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## THE ROV

A profile of the Rov *zekher tsaddik livrokha* should include comments on his persona, his teaching and his influence. This would have been the appropriate way to introduce him, with love and reverence, during his lifetime and remains appropriate for a retrospective presentation. What follows is such a three-tiered introduction; ואם אשגה. ה' הטוב יכפר בעדי

### 1.

To understand fully who this great man was and what he represented, it is necessary to recall that he was, first of all, a worthy heir of the *beit ha-Rav* (בית הרב), that most remarkable institution of modern Jewish life—vibrant, fascinating, invigorating, ennobling. The *beit ha-Rav*, sometimes referred to as *beit ha-malkhut*, (בית המלכות) was a focus of Jewish creativity and rabbinic leadership in Lithuania, and eventually in all Eastern Europe. *Beit ha-Rav* became synonymous with intensive, trail-blazing Torah scholarship, exemplary piety, and dedicated leadership. We know of many uninterrupted spiritually-aristocratic traditions in the last two or three centuries of Jewish history; it is fair to say that the *beit ha-Rav* in Lithuania is in many respects probably *sui generis*, really in a class by itself, the cradle of so much of Jewish life and learning in modern times. Rabbis of the *beit ha-Rav* were trusted mentors to countless members of the Jewish communities in Europe. People, learned and unlearned, rabbis and laymen, would refer to *beit ha-Rav* “*mit a tzit-ter*”, with deep reverence and great affection.

He was, I must add, *not only* a worthy, luminous heir of the illustrious *beit ha-Rav*, to which he frequently referred in his lectures and shiurim, for to this should be added the special individuating characteristics of Brisk, a simple place name that has been transformed into a complex of values, associations and ideals, a network of great achievements and lofty aspirations. Brisk became a code-word for conceptual precision and

rigor in Torah study, laser-type analysis of and commentary on baffling passages or difficult themes, economy of expression and clarity of exposition, intellectual honesty together with intellectual boldness, strenuous discipline and disciplined sensitivity—all this as well as a pervasive tradition of *hesed*. *Rav hesed ve-emet*, abundant in goodness and truth, was an uplifting, enticing ideal and a remarkable, irresistible reality. Reb Hayyim's acts of *hesed* are legendary; the Rov's *hesed* was bountiful.

## 2.

The Rov was all this and more, because his glorious heritage was filtered through his unique personality, through the original constructs of his mind and heart, through that new entity formed by his majestic Torah learning together with his all-encompassing philosophic, scientific and humanistic education. We need to be precise: even his sovereign mastery of the traditional sources of halakah together with his creative control of aggadah, kabbalah, Jewish philosophy, Biblical exegesis, and the literature of hasidism would make his learning unique—how much more so with the catalytic addition of the other ingredients. To be sure, comprehensiveness, impressively wide-ranging learning, was always the lodestar of *gedole Yisrael*—it was assumed that rabbinic authorities had mastered the vast corpus of Torah teachings; however, his knowledge and range of associations in the universe of Torah and *hokhmah*, his erudition and creativity, his powers of analysis and interpretation, his insight and intuition represent a *special* kind of comprehensiveness. This needs to be recognized and underscored, for even apparently devoted students are not able to acknowledge the true dimensions of his uniqueness. As we shall note, it is easier—yet unpardonable—to reduce the extraordinary to the ordinary; this is the case even if the ordinary refers to recognized standards of intellectual-piritual greatness. There are differences even among the great and we need to free ourselves from routinized thinking in order to perceive and appreciate these differences. The Rambam already taught us that among the “causes of disagreement” is the fact that “man has in his nature a love of, and an inclination for, that to which he is habituated. For this reason also man is blind to the apprehension of the true realities. . . .”<sup>1</sup> It takes special effort and honest concentration to transcend conventions of perception and expression, to recognize something new and beautiful and authentic—something beautiful in its original mode and authentic force.

