
WHO'S A CAVEMAN?

The Relationship between the Beit Midrash and the World

The Weekly

TORAH

C?NTR?VERSITY



OCTOBER 31, 2021
YU TORAH MITZION KOLLEL
פי תולדות תשפ"ב

RIETS CENTENNIAL

(1) *Yeshiva University Commentator*, August 23, 1997



L to R: David Gottesman, Chairman of the Board of Trustees; Robert M. Beren, Member of the YU Board of Trustees; Herbert Smilowitz, Vice Chairman of the RIETS Board; University President Dr. Lamm; Moshe L. Green, Vice Chairman of the RIETS Board; Judah Feinerman, Chairman of the RIETS Board.

RIETS Celebrates Centennial Anniversary

BY NIR KNOLL

On May 28, 1997, approximately 800 members of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) and Yeshiva University faculty assembled at the Grand Hyatt in New York City to celebrate the Centennial anniversary of RIETS. The joyous evening consisted of a Centennial Convocation and dinner.

During the convocation, RIETS presented 161 Centennial Medallion Awards to major supporters and their families in recognition of cumulative contributions of \$100,00 to \$5 million that have sustained the institution over the past 100 years. In addition, during the Dinner, 348 Centennial Awards were given out to supporters who have contributed between \$25,000 to \$99,999.

Robert M. Beren, a member of the YU Board of Trustees and general chairman of the event, was the principal recipient of the highest Centennial Medallion Award, the Platinum version. Also, as sole trustee of the Israel Henry Beren Charitable Trust, named for his late uncle, Beren formally announced the endowment of the Israel Henry Beren In-

stitute for Higher Talmudic Studies at RIETS. Dr. Abraham M. Mann, Director of Development for RIETS, explained that the "institute's objective is to produce excellent Rabbinic leaders and talmidei chachamim with extensive knowledge of the Jewish community, leadership abilities and broad general knowledge of Torah."

As the evening progressed, Rabbi Sholom Klass, founder of the Jewish Press, received the Lifetime Achievement in Journalism Award for his support of Jewish education. In addition, a presentation was made to the families of Julius and Meyer Berman in recognition of their establishment of the Rabbi Henoah and Sara D. Berman Chair in Talmud at the RIETS affiliated Caroline and Joseph S. Gruss Institute in Jerusalem. Rav Aharon Lichtenstein, the director of the Gruss Institute and Rosh Yeshiva of Gush, is the inaugural occupant of this newly endowed chair. The program was also highlighted by prayer recitals from Cantors Sherwood Goffin of Lincoln Square Synagogue and Joseph Malovany of the Fifth Avenue Synagogue. Both are also faculty members at RIETS' Philip and

Sarah Belz School of Jewish Music.

Also honored was Rabbi Norman Lamm, President and Rosh Hayeshiva of YU, on the occasion of his 20th year as president of YU and RIETS. He delivered a Centennial Address concerning the current and future mission of RIETS. Rabbi Lamm noted that "we who study and teach at Yeshiva essentially live in a private community—a marvelous enclave, one of study and thought and research, of vibrant ideas and creative concepts and novel interpretations and spiritual growth, all on the very highest levels. But it is an enclave, not a cave; we are not hermetically sealed off from the world." Rabbi Lamm also stated that "unquestionably, the great mission and prime emphasis of RIETS is Torah lishmah—the study of Torah for its own sake... Our credo is and must remain that Torah is the highest and most sublime ideal of Am Yisroel, that study of Torah is the noblest occupation, that the Torah way of life is worthy of the most demanding sacrifice." However, he explained that the "Torah is not incompatible with a cre-

Continued on page 11

One Hundred Years for RIETS

continued from page one

ative life in the enormous variety of pursuits open to us in the modern life: in the arts and sciences and business and crafts and professions. Further clarifying the role of RIETS in a contemporary society, he stated that "the second emphasis of RIETS, as the premier institution of Modern Orthodoxy, is therefore on service to the Jewish community... the adjective 'Modern' should not fool anyone. Our commitment to and the celebration of Torah lishmah of any other advanced yeshiva; but unlike others, our confrontation with modernity is more nuanced, more subtle and more balanced." Rabbi Lamm also remarked that "we have and should have higher and more demanding standards than the rest of society and the Jewish Community, but not so high that we look upon them with withering contempt... and not so demanding that others look upon us as out of reach and irrelevant."

