

Rav Yoseph B. Soloveitchik Speaks at the Sheloshim of Rav Moshe DovBer Rivkin

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Introduction

In late 1976, the Torah world experienced a profound loss with the *petirah* of Rav Moshe DovBer Rivkin, זצ"ל, a rosh yeshivah in Yeshiva Torah Vodaas for almost fifty years, during which time he also conferred *semichah* on hundreds of *talmidim*.

Born in the late nineteenth century to a family of distinguished rabbanim and Chabad Chassidim, he brought from pre-War Europe to yeshivos in America the time-tested system of genuine Torah learning, which helped shape the Torah world as we know it today.

He wrote two *sefarim*. *Tiferes Tzion*, a compilation of a select number of his “*lomdus*” *shiurim* given in Yeshiva Torah Vodaas, and *Asbkanta D'Rebbi*, a halachah *sefer*, which documents the last days of the 5th Lubavitcher Rebbe, known as the RaShab, in Rostov.

Rav Rivkin was a quiet and reserved person who rarely socialized in the public sphere. He spent most of his life at his desk learning and writing. Nevertheless, many great Torah personalities were aware of his *gadlus* and corresponded with him on a regular basis.

One of those *gedolim* who clearly shaped the twentieth-century Torah world, whose imprint was felt worldwide, was HaRav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, זצ"ל. He came to America just a few years after Rav Rivkin, and a lifelong friendship ensued between these two giants of Torah.

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After Rav Rivkin passed away, Rav Soloveitchik felt the need to eulogize him. At his weekly Gemara *shiur* at the Moriah Shul on the West Side of Manhattan, Rav Soloveitchik delivered a lengthy *hesped* in honor of the *sheloshim*. The *shiur* was given in Yiddish and recorded. The recording has been in the family's possession for over forty-five years. We finally decided to transcribe and translate the *shiur* for dissemination to the Torah world since we believe that besides giving honor to Rav Rivkin, the *hesped* possessed a timely and timeless message for all to appreciate. The version presented here of that *shiur* is written in the first person, as if Rav Soloveitchik is speaking.

The Hesp

The Mishnah (*Succah* 51a) states that *Whoever did not see the Simchas Beis HaSho'eivah never saw rejoicing in his life*. A highlight of the celebration was that *chassidim* and *anshei maaseh* (pious men and men of good deeds) would dance before them [the people] and juggle torches. But what is the meaning of *Simchas Beis HaSho'eivah*?

In our Gemara, Talmud Bavli (*Succah* 50b), *Simchas Beis HaSho'eivah* signifies, simply, the literal meaning: “a celebration of drawing water from the well”¹ for the purpose of *Nisuch HaMayim*.² *Tosafos* (ibid. ד"ה חד תני), however, cites a Talmud Yerushalmi (*Succah* 19b) that also relates it to “drawing” something, but not water—at least, not ordinary water—but *Ruach HaKodesh*. *Tosafos* states: “The *Shechinah* rests within *simchah*, as it states (II *Melachim* 3:15) “וְהָיָה כְּנִגְן הַמְנַגֵּן וַתְּהִי עָלָיו יְדֵיָהּ”, *It happened that as the musician played, the hand of Hashem came upon him.*” They then cite the story of Yonah ben Amitai, who was a simple person going to be *oleh regel*.³ But when he entered the *Azarah*⁴ for the *Simchas Beis HaSho'eivah* on Succos, he became so spiritually moved, and a sublime joy so overwhelmed him, that he left as a *navi*.⁵ Thus, he entered as a simple Jew and left as a *navi*.

It seems to me, however, that Bavli and Yerushalmi are not arguing with one another. There is a bridge between the *Simchas Beis HaSho'eivah*

¹ Based on the verse (*Yeshayah* 12:3) וְשָׁאַבְתֶּם מַיִם בְּשִׂשׂוֹן, *Draw water with joy*.

² The water libation brought on Succos in conjunction with the morning *Tamid* offering. See Rashi, ibid. (50a) בית השואבה (50a).

³ Pilgrimage to Yerushalayim for the festival.

⁴ The main Courtyard of the Beis HaMikdash where the libations on the Outer Altar took place.

⁵ It was at this time that he received the prophetic message to urge the people of Nineveh to repent.

of “drawing water” and the *Simchas Beis HaSho'eivah* of “drawing *Ruach HaKodesh*.” For if there is no bridge, then why is there no *Simchas Beis HaSho'eivah* of *Ruach HaKodesh* at *Nisuch HaYayin*?⁶ It is thus evident that the *Nisuch* of water has some higher quality than the *Nisuch* of wine, despite the fact that *Nisuch HaYayin* took place twice daily, while the *Nisuch HaMayim* took place only on Succos. Yet Chazal state that (ibid. 51a): “There was not a courtyard in Yerushalayim that was not illuminated by the light of the *Simchas Beis HaSho'eivah*,” to the extent that (ibid 53a): “A woman could sort grain by the light of the *Simchas Beis HaSho'eivah*.” All of Yerushalayim was in a state of ecstasy and Heavenly joy in the drawing of the water for *Nisuch HaMayim*, so there must be some connection between the drawing of water and *Ruach HaKodesh*. But in what sense is *Nisuch HaMayim* more elevated than *Nisuch HaYayin*?

