

# THE BENJAMIN AND ROSE BERGER TORAH TO-GO®

JUNE 2024 • SIVAN 5784

ESTABLISHED BY RABBI HYMAN Z"L & ANN ARBESFELD

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CHAG HASEMIKHAH

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*Rabbi Charlop received his semicha from RIETS in 1953, was rabbi of the Young Israel of Mosholu Parkway from 1966–2008, and was the Max and Marion Grill Dean of RIETS from 1971–2008.*

The Metzuyanim Fund will be allocated for stipends to financially support a cohort of promising talmidei chachamin in the Yeshiva.

*"Under his leadership, the whole Yeshiva changed... We all owe a great debt of gratitude."*

**Rav Hershel Schachter**

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Yeshiva University and RIETS*

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*Interim Dean and Rosh Yeshiva,  
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# Divrei Pesicha

As we enthusiastically showcase our newest Musmakhim on the occasion of the 5784 RIETS Chag HaSemikhah, we commemorate their outstanding achievement this year in a manner which is markedly different than in many years past. Our great pride in their accomplishments in reaching this major milestone is as heartfelt as ever, but due to the horrific events of this past Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah, on the now infamous calendar date of October 7, our happiness is significantly mitigated, as Klal Yisrael as a whole continues to suffer and our dear brethren in Eretz Yisrael continue to endure terrible personal and familial tragedies and calamities.

This Chag HaSemikhah was originally scheduled for just a few weeks after the war began; it was for that event that this published collection of Divrei Torah was initially prepared. It was decided then that due to the extraordinary magnitude of the catastrophe we all sensed at that time, holding a festive Chag HaSemikhah would be most inappropriate. But given that unfortunately, the hardships and adversities facing us are far from over, one may legitimately wonder how and why we can celebrate even today.

One answer may perhaps be found in a lesson learned from Megillas Esther. After the plot to destroy the Jewish people was exposed, Esther and Mordechai, having received authorization to do so, informed the Jews that they have official permission

to organize, to defend themselves, and to eliminate anyone who threatens them (Esther 8:11). The reaction of the Jews to this good news was celebratory: They experienced *orah vesimchah vesasson vy'kar* – light, gladness, joy, and honor (passuk 16). They were jubilant.

But why? The Jews were still in grave danger. The actual battle was yet to be waged. The potential loss of many lives remained a very serious possibility. Why were they so exuberant already then?

One answer may be that they then discovered a new-found confidence built on a renewed sense of *emunah* and *bitachon*. They became truly convinced that Hashem would see to it that all would work out well in the end, in spite of various undeniable hardships along the way. What gave them this conviction? A newly invigorated commitment to Torah.

Indeed, the Gemara in Megillah (16b) states that the “*orah*” identified in the aforementioned passuk refers to the light of Torah; they were rejoicing in their rediscovered respect for Torah and for learning, which gave them the sense of assurance, of trust in the future, and of courage. An earlier Gemara there (14a) teaches that the initial decree against the Jews inspired a greater return to the ways of Torah than all of the prophets were able to generate. And it was this new feeling of determination that boosted their overall morale, even in the face of on-going challenges.



**Rabbi Michael Taubes**

*Interim Dean, RIETS  
Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS & YUHSB*

In a similar vein, it may be suggested that in our current crisis as well, we too should be stirred and motivated towards a renewed commitment to Torah. And we can be exhilarated, despite the very real difficulties lying before us, by witnessing – and indeed celebrating – the successes in Torah attained by another generation of ordained rabbis, of devoted students of Torah, of the next leaders of Klal Yisrael. It is in that spirit that we rejoice, together with our new Musmakhim and their families, in Torah learning, Torah teaching, and Torah leadership, with feelings not just of hope, but of certainty, that we too will ultimately merit the kinds of personal and communal yeshuos which were bestowed upon our ancestors.

On behalf of the entire RIETS hanhalah, I extend my warmest Mazal Tov wishes to all of our new Musmakhim and my sincerest tefillah that we will see much nachas from each of them in the years to come.



## Divrei Beracha

In my first year teaching at YU, I noticed that every Wednesday evening, during the last half hour of second seder, Rav Schachter gave a short shiur to some of the *talmidim* who are in a six year *semikha* track. The focus of the shiur is the *yesodos* from Rav Soloveitchik's *yahrtzeit* shiurim, which Rav Schachter says over from his own memory (and not from the write up). When I discovered this shiur, I started to sneak in to listen. In one such shiur, Rav Schachter quoted that Rav Soloveitchik explained that there is a certain great joy in teaching Torah to other people. When the halacha expects somebody to experience a very high level of *simcha*, he becomes a *chiyuv* for an *aliyah* to the Torah, a position of teaching Torah to others. Rav Soloveitchik explains that this is the reason that *Shulchan Aruch* (YD 384:2) holds that an *avel* cannot get an *aliyah* even though he

may stay in the room for *kerias haTorah* (YD 393:3). Apparently, even in those circumstances when we are willing to allow an *avel* to learn Torah, such as learning portions that are related to mourning or part of the daily routine (such as *kerias haTorah*), we do not allow the *avel* to teach others. All Torah brings *simcha*, but teaching others brings an entirely different level of *simcha*.

Rav Soloveitchik explained that this is why there is a *minhag* for a *chasan* or *ba'al bris* to get an *aliyah*. The greatest way to express *simcha* is to teach Torah to others. Our *musmakhim* have spent many years toiling in the great *shira* of *limud haTorah* in yeshiva, and are now primed to elevate the joy inherent in the song of Torah by going out to communities, shuls, and batei medrash, to share torah with others and fulfill the holy task of emulating the ways of



### Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz

*Abraham Arbesfeld Chair of the  
Director of the Rabbi Joseph B.  
Soloveitchik Semikha program*

Hashem by teaching Torah to others. We wish all of our precious *musmakhim*, who represent the very best of our yeshiva, abundant *hatzlacha* in this most holy and joyous endeavor.



# LEARN MORE ABOUT THE RIETS KOLLELIM

## **MARCOS AND ADINA KATZ KOLLEL**

**Rosh Kollel:** Rabbi Hershel Schachter

The Kollel embodies, in the highest sense, the concept of Torah Lishmah. With more than 80 Kollel Fellows, most of whom are still in the Yoreh Yoreh semikha program, it is the largest of RIETS' Kollels. Talmidim study approximately 20 dapim of Gemara per semester, including regular bechinot and a night seder requirement, and Kollel Fellows are eligible to receive a monthly stipend.

## **BELLA AND HARRY WEXNER KOLLEL ELYON**

**Rosh Kollel:** Rabbi Mordechai Willig

Talmidim enter the four-year Kollel Elyon program after finishing their Yoreh Yoreh semikha studies. This program combines intensive Torah learning for future rabbinic leaders with courses such as counseling, advanced public speaking, writing, business ethics and conflict resolution. Participants receive more than 400 hours of professional training as a supplement to their intensive Torah studies. RIETS offers generous stipends to the Kollel's Fellows.

## **ISRAEL HENRY BEREN INSTITUTE FOR HIGHER TALMUDIC STUDIES**

**Rosh Kollel:** Rabbi Michael Rosensweig

This program provides post-rabbinic training for scholars who will become future roshei yeshiva and spiritual-intellectual role models for the Jewish community. Candidates are selected from among the most promising young rabbinic scholars and are also eligible to receive graduate school stipends.

## **KUPIETZKY KODSHIM KOLLEL**

**Rosh Chaburah:** Rabbi David Horwitz

In establishing the Rabbi Jacob H. Kupietzky Memorial Program for the Study of Kodshim, the Kupietzky family pays tribute to Rabbi Jonah and Fran Kupietzky's father, a Talmudic scholar who learned with the legendary Chafetz Chaim, and paves the way for a new generation of scholars to acquire mastery of the rarified texts and esoteric concepts of the Talmudic order of Kodshim.

## **RABBI NORMAN LAMM KOLLEL L'HORA'AH (YADIN YADIN)**

**Rosh Kollel:** Rabbi J. David Bleich

**Assistant Rosh Kollel:** Rabbi Mordechai I. Willig

This intensive five-year program grants Yadin Yadin semikha to outstanding scholars who have already received semikha Yoreh Yoreh, enabling them to serve as poskim in areas of Even HaEzer and Choshen Mishpat. They study halacha and responsa while observing the Beth Din of America and other batei din.

## **RIETS ISRAEL KOLLEL ON THE CAROLINE AND JOSEPH S. GRUSS INSTITUTE IN JERUSALEM**

**Director:** Rabbi Dovid Miller

Opened in 1977, the RIETS Israel Kollel Institute offers yearlong programs of study for both semikha and post-semikha talmidim. RIETS talmidim can spend one of their four years of the semicha program studying there. Rabbi Dovid Miller serves as the Director of the YU Caroline and Joseph S. Gruss Institute in Jerusalem and is the Rosh Kollel of the RIETS Israel Kollel.

## **LUDWIG JESSELSON KOLLEL CHAVERIM**

**Rosh Kollel:** Rabbi J. David Bleich

Established in 1978, the Chaver Program is a Kollel for men entering or completing professional studies other than the rabbinic. Participants pursue a post-college year of intense study of Talmud and halacha related to their professional goal while attending regular RIETS shiurim.

## **THE JACK AND GITTA NAGEL YU COMMUNITY KOLLEL (AFFILIATE)**

**Rosh Kollel:** Rabbi Jonah Steinmetz

The Jack and Gitta Nagel YU Community Kollel was founded in the Summer of 2022. The Kollel brings young talmidei chachamim from the RIETS Beis Medrash to the Pico-Robertson neighborhood, infusing that community with high-level, relatable, exciting Torah-learning opportunities. The Kollel is committed to providing learning opportunities and meaningful programming for women of the community.

## **YU TORAH MITZION KOLLEL OF CHICAGO (AFFILIATE)**

**Rosh Kollel:** Rabbi Reuven Brand

The mission of the Yeshiva University Torah Mitzion Kollel of Chicago is to nurture the spiritual growth of the greater Chicago Jewish community. The dynamic and talented team of scholars shine throughout Chicago, strengthening shuls and schools and the community at large with a learning portfolio unique in its scope and breadth. The Kollel partners with local institutions to provide one-on-one learning opportunities, inspiring youth and teen programs, women's initiatives, online resources and access to renowned Torah personalities. Since the YU Torah Mitzion Kollel's founding in 2008, several alumni have taken community positions in rabbinic and lay leadership capacities in Chicago, other U.S. communities and Israel.

## **KOLLEL OHR HAEMET (AFFILIATE)**

**Rosh Kollel:** Rabbi Eliyahu Ben-Haim

Kollel Ohr HaEmet serves all members of the Great Neck Jewish community. Affiliated and non-affiliated Jews alike find their home in the Kollel, where they can learn Torah and grow spiritually. The Kollel's constituents share the common goal of aiming for spiritual heights and are united in the effort to do so. Classes cover the broad spectrum of Torah learning including: Chumash, Mishna, Gemara, Halachot, Hashkafa and Mussar.

