

Address by

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at the

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I am overwhelmed by the extravagant introduction by the officers of our University Board of Trustees. The praise has been so extravagant, the encomia so dazzling, the presentation so persuasive, that I thank you for enabling me to draw inspiration -- from myself... But, don't worry about my getting a swelled head as a result, because I always recall something that happened just about 25 years ago. I was elected in August 1976 and in September, after school, started I decided to mingle with the students. So, I proceeded to have lunch in the cafeteria. Now, in the cafeteria in those days there were three price levels, the lowest for students, then faculty, then outsiders. I took my tray, placed my lunch on it, and presented myself to the cashier. She looked at me and said, "You're not a student, are you?" I said, "No." "Are you member of the faculty?" I said, "No." "Oh, then you're an outsider." I said, "No." At which she loudly exclaimed, "So you're a nobody."

It would be both foolish and arrogant of me to accept all the credit for these achievements. The support of countless individuals, working together, deserves credit for our improved status: cooperative governing boards, understanding faculties, hard working administrators, sophisticated and successful Investment Committee people, diligent fundraisers and many, many others. As for my own role, I am -- to you use a Twelfth Century metaphor -- a dwarf standing on the shoulders of giants, namely, my distinguished predecessors, Dr. Bernard Revel and Dr. Samuel Belkin *zikhronam liverakha*, whose immense contributions to Yeshiva University, to Jewish education, to general higher education, to the scientific and medical communities, to the law community and especially to the Torah community -- indeed, to all of society--should never be forgotten.

In thanking them and all of you for your many expressions of kindness, I welcome you to this happy Annual Hanukkah Dinner. In so doing, permit me to mention that Yeshiva placed an ad in *The New York Times* concerning the Hanukkah Dinner. I will read to you one significant sentence. Please listen carefully: "We know of no better manifestation of devotion by the descendants of the People of the Book to their traditions, culture, learning, and education than to join the endeavor to make... Yeshiva... a great success." I endorse this sentiment, of course, and the reason that most or all of you have missed it is that the ad appeared in the Times on November 8 -- 1928... The more things change, as the French saying goes, the more they remain the same.

The guiding motif, the mission, the essence of Yeshiva University is Torah Umadda: "Torah" refers to the entirety of the sacred Jewish tradition; the prefix "U" means "and"; "Madda" refers to general learning, culture, worldly knowledge. At Yeshiva University, that is our reigning philosophy. It implies the symbiosis, the working together of, on the one side, Torah, beginning with the sublime verses of Genesis, and all the way through the intellectual depths and the moral heights of the Talmud, and, on the other side, Madda -- the vast panorama of worldly wisdom in its creativity and constructiveness from medicine, to law, to business, to social work, to psychology, to literary studies, to history. We are resolved to keep true to our venerable tradition and at the same time to experience the best of modernity. It is a dynamic, creative, brave, and noble experiment.

The beauty of Yeshiva, the source of its uniqueness, lies in its planned and deliberate diversity. We are both Yeshiva and University, both Torah and Madda. And the encounter of one with the other is what sends off sparks -- dynamic, creative, fiery sparks, sparks that illuminate and enlighten. Each of these, Torah and Madda, helps the other find within its own resources that which makes it enduring and desirable. Torah helps modern society rediscover its own roots in faith (the inalienable rights granted to us by our Creator); the dignity of human beings (the concept of *Tzelem Elohim*, the image of God); modesty, as respect for the human body; love of family; concern for the disadvantaged and the oppressed, for the widow and the orphan and the poor. And Madda bids people of Torah discover and rediscover within its own resources such themes as democracy, majority rule (*acharai rabbim le'hatot*), tolerance, the value of the individual, openness, the brotherhood of all human beings -- in the words of the prophet *Halo av echad le'kulamu*, "Have we not all one Father?" So that Torah Umadda reveals the imponderable depths of both great and vibrant cultures which can reinforce each other.

To appreciate Torah Umadda, try playing a mental game. Imagine if the Moslem world had done in their communities what we are doing on a large scale in ours. If at least some significant number of Imams and Mullahs of the millions of Moslems in the world would have condemned Bin Laden, and said that all terrorism, all violence without discrimination, is despicable. And if the *midrassas*, the religious schools in the Moslem world, would teach brotherhood and friendship -- we would have Moslems who remain true to Islam, specifically to those parts of Islam which are consistent with the enlightened principles of the modern world such as peace, tolerance, and democracy. There would have been no large scale backing for the likes of Bin Laden, no teaching of hate, no sending of children to commit suicide as a way of murdering others. Maybe if they had the equivalent of Torah Umadda, Islamic style, their young people would be like the young women and the young men who stand guard over the remains of victims of all religions, giving companionship to the dead, instead of murdering in the name of Allah. And we would not have experienced what happened last night in Jerusalem when the suicide attacks occurred. There are at least four Yeshiva University students in this latest outrage who are victims -- one quite seriously, the others a bit less seriously. I know I speak for all of you when I pray for their health and their recovery, as well as the recovery of all those many who were injured.