I would suggest that *Nisuch HaMayim* has a particular symbolism. There is an old adage regarding the feelings of a person pertaining to his emotional status. The rule is simple. One becomes emotionally moved from a particular spectacle—meaning, the spectacle elicits within him the greatest emotional charge, spirituality, passion, and joy—the less frequently he observes the spectacle. The more seldom, the mightier and stronger the impression. And the opposite is also true. The more often a person encounters a particular spectacle or phenomenon, the smaller and weaker the impression. This happens because habit dulls a person. Repetition of a particular spectacle or happening many times makes a person unfeeling, so that he eventually feels nothing—to such an extent that even a real miracle, which expresses a manifestation of the *Shechinah*, will not always leave an impression! The first time, yes, he will be moved. And yes, even the second, third, and fourth times. But repeatedly witnessing the same event, every day, will cause one to lose his inspiration and feeling.

I know this from my own travels. I was born in Russia, and until I left Russia, I had never seen a sea in my life. I remember the amazement and spirituality that I experienced when I saw it for the first time. I was a young boy when I saw the sea, the Baltic Sea. I recall that it was a beautiful, bright day in the middle of Iyar, after Pesach, and I saw the sea near Danzig from afar. I will tell you what then occurred to me. It appeared to me that the ocean was very blue, a dark blue, as though the sea were a dark blue forest, almost black. It was like the sky in the evening, like how Rashi defines *techeiles*.⁷ That is how it seemed to me at first. But upon approaching the

⁶ The wine libation brought in conjunction with the *Tamid*, the daily morning and afternoon sacrificial offerings.

⁷ The blue-dyed woolen strand used for *tzitzis*.

sea, the splendor and esthetic beauty was so enchanting that I spontaneously, though unintentionally, began citing from *Tehillim* (104:1,25):

בְּרָכִי נַפְשִׁי אֵת יי, יי אֱלֹהֵי גְדֻלַּת מְאֹד, הוֹד וְהַדָּר לְבִשְׂתָּ. זֶה הַיָּם גָּדוֹל וְרָחֵב
יָדִים... חַיּוֹת קְטַנּוֹת עִם גְּדֻלוֹת.

Bless Hashem, O my soul, Hashem, my G-d, You are very great;
You have donned glory and majesty. Behold this sea, great and of
broad measure; ... creatures small and great.

Spontaneously! It was a reaction! An esthetic reaction! A religious reaction to Creation! And when I recited the *berachah* מְעִשָּׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית *Who makes the work of Creation*,⁸ it was not an ordinary *berachah*, but much more. Generally, a *berachah* is just a *berachah*. How many times have we recited a hundred daily *berachos*? But how much *kavanah*⁹ do we have? Nothing with nothing! Yet it is a *berachah*, and we can rationalize that it is valid. But the *berachah* of מְעִשָּׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית that I recited at that time was not simply a *berachah*; it was an intense religious experience. It was as though I was literally meeting with the *Ribbono shel Olam*, and I felt as though the *Shechinah* was hiding itself in the darkness and vastness of the sea. Since that time, I have seen the sea many times, and I recite מְעִשָּׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית when I have not seen it for thirty days. But what kind of *berachah* is it? A *misnagdesha*¹⁰ *berachah*.

Simchas Beis HaSho'eivah comes to repair this failing of man. It comes to teach Jews that it is incumbent upon them to be aroused not only from an event that occurs once in fifty years; once in a *joyel*.¹¹ Rather, even in a common, daily happening, they must see the *Ribbono shel Olam*; to become moved, spiritually elevated, and joyous, and recite the *berachah* with emotion and passion. I cannot tell anyone that their *berachos* should be of the caliber of the מְעִשָּׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית that I recited so many years ago. But imagine, is there a more ordinary, daily, or more necessary event than drawing water? I still remember, as a youngster, standing at a well or a running spring, watching how every hour people came to draw water, all day long drawing water. On the surface, drawing water is a mundane activity. But the lack of importance that people attach to it is a result of habit, and when people are used to something, the regularity dulls their appreciation and sensitivity.

⁸ The blessing recited upon seeing lightning, a comet, exceptionally high mountains, and exceptionally large rivers.

⁹ Attention and concentration.

¹⁰ A self-effacing term connoting a dry or dispassionate rendering.

¹¹ Jubilee.

But *Yiddishkeit* teaches Jews to be moved by all happenings; even the most ordinary, like drawing water, for the *Shechinah* reveals itself through every happening and every phenomenon. Therefore, man must not lose his feeling and must remain sensitive to every phenomenon, including things that he observes many times a day. And this finds expression in the institution of water, and from the concept of *berachah*.