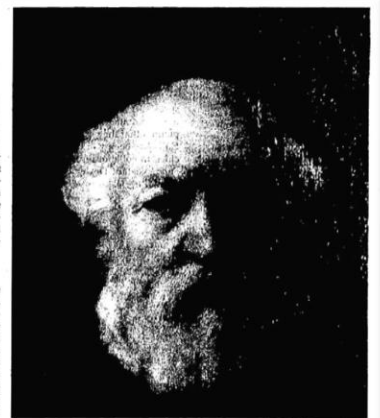
Rabbi Lamm also discussed the vast tradition of RIETS, noting that through his support of the Hovevei Zion movement and "sophisticated *ahavat Yisrael*," Rav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor "in many ways adumbrated—explicitly but mostly implicitly, in the way he behaved—the ideals which inspire this Yeshiva and make it unique." In addition, Rabbi Lamm also noted the great

contribution of the Rav in shaping RIETS stated that "it is his legacy that must be preserved, expanded, and continued as a living tradition at Yeshiva University and RIETS. But—it must be his true legacy. No one-sided distortion of this complex intellectual and spiritual giant should be countenanced."

The Man and the Yeshiva

Rav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor, the Kovner Rav and namesake of RIETS, was one of the 19th century's most prolific scholars of Torah. He became the Chief Rabbi of Kovno in the 1860's and continued to be the dominant figure in the World Jewish Community until his death in 1896. Rabbi Zevulun Charlop, the Dean of RIETS noted that even Jews who had migrated to the United States from Czarist Russia towards the end of the 20th century continued to view Rav Yitzchak Elchanan as "the single most dominant figure in World Jewry," regardless of their religious commitment.

After his death in 1896, a group of American Jewish Leaders, founded the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) (Yeshivas Rabbenu Yitzchak Elchanan), in his memory. Throughout the century RIETS has continued to flourish even suc-



Rav Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor

cessfully branching into Israel through the Caroline and Joseph S. Gruss Institute in Jerusalem, which provides many YU graduates with the opportunity to conduct their post-graduate and Semikhah studies in Israel. In addition, over the past 100 years, RIETS has granted Semikhah for approximately 2,400 students, with over 140 students receiving ordination in the last Hag Hasemiklah in 1994. Commenting on the Centennial anniversary and massive growth of RIETS, Rabbi Charlop stated that this "celebration signifies that we are thriving."

(2) TALMUD BAVLI SHABBAT 33B

אזלו טשו במערתא איתרחיש ניסא איברי' להו חרובא ועינא דמיא והוו^א משלחי מנייהו והוו יתבי עד צוארייהו בחלא כולי יומא גרסי^ב בעידן צלויי לבשו מיכסו^ג ומצלו והדר משלחי מנייהו כי היכי דלא ליבלו איתבו תריסר שני^ד במערתא אתא אליהו וקם אפיתחא דמערתא אמר מאן לודעיה לבר יוחי דמית קיסר ובטיל גזירתיה נפקו חזו אינשי דקא כרבי וזרעי אמר^ה מניחין חיי עולם ועוסקין בחיי שעה כל מקום שנותנין עיניהן מיד נשרף יצתה בת קול ואמרה להם להחריב עולמי יצאתם חיזרו למערתכם הדור אזול איתבו תריסר ירחי שתא אמרי^ו משפט רשעים בגיהנם י"ב חדש יצתה בת קול ואמרה צאו ממערתכם נפקו כל היכא דהוה מחי ר' אלעזר הוה מסי ר"ש אמר לו בני די לעולם אני ואתה בהדי פניא דמעלי שבתא חזו ההוא סבא דהוה נקיט תרי^ז מדאני אסא ורהיט בין השמשות אמרו ליה הני למה לך אמר להו לכבוד שבת ותיסגי לך בחד חד כנגד^ח זכור וחד כנגד^ט שמור א"ל לבריה חזי כמה חביבין מצות על ישראל יתיב דעתייהו שמע ר' פנחס בן יאיר התניה ונפק לאפיה עייליה לבי בניה

THE DRASHA

(3) "CAVES & ENCLAVES," SEVENTY FACES, RABBI DR. NORMAN LAMM

At this point, both older and younger man understood that sincere devotion of even a layman, a non-scholar in Torah, is precious, and should not be deprecated.