As for comprehensiveness, the Rov always taught that for Torah to be rich and repercussive, charming and challenging, timely and timeless, it must be comprehensive and commodious and dare not be compartmentalized or fragmented, shallow or routine. In *Kiddushin* 30a, our rabbis interpret *ve-shinnantam le-vanekha* (Deut. 6:7) rather strikingly: “Do not read *ve-shinnantam* but rather *ve-shilashtam*. A person should always divide his study time into three parts: a third should be devoted to Scripture (*Mikra*), a third to Mishnah and a third to Talmud.” How are we to understand the transition from *ve-shinnantam* to *ve-shilashtam*? This is certainly not to be seen as just another application of the well-known *al-tikrei* principle, which is based upon a different vocalization of the same letters (e.g., *banayikh-bonayikh*); phonetics and semantics are intertwined in cases of *al-tikrei* in order to focus our attention on a new insight or novel inference. It appears that we have here a new conceptualization, a dynamic interpretation which underscores a basic principle and essential feature of Torah study. *Ve-shinnantam* means to have a clear, unobstructed grasp of the subject matter (*Torah*) in its entirety which may then be transmitted without hesitation, with zeal and accuracy, charm and authoritativeness. (ושננתם לבניך): שיהו דברי תורה. אל תגמגם ותאמר לו אלא אמור לו מיד מחודדין בפוך. שאם ישאל לך אדם דבר, אל תגמגם ותאמר לו אלא אמור לו מיד.

This mode of teaching and transmission is attainable only if one has comprehensive scope and the ability to systematize; that is the thrust of *ve-shilashtam* as setting the groundwork for *ve-shinnantam*—study methodically so as to include everything (*Mikra*, *Mishnah*, *Talmud* [in which, according to the Rambam, philosophy is included]) and then you will be in a position to transmit Torah precisely and unflinchingly. Fragmentation often results in distortion.

At the beginning of *Hilkot Talmud Torah*, Rambam cites *ve-Shinnantam* when emphasizing the obligation to teach Torah to everyone—all students are perceived as sons—whereas he could have cited the verse ולא בנו ובן בנו בלבד אלא מצוה על כל חכם. ולמדתם אותם את בניכם. He says: וחכם מישראל ללמד את כל התלמידים אעפ שאינ בניו. שנאמר ושננתם לבניך. בניך אלו תלמידך. We must be attentive to the significance of this formulation.

It appears that there are in fact two levels of teaching: *limud*, teaching everyone something, on many different levels—a task which everyone is able to perform in one way or another; *shinun*,—teaching which requires finely-honed interpretive-expository skills and extensive knowledge, which only the sages have acquired. This explains the Maimonidean formulation which shifts from the commandment to teach one’s children and grandchildren to the obligation incumbent

upon every scholar to teach all the disciples even though they are not his children. In sum, *ve-shinnantam*, interpreted also as *ve-shilasham*, underscores the lesson that the ideal fulfillment of the mitzvah of Talmud Torah (to study and to teach) hinges on lucid, systematic knowledge which is all-inclusive. Seen from this perspective, it is clear why Talmud Torah is a special, open-ended mitzvah which is fulfilled with different degrees of intensity and creativity by different people.<sup>2</sup>

The Rov's virtuosic-versatile teaching is a vigorous, persuasive illustration of the truth of this interpretation. His Torah is comprehensive and therefore sharp; it is systematic and therefore effusive; his fulfillment of the mitzvah reflects his individuality. He occupies a position in Torah teaching which is his and his alone.

### 3.

What needs to be emphasized repeatedly, and unequivocally, is his uniqueness. His extraordinary Torah erudition together with his wide-ranging general knowledge, his dazzling brilliance, lucid, compelling analysis, phenomenal originality (which did not tolerate the shallow or the commonplace), astonishing intuition, almost legendary preoccupation with Torah (even when drinking a cup of tea or crossing the street—as was pointed out by my son Reb Mosheh), uncompromising honesty, unfailing eloquence, deep-seated sensitivity and lyricism, carefully-crafted philosophy (or *hashkafah*), and overpowering charisma—all combined to shape a remarkable Torah personality, unlike others whom we knew. This is the concept and reality of “לא כן עבדי משה” Not so my servant Moshe” (Numbers 12:7). It is a cardinal principle that Mosaic prophecy is not only of a higher order but is intrinsically different, unique, generically and qualitatively incomparable. Failure to recognize that Moses was not just another prophet was, in the opinion of Rambam, the error and sin of Miriam; she did not malign or slander her brother Moses but she, who was “older than he and had nurtured him on her knees and had put herself in jeopardy to save him,” did not acknowledge his unique status and stature. She thought that he was like the other prophets. והיא לא דברה בגנותו. Failure to discern precisely and acknowledge properly the true greatness of a person is part of “raillery and slander” (ליצנות ולשון הרע) according to Rambam.<sup>3</sup>

Many years ago, the Rov mentioned to me with words of high praise an article on Rav Hayyim Brisker by Rav Meir Berlin in which the

latter used the expressive, repercussive phrase לא כן עבדי משה to characterize Reb Hayyim vis a vis his contemporaries—indeed truly preeminent *gedole Yisrael*, whose light never dims. The point was that Reb Hayyim was unquestionably different even in this galaxy of great sages; routine praise, even if sincere, misses the mark.