One should ponder: Why is there an opinion that *birkas hanehenin*¹² is mandated Biblically? Or why, according to others, did the Sages institute *berachos*? What are *berachos* meant to show? What is the significance of *berachos*? Does the *Ribbono shel Olam* need our *berachos*? It is because the essence of *berachos* is nothing more than a reminder that from everything, and through everything, in this world, the shine of the *Shechinah* radiates out; it is the hand of Hashem. When I take a little water to drink, even this simplest act, is a wonder! Even the most necessary, daily activity is astonishing. In this activity, we can see the hand of the Creator. A person should be inspired, singing and dancing, though that is not of paramount importance. Mainly, a person should have an inner joy when he takes a sip of water or a morsel of bread; when he recites *נְהַיְהוּ בְדַבְרֵי*¹³ or *שֶׁהַפֶּלַח נְהַיְהוּ בְדַבְרֵי*¹⁴ This alone is wondrous; the whole process, from sowing, whereby man sows by throwing seeds into the earth, and then waits. And over the winter, when the seeds appear rotten and he looks at the earth and there is nothing recognizable. Then suddenly, spring arrives, and stalks begin sprouting and growing from the earth, full of kernels. Does one not see the hand of the Creator in this?

It is interesting that in the Mishnah (*Berachos* 44a), regarding what *berachah* one recites on drinking water to quench one's thirst, the halachah is *שֶׁהַפֶּלַח נְהַיְהוּ בְדַבְרֵי*. But another opinion there is that it is the more expansive *בּוֹרֵא נִפְשׁוֹת רַבּוֹת*.¹⁵ When a Jew drinks water, he should appreciate that water is the first condition for life. All explorations as to whether there is organic life on other planets hinges on one thing: Is there water there, or not? When a Jew takes a sip of water, which is the source of life, organic existence, organic life—should he not be overcome with amazement? Since water contains the secret of life, one opinion holds that reciting *שֶׁהַפֶּלַח נְהַיְהוּ בְדַבְרֵי* is not sufficient. It requires a different *berachah* that will express his amazement; that is: *בּוֹרֵא נִפְשׁוֹת רַבּוֹת וְחִסְרוֹנָן, עַל כָּל מַה*

¹² Blessings over pleasurable experiences such as food or drink.

¹³ Through Whose word everything came to be.

¹⁴ Who brings forth bread from the earth.

¹⁵ In its entirety (which is cited below), it is rendered as, **Who creates numerous living things** with their deficiencies; for all that You have created with which to maintain the life of every being. Blessed is He, the life of the worlds.

I find myself in a strange situation, having to speak about *chassidus*, since I am a *misnaged*, not a *chassid*. However, I have some knowledge and background in *chassidus*. I was raised in a Chabad city, Choslovich, which was a center of Chabad, and, in my childhood, I davened in the Chabad shul, the old *beis midrash* where the Rebbe¹⁸ davened once or twice. This occurred when the Rebbe traveled with the Russian army from Smolensk, to fight against the invasion of Napoleon.¹⁹

Therefore, having spent my young years in Choslovich and being familiar with *chassidus*, and particularly Chabad, if you were to ask me what Chabad wanted to teach Jews, I will give you the answer. *Chassidus*, in general, and the mission of the Baal Shem Tov, and particularly Chabad, was how to recite a *berachah*! As the Gemara states in *Perek HaMeiniach* (*Bava Kamma*, 30a): “One who wants to become a *chassid*, should fulfill matters of *berachos*,” meaning, “Do you know who is a *chassid*? One who knows *how* to recite a *berachah*.” I do not mean that one should know that when drinking water, one recites *נְהַפְלֵה נְהַיָּה בְּדַבְרוֹ*, or that on bread one recites *הַמּוֹצֵא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ*. Knowing this is not much of an accomplishment; it is known by every day-school child. But *how* to recite a *berachah* entails that the act of drawing water should resemble *מִים בְּשִׁשּׁוֹן*; that is, he should feel the drawing of *Ruach HaKodesh*. And not only from drawing of water. But in all mundane, daily activities one must feel the existence of the *Ribbono shel Olam*, and be inspired to the level of *Hasbraas HaShechinah*.²⁰ I once heard from my father, ז”ל, that R’ Chaim said that when one heard a certain Rebbe reciting a *berachah*, he was moved to cry from emotion, and this is not an exaggeration. And this from R’ Chaim, who was not a *chassid*, though he was closer to *chassidus* than one imagines.

This is, in truth, the essence of *chassidus*. *Chassidus* wanted to instill passion when reciting a *berachah*. If we cannot recite a *berachah* with the same enthusiasm as shown by the *olei regel* to the festival, who danced to the “drawing of water,” and the pouring of the water, then we cannot rise to the level of *Ruach HaKodesh*. And if I were asked how Chabad influenced me, I would answer that I had a rebbi who shaped my knowledge of Chabad; who taught about Chabad instead of teaching Gemara. I still know sections of *Tanya*²¹ by heart, especially from *Shaar HaYichud VebaEmunah*. As I have said many times, this rebbi did not teach Gemara, and my father really gave me a much better rebbi than him for

¹⁸ The Baal HaTanya, R’ Shneur Zalman of Liadi (1745–1813), first Lubavitcher Rebbe, known as the Alter Rebbe.

¹⁹ See Sidebar 1.

²⁰ To be cognizant of the Divine Presence.

²¹ The major philosophical work of R’ Shneur Zalman of Liadi.

Gemara. But if not for him, I would have been lacking a whole dimension of thought. Many of the *derashos* that I have given, and some of the delightful accompaniments to my *derashos*, are due to that rebbi. His name was R' Boruch Yakov Vissberg, who claimed that he was a descendant of Chabad. "Remember," he would teach, "holiness is in the ordinary!" And that is how he taught *Tanya*.