What do we learn from this? We learn that caves are important, that they are critical if we are to create *talmidei chakhamim* and nourish people of great spiritual capacity. But it is not the norm for Jewish society and community or, for that matter, for *talmidei chakhamim*. Any attempt to impose the discipline of the cave on the "real world" is destructive, and those who advocate it are told: *go back to your cave!* . . . The Divine Voice favors the new-found maturity of R. Simeon bar Yochai, not the radical view of his son; hence, the command to us is clear: *leave the cave* . . . The regular Jewish community that remains loyal to Yiddishkeit is a precious one and should be valued, even as is an old and apparently uneducated man who does what he can with love. "See how the people of Israel love the *mitzvot!*"

We too, then, must include every Jew who cherishes his Jewishness, even though he may be ignorant of the correct way of doing so, in the circle of our deepest spiritual concern and personal regard and friendship and love, and never seek to exclude him.

We who study and teach at Yeshiva essentially live in a private community—a marvelous enclave, one of study and thought and research, of vibrant ideas and creative concepts and novel interpretations and spiritual growth, all on the very highest levels. But it is an *enclave*, not a *cave*; we are not hermetically sealed off from the world. Yes, the “cave experience” can be, and indeed is, a vital element in one’s Torah development, and that is why we recommend a year of intensive immersion in Torah in Israel and, for Semikha students, at our Gruss Institute in Jerusalem. But the cave is not the natural habitat of Torah; a “house of study”—a *bet ha-midrash*—is where Torah flourishes, not a “cave” of study. We do not and should not aspire to educate our students to live in caves once they have left the Yeshiva. We have and should have higher and more demanding standards than the rest of society and Jewish community, but not so high that we look upon them with withering contempt—“wherever they cast their eyes it was burnt”—and not so demanding that *others* look upon us as out of reach and irrelevant.

Unquestionably, the great mission and prime emphasis of RIETS is *Torah lishmah*—“the study of Torah for its own sake”: not for professional achievement, not for adornment or prestige, not for the glory of any individual or any institution. In the context of Yeshiva University’s Torah Umadda education, this goal is in the tradition of R. Simeon bar Yochai when he emerged from his cave the second time. Our credo is and must remain that Torah is the highest and most sublime ideal of *am Yisrael*, that study of Torah is the noblest occupation, that the Torah way of life is worthy of the most demanding sacrifice. But Torah is not incompatible with a creative life in the enormous variety of pursuits open to us in modern life: in the arts and sciences and business and crafts and professions.

The second emphasis of RIETS, as the premier institution of Modern Orthodoxy, is therefore on service to the Jewish community. The adjective “Modern” should not fool anyone. Our commitment to and celebration of *Torah lishmah* is no less than that of any other advanced yeshiva; but unlike others, our confrontation with modernity is more nuanced, more subtle, and more balanced. We neither accept it uncritically nor reject it unthinkingly. We believe, as the Rav taught us, that Torah can be lived and implemented in every time and circumstance, and that includes

modernity and post-modernity. We stand firmly in the world of Halakha, but we shall not turn our backs on the world of *Madda*—of culture and science. We shall ever heed the Voice that bids us “leave the cave!” That dialectic between the Cave and the World is the source of our glory—as well as of our dilemmas, our tensions, and our perplexing inconsistencies. Our commitment is to Torah, to this community of Modern/Centrist Orthodox Jews, and to this ideology. And it is a commitment, not a compromise or concession.

