

[Note: In 1956, the Rav ZT”L presented a talk to the Rabbinic alumni of RIETS where he spoke of his attachment and commitment to the Yeshiva and its critically important mission in spreading and ensuring the survival of Torah and Judaism in America. He compared the Yeshiva to other Orthodox institutions. Below is a summary of the latter part of his remarks.]

The Rav emphasized forging a unique, individual path in Torah study. He stood on the shoulders of his father and grandfather, Rav Moshe Soloveichik ZT”L and Rav Chaim Soloveichik ZT”L, and imbibed their Torah teachings. They assisted him in forming his method of study (the Rav said that he considered his father to be his Rebbe even though he did not study all of Shas with him because he gave the Rav his initial direction in Torah study). Yet, he developed his own unique method of study, different from theirs. The Rav was not fond of imitation. He was annoyed when he heard his students using terms, almost by rote, like “Gavra”, “Cheftza”, “2 Dinim” etc., what we today refer to as “Brisker” terminology. When it comes to Torah, imitation is not sufficient. One must forge their own path in Torah study. One who develops his unique approach walks in the way of Abraham our patriarch, who Chazal refer to as יחידו של עולם, the unique individual in the world, for having forged his own path that diverged from everyone else.

Rabb Samson Rafael Hirsch ZT” L was active in the mid-19th century. He was a great person and great personality. The Rav recommended reading his works, especially his commentary on Psalms, which contained pearls of wisdom. His greatness stemmed not from the intellectual perspective, but from his fine esthetic feelings and ethical sensibilities. He fought the same battle being waged by the Yeshiva: how to save traditional Judaism amid a culture and science-oriented society. He forged German Orthodoxy behind the idea of תורה עם דרך ארץ, Torah observance combined with participation in society. He sought to unite fear of heaven, יראת שמים, with educated observant Jews. He accomplished much in Germany. However, the Yeshiva (RIETS) wants to instill Torah in students who can participate in any scientific discipline within society. Hirsh wanted to bring the youth into the traditional Jewish chamber, היכל, and build a Judaism based on ceremony and sentiment, lighting Shabbat candles, placing a white tablecloth on the Sabbath table, using a silver Etrog case, singing קול השם על המים when they return the Torah to the ark. A Judaism similar to what many modern Orthodox

Jews seek today. Hirsh even advocated growing a beard in Sefira and the 3 weeks. German Jews kept the Torah scrupulously. One of the Rav's professors, Professor Mitwoch, was fully observant to the point that he came to university, even in the beginning of the Nazi period, wearing slippers and a 3-week beard on Tisha B'Av.

German Jews produced many educated people. But it was a menorah of 7 lights and 7 Chochmot. All the lights were directed to the middle light and the פרוכת, the cover of the Ark. But German Jews remained outside of the פרוכת in the outer chamber of the Temple. They never lifted the veil to observe what was behind it and approach the Ark. They were missing the Torah. German rabbis were scrupulously observant of Halacha. Rabbis today can learn much from their character regarding synagogue and maintaining Minhagim. However, their Torah knowledge was limited to some Shulchan Aruch, Chayei Adam, Kitzur Shulchan Aruch, some Jewish philosophy, some Tanach, all infused with a pleasant exterior. Many of our Musmachim would prefer that RIETS should follow the same path and produce היכל and מנורה rabbis, not rabbis who lift the veil and see the Aron HaKodesh. They are of the opinion that were the Yeshiva to follow that model, Modern Orthodox Jews would understand how important the Yeshiva was and support it more significantly financially.

However, the Yeshiva had a different idea how to express its greatness and importance. Whether the Yeshiva has a היכל or not is not known, but it has an Ark. The Rav said that there was no finer set of Rabbeim than the Roshei Yeshiva at RIETS in any Yeshiva in 1956, including Israel. The level of the Shiurim presented at RIETS were of a level worthy of presentation in the Volozhin Yeshiva. The language of the Yeshiva and מהלך המחשבה, Jewish Torah and Philosophy mindset, is the same as all other Yeshivot. We want to educate Torah Jews and Torah scholars. Simultaneously we want to provide them a proper secular education. The claim against the Yeshiva is that it hasn't yet found the synthesis between Torah and דרך ארץ, how to conduct oneself properly in public as a Jew. According to the Rav, the greatness of the Yeshiva is that it does not seek synthesis. First, synthesis cannot exist in our world. If there is a contradiction between Torah and science, we can't synthesize them. In this area, the Rav disagreed with Hegel's idea of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. A contradiction between Torah and Science is a תיובתא, an unresolved question. Synthesis is superficial, apologetic. It leads to mimicry and

the loss of individual creativity. It leads to simply parroting back an idea. Even the Rambam was not successful when it came to achieving synthesis. The greatness of RIETS is that it's a full Yeshiva of the highest level as well as a fine academic institution, without synthesis and without interference from many of our modern orthodox "thinkers", כביכול.

