

The late Dr. Fox was a founding member of TRADITION's editorial board.

## THE RAV AS *MASPID*

**A**mong the variety of forms which Rav Soloveitchik *zt"l* chose for his writings, one of the most striking and instructive is the *hesped*, a eulogy given in memory of a recently departed figure of outstanding stature in the world of Jewish life, learning, or leadership. The corpus of his published works includes six such eulogistic essays, each one a carefully crafted study which is a source of illumination and instruction.<sup>1</sup> I shall try to show that an analysis of these eulogies opens up dimensions of the Rav's thought and method which have not been sufficiently noted in the literature about his work. Each of them is of intrinsic interest and importance, making them eminently worthy of careful study. These *hespedim* should not be confused with the annual *yahrtzeit shiurim* which the Rav gave in memory of his father, or with lectures that he gave on similar memorial occasions. The eulogies which we shall study are of a quite different genre. In this essay we can do no more than make a first attempt to open up this fascinating area of Rav Soloveitchik's thought.

Although each of the six eulogies has its own distinctive character, there are certain common qualities which they share. First, they are all informed by the Rav's understanding of what the halakha defines as the nature and function of every true *hesped*. As he puts it, a *hesped* must fulfill two separate but related functions. It must cause us to feel deep sorrow over the loss we have sustained, and it must make us aware intellectually of the depth and significance of that loss. A *hesped* "seeks, first of all, to make people weep. . . The Halakhah did not like to see the dead interred in silent indifference. It wanted to hear the shriek of despair. . . ." But in its other dimension, "the *hesped* turns into *kilus*, eulogy, informative and instructional. Instead of addressing ourselves to the heart . . . we try now to contact the mind. We no longer try to arouse emotions. We seek to stimulate thoughts by telling a story . . . the life-story of the deceased."<sup>2</sup> The Rav introduces this same distinction in the opening of his eulogy for R. Hayyim Heller. The *maspid* must cause the sounds of agony to be heard and tears to flow as he

makes his audience aware of their loss. At the same time, he must serve as a pedagogue, using calm reason to teach the people the full significance of the personality whom he eulogizes.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, there is a nearly insoluble problem, which is the second feature held in common by all these eulogies. Rarely do we manage during the lifetime of a person to come to know him or her thoroughly and deeply. Even when we are in frequent contact with an individual, we tend to have only a superficial sense of the complex and subtle elements which constitute a human personality. This is true of our efforts to understand ordinary individuals; how much more so of the attempt to grasp the inner reality of great figures, scholars, teachers, moral guides and leaders. Only when they have left us do we begin to realize how little we really knew them. How then can we eulogize them? As a paradigm of this dilemma the Rav cites a talmudic episode in which the disciples of a great sage discovered, to their distress, how little of his teaching they had mastered. Returning from his funeral, they sat down to eat and could not resolve a seemingly simple problem about the laws of grace after meals. With all they had learned from their teacher, they were now aware that they had barely scratched the surface of his vast scholarship. Usually, it is only after we sustain the loss of a loved one or a great teacher that we become painfully aware that there is so much we now want to know that we failed to learn. During life we maintain a distance even from those to whom we are closest, which leaves us, after their death, ignorant of what they knew and of what constituted their true inner being.

This imposes on the *maspid* a very heavy burden, for he must uncover the secret recesses of the inner life of his subject, and he must do so with full responsibility for the accuracy and the perceptiveness of the picture which he paints. The Rav cites an extended talmudic passage concerning the last rites for Rav Huna (*Moed Katan* 25a), from which he draws the sharp conclusion that we may eulogize only if we are able to depict the deceased accurately and perceptively in his full reality. Under no circumstance should we eulogize if we diminish in any way the stature and personality of the deceased. We must not reduce great men to fit into our limited conceptions and understanding. We must rather elevate ourselves and the audience to the point where we are capable of some sound understanding of the nature of the departed.<sup>4</sup> With characteristic modesty, the Rav repeatedly expresses his sense of his own inadequacy to create a full and accurate picture of his subject. Yet, he is so aware of the failures of others that he is driven to try. One thing is certain. In his depictions of his subjects he avoids the trite language, the cliché-laden rhetoric, which he finds so offensive in ordinary

eulogies. In an expression of frustration with the limits of all language, Nietzsche somewhere observes that “The word dilutes and blunts; the word depersonalizes; the word makes the uncommon common.” Struggling against this problem, the Rav understands that he must use language to overcome language, that as a *maspid* he must be not only a rational teacher, but a creative artist. With rare skill, his artistry makes itself manifest in each of his *hespedim* as he penetrates, intellectually and emotionally, into the depths of the individual personalities. His rational discourse transcends itself to become poetry, poetry which teaches us by stimulating the imagination while arousing the intellect. If it is possible to use language effectively to portray a human personality in its hidden inner reality, then the Rav has achieved rare success in his efforts.