I know that Torah Umadda is not, or not yet, the ideology of the majority of our people. There are those whose links to Torah are weak, questioning, attenuated. And there are those whose fear of modernity pushes them into a sense of isolation, of excluding others who are not of the same outlook, turning their backs on the wide worlds of science and culture. But I urge you not to be impressed by numbers, and not to be depressed by minority status. At the very beginning of our history, inscribed in the very birth certificate of the people of Israel, the Torah tells us that the Almighty proclaimed quite clearly, *Ki lo me'rubkhem mi-kol ha'amim chashak Hashem ba-khem va-yivchar bakhem, ki atem ha-me'at mikol ha-amim*, "Not because you are so numerous did God choose you, because you are the fewest of all people." And in the prophetic era, Jewish pagans far outnumbered those few Jews who stayed loyal to one God. But in the long sweep of

history, who emerged victorious? It was the minority.

In our Hanukkah prayers which we will shall recite in about a week or so, we praise God who *masarta gibborim be'yad chalashim ve'rabim be'yad me'atim*, "You delivered the mighty in the hands of the weak, and the many in the hands of the few." The Maccabean revolution was a minority phenomenon, and yet it proved victorious. In the words of the prophet Zechariah, *Lo be'chayil, ve'lo be'koach ki im be'ruchi, amar Hashem Tzeva'ot*, "not by might and not by strength, but by My spirit said the Lord of hosts." If we have spirit, the numbers won't count.

So it is with Torah Umadda: we Jews are a minority in this country and certainly in the world; fully traditional Jews are a minority amongst Jews; Torah Umadda people are apparently a minority among them. But -- so what? Our durability, our strength, our influence far exceeds mere numbers. We shall succeed and are succeeding whether our numbers be many or few, as long as our vision is grand and large.

Does it mean that we have solved all our problems? No, it certainly does not. There are many challenges ahead of us. But I know that we are going to rise to the occasion and achieve our goals. Do you remember the old ad, "You don't have to be Jewish to love Levy's rye bread?" Well, you don't have to be Orthodox and you don't have to be observant, you don't even have to be Jewish, to appreciate the extraordinary value of this valiant, courageous magnificent cultural triumph of forging an encounter between two great and historic and vibrant cultures. Anthropologically, Torah Umadda is an enterprise that is gallant and heroic, an effort of historic dimensions. I am proud of that, and I am proud of Yeshiva. It is an honor to be a part of it and I hope you feel the same.

That is our legacy to the future. Keeping Torah Umadda whole and in balance is critical to our success. So we must never, never permit the undermining of that delicate balance that Yeshiva University has created. We are one and we must remain one, one institution encompassing the very best of two great civilizations cultures and traditions. What Yeshiva has joined let no man tear asunder.

It has not been easy to steer Yeshiva on a straight line between the various forces that sought to divert it from its classical position. We have been criticized from within and from without, by Right and by Left, not always with the greatest friendship or pleasantness. When I was invested, installed, twenty-five years ago, the then Commissioner of Education of New York, Dr. Nyquist, invited me to join the fraternity of college presidents and said, "From now on you will sleep like a baby -- sleep an hour, cry an hour. Sleep an hour, cry an hour." Unfortunately, he was right.

Juggling while walking on a tight rope has not been part of my formal education, and learning on the job has been far from easy. But I bear the stigmata, the wounds, with love. It was all worth it. In this respect, I think back to the words of one of my great heroes, Abraham Lincoln, who said, "I may not have made as great a president as some other man, but I believe I have kept these discordant elements together as well as anyone could."

My investiture in November of 1976 was held outdoors on our Main Campus. It was a raw day, the weather was most inclement, a damp chill was in the air, clouds were threatening a downpour, in a word – it was depressing. Suddenly, the sun came out and changed the whole atmosphere. Dr. Israel Miller, then senior vice president, was in the middle of speaking and he stopped and commented, “This is a good omen for the new president and administration.” Israel, wherever you are, you were right! I have had plenty of clouds, often felt chilled, exposed to much bad weather, suffered many raw situations, but ultimately the sun came out. And I thank God for it.