The connection between these 2 internal institutions, lies in 2 separate dimensions. The remarkable ability of students to jump from the world of עידי מסירה כרתי to a theorem in mathematics or a principle in physics. He is both a Ben Torah and an excellent college student. We must be pleased there is no synthesis, for if it existed, he would succeed in neither discipline. RIETS is unique. Israeli institutions should not minimize what the Yeshiva has accomplished. They can learn much from the Yeshiva's accomplishments. We have succeeded in educating a successful Torah generation from both perspectives. They have not. RIETS has indeed accomplished much. For only Torah can save Judaism in America. Simply having a religious university will accomplish nothing, even if it is named after the Vilna Gaon or Bar Ilan. Catholics also have religious universities. Simply mimicking their institutions would be unacceptable. The Rav hated copying others. We **must** have a Yeshiva, but also a secular institution alongside it because the times demand it. We cannot and must not synthesize them. Better to have 2 separate heads, Torah and secular education, than a synthesized none.

The Rav praised Dr. Belkin for his fastidious and scrupulous adherence to the חושן משפט and the prohibition of לא תלין פעולת שכיר in making sure that payrolls were met even in the financially difficult summer months. It would be better that Dr. Belkin be able to spend his summertime writing and delivering excellent papers and talks instead of constant fund raising. The Rav suggested that other directors of Yeshivot that seek to check the kashrut of the Yeshiva's "Tzitzit" and his "Tzitzit" should focus on their own house and be as careful in meeting the laws of חושן משפט in their own institutions.

The Yeshiva faculty should realize what a great Torah and educational institution it has created and ignore the media, not only Jewish media but also the New York Times, that seek to minimize their achievements and role. They should be proud of

their accomplishments in both Halacha and Torah as well as in secular areas. They should have pride and heightened self-esteem commensurate with their accomplishments.

The Rav insisted the Musmachim who received so much from the Yeshiva demonstrate more Hakarat HaTov to the Yeshiva and be more forthcoming financially to ensure the economic survival of the Yeshiva. It is not sufficient for a rabbi to ask his congregants to contribute, he must set an example himself by giving significant amounts to the Yeshiva.

Midrash says:

בשעה שאמר לו ועשו לי מקדש אמר משה לפני הקב"ה רבונו של עולם כתיב הנה השמים ושמי השמים לא יכלכלוך ואתה אומר ועשו לי מקדש אמר ליה הקב"ה משה לא כשם שאתה סבור אלא עשרים קרש בצפון ועשרים קרש בדרום ושמונה במערב ואני יורד ומצמצם שכינתי למטה דכתיב 'ונועדתי לך שם ודברתי וגו'.

Even though God *could* contract into a small space, a square cubit, why did Gd have to contract Himself? According to Rambam, God taught us an important foundation in Judaism. The human being is similar to God in this case. He seeks, and is drawn to קדושה, sanctity. Even communism cannot destroy the natural attraction of the human being to God.

כאיל תערוג על אפיקי מים כן נפשי תערוג אליך אלקים (תהלים מב:ב)

The difference between the gazelle that has previously found water and one that never has, is that the former knows how to locate water quickly and quench its thirst. The latter can easily get lost while attempting to find water and die of thirst. However, both have the same drive to drink. A Jew that already drank the waters of Torah and keeps Mitzvot and studied in Yeshiva, regardless of what he became afterwards, can readily quench his thirst for the word of God. A Jew who has not received a Torah education has the drive but not the roadmap to quench his thirst for God.

The Rav was impressed by the dedication of conservative Jews who treat the unveiling of a monument at a gravesite with such respect and somber attention. He

noted their commitment when they drive to a conservative temple to attend Yizkor services. These are the gazelles who naturally seek water, but they don't have the merit, זכות, to have the proper roadmap to find it so they express their feelings through a psychopathic, anti-Halacha act. Chazal say that even the thief recites a prayer that he should be successful:

א"ר פפא היינו דאמרי אינשי גנבא אפום מחתרתא רחמנא קרי

Even a thief relies on Gd and recites a prayer that he should be successful. Judaism wants each Jew, even Orthodox rabbis who understand the importance of Shabbos, ritual family purity and teaching children Torah, to realize that his desire for water cannot be quenched regardless how much he drank, how much dedication he has shown for Judaism. He must always seek to come closer to God, to seek ever more sanctity, קדושה. A person should never consider himself as having reached the apex of Judaism. He must think there is always higher to climb and more to grow. He must never be satisfied with his accomplishments. He must be like the gazelle, always seeking more and better water. Hasidic Jews express this idea every Shabbos morning (משנה כלים א:ו):