A third feature common to these eulogies is the Rav’s familiar practice of dealing with a problem by formulating archetypes which provide the architectural framework within which he then carries on his eulogistic work. It is well known that such typology is a central feature of much of the Rav’s teaching. We see it in these eulogies in its full flowering. Let us consider some examples. He illuminates the personality of R. Yitshak Zev, his uncle, through the distinction between the *Rosh haShana* and *Yom Kippur* personality types. *Rosh haShana* is associated with public divine revelation, while *Yom Kippur* is characterized by private divine revelation. The *Rosh haShana* prototype is Aaron, while the *Yom Kippur* prototype is Moses. The Brisker Rav is then described as a Moses type, and it is from this perspective that we are helped to understand him.

Similarly, the account of R. Zev Gold is located within the distinction between the *kedusha*, the holiness, of the Sabbath and Festivals, and the *kedusha* of *Rosh-Hodesh*. The former is public and the latter is hidden and private. Rabbi Gold is then described as a *Rosh-Hodesh* type. The personality and the leadership of R. Hayyim Ozer is exemplified by the distinction between two of the vestments of the high priest, the *tsits* and the *hoshen*. The former was worn on the front of the elaborate headdress of the high priest, while the latter was worn as a breastplate. The *tsits* is located on the forehead of the *kohen gadol*, a location which associates it with the center of intelligence and knowledge. The *hoshen* is worn over the heart, the center of love and devotion to the people of Israel whose tribal names are engraved upon it.<sup>5</sup> The role of R. Hayyim Ozer as Jewish leader is then explicated through these archetypes. Unlike conventional leaders, he represents a unique combination of head and heart, of learning and love of Israel. This combination determines his decision-making process so as to assure that it flows from the

teachings of the Torah and is simultaneously determined by an overflowing love of the Jewish people.

As we noted, the method of understanding various phenomena through the delineation of archetypes is a central feature of the Rav's work. It is present not only in his eulogies, but also in his philosophical-theological essays, and, with certain variations, also in his purely halakhic discourses. If we reflect on the way in which this method is used in the *hespedim*, we can gain insight into its meaning and purpose in the other genres of the Rav's writings.

There are two features of the Rav's thought which come into play at this point. As is well known, the Rav consistently insisted that the halakha is the only source of authentic Jewish ideas. Thus, we must always seek the halakhic foundations of any doctrine which he sets forth. Furthermore, central to all of his methodology in the analysis and exposition of Jewish texts is conceptual formulation and clarification. These features are immediately recognizable by anyone who ever attended a *shiur* which he gave, no matter what the subject or what texts were being studied. We must ask ourselves what is the relationship of articulating typological distinctions to the process of formulating and clarifying basic concepts. My contention is that we can come to an understanding of this method and its significance if we pay close attention to what the Rav did in his *hespedim*.

We begin from a premise that I believe is basic to the Rav's thinking, although it has not been widely noted in the literature. Early in 1959, Dr. Hillel Seidman published a very important and rich account of a discourse which the Rav had recently given. His text was based on his careful notes of the Rav's presentation, and he assures his readers that the final text was "reviewed and authorized by the Rav."<sup>6</sup> In this discourse the Rav argued that to achieve a proper halakhic understanding of the question, "What is a Jew," we must focus on the fact that in the halakha, the individual Jew is regularly treated on the model of a *Sefer Torah*. A few examples will make the point clear. The rule is that when one is present at the time of the death of a fellow Jew, he is required to rend his garments. The *Gemara* explains that this is comparable to being present when a *Sefer Torah* is destroyed by fire.<sup>7</sup> A second example: a *Sefer Torah* which disintegrates from age or use is to be buried next to a *talmid hakham*.<sup>8</sup> The two are perceived as sharing certain common qualities. We rise in respect for a *Sefer Torah* as we do for the scholars who devote themselves to the study of Torah.<sup>9</sup> The point of these halakhic examples is to establish that in halakhic-conceptual terms, a Jew is to be understood as analogous to a *Sefer Torah*. It then

follows that the concept, "Jew," receives its clarification and formulation from the concept, "*Sefer Torah*." The Rav further supports this contention by citing aggadic passages in which the same analogy is drawn. When R. Eliezer's pupils visited their teacher during his illness, R. Akiba found them crying bitterly. When he asked why they were crying, they answered that if one sees a *Sefer Torah* suffering, it is impossible not to cry.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the Rav sets forth a whole series of the halakhic manifestations of this analogy. From the *halakhot* of preparing the parchment, writing a *Sefer Torah*, and giving it the sanctity which it requires, the Rav teaches us a series of *halakhot* that pertain to the life of the Jew as if he were himself a *Sefer Torah*. This is not the place to elaborate further on this essay, but we should stress that it is eminently worthy of careful study.