The Rov subsequently used this same highly-charged phrase to portray his uncle the Brisker Rov and we may properly, with a full measure of intellectual rigor and accountability, honesty and discipline, apply it to the Rov. Let us listen to his words and learn from them:

ובכל זאת, לא כן עבדי משה . . . הרב מבריסק הלא היה מופרד ומופרש מהם; שונה בדרכיו וארחותיו. החואר גדול הדור אינו הולמו ואינו מבטא את האופייני לו. היחיד שבדור או בחיר הדור היה. עולמו המחשבתי, השקפתו, חסידותו, מידותיו ופעולותיו אינם נתפסים במטבעות שטבעו הספרנים. ההספרים שנאמרו אחרי מיטתו והמאמרים שנכתבו עליו קיצצו כמיטת סדום את מקוריותו וייחודו של האיש הזה. במקום להביע את אשר היה האיש, נהיה הוא את אשר רצו הספרנים לומר עליו בכליהם הלשוניים שכבר העלו חלודה.

What could be more appropriate for us as we continue to think about the Rov and confront the challenging and daunting task of portraying him as he was and not as stereotyped phraseology or conventional plaudits would depict him, not as he would appear as the result of self-mirroring. We all know that language, imperfect to begin with, is debased; we find everywhere inflated rhetoric, meaningless hyperbole, sweeping generalization, unbalanced comparison, insipid stereotype, perfunctory praise. The leveling process casts its net even on truly great *bakhme Yisroel*; they are presented as if they were all alike—same youthful precocity, same Torah expertise, same piety, same kind of communal leadership. In this scheme there is no room for individuating characteristics. As for us, there is no fear of contradiction in saying simply and forthrightly—without any trace of posthumous flattery or eulogistic license—that the Rov was different: different in his teaching, different in his outlook, different in his style, different in his behavior, different in his charisma. Indeed, לא כן עבדי משה.<sup>4</sup>

The truth is that it is not really possible for anyone to say, without proper qualification, that the Rov was identical with his father and grandfather—great tribute that it is, this would be an example of a kind of oversimplification which impoverishes our spiritual-religious history. Of course, there were basic similarities and common features but equally evident is the fact that there were essential differences and individuating features. Juxtaposing the semikah given him by the Kovner Rav,

Rabbi Avraham Shapiro, and the letter written about him by his father in 1935 is a good way of balancing and integrating judicious comparison to his ancestors with candid recognition of his own persona. The Kovner Rav underscored with passionate elegance the intellectual similarities between grandfather and grandson:

נחה עליז רוח זקנו הארי החי הגדול שבחבורה . . . כמוהו מושל בים התלמוד עד עמקי תהומותיו,  
וכל רז לא אניס ליי. מעלה נסתרות ומפענח נעלמות ובוקע נתיב אורה בהלכות העמומות.

His father readily and emphatically acknowledged the unique endowment of his son—his unique talents together with his unique training, his erudition coupled with his analytical skills, his mastery of halakhah and of Jewish thought, his great creativity in the study of Torah and philosophy. The father introduces the son, whom he describes as having been a youthful prodigy and a distinguished philosophy student, in a way that allows his radiant persona to shine forth; he focuses on the fact that the diverse resources converge to emphasize the Rov's preeminence in knowledge and understanding of Torah.

After emphasizing his son's fame (לפניו והכריזה עליי) and highlighting the fact that he is really *sui generis* (הוא מין בפני עצמו) (התכונות מיוחדות), he writes as follows concerning the Rov's unique achievement:

בדורות הקודמים דימו שאי אפשר במציאות להיות תורה ושאר חכמות משולבים יחד. אמנם  
בדור זה כבר פוגשים תורה וחכמה מחוברים. אבל באופן הזה גדול הדור בתורה באופן מבהיל.  
כאחד מגדולי הדור בדורות הקודמים, ואם בשאר חכמות באופן גדול הנו היחיד ומיוחד, אין  
ספק, כי הוא כעת יחיד הדור בהבנת התורה. הבנתו היא משקולת ודעתו היא המכרעת בכל  
דיני התורה, קלות וחומרות.