In any event, as I have said, this rebbi, simply put, saved me. He imparted to me a new outlook on *Yiddishkeit*. Let me explain. We used to sit and talk, and since he was from the yeshivah in Lubavitch, we would discuss kabbalistic concepts such as *Malka Kadisha* and *Chakal Tapuchin*.²² I did not understand it at all, and they were only words to me. But the manner in which he said them and spoke about them, was really like the enthusiastic singing and dancing exhibited by the drawers of water. And he instilled in me the flavor of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, so that many times, when I say *Malchios*,²³ I am reminded of him. And that, in fact, is the essence of Chabad. Doing something simple, everyday, and mundane, and, nevertheless, being joyous with *Hasbraas HaShechinah*. As we explained, drawing water, and with the drawing of water, drawing *Ruach HaKodesh*. This is the doctrine of *chassidus*, in general, and of Chabad, in particular.

One of those who represented *chassidim* and *anshei maaseh* in our generation was the *nistar*, Rav Moshe Duber Rivkin, זצ"ל. Emanating from him was the illumination of a torch of fire, simply through his personal appeal. His countenance alone had a definite grace, a definite brightness. As Chazal put it: מאור פניו של אדם. It is a strange expression, מאור פניו של אדם, meaning, "the light that a person shows on his face radiates outwardly." Now, not all faces radiate light. Some faces radiate the opposite, projecting sadness and depression. And then there are those whose faces truly project the light within the man. I am not sure why, but whenever I met with Rav Rivkin, he projected a certain calmness and inner serenity. Whenever I met him, even if I was not in a good mood, his inner joy poured over me from his whole personality. Unlike many people who produce a tense and strained atmosphere, Rav Rivkin had the

²² *The Holy King. The Field of Sacred Apples*, refers to נעשה ונשמע, the giving of the Torah. See the *zemer* אתקינו סעודתא which is recited at each Shabbos meal, which is meant to infuse spiritual meaning to the feast.

קוראים את ליל שבת חקל תפוחין קדישין, כי בשבת מחזירין לישראל השני כתרם של נעשה ונשמע, ואיתא בשבת בפר"ע מה תפוח פריו קודם לעליו כן ישראל הקדימו נעשה לנשמע, ואיתא שם שבשבת ניתנה תורה ולכך אומרים בשחרית ישמח משה (חידושי הר"ם דף רצ)

²³ The first of the three special blessings recited in Mussaf on Rosh Hashanah, whose subject is the proclamation of Hashem's Kingship.

opposite effect. When you met him, he had a strange influence; he calmed you, and infused into you a kind of tranquility, and a kind of joy. Suddenly, all your worries would disappear for a while, and you saw the world in a brighter glow. This is what Rav Rivkin was for me. It seems to me that this is how a Jew felt at the time of the second Beis HaMikdash when he came in contact with one of the *chassidim* and *anshei maaseh*, watching him walking around with the torch of fire. And wherever he went, there was light. As one belonging to the group of *chassidim* and *anshei maaseh*, he, in fact, represented the profile of Chabad. He was among the *chassidim* and *anshei maaseh* who danced with the torch of fire, so that when he arrived, it became light.

Chazal state in the Gemara (*Berachos* 7b) גדולה שמושה של תורה יותר מלמודה שנאמר *Attending to those who study Torah is greater than studying Torah with them, as it states (II Melachim 3:11): פה אלישע בן־שפט אשר־נצק מים על־יגרי :אליהו: , Here is Elisha the son of Shafat, who poured water on the hands of Elyahu.*²⁴ In other words, the relationship between a rebbi and a student is twofold, a double relationship. First is the relationship regarding למודה של תורה, learning Torah; the rebbi teaches him Torah, sharpens his mind, and gives him knowledge, in order to develop his power of understanding Torah studies. If a rebbi fulfills this task, and does his duty, the rebbi is aware that he is learning Torah with the student; and the student is aware that he is learning Torah with the rebbi. The student is engaged, and the rebbi utilizes all his capabilities to explain and analyze, and to refine the student's power of thought, and so on and so forth. The subject of a student's studies and the rebbi's interaction with him is called למודה של תורה. But there is also interaction through שמושה של תורה. This occurs when the student learns with no special intent or concentration. The rebbi is not aware that he is teaching anything to the student, nor does the student apply himself to understand. This is שמושה של תורה! It is spontaneous, as though generated from itself, and it is specifically in these moments that the student learns more from the rebbi than in the hours of concentrated study. This is a fact. I know that I learned more from my father, ז"ל, simply by attending to him, just serving him, than I did when learning with him. More even than learning with him for three, four, or five hours a day. The spontaneous learning from simply being in his presence, hearing his comments and observations on what he was doing, gave me more insight than the long *shiurim* that he would say.

²⁴ The Gemara adduces this from the fact the verse does not say למד, *he studied*; rather נצק, he attended him *by pouring water on his hands*.

In those moments, the rebbi entrusts himself to the student; he confides in him. It may seem to the student that the rebbi is imparting things that are unimportant or of no significance. But the impression on the student is enormous. Metaphorically, *למודה של תורה* is like a melody with words, dependent on the competence of the rebbi in relating the subject matter and the student in absorbing it. *שמושה של תורה*, however, is when the rebbi, unintentionally, entrusts himself to the student, and is like a melody without words that can go on constantly, night and day. This is the Rebbe's melody of Chabad, and is never-ending.