We can now begin to understand the significance of the Rav's stress on the law of *hesped* which requires the *maspid* to give a full account of the personality of the deceased. If a Jew is a *Sefer Torah*, then to know an individual Jew requires the same kind of intellectual effort, the same kind of conceptual formulation and elucidation as does every other topic in the study of Torah. The more eminent the person, the greater and deeper his learning, the more exemplary his virtue, the more creative and sound his leadership, the more sensitive his piety, the greater the intellectual challenge in understanding the departed personality. To give an accurate and adequate account of that person, the *maspid* must employ the same processes of analysis and exposition that he uses in explicating any passage in the halakha. Moreover, understanding the person is a step toward the knowledge of God. Every man is created in the image of God, but that divine image is present in a unique way in the personalities of *gedolei Yisrael*. "The attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He, descend to the lower realm and are concretized in *gedolei Yisrael*, the Sages of the sacred tradition. . . They serve as a dwelling-place for the *Shekhina*. . . A great man becomes the instrument through which one of the divine attributes is actualized [here on earth]."<sup>11</sup> Thus, the study and exposition of the essence of a particular human personality constitutes a major step in the study of Torah, which is, in turn, a necessary condition for the knowledge of God. The acquisition of that knowledge is the first positive commandment in Maimonides' listing of the *mitsvot*. Study of the Rav's method in formulating a *hesped* provides us with a model for understanding his method in straightforward halakhic analysis.

A striking example of this method is found in his characterization of the mode of Torah knowledge of R. Yitshak Zev, the Brisker Rav,

and of his father, the Rav's grandfather, the incomparable R. Hayyim Brisker. I have discussed this in more extended form elsewhere,<sup>12</sup> and shall simply summarize briefly here. The Rav begins from the halakhic distinction between *erusin*, betrothal, and *nissu'in*, marriage. In the former state, the couple constitute two separate entities, closely related, with intimate knowledge of each other, but still separate. In the latter state, all the barriers have been broken. In a true halakhic marriage, the couple are as one. They share a common essence; their hearts beat with a common rhythm; their knowledge of each other is not simply discursive, but immediate, intuitive, and deeply perceptive. Providing us with prooftexts from the classical sources, the Rav analogizes the relationship of a *talmid hakham* to Torah to the relationships of *erusin* and *nissu'in*. The former represents a great achievement, but is still purely discursive. It relies on all the tools of the highly developed intellect to grasp and give structure to each topic in Torah learning. A few rare individuals may be said to be married to the Torah, not just betrothed. Blessed with the highest qualities of intellectual depth and acuity, they transcend the limits of intellect to understand Torah by way of direct intimacy. Their knowledge is intuitive. Their intuitive formulations will subsequently be verified by discursive analysis, but they could never be achieved by such analysis alone. If we perceive R. Yitshak Zev as married to the Torah, then we have the indispensable key not only to his way of Torah learning, but to his entire personality.

There is in these eulogies a dialectical movement back and forth between pure halakhic categories and the elucidation of the individual personality that has been taken from us by death. The distinction between *Rosh haShana* as public revelation and *Yom Kippur* as private revelation provides the general halakhic-conceptual framework. This in turn generates a way of understanding Moses and Aaron. The Priest is the open man of the people, and the Prophet is the withdrawn figure, his face covered by a veil that hides his shining brilliance. The priest is mourned by all the people, while the prophet only by the limited number who have some sense of who he truly was.<sup>13</sup> R. Yitshak Zev is now characterized as a Moses/*Yom Kippur* figure, and the Rav sees more than symbolic significance in the fact that he died on *Yom Kippur*. He was a hidden personality, living, like Moses, behind a cloud that kept him from being accessible to the general public. The people "sensed intuitively that this was a holy man who walked among them, however, only a very small number of select individuals knew and understood him."<sup>14</sup>

Having placed his uncle appropriately in the typological framework, the Rav now confronts the question of what this characterization

teaches us about R. Yitshak Zev as student and teacher of Torah. This is the essential question, since it was Torah learning which was the chief defining force of his life. Here the Rav introduces us to a second typology which we have already discussed, namely, the distinction between being betrothed to the Torah and married to the Torah. Having set out the halakhic grounds and implications of this distinction, he turns first to his grandfather, who presents us with the ideal model of one who is married to the Torah, and then helps us to see how this characterization helps us to gain insight into the personality of R. Yitshak Zev. In the course of this extended presentation, there are a number of intricate and technical discussions of complex halakhic topics. This is not the place to expound on these discussions, but it must be said that any reader who is at home in the literature of halakha will have no difficulty in seeing how all of these discussions connect to the central theme of the *hesped*. In turn, these discussions illuminate for us the connection between forming basic concepts in halakha and forming conceptual structures for understanding a great Jewish personality.

In the *hesped* for R. Hayyim Heller we find a similar methodology. I shall mention only one common characteristic, the description of R. Hayyim's way in Torah learning. Here we are introduced to the familiar halakhic categories of long and short forms of benedictions, *berakha aruka* and *berakha ketsara*. These categories are then applied to other areas of halakhic practice, in particular to the procedures of the priests in the Temple service. There is a setting in which the ritual involves an extended procedure, and another in which the procedure is short and direct. This is then applied to styles of learning, and finally to the method of R. Hayyim, which was direct, concise, compressed, immediate and intuitive. Although this may sound very much like the *erusin/nissu'in* distinction that was used to illuminate R. Yitshak Zev, it is not fully identical. While the Rav had unlimited admiration for both of these great luminaries, he saw that each had his own defining characteristics. It would be presumptuous to try to spell out the full and exact nature of their differences and how these are implicit in the different typologies, since the Rav did not choose to do so himself.