In a subsequent paragraph he refers explicitly to his son's general education and distinguished achievement in philosophy:

היי עילוי וגאון בילדותו ועתה כבר כל התורה חקוקה על לבו . . . והלא אינו בעל מלאכה אחת  
רכש במידה מרובה גם הפרפראות לחכמה, המעטירים אותו ונתנים לו לזית חן ויופי. השיג את  
תאר ד"ר פילוסופי באופן הכי מצוין בהאוניברסיטה דברלין, והפרופסורים דשם היו בהתפעלות  
מגדל כשרונותיו ורוחב הבנתו העמוקה שלא ראו כזאת. ומחדש גם בחכמה זו כגאון הדור.

The conclusion is powerful and succinct:

ואך הוא הגברא דכולי ביי, גדול התורה בתורה, אב וגאון בשאר חכמות, אחד המיוחדים  
בכשרונות בין עם ישראל.<sup>5</sup>

## 4.

This uniqueness also underlies the abundance, the bountifulness, what almost seems to be the ubiquitousness of his teaching—a fulfillment and manifestation of (ולהורות נתן בלבו), (He has put in his heart that he may teach” (*Exodus* 35:34)<sup>6</sup>; the extraordinary ability to communicate ideas and insights is a special gift, a special dimension of genius, for not every person, even one possessed of great learning, is blessed with ולהורות נתן בלבו. The Rov had it and his inspired, disciplined teaching was like a spring flowing with undiminished, ever-increasing strength.

This extraordinary ability was felicitously coupled with his unflinching readiness to teach. I am inclined to suggest that his real greatness lay not in the majesty of his erudition, the force of his originality or the brilliance of his intuition. (People always admired the sheer pageantry of his learning and were enchanted by the elegance of its various manifestations and formulations). His greatness—intellectual and moral—lay in his extraordinary ability and amazing readiness to teach and converse effectively, vigorously and intelligibly *on all* levels; moreover, he did so sympathetically and graciously in a way that simultaneously satisfied and stimulated the listener. In order for the Rov to give a shiur, a derashah or a lecture, he had to engage in an act of צמצום, contraction; he had to restrict and restrain a mighty intellect and channel it, to select prudently from an awesome erudition and a vast reservoir of original insights in a carefully controlled way. The profundities of his learning and the subtleties of his thinking had to be unfolded slowly and methodically. Otherwise, students and listeners would have been overwhelmed, would have drowned in the sea of his Torah. His teaching would not have been intelligible—it would rather become a source of frustration and restlessness. He knew that teaching, no matter how profound, must be pleasant and palatable.

דבש וחלב תחת לשונך. כל שאומר דברי חורה ברבים ואינם ערבים לשומעיהם כדבש וחלב המערבים זה בזה, נוח לו שלא אמרן. (שיר השירים רבה ד:כב).

Every shiur, every speech, was crafted with consummate artistry. This is not only an expression of his literary-conceptual perfectionism but of his realization that if he was to teach effectively, he had to contain his immense learning and unbounded creativity. Style and exposition required sustained attention; hasty writing like shabby thinking was intolerable.<sup>7</sup> He had to find the best way to combine felicitous generalization and lucid, compelling interpretation of detail, while interjecting

a sprightly parenthetical remark, an anecdotal reference or a lyrical note. Otherwise we would not have been able to learn from him. He, therefore, happily fused apparently limitless erudition with enthralling elegance and immense pedagogic skills. When he repeated an idea or interpretation—and the repetition was always eloquent—his intention must have been to guarantee that the presentation was properly textured and fully-nuanced, that one theme had been adequately developed and the transition to the next one was crystal clear. Ever mindful of his audience and the goals of his presentation, he used as much learning—*lomdus*, midrash, philosophy, history, literature—as was necessary and no more.

When I think of and see him, before my eyes, preparing and delivering a shiur, I am reminded of the following: The Gemara (*Sukkah*, 28a) says, in referring to the fact that Hillel had eighty disciples, that “the greatest of them was Jonathan ben Uzziel and the smallest was Rabban Johanan ben Zakai.” The text then continues to depict graphically the greatness of the smallest, least distinguished disciple: he is described as knowing everything.

אמרו עליו על רבן יוחנן בן זכאי שלא הניח מקרא ומשנה גמרא הלכות ואגדות דקדוקי תורה  
ודקדוקי סופרים קלים וחמורים . . . דבר גדול ודבר קטן דבר גדול מעשה מרכבה. דבר קטן  
הוויות דאביי ורבא.