On this centennial of the naming of RIETS we are summoned to reaffirm our commitment to that historic vision, for it is our truth. And, as the Hasidic Zaddik R. Hirsh Rimanover taught, in a playful but profound comment on the verse *lo tonu ish et amitó* (“you shall not deceive your fellow man”—Lev. 25:17): The word *amito*, friend or fellow man, is spelled with an *ayin*; with hardly any change in pronunciation it can be read as if it were spelled with an *aleph*, thus: “do not deceive your [very own] truth.” In other words: *Be true to your own ideals!*

This restatement of our institutional mission should be self-evident. It should also be evident to all that this is not an easy task educationally, for our ideological balance is always precarious, and we are constantly called upon to exercise careful judgment. Younger people, especially, incline to idealistic perfectionism and are less tolerant of the foibles of an imperfect humanity and an inconsistent community—much like R. Elazar, son of R. Simeon bar Yochai. That is the way of the world, and we should be proud of our students. And if they sometimes tend to relatively extreme views, it is because of the purity of their ideals and their quest for absolute consistency, aspirations which are inspiring and admirable. It is true that such over-demanding youthful idealism can lead them and us astray, and thus prove quite dangerous. But we are adults, and so must be confident that they will mature; and we who are older must be wiser and teach them how to bank the fires of youthful zeal and sublimate their passionate idealistic yearnings in a manner that will enhance and not destroy the community of *kelal yisrael*; that will heal and not hurt, following the more mature R. Simeon bar Yochai rather than his son R. Elazar—and yet keep their idealistic ambitions alive and active for the rest of their lives.

And we must look with love and appreciation upon the non-

Yeshiva lay community, encouraging their observance of *mitzvot* at whatever level they have attained—“See how the people of Israel love the *mitzvot*”—inspiring them to greater love of *mitzvot*, to deeper study of Torah, to a more intense passion for our people and land, to increased support for Torah and its schools, and urging upon them a nobler degree of ethical and moral conduct.

As I consider our alumni and our current students, I can tell you that the overwhelming majority live up to and exceed our expectations. They are aflame with dedication, but they are more mature than their years. They are idealistic, and among their great ideals are their love of their fellow Jews, their love of Eretz Israel, as well as their love of Torah. Be proud of them! They deserve it. And we deserve them. R. Isaac Elchanan too would have been proud of them.

(4) TALMUD BAVLI BERACHOS 35B

"ואספת דגנך מה ת"ל לפי שנא' לא ימוש
 ספר התורה הזה מפך יכול דברים ככתבן
 ת"ל ואספת דגנך הנהג בהן מנהג דרך ארץ דברי ר' ישמעאל ר"ש בן יוחי
 אומר אפשר אדם חורש בשעת חרישה וזורע בשעת זריעה וקוצר בשעת
 קצירה ודש בשעת דישה וזורה בשעת הרוח תורה מה תהא עליה אלא
 בזמן שישראל עושין רצונו של מקום מלאכתן נעשית ע"י אחרים שנא'
 'ועמדו זרים ורעו צאנכם וגו' ובזמן שאין ישראל עושין רצונו של מקום
 מלאכתן נעשית ע"י עצמן שנא' ואספת דגנך ולא עוד אלא שמלאכת אחרים
 נעשית על ידן שנא' *ועבדת את אויביך וגו' אמר אביי הרבה עשו כרבי
 ישמעאל ועלתה בידן כר' שמעון בן יוחי ולא עלתה בידן א"ל רבא לרבנן
 במטותא מינייכו ביומי ניסן וביומי תשרי לא תתחוו קמאי כי היכי דלא
 תטרדו במזונייכו כולא שתא: אמר רבה בר בר חנה א"ר יוחנן משום רבי

(5) THE LAMM HERITAGE ARCHIVES

 NORMAN LAMM
 THE JEWISH CENTER

 LAG BA-OMER
 MAY 7, 1966

"THE REST OF THE WORLD"

The semi-holiday of Lag Ba-Omer, which we
 celebrate tomorrow, is traditionally associated with one
 of the most luminous figures in Jewish history: R. Simeon
 bar Yoḥai, distinguished disciple of R. Akiva.

The reason for this connection is three-fold:
 Lag Ba-Omer is the day on which R. Simeon was married.
 Furthermore, it is the day on which he risked his life,
 defying the tyrannical edicts of Rome, and accepted semikhah
 (his ordination). Finally, R. Simeon bar Yoḥai died on Lag
 Ba-Omer. Another opinion adds a fourth reason for the re-
 lationship between this Tanna and the festival of Lag Ba-
 Omer: This is the day that R. Simeon emerged from his cave.