There are, however, three striking differences that come to the fore as we study these eulogies. One is that R. Hayyim Heller, unlike most classical *talmidei hakhamim*, was a great and creative master of the Bible as well as rabbinic literature. Second, he was unique among such figures in his knowledge of semitic and classical languages and in his application of this knowledge to a defense of the integrity of the *Tanakh*. Third, the Rav stresses the special importance of R. Hayyim

Heller as a last living link between the earlier generations of Torah learning and the generations that followed him. In this discussion, the Rav introduces historical concerns into the mix of halakhic typology with which he illuminates the personality of R. Heller. He does so by giving us other examples from Jewish history of figures, such as Serah bat Asher and Ahiya haShiloni, who were indispensable links between earlier and later generations.

Even this historical perspective emerges from a quasi-halakhic description of R. Hayyim Heller by Dr. Samuel Belkin. Using the language of the liturgy, Dr. Belkin speaks of R. Heller as belonging to a special group known as "*peleitat sofereihem*," the remnants of the Scribes of Jewish antiquity. The Rav gives a historical account of the meaning of the term "remnant." No matter how many great Torah scholars adorn any given generation, they cannot be truly connected to the great chain of tradition unless there is among them at least one figure who is a remnant of the past, who alone is able to bridge the abyss which separates the later generations from the earlier. In this sense, we have in R. Hayyim Heller the necessary connecting link which authenticates and authorizes the present generation of scholars by joining them with their past. R. Heller, by the Rav's reckoning, had intimate connections with three generations of the greatest Torah scholars that preceded him, and he transmitted not only their formal teaching, but their inner reality, to the generations which followed him.

The *hesped* for the Talner Rebbe reveals essentially the same characteristic methodology as well as a certain commonality of themes with those that we have already discussed. Yet, what should occupy the attention of the careful reader is what is distinctive in each case. We saw how, despite similarities, R. Hayyim Heller is carefully delineated in ways which distinguish him from R. Yitzshak Zev, so that he emerges as the unique Torah personality that he was. Both are differentiated from R. Hayyim Ozer, who shares their learning but also assumes a role of public leadership which was alien to the others.

In his learning, in his piety, and in his love of Israel, the Talner Rebbe is similar to the other great figures whom the Rav eulogized. The most obvious distinction is that while the others represent the great tradition of *mitnagdim*, the Talner Rebbe was the scion of one of the great hasidic dynasties. Superficially, it would seem that the Rav does little more than follow a by-now familiar pattern in his *hesped*, but closer reading shows us that this is not a sound conclusion. There is the usual expression of regret over the failure to know the person in sufficient depth during his lifetime, and the gnawing, agonizing questions,



“Who was he? Whom did we lose?” This is preceded by an extended halakhic discourse in which two types of mourning are carefully defined and distinguished. The first stage is *aninut*, which is the initial “spontaneous human reaction to death. It is an outcry, a shout, or a howl of grisly horror and disgust. Man responds to his defeat at the hands of death with total resignation . . . Beaten by the fiend . . . man begins to question his own human singular reality. . . He starts downgrading himself. He dehumanizes himself. He arrives at the conclusion that man is not human, that he is just a living creature like the beast of the field.”<sup>15</sup> In this state, the halakha frees man of all *mitsvot*. The reason, as the Rav explains, is that “our commitment to God is rooted in the awareness of human dignity and sanctity.” When a despairing individual questions all that makes us distinctively human, there is no longer any ground of human dignity and no foundation on which to view man as uniquely bound by God’s commandments.<sup>16</sup> If we are merely animals, then we have no more obligation, no more divinely imposed duty, than do animals. Following the burial, the stage of *avelut* begins. Here the halakha requires man to overcome his self-rejection, to reaffirm his own humanity and to grieve without allowing his distinctive humanity to disintegrate. Thus, we begin with an illuminating halakhic typology from which we learn much about the formal laws of mourning but even more about the conceptual world, the world of religious ideas, which underlies these *halakhot*.

There is here another motivation which is more explicit than in some of the other eulogies. The Rav had already eulogized the Talner Rebbe at his funeral. There he raised the question, “Who was he?” but failed, in his own judgment, to answer it properly. “Of course, due to the fact that I was in a state of total confusion and despair, I could not pursue the analysis in an orderly manner.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, in the condition of *aninut* it was not possible to supply the mode of discourse which could answer the question adequately. Now that *aninut* has yielded to *avelut*, it is not only emotionally and intellectually possible, but obligatory, to answer the unanswered question through a proper *hesped*. Here the halakhic analysis serves as a direct mandate for practical fulfillment of an obligation.

