

The Five Torot and the World of Tomorrow

Transcript of Rabbi Dr. Berman's investiture speech as delivered Sunday, September 10, 2017

It is deeply humbling to stand here today in this hallowed hall, this hall through which the voices of our past continue to echo across the generations, the voices of our early presidents, Dr. Bernard Revel and Dr. Samuel Belkin, and those of the great scholars and sages who have lectured from this pulpit, most notably our revered teacher of blessed memory Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. As we embark on this next phase of Yeshiva University's illustrious history, I am fully conscious of the fact that we are only here today because of the incredible work and sacrifice of so many leaders who have come before us. Whatever success we hope to achieve in shaping our future will be due to the fact that we are standing on



Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman

President, Yeshiva University

the shoulders of giants, and I begin my talk today by asking you to join me in showing recognition and appreciation to the third and fourth presidents of Yeshiva University, Dr. Norman Lamm and President Richard Joel.

I first stepped into this room when I was 13 years old as a student of the Marsha Stern Talmudical Academy. Since that moment, I have been inspired and nourished by Yeshiva University. My studies — high school, college, graduate school, ordination,

post-ordination, and my early teaching career — all occurred at YU. Even my wife — I met Anita when I was a senior in high school on the MTA-Central blind date event.

Intellectually, spiritually and socially I am a product of this special institution.

Most new presidents of universities need to learn the story of their institutions to understand their narrative and their purpose, but I do

The Five Torot of Yeshiva University

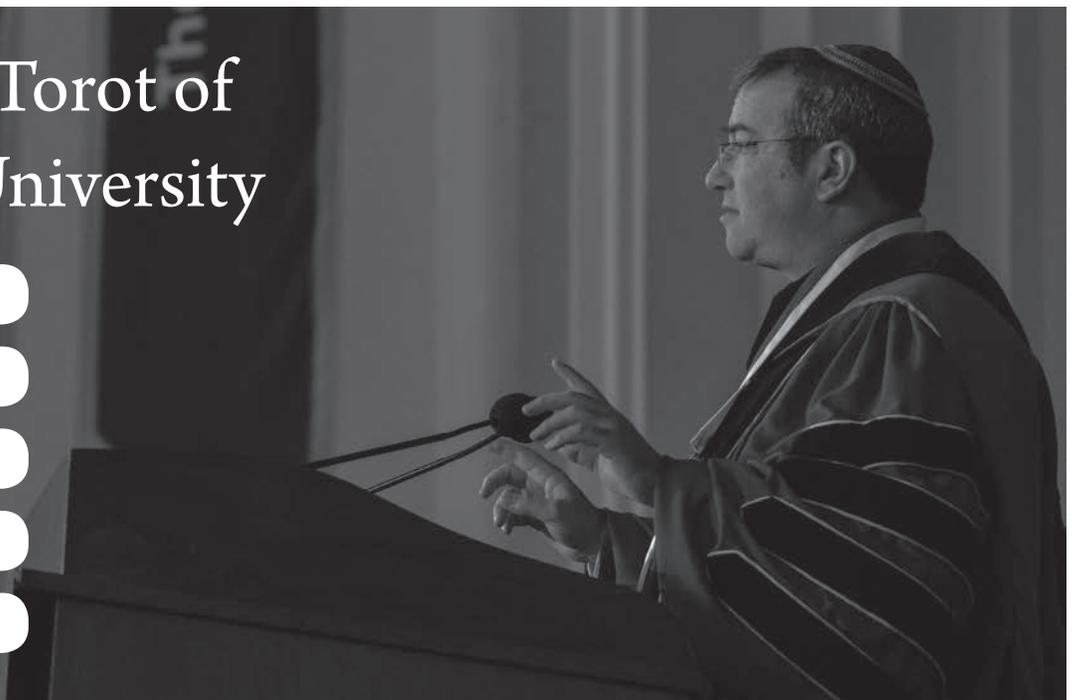
TORAT EMET

TORAT CHAIM

TORAT ADAM

TORAT CHESSED

TORAT TZION



not need to read a history book to understand Yeshiva University. It is in my heart and it is in my soul, as it is in the heart and soul of so many of you who are sitting here today and so many people who are our friends and partners throughout the world.