# MEET THE RIETS ROSHEI YESHIVA



Rabbi Elchanan  
Adler



Rabbi Asaf  
Bednarsh



Rabbi Eliyahu  
Ben-Haim



Rabbi J. David  
Bleich



Rabbi Yitzchok  
Cohen



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Hirsch



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**Rabbi Michael Taubes**  
Interim Dean  
Rosh Yeshiva



**Rabbi Larry Rothwachs**  
Director of Professional Rabbimics



**Rabbi Ronald L. Schwarzberg, CPT**  
Director, The Morris & Gertrude Bienenfeld  
Department of Jewish Career Development & Placement



**Rabbi Zevulun Charlop**  
Dean Emeritus

# CHINUCH INCUBATOR

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It's a crisis we're hearing about everyday: the shortage of teachers entering Jewish education. While it might be easy to point to causes large and small, RIETS is most interested in a solutions-oriented approach: How can we encourage and support young men and women to consider a career in chinuch?

In 2021, YU conducted extensive surveys, interviews and focus groups that comprised of school leaders, teachers, and graduate and undergraduate teachers. Three broad challenges emerged that influence students' willingness to consider a career in chinuch:

**Money:** How will educators support themselves and their families?

**Perception:** Young people worry that the field is not respected in our community.

**Inexperience:** Too many college students make decisions about a career in Jewish education without hands-on experience in the field.

The Chinuch Incubator was created to answer these challenges. Targeting students who are part of YU's sphere of influence, the program works collaboratively across YU's schools and departments to identify, inspire, educate and guide students as they consider careers in Jewish education. The program is led by Rabbi Yehuda Chanale under the guidance of Dr. Rona Novick, Dean of the Azrieli Graduate School for Jewish Education and Administration, and Rabbi Menachem Penner, Dean of RIETS.

"Our community is soon going to have to make a choice," said Rabbi Penner. "We can either encourage the next generation of young adults to consider careers in education or we can lower our hopes for the chinuch of our young children. RIETS, the Azrieli Graduate School and Yeshiva University are committed to guaranteeing that we have the Limudei Kodesh teachers we need to assure our Jewish future."

## HOW IT WORKS:

**Identify:** The Chinuch Incubator collects nominations for talented teachers from a variety of contexts: camps, youth groups, day schools, yeshivas and seminaries.

**Inspire:** The Chinuch Incubator encourages teachers to develop mentorship relationships with students.

**Educate:** By collecting data on teacher salaries, benefits, tuition remission and general teacher satisfaction, the Chinuch Incubator ensures that students are making decisions based on a real understanding of the teaching field. In addition, it profiles different ways in which teachers supplement their income through other jobs that build off their teacher skill sets.

**Guide:** The Chinuch Incubator shows students the different pathways to entering the field and growth opportunities within it. Resources will be shared with parents to help allay potential fears and help parents to better guide their children.



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**We are proud of the over 150 students who have or are participating in one of our current programs as we seek to launch even more!**

- "Taste of Chinuch" Melave Malke, Dinner Talks and Shabbatonim
- MafTeach School Community Fellowship
- MTA Lunch and Learn Fellowship
- GPATS-Maayanot Friday Fellowship
- Individualized support and mentoring meetings

**We are proud of our over 60 MafTeach Fellows who are considering a life dedicated to teaching Torah and have committed to visit one of 8 communities around the country for extended weekends over this year.**

**We thank the following schools for partnering with us and investing in the future of chinuch in their schools and the field at large:**

Atlanta Jewish Academy, Atlanta • Fuchs Mizrahi School, Cleveland  
Ida Crown Jewish Academy, Chicago • Katz Yeshiva High School, Boca Raton  
Kohélet Yeshiva, Philadelphia • Kushner Academy & High School, Livingston  
New England Jewish Academy, West Hartford • Ohr HaTorah Yeshiva, Hollywood  
Robert M. Beren Academy, Houston • Seattle Hebrew Academy, Seattle

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**To learn more about MafTeach and other Chinuch Incubator programs email [chinuch@yu.edu](mailto:chinuch@yu.edu)**





## RIETS ISRAEL IMMERSION PROGRAM

The RIETS Israel Immersion Program seeks to optimize the contribution of aliyah-bound Gruss students into Israeli society, to expose and guide Gruss students to the variety of professional options in Israel, and to explore options “outside of their comfort zone.” Rabbi Yossi Goldin, Placement Advisor and Israel Immersion Program Coordinator for the RIETS Israel Kollel, assists Gruss students in the pursuit of such opportunities through internships, assistance in placement and educating them about the realities of living in Israel as a Rav and/or Mechanech.

### THE ISRAEL IMMERSION PROGRAM CONSISTS OF THREE DISTINCT PROGRAMS:

**The Gruss Kollel Speaker Series** aims to inspire, encourage and inform Gruss students of the differences they can make in Israel. They hear from community leaders and Rabbanim of the importance of impacting the Anglo communities in Israel. Speakers have included Rav Yehoshua Fass, Rav Dov Lipman, Rav Judah Mischel and Rav Ezra Friedman. Shmuel Rosenthal, a talmid who took part in the speaker series explains, “The Gruss Kollel Speaker Series was a great opportunity to get a feel of the different forms of furthering a career in Klei Kodesh outside of the gap-year programs. We had a variety of presentations, ranging from Kiruv organizations to teachers and heads of school in the Israeli school system.”

**The Gruss Kollel Internship Program** was implemented to help Gruss students get their feet wet in Avodas Hakodesh positions in Israel. Options for the internship program included Misrad HaChinuch, Rabbanus, Kiruv

and Community Programming. Yonatan Abrams, a Gruss student who partook in the internship program, interned at Beit Kneset Ohel Ari in Ra’anana.

Abrams describes his time interning as “an incredible growth experience for me. I have had the opportunity to get to know the people of such a wonderful community and speak and teach in both Hebrew and English to people of all ages. The rabbi of the shul, Rabbi Chanan Atlas, has been so kind in his mentorship and has given me very good advice towards my growth as well as about being a Rabbi in Israel in general.”

**The Post-Semikha Israel Immersion Fellowship** is designed to assist RIETS musmakhim olim more easily integrate into Israeli culture. This is done through the acquisition of high-level Hebrew speaking early on in their aliyah as well as opening up many more professional opportunities for them in Avodas Hakodesh. The expectations of the fellows include attending a “Rabbinic Ulpan” two afternoons a week for three hours each session over the course of six months.

The fellows participate in a weekly “speaker series” in order to hear from community leaders in Israel and Anglos in the field about their experiences. A few benefits of the fellowship include receiving a 2,000 NIS monthly stipend. Rabbi Moshe Stavsky, a current fellow said: “I greatly appreciate the program. The immersive and supportive format of the ulpan sessions has already improved my ability to converse and teach in Hebrew. I am enlightened each week by the variety of speakers who share their personal experiences in serving the Jewish people in Israel.”



# REBBETZINS YARCHEI KALLAH

The Rebbetzin Esther Rosenblatt Yarchei Kallah for Rebbetzins, led by Rebbetzin Meira Davis, was recently held in December 2022 in Teaneck. It was the first in-person program of this annual event since before COVID. About 90 Rebbetzins, whose husbands are in pulpit positions, gathered from across the U.S. and Canada for the unique opportunity of networking with their peers in a safe and supportive environment. They treasured the opportunity to develop lasting relationships, to acquire new resources and skills, and to enjoy the intellectual stimulation of Torah study with leading scholars as well as interacting with more experienced Rebbetzins. This event acknowledges the great contribution and influence of Rebbetzins in the growth and success of the rabbinic couple in developing their community and the value of the support that RIETS gives its musmakhim and their spouses.

Topics explored in the sessions included the role of the Rebbetzin as a community role model, how to prepare a shiur, the impact of social media on social discourse, being an effective shadchan, navigating being a Rebbetzin and a professional, programming for singles, supporting divorcees in the community, substance abuse among Modern Orthodox teens, wisdom from a Rebbetzin Emeritus, teaching children how to develop healthy relationships by modeling, self-care, supporting couples experiencing infertility. Additional discussions addressed healthy marriage, managing healthy relationships with community members, how to step into one's power as a Rebbetzin, juggling many roles, with numerous shiurim and small roundtable discussions on specific topics.



## QUOTES FROM REBBETZINS AFTER THE EVENT:

"I left feeling empowered, supported and proud of the life that my husband and I have chosen to lead. I felt like each session inspired me to be better and give even more in whatever area was being discussed. The camaraderie was energizing!"

"I enjoyed the networking, the shiurim, seeing people and being pampered. Rejuvenated me, inspired me, validated me."

"It gives me chizzuk to continue what I'm doing and gives me a chance to take a step back and think about my position-what I'm doing right, what I can improve."

"THANK YOU!!! To the amazing team of people who worked so hard to put together this incredible program, Thank you is not enough. This is something I look forward to every year and always walk out invigorated. May Hashem bless you and reward you for your efforts, and may you receive all the zchusim from the good that comes out of this conference."

FINDING THE RIGHT  
RABBI FOR YOUR  
COMMUNITY ISN'T  
EASY.

UNLESS YOU  
KNOW WHERE  
TO LOOK.

The Morris and Gertrude  
Bienenfeld Department of  
Jewish Career Development  
and Placement

## 2022 In Numbers



150

Students & Rabbis

Helped by our office



45

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# STANDING AT THE *Crossroads*

## THE MIGDAL VS. THE MIZBEACH

Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman

President and Rosh Yeshiva,  
Yeshiva University and RIETS

*Adapted from Rabbi Dr. Berman's Chag HaSemikhah address from the previous Chag (5782/2021) honoring Rabbi Joel Schreiber.*

About five years ago, I received a call from Joel Schreiber, past chairman of the board of RIETS. I had made Aliyah about ten years prior and was living in Israel happily and comfortably.

Joel reached out to me to share that he knew I was asked to consider becoming the President of YU and he wanted to talk to me about accepting. Thus began one of the most passionate descriptions of the significance of Yeshiva University that I have ever heard. Joel is an ardent believer. I similarly spoke with my rabbeim, our senior Roshei Yeshiva, who were of course equally passionate about our Yeshiva. And I had to decide what to do.

Many of you have, in some form, also experienced these types of decisions for these are the years in which you will be asking yourselves these kinds of questions: Who will you marry? Where will you live? What position will you accept? Moments in which you stand at a crossroads and your decision will forever alter the course of your life.

What do you do at such moments? How

do you make these kinds of decisions? Or more broadly, as *musmakhim* of our Yeshiva, how do you, as rabbis, educate your students, congregants, lay leadership, community partners to best navigate the course of **their** lives?

