through text, pictures, memorabilia and other displays.

The Norman Lamm Yadin Yadin Kollel

As part of the Lamm Heritage, YU will endow and enhance the Norman Lamm Yadin Yadin Kollel. Housed in the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), this intensive two-to-five-year program grants *yadin yadin*, an advanced level of *semicha* (rabbinic ordination), to outstanding scholars who have already received *yoreh yoreh semicha*, preparing them to adjudicate in matters of Jewish law.

The Beth Din of America and YU plan to create a joint program between the Beth Din and the Yadin Yadin Kollel, with the goal of training a cadre of serious judges who will serve the Modern Orthodox community in America.

Our most dedicated students are eager to further their rabbinic education at YU. Through the Kollel, we will produce a stronger and larger core of capable leaders to handle difficult issues and situations facing Jews and Judaism in the modern world.

The Norman Lamm Web Site

Serving as an enduring virtual meeting place for Dr. Lamm ideas and scholarship, The Norman Lamm Web Site contains over 800 of his digitized sermons, so they will continue to enlighten future generations.

The Norman Lamm Prize

As the capstone of the Lamm Heritage, the Norman Lamm Prize will pay tribute to Dr. Lamm's lifetime of scholarly achievement. The Prize will be awarded to leading scholars and personalities who represent the values to which Dr. Lamm has devoted his life. As visiting scholars at YU, Lamm Prize winners will contribute richly to our academic life by delivering lectures and leading discussions with the YU community. The prize will honor its recipients by linking them forever with Dr. Lamm's name and that of YU. On March 16, 2010 Yeshiva University will confer the inaugural Norman Lamm Prize to Chief Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks.

For more information, visit www.yu.edu/lammheritage.

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THE CHALLENGES OF THE MODERN RABBINATE

*May, 1968 (England)**

THE RABBINATE TODAY has fallen upon hard times. In the last year or two, there have appeared a number of articles announcing the imminent demise of the Rabbinate, one of *the* greatest of Jewish religious institutions. Its functions have been taken over, one by one, by others—the Roshei Yeshivah and the professors, the fundraisers and the social workers—and the Rabbi has become a vestigial functionary, a charming anachronism. Sooner or later, the community will manage very well without him, perhaps devising some other functionary to preside over synagogue services.

Now, I do not wish to address myself specifically to this question of the future of the Rabbinate. “I am neither a prophet, nor the son of a prophet.” Besides, the Talmud makes some unflattering remarks about those who pretend to the mantle of the seer. Furthermore, our loyalty to Torah unquestionably transcends our loyalty to the Rabbinate, and if Judaism can get along without professional Rabbis in the future—as it has in the past—so be it. I may be sad at such morbid prospects, but not crushed.

* This particular address was not delivered at a *Chag HaSemikhah*, as are the others in this volume. What follows is adapted from an address at the Anglo-Jewish Preachers Conference held in Manchester in 1968, and was published by the Conference.

However, I honestly do not believe the grim prognosis. As Mark Twain once said, upon reading an announcement of his death in the morning newspapers, "I have read my obituary and believe it is much exaggerated."

It is, of course, true that the Rabbinate is in trouble—and it is in greater trouble in Israel than in the English-speaking countries (although I shall confine my remarks to our communities in the Diaspora). I believe we have slipped into a rut, but we are not lost. We are in many ways stricken, but not irreversibly. I submit that we still can recapture our commanding role as spiritual leaders and effective guides if we bestir ourselves—before it is too late. The verse *mipnei sevh takum* ("before a hoary head shalt thou rise"—Lev. 19:32) is interpreted by the Zohar temporally rather than spatially: "before" implies a chronological priority, as if to say, "before you grow old, rise!"

There is still time for the Rabbinate to rediscover the sources of its inspiration and to rise to the summons of history, before it becomes encrusted with and disheartened by its diminishing authority and scope. Perhaps, in face of this trivialization, our greatest challenge is precisely to rediscover our real, genuine challenges. Merely to identify them correctly is, in part, the beginning of an authentic response, even as the Neo-Kantians taught that the right question is half the answer. Permit me, therefore, to point to what I believe are *some* of our major challenges, and in some of these cases to adumbrate what I feel ought to be the direction of our responses.

The first of these challenges is that posed by the existence and success of the State of Israel. Israel represents one of those major turning points in Jewish history, the consequences and ramifications of which take generations to measure. In addition to the obvious salutary effects of the founding and survival of the State, which require no elaboration before an audience of this kind, its emergence has given rise to as many new problems as it has solved old ones. To put it bluntly, it has called into question our very existence as autonomous and self-perpetuating Jewish communities in the *Golah*. It does this in two ways, one more immediate and the other more theoretical.

Practically, it has — paradoxically! — accelerated assimilation in some circles. Before 1948, there were many marginal Jews who stubbornly retained their Jewish identity and affiliation because they felt a personal responsibility to the Jewish heritage and people, and did not want to be guilty of contributing to its disappearance. With the State emerging as the guarantor of the Jewish future, many of these peripheral Jews no longer accept such an obligation, and have no qualms about gently and softly sliding into the gaping void of eternal oblivion. I do not believe there is anything we can do, in a direct way, to counter this rather unconscious argument. It tells us that we can no longer appeal to the Jewish instinct for survival, but that we must address ourselves to the strictly religious yearnings, inchoate though they be, of as yet uncommitted Jews.

The second effect of this historic watershed is theoretical, but no less urgent. It constitutes a reproach to our very determination to survive as Jewish communities outside of Israel. I do not want to get into the maze of dialectics of affirmation or negation of the *Golah*. Such debates are fascinating, troubling, but often inconclusive. We do know, on the one hand, that we *ought* to go on *aliyah* and encourage others to do so; that is part of our Torah commitment. But we know just as well, on the other hand, that barring any unforeseen events, the great majority will not go. Hence our duty is to go and to inspire others to go on *aliyah* and at the same time to build a firm and stable and enduring Jewish life here and in the United States and elsewhere. Intellectually, this means picking our way through a minefield of ambivalences. Practically, we must devise a plan whereby at least one member of every family will be encouraged to go. But no matter what the specific solution, it is a problem that cannot and must not be avoided.

The second challenge is the *communal* one. Three elements are discernable here. Let us enumerate them in ascending order of importance.

First is the question of co-existence with non-Orthodox religious groups within the Jewish community. The problem is

ubiquitous and sufficiently well known for us to dispense with any descriptions. We in the United States face an almost identical situation, *mutatis mutandis*. For myself, I accept neither extreme. I do *not* believe that all differences are confined to the liturgy and that communally we must accept each other's convictions as equally legitimate. If we are indeed Orthodox, then we have commitments that we cannot in good conscience compromise in the name of sportsmanship or good fellowship or even unity. To ask us to recognize as a bona fide Rabbi one who is lacking in acceptance of Halakhah or in the requisite knowledge of Torah, is to ask us to abandon our own principles. It may lay us open to the charge of having closed minds, but I always recall Prof. Lionel Trilling's remark that some people are so open-minded that their brains fall out.

At the same time I refuse, without cogent reason, to read anyone out of the Jewish community. We have suffered so much by the decimation we experienced in the Holocaust, by increasing intermarriage and assimilation combined with a decreasing birth rate, that we can ill afford the luxury of denying the identification of Jewishness to those who desire it. To take a "hard line" means not only to lose those who currently consider themselves officially non-Orthodox, but to abandon their children and the masses of undecided onlookers, including so many of our own people, who can only be discouraged and repelled by an inflexibility they do not comprehend and therefore consider Neanderthal.

We are challenged, therefore, to develop a theory of Jewish communal relations according to Halakhah—and I believe this can be done if we are straightforward and fearless—and to apply it practically in steering through this dilemma on a safe course.

The way we have managed it so far in America, for better or for worse, is to distinguish between *kelapei penim* and *kelapei chutz*. Internal matters of the community, those relating to religious observance and halakhic authority, are reserved by us for those who accept the sovereignty of Torah. All other matters, dealing with external relations, be they Israel or the general society or government, are considered as properly requiring our

full cooperation with all interested Jews. It is the middle ground where the difficult questions arise and which most tax our wisdom, our tact, and our prudence as we juggle the often contradictory values of religious purism and mutual respect.

But this leads to the second element of our communal challenge. Before we confront the dilemma of the Orthodox community in its relations with others, we must manage to hold our own *kehillah* together and prevent it from flying apart by the centrifugal forces tearing at it precisely because of the question of relations with the non-Orthodox. Here too we face a thorny challenge, and one that may well be more fateful than the first, which I feel is often exaggerated and inflated by empty and acrimonious polemics. We have got to learn to retain the sense of fraternity amongst *all* segments of the Orthodox community. The segregationists must not imagine that they can keep on reading out of Orthodoxy anyone whose communal philosophy is somewhat to the left of their own. Ultimately the circle of the acceptable becomes narrower and narrower, until it disappears; it is much like peeling an onion until you discover that you have nothing at all left. *Benei Torah* are a *community*—and must never become a mere sect. At the same time, the more liberal, integrationist elements must recognize that in the Hasidic and Yeshiva communities we have invaluable resources of learning and passion that we renounce only at the risk of our own disintegration, Heaven forbid. As Rabbis, it is up to us to contribute to the equipoise and tranquility of the community.

But both of these questions are as nothing as compared with the single most urgent issue of all: adequate Jewish education, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Unless a community can successfully build Day Schools where its children, both boys and girls, will receive a thorough Jewish education up to the university level, it cannot expect to survive; nay, it has no right to expect to endure.

American Jewry was a dying community until the Day School movement breathed new life into it. It provided us with a reservoir of *ba'alei batim*, of potential Rabbis and religious

functionaries, of those who at least will know what they are rejecting—and what they may some day return to. To our chagrin, I admit that it was not primarily Rabbis who initiated the Day School movement. But once it was under way, pulpit Rabbis encouraged it in all ways: educational guidance, recruitment, and fund-raising. Every self-respecting Rabbinical student knows that his first duty in coming to a new position is to build a Day School. He may try and fail—but it is nobler to try and fail than to fail to try.

The third main challenge is the *institutional* one. Because I am unacquainted with the structure and nature of the typical Anglo-Jewish synagogue, I must confine my remarks to the American Orthodox synagogue and assume that my observations will be of interest if not of relevance to you.

The synagogue in the U.S.A. is becoming progressively more secularized. Not only the Conservative and Reform temple, but even our own Orthodox synagogues have been affected. No longer is the “shul” only a place of prayer or study. It is also the social center of the Jewish community, particularly in the suburbs and provinces. The social hall has encroached on the sanctuary. People join a synagogue for a variety of reasons, but not necessarily for purely religious ones. There are clubs, parties, balls, and discounts for members’ Bar Mitzvahs.

Now that is not all bad; not at all. I would rather have Jews congregate about the synagogue than in places completely devoid of Jewish associations. However, it often becomes questionable which aspect is more important and which influence prevails. And then we are in trouble. I am reminded of the words of Joel (2:17): “Between the court [hall] and the altar let the priests, ministers of the Lord, weep; and let them say, ‘Spare Thy people, O Lord...why should the [other] nations say, Where is their God?’” We, the *Kohanim* of our synagogues, often weep out of sheer frustration. We and our synagogues are torn between the competing forces of the “altar” and the “hall.” Which shall triumph: the social hall or the sanctuary? The parties or the prayers? The platform or the pulpit? The *dinim* or the dinners?

The "Bar" or the "Mitzvah?" By our own highest resolve we must determine that we can have both, with the *mizbeiach* always primary. We must reassert the *religious* nature of our lives and our public institutions, so that our non-Jewish neighbors, the *goyim*, will never have the occasion, as unfortunately they sometimes do, to ask, "Where is their God?," whether Jews are really a religious people. Our task is clear, and we must execute it successfully and fearlessly.

Fourth on my list is the *intellectual* challenge. In a way, the institutional problem is just a reflection of the intellectual crisis in which we now find ourselves. Because of the limitations of time, I cannot treat this matter with more than minimal adequacy and therefore apologize for it. The thrust of the philosophic attack on Judaism today is not the same as that of the 19th century. I am amused at both the pocket-*apikorsim* and the over-anxious defenders of the faith who waste their mental energies and forensic talents debating such issues as Darwinism or Wellhausen. These are issues which are only peripheral to the concerns of contemporary man. And perhaps that is the real problem—they have simply been bypassed!

Our most serious threat comes from secularization and secularism. I say "threat" because we have not yet adequately dealt with it; but "challenge" would be more accurate, because it affords us opportunities as well—if we are astute enough and profound enough in joining the issue honestly.

Secularity is not just a philosophy. It is the mood, the very mental climate, of the contemporary city dweller in our technopolitan society—what Harvey Cox has called "the Secular City."

Three factors amongst many other relevant ones demand our attention in confronting secularity, and I shall sketch in what I submit ought to be our approach to them.

First, secular man is interested only in this world. He does not know and could not care less about that other world of which Christianity has been preaching, and whose geography it has been mapping, and whose temperature it has been measuring for almost twenty centuries. Second, secular man is

convinced of his own freedom and autonomy, and cannot accept a theocentric universe where God determines everything and man is shorn of all power. Third, he tends more and more to a commitment to ethics while casting away all traditional moral restraints which he does not consider as enhancing his personality, deepening his relationships, or fulfilling his potential.

Now, with regard to the rejection of other-worldliness, we Rabbis, as teachers of Judaism, must strive to clarify to contemporary men that we refuse to be caught on the horns of this dilemma. We confirm neither the exclusive affirmation of material existence, nor the classically Christian view that this world is of no significance save as a pale reflection of the other world. Indeed, we do not subscribe to the ultimate bifurcation between *Olam Ha-Zeh* and *Olam Ha-Ba*, between body and soul, between Law and Love, between the letter and the spirit. Of course we know of these distinctions and we use them. But they are primarily analytic tools, not hypostatic realities separated by an unbridgeable metaphysical abyss. Both Christianity and modern Western man have inherited these dualisms from ancient Gnosticism, and therefore feel constrained to choose between them. But Judaism, in its mainstream, has always affirmed both sides of each dualism, accepting an ultimate monism, and in fact tends to emphasize the here-and-now. Indeed, in all of Mishnah there is only one reference to theosophy (*Hagigah* 11b)—and it is negative!

The question of the autonomy of man in the face of an omnipotent and omniscient God has been raised by a number of existentialist thinkers, such as Camus and Sartre. Here too we must teach our people not to confuse Judaism with Christianity. Christianity has taught the moral nihilism of man who can be saved only by grace. Modern man, who has built a fantastic technology, cannot accept this denial of his innate value and power and freedom. He therefore proceeds to assert his own freedom as over against God's hegemony.

Here again Judaism is in a favored position. It is our task to elaborate the Jewish view which sees God as denying Himself freedom and omnipotence in order to endow man with power

and choice—for better or worse. I am sure that you are as aware as I am of the relevant sources in Bible, Talmud, and Midrash. Interestingly, we read in the *Tanchuma* to *Tazria* of a debate on this very topic between Tyrannus Rufus and R. Akiva. R. Akiva pointed out that God did not finish creation, but left it to man. Holding up stalks of grain in one hand and a loaf of bread in the other, the Jewish Sage pointed out to the Roman general the superiority of the latter to the former. Thus did R Akiva explain circumcision to the Roman pagan: God even left man himself unfinished and demanded that he create himself, that he perfect himself. So that man's right and even duty to assert his own creativity and inventiveness, his own freedom, is an integral part of Judaism and can certainly accord with this aspect of the thinking of secular man.

The third element is more troublesome. Contemporary man, in his anthropocentrism and his denial of transcendental morality, has but one rule: the respect for the integrity of his inter-personal relationships. Moral prohibitions as absolutes do not interest him. His only question is: Am I fulfilling myself without hurting anyone else? If the answer is "yes," he permits and encourages it; if "no," he considers it wrong.

That this attitude is pervasive should be obvious from the fact that it has infiltrated even the churches. Study *Sex and Morality* by the British Council of Churches in 1966 and you will discover the extent of the moral disaster. Read between the lines and you will notice how it gives its *hetter* to *Lady Chatterly's Lover*, a particular form of adultery. Only recently a convocation of Episcopalian priests in New York declared as "morally neutral" the act of homosexuality where there was true love between the two parties and no outsider is hurt. These are symptoms of the new "immoral ethics" that threaten the whole structure of Jewish morality, heretofore accepted unquestionably, at least in theory, by the Western world.

And here there can be no accommodation. As Rabbis we may applaud the stress on meaningful personal relationships; but we must stand fast and firm and remain unapologetic in our

undisguised espousal of theistic morality. Before Christianity civilized the pagan world by teaching it Jewish morality, we were all alone in fearlessly proclaiming the Law of God to an unredeemed world. Even if now the rest of official Christianity will follow the avant-garde of the Church and revert to paganism, which I do not expect, we shall continue our lonely watch with dignity, with conviction, and without ever wavering.

Finally, a nettlesome challenge to the modern Rabbinate is what we may call the *professional* challenge. Unfortunately, in the eyes of our contemporaries and even, alas, our own eyes, we are no longer *Rabbanim* in the grand tradition, but professional generalists in charge of communal trivia, pious superficialities, and ritualistic irrelevancies. We have, under the impress of an all but inexorable sociological development, yielded one realm after another of special and significant rabbinic competence. We have surrendered our halakhic positions to the *yeshivot* and Roshei Yeshivah; *machshavah* to the professors of religion and theology; and communal leadership to the professional fundraisers and executives. Even the function of the Rav in *chessed* has been reduced from personal involvement to perfunctory service: we screen people in order to refer them to charitable organizations, psychologists, or marriage counselors. What we are left with is enough to discourage any intelligent man—a required weekly sermon; ritualistic “prayers” dutifully pronounced at official occasions and listened to by no one, probably not even by the Deity; minor counseling; Hebrew school supervision; and the development of just enough dignity to stand on when our own “spiritual authority” is challenged. We even pay regular hospital visits and *shivah* calls as if these were professional obligations rather than human encounters obligatory upon all Jews. Once we have succumbed to this trivialization, to this vulgarization, there is little left to encourage us or to inspire bright and dedicated young people to the Rabbinate. No committed and ambitious young man should ever aspire to become a functionary in an arid community, certainly not to become a parish butterfly.

There are two responses to this situation that I regard as most urgent, and that I respectfully submit for your attention. One is programmatic, the other personal.

The first response to this professional challenge consists of an educational reform which I believe is worthy of serious deliberation.

Our trouble is that we are generalists in an age of specialists, and so we are gradually becoming superfluities.

Some wit once said: The generalist learns less and less about more and more, until he knows nothing about everything; whereas the specialist learns more and more about less and less until he knows everything about nothing.

We Rabbis must avoid both these pitfalls. We can, on the one hand, hardly expect any longer to produce the kind of personality such as a Rambam, what the secular world calls a Renaissance Man. Our accumulated knowledge is too great, and such genius is too rare. Nor can we opt either for generalism, which has helped bring us to this sad state, or specialization, which would destroy the Rabbinat just as effectively.