We know instinctively what Yeshiva University is and what it is meant to be.

Yet, interestingly, it is not always so easy to articulate.

Before I officially started as president in June, I spent three months living on campus commuting back and forth from Israel. When I moved out after graduating college in 1991, I have to admit that I never thought that, 26 years later, I would move back into the Morg dorm, but life is full of surprises.

During this time, I had the opportunity to speak with board members, alumni and supporters as well as meet with the faculty, administrators and professional staff of each of our schools, and spend much quality time with our students. And in most of my meetings, I asked the same question. What does Yeshiva University stand for?

Perhaps, unsurprisingly, there were many different answers and often there was no answer at all.

This is a crucial question for us. Yeshiva University is, of course, an institution; it has campuses, buildings and students. But, at its core, Yeshiva University is an idea. And it is this idea that gives us our strength and positions us to be the educational and intellectual epicenter of a large global movement. Therefore, before I outline our direction for the future of the institution, in the first part of this talk I need to address the question of Yeshiva University as an idea. What

is Yeshiva University? What does it stand for?

In my mind, there are five values that personify Yeshiva University, which I would call the Five Torot or the five central teachings of our institution.

The first is Torat Emet — we believe in truth.

We believe that God gave the Torah to Moses at Mount Sinai. We believe that in that Torah there are eternal values, not subject to the vagaries and vicissitudes of history. It is this pursuit of truth that animates our intense study of Torah during the day and deep into the night which, in turn, deepens our relationship with God.

But we also believe that our goal is not simply to sit, study and live in some ivory tower but that we must be fully engaged in the world and responsible to the world.

We do not just believe in Torat Emet but also Torat Chaim — that our truths and values must live in the world.

Who are our graduates?

They are rabbis and Jewish educators and they are lawyers and doctors, accountants and financial analysts, social workers and psychologists, mothers and fathers, community leaders and leaders of industry — all of whom are out in the world, acting daily as productive citizens of society.

And we are uniquely qualified to raise engaged Jewish citizens for whom Judaism is vibrant and essential to their lives. Many of our students come to campus with a full day school education; some of our students come from public school, with little to no previous Jewish education. Here in Yeshiva University our students find friends for life, and often even soul

mates and partners for life. Here in Yeshiva University our students have the opportunity to not just learn about Judaism but to experience Judaism, to appreciate that Shabbat is not just something we keep, it is something we treasure, and that living a life of faith adds great meaning and joy to one's life.

Moreover, at this moment in time, as cultures shift and as moral intuitions inevitably adjust, all parents know how difficult it is to help their children navigate the tension between tradition and an increasingly complex world. Yeshiva University, located at the nexus between heritage and pioneering, provides the students of the next generation with the tools for critical critique and self-reflection so that they can not only weather the storms and tempests of contemporary moral discourse but also leave here both rooted and nimble, anchored in our values and equipped with the language and sophistication necessary to succeed as leaders in the world of tomorrow.

By offering in one institution a comprehensive, integrated educational program that produces the Jewish leaders of the next generations who are firmly committed, forward focused, engaged in the world and pillars of society, Yeshiva University is the world's premier Jewish educational institution.

But Yeshiva University is not just for our Jewish students. We are also proud to include a large non-Jewish population in our graduate programs, and this message applies to you as well.