What is true for individuals is also true of societies as a whole. There are pivotal moments in which history is determined, when society stands at a crossroads.

These are the moments, both as individuals and as societies, that are definitive and revealing. What are your values? What are your priorities? What are your fears and insecurities? Sure, we all speak about Torah and serving Hashem. But *tachlis*, when it counts, when something is on the table. Who are you? What do you stand for?

In the Torah there is a story about a society that stood at its own crossroads that provides some guidance as to how one addresses these kinds of questions. In the story we read of two very different responses: the *migdal* and the *mizbeach*.

At the end of Parshat Noach, we read of a society that was both drunk with their newfound power and scared for their lives.

It was after the flood and the world was repopulating.

וַיְהִי כָּל הָאָרֶץ שְׂפָה אַחַת וּדְבָרִים אֶחָדִים.  
*And the whole world was of one language and of common purpose.*

וַיֹּאמְרוּ אִישׁ אֶל רֵעֵהוּ הִבֵּנוּ נִלְבְּנָה לְבָנִים וְנִשְׂרָפָה לְשִׂרְפָה וַתְּהִי לָהֶם הַלְּבָנָה לְאֶבֶן וְהַחֲמֶר הָיָה לָהֶם לְחֵמֶר.

*They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks, forging them in fire, And the brick served them as stone, and lime served them as mortar.*





We read that society was beginning to industrialize and discover. Instead of just using stones to build, as in their past, they began to harness and channel energy, fire, to create bricks, which broadened their range of opportunities. Technology, innovation, the social and economic order were beginning to evolve.

And what did they do with this newfound scientific ability?

וַיֹּאמְרוּ הִבֵּה נִבְנֶה לָנוּ עִיר וּמִגְדָּל וְרֵאשׁוּ בְשָׁמַיִם וְנַעֲשֶׂה לָנוּ שֵׁם פֶּן נִכְרַח עַל פְּנֵי כָל הָאָרֶץ.  
*And they said, "Come, let us build us a city, and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for ourselves; else we shall be scattered all over the world."*

Why a tower?

The Netziv explains that they were afraid. They saw people starting to spread across the world and they were worried that they and their ideas would be lost. So, they initiated this huge urban project with a massive blast-like furnace, a *kivshan*

*ha-esh*, for a mass production of bricks to build a tower tall enough so that they can always keep watch over the people and wherever people spread they will always look up and know that they are being watched. They were ensuring their continuity by policing the populace.

In fact, a close reading of the story reveals that they had something else to fear as well: their own mortality. Inexplicably, they were dying at a younger age than ever before. If you follow the ages in the genealogical sections that are often read too hastily, you will note that Shem the son of Noah lived 600 years. His son Arpachshad lived 438, Shelach his son 433, Ever 464, Peleg 209, Reu 239, Serug 230, Nachor 138, Terach 205. Chazal teach us that it was at the end of Peleg's life that Migdal Bavel happened, when life expectancy precipitously dropped by two hundred years.

And keep in mind that this was all in the context of living in the wake of a global

flood that wiped out the world. In fact, one midrash says that they were afraid of another flood happening so their plan was to build many towers as scaffolding to hold up the *rakia*, firmament, lest it collapse again, and waters would come flooding down.

All of these elements highlight the same essential point: Towers, policing, hiding behind walls — these are not the signs of strength but insecurity. And the society used their scientific and technological advances to *naaseh lanu shem* — to be remembered, to create some sense of permanence, to make for themselves a name.

This is the backdrop of the introduction to the hero of Sefer Bereshit — the hero of the Jewish people and all of humanity.

What is sometimes lost is that Avraham was alive during Migdal Bavel. *Seder Olam* writes that Avraham was 48 years old. The Netziv explains that the furnace

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**TORAT EMET**  
**אמת**  
**TRUTH**  
 We believe in truth, and humanity's ability to discover it.  
 The pursuit of truth has always been the driving force behind advances in human understanding, from Socrates' wanderings through the streets of Athens to the innovations of the Industrial Revolution. People of faith, who believe in a divine author of Creation, believe that the act of discovery is sacred, whether in the realm of philosophy, physics, economics or the study of the human mind.  
 The Jewish people in particular affirm that beginning with the Revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai, God entrusted eternal teachings and values to us that we must cherish and study diligently above all else, for they represent the terms of the special covenant that God made with us. All people, regardless of their faith background, should value the accumulation of knowledge because it is the way to truth and a prerequisite to human growth.

**TORAT CHAIM**  
**חיים**  
**LIFE**  
 We believe in bringing values to life.  
 Jewish thought asserts that truth is made available to human beings not simply so they can marvel at it but also so that they can use it. Students studying literature, computer science, law, psychology or anything else are expected to take what they learn and implement it within their own lives as well as apply it to the real world around them.  
 When people see a problem that needs addressing, their responsibility is to draw upon the truths they uncovered during their studies in finding a solution. They must live truth in the real world, not simply study it in the classroom.

**TORAT ADAM**  
**אדם**  
**INFINITE HUMAN WORTH**  
 We believe in the infinite worth of each and every human being.  
 Jewish tradition first introduced to the world the radical proposition that each individual is created in the divine image and accordingly possesses incalculable worth and value.  
 The unique talents and skills each individual possesses are a reflection of this divine image, and it is therefore a sacred task to hone and develop them. The vast expansive human diversity that results from this process is not a challenge but a blessing. Each of us has our own path to greatness.

**TORAT CHESED**  
**חסד**  
**COMPASSION**  
 We believe in the responsibility to reach out to others in compassion.  
 Even as we recognize the opportunities of human diversity, Jewish tradition emphasizes the importance of common obligations. In particular, every human being is given the same responsibility to use his or her unique gifts in the service of others; to care for their fellow human beings; to reach out to them in thoughtfulness, kindness and sensitivity; and to form a connected community.

**TORAT ZION**  
**ציון**  
**REDEMPTION**  
 We believe that humanity's purpose is to transform our world for the better and move history forward.  
 In Jewish thought, the concept of redemption represents the conviction that while we live in an imperfect world, we have a responsibility to strive toward its perfection. Regardless of a person's personal convictions about whether social perfection is attainable or even definable, it is the act of working toward it that gives our lives meaning and purpose. This common striving is an endeavor that brings all of humanity together.  
 The Jewish people's task to build up the land of Israel into an inspiring model society represents this effort in microcosm. But it is part of a larger project that includes all of humankind. If the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice, then redemption represents our responsibility to work together in the service of God to move history forward.

Avraham was thrown into by Nimrod in the midrash was the industrial *kivshan ha-esh*, because Avraham had the courage to defy the common thinking and current order of the day.

And Avraham too had a building project.

When Avraham journeyed from his family's home to Bet El, he built not a *migdal* but a *mizbeach*.

And there are three elements to Avraham's building project. The first is the purpose of the building. And here too "shem" name, is the central theme — but not *na'aseh lanu shem*:

וַיַּעֲתֶק מִשָּׁם הַהָרָה מִקְדָּם לְבֵית אֵל וַיֵּט אֶהְלֵה בֵּית אֵל מִיָּם וְהָעֵי מִקְדָּם וַיְבֹן שָׁם מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם ה'.

Avraham built a *mizbeach* not for his own name, but to sanctify the name of G-d.

Avraham's building project was not about power but sacrifice. A *mizbeach* is an admission of humility, that there is a higher being and purpose. It is a tribute to the transcendent.

The second element is that Avraham during this whole time was thinking about his children and future descendants. As Rashi explains, he chose Shechem and Bet El to daven for bnei Yaakov and bnei Yisrael who would each face challenges in the future in those two places. All throughout his journey, Avraham never lost focus on his family and their future.

And the third element is his impact. Umberto Cassuto, the early 20th century biblical commentator remarks that these *mizbachot* stood at the crossroads of the land. He explains that there was a major highway that ran north and south in Israel and two thoroughfares that ran east to west. Together these roads crisscrossed the country and divided the country into thirds. Avraham built the *mizbachot* in those spots in Bet El and Shechem because these were the roads with the highest frequency of travel, so he placed himself at the crossroads to have the highest level of impact. Avraham's



See more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Berman at [www.yutorah.org/teachers/Rabbi-Dr.-Ari-Berman](http://www.yutorah.org/teachers/Rabbi-Dr.-Ari-Berman)

goal was never to simply worship Hashem himself but to spread the name of Hashem to others. So, he found the major arteries and pathways into society and publicly called out in the name of Hashem.

There were three elements to Avraham's building project, and it differentiated him from the society around him.

While they saw the transient nature of life and sought permanence by spotlighting their own name, Avraham understood that there is only one who is truly permanent – *malkhutkha malkhut kol olamim u-memshalltekha be-khol dor ve-dor*. And our goal is to attach ourselves to Him.

In addition, Avraham knew that legacy is not about making sure that your name lives on but that your values live on through your family, children and the next generations. That's legacy.

And finally, Avraham did not hide behind towers but stood at the crossroads and called out in the name of Hashem. He

understood that one cannot sanctify Hashem's name in this world by policing from afar but by direct interaction, one person at a time, with kindness and love, exemplifying, teaching and spreading our Torah values. A *mizbeach* is not as tall, but ultimately it is far more effective. It speaks to one's aspirations, not one's fears. It touches one's heart, it doesn't impose on another's will. The *migdal* is a display of power, a *mizbeach* is actual influence. Power comes and goes. It is transient by nature. Influence and impact can last forever.

For Avraham, the focus was on being an *eved Hashem*, on his children and their future, and his impact on the world.

Two responses to the same circumstances.

This frames the reason why today is such a celebration. For we are graduating the next generation of rabbinic leaders who embody our Torah values and who will build the *mizbachot* of the future standing at the crossroads of our community and society.



My dear musmakhim,

I have had the opportunity to spend some time meeting with each one of you and I have to tell you that I have walked away from our encounters so impressed by you and your aspirations.

And you truly run the gamut. One musmakh told me that he is interested in teaching upper elementary school because that is the age when children are impressionable without the natural front of a resistant teenager. Another has a passion for kiruv and is looking to find innovative ways to transmit the beauty of the Torah to those without a formal background. From talmidim who are committed to becoming yeshiva day school and high school teachers to those who are choosing to care for and guide our communities as rabbanim. From those who will assume communal lay leadership roles giving shiurim and divrei Torah to those who are growing to be our next great poskim and dayyanim. We have musmakhim living in Israel and musmakhim who stretch throughout the US and diaspora communities. Many have already written sefarim and you are all burgeoning talmidei chachamim.

And every one of you embody our Torah values: commitment to Torah, *yiras shamayim*, *middos tovos*, fine character, *mentschlichkeit*, caring.

*Ruach habriyos nocheh hemanu*

*Ruach HaMakom nocheh hemanu*

This is the hallmark of our yeshiva.