To illustrate, *gedolei Yisrael*, in general, did not confide in people. They learned Torah with them, but were too modest to pour out their hearts to others. Yet, from time to time, they did do so, even *gedolei Yisrael*. Every person has a need to sometimes confide in another when the burden that he carries is too heavy. The advice of (*Mishlei* 12:25): ²⁵ *דאגה בלב איש ישיחנה* applies to everyone, even *gedolei Yisrael*! As an example, my grandfather, R' Chaim, had an iron will, which could not be bent. Iron! He publicly disseminated Torah to thousands of people, but seldom did he confide in another, even in his greatest students. Nevertheless, there were certain moments when R' Chaim would divulge something to one of his students, something very intimate. As a result, this student understood more about R' Chaim than from attending his *shiurim*. Such a student, who was a confidant of *gedolei Yisrael*, was a singular individual in whom *gedolei Yisrael* had unbounded trust, a privilege that not many merited.

Rav Rivkin, ז"ל, was such an individual, who not only learned Torah from the princes of Chabad, but was privileged to be a *יוצק מים על ידיהם*. From time to time, they confided in him, despite the fact that he was very young. When I received his *sefer* *אשכבתיה דרבי*,²⁶ I read the whole *sefer* from cover to cover, and wrote him a lengthy letter²⁷ about my memories regarding Chabad, from my days in Choslovich.²⁸ The beauty of the *sefer* consists of two parts. First, it relates many customs of Chabad, which are not known to many people, and strives to explain the customs and justify

²⁵ The Gemara (*Sotah* 42b) cites two opinions regarding this verse. One opinion is that one who has dread in his heart *ישתנה*, should suppress it, while the second opinion is that he should *ישיחנה*, relate it to others.

²⁶ The main body of the *sefer* are the notes of Rav Rivkin, recording the behavior and customs he witnessed in the last days of the Rebbe, R' Sholom Ber's life, when he attended to him. The title is an allusion to the Gemara (*Kesubos* 103b), which records the events at the time of the passing of the Tanna, Rabbi, and conversations with his students.

²⁷ See letter in Sidebar 3.

²⁸ See Sidebar 2.

them in a scholarly manner. And not only the customs of Chabad, but also the halachos regarding *Orach Chaim* are explained in a scholarly manner. After all, Rav Rivkin was a great scholar, and it is a wonderful *sefer*.

But what drew me to the *sefer*, what possessed me in the *sefer*, was not only his striving to impart the Torah of Chabad. Rather, it is in its relating the *sichos*²⁹ of the two *gedolim* of Chabad, R' Sholom Ber and, especially, R' Yosef Yitzchak, for he was among their confidants, and what they told him was private. What is amazing is that a person normally confides things to an older person, and here, it was the opposite, as he was still very young. The *sefer* begins in 1917–18, after the Bolshevik Revolution. R' Rivkin was then a young *bachur*, who was not only fully accomplished in Torah, but was also one who was *יוצק מים על ידיהם*, and from *אשכבתיה דרבי* you can readily see that he did so for the princes of Chabad. This type of communication is very difficult to find in the repertoire of Chabad, which is considerable, and in all places it teaches us about intellectual fundamentals. But he teaches us about “the pouring of water”; about intimate, personal things. The very fact that Rav Rivkin was the one chosen to bring them the water and pour it over their hands suffices to show the trust they had in him, and it serves as a powerful and correct testimony. For example, he tells of a visit he made in the company of his Rebbe, R' Yosef Yitzchak, when the Rebbe went to the cemetery after R' Sholom Ber passed away. Simply a visit, and there were no great novel ideas presented. But there shone through more radiance of Chabad than in their Torah discourses.

In truth, Rav Rivkin was among the last of the *chassidim* and *anshei maaseh*. But he reminds us not only of the *chassidim* and *anshei maaseh* of the *Simchas Beis HaSho'eivah*, but of the roshei yeshivos as well.³⁰ In addition to being a *chassid* and *ish hamaaseh*, he was a *gadol* in the area of *למודה של תורה* as well. He was one of the *gedolim* of the generation, a remarkably gifted *mechadesh*³¹ with extensive knowledge, who was a rosh yeshivah for close to fifty years. Do you know what Chazal (*Yoma* 28b) mean in describing Avraham Avinu as a *זקן ויושב בישיבה*, *an elder who sat in yeshivah*? It means that he sat in yeshivah as a young man, as in the case of Rav

²⁹ Conversations or talks.

³⁰ A reference to Rambam (*Hil. Lulav* 8:14), who states that aside from *chassidim* and *anshei maaseh* who danced and performed, roshei yeshivos, Sanhedrin, and *zekeinim* did so, too.

³¹ A scholar with analytical skills that yield novel and imaginative approaches to the topic.