The educational philosophy of Torah u-Madda is based on Maimonides' directive to accept the truth from whatever source it comes. We know

that there are great truths to be discovered in the study of the human mind, the physical world, literature, legal interpretation and more. Our belief in the higher purpose of education is true for all of humanity. In addition, Torat Chaim requires everyone to be engaged in the project of applying these values and truths to the world, and we look to all of our faculty and intellectual leaders to guide us in this effort. As such, by utilizing our vast, interdisciplinary resources, Yeshiva University is uniquely positioned to address the most pressing moral issues of the day. In an era in which there is a breakdown of civil and civic discourse, we stand proud as educators, thought leaders and moral voices for our generation.

These are our first two values: Torat Emet and Torat Chaim.

But Yeshiva University does not only believe in truth, it also believes in humanity.

Our tradition teaches us that each individual is created in God's divine image and that it is a sacred task for each individual to hone and develop their unique talents and skills. In addition, we are charged with the obligation to use these unique gifts in the service of others; to care for our fellow human beings; to reach out to them in thoughtfulness, kindness and sensitivity, and form a connected community. These two values, humanity and compassion, are our next two Torot: Torat Adam and Torat Chesed.

One of the aspects of YU that simply amazed me when I was walking around the university in the spring is the way in which these themes of Torat Adam and Torat Chesed manifest themselves in each of our

schools.

For example, in Cardozo, Professor Jocelyn Getgen Kestenbaum leads the Ferencz Human Rights and Atrocity Prevention Clinic, which fights against human rights violations and genocides around the world. Dr. Bill Salton heads the Parnes Clinic of the Ferkauf School of Psychology which provides low-cost, high-quality psychological treatment for a Bronx population that would not otherwise be able to afford it. The Wurzweiler School of Social Work is launching a new innovative mental health clinic, which will help people from all walks of life cope with life stress issues. When I was visiting the Albert Einstein College of Medicine I encountered a group of people sitting around a table who were introduced to me as super-scientists. I asked them about their research and each shared with me their work on some matter crucial to the betterment of humanity. One was a leader in the fight against AIDS, another the Zika virus, a third, breast cancer.

And this spirit exists not only in our graduate schools, but in our undergraduate schools as well. I was walking in the library one night and saw two students with YU t-shirts. I asked them where they were coming from and they replied: the START Science Program. This is a program in which every week over 100 Yeshiva University undergraduate students go to the local Manhattan public schools to teach children about science and technology. When I heard this I was very impressed, but it was only later that I discovered that this program was actually launched by undergraduate students at Yeshiva University seven years ago and has subsequently spread to chapters in countries across the world. And this

is emblematic of our student body, as hundreds of our students participate in these kinds of programs throughout the academic year, channeling their unique talents into extraordinary acts of kindness. Just last week our Student Life department initiated student-led missions to Houston to help our fellow citizens recover from Harvey. Within minutes our sign-up sheet had over a hundred students volunteering to go.

And this is what we do. At Yeshiva University, we teach our students to fight for justice; to fight for the underprivileged; to fight against violence; to fight against disease.

But most of all, at Yeshiva University we teach our students to fight against indifference.

The values of Torat Adam and Torat Chesed pervade our entire university, fusing a lofty sense of human dignity with an inspiring commitment to compassion.

These are our first four principles: Torah that is True and Torah that is alive; a belief in human capacity and the need to reach out to others.

And there is a fifth: Torat Tzion, the Torah of Redemption.

Torat Tzion of course directly relates to the project of building the modern State of Israel. And this is very important to us as proud Zionists. We certainly encourage students to move to Israel and we encourage those who live outside of Israel to devote their time and resources to help Israel further its role as a shining light to humanity. But it is also much more than that, because the return to Israel in Jewish theology is, in and of itself, part of a much greater narrative. Torat Tzion tells us that we are not accidents of history, nor even simply

participants in history, but we are drivers of history.

Torat Tzion requires us to understand that as human beings we all have one common, overarching goal, and that is to redeem the world, and transform it for the better; to birth a world suffused by justice, goodness, prosperity and transcendence. If, as Martin Luther King Jr. proclaimed “The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice,” then Torat Tzion charges us with the task of moving history forward. This directive applies to all of humanity. And at this moment in time — more than at any point in the entire span of Jewish history — the Jewish people are capable of partnering with the full breadth of humanity to move history forward.