The stage is set for the Gemara to ask a crucial question: “וכי מאחר שקטן . . . שבכולם כך. גדול שבכולן על אחת כמה וכמה. If the smallest of them was so great, how much more so the greatest.” However, we are eager to know what remains to be said in laudatory characterization of the greatest; what is the extra dimension that may be identified and attributed to the most distinguished of the disciples. This is the answer: They said of Jonathan ben Uzziel that when he used to sit and occupy himself with the study of Torah, every bird that flew overhead was immediately burnt, *כל עוף שפורה עליו מיד נשרף*.<sup>8</sup>

In studying this remarkable passage and pondering its significance, the yeshiva student focuses on a legal issue to be decided in accord with the *Hoshen Mishpat* or *Hilkhot Hovel u-Mazik*: who has to pay, who is liable for the damage and the loss. The Kotzker hasid, conscious of and questing for ecstasy, marvels: if this is how the student is portrayed and celebrated, what is left to describe the teacher? *וואס איז שוין ביים רבין?* What unusual resourcefulness does he possess?

To paraphrase the Talmudic sentence, *וכי מאחר שהתלמיד כך הרב על אחת כמה וכמה*. We seem to have exhausted everything; every factual assessment, every metaphor, every category of praise has been used. Our

armamentarium is depleted. The answer of Kotzk was: *ביים רבין ווערט נישט פארברנט*. The master has sovereign control over his mighty resources and uses them with laser-like precision. He creatively summons forth from his reservoir of knowledge and skills only that which is necessary for the task at hand. While revealing one thing, he conceals many things. Nothing is squandered; no available resources are used needlessly or mindlessly. There is no exhibitionism, no ostentatious parade of erudition, no ornamental accumulation of source references. The rebbe produces much light and just enough heat—nothing is burnt and the Torah teaching shines luminously.

The Rov always dispensed his Torah learning in a measured way. He shared his learning graciously and benignly in order to make it possible for others to be partners or participants in the intellectual process. His thorough, meticulous preparation as well as masterful, deliberate presentation were expressions of this. He always prepared very carefully, regardless of the level of his presentation. I recall vividly how he would write out his remarks for the boys and girls of Maimonides School when he came to address them on *Erev Yom Ha-Kippurim*—remarks about the beauty and sanctity of *Yom Ha-Kippurim*, about *taharah*, about the role of the Kohen Gadol, about the exaltedness of prayer, about *teshuvah* and *kapparah*, about the inseparability of mitzvot between man and man and those between man and God, about the striving for moral perfection, about the multiple meanings of *לפני ה'*. Everything was carefully crafted even—or especially—for young boys and girls who needed to be reassured and aroused in the quest for understanding and insight, piety and spirituality.

The great master-teacher is described as follows:

ויוחר שהיה קהלת חכם, עוד למד דעת את העם, ואזן וחקר וחקן משלים הרבה.

His learning enables him to teach and disseminate knowledge among the people, among all the people; for this purpose of effective, inspiring teaching, he devises multiple techniques of clarification and exposition and various strategies of explanation—*meshalim harbeh*. The wise man pays a price for his teaching, which is *torat hesed*.<sup>9</sup> For a sage to transmit knowledge and wisdom to the people, not to a pre-selected elite, is to be deflected from his own study and writing, his attainments and advance. Nevertheless he persists and teaches in a stimulating way. This was the Rov: the rabbi's scholar, the layman's rebbe, the child's guide—all luminous facets of his untiring teaching—*ולהורות נתן בלבו*.

## 5.

This remarkable achievement was the consummate expression of combined intellectual and moral prowess—of magnanimity, generosity and graciousness. The statement in *Nedarim* 38a comes to mind:

לא ניתנה תורה אלא למשה ולזרעו . . . משה נהג בה טובת עין ונתנה לישראל ועליו הכתוב אמר:  
טוב עין הוא יבורך (משלי כב:ט).

The Rov had a very bountiful eye; he was a great טוב עין. He shared his wisdom and learning with everyone—rabbis and students, various groups of baale batim, young and old, large gatherings and small assemblies. Whether he was interpreting a difficult passage in Tosafos, explicating a particularly recalcitrant formulation by Rambam, interpreting a comment of Rashi or Ramban on the Torah, he was always the master-teacher—happily and skillfully making his rich learning available to all.