My prescription is something I have always felt intuitively was implicit in the Rabbinat throughout its history, but which was consciously brought to my attention by the recent innovation in the English Rabbinat, introduced by the Chief Rabbi, namely, the Cabinet, whereby different individuals are assigned different and specialized roles. But what I have in mind is not administrative but personal, not a bureaucratic improvement but an educational reform.

We must learn, in essence, to combine generalism with selective specialization. As generalists, Rabbis must be trained to be competent in *all* fields in which Rabbis are and ought to be active — preaching, counseling, administration, youth, theology, writing, education, and it goes without saying — *lomdut*. Every Rav should have passing adequacy in each of these areas, and far more than the minimum in the last category. Even for Rabbis it is true that *Talmud Torah ke-negged kulam*, study of Torah outweighs all other commandments. (Rav Kook once said, in a light moment, that Rabbis or spiritual leaders are known as *einei ha-eidah* and we therefore pray *ve-ha'er eineinu be-Toratekha*, that even Rabbis should study Torah...) Of course, this learned audience does not

need to be reminded that *am ha-aratzut* is the very antonym of *Rabbanut*.

However, in addition, our schools—and we ourselves—must encourage each Rabbi to specialize in *one* area without ever relinquishing passing ability in the other areas. For to do *only* one thing well means to become a “professional,” not a Rabbi: a professional teacher or speaker or writer or psychologist. And this is tantamount to giving up our souls and surrendering the influence that *only* a Rabbi can have on the community by virtue of his manifold tasks and the large number of people with whom he comes in contact.

Thus, for instance, some of us must specialize in *pesak*—which once was almost the exclusive function of the Rabbinat. We must know that there are colleagues (and not only professional *dayanim*) to whom we can turn for *she'eilot nashim*, others for *gittin*, others yet for *Choshen Mishpat*. Some must become preeminent in teaching Talmud and *Mefarshim*—in effect, to become Roshei Yeshivah, while at the same time retaining ties in the Rabbinat so as not to fall victim to the derisiveness that characterizes the approach of so many Roshei Yeshivah to *Rabbanim*, an attitude which effectively discourages many of their best disciples from entering the Rabbinat. Some must learn modern historical and biblical and theological scholarship and develop approaches for religious intellectuals to contemporary problems—probably our greatest and most pressing need at present. Others must specialize in youth work, others in educational administration, and so on.

I do not mean merely that we have to be better in some things than in others. That happens to everyone all the time; rather, we have to be *expert* in some areas while not abandoning the others: sufficiently expert to be effective and acknowledged, and above all, to serve as a resource of knowledge and experience and assistance for our colleagues.

The second response to our professional challenge is that of a profound personal decision. It calls upon us to reassert our own innate strength and enthusiasm and spirit by a sheer act of will.

Our personal dedication must be such as to shatter the professional fetters which threaten to diminish us and emasculate our leadership and influence. We must simply refuse to crawl into the little notch that the Jewish community has carved out for us. We must adamantly reject the role that it has prepared for us and the image it wishes us to project. We dare not become dignified mannequins presiding over a game of religious charades.

In Kabbalistic terms, we must strive for *chessed she-be-gevurah*. That should be our special pride. Let us face our tasks with *gevurah*, with intellectual vigor and spiritual strength and idealistic commitment. But let us never be guilty of intolerance or belligerence. *Chessed she-be-gevurah* means to be aggressive, but not offensive; tough, but not rough; to act with vigor, not rigor. It demands of us courage and heroism with personal graciousness and compassion and generosity.

Such an attitude may sometimes cost us popularity, but we did not accept upon ourselves the burdens of spiritual leadership in these difficult times in order to win popularity contests.

Apropos of this last point, I offer you an interpretation I heard from Rabbi Kreiswirth of Antwerp, Belgium.

After Naomi rejected the entreaties of her daughters-in-law to follow her, she succeeded in discouraging Orpah, but not Ruth. Subsequently, according to the tradition, Ruth became the ancestress of David, and Orpah the ancestress of David's great antagonist, Goliath.

Now, this is apparently an injustice. Did not Orpah too express a desire to follow Naomi and was it not Naomi who dissuaded her from pressing her noble ambitions? Is it not unfair that she should have been defamed by history as the grandmother of that Philistine brute, Goliath?

The key lies in the two verbs which describe the point of departure between these two young widows, *Va-tishak Orpah le-chamotah ve-rut dovkah bah*. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law while Ruth clung to her. Both had good intentions; both entertained lofty sentiments; both meant well. But Orpah was satisfied with an externalized gesture, while Ruth cleaved with a

superhuman devotion that would not let her go. And from this apparently innocent and slight difference did the fate of these two young women diverge so radically: the empty kiss of Orpah led to the vile blasphemies of the Philistine Goliath, while the selfless, devoted clinging of Ruth led to David, sweet singer of Israel.

That the difference in the destiny of the two sisters-in-law lies here, is attested by the Talmud which, describing the encounter between Israel and the Philistines, declares: *Yavo'u benei neshukah ve-yiplu be-yad benei devukah*, "Let the children of the one who kissed fall at the hand of the children of the one who clung" (*Sotah* 42b).

One of the most glaring weaknesses of Rabbis has been our sweet disposition. Too often we have forgotten the revolutionary nature of Torah and the transforming quality of its precepts, and so we have been unwilling to rock the boat in our communities. We have permitted passivity to displace passion, and saccharine sentiments of "respect" for Judaism to substitute for the searing of the heart and the soaring of the soul. We have often failed to demand of our people, to challenge them by examples of conviction and profundity. We asked them to kiss the Torah, and both they and we failed to cling to it by studying it. We introduced politeness and manners and respect and aesthetics into our services—the *va-tishak*. But we forget that while these are certainly desirable, services demand much more than this; they require passion and depth and commitment and a willingness to risk your life. Indeed, we forget that services themselves are not the totality of Judaism. No wonder we are so often the victims of superficiality and a creeping mediocrity that has become an accepted occupational hazard of the Rabbinate.

So if we are to break out of this professional trivialization which has so diminished our roles and threatened to undo us, we must resolve to do away with our comfortable, pacific image of kindly ministers of religion who do not wish to disturb the peace. We must do away with that which is symbolized by the empty kiss. Instead we must surge forth with regained strength and

renewed dedication and redoubled pride to perform our tasks with true *deveikut*, to cling and cleave to our ideals with superhuman strength, and to arouse in our flocks the awareness that they are themselves *benei devukah*. We must not desist; we must not permit ourselves peace until our clinging has evoked a cry to us from our communities: "Thy God is our God, thy people is our people, thy Torah is our Torah, thy destiny is our destiny."

Let this resolve and this determination evoke in us the courage—moral, spiritual, and personal—and the heroism which brought us into the Rabbinate in the first place, so that we may restore it to its historic role, and that it, in turn, may restore us to the awareness of the dignity of our calling.

Our challenges are mighty. The obstacles are high. The path is difficult. But with strength and vigor we shall prevail.

We shall overcome.

THE SELF-IMAGE OF THE RABBI

March 29, 1981

A GOOD PART of the functioning of a rabbi, in the many aspects of his career as a teacher of Torah and leader of his community, depends upon his self-confidence—a psychological and also spiritual issue which involves his self-image as a rabbi and student of Torah and his conception of his role, his identity, and his destiny.

Maimonides on Pride

At first blush, the problem is a rather simple one. Self-image is a question of *ga'avah* (pride) or *anivut* (humility), and Maimonides in his *Hilkhot De'ot* is quite clear on this. In all other attributes of character, as a matter of Halakhah, Maimonides demands that we follow the middle way between the extremes. We are to shun the extremes and follow the path of moderation, the mean between the two polar opposites. This middle way, what is popularly known as the "Golden Mean," Maimonides identifies as "The Way of the Lord." But there are two exceptions that Maimonides makes in formulating this *halakhah* of character, and one of these is self-assessment. Here Maimonides identifies the two extremes as *ga'avah* (pride) and *shiflut* (lowliness), and the middle way as that of *anivut* (humbleness). Unlike other characteristics, or *de'ot*, a person here must choose the extreme of *shiflut*—of self-abnegation or lowliness. Thus, we read concerning Moses that, "and the man

Moses was very humble" (Numbers 12:3). Maimonides interprets the intensive as indicating the extreme; thus, "very humble" (*anav me'od*) equals "of lowly spirit" (*shefal ruach*).

Similarly, in the fourth chapter of *Avot* we read that R. Levitas of Yavneh says, "Be exceedingly careful (*me'od, me'od*) to be lowly of spirit." Hence, with regard to a person's self-definition, the "golden mean" or middle way does not apply and, instead, one must opt for *shiflut* or lowliness—the extreme or intensive form of *anivut*, humbleness.

However, the matter is too complex and too consequential to leave it at that. An analysis of Maimonides' view leaves us with a number of troubling questions.

For one, does not *shiflut*, as Maimonides explains it, seem to conflict with *emet*, truth or honesty? If, e.g., Maimonides thought of himself as an ignoramus, that might be an instance of *shiflut*; but is it true?

And is it psychologically desirable? How many of us consciously conform to the norm of such *shiflut*, and how many of us are prepared to raise our own children and educate our own students towards the ideal of feeling worthless? One need not subscribe to the contemporary ideology of narcissism to be worried by its extreme antonym as a norm of self-perception and conduct.

Moreover, there are alternative sources to Maimonides' invocation of R. Levitas. Whereas R. Levitas of Yavneh demands *shiflut* as *me'od me'od*, we read in the same chapter of *Avot* that R. Meir says: "Be lowly of spirit before every man." Notice: there is no demand for *me'od me'od*, of going to the extreme, and R. Meir addresses himself not to substantive self-image but "before every man," in other words, only to one's conduct in relation to and in the presence of others.

An Alternative to Maimonides

I believe, therefore, that a legitimate alternative to the opinion of Maimonides exists within the writings of the Sages, even though this view may not have been formally articulated. This approach, which would follow R. Meir instead of R. Levitas, would hold

that *ga'avah* is a homonym for two related yet different characteristics. The first of these is self-importance, vanity, egotism; its opposite is *shiflut*—humility, low self-esteem. The second form of *ga'avah* is arrogance, haughtiness, and aggressive self-assertion—more of an attitude to others than a vision of one's own place in the scheme of things. Its antonym at the other end of the spectrum is *anivut*—meekness, a willingness to abide insults without reacting in kind. *Shiflut*, humility, is a matter of self-deprecation; it is a psychological condition. *Anivut*, meekness, implies self-effacement; it is a behavioral reaction. They are polar qualities on two different spectrum bands of character.

Thus, when R. Meir demands that we be “lowly of spirit before every man,” he is elaborating a social, not an existential or psychological attribute, and his “lowliness of spirit” is a synonym for a moderate form of self-image, or: *anivut*. It is a moot question whether, using Maimonides' general system of *De'ot*, R. Meir considers *anivut* an extreme which, in this case, is desirable; or whether he holds it to be a mean between *ga'avah* (as aggressive self-assertion) and some unarticulated extreme form of meekness.

Despite their assaults upon him, Moses (in the passage mentioned above) keeps his peace; he does not respond. Instead, it is the Almighty who takes up the cudgels on behalf of Moses. The silence of Moses is the result of his *anivut*, his meekness.

According to this definition, there is no conflict between the proper form of self-definition and honesty, *emet*.

Interestingly, this will explain as well an otherwise startling passage in the Talmud at the end of *Sotah*. In the last *mishnah* of that tractate, we read that when Rabbi (R. Judah the Prince) died, *anavah* (the same as *anivut*) and the fear of sin vanished from the world. In the *gemara* on that *mishnah* we read that R. Joseph said to the Tanna, “Do not say *anavah* (in other words, the fear of sin may have vanished upon the death of Rabbi, but not *anivut*), for I am here.” Now, this is an astounding statement. Surely, the very self-awareness of humility undoes it and disproves it!

However, if we interpret *anivut* not as humility but as meekness (an interpretation suggested to me by my late, dear friend

Dr. William Zev Frank), the passage makes eminently good sense. One can be aware of one's meekness without destroying it, even as one can be aware of one's musical talent or height or fair complexion without subverting any of these qualities. A man can recognize that he is meek, that he never answers an insult in kind, and the statement is not at all self-contradictory or paradoxical. (This redefinition of *anivut* is mentioned as well by the Netziv, who cites the passage in *Sotah* as proof. See his *Ha'amek Davar* and *Harchev Davar* to Nu. 12:3.)

Hence, with regard to both *shiflut* and *anivut*, we may insist upon the middle way instead of the extreme, as we do with other attributes of character.

It is this doctrine of moderation with regard to self-definition which, I submit, is crucial for the rabbi of today. And even if one were to disagree with my thesis concerning this alternative to the decision of Maimonides, surely a community, like a nation, must operate according to different rules from those of an individual (a topic too involved to discuss here, but *kavod* and *kinah* come to mind immediately as examples)—and a rabbi in his role of communal leadership should be viewed as representing the community as well as an individual.

It is imperative that our *musmakhim*, who bear the burden of Torah leadership and of continuing the heritage they have learned in these sacred precincts, guard against both extremes in their rabbinic role—that of *ga'avah*, as exaggerated and overweening self-confidence and self-importance; and *shiflut* in the form of a weak self-image, the lack of self-esteem and self-worth.

Occupational Dangers

Young rabbis must be forewarned of one of the occupational dangers of the rabbinate: laymen sometimes look up to a rabbi (and, occasionally, to a teacher) deferentially and thus distort his perspective on himself. It is too easy to emerge from your studies here, in this atmosphere of intense intellectual competition and spiritual ambition, and the attendant deflation of ego, and suddenly find yourself on a pedestal where you believe some of the adulation you will receive. My advice to you is: be wise, don't believe it. It is dangerous to your spiritual health.

Moreover, a rabbi must be careful never to practice *ga'avah* towards his own laymen, his "baalebatim." The layman is not the natural enemy of the rabbi. He is his *talmid*, his disciple, in ways both formal and informal, and like students of all ages he is sometimes resistant to instruction. But this only constitutes a greater challenge to the rabbi to marshal both his inner resources and his acquired techniques to teach, educate, inspire, and instruct. But never, never look down upon the men and women of your community. That Jews come to *shul* or study Torah or work for the Jewish community or contribute to Israel—in this atmosphere of widespread assimilation and assertive ignorance—is already a "plus" and a sign of the Jewish dignity of your people. You will find many of them considerably talented, learned, experienced, devoted, charitable, and self-sacrificing—even if very few will not have all of these qualities, and some will have none. They deserve not your obedience, but certainly your respect and your love.

You must live up to their highest ideals of what a rabbi should be—a man of integrity and spirituality. Scholarship and piety are necessary but they are not sufficient. A spiritual person is one whose ideals and practice transcend his self-interest, whose deportment and, indeed, very presence symbolize the values of Torah. Your people want and need and deserve a symbol not of other-worldliness, but of the sanctification of this world: a man who, together with his sophistication and secular learning, is living proof that Torah creates a spiritual personality in this very world of technology and high finance, of hedonism and narcissism.

By all means, a rabbi should have a good living salary, no less than others, but his material ambitions should never be his priority. A rabbi should always have his hand stretched out to his laymen to solicit their help and substance for *tzedakah*—but never, never may he have that hand out for a personal gift or fee.

But mostly, do not succumb to the *ga'avah* that you are an accomplished scholar of Torah, that you already are a *talmid chakham*, that you have gotten enough Torah erudition from your masters to last you a lifetime. *Semikhah* is not only, as it is classically

known, *heter hora'ah*, but also a *hora'ah lilmod*... Smugness at this stage of your development is the sure road to lasting and pervasive ignorance.

Remember always the astounding tale that the Sages tell us (*Shab.* 147b) about one of the greatest of all the Tannaim, R. Elazar b. Arakh, who one time went to visit two places that were renowned in antiquity for their fine wine and sparkling waters. According to the Sages, R. Elazar overstayed his visit; the spa apparently attracted him more than it should have. As a result, he slowly but surely began to forget his learning. So much so, that when he returned to the great Academy of Yavneh, the greatest academy of learning in the history of our people, and he was invited to read in the Torah the portion that begins with *ha-chodesh ha-zeh lakhem* ("This month shall be for you..." Ex. 12:2), he mistook the text for three similar words that had a totally different meaning: *ha-cheresh hayah libam* ("Their heart was mute"). His learning did not return to him until the Rabbis prayed for him. The lesson from all this, our Talmudic text continues, is the statement in the *mishnah* by R. Nehorai that one must always go to a place of Torah learning even if it means going into exile: "And do not rely upon your own intellect."

If this is true of the great R. Elazar b. Arakh, whom his teacher R. Yochanan b. Zeikkai (according to Abba Shaul) considered the greatest of all disciples, how much more so is it true of us lesser mortals. There will be a thousand reasons for us to be distracted from regular study of Torah—from the professional demands upon us to community concerns, from family obligations to the leisure pursuits of our own laymen. Excessive self-confidence in our own learning can, as R. Elazar b. Arakh learned, deaden our sensitivity—make our "hearts mute"—and pave the way to forgetfulness and corrosive ignorance.

It is only a consistent and creative uncertainty about ourselves that can motivate us to keep up our learning and to develop into mature *talmidei chakhamim*.

But I feel that I must caution you even more against the other extreme, that of excessive *shiflut*, which afflicts the Orthodox Jewish community generally and us, often, in particular.

Our Collective Self-Image

I address myself to our weak collective self-image in several respects—professionally as rabbis; communally as Orthodox Jews; and institutionally as alumni of Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary and Yeshiva University.

As rabbis, our humility has its source in our perception that the Rabbinate has come upon bad times. For a variety of reasons, not irrelevant but too extensive for us to address here, the rabbinate as a career has become devalued in Jewish life.

In the secular Jewish world, some of its functions are being taken over by professors of Judaic studies, and others by executives of the various federations and other Jewish agencies. In the Orthodox world, *Roshei yeshivah* and Hasidic *Admorim* have captured much of the authority and esteem previously held by rabbis. Prestige and influence—sometimes even *shiddukhim!*—often can be seen slipping away from rabbis to these other groups. As a result, Orthodox rabbis emerge with a sense of inferiority, an awareness that they are no longer in the center of things, that they are marginal.

But as young *Rabbanim*, as students of Torah educated in our holy Yeshiva, you must accept this as a happy challenge “to restore the crown (of the Rabbinate) to its ancient splendor,” perhaps in new and unforeseen ways.

Do not allow humility to interfere with your life’s mission. Remember the immortal rebuke delivered to King Saul by the prophet Samuel: “Even though thou be small in thine own eyes, thou art head of the tribes of Israel” (I Samuel 15:17).

Never mind your self-doubts and the new competition to the Rabbinate. If you have a clear consciousness of serving as “the head of the tribes of Israel,” of your responsibility to create and to lead a *kehillah kedoshah*, a truly “holy community,” you will enhance the dignity of the Torah and the Rabbinate and raise it to a new plateau.

You will learn to speak out clearly, fearlessly, attractively, cogently, and unequivocally on issues affecting the Torah of Israel, the people of Israel, and the State of Israel.