And everyone in the Jewish world knows this. Over Sukkot, I was in Yerushalayim and had a meeting with the President of Israel, Isaac Herzog, and he said to me that we need Yeshiva University graduates and especially Yeshiva University rabbis.

Everyone in the Jewish world and beyond saw what happened the last year and a half dealing with COVID. How our poskim, rabbanim and mechanchim led with the full plethora of our values — truth, wherever it is found like in science and

medicine, life, valuing each *neshamah*, caring for others, concerned about the health of not just ourselves but our community and our neighbors.

And I have to tell you that people are scared. We too are standing today at a crossroads. While there are advances in science and technology, innovation and entrepreneurship, that are creating new vistas in improving quality of life and human flourishing, at the same time there is a profound sense of insecurity especially in our community with the rise in anti-semitism and anti-Israel rhetoric, with traditional values under attack, the erosion of civic and political discourse, and extraordinary fears about health. We have lived through and are still living through the *mabul* of our generation and there is not only much underlying trauma but still deep uncertainty about the future.

In so many ways, it feels like we today are living in uncharted waters without a map. Of course, for us, even when there is no map, we know we have a compass. For our Torah values are our compass and they enable us to navigate through all times, even the most challenging. But we need the people who are carrying that compass; the leaders who will stand at the crossroads, who will model the values of the *mizbeach*, comforting, loving and guiding the next generation on the road ahead.

This is a moment when we truly need YU rabbis.

And that is one of the main reasons I am here today.

In your life, my dear students, you will personally face significant life decisions and be called on to guide others who are navigating the crossroads of life.

I have spoken to a number of you who are considering these kinds of questions yourselves right now and they usually entail a measure of risk. I remember the words of my rebbi, Rav Aharon Lichtenstein ztz'l, when speaking to him

about making Aliyah he said to me “that there are those who live their lives risk averse, that’s not how I lived mine and that is not how I encourage my talmidim to live theirs.” There is always risk — so remember this tripartite formula from Avraham’s journey which could be instructive to you. What choice will help me be a better *eved Hashem*? How will my decision affect my family and children? Will it help me or hinder me from the kind of impact of which I am uniquely capable?

For me, listening to Joel, speaking to our Roshei Yeshiva, hearing how they believe in you, was profoundly inspiring, and a key element to my life decision.

For I believe in you, our Yeshiva believes in you, your family and friends who surround you today along with the wider Jewish world — all believe in you.

You are our hope and our future.

And so, my bracha to you today is to embody the values of our yeshiva and build lives of meaning and impact. May Hashem bless you with good fortune and happiness. May you find joy in your life, love in your heart and purpose in all that you do. I have been inspired by seeing how you have handled this chapter in your life, which gives me profound confidence in the way you will write yourselves into the next chapter of the great story of the Jewish people, bringing joy and redemption to those whom you love and to all those around you — *simchah le-arztekha* and *sasson li-irekha* — joy to the cities in which you reside and to our eternal city of Jerusalem; joy to your homes and joy to our homeland.

# DEEPLY ROOTED VALUES THAT MOVE HISTORY FORWARD







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# *Divrei Chag be-Chag:* The Chag HaSemikhah Addresses of Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm

*This article was originally printed in Tradition's Rabbi Norman Lamm Memorial Volume. Reprinted with permission.*

In one of his most famous lectures, “Notes of an Unrepentant Darshan” (1986), Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm pointed to three great influences on his speaking style: his uncle, Rabbi Joseph M. Baumol, Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, who taught homiletics at RIETS, and Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik. Rabbi Lamm explicated the greatness of each of his mentors, and the different lessons he learned from them. There was, however, one thing that these greats shared in common. “Each of them succeeded because he spoke to his own listeners, not to some imagined or stereotyped or idealized audience.”

When one reads the myriad of Rabbi Lamm’s printed sermons from his years in the rabbinate, one can easily discern the nature of his audience. His words were chosen not just for their beauty

and power, but because Rabbi Lamm felt that he had what to say to his *kehillah* and his generation. Though his *divrei Torah* are timeless, one is brought back to the 1950’s, 1960’s and 1970’s in almost every sermon. He was not afraid to speak the truth, and his wisdom, often commentating on issues well before their time, continues to instruct us today. Yet, one cannot help but conjure up an image of his audience while reading his *derashot*.

Rabbi Lamm shared with his family that some of his favorite *derashot* were those delivered at the many Chag HaSemikhah convocations over which he presided as Rosh HaYeshiva of RIETS and President of Yeshiva University. True to form, these speeches were not just masterful and eloquent. They resonate with timely messages spoken to the audience sitting before him at the front of Lamport Auditorium on the Uptown Yeshiva Campus — the newly minted rabbis celebrating their ordination and

beginning their careers in the rabbinate.

In his famous 1994 Chag address, “The Spirit of Elijah Rests upon Elisha,” Rabbi Lamm expressed his passion for the Chag HaSemikhah and what it represented. He noted that Eliyahu, when commanded at the end of his prophetic career to appoint new kings in Syria and the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and *afterwards* to anoint a new prophet in the person of Elisha, reverses the order of his missions. Rabbi Lamm explained that “as important as political moves and international relations and diplomatic maneuvers are, the single most important task before the Jewish People in every generation is to ensure the continuity of its spiritual leadership. Let kings and heads of state wait; let matters of historic moments bide their time; let the politicians stand aside and let the statesmen cool their heels in the outer offices of our attention. The priority of priorities is that there be prophets of G-d and teachers of



Torah and models of moral conduct and exemplars of Torah ethics to make our people worthy of saving.”

Rabbi Lamm was well aware that not every *musmakh* before him would be pursuing *avodat ha-kodesh*. He spoke directly to the future doctors and lawyers in the graduating class, reminding them of their duty to give back to RIETS to allow others the same full scholarships they had received for their semikha studies and their special responsibility — beyond their rabbinic colleagues — to study Torah and find ways to uplift the community.

Yet his remarks were clearly directed to the community rabbis before him. A synagogue rabbi himself for some 25 years, Rabbi Lamm shared the lessons of his rabbinate along with advice on emerging issues in the Jewish community that his students would soon face. Some of his messages were equally relevant to those who would be serving in schools, but, more often than not, he presented the rabbinate through the eyes of a shul rav.

There is no summary that could do Rabbi Lamm’s words justice. I strongly suggest reading these addresses in full in the collected volume *The Spirit of the Rabbinate*.<sup>1</sup> I will, however, lay out four themes that Rabbi Lamm returned to, decade after decade, in speaking to the *musmakhim*. In order to maintain the beauty of his style, I have taken the liberty to quote generously from his addresses, summarizing only when needed to maintain the brevity of this article.

Rabbi Lamm exhorted his students, with one thousand guests assembled in Lamport Auditorium, to follow the examples of great leaders in Tanakh — Moshe, and of course, Eliyahu and Elisha, who seemed to be his favorites. He also spoke frequently of the builders of RIETS and YU, giving a new generation of students an appreciation for their yeshiva, the institution of RIETS.

Each address introduced a new starting point, whether in Tanakh or the words of Chazal. Four themes, however, appear again and again:

- *Musmakhim* should feel pride in their choice of career.
- Growth in Torah must continue long after one leaves the walls of Yeshiva.
- RIETS graduates must reach out to Jews of all backgrounds with the word of G-d.
- Future rabbis must lead with integrity, boldly standing up for their values.

### Rabbinic Pride

Rabbi Lamm felt that low self-esteem was a greater threat to most rabbis than an inflated sense of self-worth. No doubt, individual rabbis suffer from outsized egos, many seeing their rabbinic positions as opportunities for self-aggrandizement rather than service to their flocks. Yet his first Chag HaSemikhah *derasha*, “The Self Image of the Rabbi” (1981), was used to reinforce a sense of pride in those who chose *avodat ha-kodesh* professionally.

He began by calling for balance: “It is imperative that our *musmakhim*, who bear the burden of Torah leadership and of continuing the heritage they have learned in these sacred precincts, guard against both extremes in their rabbinic role — that of *ga’avah*, as exaggerated and over-weening self-confidence and self-importance; and *shiflut* in the form of a weak self-image, the lack of self-esteem and self-worth.”

Most of his lecture, however, decried the fact that the rabbinate had been devalued in modern times, not just in the eyes of the community — but in the minds of rabbis themselves. Rabbi Lamm spoke directly to the students before him: “You are a group of intelligent and bright young men who could have become doctors and lawyers, businessmen and scientists, psychologists and computer experts, as easily as your colleagues who graduated

with you from Yeshiva College. You do have the blessing of abundant ‘intelligence and knowledge.’ But you chose to use it for Torah, which is ‘in your mouth and in your heart in order to do it.’”

A new generation of rabbis needed to project a sense of pride and excitement to the public: “Lead, for Heaven’s sake; lead *le-shem Shamayim*; and let the world know that there is a new and reinvigorated and energetic and authentic rabbinate, that there are still prophets in Israel! There is hardly a greater *kiddush Hashem* than the awakening awareness that the *rabbanut* is alive and well and that Torah is thriving in Israel!” (“There is a Prophet in Israel”, 1986).

Of course, the fact that the rabbinate is an optimal career choice meant that *musmakhim* had little reason to complain about their institutional responsibilities. Their careers would be difficult — but many careers are difficult. They would face burnout — but they would do so in the service of G-d. They might not see the financial compensation and benefits of their peers in certain secular professions — but they would live lives of meaning, infused with Torah study (“A Perfect World”, 2002). This message was also imparted by the Rosh HaYeshiva to first and fourth year *semikha* students each year, at dinners for their respective classes.

### Torah Study

Rabbi Lamm seemed very concerned that his students would abandon *limmud ha-Torah* once they settled into their positions. Time and again, he exhorted his graduates at the Chag HaSemikhah to make Torah study a lifelong pursuit. Was he simply frustrated, as he mentioned in other *derashot*, about rabbis spending more time reading the *New York Times* over their morning coffee than perusing the upcoming *parsha*? Or was he challenging them to follow in his footsteps by which he grew into a formidable Torah scholar despite years of

crushing communal responsibility?

At times, he seemed to be cautioning against a neglect of Torah study, reminding his students with a touch of humor that their *heter hora'ah*, rabbinic license to arbitrate matters of halakha, came with a *heter lilmod*, the permission to continue their study (“The Self Image of the Rabbi”, 1981). A central theme of one of his earliest Chag HaSemikhah addresses, entitled, “The Makings of a Ben Torah” (1983), was that *musmakhim* needed to minimally remain *bnei Torah!* “The day you stop studying, the day you stop climbing the road to Torah excellence, is the day you are no longer a *ben Torah*. On that day, all that is written on your rabbinic diploma is rendered meaningless.”