In addition, he felt—and compellingly expressed the idea—that wisdom, like prophecy, was not to be seen as the private possession of an individual אין הנבואה וגם החכמה קנין היחיד. שייכות הנה לכל. The halakah obligating a prophet to communicate his prophecy—נביא הכובש נבואתו חייב מיתה—<sup>10</sup> בידי שמים should govern the behavior and attitude of the wise man, even if a high price is paid. Noblesse oblige; the sage is driven to share his learning. The Rov illustrated untiringly the lesson implicit in the opening halakhot of Rambam, *Hilkot Talmud Torah*,<sup>11</sup> that studying and teaching constitute one unified mitzvah, one fully integrated performance. As we shall subsequently note, his magnanimity—making his great mind and soul available to those who thirsted for “the word of God”—together with the charm and cogency, pedagogic refinement and rhetorical force of his teaching resulted in an extraordinarily widespread impact which literally made him the רבן של ישראל.

## 6.

These comments on magnanimity and bountifulness lead to one more comment on the Rov's personality. This great man, whose unique scholarship was admired far and wide and whose wise counsel was sought throughout the world, was totally unpretentious, free of all pompousness and officiousness. He deserved and received the greatest respect but never wanted this to be tinged with artificiality. He opened the door, answered the telephone, conducted all his correspondence—

without secretaries, without an office staff, without any bureaucracy. His resistance to and antipathy for mechanization, institutionalization, stodginess, perfunctoriness—above all artificiality and pretense—carried over to his personal behavior. Just as he was far from banality and platitude in thought or style, so he had no use for the artificial, which is also superficial, in behavior and human relations. The Rov's greatness was thus expressed also in his individuality, personal authenticity and naturalness in everything he did.

## 7.

As for his method of Torah teaching—the celebrated Brisker mode of analysis, interpretation and exposition—let me, in the interests of brevity, mention two salient components.

(1) This method necessitates treating Rambam's *Mishneh Torah* not only as a code of halakhah (as the influential precursor of the *Shulchan Arukh*), but as a commentary on the Talmud; it recognizes that Rambam the authoritative codifier is eo ipso a versatile, original commentator. This premise yields great exegetical-interpretive freedom in reconstructing the implicit commentary. The characterization of a statement as a "difficult Rambam" usually presumes a conventional explanation of the Talmud text or a common form of reconciliation of several texts;<sup>12</sup> when this conventional interpretation fails to illumine the Maimonidean formulation, we are left with a "difficult Rambam." It is self-evident that a curt, normative formulation, an halakhah pesukah, in the *Mishneh Torah*, reflects Rambam's latent explanation of Talmudic texts and halakhic concepts—an explanation that often differs from the standard commentators. Consequently, a major task of the rabbinic scholar is to unfold or reconstruct Rambam's unarticulated interpretive processes—in other words, to compose, by means of fastidious reasoning and disciplined hypothesis, the kind of commentary that Rambam would have written on the Talmud.

The testimony of Rav Menahem ha-Meiri (introduction to *Bet ha-Behirah*) concerning the mode of study followed in his school is particularly informative and enlightening. Having completed the study of a Talmudic passage and arrived at what seemed to be the "true explanation" of the passage, he would consult the *Mishneh Torah* in order to find the practical codificatory summation and frequently the latter, in its Maimonidean formulation, convinced him that his explanation of the passage was defective or imprecise. The attempt to align the *pesak* with

the *sugya* necessitates intensive intellectual exertion and relies on great ingenuity and resourcefulness. Failure to do this will often leave one with an inadequate understanding.

וכלל אמר לך, ומחסוך אל תבוז אליו, והוא שכל מי שלא יחוש לידיעת פסק הענין לא יעלה בידו בהרבה מקומות אמתת הפירוש וגם הוא לא יתעמל בזה, וחי השם, הרבה פעמים קרה על סוגית ההלכה והייתי חושב שכונתי בה לביאור אמת, וכשהייתי מחפש לידיעת הפסק בספרי המחברים הקדמונים בפסקיהם ויותר בספרי הרב ז"ל אשר היו לי מכוש אחרון וסוף הוראה לכל החבורים המחברים דרך פסק הייתי מרגיש בעצמי שלא היה ביאור הסוגיא עולה בידי כהוגן.

It is especially interesting, in light of this, to read the Rov's description of how his father was accustomed to study.

אבא מרי דיבר תמיד על אודות הרמב"ם, וכך היה עושה: היה פותח את הגמרא: קורא את הסוגיא. אחר כך היה אומר כדברים האלה: זהו פירושו של הר"י ובעלי-התוספות: עכשיו נעיין נא ברמב"ם ונראה איך פירש הוא. תמיד היה אבא מוצא כי הרמב"ם לא פירש כמותם ונשה מן הדרך הפשוטה.<sup>13</sup>

Hence the biggest challenge and the delightful opportunity provided by the Rambam—is the invitation to disciplined yet imaginative interpretive hypothesis, to a hermeneutic which fuses textual precision with conceptual insight.