You are rabbis. Bear your mission with pride and dignity "even though you be small in your own eyes."

Extremism in Our Time

There is yet a second area in which this pervasive lowliness has insinuated itself and caused great difficulty. In the Orthodox community generally, I see *shiflut* as the root of certain pathological manifestations of extremism that have become a source of humiliation and chagrin to all of us. Any psychologist will discern a sick sense of inferiority and grave self-doubt as one of the main causes of this violent, militant, and contemptible extremism that has created a massive *chillul Hashem* for all Jews, and especially Orthodox Jews. Riots, violent demonstrations, rock-throwing—this is not our way. "The words of the wise spoken softly are more acceptable..." (Eccl. 9:17).

I have no doubt about it; this contemptible extremism which has so sullied the good name of Torah—whether this militancy manifests itself in physical violence or verbal abuse or in self-righteous contempt for others—is a faithful indicator of a faithless man, and one who is *mi-ketanei emunah*, plagued by inner doubt and religious insecurity.

I bring this to your attention not because I suspect that there are extremists among you, but because we must all beware of a dreadful error that some of us make if we think, in the privacy of our consciousness, that somehow it is the extremists who are "authentic" and that moderation is merely pragmatic rather than principle and thus an unworthy compromise.

Not so! Those who throw rocks do not represent the "Rock of Israel!" Those who suffer a wrenching inner self-contempt and express it in arrogant self-righteousness—they do not represent Torah and Judaism. Remember: it is the way of moderation which Maimonides refers to as the "way of the Lord."

The teaching of moderation is not a policy of prudence but a philosophy of character and society. Extremism may be far more successful in whipping up passions and fostering the illusion of principle. But it is fundamentally inimical to Torah and to reason

and it is hospitable to bigotry. Its “idealism” is meretricious, and its claim to Jewish authenticity rings hollow and false.

Both American society and the Jewish community must be alert to the perils of political and religious extremism, whether of the Right or of the Left. The allure of the quick fix is all too prevalent in times of crisis or transition, and we must not fall victim to it.

Radical Moderation

One of the main contributions that a renewed and dynamic Jewish spiritual leadership can make to our community and our times is a dedication to moderation without blandness, to a kind of radical or extreme moderation which is based upon high principle, great ideals, deep faith, respect for people—together with a healthy skepticism of easy solutions and a contempt for small-mindedness and meanness of spirit.

This leads me, finally, to a few words about our institutional self-image as rabbinic alumni of RIETS and advocates of our institution and what it stands for.

I am often dismayed at our inferiority feelings, our defensiveness, our lack of self-esteem.

Let me remind you. As a group, your cultural-educational credentials are no less impressive than Conservative or Reform or secularist or lay leaders of any stripe in the Jewish community.

And your *lomdut* and the *derekh* you learned here at the feet of some of the greatest Roshei Yeshiva anywhere in the world are not one whit inferior to those of other *yeshivot*, despite the perennial criticism, cynicism, and *bittul* that are as old as our Yeshiva is—which means about four times as old as any of you!

We have for too long tended to internalize the carping criticism of certain scoffers, and have developed a rankling lowliness, one that is unworthy and even corrupt.

If our view of Torah in the world is subjected to respectful critical analysis by the other *benei Torah*, let us listen and assess and evaluate it openly and honestly, and respond truthfully and forcefully and respectfully. But if the criticism is petty

and mean-spirited—simply ignore it. Do not dignify it with either your remonstrance or your concern. Treat it with the studied contempt it so richly deserves.

Remember that the *Torah u-Madda* we aspire to is an ideal and not a compromise, a *le-khat-chilah*, and not a *be-di-avad*, that it is ideologically grounded in our Torah *Anschaung*.

The RIETS Record

Bear in mind what Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary has done for Torah and for the Jewish Community:

- We have reproduced ourselves in kind: so many of our own Roshei Yeshivah are themselves alumni of our Yeshiva;
- We have 367 rabbis now serving in congregations throughout the United States, and another 337 now active in various forms of education and community service;
- 157 of our alumni have made *aliyah*, and are significantly involved in education and the rabbinate in the State of Israel;
- 21 of our rabbis are now serving in Canada, 4 in Australia, and others in other countries;
- This Yeshiva is involved in an effort to open up new communities where the influence of Torah will make itself felt. Its work in the Division of Communal Services, and especially its Youth work and Seminars, continues to inspire hundreds and thousands with our outreach.

How many other *yeshivot* can show such a record of achievement towards the sacred goal of the advancement of Torah, *le-hagdil Torah u-le-ha'adirah*?

It is true that most of our rabbis and students do not necessarily affect the garb or other accoutrements that many students of other *yeshivot* (and some of our own) do. So what? I refuse to identify halakhic authenticity with sartorial style or hats of a particular hue.

As you go out to do battle with the forces of ignorance and assimilation and hedonism in the "war of Torah," be proud and strong, never fearful and diffident and self-denigrating, never a *shefal ruach* (according to both interpretations of Tannaim in the

mishnah in *Sotah*). Excessive self-doubt, lack of confidence, and extreme humility are both dangerous and false!

In a remarkable story, the Sages (*Tanna de-Bei Eliyahu* 2) relate that a young man accosted the prophet Elijah and insulted him. The response of the prophet was immediate and penetrating: "How will you answer for this to your Creator on Judgment Day?"

Elijah's telling retort had its effect. The young man answered, "Intelligence and knowledge were not granted to me."

Elijah was not satisfied with this answer, and pursued the matter: "My son, what do you do for a living?" The young man responded that he was a fisherman by profession.

"Ah," cried Elijah, "for the art of fishing you do have intelligence and knowledge; you know how to spin the flax and weave the nets and identify the migrations of the fish, when to throw in your nets and when to pull them up, how to prepare your product and how to market it. But Torah—concerning which it is written, 'this matter is very close to you, it is in your mouth and in your heart that you may do it.' (Deut. 30:14)—for this you do not have enough 'intelligence and knowledge?'"

Extreme self-deprecation leads to evil conduct; even worse, such diffidence is spurious and false! Those who fall prey to it will someday have to answer for it when judgment will be made.

The Sense of Being Chosen

You are a group of intelligent and bright young men who could have become doctors and lawyers, businessmen and scientists, psychologists and computer experts, as easily as your colleagues who graduated with you from Yeshiva College. You do have the blessing of abundant "intelligence and knowledge." But you chose to use it for Torah, which is "in your mouth and in your heart in order to do it."

Remember that—and, without becoming supercilious, bear yourselves with pride in your life's mission, in your rabbinic calling, in your Yeshiva, and in the Torah you teach. In the words of R. Nehorai (whom some Sages identify as the self-same

R. Elazer b. Arakh!), "Do not rely upon your own intelligence." Do not *rely* on it—but also do not *deny* it!

Your task is a psychologically difficult one, but one that is a sacred and inescapable obligation: to choose the right theme at the right time, to shun both arrogance and humility in their extremes, to know when to be more humble and when to be more proud. Such moral moderation requires an abundant intelligence and a high degree of wisdom. But without a sense of balance, without that dynamic equilibrium, you will have failed in your mission—and "how will you answer for this to your Creator on Judgment Day?"

All that we have said is summed up in a comment of Rashi on the verse, "And Moses said to Aaron, 'Draw close to the altar'" (Lev. 9:7). Rashi comments: "Aaron was diffident and afraid to approach the altar. Moses said to him, 'Why are you diffident, seeing that this is what you were chosen for?'"

The author of *Sefat Emet* comments that from this we learn that one who prepares for a life of sacred service must wrestle with two opposing forces within him—the ambivalence of *bosh ve-yarei la-geshet* on one side, and an awareness of *ki le-kakh nivreita* on the other; it is a struggle of the dialectic of personal humility and a sense of destiny.

Never lose that healthy consciousness of shyness, diffidence, and apprehension about taking on too much responsibility: it is an excellent antidote for *ga'avah*.

And never be without a sensitive and historical awareness that, "For this you were chosen," that you are entering a "calling," a great and noble and historic mission—that of the Rabbinate and the teaching of Torah.

And so, with this awareness—"draw close to the altar, and atone for yourself and for the people."

THE MAKINGS OF A *BEN TORAH*

March 6, 1983*

TO BE A RABBI, one must first of all be a *ben Torah*. What or who is a *ben Torah*? The translation, "a scholar of the Torah," does not do the term justice; it is far too restrictive. A better definition would be "a Torah person" — bearing in mind that one cannot truly be a "Torah person" without first being an accomplished Torah scholar.

What, then, are the extra ingredients, beyond Talmudic learning, that go to make up a Torah person, a Torah personality?

Someone once said that education is what a person has left after he has forgotten all that he has learned. Applying this to a *ben Torah*, we might then ask what distinguishes a *ben Torah* from others after you have subtracted all that he has learned of Talmud *Bavli* and *Yerushalmi*, of Rashi and Tosafot, of Rishonim and Acharonim, of Rambam and Ramban, of *Tur* and *Shulchan Arukh*, of *Shakh* and *Taz*, of R. Chaim and R. Akiva Eger. Remove all that and ask: What makes (or should make) us different and special? What, in other words, are the attitudinal foundations that inform the mentality of a *ben Torah*?

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The most obvious and the primary answer is that a Torah person loves and esteems the Torah and Torah learning. So, if a *ben Torah* forgets all that he has learned, his first task is—to learn it all over again. “For they [the words of Torah] are our life and the length of our days” (*Siddur*). Inscribed in the cornerstone of our yeshiva is the principle that R. Chaim of Volozhin cemented 180 years ago into the foundation of his yeshiva, Yeshivat Etz Chaim, the mother of all *yeshivot* since. This mishnaic dictum, *ve-talmud Torah ke-negged kulam*—the study of Torah outweighs all other commandments—is to be taken not quantitatively, but functionally. The study of Torah is not only greater than the sum of all the other commandments; it is their very source. Torah is the “tree of life;” all the other commandments are the branches of that tree. Accordingly, the study of Torah is the source of all Jewish life.

That is why your overarching commitment is to learn, and then learn more. The day you stop studying, the day you stop climbing the road to Torah excellence, is the day you are no longer a *ben Torah*. On that day, all that is written on your rabbinic diploma is rendered meaningless.

I have long wondered about an imbalance between our early morning and our late evening prayers. Upon arising in the morning and upon going to sleep at night we recite two blessings that are quite parallel to each other. In the morning, we bless God “who removes sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids.” Similarly, after reciting the *Shema* before retiring, we bless God “who closes my eyes in sleep and my eyelids in slumber.” However, accompanying these blessings are two additional petitions that are not really analogous. The night prayer seems reasonable enough: “May it be Thy will...to grant that I lie down in peace and that I rise up in peace. Let not my thoughts upset me—nor evil dreams, nor sinful fancies,” etc. By the same token, we should expect that the morning prayer should ask that God grant that we rise up in peace, that we prosper, that we be spared all misfortune. Instead, we pray, “May it be Thy will...to habituate us to thy Torah, and to cause us to adhere to Thy precepts,” etc.

Why the asymmetry?

Because a true *ben Torah* must know and understand that without Torah, he cannot know that he is awake. How do we know that our lives are not but dreams—and not necessarily pleasant ones, at that? Without our daily contact with the eternal, without this glorious communication with the transcendental to elevate and transform the routines of daily life, what difference does it make whether we are sleeping or not sleeping?

A Rav who does not practice “habituate us to thy Torah” is not only in a state of somnolence; he is inauthentic. His mind and his heart are sealed even if his eyes are open. Moreover, he is cut off from his moorings, alone in the world. A *ben Torah* without Torah is an orphan.

So the love of Torah is an absolute prerequisite in the mentality of a *ben Torah*. We expect you, therefore, to enhance your own love of Torah. Let it motivate you to greater learning, let it inspire you to goad your fellow Jews until they, too, achieve the status of being Torah persons, and always know that a rabbi is not a rabbi if he is not a *ben Torah*. After your years here, so much must by now be obvious to you. Are there, then, other ingredients, beyond study, that are required of the *ben Torah*?

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There is *ahavat Yisrael*, the love of Israel; this is the love that complements your love of Torah.

Remember always that Torah was not meant exclusively to provide for your *own* spiritual needs, your *own* religious integrity, your *own* intellectual creativity. The Talmud refers to the study of Torah for its own sake as “an elixir of life.” But it is the kind of medicine of which you must be not only the consumer but also the pharmacist. It is a medicine that if kept on the shelf and never dispensed is no longer a medicine but merely a chemical, one that in time can become dangerous.

The problem with too many of us in the *yeshivot* is that we have somehow managed to assimilate—excessively—the spirit of the times. Society today is highly narcissistic. Everywhere

it seems, we are admonished to undertake the quest for self-fulfillment, for self-expression, for self-realization. Unfortunately, we have too often adopted that self-centeredness in its spiritual form, and we have thereby become religious narcissists. We are too concerned with our own Torah growth, and the result of this spiritual introversion is an indifference, at times even an antipathy, to Jews who are unlike us, who are, by our standards, deficient in learning or in commitment or in observance. As a consequence, even those who admirably devote their lives to the teaching of Torah, as rabbis or as educators, confine themselves to preaching to the converted, and come to see themselves as halakhic technicians. Their sense of responsibility for others' lives—physical as well as intellectual, worldly as well as spiritual, psychological as well as scholarly—is inadequate.

From this there derives a deep malaise in our community, a malaise that must be exposed if it is to be uprooted. For Torah was meant for *all* Jews, not just for a small circle of the religiously privileged, the halakhic cognoscenti. It was meant for laymen as well as rabbis, for those who yearn for the poetry of Torah as well as for those who revel in its intellectual rigor, for those who are not yet observant as well as for those who already are.

And that means that rabbis, whether in the pulpit or the classroom, must use all the forms of communication in order to bring Torah close to Israel—not just those forms that confer prestige in the halls of the yeshiva.

Perhaps that is why, right after we ask God that it be His will that He habituate us to Torah, we add, "Lead us not into sin, transgression, iniquity, temptation or disgrace." The temptation of smugness? The disgrace of ignoring or denigrating those who are not yet within the circle of Torah and *mitzvot*?

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I do not want to be unkind or unfair. I recognize the psychological reality: After such deep immersion in the study of Torah here at Yeshiva, with criteria and standards so very different from and so far beyond those that prevail in the "outside" world, it is understandable if we sometimes feel discomfort with those who have

not attained such a level, who have never aspired to it, who—perhaps—look down upon it because they have never experienced its intellectual stimulation, its moral beauty, its ethereal sanctity, its transcendental significance.

Let me confess to you: I, too, am uncomfortable with many Jews and with many types of Jews. Any rabbi, any principal, any Jewish leader, any president of Yeshiva University has to deal with a variety of people of whose views he may not approve, whose life-styles he may not share, whose company he may not enjoy—or whom he simply does not like.

I can give you a whole list of my own pet peeves, of Jews with whom I do not feel particularly relaxed: Jews who are either enamored of or intolerant of non-Jews; Jews who are embarrassed by their Jewishness or who are aggressively holier-than-thou; zealots who bum the Israeli flag and Israelis who believe that now that we have a Jewish State we do not need Torah; Jews who are indistinguishable from WASPs and Israelis who regret that they are not WASPs; Op-Ed page writers who loudly proclaim their Jewishness and then go on to excoriate Israel with venom. And the list goes on and on.

But—and this is my point—so what if I am not comfortable with them? The love of Israel means that even if I do not approve of them or endorse their views or relish their company or even *like* them—I must *love* them. I must dedicate my life to saving and enhancing and enriching their lives, to healing them spiritually and physically, to comforting them, to bringing them to Torah and Torah to them—and them to each other.

That is what the love of Israel is all about. It is not an easy *mitzvah*. And it is especially incumbent upon Jewish leaders and *benei Torah*.

* * *

This duty of the *ben Torah* towards his fellow Jews was already adumbrated by Moses. I believe, I suppose rather shockingly, that Moses did not especially like his Jews. He did not find them congenial, he was not comfortable with them, he did not enjoy their presence. He had little respect for them, he had no desire to

impress them, he did not seek their approbation, there was virtually no mutuality between him and the people.

Truth to tell, Moses was not the sort of man who could be easily pleased. It is usually difficult to develop an easy relationship with a perfectionist, let alone the greatest prophet who ever lived. And it is also true that there wasn't much to like about these Israelites. They were an impetuous and whining and capricious lot. Moses broke open for them the horizons of Heaven, and they concentrated on their trivial needs and petty wants. He offered them a career of holiness, and they sniveled about leeks and onions and garlic. He offered freedom, and they complained that they were thirsty. He pointed to the heights of the spirit, and they yearned for the fleshpots of Egypt and coveted another *fleishig* meal. They were ungrateful, stubborn, slow to learn and narrow.

But Moses was passionate in his love for Israel. Remember that Moses was the only human being in history to whom God made the offer that, for his sake, He would abandon the Children of Israel and raise up a new people from his, Moses's, loins, and that this new people would be the Chosen People, descendants of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and — Moses. But Moses refused. He gave up this stunning opportunity. Not only that; his refusal bespoke his feeling of injury on his people's behalf. For after he asked God to forgive his people, he went on to say, "And if not, erase me from Thy Book" (Exodus 32:32). He loved the Jews so much that he was willing to forfeit, for them, his life, his fate, his destiny and eternity.

Moses loved them enough to risk and sacrifice all for them but he did not like them very much. As a result, he was impatient with them, intolerant, angry and upset.

So Moses teaches all Jews, and especially Jewish leaders imbued with Torah, that love transcends liking. (My friend Michael Tabor of Manchester, England, said, "You like because; you love despite.") You will recall that Ramban interprets the commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" as dealing with function, not emotion; act lovingly towards your fellow man even if you do not particularly like him. Similarly, *ahavat Yisrael*

is volitional, not affective. To possess true love of Israel means to overcome your dislikes and your distastes, your peeves and your complaints, and to serve your people heroically.

Moses was the ultimate archetype of the Rav, the Rosh Yeshiva, the *talmid chacham*—the *ben Torah*. His difficulties, his challenges, his ambivalences and his resolutions are all a model for Torah leadership in the personal and social problems that confront us.

It is this love of Israel that will inspire you to devote your lives, whether vocationally or avocationally, to the sacred service of Torah and Israel; to risk problems and peacelessness of mind; to travel far and wide to seek out our people. The mission upon which you now embark is, truly, a mission of love.

* * *

These twin loves, the love of Torah and the love of Israel, are what a true Rav, a true *ben Torah*, has left even after he has forgotten all that he has learned. These are the basic attitudes that inform and orient and motivate him.

Your teachers have found you worthy of bearing the mantle of the rabbinate. This means that they have trust and confidence in your learning, and also in your love of learning and in your love of your fellow Jews—all of them.

I have no doubt that that trust and that confidence will be vindicated as you go forth, each in his own way, to spread the learning of Torah and to serve your people Israel and, in the process, bring much comfort and pride to your families, your teachers, your yeshiva.