At this point, the Rav is able to turn to an account of the qualities which made up the personality of the Talner Rebbe. “All our great leaders, both hasidic and mitnagdic, were preoccupied with and committed to one task—teaching. The teacher, the rebbe, has been throughout the generations the central figure within the covenantal community. The teacher towered above any other figure—king, warlord, or high priest.”<sup>18</sup>

In this respect the Talner Rebbe was similar to the other great Jewish leaders whom the Rav has eulogized. The task of the *maspid*, however, is to help us understand what is distinctive about his subject, what constituted the essential nature and contribution of the person whose death we are mourning.

To achieve this end, the Rav introduces us to a new typology, the distinction between the “king-teacher” and the “priest-teacher” or “saint-teacher.” The king-teacher “addresses himself to the mind. He teaches both pure halakha and applied halakha. He teaches disciples how to conceptualize, how to classify, how to reconcile texts and opinions, how to systematize, to infer, and to analyze.” This king-teacher is concerned, above all, with the use of the tools of the intellect and with forming the capacity of his students to use their own intellectual powers creatively to understand and systematize every topic in the study of Torah. He is concerned with what the *Zohar* describes as the outer garments of the Torah. This study is of vital importance for the religious life of the Jews. It is indispensable, not only as a *sine qua non* for the fulfillment of our obligation of *limud haTorah*, but also as a central element in Jewish spiritual life. The great models of this king-teacher type are Rambam, the Gaon of Vilna, and the Rav’s own ancestors.<sup>19</sup>

The saint-teacher, in contrast, “focuses his attention upon the invisible, intangible letters, the soul of the Torah. . . the saint-teacher speaks to the heart, communes with the heart and tells the heart how to attune its own excited accelerated beat to that of the Torah. The saint-teacher teaches man the art of catharsis, how to cleanse and purge the heart of vulgarity and inhumanity, of unworthy sentiments, uncouth emotions and selfish desires. How can a man merge his soul with the soul of the Torah if his inner life is unclean?”<sup>20</sup>

In making this typological distinction, the Rav has succeeded in teaching us who the Talner Rebbe really was. In fact, he teaches us what constitutes the nature of the life and service of the true hasidic rebbe, in contrast to that of the classical mitnagdic *talmid hakham*. His learning may be no less than that of his king-teacher colleagues, but there is an added dimension which defines him as saint-teacher. He is concerned with transmitting intellectual understanding of the Torah to his disciples, but even more with forming their characters. He guides them so that they hear not only the words of the Torah, not only the intense rational discourse of Talmud study, but shows them how to penetrate to the non-verbal, perhaps super-verbal, soul of the Torah. He creates not just great Talmudic virtuosos, but virtuosos of the spirit, who are so fully purified, so refined in character, so delicate in sensitivi-

ty, that the soul of the Torah expresses itself through them and in them. To achieve this end he directs himself, not only to a highly select intellectual elite, but to every Jew, however humble. "Hence, the teaching of the saint-teacher is exoteric, democratic, understandable and accessible both to the simpleton and to the philosopher." While other hasidic dynasties came to so intellectualize their teaching that they lost their democratic touch, the Talner Rebbe and the Tchernobil dynasty of which he was such a glorious representative remained faithful to the original charge of teaching every Jew and uncovering the spiritual capabilities of even the most ordinary disciple.<sup>21</sup> The *maspid* places his subject into the general framework of understanding which is part of the apparatus for knowing the essential reality of any great Jewish leader. He then brings to our attention those special characteristics which define the uniqueness of the particular person whom he is eulogizing. In this process, he never abandons that part of the art of *hesped* which requires him to serve as the poet who arouses our deep sense of loss, even while he is serving as the rational teacher who illuminates for us in intellectual categories the nature of the person whom we have lost.

In the eulogy for R. Zev Gold we find the stress on another distinctive characteristic. The opening moves seem to be one more variation on the themes to which we have already been introduced. A distinction is drawn between the *kedusha* of two types of holy days, *Shabbat* and *Yom Tov*, on the one hand, and *Rosh-Hodesh*, on the other. The former is holiness which is open, public, evident to everybody, while the latter is holiness which is hidden, not immediately apparent. This general description is based on halakhic sources which are rigorously examined and carefully illuminated. Following his principle, which we discussed earlier, that the Jewish personality is to be understood on the halakhic and theological model of the essence of a *Sefer Torah*, the Rav uses the typology of the holy days, which he has set forth, as a paradigm for a typology of human holiness. "In the holiness of man there are also two types: publicly revealed holiness and hidden holiness. . . Both of them flow from the deepest recesses of the human soul and from the spiritual dimension of the personality."<sup>22</sup>

Those great figures who embody the Sabbath/Festival type of holiness are fortunate in being immediately recognized and revered. Their holiness is evident in their life-style, in every aspect and dimension of their being. As a result, they need not struggle for public regard, since they have an immediate and indelible effect on every person with whom they come into contact. All grasp their special distinction and deal with them in humble submission. "*Ashrei ha-adam she-kedushato*