It is in reference to this fourth reason that I
 propose to emphasize the marvelous tale told in the Talmud
 concerning R. Simeon's famous sojourn in the cave. This
 story, if properly understood, contains within itself a
 judgment on our lives in 1966 that is so incisive, so power-
 ful, so relevant, that we cannot and dare not ignore it.
 For the essence of the story of R. Simeon bar Yoḥai is the
 question of how loyal, observant, and God-fearing Jews ought
 to orient themselves to the rest of the world.

-10-

Orthodox Judaism in our generation is beginning to emerge from its cave. It must never reject that cave entirely. There will and should always be some who will guard that cave and prefer to live in it. God bless them. But, as R. Simeon and R. Eliezer learned 1800 years ago, that cannot hold true for the entire people of Israel. To insist upon it is to wish, Heaven forbid, destruction upon the Jewish people and particularly the Jewish State. If there are such, then the divine voice commands them: hizru le'maaratkhem, return to your caves and do not impose your wish upon the community. As a people we must leave our self-contained caves and risk the great perils - and they are many and tragic - of attempting to live the life of Torah in the wide community, joining the rest of the world in the daily pursuits of all mankind, and endeavoring to be mekadesh shem shamayim ba-rabbim, to sanctify the Name of God in public.

Our God-ordained duty is to bring the trei medanei assa, the two myrtle twigs of Judaism, to the entire world; to offer all Jews and all mankind the sweetness and pleasantness of Torah; to challenge them both to recall the glories that were and prepare for those that yet will be; to inspire teshuvah u-maasim tovim wherever we are; to look confidently towards what destiny is yet to bring us; to acknowledge the mitzvot as our most precious and most beloved possession.

(6) EIN AYA ON SHABBAT 33B

Commentary: The sanctity of the Sabbath comprises two aspects: One, it sanctifies and uplifts Israel with its holiness, with the very sanctity of the day, uplifting them beyond all mundane matters and infecting them

with a higher glory and sanctity. Besides this, the sanctity of the Sabbath also attracts the energy of all the weekdays with all their mundaneness and lowliness; by remembering (during the week) the holiness of the Sabbath, the week days are uplifted. Though it be unconscious, the Israelite soul uplifts itself even during the week by virtue of the remembrance of the Sabbath day. In this way, secular affairs are not as lowly as they outwardly appear, rather they are continually uplifted by the sanctity of the Sabbath. And though they (the Jewish People) are engaged most of the time in mundane work, nevertheless, holiness is so close to their heart that the highest purpose of life is lodged deep in the heart which is rooted in holiness. According to the sublimity of the revelation of God's closeness in the soul – which depends on the good and righteousness and other ways of God (blessed be He) entrenched in the soul – it is possible to view temporal life and those engaged in it with contentment.

Twilight is the passage between past and future; it connects the secular to the holy and symbolizes the influence the holy exerts upon the secular. Though based on outer perception the secular would appear very gross and lowly, there is within it an inner power whose holiness and superiority can be recognized only by an acute inner sense that resembles the sense of smell, "something from which only the soul, not the body derives pleasure." The effect of the holy over the secular results in practical alacrity until even the energies of old age are aroused to alacrity in deed and action. Though the secular is influenced by the holy, nevertheless the level of the holy is not lowered; the holy does not become an adjunct to the secular but rather retains its independent level.

When they encountered *Friday afternoon an old man*, who naturally should no longer have the energy for speed, so utterly transformed that his liveliness reflected holiness, he was *holding two twigs of myrtle*, to smell in honor of the Sabbath, signifying the inner, spiritual sense which must issue from the holiness of the Sabbath. But why two? *One for 'Remember (the Sabbath),'* symbolizing the relation of the Sabbath to the secular, *and one for 'Keep (the Sabbath),'* symbolizing the observance of Sabbath's holiness per se. He said: *"How the commandments are beloved by Israel!"* The holiness of the commandments is the soul at the center, the life-energy of the wheel of all their actions, simple and lowly though they seem. *Their mind was put at ease* and they no longer were troubled by eternal life being sacrificed for temporal life, having seen that even the temporal life of Israel is integrally bound to eternal life and this bond rejuvenates and energizes the feeble and tired, making them zestful for holy service even in old age. This sublimation whereby the heaviness of old age might be converted to the agility of youth, is possible only when secular deeds reach beyond to holiness. This is the relation of eternal life to secular life which is elevated through the association. Therefore *their mind was put at ease.*