Let me share with you a personal story that illustrates this point.

My wife’s grandmother, Bubbe, is an extraordinary woman who survived the Holocaust by evading the Nazis hiding in caves, forests and cemeteries. She was born in Poland, and had a large family including her brother Pinchas to whom she was very close. Her childhood sweetheart, Shlomo, eventually became her husband and together they lived a relatively quiet and peaceful life. But then the Nazis invaded Poland, entered their town, and gathered and killed all of its Jews. Bubbe managed to escape into the woods with Shlomo and a few of their nephews and nieces, but no one else in their large family was as fortunate. She never left her husband’s side and together they managed to evade the Germans, and found their way to Romania. Following the war, they left Europe and went to Cuba, and then when Castro rose to power, they fled once again, this time to New York.

Fast forward the story by a couple of decades, and one day Bubbe received a call from a friend of hers who just returned from a trip to the former Soviet Union. “Cyla” she said, “You need to sit down, I have something astounding to tell you. Your brother, Pinchas — he is alive. While you ran west, he escaped east. You each thought the other was dead, but Pinchas is alive and living in Russia.” Bubbe immediately contacted him, but they were never able to meet, as soon afterwards Pinchas died. Pinchas, though, had a daughter named Gala, who married Vladimer. When they had a son, they named him Pinchas, after her father. Some years later, the Iron Curtain fell, and Gala and her family moved to Israel. Shortly thereafter, Anita and I were studying in Yeshiva University’s center in Israel. At the end of the year, Anita gave birth to our first son, whom we named Shlomo after her grandfather who had recently passed away. I still remember the scene when Bubbe came to Israel for the bris. She was sitting with her new great grandson, Shlomo, on her lap, when in came a woman who carried a clear family resemblance. It was her niece Gala whom she had never previously met. And with Gala came a little boy named Pinchas. And when Pinchas ran over to see the baby, once again Bubbe was surrounded by Pinchas and Shlomo.

You see, they thought they could kill us, they thought they could remove us from the earth, but Pinchas and Shlomo were alive again, and this time they connected with each other in Jerusalem, the capital of the modern Jewish State of Israel. Bubbe’s life represents the dramatic story of the Jewish people in the modern era, a story of an indomitable spirit able to

transcend destruction and to rebuild a lost world.

It is my great joy at this point to pause for a moment and acknowledge the presence of a woman who is over 100 years old, beli ayin ha-ra, who is here with us today celebrating the investiture of her grandson — ladies and gentlemen, my Bubbe.

To me, this story highlights the reality of the Jewish world today, as it provides a stark contrast with the Jewish world of yesterday. The prophet Ezekiel foretells a wondrous future in which the dry bones of Israel are brought back to life, but for us living today we know that this is no dream; it describes our reality. Pinchas and Shlomo once left for dead have now returned in a new generation. And look at the world that they face today. It is an era that is simply unprecedented in Jewish history.

We live in an era that is miraculous and wondrous. The Jewish people are no longer lost in exile but have once again returned to their homeland. Torah study is open and accessible throughout the world. Where once we might have looked at our neighbors and saw only persecutors, today we may look at them and see potential partners. And this presents us not only with great opportunities but also great responsibilities.

As Rabbi Soloveitchik taught us in 1956, in this very room, from this very podium — some of you may even have been in this room — kol dodi dofek, the voice of God is metaphorically calling to us, knocking at our door. He has placed us in this incredible time, and he beckons us to respond.

Yeshiva University represents the

kinds of thinkers and dreamers who have always believed in embracing history and its opportunities. Now more than ever before it is time to think bigger, to think beyond our individual selves, to move history forward, to spread positive values to the world and to fight for peace and prosperity for all of humanity and with all of humanity.