On your behalf, I—and, I am sure, all our people—pray for you, in the words of the latter half of that morning prayer I discussed earlier, the prayer that begins with a petition for habituating us to His Torah and letting us cleave to His commandments: “Grant us today and every day, grace, favor and mercy, both in Thy sight and in the sight of all men, and bestow loving-kindness on us. Blessed art Thou, O Lord, who bestowest loving-kindness on Thy people Israel.”

THERE IS A PROPHET IN ISRAEL

April 6, 1986

THIS ADDRESS IS DEDICATED, as is my *shiur* tomorrow, to the memory of my revered teacher Dr. Samuel Belkin ztz"l, whose tenth *yahrzeit* we commemorate during Chol ha-Moed Pesach.

Because Dr. Belkin was not only my teacher for one year—the last that he taught—but also my predecessor as President, I had the opportunity to appreciate the full scope of his prodigious talents and insights—his greatness not only as a *talmid chakham* and as an educator, but also as a leader. And it is this quality of leadership that I choose to discuss on this, his tenth *yahrzeit* and the one hundredth birthday of our Yeshiva.

Dr. Belkin taught us by example that to be a *talmid chakham* you need "*lomdus*"; to be a *yerei Shamayim* you need *emunah*; to be a teacher you need love of your pupils as well as your subject matter. But to be a Rav, a rabbi in the classic Jewish sense, you need all these and much more: you need the gift of leadership.

Dr. Belkin himself was an orphan from Lithuania who became a renowned *talmid chakham* at a young age, wandered to the United States, got himself a doctorate at Brown University, and then came to Yeshiva as both a Rosh Yeshiva and professor of Greek. His contribution to the Jewish world, however, was not confined to what he knew and what he taught, but was

distinguished by the way he combined these with his vision, his goals, his determination, his readiness to use either gentle persuasion or confrontation—in a word, his leadership. It was the ability to integrate his Torah and his *Madda* with his leadership qualities that ensured his place in Jewish history.

Dr. Belkin was blessed with great gifts, both intellectual and personal, and few of us indeed can aspire to equal his achievements. But we can learn from him, each in his own way and in accordance with his own personality, to exercise leadership in our careers as rabbis; to bear in mind that the rabbinate is neither a service profession nor a lifelong *kollel* at the expense of a congregation, but a challenge to take the initiative to dream dreams for the greater glory of God and Torah and Israel—and implement them; to teach, but also to direct and orient and mold and build and create.

Do not take this charge lightly. Leadership is not for the faint of heart, but neither is it for the light-hearted and the frivolous. If an ordinary person makes a mistake, he merely makes a mistake; if a leader errs, he misleads. Indeed, according to the *Pesikta Rabbati* (ch. 22), misleading, or the failure of a leader to exercise leadership, is a violation of one of the Ten Commandments! Thus, the *Pesikta* interprets the verse not to take the Name of the Lord in vain, to mean: not to accept an office when you are not worthy of it. The Netziv explains: the name *Elohim* can be either sacred or profane, depending upon whether it refers to God or to a human source of power, such as a judge or a prince. One who is designated a leader therefore shares with God, as it were, the title *Elohim* and if he proves unworthy of it by neglecting his responsibilities, he weakens and desecrates that Name—thus violating *lo tissa* and taking the Name in vain.

But there is not only danger in undertaking leadership, there is also glory. If abuse or disuse of responsibilities as a leader puts one in violation of *lo tissa*, then the proper execution and positive assertion of one's leadership is nothing less than a *kiddush Hashem*, the sanctification of the divine Name.

Let me explain this by referring to a fascinating story recorded in *Tanakh* (II Kings, 5):

Some 2,800 years ago, there was a king in ancient Israel, Jehoram, and a prophet, Elisha, the disciple of Elijah. The Kingdom of Israel was then effectively a satellite of Aram or Syria, and the Israelite king was a vassal of the king of Syria.

Naaman, the general of Syria, was a leper. A captive Israelite girl told Naaman that he could find relief by consulting Elisha the prophet. The king of Syria thereupon sent his general to Jehoram, the king of Israel, asking that the latter provide the cure from his leprosy. Jehoram panicked, for he had no idea how to cure lepers, and suspected that the Syrian king was using this as a pretext for attacking him.

When Elisha heard about that, he sent word to Jehoram that he, the prophet, will effect the cure: "Let him know that there is a prophet in Israel." Elisha then sent a messenger to Naaman telling him how to proceed in order to be cured. Naaman's advisors prevailed upon him to follow the prophet's advice, which he did, whereupon he was healed.

The story then reaches its climax in the words of Naaman: "Now I know that there is no God in all the world save in Israel." It is the act of *kiddush Hashem*, the glorification or sanctification of God's Name.

Three things stand out in this story, and they make of it a parable of eternal and cogent relevance.

First is the description of Naaman: *gibbor chayil ish metzora*, the man was a mighty hero, but a leper.

What a startling juxtaposition, what a striking contrast: mighty, but a leper...

The *gibbor chayil metzora* is a symbol and picture of modern society, expressive of a painful paradox of Western civilization: technologically powerful, but ethically leprous; scientifically progressive, but spiritually regressive; materially mighty, but morally a midget. From the distance, when you behold this *gibbor chayil*, this mighty warrior who symbolizes modern society, you think he

is self-confident, assertive, optimistic, problem-solving. But draw closer to him and you see that he is a *metzora*, a leper, corrupt, frightened, in despair and disrepair, uncertain and perplexed, rotting and withering away inside.

Second, within the camp of Israel itself, there is a troublesome tension between king and prophet. The captive girl recommends the prophet, but the king of Syria sends Naaman not to the prophet, but to the king of Israel. The latter, in his despair, rends his clothes out of sheer frustration and worry—and he does not even think of sending the leper to the prophet! Ultimately, however, it is only the prophet who can, by imploring God, heal the leper: so that all may “know that there is a prophet in Israel.”

In Israel there is always the tension between prophet and king, between the sacred and the profane, between that aspect of the life of Israel that is represented by the king—worldly knowledge, power, material wealth, cleverness—and that represented by the prophet: *kedushah*, holiness, the supreme word of the Lord, Torah, the spirit, and Jewish way of life. We have often erred and misled others by offering to the world the king instead of the prophet as the source of Jewish healing. We have told ourselves and others that the ancient vision of salvation from Israel will come through a Jewish government or through Jewish nationhood, through Jewish scientists or Jewish Nobel Prize winners, through Jewish wealth or through Jewish writers or Jewish intellectuals.

Not so! Those who are symbolized by the king of Israel can help; they are, indeed, indispensable. Without *madda*, without a material framework, without a proper natural and national context, without secular knowledge, without the profane, the prophet cannot flourish. But the main task of healing the Naamans of the world of their spiritual ills, of resolving their inner contradictions, of banishing the leprosy of the heart and soul, can come only through prophecy and Torah. “Let them know that there is a prophet in Israel.”

The third thing we learn from this passage is that if and when the prophet is ready to take the initiative and let the kings,

Jewish and non-Jewish, know that there is a prophet in Israel ready to heal the moral sickness that plagues the world, the result is *kiddush Hashem*, the sanctification of the divine Name.

What held true for Elisha the prophet holds true for each of you: Lead, for Heaven's sake; lead *le-shem Shamayim*; and let the world know that there is a new and reinvigorated and energetic and authentic rabbinate, that there are still prophets in Israel! There is hardly a greater *kiddush Hashem* than the awakening awareness that the *rabbanut* is alive and well and that Torah is thriving in Israel!

As we induct you officially into the *rabbanut*, we charge you with the holy burden of spiritual, Torah, intellectual, and communal leadership.

Leadership means creating, encouraging, and inspiring followers. *Ein melekh beli am*, there can be no king without a country. And this task will demand of you new talents, largely untried during your student days—talents of motivation and organization and personal vigor and communal relationships. Rabbis must have “baalebatim” and congregations, and teachers must have pupils and schools. And if they're not there waiting for you, go out and beat the bushes, find them and mold them and elevate them, and “let them know there is a prophet in Israel.”

Yeshiva is, in many ways, a social cocoon. Although we are much more open to variety than other *yeshivot*, nevertheless, we are more or less homogeneous. In the exercise of rabbinic leadership, you must learn to be open to *all* Jews from *all* backgrounds—Ashkenazim and Sephardim, old and young, men and women, Orthodox and non-Orthodox, affiliated and non-affiliated, those already on the way to *teshuvah* and those not yet at that level, confirmed secularists and those who simply go along with the crowd unthinkingly—you must be the Rav of all of them, whether or not they belong to your shul, whether or not they identify with our worldview. They—all of them—must know that you represent the prophet in Israel, the *mesorah* of the *rabbanut*; that you bear the ring of authenticity; that your love and concern are broad and not parochial; that even the Naamans of life can come to you for help.

At a time when the vacuum in Jewish leadership in the community is being filled by well-meaning people who often lack any Torah orientation, it is time for our rabbis to take their place in community leadership—whether of *vaad ha-kashrut* or *mikvah*, UJA or Federation, Soviet Jewry or PACs. You must breathe a *neshamah* into the established Jewish leadership by forthrightly articulating what we stand for, and doing so with *darkei no'am*, the “ways of pleasantness.”

But, of course, you must never become just another “macher.” You must ever remember that the source of your legitimacy as rabbis is—your status as *benei Torah* and *talmidei chakhamim* scholars of Torah. Unless you continue and deepen your study of Torah, unless you teach and are *marbitz Torah*, your credentials are suspect, your legitimacy is in question, your effectiveness is crippled.

This is a time of growing Jewish literacy among an emerging group of our Orthodox “baalebatim,” and many of you will be undergoing a *bechinah* every time you give a *shiur* or *derashah* or answer a *she'eilah*. Only through your knowledge of Torah will people know that “there is a prophet in Israel.”

To be a *talmid chakham* you need a head. To be a *yerei Shamayim* you need a heart. To be a *gomel chasadim* you need hands and feet. To be a *darshan* you need a mouth. But to be a leader—you need a *chut ha-shedrah*, a spine, a backbone. And in age when, as we are told, the majority of the population suffers from back pain, that is no simple matter.

Leadership means not only marching at the head of a column of loving and admiring followers, but also the ability to put up with criticism, justified and unjustified, often harsh and pitiless; with sarcasm and innuendo and vicious rumors; with yes-men who shield you from the truth and, more often, implacable adversaries who expose you to falsehood; with inertia and with hysteria; and with a lot more. Leadership means to put up with all this, and yet to hold fast to your principles despite all; to draw strength from your supporters—and even from your critics.

This has been the policy which our Yeshiva has followed for itself for one century—and *be-ezrat Hashem* will do so for at least another one. We did not become what we are by timidity and fear of criticism.

I have been connected with Yeshiva for 40 of its 100 years, ever since I came here as an 18-year-old student. I know something of its previous history. The way that Drs. Revel and Belkin chose for us was often beset with pain and controversy. It was never easy. We were told by Jews who were authorities in the world of secular education that “yeshiva” and “university” were antonyms, that they could never coexist in one institution. And the rivals of Yeshiva in certain non-Orthodox camps which today speak so admiringly of “pluralism” sneered at us, mocked us, wrote our obituaries. We were too Orthodox, too East European, too Old World.

At the same time, other *yeshivot* refused to recognize our existence; they too believed that “yeshiva” and “university” could never live together, conveniently ignoring the tradition of “the beauty of Japhet in the tents of Shem.” For them, we were too modern, too American, too New World. To this day, at a wedding or at a funeral where our people mingle with those of certain other *yeshivot*, the others will be announced as the Rosh Yeshiva of this or that yeshiva, this or that Kollel, this or that Beis Medrash. But our Roshei Yeshiva, distinguished *geonim* and *gedolei Yisrael* of this, the mother of American *yeshivot*, are introduced with all kinds of devious euphemisms—the Rav of such and such a shtetl, the *talmid* of such and such *gaon*, the son-in-law of such and such *gadol*—but rarely as *Rosh Yeshiva be-Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan*.

Yet the greatness of our Yeshiva is that we kept to our *derekh* with strength and with courage, that we conducted ourselves with individual and institutional dignity, that we refused to reciprocate petty insults and trade invectives, but continued to relate to others according to the principles of *kevod ha-beriyot* and *kevod ha-Torah*. This will continue to be our policy—one from which we will not be deterred, neither by flattery nor by threats.

What is true for Yeshiva as an institution is true for each of you as individuals. Only a few years ago, the rabbi of a significant congregation in this city was beset by problems and attacked viciously for a ruling he had made in good faith. He was pressured and buffeted by all sides.

Because he was not a *musmakh* of our yeshiva, he asked me to introduce him to our revered mentor, the Rav. I did so. It was *Parashat Vayetzei*. The Rav heard him, thought silently for a few minutes, and said to him the following: "Our *sedra* ends with the words, 'and Jacob went upon his way, and he was met by the angels of God.' That is my advice to you: Go upon your own *derekh*, your own way, without looking right or left; and if you do so with sincerity and truth and honor, with the conviction that this is what Torah demands of you at this time and in this place, then you will be met by 'the angels of God.'"

That wisdom is worth sharing with you, our newest *musmakhim*. If you are to be leaders, if your goal is the honorable one of *kiddush shem Shamayim*, then don't be overly concerned with what others say or press you to say; don't pander to the Left and don't cower before the Right. In Torah there is neither left nor right—if your "way" is that of a Jacob, then what follows is the meeting with the angels. There is only one way: straight ahead. Only with such firmness of method wedded to sacredness of purpose will the world know that "there is a prophet in Israel."

I hope I have not frightened you with this charge of leadership. Truth to tell, it is a hard, often painful way. But remember: nothing is easy. The Chazon Ish writes wistfully, in one of his letters, "everything comes with difficulty, and I have rarely encountered anything that is easy." If it was so for him, how much more so for us!

It is a mission that you dare not take lightly, but of which you must not despair. It will raise you up even as it wears you down. It will both exhilarate you and exhaust you. It will inspire you and scare you. You have chosen it—and it has chosen you. "Yours is not to complete the work, nor are you free to desist from it" (*Avot* 2:16).

You will not, in the exercise of your rabbinic leadership, avoid mistakes. But if you approach your tasks with a stout heart and deep commitment to the Almighty and to Torah; if you are frank enough to admit an error and correct it; if you are bold enough to stand up to others in the name of what you know to be right and proper and truthful—you will ultimately bask in the warmth of knowing that you brought to bear in your communities the presence of the contemporary counterpart of a “prophet in Israel;” that you made a genuine and lasting contribution to reducing the manifold leprosies of our ailing people and diseased times; that you did your share in effecting a *kiddush Hashem*; that you made it possible to be met by the angels of God in the form of children you sent to *yeshivot*, adults who deepened their life of Torah and *mitzvot*, of a community endowed with a new and proper respect for Torah Judaism, of other young people whom you directed to our Yeshiva and who will some day take their places as *musmakhim* and as leaders.

Such rewards are enough to give you the courage to survive all the tests and rigors and pains of leadership. Not all of you have all the requisite personal attributes for great leadership, but each of you has some capacity for moving ahead and inspiring others to follow you, whether in the congregational rabbinate, in education, or in any area of *avodat ha-kodesh*. Take that capacity, great or small, work on it, develop it, and express it *le-hagdil Torah u-le-ha’adirah*.

The mantle now is given to you as the dawn breaks on a new century for our beloved Yeshiva. You are not only our alumni, but our pride and joy, our emissaries to the Jewish community.

Wear the mantle, the mantle of the prophet who wanted all the world to know that “there is a prophet in Israel,” with distinction, with resolve, with hope.

And may the Almighty grant you and your families the years, the health, and the strength to some day pass it on to a new generation, and another one after that, *ad biat ha-go’el*.

A RABBI INSIDE AND OUT

March 18, 1990

EVERY MORNING, at the introduction to our *Shacharit* prayers, we recite the following words: *Le-olam yehei adam yerei Shamayim ba-seter u-va-galuy*, "a person must always be in fear of Heaven, both in private and in public."

The source of this statement is the *Tanna de-vei Eliyahu*, where it appears in a slightly different form, omitting the word *u-va-galuy*, thus reminding us to be God-fearing in private. This reading, which is also that of Rambam in his version of the *Siddur*, is obviously meant to encourage Jews living under oppression not to forsake their faith within the privacy of their own homes and hearts even if they are forced to do so in public.

However, the popular version, which we recite daily, is puzzling. Why was it necessary to include *u-va-galuy*? And if it was done in order to emphasize that for Jews living under comparative freedom piety had to be pursued at all times and occasions, why not simply say *Le-olam yehei adam yerei Shamayim*, that a man should always be God-fearing, without specifying that he should do so both *ba-seter u-va-galuy*?

I suggest that a hidden nugget of wisdom lies here—a teaching that there really are two different kinds of piety, one for *ba-seter* and one for *u-va-galuy*, and that the two realms of the hidden and revealed, or private and public, are distinct from, although

continuous with, each other. The *ba-seter* or "Inside" fear of Heaven is a piety of and for oneself; it fills one's inner space. Such a person is concerned only with his own spiritual welfare and growth in Torah. He experiences a kind of noble egotism of the soul, one which may, however, lead to spiritual narcissism. His untiring efforts are focused only on his own *avodat Hashem* as he shuts the world off in order for this kind of devoutness to flourish. Such an Inside person is, in effect, reliving the condition of Moses who was commanded to ascend Sinai by himself: "no other human may accompany you." The Inside piety is fashioned out of solitude and loneliness and the stillness of one's heart and conscience.

The *u-va-galuy* or "Outside" piety is an outgoing experience. Here, the emphasis is not on oneself but on others, on the world. This kind of devout person is deeply concerned about the welfare of others, both spiritual and material. He is seized by a kind of spiritual altruism as he feels himself bound by a common creatureliness to all Jews, to all humans—indeed, to all forms of life. His religious experience reflects the Psalmist's triumphant cry, *kol ha-neshamah te halel Kah hallelukah*, "let every soul praise the Lord"—as all of creation, in all its richly resplendent forms, joins the worshipper in offering praise to the Creator. This is the *u-va-galuy* form of piety.

Therefore, *Le-olam yehei adam yerei Shamayim ba-seter u-va-galuy*. One must forever be devout, both Inside and Out.

And what is true for people generally is doubly true for rabbis. The Rabbinate must be lived and practiced on two levels: Inside and Outside.

Inside

The special *yerei Shamayim ba-seter* of a Rav, that piety which relates to his private sphere, comprises a number of areas.

Above all, there always stands the high demand for continuing *talmud Torah*. True, the study of Torah is incumbent on all Jews, but it holds special significance for and makes unusual demands upon rabbis who are, after all, teachers of Torah.

As such, you who today are officially inducted into the Rabbinate as we carry out the *shelichut* of yore are doubly fortunate: as *rabbanim* and *mechankhim*, you both learn and teach—and this is an expression of the love of both Jews and Torah. Bear in mind the incisive comment of the Kotzker Rebbe who, on the well-known statement of R. Akiva that “thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” is a *kelal gadol ba-Torah*, a great principle of Torah, added: the greatest way to express your love of your fellow Jew is to teach him Torah...