At other times, he shared with the *musmakhim* the place that high-level *talmud Torah* played in his life. In a stirring portion of “The Spirit of Elijah Rests upon Elisha” (1994), he begged his students “to continue to immerse yourselves in Torah study; never stop. Your Torah will be your refuge and your strength, your consolation and your joy, and your inspiration to greater aspiration. And it, above all else, will help you help your people. It is our firm belief that, as the Sages told us, the eternal light of Torah will lead people to the paths of goodness and holiness, and that ‘the people’ in this case refers both to your congregants or your pupils, and to you yourselves as well. It is inevitable that your long immersion in the world of Gemara and Rashi and Tosafot and Rishonim will inspire you to devote your lives to spreading Torah and to [service of] the Jewish people.”

## Outreach

Insufficient attention has been paid to the extent that Rabbi Lamm pushed his *musmakhim* to speak to a wide spectrum of Jews — and even non-Jews — through their rabbinate. After all, he served as a Rosh Yeshiva at RIETS and a shul Rav in Manhattan (albeit preaching to

*baalei batim* of the 1960’s and 70’s and notwithstanding the fact that he started in Springfield Massachusetts). He stressed, however, that much more was needed from a new generation of rabbis.

“Torah was meant for *all* Jews, not just for a small circle of the religiously privileged, the halakhic cognoscenti. It was meant for laymen as well as rabbis, for those who yearn for the poetry of Torah as well as for those who revel in its intellectual rigor, for those who are not yet observant as well as for those who already are.

And that means that rabbis, whether in the pulpit or the classroom, must use all the forms of communication in order to bring Torah close to Israel — not just those forms that confer prestige in the halls of the yeshiva.” (“The Makings of a *Ben Torah*”, 1983)

He, admittedly, understood that for *bnei yeshiva*, the responsibility of outreach meant moving beyond one’s personal comfort zone. Rabbis, he said, needed “the readiness to have your concern embrace *Kelal Yisrael* and even the rest of humanity. And I add this important caveat: you must never fall prey to the comfortable but execrable and scandalous notion that the term *Kelal Yisrael* is restricted to only those who do and think as we do.” (The Rabbi Inside and Out”, 1990). In an early reference to an image he would expand into one his most famous lectures, “Caves and Enclaves” (delivered at the RIETS Centennial in 1997), he called upon his students to be prophets who leave their “cave”, the warm, nurturing environment of the yeshiva, to meet the Jewish People *ba’asher heim sham*. “A cave is secure and safe and protective — but one who does not venture out to meet the brutal realities of ‘real life’ to which ordinary Jews are subjected, who prefers safety over risk and caves over vision and his own security over his people’s needs — is no prophet!” (ibid)

Calling upon the example of Moshe Rabbeinu, Rabbi Lamm told his audience of future rabbis that “the love of Israel

means that even if I do not approve of them or endorse their views or relish their company or even *like* them — I must *love* them. I must dedicate my life to saving and enhancing and enriching their lives, to healing them spiritually and physically, to comforting them, to bringing them to Torah and Torah to them — and them to each other. (“The Makings of a *Ben Torah*”, 1983)

Such an approach is needed not just in the face of personal discomfort, but even when such outreach threatens one’s professional aspirations. In 2002, in his last address as Rosh HaYeshiva (“A Perfect World”), he charged, “You must never give up on any Jew, no matter how difficult it may be. You must risk everything to bring about such a vast change in the communal mood as to make the commitment to Torah the most logical, rational choice for *Kelal Yisrael*.”

Finally, Rabbi Lamm spoke to the fact that a selfless rabbinical career would lead to exceptional personal growth. It is difficult to love one’s congregants, but a lifetime of effort on their behalf would bear fruit in terms of middot development. This love will be difficult to practice at first but will become second nature for a dedicated Rav. “It will take time, but you will learn it. The Rav quotes R. Chaim as saying, ‘I am basically a cruel person and I am also stingy, but I worked on myself and turned my cruelty into kindness and miserliness into generosity.’ So, work on yourselves! Both you and your people will benefit.” (“The Who What and Where of the Rabbinate”, 1998).

I share this last point frequently with my talmidim at RIETS. A life in the rabbinate is more than a sacrifice on behalf of the *kelal*. Many of the “negatives” associated with life as a synagogue rabbi, from the need to be on one’s best behavior at all times, to the challenges and stresses of accompanying families through the most difficult of circumstances are simultaneously pathways for personal spiritual success.



## Leadership

While Rabbi Lamm spoke about the challenges and responsibilities of the rabbinate in most of the Chag HaSemikhah addresses, this topic served as the overarching theme of his 1986 keynote “There is a Prophet in Israel.” “Leadership,” he said, “is not for the faint of heart, but neither is it for the light-hearted and frivolous. If an ordinary person makes a mistake, he merely makes a mistake; if a leader errs, he misleads.”

The *derasha* focused on the account in *Melachim Bet* of Naaman, an Aramean king stricken with incurable leprosy. In this narrative, read as the *haftara* for *Parshat Tazria*, the text explains how the advice of a young Jewish slave-girl points the powerful king to seek answers from the Hebrew prophet Elisha. Naaman, however, approaches not the prophet, but King Yehoram, who muddles this opportunity for a great *Kiddush Hashem*. Elisha sends word to the king, “Let him know that there is a prophet in Israel.” Elisha reverses the failure of Yehoram, heals the gentile king and brings about a great sanctification of the Divine Name.

Rabbi Lamm saw in this story the classic tension between the Jewish king and prophet. The former bears the responsibility to administrate the needs of the Jewish people. He lacks, however, the religious sensitivity of the seer. Those infused with the wisdom of G-d needed to play an equal role in steering the nation.

Rabbi Lamm did not downplay the challenges that lie ahead for his charges. He understood that the world in which the *musmakhim* would soon be serving was hostile to many values cherished in the walls of the yeshiva. The *talmidim*, who found comfort amongst their colleagues in the *beit midrash* would soon spread out across a foreign world.

“[A] requirement for true spiritual leadership is courage, the moral strength and spiritual power to fight a lonely battle, to stand up against great odds and to

struggle for what you believe and know is right. I am not championing mavericks who are dissenters just for the fun of it. I refer to the quest for principle, for the stubbornness that comes from seeing and holding fast to a truth when others are blind to it.” (The Rabbi Inside and Out”, 1990)

“Leadership means not only marching at the head of a column of loving and admiring followers, but also the ability to put up with criticism, justified and unjustified, often harsh and pitiless; with sarcasm and innuendo and vicious rumors; with yes-men who shield you from the trust and, more often, implacable adversaries who expose you to falsehood; with inertia and with hysteria; and with a lot more. Leadership means to put up with all this, and yet to hold fast to your principles despite all; to draw strength from your supporters — and even from your critics.” (“There is a Prophet in Israel”, 1986).

He cited RIETS, as a model which the students should emulate. “[T]he greatness of our Yeshiva is that we kept to our *derekh* with strength and with courage, that we conducted ourselves with individual and institutional dignity, that we refused to reciprocate petty insults and trade invectives, but continued to relate to others according to the principles of *kevod ha-beriyot* and *kevod ha-Torah*. This will continue to be our policy — one from which we will not be deterred, neither by flattery nor by threats.” (Ibid)

Rabbi Lamm noted that many leadership positions in the non-profit world of Jewish organizations were being filled by well-meaning people who lacked a Torah orientation. The time had come for the *talmidim* of RIETS to fill positions through the Jewish world, “by forthrightly articulating what we stand for, and doing so with *darkei noam*, the ‘ways of pleasantness.’” (“There is a Prophet in Israel”, 1986).

In 2003, Rabbi Lamm handed over the presidency to Richard M. Joel. He

graced the stage at the Chag HaSemikhah through the Chag of 2014 but was well enough to speak just one additional time. At the Chag of 2006 he delivered a short, but powerful speech entitled “Elijah as a Model for Rabbis.” For this final address he hearkened back to one of his “rabbinic” heroes, the Prophet Eliyahu, and to key messages of earlier glorious years.

The former president of RIETS gave voice to Elijah’s professional burnout and his disappointment in the Jewish People. He doesn’t blame the prophet for his frustration. But Rabbi Lamm proclaimed G-d’s response to Elijah as a message for his *musmakhim*: “Don’t curl up in a cave. *Mah lecha po, Eliyahu?* Be among Jews, disobedient and fickle as they are! You are a Jewish prophet, a spokesman for the Almighty, not an actor playing to an admiring audience!”

He did more than just exhort them; he reassured them. “Our Yeshiva stands behind you. You may occasionally feel lonely, but you will never be alone. We are proud of you. And you should be proud of us — your Rabbeim, your colleagues, and those many who work with you behind the scenes ... and may the *Ribbono shel Olam* guide and guard you, your families and pupils and congregants, *mei-atah ve-ad olam*, from now and forever more.”

Rabbi Lamm would never have said “I will stand behind you”. He was a man of the institution, never singling himself out. And yet, with his passing, rabbis of my generation feel orphaned. Still, *siftotav dovevot ba-kever*, his words saved for practicing rabbanim and generations of rabbis to come, continue to guide, motivate and inspire.

## Endnote

1. Published by the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary in 2010, with a foreword by President Richard M. Joel.



# Passing the Torch: Insights from the Future Leaders of the Jewish Community

## Rav Chessed and the Job of the Rabbi

“What is the job of a rabbi?” This is a question that was once posed to three *gedolei hador* — Rav Itzele Petterburger, Rav Yechiel Michel Epstein and Rav Chaim Soloveitchik.

Rav Itzele responded that a rabbi’s job is to spread Torah in *Klal Yisrael*; the rabbi is responsible for teaching Tanach and Mishnah, and for establishing regular *shiurim* in Gemarah and Halachah. Rav Yechiel Michel answered that the rabbi’s job is to rule on halachic matters and to be available to answer the questions of his community. Rav Chaim, however, responded somewhat differently. Rav Chaim answered that the job of a rabbi is to do *chedsed* — to empathize with the trials and tribulations of each and every Jew and to be an active participant in acts of kindness towards others.

At first glance, Rav Chaim’s response appears to be somewhat surprising. While Rav Itzele and Rav Yechiel Michel’s responses focused on what most of us would instinctively believe to be the principal responsibility of a rabbi — ensuring widespread Torah learning

and providing halachic guidance to the community — Rav Chaim takes a whole different approach. What is it about doing *chedsed* and showing compassion to others that, in Rav Chaim’s opinion, makes it the defining characteristic of the “job” of the rabbi and community leader?