Torat Emet, Torat Chaim, Torat Adam, Torat Chesed and Torat Tzion — Truth, Life, Humanity, Compassion and Redemption.

These are the Five Torot that differentiate us and are our identity. They root us deeply within a structured value system while providing moral guidance and direction in living our lives. They propel us to develop our talents and skills while directing us to reach outwards and connect to others in kindness. And they inspire us with a grand, historic purpose to make a difference, and impact the world.

This is what we believe Judaism represents and what God wants from all of us. This is not just about Modern Orthodoxy, or even Orthodoxy. These are our messages to the Jewish people and to the world at large.

This is who we are — this is our philosophy of life.

And now that we have discussed the idea of Yeshiva University, we can focus on outlining the future of Yeshiva University as an institution. Once we have established who we are, we can now lay out where we are going. And I have to tell you that the future of Yeshiva University as an institution is bright and it is exciting.

When Yeshiva was founded in the early 20th century, it met the needs of an Orthodox Jewish immigrant

population with limited higher education possibilities. Over the generations, our specific form and structure has shifted depending on times, needs and circumstances, but the core mission has always remained the same. At this point, the world has changed greatly but our task of educating the next generation of students and future leaders has not changed, it has just shifted to be in synch with our new realities. Today, perhaps more than ever before, there is a need to raise generations of students who are both deeply rooted and forward focused. And Yeshiva University will continue to look ahead into the future to open up new worlds for them.

And I say this specifically in respect to three areas in which we will be looking to expand.

First, new industries:

We will continue to excel at educating our students in the areas of law and medicine, accounting and finance, social work and psychology, education and scholarship. But as the global economy evolves we will also create new opportunities for our students in the areas of STEM — science, technology, engineering and mathematics — as well as in the health fields. The marketplace of tomorrow will feature high demand for graduates trained in coding, data analytics, quantitative analytical skills, as well as those with entrepreneurial experience, and we will be preparing our students with the skill sets necessary to succeed in this new reality.

Second, new markets of students:

In our graduate and undergraduate programs we will be diversifying our offerings and utilizing the latest

technological innovations allowing for greater accessibility to attract new student populations both in the United States and internationally. Moreover, we will actively seek to attract students who represent the values of our institution, who are role models of our Five Torot, including students who show a propensity and passion for their Torah studies, or who display extraordinary capabilities in areas that create new knowledge like in science and technology, or young social entrepreneurs who stand out for their communal contributions, or those who have shown the courage of their convictions to respond to the historical opportunities of our era. For example, by creating scholarships for students, who after studying for a year in Israel, continue their stay there by volunteering for *sherut leumi*, national service, or volunteering to become members of *Tzahal*, soldiers in the Israeli army, or students who volunteer to join the United States Armed Forces. We already have a significant number of these students in our ranks and we will work to attract even more of such people in the years ahead, as these are the young men and women we wish to showcase to our community as role models and future leaders,

And finally, new educational pathways:

We conceptualize Yeshiva University as a single, interconnected network, instead of a collection of separate schools. As such, new connections between our graduate schools and new pipelines between our undergraduate and graduate programs, like the Einstein College of Medicine, the Cardozo School of Law and the newly developed Katz School, will enable our students to complete their

studies here market-ready and poised for immediate success. In addition, our tens of thousands of alumni and friends are a crucial part of our network and will play an important role in our new educational models as connectors who will help place our students at summer positions or advanced internships between their college and graduate school years. Moreover, we are looking to partner with the graduate schools of other stellar institutions in their areas of expertise.

