

Rabbi Soloveitchik, 1903-1993

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NEW YORK — Thousands of students and disciples gathered in Boston last Sunday to pay respect to Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, the central intellectual and religious figure behind American Orthodox Judaism.

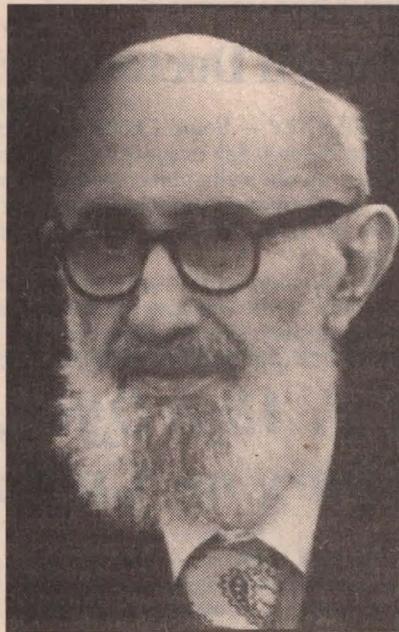
Soloveitchik, 90, died of heart failure April 8 at the end of the third day of Passover. A master of the worlds of Jewish law and Jewish thought, he was almost universally referred to as "the Rav," the rabbi and teacher par excellence. Born into Europe's most prominent dynasty of Talmudic scholars, Soloveitchik trained generations of American rabbis as the leading professor of Talmud at Yeshiva University from 1941 until his retirement in 1985.

The holder of a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Berlin, he demonstrated that modern culture and intellectual thought are not incompatible with total observance of *halacha*, or Jewish law. He thereby enabled Orthodox Judaism to establish a secure foothold in America.

Chasidic Texts and Pushkin

Soloveitchik was born Feb. 27, 1903, in Pruzhan, Poland, in what is now Belarus. The bulk of his early education was in the Talmud and traditional texts. But as a child, he studied briefly under a Lubavitcher Chasid, which gave him an appreciation for Chasidic texts rare in his family's circle. Later, his mother introduced him to the writings of Ibsen, Pushkin and Bialik.

He was tutored in secular subjects, with his first formal secular education coming at age 22, when he entered the University of Berlin. It was there that he met Tonya Lewitt,



THE RAV: Soloveitchik found modern culture and *halacha* compatible.

whom he married in 1931. She died in 1967. In 1932, they emigrated to Boston, where he founded in 1937 the Maimonides School, the first Hebrew day school in New England. It was at the school that his funeral was held, with the main hall packed and the crowd overflowing into the classrooms.

Soloveitchik's weekly lessons for laymen attracted thousands from all over the New York area, as did his annual Talmudic discourses on the occasion of his father's *yahrzeit*.

But citing a family tradition against publishing while still alive, and in keeping with his perfectionist nature, Soloveitchik's writings were few and far between, with several yet to be translated into English.

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