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ADDRESS AT YESHIVA UNIVERSITY
CENTENNIAL HANUKKAH DINNER

I know of no better way to express our collective gratitude at reaching the venerable age of 100, or my individual thanksgiving for ten years in office, than by reciting with you the traditional blessing, "She'hecheyanu ve'kiymanu ve'higianu la-zeman ha-zeh." Blessed is God who has granted us life, let us exist, and enabled us to reach this season.

The three critical verbs in this ancient blessing form a meaningful framework for our most cherished sentiments this day. Let us look at them, one by one, in reverse order.

Ve'higianu: "He has enabled us to reach this day." There were several years during this past decade when we never thought we would reach this day, when our future was in doubt. There were those who counseled us to close our doors and go out of business. Others advised us to declare insolvency even though we would live under a cloud for ever after. But those of stouter hearts and greater vision and courage prevailed -- and we persevered and fought and labored with unfaltering spirit as virtually every member of our Boards rallied around our magnificent lay leadership. And so -- we have "reached this day" -- with dignity and honor.

In thanking the Almighty, I thank too the instruments of His salvation: the distinguished leaders of our Boards whose names I

refrain from mentioning both out of respect for their humility and out of fear of inadvertently omitting other worthies; our many friends who gave sacrificially of both their time and their substance; my colleagues, whose loyalty and hard work bordered on the unbelievable; all of you who are with us to celebrate and who so richly deserve to join us in our joy because you were with us in our times of woe and worry.

Ve'Kiymanu. God let us exist us to this day. This verb has always bothered me. Surely, if she'he'chayanu and ve'higianu -- if He granted us life and enabled us to reach this day -- then certainly He granted us existence!

I am reminded of the Woody Allen character who wrote a scholarly paper, entitled, "Non-Existence: What To Do If It Strikes You Suddenly."

The word kiyyum in this context has, I believe, a halakhic or legal connotation. In Jewish law there is a concept of kiyyum shetarot, the authentication of legal documents by verifying the signatures of the witnesses. Hence, ve'kiymanu means: He has authenticated us; He has substantiated the rightness and truth of our vision; He has permitted us to reach this day with our ideals untarnished, our mission uncompromised, our souls unsullied, our faith undefiled.

Whatever other tasks I may have, and they are many, my most important responsibility is that of guarding the spirit, the soul, the ideals of Yeshiva University. And I have had two

great sources of guidance and inspiration in this respect.

The first was my beloved teacher and revered mentor, the late Dr. Samuel Belkin, who presided over this institution for 33 years, during its period of greatest expansion and raised it from a small college to a major university. He taught me not only the synthesis of the sacred and the secular -- to strive to combine, as he did, the role of a brilliant Rosh Yeshiva and that of a learned professor of Greek -- but also to aspire to bridge the world of scholarship and literature and research with that of practical affairs and leadership and building. The insignia of his influence is imprinted in every brick, in every school, in every program at Yeshiva University. We shall never forget him.

The second source for me was and remains my eminent teacher, one of the greatest luminaries of the last several generations in Talmud and Jewish Thought, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. "The Rav," or Master as he is known both affectionately and reverently, has by the sheer force of his genius dominated and directed the destiny of Judaism for the past 45 years. His brilliance, his spiritual leadership, his intellectual honesty, his mind-boggling mastery of Jewish and secular learning have been indelibly stamped into the very soul and spirit of Yeshiva. We pray for his health in this time of his frailty.

These two giants are the shnei edim keshirim, the two trustworthy witnesses, whose signatures validate the essence and mission of Yeshiva as first enunciated by Dr. Bernard Revel. We who are here to celebrate this Centennial praise God for

ve'kiymanu -- for enabling us to verify those signatures, to authenticate that document of destiny, to vindicate our most cherished ideals and beliefs. Torah U'madda -- the integration of Torah in its uncompromised sanctity with the unfettered pursuit of worldly wisdom -- remains and will remain the leitmotif of Yeshiva University against the forces of both skepticism and parochialism, of both cynicism and extremism. Ve'kiymanu means that we shall never forsake our confidence in the compatibility of Judaism and worldly learning, of commitment and tolerance, of love of our people and love of all people. It is this to which our faculties and our students, our alumni and our Board leaders, are dedicated with all their hearts and souls.

