

"THE RAV"

INTRODUCTION TO <sup>the</sup> THE COMMENTATOR VOLUME ON THE RAV

"Is not My word like a fire?, says the Lord; and like a hammer that breaks the rock into pieces?"

The divine word, says Jeremiah, is layered or multi-dimensional. Like the many splinters of a rock split by a hammer, so the divine message lends itself to manifold situations and interpretations.

Torah, like its Giver, is capable of many explications and applications. The same holds true for teachers of Torah: they are not monochromatic, and their teachings, like Torah itself are multivalent; they can be understood at many levels, reveal many secret aspects of the Torah, and throw light on the most obscure passages.

Such a person was our great teacher, the Rav, Rabbi Joseph B. Solovietchik, of blessed memory. <sup>into</sup> His ~~In the sixty or so essays in this volume, they~~ give us a glimpse of the complexity of his personality as well as the universality of his legacy as perceived by his students. His genius, his probing intellect, his unassailable loyalty to the God of Israel, his incredible mastery of Halakha and Aggada, and the broad sweep of his knowledge of so many other disciplines - - all made him resistant to easy classifications. He was a man who could never be bored and, equally, could never be boring. He was the Teacher par excellence, and we were honored to be allowed into his class.

His complexity and coruscant creativity were such that <sup>an "official"</sup> he rarely repeated interpretations of a text when he came to it at a later date. Thus, when I was a student of his, we learned the tractate *Shabbat*. His *sheurim* were, of course, masterful. Several years later, I heard that he had given *sheurim* on the same tractate. I managed to obtain the notes of some of his very good students - - and there was hardly any relation between the interpretations he gave when I was in his class and the new ones! He simply approached the material with a fresh mind, and exercised those areas of his creative brain to yield insights that were new and different from what he had offered previously.

Moreover, the range of his intellectual interest was extremely broad. It was not unusual to sit in a *sheur* or a *yahrzeit* lecture in which he descended into the depths - - or perhaps ascended to the heights - - of analysis of a Talmudic text and the R<sup>a</sup>shonim on the entire *Sugya*, and shortly thereafter segue almost imperceptibly into citations from Augustine or Kant or non-Aristotlean logic.

All this time, he also exercised leadership on behalf of Modern Orthodoxy (via the RCA) and the entire people of Israel. His personality was enhanced by a sense of humor which was always relevant, always insightful, always wise.

His major interest, of course, lay in his Torah studies. He was an inexhaustible supply of *sheurim* on a vast variety of topics. This was his life, and from this he drew his life's meaning (s).

Both the catholicity and the variety of his interests, are mirrored in the <sup>as well as writings</sup> approximately 60 contributions ~~to this volume~~ by a variety of people, mostly his students, all of which are testament to the precious "pieces" or sparks hammered from the rock of his intellect.

The Rav was not a one-issue person. In addition to his immortal Torah contributions, the very variety of his life and legacy include some of the following: Religious Zionism, advanced academic studies, his support for Torah education for women, etc. His greatness will survive even the attempts of those whose adulation would have him confined solely to his role as a Rosh Ha Yeshiva, and who ignore all else. But the Rav cannot be forced into the *mitat sodom*. <sup>Individual students</sup>

~~Readers of this volume will appreciate that each contributor knows only one or two or three of the many and varied "sparks" of his magisterial mind, and that together they confirm that narrowness was inimical to his personality.~~ <sup>may</sup>

~~The essays appearing in this volume - - some that have already appeared in print and some that are new- - testify to his charismatic personality and to the indelible impression it made upon those who were lucky enough to be his students, as well as those who, even though they were not "official" students of the Rav, poured over his *chiddushim* and adored his profound essays - - many of which have already appeared in print and many more that await publication.~~ <sup>Some of his students have written several significant volumes both in Jewish law (Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's many volumes is prominent among them) and in Jewish thought</sup>

Finally, I congratulate the editors of *Commentator* for their initiative in conceiving and executing this project as a tribute to the memory of our illustrious *Rebbe*.

*Yehei zikhro barukh*