I emphasize “disciplined yet imaginative” because that is the key to understanding what is colloquially referred to as a *hiddush*.

## 8.

A *hiddush* is not something contrived or extraneous or completely autonomous, but an age-old time-less truth waiting to be brought to the surface. It is an inspiring, edifying, insight not hitherto perceived, a novel interpretation based upon previously unnoticed associations or connotations, an elegant clarification which resolves hard-core difficulties. A *hiddush* is present in Torah, but temporarily invisible. The resourceful, erudite interpreter, using penetrating logic and creative powers of association and differentiation, brings this new-old truth to everyone's attention. This is really what the Ramban is telling us in the introduction to his *Milhamot ha-shem*: החיוב המוטל עלינו לחפש בעניני התורה: והמצוות ולהוציא לאור תעלומות מצפונים. The highest praise in Brisk was to react to an idea or insight, to a beautiful compelling *hiddush*, with the rhapsodic exclamation: אמתה של תורה i.e., the *hiddush* reveals the truth which

has not previously been grasped. In the letter which we have already mentioned, the Rov's father says of him: הוא יחיד הדור בחידוש התורה לאמתה.

It is well known that the Talmud (*Sukkah* 28a) characterizes R. Eleazar as never having transmitted a teaching which he did not hear from his teachers—indeed, he himself proclaimed ולא אמרתי דבר שלא שמעתי מפי רבי מעולם. Yet, elsewhere (in אבות דרבי נתן), our Rabbis emphasize that he was the master of doctrines which nobody ever heard prior to his teaching them: שלא שמעתון איון אדם מעולם. Many have correctly suggested that these two descriptions are not contradictory. R. Eleazar's grasp of the *masorah* was so comprehensive, his knowledge so fastidious, his understanding so profound, his intuition so keen, that his שמועה, his tradition, included themes and motifs, premises, conclusions and insights unknown to others. He elaborated them and they, in turn, became components of the *masorah*.

There are in the Rambam's *Mishneh Torah* hundreds and hundreds of *hiddushim*—in addition to those explicitly signaled by the phrase “it seems to me” (יראה לי)—which the commentators acknowledge by noting that they are original Maimonidean formulations: דברי רבנו ראויים אליו; סברא דנפשיה וראויים הדברים לאומרם and similar phrases. They do not strain to find an explicit source; rather they highlight the novelty, are stimulated by its profundity, savor the felicity of style, power of compression, wealth of allusions while they experience time and again the delicacy and dynamism of the innumerable original explanations and conclusions; in a word, they confront, admire and are stimulated by the multi-splendored originality.

The *masorah* is being deepened and expanded by a great *hakham ha-masorah* who succeeds in discovering inherent, authentic ideas which have not received any attention or have not been given the primacy and prominence which they deserve and, concomitantly, the opportunity to influence our thinking and behavior.

The Rov, at the beginning of his essay *Ra'ayonot 'al ha-Tefillah*, had occasion to comment on this phenomenon, this process of *hiddush* (intuitive, authentic interpretation and expansion) as follows:

הכל זקוקים לגאולה ולפדיון: הציבור ההיסטורי. גם היחיד. לפעמים נשארתי אידיאה גלמודה ואלמונית במערכות המחשבה. עד שבא גואלה הקרוב לה ומוציא אותה מברידותה ומשוממותה לחרות ולמרכזיות.

ישנה גאולה גם במחשבה ההלכתית. ישנן סברות שנידונו לזמן רב או קצר לגלות וחתרו לגאולה במשך דורות עד שבא הגואל וגאל: הגואל הוא אחד מחכמי ישראל שאותו בחרה ההשגחה להוציא את השיטה או הסברה מברידותה למרכזיות המחשבה ההלכתית.

It is self-evident that not everyone is qualified or licensed to submit novellae and not every *hiddush* will be absorbed into the mainstream of our *masorah*. When we read the Talmudic statement that *כל מה שתלמיד ותיק עתיד לחדש* was included in the original revelation of Torah, the adjective *vatic* resonates in a special way: only a trusted, thoughtful transmitter, one who carries the *masorah* and contributes to it with dedication, authenticity and creative understanding, joins the august company of *hakhme ha-masorah*. Originality and innovativeness are outgrowths of being saturated with traditional categories and concepts. There is a weighty inducement to novelty but it is accompanied by a deep sense of responsibility and accountability.