Rivkin, who came to America as a young man of approximately thirty-six or thirty-seven. Yet, he remained in yeshivah even as an older man, teaching Torah to *talmidei chachamim* and *morei horaah*.³² He ordained hundreds of rabbis and was one of the pioneers who built Torah in America. It is interesting that this Chabadnik's method of learning was very akin to ours, stressing comprehension and depth. He not only helped lay the cornerstone of Torah in America; he promoted the reality, a very good reality, that Torah in America should be learned with *havanah*.³³ In all circles, America has become a place of Torah, in that there are many young men who are not only learning Torah, but that the Torah being learned is of a high quality. The young scholars in America are firm in their positions; they will not buy into everything nor easily be taken in. They argue with you, and they are often right. And the fact that there is a relatively high level of Torah can be attributed in great part to R' Rivkin. He fulfilled the saying of Chazal that “*ושננתם לבניך*,” *You shall teach them to your children*,” includes “*אלה תלמידיך*,” *These are your students*.³⁴ This saying is not simply a compliment. Did Chazal merely want to compliment the rebbi by telling him “You have many children?” No! It is not a compliment. It is a *halachah*. It is the law. It entails the obligation that a rebbi must treat his students like his children. And whether “his students are like his children” or whether his students are strangers depends on the rebbi, on how he relates to them. In general, a rebbi cannot teach a student if there is not an attitude of love and affection. In truth, a great rebbi relates to his students like he relates to his children. Thus, *ושננתם לבניך*, *אלה תלמידיך* is not a compliment and not praise. It is a requirement, a mitzvah, a halachah, a law! And that was what R' Rivkin did, attested to by his students, who recount that they had a relationship with him as with a father. Now, this relationship need not be verbalized. The student feels it and the rebbi feels it, and it is like a self-generated relationship between them. But it depends on the rebbi or the rosh yeshivah, on whether he is a person of *chessed* or not. If he is such a person, then his Torah is a Torah of *chessed*, and where there is *chessed* there is *התפשטות*, expansion. And when there is *hispashtus* from the rosh yeshivah to his entire class—whether fifteen, twenty, one hundred, or two hundred—they become one small family, or more correctly, one house, the house of Avraham. This idea can be drawn from the verse charging Avraham (*Bereishis* 18:19) *אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת־בְּנָיו וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ אַחֲרָיו*, *because he commands his children and household after him*. One wonders: since the verse already states *אֲשֶׁר יִצְוֶה אֶת־בְּנָיו*, to whom

³² Rabbis who determine or resolve practical matters of halachah.

³³ Scholarly comprehension.

³⁴ See Rashi to *Devarim* 6:7 and Rambam *Hil. Talmud Torah* 1:2.

does וְאֶת־בֵּיתוֹ אֶחָדִי refer? It refers to his students, and they are called “the House of Avraham” all because Avraham was the ultimate *ish bachessed*.

I can say, unequivocally, that I never heard R' Rivkin speak ill of another Jew. It is likely that he had complaints against certain people, as does every person. But I never heard any, nor did I ever hear any bad-mouthing or derogatory word about any party. But there is something else that I never heard. I never heard him bemoan anything. After all, every person goes through good times and bad times. There are times when he is sad, or not happy with himself, frustrated or disappointed. And people express these feelings openly. But I never heard any such expression from him. He always had a bright smile on his face, which cheered me up whenever I saw him. He fulfilled that which the Gemara states (*Bava Kamma* 30a): *The chassidim of earlier generations would hide their thorns or shards of glass three tefachim deep in their fields*; meaning, that if something was “broken,” or he felt at times unwell or distressed, he would not express it. He was always happy with his lot in life, happy with his Torah, and happy with his whole *hashkafah*—the *hashkafah* of Chabad.

חבל על דאבדין ולא משתכחין³⁵

יהי זכרו ברוך³⁶



³⁵ Alas, for those who are gone, and cannot be replaced (*Sanbedrin* 111a).

³⁶ May his memory be a blessing.

Sidebar 1

At that time, the Rav³⁷ [the Baal Hatanya], רב"ז, organized intelligence in favor of the Russian army, without whose help the Russians might have lost the war. The Rav was of the opinion that if France were to conquer Russia all would be lost, since France was at that time a land of heresy and atheism. The Rav argued that if Russia were to win the war, the Jews would indeed be poor, but would still believe in the *Ribbono shel Olam*. But if France were to win, the Jews would be rich, and have plenty of business, but would lose the *Ribbono shel Olam*. And when it is a question of losing the *Ribbono shel Olam* or losing money, the Rav ruled that losing the *Ribbono shel Olam* is worse. But he did not merely issue a ruling from the pulpit. He actively organized an intelligence cell, and the head of those whom he enlisted was a chassid by the name of Meiselsh, who spoke French perfectly, with a perfect French accent. I am not coming to tell *chassidische* tales. But without the Rav, Russia might have lost the war. All the plans of the French general staff were known by Meiselsh, and he handed them over to the Russian government. This is how the story was told in Choslovich, as follows:

When the Russian army was still at a distance, the French army had already surrounded Choslovich. Aware that the Rav was handing over intelligence information to the Russian government, an order was given that the Rav of Liadi be brought to the general headquarters in chains. And so the French army took over Choslovich and began searching for the house of the Rav. Now, at that time, there was a Rav by the name of R' Yisrael, and the story goes as follows (though I cannot swear to its authenticity one hundred percent). It is a simple story, not one of miracles. This R' Yisrael³⁸ was a student of the Gaon, and was known to hound chassidim. Listen to this story! The situation was very tight, and with the French about to search every house, the Rav said that there was but one place where the *Ribbono shel Olam* would protect him and he would be saved. By R' Yisrael! The chassidim answered, "What are you talking about? By R' Yisrael? He will immediately give you up to the government!" "He will not," answered the Rav, "He will not give me up. He is an observant Jew, who acts *lishmah*, for the sake of heaven." And so he went to R' Yisrael, who took him into his house.