Finally, to end at the beginning: she'hecheyanu. He has enabled us to live to see this day, our one hundredth birthday.

Let this be said at once: We may be 100 -- but not 100 years old! To be "old" means to be incapable of renewal, to despair of rejuvenation. That does not describe Yeshiva University.

The Jewish tradition teaches us to respect the elderly and to strive to live long -- but not to be old. Nature and Scripture, life and law, people and precepts must always fill us with wonder and awe and a sense of youthful adventure. A great Jewish scholar said of Hasidism that it rejuvenated us by a thousand years; it added a new prohibition: "Thou shalt not be old."

In the physical world, youth always recedes and age is

inevitable. In the realm of the spirit, youth and age are fluid; they constantly interpenetrate. The ancient alchemists were right when they sought that which would restore man's youth to him. They were wrong in looking for it in the form of an elixir that would renew his physical stamina and his procreative ability. The real fountain of youth is in the heart, not in the glands. It is a question of attitude, not elixir.

I assure you that Yeshiva University is as young or younger than it ever was. Whether in the Bet Midrash or the laboratories, in the clinics or the hospitals, the moot court or the seminars, the lecture halls or the computer rooms, the libraries or the museum -- we are filled with a renewed sense of the excitement of learning, the zeal for service, the capacity to dream new dreams and strive to attain the unattainable.

Yeshiva may have reached the age of 100, but our vigor is undiminished. Arthritis hits the joints, not the mind; cholesterol clogs the arteries, not the spirit. Walk into any classroom -- and the aches and pains will disappear, because in front of you you will find inquiring minds who have not yet learned all the things that cannot be done. You will find the exuberance of young men and women who are not convinced that cancer or AIDS are invincible or that schizophrenia is incurable; students of the law who are not as sure as their elders that law and justice have nothing in common; young people who, in an age of rising material expectations and widespread corruption, study for a career in social work or community leadership or the

rabbinate or education where ideals and spiritual satisfaction count more than material awards or comforts; young men and women with bright eyes and facile minds and enthusiastic hearts and fire in their bellies who are determined to revolutionize the Jewish community by slaying the dragon of ignorance, and restoring the lustre of the crown of Torah, and rescuing the sacred tradition from the swamps of sloth and cynicism, and giving confidence and pride to their fellow Jews instead of the weakness and fawning on which assimilation feeds, and recreating American Jewry as a Kehillah Kedoshah, a "sacred community."

That is the youthful ambition you will find at Yeshiva. It is too precious to allow it to atrophy. You and I both need it if we are to stay young, in touch with the quickening currents of life itself. Rally around them, encourage them, support them -- and you will draw from them the vital juices of courage and inspiration; it will freshen your blood and strengthen your spine and make your heart skip a beat as you join your experience to their adventure, your hopes to their ambitions, your means to their ends.

Just as we faced the challenge of survival and survived, so now we face the challenge of excellence and renewal -- and we shall excel and be renewed. With your help, Yeshiva University will become what Yeshiva University can become.

We are alive! Thank God she'hecheyanu la-zeman ha-zeh!

Let me conclude with a story of one of those students -- a

true story, one that reminds us that Yeshiva is not only a powerhouse of learning and research and service but also a family where the human element is ever present.

In March, 1946, an 18 year old freshman at Yeshiva College was called into the office of the Dean of Men, the late Mr. Samuel Sar. The boy was perplexed and just a bit nervous. Dean Sar told him, "I know your family is having financial difficulty, so go into the next room, choose a suit from the racks, and exit by the other door. No one, not even I, will see or know what you take. Take it home and enjoy a new suit for Pesach."

The boy broke down and cried. He refused the gift -- he had a family tradition of independence -- and embraced Dean Sar and said he would never forget this offer of generosity and human compassion by Yeshiva.

That young man, the son of an alumnus who attended the original Etz Hayyim Yeshivah on the lower East Side in the early years of the century, and who is here with us today, did not take the suit for Passover as did many others; but he did take, as did all others, an incomparable education, a way of life, a love of learning, a commitment to Jewry and to America, a readiness to live a life of service.

To all those who made that possible in the past, to all of you who are making it possible now and will make it possible in the future for other students and scholars, that young boy stands before you now, forty years later, and says: "Thank you -- and God bless you!"