The Rishonim (see Rambam, *Sefer HaMitzvos, Mitzvas Aseh* 8, *Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah* 611) count the *mitzvas aseh* of “*v’halachta b’drachav*” (*Devarim* 28:9), the *mitzvah* to emulate Hashem and follow in His ways among the 613 *mitzvos*. What does it mean to emulate Hashem and follow in His ways? Chazal (*Shabbos* 133b, *Sota* 14a) specifically highlight the *chedsed* of HaKadosh Baruch Hu — “*ma hu chanun v’rachum*,” just as Hashem is compassionate and merciful, “*af atah heyei chanun v’rachum*,” so, too, we are supposed to be compassionate and merciful. “*Ma hu malbish arumim... af atah halbeish arumim*” — just as Hashem clothes those who are without clothing, so, too, you should clothe those who are without clothing. “*HaKadosh Baruch Hu biker cholim... af atah baker cholim*” — just as HaKadosh Baruch Hu visits the sick, so, too, you should visit the sick.



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“*HaKadosh Baruch Hu nichem avelim... af atah nachem aveilim*” — HaKadosh Baruch Hu consoles mourners, so, too, you should console mourners. “*HaKadosh Baruch Hu kavar maisim... af atah k’vor maisim*” — HaKadosh Baruch Hu buries the dead, so, too, you should bury the dead.

We see from Chazal that the way to emulate HaKadosh Baruch Hu is by showing compassion, having mercy and



doing chessed. Each individual must emulate Hashem in this way, but Jewish leaders and rabbis especially must be “*domeh la'malach Hashem*” (Moed Katan 17a, Chagigah 15b) and act properly (see Rambam, *Hilchos Talmud Torah* 4:1). In fact, this quality, according to the Alter of Kelm, Rav Simcha Zissel Ziv (*Chochma U'Mussar* 1:3), was the quality, which made Moshe Rabbeinu fit to be the first leader and “rabbi,” of *Klal Yisrael*.

The Torah in Parshas Shemos records three stories about Moshe Rabbeinu, which teach us about Moshe Rabbeinu's essence and what made him fit to lead the Jewish people. The first event occurred when Moshe left Pharaoh's palace and witnessed an Egyptian man striking a Jewish slave. The Torah (Shemos 2:11-12) tells us:

וַיְהִי בַיָּמִים הָהֵם וַיִּגְדַּל מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּצֵא אֶל אֶחָיו וַיֵּרָא בְּסַבְלָתָם וַיֵּרָא אִישׁ מִצְרִי מַכֶּה אִישׁ עִבְרִי מֵאֶחָיו. וַיִּפֶן כֹּה וְכֹה וַיֵּרָא כִּי אֵין אִישׁ וַיִּדֹּף אֶת הַמִּצְרִי וַיִּטְמְנֵהוּ בַחֹל.

*And it came to pass in those days, when Moshe had grown up, he went out to his brethren and witnessed their labors. He saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brothers. He looked this way and that way, and when he saw that there was no man, he struck down the Egyptian and buried him in the sand.*

The very next passuk in the Torah (ibid 2:13) records the second episode:

וַיֵּצֵא בַיּוֹם הַשֵּׁנִי וַהֲנֵה שְׁנַי אֲנָשִׁים עֹבְרִים נְצִים וַיֹּאמֶר לְרִשָּׁע לְמָה לְמַךְ רֵעִי.

*He went out the second day, and there were two Hebrew men fighting and he said to the wicked one: “Why are you hitting your friend?”*

Then the Torah records that Moshe fled to Midian to escape Pharaoh who attempted to kill him and sat by a well (ibid 2:15). The Torah (ibid 2:16-19) then records a third incident involving Moshe:

וּלְכַהֵן מִדְיָן שִׁבְעַ בָּנוֹת וַתִּבְאֵנָה וַתִּדְלְגָה וַתִּמְלֹאנָה אֶת הָרְהָטִים לְהַשְׁקוֹת צֹאן אֲבִיהֶן. וַיָּבֹאוּ הָרְעִים וַיִּנְרְשׂוּם וַיִּקָּם מֹשֶׁה וַיּוֹשֶׁעַן וַיִּשְׁק אֶת צֹאנָם. וַתִּבְאֵנָה אֶל רְעוּאֵל אֲבִיהֶן וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִדּוּעַ מִהֲרַתָּן בָּא הַיּוֹם. וַתֹּאמְרָן אִישׁ מִצְרִי הִצִּילָנוּ מִיַּד הָרְעִים וְגַם דָּלָה דָּלָה לָנוּ וַיִּשְׁק אֶת הַצֹּאן.

*The priest of Midian had seven daughters. They came to draw water and filled the troughs to water their father's flock. But shepherds came and drove them off. Moshe rose to their defense, and he watered their flock. And when they returned to their father, Reuel, he said, “How is it that you have come back so soon today?” And they answered, “An Egyptian rescued us from the shepherds; he even drew water for us and watered the flock.”*

The Alter of Kelm says that from these three stories we see who Moshe was as a person and why he was chosen as the leader of the Jewish people. Moshe stood up against injustice and showed compassion for individuals in their times

of need. Moshe saved a Jew from an Egyptian who was oppressing him, he protected another Jew from someone who was hitting him and defended the daughters of Yisro from the shepherds by the well and gave water to their animals. Moshe saw people who were struggling and came to help them manage their difficulties. Ultimately, in each of these instances, Moshe emulated HaKadosh Baruch Hu, he did chessed for people in their times of need and stood up against injustice. It was for that reason that he was fit to be the leader of the Jewish people.

Being a rabbi and Jewish leader requires one to emulate HaKadosh Baruch Hu and be compassionate and merciful towards others, something that Moshe Rabbeinu exemplified. This is certainly something that Rav Chaim did as well. Rav Chaim was not only famous for the Torah that he taught, which he must also have believed to be part of the responsibility of a rabbi, but for his legendary acts of chessed and the compassion he showed for others, memorialized on his tombstone as, “*Rav HaChessed Sar HaTorah*.”

May we follow in the ways of HaKadosh Baruch and learn from great leaders like Moshe Rabbeinu and Rav Chaim and fulfill our duty as rabbis and leaders not only by teaching Torah and answering questions, but by doing chessed with those who are in need of our help in whatever context we may find ourselves in.



## Four Lessons from Avraham Avinu

Avraham Avinu is the first individual in the Torah who actively educates others. Rambam (*Hilchos Avodah Zarah* 1:3) notes that Avraham would travel to teach about Hashem and his beautiful Torah. Rambam writes that he had tens of thousands of followers. Of all of Avraham's students, the Torah only discusses a handful of them: Avraham's sons, Yitzchak and Yishmael, born to different mothers, one to become the heir to his father's spiritual kingdom and the other cast aside. Additionally, we are told about Eliezer and Lot. Eliezer is Avraham's most trusted servant and Lot his nephew. Let us highlight four lessons, one from each student and with this we can get a glimpse into Avraham's educational methodology.

### Lot

Lot traveled with Avraham from Canaan and benefited from the bracha that Hashem promised Avraham. This allowed Lot to maintain a large flock. Avraham's and Lot's shepherds got into a dispute. Avraham resolves that the best path forward is to separate. Avraham went one way and Lot the other.

After Lot departs from Avraham, the Torah (Bereishis 13:14) tells us Hashem spoke to Avraham. The midrash (*Pesikta Rabasi* ch.3) comments that the whole time Lot was with Avraham, Hashem didn't speak to him. Avraham sacrificed his communication with Hashem in an attempt to positively influence Lot.

The Gemara (*Bava Metzia* 62a) quotes R. Akiva that *chayecha kodmin l'chayei chavercha*, when one must decide between his own life and someone else's, his own life takes precedence. Chasam Sofer (*Toras Moshe*, Kedoshim) wonders: does that mean that the mitzvah of *veahavta l'arayacha kamocho*, love your neighbor like yourself, is suspended

whenever someone has personal needs? He suggests that *chayecha kodmin* only applies in situations of physical needs. If one's physical safety is at risk, the Torah states that saving his own life comes first. However, when discussing matters of *ruchniyus*, spiritual matters, such as teaching Torah, one must give up on his own Torah to teach others. Like, Avraham, who made a spiritual sacrifice in order to teach Lot, we too, must make sacrifices in order to teach others.

*Lesson 1: Education will at times take personal and spiritual sacrifice from the educator.*

### Yishmael

Avraham's oldest son was Yishmael, born to his wife Hagar. After the birth of Yitzchak, Yishmael acted malevolently towards his half-brother, and was involved in many *aveiros* too. At a certain point, Avraham is confronted by his wife Sarah, who is concerned for the welfare of their son Yitzchak. For Sarah, her concern with Yishmael's behavior demanded that Avraham kick Yishmael out of the house. For Avraham this was extremely difficult. Yishmael was his oldest son! How could he send him into the desert? Despite this concern, Hashem told Avraham to listen to Sarah's voice and to send Yishmael and Hagar away.

Shortly after Yishmael was kicked out of the house, he is seen as righteous in the eyes of Hashem, implying he did teshuva. [See *Bereishis Rabbah* 53:14, quoted by Rashi, Bereishis 21:17, on the concept of *ba'asher hu sham*.] The Gemara (*Bava Basra* 16a) confirms Yishmael did teshuva in the lifetime of his father Avraham. This is confounding. If Yishmael was able to do teshuva on his own, why was there a need to kick him out of the house? Why didn't Sarah just rely on Avraham's ability to positively influence people?

Rav Avigdor Miller explained that Yishmael's removal was not only to protect Yitzchak, but for Yishmael's own



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personal development. He needed to be in a different environment to blossom. Yishmael would become a partner to Yitzchak in spreading monotheism around the world, and that was not going to happen under Avraham's tent. While extremely difficult emotionally, Avraham needed to allow Yishmael to go elsewhere to create his own acceptance of, and personal relationship with, Hashem.

*Lesson 2: Every educator is not going to be able to educate every student. While we try our best, finding an alternative strategy, environment, or person to connect with the student may be the best approach.*

### Eliezer

Avraham told his servant Eliezer to go to Haran to find a wife for his son Yitzchak. Avraham gave strict guidelines to Eliezer about what to look for. He required Eliezer to swear that he would uphold these guidelines. Eliezer couldn't choose from the daughters of Canaan, he was to choose from Avraham's family in Haran (Bereishis 25:1-9).

However, many of the things that Eliezer did do to find Yitzchak's wife weren't determined by Avraham. For example, the tefilla that Eliezer prays, as well as the method of finding and evaluating Rivka. Eliezer was regarded as "*Damesek Eliezer*" someone who drew and distributed the "water," Avraham's Torah, to others (*Yoma* 28b) Why would he veer, or add, to the words and methods of Avraham, his master and teacher?



Eliezer was looking for someone with the *middah* of chesed. If she was going to join Avraham's family and become one of the imahos, then she needed to mirror Avraham's mode of chesed. Avraham's chesed was above and beyond. He waited outside in the strong heat for guests three days after having a bris milah. When they did arrive he did everything possible for them. These actions are above and beyond ordinary chesed.