Now, French intelligence were aware that R' Yisrael was an opponent of the Rav. So, although they made a thorough search of all the other

³⁷ The Baal HaTanya was often called "the Rav" after his major halachik work, *Rav Shulchan Arukh*.

³⁸ The Rav notes that he does not know who he was, but he was not the author of *Peas HaShulchan* who went to live in Eretz Yisrael.

houses, when they came to the house of R' Yisrael, they merely knocked on the door, and when he came out, they asked, "Is the Rav Shneur Zalman of Liadi here?" He answered: "It would have been good if he were here, and I would immediately hand him over to you. However, I have no idea where he is." And so they left! The Rav remained there, and declared at that time that nobody in Choslovich should ever speak disparagingly of R' Yisrael. That is how the story goes, and it appears to be true, and I have recounted the story to an uncle of mine. I have heard it from tens of chassidim, older chassidim, who heard it from their parents, who, in turn, heard it from their parents. And it is not far-fetched, since it is a relatively recent *mesorah*.³⁹

³⁹ A recounting of events through the generations.

Sidebar 2

I will tell you something else that occurred in my younger years. You know, as I have told you, there was an old *chassidische beis midrash*, and there was one place on the northern side where nobody sat. I used to always go there Friday before dusk, after *plag haminchab*.⁴⁰ What did I see that drew me there at that time? Chassidim. Now, the chassidim in Choslovich were very poor, but happy. These poor Jews were peddlers in the surrounding villages, who wandered around the villages all week, and came home for Shabbos. Late Friday they hurried home, and with the water of the mikveh still dripping from their *peyos*, they immediately began singing a melody. Chassidim know the melody, though I do not. And with this longing melody, they went around the *beis midrash*, up and down, up and down, up and down! They could not stand in one place, for there was so much inspiration and so much passion that they could not stay in one place. Up and down, up and down, up and down, saying *Tehillim* (107: 1–3): 'הָדוּ לַה' בְּיָטוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חִסְדּוֹ: וְאָמְרוּ גְּאוּלֵּי ה' אֲשֶׁר גָּאֲלָם מִיַּד-צָר: וּמֵאֲרֻצּוֹת לְבָצָם מִמִּזְרַח בְּיָטוֹב כִּי לְעוֹלָם חִסְדּוֹ: וְאָמְרוּ גְּאוּלֵּי ה' אֲשֶׁר גָּאֲלָם מִיַּד-צָר: וּמֵמַעְרָב מֵצָפוֹן וּמִיָּם.⁴¹ Though I was a young boy, I felt that these Jews were not merely reciting a chapter of *Tehillim*. Rather, they were experiencing the redemption as though taking place now. Taking place right now! They were removed from the village, from the peasants, from all worries and concerns, and entered into a world of “all good”— יוֹם שֶׁכֻּלּוֹ שָׁבַת וּמְנוּחָה — לְחַיֵּי הָעוֹלָמִים, *A day which will be completely a Shabbos and rest day for eternal life*. I would stare at them, like they were the chassidim and *anshei maaseh* who danced by the *Nisuch HaMayim*. They danced because they were in a state of *hasbraas haShechinah*, which screamed out וּשְׂאֵבֹתָם מִיָּם בְּשִׁשּׁוֹן from within them.

⁴⁰ Approximately an hour and a quarter before sundown.

⁴¹ *Give thanks to Hashem, for He is good, for His kindness endures forever! Those redeemed by Hashem will say, those whom He redeemed from the hand of distress, and whom He gathered from the lands: from east and from west, from north and from the sea.*

Sidebar 3

Letter from Rav Yoseph B. Soloveitchik to
Rav Moshe DovBer Rivkin⁴²

HIGHLANDS 8-4687

יוסף דוב הלוי סולוביטשיק
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אור ליום שני, מעלי ריש שחא, תשס"ו

כבוד ידידי, הרב הגאון הגדול, גפן אדרת לישראל, הפארה, מוה"ר מ. דובער ריבקיין, שליט"א;
שלום וברכה!