So never entertain any excuse to become lax. I am confident that you will continue to learn throughout your lives. I caution you only that you must never be satisfied with the level and depth that are required of you when you instruct children or teach adults who are relative novices. You must continue to analyze and probe as if you never left the *Beit Midrash*, no matter how little you are challenged by your pupils.

In addition, you must make up by yourselves for all that we did not have time to teach you in class: the rest of *Shas*; a better acquaintance with *Teshuvot* literature; and not only Halakhah, but also *machshavah*, for Jewish Thought is an essential vessel for Halakhah.

And whatever specialty you pursue within Torah, I urge you to develop your ideas and, if worthy enough, publish them. Disseminating your *chiddushim* is a great spur to your further study and creativity. Remember always this ethical note by the medieval author of *Sefer Ha-Chasidim* (#530):

Any new idea that comes to you is a divine revelation, and it was granted to you in order that you write it down and share it with others; if you fail to do so, you are in effect stealing from God!

But equally important, Halakhah sets special character criteria for rabbis: there is a more stringent code of *middot tovo* for rabbis than for laymen. On behalf of your distinguished teachers, I insist that you learn well and deeply, and apply carefully and wisely, the fifth chapter of Rambam, *Hilkhos Deot*. Here Maimonides codifies the law of *yerei Shamayim ba-seter*, the Inside Conduct, of a Rav.

For now, let me cite the opening of *halakhah* 1, which is an outline of the details that follow, and the beginning of the last *halakhah* (13) to which I recommend that some of you give special attention.

Just as a wise man [for which read: Rabbi, Rav] is distinguished by his wisdom and his character, and is thereby different from all others, so must he be distinguished in his conduct—in his eating and his drinking, his sexual life and his natural functions, his talking and his walking, his dress and his choice of words, and his way of doing business. All his deeds must be appropriate and refined.

Now we turn to the very end of that chapter, 5:13, where Rambam elaborates on this last item, the higher standard for a Rav in the conduct of his business:

The business dealings of a *talmid chakham* must be conducted with integrity and faithfulness. His “yes” must be “yes” and his “no” must be “no.” He must be strict for himself but generous and forgiving and undemanding towards others. And he must pay his bills immediately.

Your education at our Yeshiva for the last four or more years was the community’s and Yeshiva’s gift to those who are preparing for a life dedicated to *avodat ha-kodesh*—the Rabbinate, Jewish education, Jewish community service, and the like. So, if that is your goal, you are not required to repay us for your learning here all these years. You are asked to remember that *Rabbanim* too must give *tzedakah* and, as your benefactors, we appeal to your sense of fair play to direct your largess to your yeshivah at least as well as to others.

But if, after all, you decide to devote your careers to something other than *avodat ha-kodesh*—to business or accounting or law or medicine or computers (all of which are more lucrative than the Rabbinate)—then RIETS asserts a claim on your indebtedness to us for the Torah education you received here. It was our pleasure to provide scholarships and thus allow you to learn without overbearing financial worries. But as soon as you can you must, as *talmidei chakhamim*, abide by this last *halakhah* which we cited: You must pay your bills *le-alter*, “at once!” We will

forgo the last requirement of *le-alter*...but sooner or later we expect you to support us to the degree that you were supported by us here as a matter of genuine indebtedness, and not as charity; and then you must add to it, as do other *musmakhim*, as an act of *tzedakah*...

Do this, and we will know, with pride, that you are *talmidei chakhamim* who are *yerei Shamayim ba-seter*, that you are authentic rabbis on the Inside.

Outside

But a Rav must also be a *yerei Shamayim ba-galuy*, one whose concern radiates beyond himself, even beyond his congregation and community or classroom and school. And that means, in one word, spiritual leadership. Now, not everyone has the capacity for broad leadership, but everyone has *some* measure of leadership he can exercise—sometimes despite himself. And spiritual leadership, in particular, has many dimensions, some of them quite novel. Let me enumerate but three of them, equivalent in ascending order to the increasing levels and responsibilities of enhanced leadership

First, as mentioned, is the readiness to have your concern embrace *Kelal Yisrael* and even the rest of humanity. And I add this important caveat: you must never fall prey to the comfortable but execrable and scandalous notion that the term *Kelal Yisrael* is restricted to only those who do and think as we do...

The most elementary level of leadership requires that you step out of "four cubits of the *Beit Midrash*" and venture into the *reshut ha-rabbim*, the public arena; that you turn your face and your concern from the exclusive preoccupation with the Inside to the Outside. To be genuine and effective Torah leaders of our people, you must be ready for the wrenching experience of emerging from the warm and nurturing milieu of the yeshiva and into the tumultuous, frustrating, often false and defiant public arena. I do not mean, *chas ve-shalom*, that you close the door to the *Bet Hamidrash* behind you—as if anyone ever "graduates" from the study of Torah...but that to a large extent

you must turn outward, that you venture out of yourself to face the rest of the world. And it is cold outside!

I know many rabbis, both young and old, who are wonderful human beings, great Jews, fine scholars—but as rabbis they are incomplete; they are *rabbanim be-seter* but not *be-galuy*! And that simply will not do. The Orthodox community and the Jewish world are yearning for leadership, and they are impatient.

The Rabbinate is a blend of priesthood and prophecy. The Outside mission of the rabbi is his prophetic function. Permit me to share with you something I heard from Chief Rabbi Avraham Shapira a few months ago: In the famous passage of Elijah confronting the prophets of the Baal on Mount Carmel, he proclaims: *ani notarti navi la-Shem levadi*—“I remained alone of all the prophets of the Lord” (I Kings 18:22). But this raises a difficult question: how can Elijah say he alone remained of all the prophets when just nine verses earlier, in the same chapter, Obadiah informed Elijah that he personally hid one hundred prophets in a cave?

The answer, says Rabbi Shapira, is that a prophet who stays in a cave is no prophet! A cave is secure and safe and protective—but one who does not venture out to meet the brutal realities of “real life” to which ordinary Jews are subjected, who prefers safety over risk and caves over vision and his own security over his people’s needs—is no prophet!

The same holds true for the Rabbinate. A rabbinic leader who refuses to emerge out of the cave of his “shul” or school, who is a *yerei Shamayim ba-seter* but not *ba-galuy*, who is satisfied to be a rabbi only Inside and not Outside—may be pious and may be a rabbi, but he is not a full rabbi, and he certainly is not and cannot be a leader.

I recommend to you as role models in this respect those who, in our very own times, were able to lead *shelomei emunei Yisrael* by exercising influence in the Outside world, outside the cave. These include Dr. Bernard Revel, who founded this yeshiva and endowed its ideology; Rabbi Feivel Mendlowitz, who built Torah Vodaath; Rabbi Aaron Kotler, who not only established

the Lakewood Yeshiva but also inspired *kollelim* around the country; Rabbi Bloch who brought Telshe to Cleveland and Rabbi Ruderman who founded Ner Israel in Baltimore; my revered predecessor and Rebbe, Dr. Samuel Belkin, who began in a shtetl as a brilliant *talmid chakham*, grew in both Torah and *Madda*, and led this institution in its most constructive phase; and, *le-havdil bein chaim le-chaim*, our great mentor, "the Rav," whose word and guidance were sought by multitudes of Jews, and even non-Jews; the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who built an empire of Torah and Hasidism—and alumni of RIETS who founded and led Torah Umesorah in its beginnings and at its heights; who founded day schools and *mikva'ot* and synagogues around the country; who built and developed some of the most renowned *yeshivot* and other institutions in Israel; who rose to head the most prestigious Jewish communal organizations in this country, and who brought glory to the Torah community. These were—and are—*Rabbanim* who abide by our definition of *yerei Shamayim ba-seter u-va-galuy*, rabbis Inside and Out.

The second level and its requirement for true spiritual leadership is: courage, the moral strength and spiritual power to fight a lonely battle, to stand up against great odds and to struggle for what you believe and know is right. I am not championing mavericks who are dissenters just for the fun of it. I refer to the quest for principle, for the stubbornness that comes from seeing and holding fast to a truth when others are blind to it.

The late Satmar Rav, one of the stubbornest men of principle in our generation, once asked: why the halakhic formulation *yachid ve-rabbim halakhah ke-rabbim* (when there is one authority against the many, the law is with the many); why not simply *halakhah ke-rabbim* (the law is with the majority)? He answered: *yachid* refers (as it often does in rabbinic literature) not to a single human, but to *Yechido Shel Olam*, to the divine One and Only. Thus: follow the majority only when you know that God, the One, is with the many; otherwise, hold out, even against the whole world.

I am not known to be a particularly avid supporter of Satmar. But this particular policy I accept as axiomatic. It is not an especially pleasant position to be in—but it is the right one. Many Yeshiva *musmakhim* of my generation had to fight such lonely battles, and while some succumbed to weakness and gave in, others fought and prevailed. It is relatively easy for you to feel good about your not accepting a “mixed pew” congregation; we hardly have any of those any more... But your older colleagues had to battle that, and parking lots, and corrupt community kashruth, and unkempt and unpopular *mikvaot*, and...the list goes on and on.

You undoubtedly will face other kinds of problems. Your leadership will be tested—constantly, and by both extremes. If you are convinced of the rightness of your position, disregard numbers and, if necessary, defy the *rabbim* for the name of the divine *Yachid*. Do it cleverly, do it strategically, but most of all—do it!

There is a third and highest level of leadership, and that is the most demanding of all, even more difficult than standing alone against the world when you know you are right and can clearly see the justice of your own point of view. And that is—the ability to lead even when the horizon is murky instead of bright, the issues muddled instead of clear, positions gray instead of black-and-white; when all the alternatives are flawed instead of perfect; when you can’t “look it up,” and have nothing but your judgment to consult; when there is no *devar mishnah*, only *shikkul ha-da’at*. At such times—and they come often, too often, in the life of a responsible leader—you have to take a position without the comfort of self-righteousness, with nothing more than a prayer to the One Who knows all human thoughts that your good intentions be acknowledged by Him whose glory you serve, and that they be correct and effective—and that, ultimately, your colleagues and followers and even antagonists appreciate both your integrity and wisdom.

Such leadership requires a broad "Outside" and not only a narrow "Inside" Rabbinite; it demands of you that you be a *yerei Shamayim ba-galuy*, and not only *yerei Shamayim ba-seter*.

Permit me to share with you what I told a convention of the Orthodox Union a year or so ago about this very theme. The Rambam in his *Perush ha-Mishnayot to Avot* quotes the Sages: "Whosoever is appointed a leader (*parnas*) by the community here below is considered wicked (*rasha*) up above."

What a strange thing to say—especially considering that Rambam himself was the preeminent *parnas* or leader of his Egyptian-Jewish community!

I suggest that the intention of our Sages was more than a caution against the hubris that often bedevils high position in society. Rather, more subtly, they meant that you cannot attain the highest level of leadership without somehow being tainted as a *rasha*, because such "wickedness" emerges from the very nature of leadership. That is a tragic but inescapable fact. Leadership involves making hard decisions—better, dirty decisions—choosing between unpalatable alternatives, but opting for the one which is least harmful, the least evil. Anyone can make risk-free decisions, clear-cut choices between right and wrong. But it takes leadership to be ready to embrace the risk of being considered a *rasha mi-le-ma'alah*, less than perfect in the abstract, of being guilty of error and failure, if by so doing you protect the integrity of *tzibbur mi-le-mattah*, of your community—which is the responsibility of an authentic leader.

The Zohar (III, 23a) offers a similar thought. On the verse *asher nasi yecheta* "when a prince shall sin" (Lev. 4:22), the Zohar adds: *vadai yecheta*, "he most certainly will sin!" The Zohar is intrigued by the word *asher* instead of *im*, "when" instead of "if," as though it is inevitable that the leader of the people sin. It therefore maintains that this is indeed so, and explains this certainty that the prince will sin as the consequence of overconfidence inspired by the readiness of his followers to be led. But the same inevitability can be tied to the essential nature of leadership which results from the need to make impossibly

difficult decisions, rather than to the subjective weakness that leaves the leader exposed to the temptation of arrogance.

You cannot be a *nasi* unless you are prepared to be accused by some—even by the most honorable of people—of being *vadai yecheta*.

No great leadership is possible unless you are ready for such crises of moral ambiguity. If you shrink from it, you can be a fine person, a Rav who is a *yerei Shamayim ba-seter*—a “private rabbi;” but you are not a leader, neither a *parnas* nor a *nasi*, certainly not a *navi*, if you cannot become a *yerei Shamayim ba-galuy*.

Conclusion

Allow me to summarize.

Rabbanut demands of you that you live on two levels: Inside and Outside, as an individual and as a public persona.

Your *seter*, your inner, private, personal life, was fashioned in our *Beit Midrash*. Your *galuy* will be molded as you encounter an often hostile world and seek to apply the norms of Torah and the values of our sacred tradition in a world that is usually reluctant to learn and impervious to your teaching. The public *galuy* world, unlike the private *seter* one, is an arena of more questions than answers, more problems than solutions, and of tormenting inconsistency, where you must make decisions and take stands where the issues are messy and murky and distasteful.

But face it you must—and do so with gusto, with brio, with zeal and enthusiasm and a bright and lustrous love for Torah and for Israel. And don’t let anyone intimidate you!

How will you know that you are on the right path? And if you can’t know for a certainty, then at least are there any precautions that you can take so that even an error will be an honest one?

Only one way: by making sure that your *bagaluy* is added to but does not displace your *ba-seter*; that you turn your face to the Outside world without ever turning your back on the Inside one;

that you always maintain contact with the *Beit Midrash* and the Torah you learned and will continue to learn in it; that you always test yourself by the loyalty you maintain to your yeshiva.

On the verse, "I considered my ways and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies" (Psalms 119:59), the *Yalkut* (*Bechukotai* 670) comments:

David said to the Holy One: Master of the Universe! Every day "I consider my ways" and say: I will go to this place, I will go to that abode. But my feet turn me towards synagogues and study halls!

No matter where you go in life, no matter what destiny beckons to you, no matter what other designs you have for yourselves, no matter where you plan to go—let the magnetic attraction of the memory of the years of learning Torah at the feet of masters always pull you back, and let your feet bring you once again here to our *Beit Midrash* of Yeshivat Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan, to your home at Yeshiva University.

Your feet will bring you back here, as long as your heart and mind and soul remain here, in the sacred precincts of this *Beit Midrash* where you were nurtured and where you grew as mature *benei Torah* and given *semikhat chakhamim*.

Do that, and you will be in a remarkable position:

- You will face the Outside without relinquishing the Inside.
- You will be *yerei Shamayim* both *ba-seter u-va-galuy*.
- You will go without leaving.
- You will move on without moving away.

In that spirit, we say to you, *tzetkhem le-shalom u-vo'akhem le-shalom*.

On behalf of myself and your distinguished *Rebbeim*, I wish you *kol tuv*. May the Almighty shower all His blessings upon you and grant you every *hatzlachah*.

May all of us, together and individually, be privileged to make immortal contributions *le-hagdil Torah u-le-ha'adilah*.

THE SPIRIT OF ELIJAH RESTS UPON ELISHA

March 6, 1994

THERE IS A BITTER-SWEET QUALITY to this celebration. On the one hand, there is a sense of joy when, at this impressive quadrennial *Chag HaSemikhah*, we initiate a new group of rabbis into their roles as congregational rabbis and educators. On the other hand, this is the first such celebration in my memory, since my student days, at which our two great luminaries, the Rav and Reb Dovid, of blessed memory, did not grace the occasion with their presence.

In a sense, both the joy and the sorrow speak to the same theme—the transferring of spiritual authority from one generation to the next, the passing of responsibility for the entire *mesorah* and Torah leadership from teacher to student.

Permit me, therefore, to refer you back to an incident in the early history of the Jewish monarchy, when the prophet Elijah invested Elisha as his disciple and successor, as related in I Kings, (chap. 19). It is a chapter which is itself worthy of study and also serves as a metaphor for your *semikhah* at this juncture of our history.

Elijah had just gone through a soul-searing experience. Having challenged the prophets of Baal, confronted their royal supporter, Ahab, and therefore earned persecution by the infamous Jezebel, Elijah finds himself distraught, in total despair, having

given up hope that his people are ready for their mission as the *am Hashem*. He is so filled with grim forebodings and feelings of inadequacy that he wants to die. God instructs him to stand at the mouth of the cave, where He reveals Himself to him. Elijah learns that God speaks to him not in the howling winds or the raging fires or the savage earthquake, but in the sound of gentle stillness, i.e., in patience and sensitivity. God then gives him three very specific commands: to anoint Hazael as the new king of Syria, Yehu as the new king of Israel, and, last, "Elisha, son of Shaphat, as a prophet in your place."

What does Elijah do? Does he proceed to follow the divine instructions exactly as they were given, namely, to anoint the two kings and then Elisha as his prophet successor? No, he does not. He changes the order. We hear nothing, for a long time, about anointing the new kings of Syria and Israel. Instead, he immediately does the last thing first:

[Elijah]...found Elisha the son of Shaphat who was plowing... And Elijah passed by him and threw his mantle upon him. And [Elisha] left the oxen and ran after Elijah and said, "Please let me kiss my father and mother and I will then follow you" — then [Elisha] arose and followed [Elijah] and attended him.

Why the change in order, appointing Elisha first and leaving his diplomatic mission for later? I suggest that this was to teach posterity that, important as political moves and international relations and diplomatic maneuvers are, the single most important task before the Jewish people in every generation is to ensure the continuity of its spiritual leadership! Let kings and heads of state wait; let matters of historic moment bide their time; let the politicians stand aside and let the statesmen cool their heels in the outer offices of our attention. The priority of priorities is that there be prophets of God and teachers of Torah and models of moral conduct and exemplars of Torah ethics to make our people worthy of saving.

And so it is with us. Of all the causes that the Jewish community, including Yeshiva University, espouses, the teaching of Torah and the education of *talmidei chakhamim* and *Rabbanim* is the most important. Unless we immediately attend to the future,

the past is pointless and the present turns puerile. That is why this *Chag HaSemikhah* is such a very important occasion. You who have become *musmakhim* these past four years are our Elishas, and your *rebbeim* are your Elijahs. We consider your learning, your *semikhah*, your future development, as our greatest mission, and it is to that end that we expend every effort in preparing your *shiurim*, counseling you, worrying about your education, and—yes—in the endless and thankless task of raising funds to ensure your ability to learn without worry and distraction—and without tuition fees. Because without Elisha, Elijah's life and prophetic career have no continuity. We need you. And you need us.

And let no one minimize the difficulties we face and which will undoubtedly continue and intensify during your careers.

You *musmakhim* who sit before me this day are being formally inducted into the rabbinate during one of the most tumultuous, perilous, and fateful periods in American Jewish history. Since the last *Chag HaSemikhah*, the danger to our continuity as a people has been encapsulated and symbolized in the National Jewish Population Study, which showed that over 52% of American Jews are marrying out—a sure sign that the majority of American Jews is unalterably assimilating and, thus, being lost to Jewish posterity.