One manifestation of all of these points will be our new connections with Israel. As we know, Israel is no longer simply a charity case for Diaspora Jews, but is now an economic powerhouse and major resource specifically in areas of innovation. Over the past few months, we have been working to formulate partnerships with universities in Israel, and I am excited to report that just last week we reached agreements with Bar Ilan University and the Hebrew University to create bridge programs between

our institutions so that a YU student who earns a BA in computer science can complete her or his studies with a Master's degree at Bar Ilan or the Hebrew University in such areas as data science, cybersecurity and information technology. Through the assistance of our alumni, this program will include high-level internships in the start-up and hi-tech industries in Israel. We have been closely working with Israel's education ministry and government on this project, and they are providing us with substantial support because they see Yeshiva University as their natural partners. There will be more announcements like this in the future but my point now is that we will continue to leverage our close ties with Israel to create these kinds of pipelines so that our students will receive the best training in the skill sets necessary to succeed in the marketplace of the future, and the world of tomorrow.

But Israel is just the beginning. The global economy is evolving and emerging markets in places like East Asia and India are growing

in importance. We already have a relationship with a number of universities in China, and have over 30 Chinese students enrolled in our Katz School, and we will be looking to expand further. In addition to growing our tuition base, these efforts will allow us to spread Jewish values and ideas across the world, help shape future global partners and ambassadors for Israel and the Jewish community, and enable our students to develop a worldwide network that will be crucial for their success in the future.

But most importantly, all of these innovative and exciting initiatives will be advanced within the context of the Five Torot. Since its founding, Yeshiva University has looked to open new worlds for its constituencies, placing them within the framework of our moral and religious ideals. Tomorrow's Yeshiva University will continue in that effort. Our differential will always be our Torot, our values and teachings, our sense of rootedness, together with our drive to engage the world, directing



We live in a rapidly changing world. Technology, medicine, education, and communications are progressing and shifting in fundamental ways. This presents daunting challenges but also extraordinary opportunities for humanity. Armed with a 3,000-year-old tradition of wisdom, Yeshiva University's mission is to guide our students and broader society in seizing these opportunities and transforming our world of tomorrow for the better.

the development of our own special skills in the service of others, with the overarching, grand purpose to move history forward and impact the world. And as we move into the next era of our history, we will apply our core principles to our current circumstances, and all of this in service to God.

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This is the future of Yeshiva University.

I will close with one final story:

Last week I spent Shabbat at our Beren campus with our undergraduate women. And in a talk at the end of Shabbat I mentioned to our students

how important it is for us to come together as one united whole; that in a time in which competition and self-focus are the underpinnings of the society in which we live, our student body must exemplify the value of supporting one another and rooting for each other's success. And I mentioned to our students that I am rooting for them, that I am rooting for each of them to succeed in life. And then one woman in the crowd shouted out: "Rabbi, we are rooting for you!"

I was very moved by what she said. And I want to tell you that this is the feeling that I have been experiencing both from inside and outside our university. Over the last number of months, I have been visiting many communities in this country and beyond, and the overwhelming feeling that I have walked away with is how many people are rooting for us to succeed. I have repeatedly encountered a clear appreciation of the crucial importance of Yeshiva University, of the necessity for Yeshiva University to live up to its own ideals, to raise the next generations of leaders, and to serve as not only the premier Jewish higher educational institute but also the spiritual and intellectual epicenter of a robust global movement that unites the international Jewish community together with all of our partners and

friends in its dedication to promoting the moral and material betterment of human society.

On and off campus, there is a great feeling about this moment and a great excitement for our future.

To all of you who have long been part of the Yeshiva University community, who have been nurtured by this institution, who deeply understand the enormous potential that lies within our mission, who wish Yeshiva University not only to grow and expand but to rise and become the place it was always meant to be, and for all those who are new to us, who are meeting Yeshiva University for the first time, who identify with our values, who see the importance of such an institution for the Jewish community and the broader society — now is the time to get involved. The participation of each and every one of you will make a real difference, strengthening and energizing our renewed sense of purpose.

For all of you sitting here today and for all of our friends who are listening throughout the world — now is the time to come together.

Join us in our journey. Be a part of history, as we maximize our potential, write a new chapter in the Jewish story and work to make a lasting impact on the history of all of humanity.