Eliezer was looking for someone whose chesed mirrored that of Avraham and he found that in Rivkah. Her chesed was also above and beyond. The sun was setting, and it was getting dark (24:11), which normally would mean it is time to head home, yet Rivkah stayed out. When Eliezer asked for water, she did not hand him the water, Rivka poured it directly in his mouth. She offered to get water for his camels. A young girl, working on her own with no help, fetching water for dozens of camels is above and beyond ordinary chesed.

Eliezer was a direct witness to Avraham's acts of chesed (*Bava Metzia* 86b). He watched with a keen eye how his rebbi

would act and understood that this is how chesed is done. This lesson was never stated, but Eliezer understood through observation. Our actions can penetrate the hearts of our students in ways that words cannot.

*Lesson 3: Students watch everything their teachers do. It is integral for an educator to realize that students will learn from actions.*

### Yitzchak

The Torah transitions from the story of Avraham to the story of Yitzchak at the beginning of Parshas Toldos. There the Torah says *v'eleh toldos Yitzchak ben Avraham, Avraham holid es Yitzchak*, these are stories of Yitzchak son of Avraham, Avraham produced Yitzchak (Bereishis 25:19). Many of the commentators ask: what necessitates the second part of the pasuk? Avraham is Yitzchak's father, so what's the need to repeat this information within the same pasuk?

The Rav (*Darosh Darash Yosef* pp. 70-71) notes that it is the word *holid* that is critical. When the Torah describes the birth of Yishmael (25:12), the Torah

uses the word *yalda*, which connotes the simple biological process of continuity. *Holid*, however, implies something greater. The Rav points out that the plural form of *holid* is *yuldu* which is used to describe the birth of the children of Ephraim and Menashe (Bereishis 50:23). Ibn Ezra there says *yuldu* means to actively raise and educate children. Rav Nisson Alpert (*Limudei Nissan* pg. 209) also suggests that *holid* is referencing Avraham's active *chinuch* of Yitzchak.

The necessity of the second half of the pasuk shows that Avraham was doing something different. Raising Yitzchak wasn't simply a biological process or necessity. It was to create a multi-generational educational process with an eternal effect. The way to do this is to be engaged and active with our children and with our students.

*Lesson 4: To pass our mesorah to future generations, there must be an active process. This requires love, care, and interest towards our students.*



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## A Rebbe or a Talmid?

Imagine a career where the more you teach, the more you learn. A career where the act of guiding and teaching others not only deepens your understanding but also illuminates your path with divine clarity. Rabbis and *mechanchim* (educators) often find themselves in this enriching situation — a journey where the roles of teacher and student intertwine, creating a profound connection to Torah that defies conventional wisdom.

Growing up in the home of a community rabbi and spending the last two years teaching in a yeshiva high school, I have learned that a practicing rabbi has the ability to learn far more than he did during his time in yeshiva. This is not simply an observation from my own experiences. It is stated explicitly by the Gemara, *Ta'anis* 7a:

וְהֵינְנוּ דְאָמְרֵי רַבֵּי חֲנִינָא: הֲרַבְּבָה לְמִדְתֵּי מְרֻבּוֹתַי, וּמִחֲבֵירַי יוֹתֵר מִרְבּוֹתַי, וּמִתְלָמִידַי יוֹתֵר מִכּוֹלָן.

*And this is what Rabbi Chanina said: I have learned much from my teachers and even more from my friends, but from my students I have learned more than from all of them.*

This statement of Rabbi Chanina is puzzling. How can it be that such a great Rabbi learned more from his students than he did from his own rabbi? Both Rashi (*Ta'anis* s.v. *Katan* and *Makkos* 10a s.v. *Lo*) and the Rambam (*Hilchos Talmud Torah* 5:13) explain that the constant questioning from students requires the rabbi to sharpen his understanding and develop newfound clarity. In addition, students offer unique insights that allow the rebbe to understand the content in a new and creative way. However, Rashi on the Gemara *Temurah* 16a, offers an even deeper insight. The Gemara says:

בשעה שהתלמיד הולך אצל רבו ואומר לו למדני תורה אם מלמדו מאיר עיני שניהם ה'.

*When the student, goes to his teacher, and says to him: Teach me Torah, if the teacher*

*agrees to teach him, then the Lord gives light to the eyes of both of them.*

Rashi comments:

שאף הרב צריך עדיין לימוד ומלמדו הקב"ה. *Even the teacher still needs to learn, and the Holy One Blessed be He will teach him.*

Rashi explains — quite beautifully — that it is not simply the interaction between the rabbi and student that brings about clarity and understanding, but it is the special *siyata D'Shmaya*, the support that Hashem extends to those who are dedicated to teaching others. For years, I could not understand how so many of our teachers knew as much as they knew and with such great clarity, but of course the answer is simple. They dedicated their lives to teaching and learning from others and were afforded great clarity, new perspectives and divine assistance.

A rabbi's role transcends conventional lecturing or speech-giving, setting it apart from the instructional methods commonly associated with experts in fields like math or physics.

The goal is not simply to transmit information. A rabbi is supposed to create an environment where those in the crowd transform themselves from being passive listeners to active participants. The presentation of Torah must be interactive and the rabbi must make it a priority to address each and every question asked both during and after presentation.

On an even deeper level, the job of the rabbi is to become a student. He must look to learn from all those he has the incredible honor to teach. In doing so, he can elevate and deepen his own *limud HaTorah* in a way that was not possible beforehand.

When a rabbi becomes a student, he doesn't simply impact his own *limud HaTorah*. The *Sefer HaMakneh*, in his introduction (no. 44), writes that every Jew has his own portion of Torah, and it is



his responsibility to uncover and develop it.

When a rabbi becomes a student, he gives others the opportunity to become a rabbi, to create, sharpen and share their own thoughts. Learning from students is not only about what they can give you, but it is about giving others the chance to reach and develop their personal portion in Torah. I take great pride in my students' achievements, whether it is excelling on a test or remembering concepts we covered in previous years. However, the most deeply inspiring moments are when I revisit my notes from past years and stumble upon a fresh, innovative idea attributed to one of my students. Equally exhilarating is when a student rushes to share with a friend or parent that they posed a challenging and thought-provoking question or creative and novel answer during our shiur.

In today's day and age, our students (and congregants) yearn to be more than passive listeners. Our responsibility is to enable, empower and unlock these abilities and in doing so, reverse the roles, where rabbi becomes student and student becomes rabbi.

In this interactive and transformative journey of *talmud Torah*, both teacher and student grow together, guided by the divine light that shines upon them.



## A Healthy Fear of Heaven: The Precondition to Serving as a Rabbi

Rav Yisroel Salanter is quoted as saying that it is more difficult for a person to change one deficient trait, than it is to study all of Shas. Transforming ourselves is incredibly challenging and strenuous. Yet, rabbis are ambitiously tasked with inspiring an entire community to better themselves. How can a rabbi possibly begin to perform this demanding undertaking? While I don't have the knowledge or the experience to fully answer this question, I can give a perspective that sheds some light.

The Gemara in *Berachos* (6b) teaches *kol adam sheyesh bo yiras Shamayim, devarav nishma'in*, any person who has fear of Heaven, his words are heeded.<sup>1</sup> The simple interpretation is that one cannot teach Torah to others, nor rebuke others to follow the word of the Almighty, without proper *yiras Shamayim*. Without the requisite fear of Heaven, a rabbi will be seen as hypocritical if trying to correct the path of a pupil. Without proper *yiras Shamayim*, a student can always say to the rabbi, first work on yourself and only afterwards come teach me.<sup>2</sup>

However, Chazal teach us that without *yiras Shamayim*, our Torah knowledge will not be preserved.<sup>3</sup> If so, even if the rabbi can be effective because he has *yiras Shamayim*, nevertheless, whatever the student learns will not be preserved without his own *yiras Shamayim*. Therefore, the rabbi's fear of Heaven is for naught if he does not impart that fear to his students!

Elsewhere, the Gemara in *Berachos* (33b) tells us *hakol bidei Shamayim chutz miyiras Shamayim*, everything is in the hands of Heaven except for fear of Heaven.<sup>4</sup> The Gemara bases this on the *pasuk* (*Devarim* 10:12) *ועתה ישראל מה ה' אלוהיך שואל מעמך* (10:12) *כי אל ליראה את ה' אלוהיך*, And now Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you other than to fear Him. The Gemara then asks *atu yiras Shamayim milsa zutarta hi*,

by stating that this is the only thing G-d asks from us, the implication is that *yiras Shamayim* is something easy and trivial, but that is obviously untrue. The Gemara responds that indeed for Moshe Rabbeinu (the one telling us this verse) *yiras Shamayim* was a minor matter. There is a dispute among the *rishonim* as to what this means.<sup>5</sup> Some explain that the Gemara is answering for Moshe alone, that *yiras Shamayim* was something easy for him to attain. Others explain that the Gemara is responding that it is indeed easy for anyone who has a rabbi like Moshe Rabbeinu to attain *yiras Shamayim*.

What emerges from the second understanding is the following profound insight. *Yiras Shamayim* is unique in that it is the one thing in this world that is exclusively in our hands. Being that Hashem gives no assistance, it is tremendously difficult to achieve.<sup>6</sup> Yet if we have teachers like Moshe Rabbeinu to learn from, it becomes remarkably easy. Somehow, a leader that exudes *yiras Shamayim* like Moshe will easily transfer that fear of Heaven to students who are looking to receive it. Presumably, Moshe Rabbeinu did not need to formally teach *yiras Shamayim* to his students. It was naturally absorbed by the students by being in his presence, and listening to him speak. The fact that Moshe was an uncompromising representative of Torah, meant that he could have profound influence on the nation, just through the way he acted. The nation looked up to him to see how an *eved Hashem* is supposed to behave. Because his *yiras Shamayim* was on such an elite level, and the people knew that he was an absolute representation of the *Shechinah*, it was "easy" to pick up *yiras Shamayim* from him.

If this is true, we see the importance of *yiras Shamayim* in representatives of Torah on two levels. First, the only way that their teaching (both formal and informal) will be effective and non-hypocritical is with proper fear of Heaven. Second, it won't just be that students will be able to receive the Torah, but they will also naturally attain



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*yiras Shamayim*, which will inevitably help preserve the Torah that they have learned and will continue to learn.

I would argue that all that we have discussed is not only applicable to rebbeim who teach Torah. This would apply to any position that holds the title rabbi. A person who is seen as someone who represents Torah is meant to be the moral compass for others and can therefore only positively influence others with proper *yiras Shamayim*. Equally as important, the only way to impart to a community proper *yiras Shamayim* is if their spiritual leader himself has a fear of Heaven that makes it easy for everyone to absorb *yiras shamayim* from him. It should clearly follow that anyone who chooses a position that represents Torah, has the responsibility to increase their *yiras Shamayim* to make it a *milsa zutarta* for their students and the broader community, and as such, even before the rabbi begins his role as a teacher, judge, or head of institutions, he must first work on and grow his own *yiras Shamayim*.

