

"Keep Looking"

a message from the President

As our undergraduate student body begins the second semester of the year 5760/1999-2000, it is a pleasure to greet you with what I hope is some sound advice. This advice is encapsulated in the two words of the title of this article. Let me explain.

One of the great luminaries of pre-World War II Lithuania, R. Hayyim Shmulevitz, once told his students of his youthful days when he learned in the Yeshiva of Grodno. For a brief vacation, he went to visit the yeshiva of Navahrdok, headed by his uncle, R. Abraham Yoffen. In the *Bet Midrash*, he asked his uncle, "who is the best student in this yeshiva?" His uncle pointed to one young man engrossed in his studies and said, "he is the most profound of all." Then he pointed to another, also bent over his tome of the Talmud, and said, "he is the most industrious--the greatest *masmid*, of all." And so he identified several of the most prominent *bachurim*, praising each for his special qualities--such as piety, range of knowledge, etc. But the nephew pressed on, saying, "yes, but who is *the best* of all?" Whereupon R. Yoffen pointed to one young man in the corner of the room. "But if so, why didn't you mention him amongst all those you singled out?" The uncle answered: "you're right, but his qualities overshadow all the others, because he is the *mevakesh*, the 'searcher' of the student body." In the course of the years, this "searcher," who never ceased to search for God, for the truth of Torah, was none other than R. Yaakov Kaniefsky, one of the dominant *gedolim* of our times in Israel, known as "the Steipler."

This quality of restlessness--intellectual, spiritual, psychological--is the key to great achievement. Those who train themselves to sacrifice rest and leisure to approach the truth--in any area, any discipline--while those who ask no in order to keep up the endless search, to keep looking, will more likely than not succeed in their aspirations. Those who are too lazy to ask questions, along with those who presume to have all the answers, will delude themselves in their complacency and probably wallow in mediocrity. Especially with regard to life's most ambitious enterprise, the search for truth--in any area, in any discipline, but especially in the quest for the truth of Torah--is it imperative to intensify the search, to keep looking. (A recent ad for Lexus reads, appropriately, "I pursue, therefore I am" ...) A wise Hasidic Rebbe explained why the term "search"--*bakashat ha-emet*--is used for truth and is generally not used for other virtues: because truth tends to be hidden.

As you return to your books and lectures, teachers and classes, bear that in mind. Ask, probe, search, test, explore, look. Never be satisfied with superficial answers. And when you think you've reached your goal--keep looking a bit more until you've covered all that you can. Search is more important even than research...

May all of you enjoy a banner semester in all respects. And--keep looking!

NORMAN LAMM