*me-shava'at mitokho u-mezaza'at et ha-zulat.*" Even the coarsest and the least learned are profoundly affected by the holy light which shines forth from them.<sup>23</sup>

The *Rosh-Hodesh* types, those whose *kedusha* is hidden, are far less fortunate when it comes to public recognition and reverence. Like *Rosh-Hodesh*, they give little direct evidence of the holiness which permeates every fiber of their being and which makes them persons of unique spiritual worth and importance. Their outer garb is so ordinary that it hides from public view the luminous inner reality of their sanctity. R. Zev Gold is represented by the Rav as such a personality type, whose holiness was generally hidden from public view. The Rav confesses that these *Rosh-Hodesh* types have a special attraction for him. He grew up among such types in his own family, particularly his father, the sainted Rabbi Moshe. It is hard to imagine a higher tribute from the Rav than to identify Rabbi Gold as belonging, in this respect, in the category of his own immediate forebears.

A *hesped* for a great Jew whose holiness was hidden and not widely noted presents a special challenge. The *maspid* must open up that which was suppressed. He must bring to the consciousness of his audience the holy reality of the deceased person, a reality of which they had almost no awareness during his lifetime. "My task is to dig up the coffin of R. Gold, who was buried in such unseemly haste, to open it up and to examine carefully the image of the person hidden there. . . to penetrate to the interior of his hidden holiness, and to find, beyond the external cloud of obscure darkness, the *Rosh-Hodesh* man."<sup>24</sup> The description which follows is based on a three-fold distinction. R. Gold is described as a man of three great loves, one in whom there burned with high intensity three flaming fires: the fire of his love for Abraham, the fire of his love for *Erets Yisrael*, and the fire of his love for the people of Israel.

There is no need to set forth here the details of this description. They are readily available to any reader of the text. We shall concentrate on the exposition of one of these three loves, because it is here that we see what the Rav understood to be the distinctiveness of R. Gold. The love of Abraham implies a thorough knowledge of the tradition which derives from Abraham and forms the spiritual reality of the Jewish people, for without knowledge, love is empty and meaningless. This brings the Rav to raise a startling question: was Rabbi Gold a genuine master of Torah learning, that is, was he truly a master of the classical sources? It is inconceivable that he should have raised such a question about any of the other figures whom we have discussed. Each was a great *talmid*

*hakham*, known and acknowledged as such in all circles. Why then raise such an unseemly question about R. Gold? And why find it necessary to answer it publicly and positively? The reason is easy to come by. R. Gold was quite different from the other *gedolim* whom the Rav eulogized. He was a world leader of Religious Zionism, a fact which was in itself enough to cast suspicion on him in certain religious circles. He was a superb orator whose appearances drew large and enthusiastic crowds of fascinated listeners. He was an incomparable master of the interpretation and exegesis of midrash and aggada. In all these regards, he was different from the types of great Jewish figures to whom the Rav was usually drawn. In his *hesped* he both explicates for us who this unusual figure really was and explains his personal admiration and affection for him.

After assuring us that R. Gold had deep mastery of classical talmudic learning, the Rav draws our attention to the full significance of his area of special achievement, the mastery of midrash and aggada. Anyone who ever learned in a typical yeshiva is aware that mastery of the aggadic portions of the Talmud was not required. In fact, excessive preoccupation with this material served to call into question one's intellectual seriousness. It is, then, not surprising that Rabbi Gold was not recognized as a member in good standing of the elite fraternity of great and creative Torah scholars. The Rav sees it as his task to teach us how mistaken this attitude is.

He makes the point by telling us that as a youngster he once heard an address by R. Gold and was overwhelmed by the experience, not simply by the powerful oratory, but by the intellectual force of the presentation. "On that night this American rabbi opened up for me the gates of the hidden inner meaning of the aggada. Suddenly I understood that "*drush*" is not only a matter of "*maggidut*," of preaching. . . that we must present the words of the Sages in accordance with their exact structure; that we must stress the central motif in their text and explicate their words just as we explicate a verse in the written Torah. Proper stress on a single word can shed new light on the entire pericope."<sup>25</sup>

If we are to take the Rav at his word, and there is every reason why we should, this experience of hearing R. Gold interpret a rabbinic aggada was a transforming moment in his own life. To appreciate the full significance of this moment, we must remember that the youngster who was so affected that night by his newly won insight into aggada emerged in later life as one of the greatest masters of the exposition of midrashic and aggadic texts. Who better than the Rav could, on mature

reflection, appreciate the significance of R. Gold as a *ba'al aggada*? Who better than he could appreciate the extent to which this aspect of R. Gold's life accounted for at least part of the hidden *kedusha* of this paradigmatic *Rosh-Hodesh* man?