### Endnotes

1. See *Ohr Hachaim* (Bereishis 1:17 and 11:22), and *Torah Temimah* (Kohel 12:96) who offer interpretations.
2. See Gemara *Arachin* (16b).
3. See, *Mishnah Avos* (Ch. 3). See also, *Shabbos* (31a) that *yiras Shamayim* is like the storehouse for Torah knowledge.
4. See Rashi and *Shitah Mekubetzes* there quoting the Rambam.
5. See Rav Elyashiv's notes on this line in the Gemara.
6. The concept of *haba litaher misayin oso* is beyond the scope of this article.

## The Little Mizbeach and the Big Ark: A Lesson For Leaders

One of the great American books — read widely in classrooms — is Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*. When I was in high school, my English teacher told us that after its publication in 1854, it sold no more than a few hundred copies in the first few years, and even by Thoreau's death in 1862, it had only sold 2,000. I remember finding it remarkable that he had no concept of the legacy it would have 160 years later.

One of the most consequential moments in all of world history occurs following Noah's departure from the *teivah* (ark). Noah constructs a *mizbeach* (altar) and brings sacrifices:

וַיִּבֶן נֹחַ מִזְבֵּחַ לַה' וַיִּקַּח מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִכָּל הָעוֹף הַטְּהוֹר וַיַּעַל עֹלֹת בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ.

*Noah built an altar for Hashem, and he took from all the pure animals and all the pure birds and offered burnt offerings on the altar.*

### Bereishit 8:20

Immediately afterwards, the Torah details how Hashem decreed that he will never again destroy mankind the same way:

וַיִּרַח ה' אֶת רִיחַ הַנִּיחֹחַ וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֵל לִבּוֹ לֹא אֲסֹף לְקַלְלַל עוֹד אֶת הָאָדָמָה בְּעֵבֹר הָאָדָם כִּי יֵצֵר לֵב הָאָדָם רַע מִנְּעֻרָיו וְלֹא אֲסֹף עוֹד לְהַכּוֹת אֶת כָּל חַי בְּאֲשֶׁר עִשְׂתִּי.

*Hashem smelled the soothing fragrance and Hashem said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man for the designs of man's heart are evil from his youth and I will never again smite all life as I have done."*

### Bereishit 8:21

The significance of this Divine proclamation is obvious. Yet there is debate as to what prompts it. One plausible reading is to focus on the latter half of the verse that *yetzer lev ha'adam ra mineurav*, God realizes man is fallible and decides to have mercy on him.

However, this explanation is problematic because merely a few chapters earlier, God explicitly acknowledges man's immense faults and deficiencies:

וַיִּרְא ה' כִּי רַבָּה רַעַת הָאָדָם בְּאָרְצוֹ וְכָל יֵצֵר מִחַשְׁבֹּת לִבּוֹ רָק רַע כָּל הַיּוֹם.

*Hashem saw that the evil of man was great on the earth, and that every design of his heart's thoughts was only evil, all day long.*

### Bereishit 6:5

Surely this realization of man's evil nature is not new and would not warrant a dramatic declaration transforming the course of world history.

This prompts other commentators to emphasize the earlier part of the verse, *vayarach Hashem et reiach hanichoach*, Hashem was pleased by the aroma of the offerings. Indeed, this is Chazal's interpretation. The Gemara (*Eruvin* 65a) describes how Hashem was appeased by the burnt offerings and He therefore acted more favorably towards mankind afterwards.

According to this second interpretation, Noah's actions constitute a remarkable accomplishment. Guaranteeing that mankind will never be fully destroyed is undoubtedly one of history's greatest feats. But is Noah even aware of this? In the verse itself, the Torah relates how Hashem made this declaration *el libo* (in His heart). Does this mean that Noah was never informed?

Our great commentators debate this question. Ibn Ezra contends that yes, Noah was indeed informed of this promise immediately afterwards by Hashem. Seforno too believes that Noah was told, but only later on after he and his family are commanded to keep the seven Noachide laws and establish a covenant with Hashem in the ensuing chapter.

In contrast, Ramban claims that, remarkably, Noah was never told. Only at the time of the composition of the Torah did Hashem inform any of Noah's descendants about the ramifications of Noah's *korbanot*.



Ramban's interpretation is incredibly striking. Noah guaranteed through his actions that God will never again destroy the world and he had no idea! Noah was never informed!

On the one hand, Noah's lack of awareness seems almost unfathomable. It is tragic and disheartening. But at the same time, this story is so human. It captures the daily drama of our lives. We too perform all sorts of positive deeds — praying, performing mitzvot, committing acts of kindness, learning Torah — and we do not know the impact of our acts. We are in the dark about whether the extra mitzvah "tipped the scales" or if saying a chapter of Tehillim saved the life of a fellow person. Our views are obstructed from seeing the chain reaction prompted by our deeds.

This certainly can be demoralizing because we would like to know the impacts we make (especially positive ones). [This lack of awareness may have prompted Noah's depression in the continuation of the story.] Yet, it can also be deeply inspiring and motivating. So often we think our actions do not have any impact, let alone a large one. But who knows? We may never be aware that we have had the impact of a Noah! Though he was completely unaware, Thoreau's composition has reverberated for many decades since he wrote it, and



our contributions to this world may do the same.

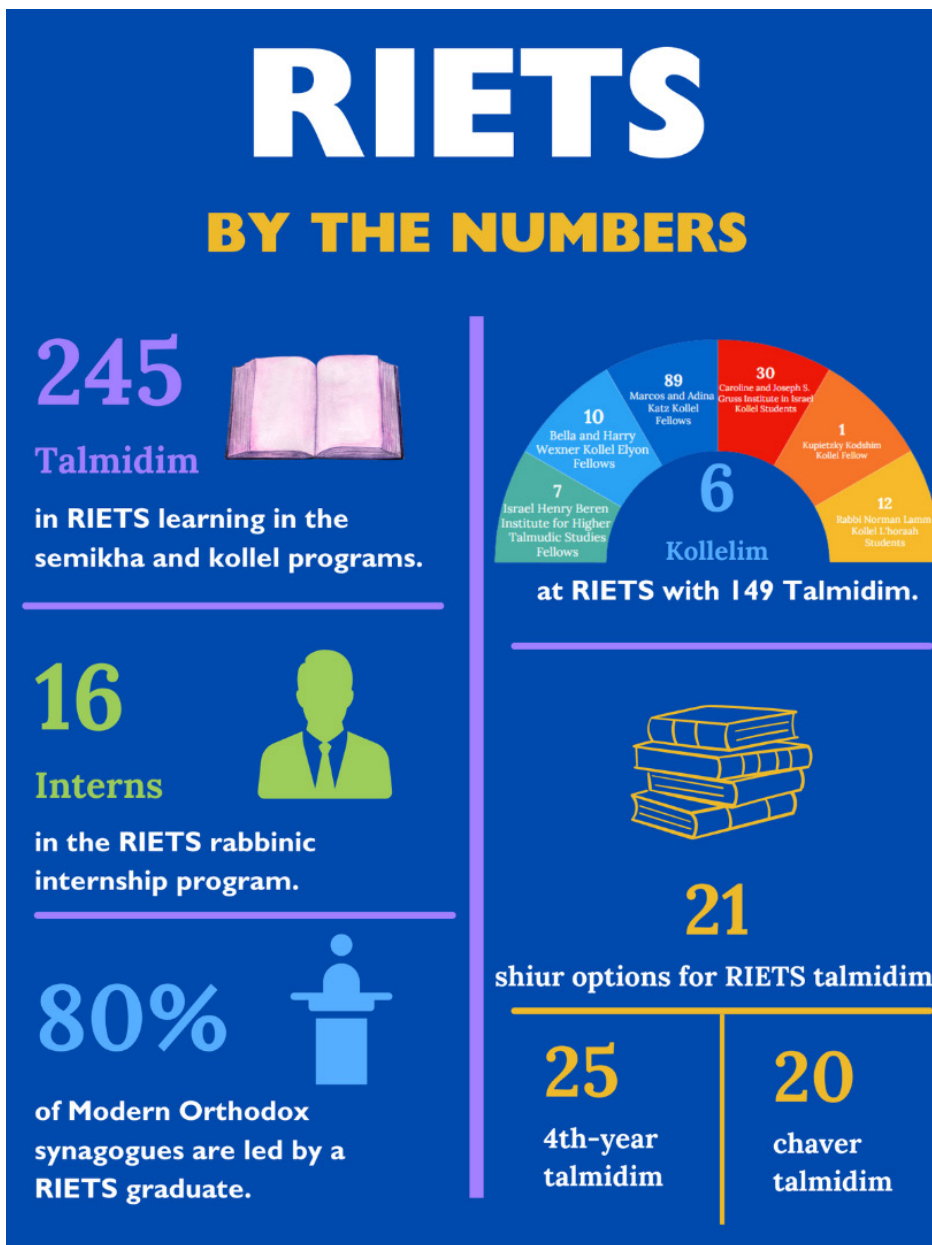
Perhaps this explains why, according to Ramban, God never informs Noah: to challenge man to act righteously and perform good deeds without knowledge of results, because we may have an impact as great as Noah had.

I would like to add a further reflection that is particularly relevant to the celebration of the Chag HaSemikhah. Noah's action is not what you would expect to be a world-saving act. It is creating an aroma. Smell makes the least physical impression. It is fleeting, lasts a moment, and then it is gone!

Somewhat ironically, Noah is best known for the *teivah*. But it is not the big ark that saves the world for eternity, it is the small *mizbeach* and the fleeting aroma!

How significant that is for new rabbis! We think our grand actions or dramatic gestures are what has the most impact. But the smallest interactions and efforts can make the biggest difference. If we consider our own lives, how many moments do we remember where another person said something at the right time or did a little act of chesed that touched us?! They too likely do not even realize the impact it had! Noah's *korbanot* are a reminder of our capacity to make important and lasting contributions and not even know it.

In my rabbinical training at RIETS, I served as rabbinic intern to the highly accomplished and deeply revered Rabbi Kenneth Hain at Congregation Beth Sholom. During my time with him, it struck me that frequently when congregants would express their appreciation and respect for Rabbi



Hain, they would bring up seemingly minor moments or acts that meant so much to them. Though a powerful orator who delivered impressive *derashot*, it was the little things that people treasured: warm gestures, supportive looks, and brief check-ins.

The message of this Noah story is to never doubt the significance of our

actions. We do not know — and may never know — the impact we make. Let us — *mechanchim* and *rabbanim* — never forget that so often what is most influential and meaningful is not what we say when we are at the pulpit or in front of the room but the quiet and less dramatic things we say and do in more private moments.

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