These shocking statistics are not the end of the story. The problem is not only demographic but spiritual as well: Jews who are marrying out are not only marrying Christians, they are becoming wedded to Christianity! The group which claims to be “the largest denomination in Judaism” has, by virtue of its “outreach to the intermarried,” opened the door to the most radical dilution of traditional Judaism in American Jewish history. Even a faculty member at a Reform seminary has complained in an official publication that what began as a welcome to non-Jewish spouses in the temple, and progressed to non-Jews becoming members of the temple (and thence to serve as officers of a Jewish congregation), has now developed to the point that non-Jewish spouses are permitted to participate and lead in “ritual” activities in and on behalf of the congregation. And if

Christians are now to conduct Jewish services, can the importing of Christianity itself be far behind? How sad!

If anyone is skeptical about the danger of such *shemad* and the ultimate christianizing of the Jewish community, such doubts dissolve in a Jewish Telegraphic Agency report at the beginning of this past January that **some 20% of the Jewish community—or about a million Jews-attended church services on Christmas**. We are in deep and unprecedented trouble—if even half these figures are true!

And not only are we in trouble in America; the situation in Israel is not much less disturbing. The peace process and the political, diplomatic, and security future of the Jewish State are matters of critical importance—and in the light of recent events doubly so. But in the long run the uncertain Jewish future of the State is even more critical. Israel is far more secure Jewishly than the Diaspora—that is why we encourage *aliyah* for our students—but not far enough. Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz said recently, with too much justification, that the great question in Israel is not whether there will be a Palestinian state, **but whether the State of Israel will be a Jewish state**. Under such conditions, we cannot comfortably dismiss any worry about the spiritual as well as demographic destiny of American Jewry by assuming that the prophetic promise of “out of Zion shall go forth Torah” is at hand in these “Messianic times,” and that, therefore, we can rely upon Israel to do for us religiously, culturally, and educationally what we cannot or will not do for ourselves.

Moreover, all is not well in our own Orthodox community. To illustrate this point let me refer again to that scene of the old prophet and his young new disciple and this time pose a halakhic question: Elijah is commanded to anoint Elisha as a prophet. But since when does a *navi* require *meshichah*? We know that a king and a *kohen gadol* and other “officials” require anointing—but a prophet? A *navi* is always a charismatic individual, an inspired nonconformist, not a formal office-holder, and there is no other case of a prophet being anointed.

The solution—and it is a relevant one—may be found in the Talmud (*Horayot* 11b), which asserts that the son of an anointed

king does not require *meshichah*, because he inherits his father's status automatically. But, the *gemara* asks, why then was Solomon anointed? Was not his father David anointed, and do we not constantly speak of King David as the Anointed King?

The answer the Talmud gives is that, in a time of *machloket*, of dispute and controversy and rancor, when the social and political consensus has been broken and the legitimacy of the new leader may be challenged, there should be a modified form of anointment—*meshichah be-afarsemei dakhyah*, anointing with pure balsam oil; the original kind of oil, the *shemmen ha-mishcha*, was not used, but there was some kind of anointment, in order to confirm the new leadership and dampen the polemics. And that is why Elijah anointed Elisha—it was a necessary symbolic confirmation of his mission in stormy times.

For the same reason, your *semikhah* at this critical crossroads of our history is so very important. Your *semikhah* is a *meshichah* at a time in which we suffer from a fragmented polity, a lack of consensus, and therefore threats to our very existence. And when radical changes are upon us and the earth is shaking under the entire Jewish community to a degree the Richter scale cannot even contemplate, our own Torah community is split and polarized—and unnecessarily so.

The polemics that infect the body politic of our Orthodox community are not always ideological. In truth, the ideological differences are not unbridgeable and the problems are not insoluble, because all of us aspire to the flourishing of *talmud Torah* and *yirat Shamayim* and wish to enhance and increase Jewish education and the observance of the *mitzvot*. If only, when your generation comes to power, you could remove the personal and organizational egos, and along with them the inevitable enmity and envy; if you could concentrate on working together instead of proving your credentials by attacking the other; if you could scrap the monumental silliness that so often seeps into the most serious of our dialogues—then you would indeed successfully cooperate with mutual respect, and even love, to enhance the goals we all cherish. If the Chofetz Chaim

and Rav Kook, and the Chazon Ish and Rav Herzog were able, despite their differing views on the communal policy of loyal and observant Jewry, to learn with each other and address each other with *derekh erez* and affection, why cannot we do the same—without demanding that the “other side” first abandon its own principles? Why do we insist that all *chilukei de’ot* must lead to *machloket*? And if there must be ideological or even political *machloket*, why must it always be so uncivil, so destructive, so arrogant and self-righteous? Why must we imitate the *goyim* of our times and insist that there are “politically correct” ways of acting like Orthodox Jews, and that all who do not conform are beyond the pale?

It is not differences of opinion that are troublesome—these can be trying but also very healthy—but unrestrained contempt and verbal aggressiveness that make any kind of dialogue exceedingly difficult and preoccupy all of us with paltry politics and petty polemics, thus distracting us from confronting cooperatively the larger and far more consequential menaces to our common future. Nero fiddled while Rome burned. And we compliment our ancient foe by emulating him in our own circumstances.

All in all, this is not a pretty picture that I have painted for you, but it is unfortunately all too real. It is into this troubled world that you enter as rabbis and educators, and your *semikhah* is, therefore, a kind of anointment with balsam oil. It confirms our faith and trust in you as you grow in Torah and mature as *Rabbanim*.

In order to do so successfully, I recommend five guiding principles, two negative and three positive.

First, despite all that I have said, you who are this day being invested in the rabbinate dare not be discouraged! The *Sefer Chasidim* of R. Yehuda Ha-Chasid teaches us that one who composes *chiddushei torah* (Torah writings) and does not publish them is guilty of being *mo’el be-hekdesh*, of illicit use of sacred property, because our intellectual achievements in Torah are the gift of the Almighty and we dare not keep them to ourselves and deny them to our fellow Jews. And if this is true of Torah novellae, which another *talmid chakham* may well be able to disprove, how much

more so is it true of creating Torah personalities, of making Jews who will live and support Torah! You have no moral right to be frightened, no right to abandon your fellow Jews, no right to hoard Torah for yourselves and deny it to others—even though you are reluctant and they are unreceptive!

Some of you who are blessed with the gift of leadership may soon rise to be the agents of great, perhaps dramatic, improvements in the relationship between Torah and Israel. But each of you can, if you will it, make at least a dent here and a change there, so that together you will have achieved mighty contributions, together with other *musmakhim* of our Yeshiva and other *yeshivot* and *benei torah* from all over the country.

The second “negative commandment” is: do not allow yourselves to be sucked into any of the fashionable extremisms that are tearing our people apart. They are tempting, even seductive. Supporting them can make us feel good emotionally without burdening our intellects.

Extremism threatens to rip off the thin membrane of civilization that covers the inner volcano of violence. Violence from the mouth of a gun is a cancer that grows from the verbal violence from the mouth of a careless speaker or the pen of an irresponsible writer. And the oncogene—the cancer’s seed—is extremism in dehumanizing your adversary.

There is a special obligation that lies upon all who have influence over the public—especially younger people, who are less prone to make fine distinctions, who are often at the mercy of boiling hormones. You will soon be in such positions in your congregations and classrooms. Remember what King Solomon taught: *ha-chayyim ve-ha-mavet be-yad ha-lashon*, the tongue has the power of life and death; speech has consequences. The Rabbis of the Mishnah taught:

Sages, be heedful of your words, lest you incur the penalty of exile and be exiled to a place of evil waters, and the disciples who come after you drink thereof and die, and the Heavenly Name be profaned. (*Avot* 1:11)

In Halakhah, exile is the punishment for manslaughter, unwitting murder, for incurring careless loss of life. The negligent teacher who uses loaded words indiscriminately will thereby arouse the evil waters—the surging waves of hatred—to churn into violence. And younger, impressionable students, bright but still immature young people controlled as much by their glands as their minds, will imbibe these words and cause death and destruction to themselves and others. And the result will be—a terrible, massive *chillul Hashem*.

So I say to you—and to your teachers and faculty and administration and myself—*Hizaharu be-divrekhem*, be heedful of your words!

Beware of carelessly stigmatizing another person. Let no hothead dare call the Prime Minister of Israel a “traitor.” Let that same Prime Minister be heedful and think twice before branding all *olim* from the Orthodox community of Brooklyn “a foreign implant.” And let all of us be very, very careful not to belittle any adversary as an “*apikores*” —or even as an “extremist” — before thinking carefully two and three times.

Beware of intolerance, and beware of tolerance for the intolerant. There is a fine line that separates passion from violence and zeal from zealotry.

Beware of the tendency to deny that any other position can have merit, that your one concern takes precedence over every other consideration, that the adversary is invariably demonic, that every means is legitimate to achieve your end. Those who passionately take strong positions in Jewish life must know that there are unbalanced people who flock to extremes and who can, with what they consider good intentions, subvert the noblest goals.

Hizaharu be-divrekhem. Let us never forget the lesson of this past week or two of dreadful history: extremism begets fanaticism and fanaticism leads to the worst of evils—bloodshed and the desecration of the Divine Name—the most horrific terms in the lexicon of Judaism—all in the name of high principle and noble ideals and love of one’s people.

As you grow and gain influence in the rabbinate, do what you can to bring peace and reconciliation and harmony to our

harassed community. Reach out to others in the community to cooperate in bringing Torah to the masses of Jews who are alienated from it, so that they can join you in staving off the insatiable monster of mass assimilation. And, above all, learn not only to speak and speak out, but also to *listen*.

Remember that, as King David put it, "Then did the God-fearing speak (*az nidberu*) to one another, and the Lord listened and He heard." Why, indeed, is the Almighty so attentive to us? Because David writes not *az dibru*, that they spoke, but *nidberu*, in the transitive form, that they let themselves be spoken to by others. This means that, unlike our normal conversations where we are interested only in holding forth and declaiming to others, a truly God-fearing person is genuinely interested in listening to what the other has to say; he is as willing to be spoken to as he is to speak—and he is not anxious to invalidate the other as not God-fearing. That is why the Almighty, as it were, perks up, emulates us, and does likewise: He listens to us—and He hears!

So, be ready to listen, to understand, to be sensitive and civil and respectful of others. But do so without submitting to ideological demands imposed upon you by others.

The third, and positive, item is—to continue to immerse yourselves in Torah study; never stop. Your Torah will be your refuge and your strength, your consolation and your joy, and your inspiration to greater aspiration. And it, above all else, will help you help your people. It is our firm belief that, as the Sages told us, the eternal light of Torah will lead people to the paths of goodness and holiness, and that "the people" in this case refers both to your congregants or your pupils, and to you yourselves as well. It is inevitable that your long immersion in the world of Gemara and Rashi and Tosafot and Rishonim will inspire you to devote your lives to spreading Torah and to the Jewish people. It is inconceivable that your adventures in the fascinating universe of *Shakh* and *Taz* and *Peri Megadim*, in arguing with R. Akiva Eger and R. Chaim and the *Minchat Chinukh*, should leave you unready and unwilling to bring these giants of the intellect and the spirit to the loving attention of all your fellow Jews. After having been immersed in Torah in the sacred precincts of our

Yeshiva, we expect you to dedicate the best efforts of your life to Torah and *Am Yisrael*. For you will one day be the Elijahs who will place your mantles upon the shoulders of yet unborn Elishas. The next positive thing you will need, and in great abundance, is the love of Israel, *ahavat Yisrael*. Truth to tell, it is a quite difficult *mitzvah* to perform. Not all Jews are lovable, and some are downright unlovable. But we were not commanded to love only those whom we admire or respect or already love. This *mitzvah* applies not only to individual Jews, but also to *Kelal Yisrael*, to us as a people.

Do not be put off by those who are openly antagonistic to Torah. We have accepted the burden of responsibility (*arevut*) for all Jews, regardless of the labels they wear. Save your aggressiveness for the battle against *am ha'aratzut*—that and the ubiquitous hedonism and rampant materialism which are so pervasive in our society. Be prepared to fight indifference to Jews and Judaism—by showing love for the very Jews who are indifferent. Work for them, befriend them, draw them close, sacrifice for them—and they, or many of them, will respond. Jews today, more than ever before, are attracted by spirituality and authenticity, and that means such things as your *kavanah* in your davening, your *yirat Shamayim*, your genuine commitment to Torah—and true and palpable love of all God's creatures, all humanity. Share these traits with them in true friendship, and you and they together will be prepared to face the greatest odds and wrest victories out of them. Remember what the Baal Shem Tov told a *chassid* who was broken-hearted because his son had abandoned Torah Judaism: "Love him more."

Finally, and very briefly, what you will need, after learning and love, is gratitude. It is a theme that has been occupying my attention in recent years, probably because it is so rare and I miss it so much. You will be in the position, as a rabbi or a teacher, to do favors for people, to help and guide and support people. Do not expect their gratitude so that you will not be disappointed. But for yourselves, remember that it is a criterion of both your *yiddishkeit* and your *menschlichkeit*.

Your gratitude must be extended to all who deserve it, and I here specifically mean our Yeshiva—yours and mine—which has given us the best of Torah, the only source of *Torah u-Madda*, the warmest climate of intelligent piety and, along with it, intellectual challenges and high ethical standards and, not least, a free Torah education that has put us on the road to becoming Torah scholars. Do this by keeping and nourishing your links to Yeshiva. We will always support you. But soon it will be your turn to help support us—by sending students, by rallying supporters to us, by giving of your own substance. And I am proud to say to you that of all our alumni, it is the rabbinic alumni who are, relative to their ability, the most generous to their alma mater. May you continue in this grand tradition of *hakarat ha-tov*.

The world you are entering as you bear the sublime mission of our holy *mesorah* is more complex, more opaque, more hazardous than that of your teachers. At times, and in time, when you will be called upon to wear the mantle of Elijah, it may seem that the sheer novelty of the problems and volume of the challenges you face are so overwhelming, so vastly different from and much more difficult than those faced by your predecessors and mentors that, like Elisha, you will feel abandoned, and perhaps even resent that “Elijah went up in a storm to heaven,” that they live in a Paradise, in heaven, in an ivory tower of the *Beit Ha-Midrash*, while you must man the front lines, whether in your community or your classroom.

But do not lose courage. Because with the help of the Almighty, you will be granted the request for a double portion of his spirit—*pi shenayim be-ruchakha*—that Elisha made of Elijah as he bade him farewell; a double portion of your teachers’ spirit will rest upon you. For our efforts, invested in you, will come to full fruition, and you will add to them your own internal resources of love of God and Torah and Israel, of courage and spiritedness.

And then your contemporaries will say of you, as the onlooking fellow disciples of Elijah—the *benei ha-nevi'im*—said of Elisha, “the spirit of Elijah now rests upon Elisha.”

So may it be His divine will.

THE WHO, WHAT, AND WHERE OF THE RABBINATE

March 22, 1998

I N GREETING YOU on our last *Chag HaSemikhah* of this troubled century, and on the 50th anniversary of the State of Israel, permit me to share with you some thoughts as to your role in a future that is, at one and the same time, both frightening and beckoning. To help you in your transition from a relatively cloistered existence in the *Beit Midrash* and college classroom to that varied and oft fearsome “outside world,” allow me to turn practical and offer you some thoughts on the “who,” “what,” and “where” of your developing careers. (The “when” is obvious—Now—and requires no elaboration.) And while I address you as pulpit rabbis, those of you going into education or allied fields, simply apply my words to your own context.

The “who” consists of your relationships with your “baalebatim,” your lay people, whether congregants, pupils, parents, board members, etc.

Many of you have expressed apprehension, during the sessions I have had with you as *Semikhah* I and *Semikhah* IV students, as to how to deal with the myriad of problems a rabbi has to contend with. I sympathize with you. We at Yeshiva hardly expect you to be full-fledged *posekim* and accomplished experts in human relations from the moment that you are placed in your first or even second position. But your “baalebatim” do not

know and perhaps do not *want* to know this, and so you must be prepared with some guidelines even as you expect to learn much "on the job."

Of the many things that ought to be on your agenda regarding your "baalebatim," let me mention three.

The first obligation of a Rabbi is *chessed*—loving-kindness, care, generosity. I must repeat what the Rav, of blessed memory, would always caution us about. He would tell us what his grandfather, R. Chaim Brisker, told his son—the Rav's father and predecessor here at Yeshiva, R. Moshe Soloveitchik—when the latter was about to leave for his first "*shtelle*:" "Listen to me, Moshe: a Rabbi must not only know 'how to learn,' the test of a Rabbi is if he practices *chessed*." So, you will be judged by your "*menschlichkeit*" as much or more than by your "*lomdus*."

You are not only going to sit in your synagogue office or classroom and dispense wisdom or offer a fine analysis of a halakhic text. You will also have to take care of the poor and the single parent and the latch-key child. You will have to hear people's problems and counsel them and find help for them. And that is a state of mind, a spiritual mission, and an art—all rolled into one. It will take time, but you will learn it. The Rav quotes R. Chaim as saying, "I am basically a cruel person and I am also stingy, but I worked on myself and turned my cruelty into kindness and miserliness into generosity." So, work on yourselves! Both you and your people will benefit.

The second thing you must learn is courage—the courage to resist and to stand alone.

You are entering a world that is crazy (from the French *ecrassé*—split or cracked), confronted by new problems even while still wrestling with stubborn old problems, full of paradoxes and antinomies and contradictions and absurdities—especially those thrown up by science and technology, such as the potential for humans to direct the future evolution of the species. You will have to consult your *Rebbeim* and older colleagues, and some day you may be called upon to make such fateful decisions. You will confront a Jewish world disappearing

at the margins, with an entrenched secularism that refuses to budge from old and tired formulas. You will be faced by young Jews who have suddenly become enamored of Eastern religions, spawning assorted forms of spurious spirituality. You are already in a Jewish community of sharp denominational divides where virulent anti-Orthodox sentiment has reached unparalleled proportions. You will have to work in an Orthodox community driven by internecine conflicts and burning animosity—and in our own part of the Orthodox community, a lack of dialogue, an unwillingness to treat those who differ with even a modicum of respect, a spiraling intolerance, a hardening of confrontational postures.

That is the kind of world you are entering—and *you will have to have the courage to change it!*

There will come a time or many times in your careers when you will have to make unpopular decisions—unpopular with your laymen, with your colleagues, with the media. But your conscience as men of Torah will allow you no other recourse. You may even, sometimes, have to risk your very livelihood because of principle. True, leadership means you must get your people to trust and follow you, but you must also have the courage to go out front, by yourselves, and show what you stand for. You may be reviled, you may be attacked. But you must develop the backbone to resist and withstand.

Remember that the courage to go it alone when necessary is the mark of authenticity. The playwright Brecht puts into the mouth of Galileo the following sentences: “Good philosophers... fly alone, like eagles, not in flocks like starlings. A single Arabian steed can outrun a hundred plow-horses.”

And centuries before him, a good—very good—philosopher named Maimonides or Rambam wrote to a student in a letter preserved to this day in the *Guide for the Perplexed*, “I’d rather please one intelligent man, even if it means displeasing ten thousand fools.”