There is an important lesson to be learned from this discussion. In the *hespedim* which we have been studying, as in very much of his own public teaching, the Rav gave a prominent place to reflection on mid-rashic and aggadic texts. This great master of halakha was an equally great master of aggada. In general, when he dealt with a topic, he joined halakhic and aggadic analysis together in a kind of inseparable unity. This is true of the *hespedim* that are before us, but it is no less true of almost all his published work. It was certainly the case in most of his public discourses, with the possible exception of his regular Talmud *shiurim*. My contention is that he wanted to teach us that proper understanding of aggadic materials requires the same kind of intense intellectual effort that is required by halakhic materials. When he learned in his youth from Rabbi Gold that expounding a *midrash* is not just a matter of "*maggidut*," he became aware of the seriousness of aggada as a branch of the Torah. I believe that he assigned to aggada a place of critical significance in the whole body of Torah literature. This by itself may be a conventional enough attitude. What is distinctive is that, as I understand him, the Rav wanted us to learn that we need to bring to the exposition of aggada the same intellectual tools that are required in the study of halakha. Conceptual formulation and analysis, systematic structuring, proper classification, exact understanding of language and terminology are demanded by the study of aggada as they are by the study of halakha. These must be informed by a feeling for the poetic, by literary imagination, by artistic sensitivity. They do not, however, take the place of the intellectual/analytic tools which are so characteristic of the Rav's treatment of a talmudic *sugya*.

Basically, I am arguing that in the *hespedim*, but not only there, the Rav has taught us one more aspect of the meaning of his well-known affirmation that the halakha is the only authentic source of Jewish ideas and doctrines. This is not a rejection of aggada, nor is it a denial of its importance in the formulation of Jewish doctrine. On the contrary, his own practice provides the strongest evidence of the high value that the Rav assigned to aggada. What he tried to teach us is how to treat aggada with the same intellectual seriousness as halakha, a methodology which transforms discussions of aggada from pretentious sermonics to intensely serious explorations of fundamental Jewish doctrines and values. We might say that in this way the aggada is absorbed

into the world of halakha, that the boundaries which separate them are diminished, if not eliminated. In eulogizing R. Gold, the Rav made it clear that, in his view, there cannot be a responsible expounder of aggada who is not, at the same time, a master of halakha. Midrash and aggada are inseparable parts of Torah, not separate realms of Torah discourse. In these eulogies, as in much of his other work, the Rav showed us how to integrate aggada into halakha, how to give to aggada the rigorous structure which entitles it to be treated with the highest seriousness as a source of Jewish self-understanding.

Finally, we must take note of the Rav's *hesped* for the Talner Rebbitzen. Here we seem to have a very different model before us. The deceased was not a world-class rabbinic scholar or Jewish leader, although she was certainly a woman of great piety and unusual learning. Because of his family relationship to her and because for many years he saw her almost every day, the Rav had a special understanding of the character of this remarkable woman. As we might expect, he approaches the task of eulogizing her with the same tools and the same sense of great responsibility that he does in all the other cases. He sets forth a halakhic account of the obligation of *hesped*, followed by the familiar question, "Who was this woman?" As the Rav says, "We were always under the impression that we knew her well. Apparently, this assumption on our part was just an illusion, a mirage. . . the woman we met and greeted every morning—'Gut morgen, rebbitzen'—was a cryptic figure, kind of a mystery. . . Now we ask ourselves, who was the woman who never omitted *tefilla be-tsibbur* [participation in communal worship], who never could catch up with the congregation, and who continued to recite her prayers long after the worshippers had left the synagogue?"<sup>26</sup> We see that the same problem which we face in knowing *gedolei Torah* of the first rank confronts us when we reflect on the personality of a woman of no such public standing and recognition, but of no less piety and perhaps of no less intellectual attainment. One suspects that the Rav would face this problem with any person. Rarely can we be confident that we truly know any individual, even one with whom we have been in close contact. The problem is intensified when the individual is a person of rare stature, of great depth, of profound spirituality, and of serious learning, such as the Talner Rebbitzen.

To meet the double obligation of causing us to sorrow over our loss and to teach us to understand whom we have lost, the Rav uses here the same devices that we saw in the other eulogies. He establishes formal classifications into which he then fits the Talner Rebbitzen. He makes an important distinction between the Torah we learn from our

fathers and that which we learn from our mothers. He calls upon his own experience to clarify that distinction, and then calls upon his personal knowledge of his subject to show us how effectively she lived her life as a transmitter of the tradition, and specifically of *torat imekha*, that which can be taught with unique understanding and effectiveness only by mothers.

The final step is to set forth a threefold account of the character and essential nature of the Talner Rebbitzen. She was a wise woman, a great woman, a dignified woman. The first two characterizations are based on biblical verses, and the third on a talmudic expression. Each is expounded with examples and anecdotes from her life. Through them the Rav paints a striking portrait of the Talner Rebbitzen, and in the process gives us a careful exposition of the meaning of the three traits which he ascribes to her. The same deep learning, the same penetrating insight, the same sense of loss which moved the Rav in his *hespedim* for the great figures whom he eulogized earlier, are fully present in this eulogy for the Talner Rebbitzen.