עשר קדשות הן, ארץ ישראל מקדשת מכל הארצות. ומה היא קדשתה, שמביאים ממנה העמר והבכורים ושתי הלחם, מה שאין מביאים כן מכל הארצות:
עירות המקפות חומה מקדשות ממנה, שמשלחים מתוכן את המצרעים, ומסבבין לתוכן מת עד שירצו. יצא, אין מחזירין אותו:
לפנים מן החומה מקדש מהם, שאוכלים שם קדשים קלים ומעשר שני. הר הבית מקדש ממנו, שאין זבים וזבות, נדות ויולדות נכנסים לשם. החיל מקדש ממנו, שאין גוים וטמא מת נכנסים לשם. עזרת נשים מקדשת ממנו, שאין טבול יום נכנס לשם, ואין חיבים עליה חטאת. עזרת ישראל מקדשת ממנה, שאין מחסר כפורים נכנס לשם, וחיבין עליה חטאת. עזרת הכהנים מקדשת ממנה, שאין ישראל נכנסים לשם אלא בשעת צרכיהם, לסמיכה לשחיטה ולתנופה:
בין האולם ולמזבח מקדש ממנה, שאין בעלי מומין ופרועי ראש נכנסים לשם. ההיכל מקדש ממנו, שאין נכנס לשם שלא רחוק ידים ורגלים. קדש הקדשים מקדש מהם, שאין נכנס לשם אלא כהן גדול ביום הכפורים בשעת העבודה. אמר רבי יוסי, בחמשה דברים בין האולם ולמזבח שוה להיכל, שאין בעלי מומין, ופרועי ראש, ושתויי יין, ושלא רחוק ידים ורגלים נכנסים לשם, ופורשין מבין האולם ולמזבח בשעת הקטרה:

The Mishna counts ten levels of increasing sanctity, קדושה, related to Eretz Yisrael. Why do we need ten? Why isn't one sufficient? After all, השמים כסאי והארץ הדום, רגלי? The answer is we do need the multitude of levels. If there was only a single level of sanctity a Jew would think he has accomplished everything once he attained that level. There must always be a higher goal. A Jew living in the diaspora would then think he has realized the highest level of sanctity. Jewish

homes of yesteryear were holy as the Temple. But every Jew knew his place. He realized that there is a higher and better place. That's why Jews yearned for Eretz Yisrael.

The Rav thought highly of Ben Gurion's accomplishments. But he advised Ben Gurion and his cohorts to realize that Jews did not yearn for Israel because they sought political independence. Not at all. It was the associated higher Kedusha that drove them to Eretz Yisrael, מעלין בקודש. And once there, he must seek higher sanctity, Jerusalem, then still higher till he gets to the Holy of Holies. Even the priest who kindles the frankincense and places the show bread, לזחם הפנים, must know that there is still a higher place. The High Priest on Yom Kippur who enters the Holy of Holies must realize there is an attic above it that is even higher in sanctity that the High Priest cannot enter even on Yom Kippur with the frankincense. Moshe asked, why God do You need a Beit HaMikdash and a Holy of Holies? After all, everything is God's, and the entire world is Your Beit HaMikdash! Apparently, God wanted to show the Jews that no matter how close one feels to God, there is always a closer level to strive for. He may never think he reached the apex of Kedusha.

The Rav did not underestimate the difficulties faced by a rabbi living in a community outside New York. He did not live in an ivory tower. He lived among the Jewish masses in Boston, and recognized the problems and struggles of the rabbi outside New York. When the rabbi is invited by the local priest to deliver a lecture in the church. When there are ignorant, obstinate Jews who think that their financial status entitles them to a voice in traditional issues. Without the work of these Musmachim, America would be a free for all place of Mamzeirut. So-called rabbis would conduct Kiddushin, marriage, between a Kohen and divorcee, a married woman lacking a proper divorce document and a Jewish man and allow illegitimate converts, who did not undergo the proper conversion of circumcision and immersion in Mikva, to enter the community. There are no Halachic boundaries they would not breach. The Rav noted in the interest of preventing Mamzeirut etc. he attempted to form with certain conservative leaders a joint Beit Din that would be responsible for marriage and divorce, however it fell through because they refused to concede on the laws of a Kohen marrying a divorcee, or a marriage with a woman who did not receive a proper Halachic divorce, or between

a man and his brother's wife where they had children and the laws of Yibum and Chalitza did not apply, and they were prohibited by Torah law to marry¹. The Musmachim of the Yeshiva must wage a never-ending battle to ensure these terrible situations do not occur, and constantly raise Torah Judaism higher.

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¹ The Rav was expert in looking at the "larger picture". He must have felt that an arrangement with the conservative movement, that required an Orthodox core to agree on any decision, would be a sufficient safeguard against issues that would arise while enabling the enforcement of basic Halacha in the critically important areas of marriage and conversion. I surmise that at the start of these negotiations, the Rav felt comfortable with the people he was working with, such as Professor Shaul Lieberman from JTS, that an agreement was possible. Given the subsequent movement away from traditional and Orthodox Judaism by the conservative movement in the years after these negotiations fell through, it would have been impossible to maintain such a joint Beit Din. Though he tried to arrive at a workable solution, he concluded it would not work.