קבלתי את אגרתו. אני נחפז להזדקק אליה, כי כל מקום שיד הולך רכיל באמצע זריזים מקדימים ליישר את העקומיות ולפענח את האמת. היטב חרה לי, כי בעטים של דברים מסורסים ומסולפפים חלטה דעתו של מעב"ג. פלוני אלמוני מסר לו רק מקצת שיהא וחצי דבר. מעשה שהיה כך היה. כסספרו בא לירי הקדשה לו הרבה זמן ועיינתו בכולו-דבר היוצא מגדר הרגלי- בכבוד ראש. התענינותי בפרי עטו של כה"ר נזקפת על שלשה נימוקים. א. אכבד אכבדהו מאד וכל אשר יכתוב אקרא בחשומת-לב. ב. חביבה יתרה הנני רוחש לתנועת חב"ד. מדי דברי בה זכר אזכרנה כחזון נעורים, רצוף רשמי ילדות המיטה, עשופה הוד רומנטי. עוד מרחפים לפני דמויות פטר(א)אליהו, עשורי תפארת קדומים. הנה דיוקן מלמדי, ר' ברוך יעקב ריסברג, ז"ל, לפני. עוד אני רואה את ארשת פניו, שהפיקה פכחון לב ופקחות עין וגם דמיון ומעוף. עד היום הזה אני שומע את קולו בדממה בין השמשות נוגה ורווי עצב ובעגועים, ודבריו בוקעים מחוך המרחק-דברים מלאי החלכות והתפעלות על דבר שבהו בליבווישש בנערותו. עוד אני נושא בנככי נפסי את דמות הרבי. הזקן שהביטה עלינו, תינוקות של בית רבם, מכחלי החרד המסוידיס-קאונה הדמות, כעלה המצה הרחב, שליט השכל, והעינים הגדולות המציבות במרחבי י-ה אין קץ, רחוקי הזון פלאים. הזקן היורד על פי מדותיו קסם אותנו, ילדים קטנים, בהדרתו וסודיותו. עוד עיני רואות את חמונתו של הצמח צדק, לבוש לבנים, שגחגלה בפנססיה הילדותיה שלנו בדמות כהן גדול היוצא מביה קדש הקדשים. עוד אזני קולטות צלילים מוזרים אבל גם מלבכים ומושכים את הלב, ניכים מקושעים, מלאם ספורזרה שיצאו מפי החוזרים בערכי החורף הארוכים לאור נר כהה על דבר אורות מקיפים ואורות חוזרים, העלם וגילוי, אהבה פנימית (אנפש ישראלית אשר מכסא הכבוד חוצבה. ועוד אני חולט ואני רואה את זקני החסידים המרקדים בקצב מהיר בליל שמיני עצרת סחור סחור לאבא מרי, ז"ל. רשמם מעין אלה לא ימחו מקרב לבי, והמה מסורשים עמוק, עמוק, במסתרי הויתיה. לפיכך כל הנכתב על תנועה גדולה זו מענין אותי מאד, מאד. ג. תיבורו נקק אותי בשל אופיו היתודי. מצאתי בו מיזוג פרדוכסלי של שכליות ואימוציונליות שני מינים שאינם מתמוגים, על פי רוב, יפה, יפה. מצד אחד מצאהי בו הגיון הלכתי חד וחלק, הערות נאות ומדויקות המבוססות על ניתוח דק. מעב"ג קולע בהן אל נקודת המוקד של כל בעיה ובעיה. במלה אחת, פגעתו בלומדות מבית מדרשו של חכמי לימא, עידיה דעידיה. מצד שני ^{לדבריה} ^{הענינה} כההלהכות חסידיה, בהתרששות אימוציונלית ובהתמכרות כנה ונאמנה לבדולי החסידות הסבירות

⁴² An English translation of this letter can be found in Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *Community Covenant and Commitment: Selected Letters and Communications*, edited by Nathaniel Helfgot, (The Toras HoRav/Ktav Publishing, 2005) pp. 289-291.

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לדרגת אמונת צדיקים פשוטה וחזקה כחלמיש צור. במושב חברים והלמידים דנתי על הזיון זה; ספרתי בשבחו של ספרו וגם על אודה אופיו המופלא. דיקנות הלכתית ולכביות חסידית עולות בקנה אחד. לראיה ולדוגמא על השניות השוררת בהיבורו צששתי אח דבריו ביחס לפום-את כהנים בקברי צדיקים. אמרתי באותה חבורה, כי בעל ההלכה נאבק קשה עם החסיד הנאמן. הראשון יודע היטב, כי קבר מטמא, כלי שום הכדל של מי הוא הקבר, אין מקום כאן לסנטימנט-שליות ולרגשי הערצה. אבל איש החסידות רוצה להקל בזה. כמדומני, שהדגשתי אז, כי כח"ר בהערתו מביע את השחומותו על מנהג השפתחות כהנים על קברי צדיקים, אך בכל זאת הוא מבי ובס מרגיש את הדחף האימוציונלי שחביאם לידי כך. המוח והלב מחרוצים, נמחבר מורה בשניהם. יאמן לי ידידי כי פילוג כזה- מהשבה ורגש- ירד גם לאיש יוחי. (לפעמים הנני נוטה להאזין להמיתח לבי. נראה לי אזובות גלגליה ז"ו.

לא יכלתי לדאבוני לעיין בקונטרסו בהוגן. שרדתי לפני ימי החסד והרחמים השתרגה עלי, ועוד חזון למועד. מוכשחני, כי כל מה שיוצא מתחת קולמסו של גברא רבה כמותיה הוא דבר מחוקן ונאה.

יקבל נא את ברכתי, להתחדשות השנה. יכתב ויחהם בספר הצדיקים לאלתר לשנת חיים ושלוה וכ טוב. לשנה הבאה נזכה כולנו לקיים, בחצוצרות וקול שופר הריעו לפני המלך ה'."

ידידו, מוקירו ומכבדו, יוסף סולוביצ'יק

גדת טאק אדמת זאתנו רב האיש, אלהיא טרוין, סיוה. וקול גרתי השני