Moreover the same Rambam codified it as a *halakhah* when he established this prerequisite for a *dayyan* or for a Rabbi and for any principled Jewish leader:

Learn from Moses, the teacher of all prophets: when the Holy One sent him to Egypt...tradition tells us that He said to Moses and Aaron, "[you must accept leadership] on condition that [you are prepared] that they will curse you and stone you."

So you must brave the imprecations and the insults and even the stones hurled at you. If you speak out on the important issues of the day which demand the voice of Torah authority, you will be criticized—no matter what you will say. And if you will say nothing, you will be criticized for that too. Even a deliberate decision to keep silent requires courage.

And third is an even greater challenge: the special code of conduct of a Rav. The first part of the same *halakhah* in the Rambam shows how a Jewish leader must comport himself:

One must not act with officiousness or vulgarity over the community, but with modesty and piety. A community official who intimidates the community excessively will be punished... And one must not treat people with contempt even if they are ignorant... Even if they be common and lowly, they still are the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; they are the hosts of the Lord whom He took out of Egypt with great strength and a mighty hand. So must he bear patiently the bother and the burden of the community as did Moses...

This is a difficult standard, but there is no excuse for violating it. You must feel a basic compassion for your people and treat them with dignity—even if you feel they are undeserving. Follow the example of Moses who, even if he didn't particularly *like* his Jews, he did *love* them...

So much for the "who."

* * *

The "what" of your callings as congregational rabbis or educators is one word: *Torah*. Without it, your sermons will consist of insipid strings of pious platitudes, your counseling will be bereft of the wisdom of the ages, and you will reduced to the level of pastoral entertainers or, at best, social workers in rabbinic garb. There is nothing wrong with social work, but a Rav must be a Rav before and above all else.

What gives you your authenticity as *Rabbanim*, as *Orthodox Rabbis*, is your study of and commitment to Torah—and that means all of Torah but primarily Halakhah.

Take it from someone with some experience in being busy: your communal and professional obligations, if you are sincere, will be overwhelming. They will make it seem forgivable to you to neglect your setting aside time to study Torah, and before long you will forget more and more. But if you keep up with your learning, your professional experience will become a source of edification; it will lead you to a form of Torah study of a different order. You will be learning with your usual halakhic acumen which you acquired under the tutelage of your distinguished *Rebbeim*, but the very act of living with people and their intimate problems—experiences far beyond those you were exposed to during your years at Yeshiva—will endow you with the ability to find in other branches of Torah marvelous secrets or dimensions you never knew existed. The Torah—both Halakhah and Aggadah, *Shas* and Midrash—will enrich your ability to deal with people, and will become, if you are wise and sensitive, a source not only of *derashot* but for the wisdom of life itself.

One of the greatest and still under-appreciated giants of Hasidic thought, R. Tzadok Ha-Kohen of Lublin, tells us that there are two traditions about the number of facets Torah possesses. According to one *midrash*, there are 49; another passage puts the number at 70 (Midrash Psalms 119 and Numbers Rabbah 13). How to explain the difference? R. Tzadok says that it depends upon the nature of the Torah studied, for there are two kinds, each with a different provenance. Torah which has 49 aspects stems from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. But the other famous tree in Gan Eden, the Tree of Life, has an even greater efflorescence; it has 70 faces or facets, as opposed to the 49 of the Tree of Knowledge.

Thus, the learning of Torah that issues from the Tree of Knowledge is more restricted: 49 aspects are the maximum one can attain by the pure exercise of intellect in the pursuit of knowledge. But when you study Torah that derives from the

Tree of Life—the fruit of a life of holiness in the here-and-now, experience in the hustle and bustle of the daily struggles of existence, there you will uncover and discover not only 49 but 70 aspects of Torah! And those extra 21 faces of Torah will be yours as you move from the Tree of Knowledge to the Tree of Life.

So—learn from your experience, and learn to find your guidance someplace in the 70 dimensions of Torah. Don't separate Torah from life. Each enriches and expands the other.

* * *

Finally, we come to the “where” of your future lives.

You are now, as I indicated earlier, in a state of transition—between school and career, yeshiva and the rabbinate, absorbing and giving, being led and leading. Some of you are prepared to go to the ends of the earth (one of you is here from Hong Kong and another from Turkey!) to teach Torah. But many of you, alas, feel that you must stay close to home, i.e., New York, or at most Israel—and even then, only Jerusalem; that everything in America west of the Hudson is the equivalent of beyond the mythical River Sambatyon, and everything north of Rockland County is the remote area of the Hills of Darkness. The Rav used to say that he never met anyone as parochial and provincial as the typical New Yorker. How right he was!

I can understand your reluctance at leaving the environs that have served you so well for so many years. Even a fetus, psychologists tell us, experiences trauma upon being expelled from its mother's womb. But it must happen. To you the Psalmist says, “I have today—*today!*—given birth to you” (Psalms 2:7). You must leave and must make your way to wherever there are Jews who need you, Jews who need to be taught and instructed and counseled and loved, and you must do so as authentic *benei Torah*, filled with *ahavat Yisrael*. Yes, despite phones and fax machines and e-mail and the Web, you will be distant from your *Rebbeim*, your colleagues, your family. But even a chick must be pushed out of the nest at some point. And you too must learn to fly—and to soar on the wings of learning and love, to heights

you never expected and to satisfactions you never imagined—along with frustrations and longing and loneliness.

Some of you will question what I say on the basis of a *beraita*. Let me bring it into the open, because it speaks to your and our situation.

R. Yosi b. Kisma said: I once was walking on my way when I was accosted by a man who greeted me, and I returned his greeting. He said to me, "Rabbi, what place are you from?" I said to him, "From a great city of scholars and scribes." He said to me, "Rabbi, would you be willing to live with us, in our place, and I will give you thousands upon thousands of golden dinarim and jewels and pearls?" I said to him, "Son, even if you gave me all the silver and gold in the world, and all the precious stones and pearls in the world, I would not live in any place other than a place of Torah." (*Avot* 6:9)

I can imagine that scene: the forward, aggressive shul president accosting the holy R. Yosi: "Hi, Rabbi, I heard your lecture last night. It was terrific! Listen, I'm the president of a shul and the head of the Search Committee for a rabbi. Come to our *shtelle* and I'll guarantee you an enormous salary, terrific benefits, retirement package, insurance, car, apartment, trip to Israel—the works..." The man must have been shocked at R. Yosi's response.

Apparently this *beraita* argues for your remaining in this, the largest Jewish community in the world, and not venturing to the hinterland where gold and silver rather than the discourses of "scholars and scribes" are the tokens of success.

And yet I tell you that go you must, if you are to be true to the mission towards which you have been educated. And that is so for two reasons.

First, the view of R. Yosi b. Kisma is not the only authentic voice of our tradition. There are other views, other than that of R. Yosi b. Kisma. Thus, Resh Lakesh, in the Talmud (*Sukkah* 20a), tells us that several times Torah was all but forgotten in *Eretz Yisrael*, and only the infusion of strength in Torah learning by *individuals*—such as Ezra, then Hillel, then R. Chiyya and his sons—who were willing to struggle in a new environment for the sake of Torah, leaving behind the secure walls of Babylonian *batei midrash*, was able to restore Palestinian Jewry to its former eminence.

Imagine if the elite of Polish Jewry—the Babylon of this historical epoch—would have gone on *aliyah* to Israel. How different the State of Israel would be and look now, 50 years after its founding!

Imagine if some of the greatest *gedolim* at the end of the 1800's and early years of this century had decided to come with ordinary Jews to the United States to introduce Torah learning here on a grander scale. R. Jacob Joseph would not have been a voice in the wilderness and it would not have taken 80-90 years for Orthodoxy to mature to where it feels it has a chance in this country.

Imagine if Dr. Revel and his early predecessors as well as Dr. Belkin and the Rav had decided to nestle in the warm and supportive environment of Eastern Europe—or the lush oil-fields of Oklahoma—and not ventured here to build Torah and our yeshiva. Where would we be today?

Imagine if R. Aaron Kotler had preferred to stay in Brooklyn, where he had all the comforts and support that an admiring Orthodoxy could give him, and not gone to Lakewood to build a great yeshiva.

So, R. Yosi b. Kisma offers a legitimate view of the role of the rabbi and his preference for the “great city of scholars and scribes,” but others offer competing visions. And I submit to you, freshly minted *musmakhim*, that your obligation lies first with the small, outlying communities where you may well struggle financially, be disappointed at the absence of intellectual and Torah companionship, nurse your dreams in loneliness. *But*—you will be working out your mistakes while making a supreme effort to do what Ezra and Hillel and R. Chiyya and his sons did for *Eretz Yisrael* Jewry in their generations. You will be building reputations at the same time that you will be participating in the renaissance of Torah even in the hinterlands. Remember that they too are Jews, they are as deserving of our attention and sacrifice as are the Jews of Boro Park or Spring Valley or Teaneck or the Upper West Side.

And then there is a second reason for urging you to be more adventurous geographically: perhaps R. Yosi b. Kisma didn't at all mean what most people assume he meant. Rather, he meant something totally different—something that I believe is of supreme importance to you as you leave the sacred precincts of the yeshiva.

Note the recurrence of the term "*makom*"—place, not town or city—in this whole passage. The discerning but materialistic and somewhat brash shul president asked the Rabbi, "what *place* are you from?" Every man and woman has a *makom*—a place or locus, spiritual-psychological rather than geographical, a rootedness that determines and fixes his character and his aspirations, his dreams and ambitions and orientations. Mr. President wanted this talented and famous rabbi not only to move to his town—that would have been quite appropriate—but to change his *makom*, his locus, to transform his very identity from a scholar of Torah to a clerical professional, from a perpetual student to an efficient administrator, from a spiritual to a social persona. Rabbi, you've got to be like one of us, one of the boys, "to live with us in our *makom*," to adjust to our self-identification, and then you can aspire to all the wealth and social prominence that goes with it. And the answer of R. Yosi b. Kisma is loud and clear: all the money and fame in the world will not move me to change my *makom* from one of Torah to one of vulgarity—rich, comfortable, well-meaning, kindly, benevolent vulgarity, but vulgarity nonetheless. I'm ready to go anyplace to teach Torah, but I am never going to transform my very identity from *ben Torah* to anything other than that. That is my *makom*—that and no other.

So perhaps, after all, R. Yosi b. Kisma was not speaking against moving to a smaller and remote community, but against transmuting his locus, his *makom*, his very identity.

Therefore, when we urge you to raise your eyes and look beyond the confines of neighborhood and city, to broaden your horizons and expand your scope, it is purely a matter of geography, not identity and spirituality. Indeed, wherever you go and

whatever you may eventually do professionally, inside the rabbinate or outside, your *makom* must always be here, firmly fixed within the walls of our *Beit Midrash* forever and ever, for this is the *makom* which nourished your souls and sharpened your wits and fostered your dreams, where dedicated and brilliant *Rebbeim* taught you how to learn, shepherded you through abstruse texts and educated you in the art of applying the light of Torah to illuminate the most dark and difficult of human situations. It is this *makom* to which each of you must always return to refresh your *neshamah* and reenergize your mind and reconfirm your commitment.

Do so, and you will find that your *makom* is very, very crowded. You will find there, with you, your *Rebbeim*, and our giants of yesteryear—the Rav and Dr. Belkin and Dr. Revel and “the Meitchiter Iluy” and all the *Gedolei Yisrael* who graced our yeshiva with their learning and their teaching. They will always be with you.

It is in this spirit that I conclude with one of the pearls of wisdom of the great Tanna, R. Meir:

R. Meir had a favorite saying: [God says:] Learn with all your heart and soul to know My ways and to be energetic when approaching the doors of My Torah. Keep My Torah in your heart, and may the fear of Heaven always be before your eyes—then I will be with you in every *makom*, for wherever your destiny takes you, your *makom* will always be in My precincts, the *makom* of Torah and fear of Heaven (*Berakhot* 17a).

Indeed, may He be with you for years without end, years of accomplishments for Torah, for yourselves and for your families, for all of us at Yeshiva and for all our people wherever they may be.

A PERFECT WORLD

March 10, 2002

AS WE WELCOME this week the new month of Nisan, the *chodesh ha-geulah* (the month of redemption), I recall the *gemara* in *Berakhot* (43b):

If one goes out in the month of Nisan, the beginning of spring, and sees the trees blossoming, he is required to utter a blessing: "Blessed is He who created a world with nothing amiss, and placed in it beautiful creatures and beautiful trees for the pleasure of humans."

In other words, a perfect world.

Really? In a world of suicide bombers and rampant international anti-Semitism, of drug culture and AIDS, of racism and genocide and, in the Jewish community, pugnacious ignorance, smug mediocrity, and progressive alienation from all that has been cherished and sanctified for almost 200 generations?

Yes, the world is perfect. Oh, I know quite well that that is a fiction, but a glorious fiction it is! I would call it a "sacred fiction," a statement that defies common sense but, if held and pursued single-mindedly, ultimately leads to uncommon truths. For there are fictions that, if you believe in them with all your heart and soul, even if your mind defies them, miraculously turn into truths, sacred truths. If you believe that this is a perfect world, and *she-lo chiser olamo kelum*, you will try to make it into a perfect world,

to repair its defects and sublimate its evil passions and make it better and nobler and holier. That, to my mind, is what *tikkun olam* really means. As we say in our *Aleinu* prayer, “*le-taken olam be-malchut Sha-dai*,” to repair the world based upon the ideals and model of the divine Kingdom.

So, I urge you, as newly minted rabbis, to engage in the heroic struggle to create absurd fictions and then turn them into sublime truths. Here are six such sacred fictions, especially for rabbis and advocates:

- Every Jew, no matter how estranged, no matter how far gone or assimilated, is redeemable if you try hard enough.
- Israel, with all its vigorous debates and invariable, volatile, and voluble divisiveness, its almost institutionalized agnosticism, is capable of once again becoming a *mamlekhet kohanim ve-goy kadosh*—a holy nation and kingdom of priests.
- Your *baalebatim* boards, parent councils, and education committees are all cooperative, well-meaning, tolerant, intelligent, peaceful, generous, and respectful ladies and gentlemen.
- America, the culture of which constitutes our pervasive environment, the very air we breathe—despite its vulgarity and shallowness—nevertheless contains enough that is precious, enough respect for the dignity of man created in the *tzelem Elokim*, enough political wisdom, enough human goodness, to encourage our religious devotion and to enable us to thrive as Jews who are *shomerei mitzvot u-benei Torah*. We can thrive as committed Jews in America.
- Your rabbinic colleagues are always helpful, respectful, without gall or envy or pettiness.
- As a Rav, you will undoubtedly devote many hours of the day to *limud Torah be-iyun*, not allowing the pesky details and bothersome frustrations to interfere with your learning.

All of you are in the spring of your careers in *avodat ha-kodesh*, and I am in my autumn years. So let me tell you that the fictions I’ve limned for you are indeed fictions, but in my over 50 years in various forms of *avodat ha-kodesh*, I’ve learned that these are noble fictions, usable ones, indispensable ones, sacred ones.

Pursued with vigor and intelligence, with both passion and sensitivity, they are not at all untrue, and they will morph into exciting, fulfilling realities—if not altogether, then enough to give you profound satisfaction and pride. *Barukh she-lo chiser be-olamo kelum.*

These six truths, induced by and developed from the noble dreams of sacred fiction, must be your goals, your sign-posts of success:

- You must never give up on any Jew, no matter how difficult it may be. You must risk everything to bring about such a vast change in the communal mood as to make the commitment to Torah the most logical, rational choice for *Kelal Yisrael*.
- Your loyalty to *Medinat Yisrael*, no matter whether you settle here or there, should be unconditional. Criticize it, if you will, but love it, support it. And every *musmakh*, indeed every graduate of our undergraduate schools as well, must at least consider *aliyah* seriously.
- You must always love your *baalebatim*, even if you don't particularly like them. They are your responsibility, like it or not. Moreover, those who are now your worst critics may eventually become your best friends.
- Don't give up on American Jewry because of American culture. This is where we live; this is where the action is. Moreover, American culture has penetrated almost every corner of the earth, especially including Israel, and to segregate from it and refuse to engage it means you are "copping out" of the great issues of our era, and that is tantamount to a soldier abandoning his station in the heat of battle. It is an act of cowardice toward your fellow Jews and treason to the mission Torah imposes upon us. Don't ever disguise it as piety, as "real frumkeit." The whole of the Jewish community are our comrades in arms, and we dare not betray their trust.
- Now, as to your colleagues, present and future. It is your duty, despite all the attacks on you, to foster peace and understanding amongst your fellow rabbis. More important:

the peace and unity of your congregation, your school, the larger community, the Jewish people, even the world—all this falls within the purview of your responsibility.

Consider the well-known passage in our daily *tefillot*: “Whoever studies *halakhot* (laws) every day is guaranteed a place in the World-to-Come” (*Megillah* 28b). This is immediately followed by the passage from *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* that “Scholars (of Torah) increase peace in the world” (*Berakhot* 64a).

I have two questions about each of these sources and about the compilers of the *siddur* who conjoined them: First, *talmidei chakhamim marbim shalom ba-olam* is factually questionable; I know of many cases where the exact opposite is true, where scholars foment strife—and I have the scars to prove it...

Second, if indeed it is important to learn a *halakhah* every day, why do we not do so immediately by studying a halakhic passage, instead of reciting the aggadic reference to *talmidei chakhamim marbim shalom ba-olam*?

The answer to both is that it is indeed a *mitzvah* to learn a *halakhah* every day, and the statement about *talmidei chakhamim marbim shalom ba-olam* is indeed a halakhic dictum. By this I mean that this statement is not a descriptive-aggadic one but is a normative-halakhic one; namely, it is halakhically required of scholars that they increase peace in the world! It is the preeminent *halakhah* one should reiterate daily.

Bear this in mind all during your careers. Rabbanim should be the initiators of peace, not the instigators of strife. *Talmidei chakhamim* should teach by example that mutual insults, disrespect, and belittlement should not necessarily accompany difference of opinion; that *chilukei de'ot* need not lead to *machloket*. This is not a matter of etiquette or decorum. It is Halakhah.

* * *

Since we are speaking of peace and unity, I feel compelled to refer to the *shalom bayit* of our beloved Yeshiva. I have already dwelled on this twice in public addresses—last June and again last December. I believe it bears repetition as we are on the verge of significant changes in the leadership of Yeshiva.

When the Torah describes the building of the *Mishkan*, the Tabernacle in the desert, it speaks of the different parts of the structure and its furnishings—the *mizbeach*, the *aron*, the *shulchan*, etc., in great detail. But the conclusion is very much to the point: “*Ve-hayah ha-Mishkan echad*,” “the Tabernacle shall be one”—unified and cohesive. All parts must meld together as one sanctuary.