There is also an even more intimate dimension than in the other eulogies. In his admiration for her, the Rav saw in the Talner Rebbitzen more than just the rare individual that she was. He saw her also, as we might expect, as an archetype of the essential Jewish woman, the true Jewish mother. "Quite often when I extended '*gut Shabbos*' greetings to her, I used to think of the great women through the ages who represented with wisdom, greatness, and dignity the *torat imekha*. Consciously or unconsciously, I greeted not only her, but her mother and her mother's mother, the entire community of mothers who kept our tradition alive. I felt as if all of them had been assembled in the dining room of the Rebbitzen, as if *Shabbat haMalka* herself had been present there. The room looked the way I imagined Sarah's tent must have looked. It was enveloped in a cloud, and there was a burning candle; there was the *Shekhinah*." Thus, he perceived the Talner Rebbitzen simultaneously as an individual whom he knew well and whom he saw daily, and as an embodiment of the archetype of the ideal Jewish woman/mother first embodied in the matriarch Sarah.

Our preliminary examination of the Rav's printed *hespedim* should serve to make us aware that a rich body of material awaits further serious study. These eulogies are wonderful personal tributes. They are at the same time treasure houses of Jewish learning, of methodological sophistication, of poetic creativity, and of human sensitivity. In the hands of this incomparable master of halakha and aggada, these eulo-



gies are important creative treatises of Jewish learning and models of how to approach the understanding and evaluation of a human personality. Reasoned analysis and poetic portrayal are held in tight balance. A tearful sense of loss is fully integrated into brilliant halakhic exposition. The intersection between halakha and aggada is established, explored and exploited for the purposes of the eulogy. Even though the subjects were almost all people whom the Rav knew well and for whom he felt deep attachment, there is never a moment of false or excessive sentimentality. With this body of material, the Rav put us further into his debt, leaving us an added legacy of precious texts to study and models to imitate.

NOTES

1. The six eulogies to which reference will be made in the course of this essay are as follows: "*Ma Dodekh miDod*," contained in Pinchas H. Peli, ed., *BeSod haYahid ve-haYahad* (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 189-254; this is a eulogy for the Rav's uncle, R. Yitshak Zev Soloveitchik, the Brisker Rav; "*Peleitat Sofereihem*," *ibid.*, pp. 255-294; this is a eulogy for R. Hayyim Heller; "*BaSeter u-vaGalui*," *ibid.*, pp. 295-330; this is a eulogy for R. Zev Gold; "*Nose'ei haTsits ve-haHoshen*," contained in essays of the Rav under the title, *Divrei Hagut veHa'arakha*, (Jerusalem, 1981), pp. 187-194; this is all that was published of an apparently longer eulogy for R. Hayyim Ozer Grodzenski; "A Eulogy for the Talner Rebbe," in Joseph Epstein, ed., *Shiurei haRav*, (New York, 1994, reprinted from edition of 1974), pp. 66-81; "A Tribute to the Rebbitzen of Talne," *Tradition*, 17(2), Spring 1978, pp. 73-83. Most of these eulogies have been reprinted in other collections of the Rav's writings. A bibliography containing many of these references may be found in Zanel E. Klein, "Benei Yosef Dovrim: Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, zzl: A Bibliography," *The Torah U-Madda Journal*, Vol. 4, 1993, pp. 84-133. All references in this essay are to the editions listed above.
2. "A Tribute to the Rebbitzen of Talne," pp. 73-74.
3. "*Peleitat Sofereihem*," pp. 259-260.
4. "*Nose'ei haTsits ve-haHoshen*," pp. 188-190.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 191-192.
6. "*Yiddishe Ferzenlikhkeit iz Geglikhen tsu a Seifer Torah*," *Die Yiddishe Vokh*, Jan. 30, 1959-March 20, 1959, seven installments.
7. *B. Shabbat*, 105b.
8. *B. Megilla*, 26b.
9. *B. Kiddushin*, 33b.
10. *B. Sanhedrin*, 101a.
11. "*Ma Dodekh miDod*," pp. 199-200.
12. M. Fox, "The Unity and Structure of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's Thought," *Tradition*, 24(2), Winter 1989, pp. 56-58.
13. In a brilliant insight, the Rav calls attention to the difference of one word

between *Num.* 20:29 and *Deut.* 34:8. The former reports that *all* the people mourned the death of Aaron, while the latter reports only that the people mourned the death of Moses. Aaron is the revealed personality, known and mourned by the entire nation. Moses is the hidden personality, known and mourned by the small elite that was capable of gaining some understanding of his essence and his greatness.

14. "*Ma Dodekh miDod,*" pp. 209-210.
15. "A Eulogy for the Talner Rebbe," p.66.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
17. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 75-76.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
21. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-78.
22. "*Ba Seter u-va Galui,*" p. 305; for the previous discussion, see *ibid.*, pp. 297-304.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 306.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 317.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 320.
26. "A Tribute to the Rebbitzen of Talne," p. 75.