Permit me to be personal. I consider myself privileged. I spent twenty-five years in the rabbinate and twenty-five years as president of Yeshiva University and they were the happiest years of my life. For me, happiness means that whatever I do in the course of my work, no matter how trivial or painful or rushed or simple or aggravating, is intimately connected with my fundamental values and principles; there is a direct link between my work and my ideals, between my present activities and my ultimate commitment and concerns. And there is no greater happiness than that, because it means life somehow has a sense of unity and cohesiveness.

I am often asked, “What do you plan to do when you leave the presidency for the chancellorship?” Some people have told me, “Well it is a great opportunity for you to relax, to visit old friends, just let things happen.” I hope I will be wise enough never to exercise that option. Allow me to explain what I do not plan to do by way of a gut vort by the great Kotzker Rebbe who said, “I have met many people who were long dead and did not realize it.” So, as long as the good Lord gives me life, and the ability to use my head, I do not plan to die before I die.

Do you really want to know what I plan to do? As chancellor, I want always to be helpful to Yeshiva University, cooperating but never interfering with my successor. I want to further my education, to fill in the gaps that have occurred over the course of my life. I want to go back to fundamental, consistent, and deep study of Talmud. I’d like to learn Latin or Greek, the better to understand English, a language I love. I’d like to go over in detail and in depth the Federalist Papers which will tell me more about America, the country I love. I want to catch up with contemporary science, get back to the literary classics that I missed in my education. I want to spend more time in Israel, especially Jerusalem, the city that I love. I want to spend time with my children and grandchildren who are here -- grandchildren whom I so love, playing with the little ones, studying with those in school, and receiving from them wisdom and instruction in the art of life when they have graduated from college. I am sure they will have much to offer me... Above all I want, now and then, to be able to walk in the snow in Central Park together with my dear Mindy without feeling guilty that I am being derelict in my duty to Yeshiva.

At the end of World War Two when General MacArthur resigned, forced out by President Truman, he quoted an old army song that said, “Old soldiers never die, they just fade away.” I paraphrase that for academic institutions: “old presidents never die, they just lose their faculties.” I hope I do neither of them for a long time to come.

Let me repeat a paragraph from my investiture address in 1976: "Maybe this isn't the best time, but it is the only time we have. And though society seems to be spinning, and institutions tumbling, and the world seems to have become unstuck, and university presidents are reeling, nevertheless I shall do the only human and honorable thing; I shall try, I shall persevere and, with the help of God, we shall together prevail. We can, because we must." I still abide by those sentiments.

Yeshiva University is now at the heights of its illustrious history, financially, academically, demographically, in prestige. It is in a better position than ever before, from the size of its endowment, to its six years record of recognition as amongst the greatest universities in the land. From undergraduate honors programs that have changed the quality of the intellectual level of our school, to distinguished graduate and professional schools, to its outstanding affiliate RIETS, it stands taller and more confident than ever before. We must not falter, not even to catch our breath, but must march onward and upwards steadily.

I hope to march with you as chancellor, together with our new president, and I pray that all of you will march with all of us to a brilliant, sun-drenched destiny that beckons; to a future when terror will be banished and ignorance vanquished; when every child will be able to look forward to the challenges of new knowledge in safety, not to die and not to kill; when the elderly will share their accumulated wisdom with us in dignity and respect; when the clang and clash of the engines of war will be replaced by the sweet lullabies of mothers raising children to love and not to hate; when science will succeed in further lengthening life--and philosophers, if they can, will teach us how to fill those longer years with meaning and not with incessant boredom; when the masters of Torah will open up the ineffable treasures of our faith to *all* Israel and then all mankind; when, as the Torah promises *Ve'natati shalom ba-arets u'shekhavtem ve'ein macharid. ve'cherev lo taavor be'artzeckhem*, "I will establish peace in the world and you will go to bed without being afraid of the terrors of night, and the sword shall never pass through your land,"; when, as Isaiah prophesied, *Ki malei ha'arets deiah et Hashem ka-mayim la'yam mekhasim*, "that knowledge of the Lord will fill the world as the water covers the sea."

And finally, in the words of the same prophet, *Ko amar Hashem, shimru mishpat ve'asutzedaka ki kerovah yeshuati la-vo ve'tzidkati le'higalot*, "Maintain justice, do what is right, for My help is sure to come soon, and My righteousness shall be revealed for all mankind."