Yeshiva is our contemporary *Mishkan*. It consists of many varied parts, quite distinguished—medicine and law, psychology and social work, Jewish education and Judaic studies, the undergraduate schools and, of course, RIETS—all of which must coordinate, each fulfilling its own distinct and immanent mission but all ultimately blending in the ultimate mission of our *Mishkan* as a whole: the perpetuation of the Jewish people and its classical culture via the ideal of *Torah u-Madda*, so that “*Ve-hayah ha-Mishkan echad*.”

YU and RIETS are legally distinct, and we must obey the laws of the State of New York. But spiritually and functionally we have, since the legal separation of RIETS, understood and intuited that “*Ve-hayah ha-Mishkan echad*.” For the last thirty years we have worked together, in consonance and mutual respect, without tension or contention, rift or conflict, for the benefit of both great institutions.

That peace, that unity, that sacred bond must never be allowed to fray. I know of no one who would consciously seek a rupture of that relationship, but the best of intentions misdirected can produce disastrous results. We must not permit anyone or anything to come between us. We may disagree about this or that—but only in respect and even love. No one has the right to turn Yeshiva into a dysfunctional family. Yeshiva University is our *guf*, our body. RIETS is our *neshamah*, our very soul. The university without RIETS is a lifeless body, a corpse, indistinguishable from a hundred other universities. RIETS without Yeshiva University is a spirit without a body, a mere ghost, insubstantial and ephemeral. Let no man tear asunder what three presidents and three administrations have kept united for almost a hundred years.

- Finally, turning back to our *musmakhim*, the sixth and last truth: Never sink into a passive intellectual mood whereby you progressively forget your learning and where your *limud ha-Torah* is barely adequate to prepare your elementary *shiurim* and lectures. It is told of the great *ga'on*, R. Shlomo Eger, that he was in a partnership with a businessman, also a great *talmid chakham*. A competitor had falsely accused them of fraud, and they were up most of the night mapping plans for their defense. Towards dawn, the partner came to the rabbi's room to share his thoughts, and found him deeply engrossed in his learning. "We are confronted with such a great *tzarah* and you still have the ability to learn Torah?" The rabbi answered, "Yes, true we face a great *tzarah*, but not learning Torah is a greater *tzarah*"...

With all this hortatory advice I am heaping upon you, let me caution you that it will not be easy. Just look at the depressing statistics about "burn-out" in the rabbinate, and the number of your older colleagues who are, or are trying to leave the rabbinate and education for other occupations.

I know that the job of a rabbi or educator is often a lonely one. You may find yourself in a community where there are very few people with whom you can converse as equals in background and knowledge and commitment. People will tend to look down upon you or up to you, depending on their own moral stature.

You will feel overworked, under-appreciated, and often very tired.

You will wonder if your words have any effect, if all your labors are for naught, if it was worth giving up other possible careers for the frustrations and heartache you may be suffering as rabbis or teachers.

So I am here to tell you: stop complaining!

First, not all other careers are paragons of pleasure and pure paradise. Every profession has its problems, its deficits, its frustrations. Excessive complaining reveals a kind of psychological

immaturity, a social provincialism. If you married well, your wife will very gently but wisely ask you, after a tantrum or two, "Well, dear, what do you want to be when you grow up?"

Second, if indeed the tendency to "burn-out" is more prevalent amongst rabbis than most other professions—and I believe it is—ask yourself: so what? If our halakhic commitments instruct us that when we recite the words of the *shema*, "*u-ve-khol nafshekha*," we be prepared for *kiddush Hashem* at all times, ready to be burned at the stake for our beliefs, then we must accept the decidedly less punitive martyrdom of frustration. Remember: better burn-out than burn...

We did not enter the rabbinate to make money, even though it is legitimate that we earn a decent living.

We did not become teachers because it is a way to get rich quick, even though we deserve adequate compensation.

We did not decide upon a career of *avodat Hashem* and *melekheth Hashem* because we aspire to a life of comfort.

We became rabbis and advocates because we wanted to remain intimately bound to Torah study in one way or another. We wanted to stem the tide of assimilation and Jewish illiteracy by putting our finger in the dike and slowing the rate of defection even if the floodwaters of cynicism and ersatz "Judaisms" swirl about us. We wanted to swim against the stream in order to reach the shore of creating a *dor de'ah*, a Jewishly educated generation.

We determined to lend every effort to stem the erosion of Jewish society, to moderate if not reverse the ubiquitous hedonism, the permissiveness, and the crass materialism that afflicts our people along with most other Americans.

We resolved to become religious leaders not despite the mediocrity of American-Jewish life, but because of it; because we felt that our years of learning armed us with an iron will to persevere in the face of all opposition; because our long hours in the *Beit Midrash* prepared us to be a fighting minority ready to suffer the consequences being outnumbered but not out-committed. We felt that our education in *Torah u-Madda* armed us uniquely with the ability to make Torah attractive;

to put a smile on the visage of Orthodox Judaism; to show that Torah and culture are not antagonistic, that piety is not parochial, and that Jewish learning takes a back seat to no discipline in its complexity and capaciousness, its majesty and grandeur, its holiness yet relevance.

Compared to all this, what is so troubling about a little more frustration than we think we deserve? How important in our lives should be the snubs of the *am ha-aratzim* and the frozen indifference of many of our fellow Jews? That, after all, is precisely our mission—to teach the ignorant, to arouse the indifferent, to melt the icy apathy, to stir the embers of love and passion and holiness in apparently dull hearts.

If you are tired of being the subject of idle conversation amongst your *baalebatim*, the targets of their unfair criticism, the occasional vicious rumor, take heart from the lesson of Moshe Rabbeinu, who worried that he would be accused by his *baalebatim* of putting his hand in the till and pocketing funds. He avoided that, but later *chashduhu mei-eishet ish*—and he didn't let it divert or dispirit or discourage him.

We live in dangerous but exciting times, and we expect of you to be the leaders of the Jewish community, to complete what my generation left uncompleted, to succeed where we failed, to be the latest link in the golden chain of our holy *mesorah* stretching from Moshe Rabbeinu to *Mashiach Tzidkeinu*.

Join the battle for Jewish creativity, for the Jewish future, armed with love: *ahavat Hashem*, *ahavat Yisrael*, and *ahavat ha-Torah*. And add to that *ahavat Eretz Yisrael u-Medinat Yisrael* and *ahavat ha-beriot*—a tall order, but a lovely one.

On this eve of *chodesh ha-geulah*, may you be *zokheh le-geulah chadashah*, and lead in the full-throated singing of a *shirah chadashah*, one of new lyrics fashioned out of your own loves and loyalties and your own particular experiences—but in the same tunes, the same chants, the same *niggun* of Gemara-learning that sustained you in your years in our *Beit Midrash*.

To that “music of the spheres” may all of us march on to fulfill our mission of *le-hagdil Torah u-le-ha'adirah*.

ELIJAH AS A MODEL FOR RABBIS

March 26, 2006

AS YOU ARE OFFICIALLY inducted in the rabbinate, which I consider the spiritual aristocracy of the Jewish people, I offer you both good news and bad news.

The good news is that you have earned the confidence of your *Rebbeim*; that you are worthy of *semikhat chakhamim*, that you are entitled to be *poskei halakhot* to all who enquire of you, and that you are expected to continue your learning for the rest of your lives. That holds true for all of you, no matter what career paths you choose.

I now address *rabbanim u-mechankhim* specifically: You will be entrusted with congregations and communities, students and schools. We are all Jews, so you know that Jews are not always easy and sweet and straightforward. Sometimes they can give you an abundance of grief. But bear in mind always that fundamentally they are good people. They are your spiritual charges. Be patient with them, even as your *Rebbeim* and your parents were patient with you.

Of course, you can't please everybody. I know of only one character in *Tanakh*—Ahashveirosh—who tried to do just that—*la'asot ke-retzon ish va-ish*—and he was considered by the Talmud a *melekh shoteh*, a foolish king. But in relating to your people generally, rely more on the use of love rather than fear. The

Rishonim always favored *ahavah* over *yir'ah*. Moreover, the *mishnah* (*Shab.* 14:4) held that *kol Yisrael benei melakhim*, all Jews and Jewesses are considered princes and princesses. *Treat them as such! Don't let them forget who they are and the stock they come from!*

And now for the bad news: You should know that American Jewry is at the brink of a vast, unmitigated disaster—a historic tragedy. A majority of American Jews intermarry; some 20% identify as Christians or other religions. So only committed Jews who have remained loyal to Torah and *Am Yisrael* have a realistic chance to survive. And even we—from semi-observant to Modern Orthodox to Litvishe *yeshivot* to the most isolated of Hasidic communities—all have our problems and attrition. None of us is perfect, and none of us has the right to boast or to be triumphalist.

In a few decades, you will face a Jewish world much different from the one I encountered when I was a beginner in the Rabbinate. You will confront novel and difficult *she'eilot*, and new challenges in a changing society and community.

What will be your responsibilities as *rabbanim*, *mechankhim*, and *manhigei kehillot*? How will you relate to those *neshamot* who are threatened with extinction as Jews? To those Jews who do not care for religion, who mock Torah, who disregard the sancta of Jewish life and are virtually pagans, committing mass spiritual suicide? To Jews who openly reject Torah Judaism, but are loyal to the Jewish people and the State of Israel?

Join me in pondering one of the most magnificent and puzzling chapters in all of *Tanakh*—that of the strange and complex prophet Elijah—in I Kings (chap. 19). For it contains invaluable lessons for you and all us—especially for you.

Our Prophet has just experienced an astonishing triumph. The wicked queen Jezebel had killed hundreds of the prophets of God, terrorized the people, and caused them to become worshippers of the idol Baal. Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal and, on Mt. Carmel—in today's Haifa—he prayed for miracles, which God provided, and so moved the thousands of Jews witnessing this confrontation, as he exposed the falsity of the

Baal worship. Whereupon the hundreds and thousands called out, in words we repeat at the conclusion of Yom Kippur—*"Hashem hu ha-Elokim,"* "the Lord is God." This enraged Jezebel, who vowed to kill Elijah. He thereupon flees from the Northern Kingdom to the Judean desert. Isolated, lonely, and hunted, he gives in to despair: *"Va-yishal et nafsho la-mut va-yomer, 'Rav atah Hashem, ki lo tov anokhi mei-avotai."* He wants to die, because he is "no better than my ancestors;" that is, he considers himself a failure.

An angel addresses him and tells him to take a 40-day journey to Mt. Horeb—another name for Mt. Sinai, where Moses gave the Torah to Israel. There, again like Moses, he enters a cave and utters his litany of anguish, awaiting God's word. He is not disappointed, as God says to him, *"Mah likha po, Eliyahu?"* "What are you doing here, Elijah?" The despondent prophet replies: "I have been zealous for the Lord the God of Hosts, for the Children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant; they have destroyed Your altars and have killed Your prophets with the sword, only I remaining—and they have sought me out to kill me," whereupon God tells Elijah to go to the mountain and stand before the Lord.

And behold, the Lord passes by him, accompanied by a great and powerful wind, mighty enough to break open mountains and shatter rocks; but God is not in the wind. An earthquake follows; but God is not in the earthquake. A fire follows; but God is not in the fire. And after the fire came a small, still voice. When Elijah hears this, he covers his face with his cape and stands at the entrance of the cave and he hears the Voice, saying *"Mah likha po Eliyahu?—*the same trenchant question, "What are you doing Elijah?" And the prophet offers the identical answer to God's repeated question *"Kano kineiti le-Hashem Elokei Tzevakot ki azvu veritkha Benei Yisrael; es mizbichotekha harasu ve-et niviekha hargu be-charev"*—"I have been zealous for the Lord the God of Hosts, for the Children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant; they have destroyed Your altars and have killed Your prophets with the sword, only I remaining—and they have sought me out to kill me."

We feel intuitively that this tale contains a powerful message. *But what is that message?* Why the repetition both by Elijah and God?—twice Elijah hears the divine query, “*Mah likha po Eliyahu?*” and twice the prophet offers the identical speech in which he blames his fellow Jews for disloyalty to God. What secret lies buried in this narrative? What does this angry and complex Prophet have to teach us?

Permit me to offer an analysis based in part on the insights of *midrashim*, *Zohar*, *Iggerot Ha-Rambam* and *Malbim*—for here is a metaphor for our times!

Elijah is saying two things. First, he is in misery and in despair. He laments: once I was a hero, the cynosure of multitudes, as thousands rallied around me and lionized me. Now I am a pathetic refugee, lonely, hungry, friendless, hunted like an animal, my zeal mocked, my loyalty to the one God ridiculed, and a bounty on my head! I want to die and get it over with. I am an utter failure.

So God has a fatherly talk to a hurting, depressed son. *What are you doing in a desert? You've gotten too used to adoring throngs as at Mt. Carmel. So you're running away from your woes by climbing into a cave. Leave the cave, Elijah, a cave is no place for a prophet. Instead, climb up to the top of the mountain where you can be seen and heard, even if you are disobeyed!*

What we learn from these few lines is that God does not dwell in noisy crowds—hurricanes and earthquakes and flames—but in the *kol demamah dakah*, the “still, small voice” in the hearts and minds of individuals. *Don't curl up in a cave. Mah likha po, Eliyahu?! Be among Jews, disobedient and fickle as they are! You are a Jewish prophet, a spokesman for the Almighty, not an actor playing to an admiring audience!*

The second part of the Elijah-God dialogue concerns the prophet's disappointment with and anger against his fellow Jews, the very ones who once cried out in full-throated glory, “*Hashem hu ha-Elokim*” and who now violate the covenant with God, destroy His altars, and persecute His prophets. In a word, Elijah is disgusted with them for their relapse into paganism.

God is now annoyed at the runaway prophet (very much as Jonah would be a generation thereafter; indeed, there is an opinion in the *midrash* that identifies Jonah as the son of Elijah!). So for a second time, He calls out to the Prophet Elijah, *Mah likha po, Eliyahu?! Do you understand me now? Don't damn all your fellow Jews; they are not a lost cause. Get going to preach to them! Help them! Teach them! Rebuke them – but love them!*

At which Elijah repeats his moody, whining complaint: it's their fault! Again, "*Kano kineiti le-Hashem Elokei Tzevakot ki azvu veritkha Benei Yisrael; es mizbichotekha harasu ve-et niviekha hargu be-charev.*"

Here we stumble across a lacuna in the Torah's record of the events, and tradition (*Tanna de-Bei Eliyahu Zuta*, ch. 5) fills it in both imaginatively and creatively. God rebukes and taunts Elijah:

So, "the Children of Israel have forsaken your covenant" – My covenant, Elijah, or *your* covenant? "They destroyed your altars" – My altars or *your* altars? "And they have sought me out to kill me" – But you are alive, are you not?... What Elijah should have said to the Holy One is: "Master of the World! They are Your children! They are the children of those whom you tested – the children of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob who carried out Your will in the world..." Instead of casting blame on Israel, he should have blamed the other nations.

In other words, the Almighty says to Elijah: *who are you to take it out on them? They did not violate your covenant nor did they bring down your altars or kill all the prophets. As for Me, I'll punish them when and as I see fit.*

The Zohar (I, 93a) adds a trenchant but beautiful insight. The very Prophet Elijah who defamed his fellow Israelites, testifying to their failure to adhere to the Covenant (*berit*), is now "condemned" to be present at every circumcision (the "sign" of the covenant – a *berit*) to the end of time, to declare and testify at every such celebration that he was all wrong, and indeed Jews do cherish and continue the covenant!

The Rambam (*Ma'amar Kiddush Hashem*) concludes the lesson taught by God to the recalcitrant prophet: *Lekh, shuv le-darkekha midbar Damesek*. Go, finish off your prophetic-diplomatic assign-

ments in Syria and appoint another prophet—Elisha—as your successor: *Your mission is essentially over! You gave up on your fellow Jews, so I give up on you. You didn't learn your lesson! Mah likha po Eliyahu?! Even great prophets have no right to abandon their fellow Jews. I shall therefore choose another prophet to carry out My mission.*

Fellow *Rabbanim*, we are sending you out on a noble and glorious mission that can be inspiring and fulfilling. You will meet some of the very finest Jews devoted to and practicing *Yiddishkeit*. Some, or many, will become your dear personal friends. But I remind you again: you will also encounter people who will prove tiring and trying, exhausting and hyper-critical (you and/or your *Rebbetzin* are either too *frum* or not *frum* enough...). But the experience of interacting with fellow Jews for the sake of Torah and *Am Yisrael* will always prove exciting!

Remember: they are a “holy people,” even if they do not know it. A Rav, like a prophet, has to be long-suffering and courageous, and if there are obstacles, take a deep breath and try again... Remember those precious four words: *Mah likha po, Eliyahu*—they are your challenge, and your reaction to them may color your entire career!

I remember my late colleague and dear friend, Rabbi Israel Miller, *ztz"l*, who told me that often when he felt upset and disgruntled and came home to spill out all his frustration and announce he's ready to quit, his wife Ruth would let him ventilate and then quietly say, “Okay, my dear, now tell me: what do you want to be when you grow up?”

Yes, Jews can be trying. (I know. I was a rabbi for 25 years, and in education at Yeshiva for 47 years.) But I emphasize again: underneath the occasional rough exterior and cynicism and disrespect, there beats an incomparable Jewish heart, an irrepressible *neshamah* that is infinitely precious, waiting to be redeemed. And that is your responsibility. Go—and redeem!

Learn from the mistakes of Elijah and from your own errors: never give up. Don't “burn out” too quickly. Guard against frustration, resentment, bitterness, feeling spent and depleted.

Don't be over-impressed with either adulation *or* criticism from the crowds. Indeed, do not be captivated by the dream of earth-shaking events, large audiences, world-wide P.R. Pay more attention to the *kol demamah dakah* in the heart and mind of each Jew you will encounter. Big crowds and instant fame are evanescent. The "still, small voice" is constant and enduring—and more deserving of your attention as spiritual leaders.

Never yield to the temptation to turn your back on them.

Never abandon a single Jew: "They are Your children. They are the children of those whom You tested—the children of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob who carried out Your will in the world." Listen carefully to that still, small inner voice—*kol demamah dakah*—speaking to you clearly: *Mah likha po, Eliyahu?* Listen—and you will succeed.

It is told of the Baal Shem Tov that a *chasid* came to see him. The man was distraught and obviously in mental anguish. He cried to the Baal Shem: My son has gone off the path of *Yiddishkeit*. He has rebelled against his parents and his God. What shall I do? The Baal Shem Tov answered in three words—three words that are most worthy of remembering and applying in any life-situation and interpersonal crisis: *Love him more!...*

Our Yeshiva stands behind you: You may occasionally feel lonely, but you will never be alone. We are proud of you. And you should be proud of us—your *Rebbeim*, your colleagues, and those many who work for you behind the scenes.

May your careers in *avodat ha-kodesh* be fulfilling. Dream great dreams. Do great things. Be ambitious *le-sheim Shamayim*, for God's sake. Bring the *geulah* step by step—slowly but surely.

We will never forget you. You must never forget us: *shimkha lo shakhahnu—na al tishkakhenu*.

And may the *Ribbono Shel Olam* guide and guard you, your families and pupils and congregants, *mei-atah ve-ad olam*, from now and forever more.



ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן

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