## 9.

It should be noted that mighty historical challenges—conditions of adversity, tendencies to decline, symptoms of erosion—elicit especially creative responses from these great sages who are the guardians and interpreters of the *masorah*. My son Reb Mayer called attention to the complementary terminology used by Rambam to describe the *hakhme ha-masorah*: they are *מעתיקי השמועה* and *מגידה* (*Mishneh Torah*, introduction and *Hilkot Teshuvah*, III, 8), transmitters of tradition and its interpreters. Actually the Rov commented on the significance of the phrase *מכחיש מגידה* in *Hilkot Teshuvah III, 8* in his famous shiur on *kiddush ha-kodesh* (now reprinted in *Kovets Hiddushe Torah*, p.61.) They counter the challenge, which ordinarily produces pessimism and demoralization, with intellectual creativity and spiritual virtuosity which can only result in optimism and revitalization. These wise men, teachers par excellence, inexhaustible sources of inspiration and commitment, sustain and advance the authoritative *masorah*.<sup>14</sup>

## 10.

(2) The second component in his method of teaching is the following: the primary mode of interpretation used in this process is abstract conceptualization—i.e., to find or extrapolate the unarticulated idea, the unperceived association, the unifying or differentiating characteristic which informs the plethora of details; to identify and analyze the concept which undergirds the many apparently disparate facts. This often involved the imaginative translation of facts into ideas; “pots and pans”

become abstract concepts. The method probes into the inner strata of Talmudic logic and formulates the disparities as well as similarities between various passages in the light of conceptual analysis. Complex concepts, discussed fragmentarily in numerous sections of the Talmud or unrelated contexts of the Maimonidean code, are defined with vigor and precision, with dialectical insight and acuity.

## 11.

This entire method which, at the risk of oversimplification, I have reduced to its most essential features, lends dignity to Torah, enhances כבוד התורה. Original and profound, elegant and enthralling, such novel interpretations combining massive erudition with great intuition speak not only to one's religious consciousness but fully engage the mind as well. They powerfully rebut the platitudinous Haskalah indictment of Talmud study as intellectually insipid and spiritually stultifying. There is not only technical proficiency and extensive knowledge but intellectual-aesthetic delight in the process of learning. By his mastery and repercussive application of this method, as a result of readily discernible, extraordinary sophistication and generally admired unfailing originality, the Rov enhanced *kevod ha-torah*. His teaching was intellectually exciting and religiously uplifting.

There is a story that when the Rov's great-grandfather, the *Beit Halevi*, met Reb Yisroel Salanter, he would repeat to him some *hid-dushim* of his son Reb Hayyim, the most forceful protagonist, if not the originator, of this approach in modern times. Reb Yisroel Salanter, who was very much attuned to contemporary nineteenth century developments coming in the wake of emancipation and enlightenment, and who agonized over the negative phenomena which he observed, responded as follows: "The next generation will study Torah that way and we shall overcome the *haskalah*." What are we to make of this remarkable statement? What is the connection between the two parts of his statement?

Reb Yisroel Salanter meant to say that in addition to the religious-metaphysical commitment which must be nurtured and sustained, young people need intellectual challenge and intellectual satisfaction. He knew well that many thought—mistakenly—that *haskalah* provided this kind of intellectual excitement; that is why an analytic-conceptual method, equal to any in its rigor and profundity, in its vigorous discipline and its invigorating results, would rehabilitate halakah while repudiating *haskalah*.

The Rov does not tell this story, as far I know, but I found one sentence in his eulogy on his uncle the Brisker Rov which makes the same point very poignantly. In that remarkable-revelatory essay, which contains a spirited characterization of Reb Hayyim's method (שיטת ר' חיים איש בריסק), more sharply delineated than what is described in *Isb Ha-Halakhah*—the Rov asks about his grandfather's decisive impact: במה היה כחו יפה, שאילמלא הוא היתה משתכחת תורה מישראל ולא היינו יכולים להרכיץ אותה בתקופה זו.

What was the secret of his genius; if not for his trail-blazing, stimulating, widely repercussive achievement, we would not be able to teach and disseminate Torah.

The Rov, who frequently emphasized the importance of enhancing כבוד תורה, who saw this as the assignment given us in this age by Divine Providence, was privileged to do this more than anyone else. He was the teacher who disseminated Torah in this age with verve and zeal, emphasizing the nobility of the intellectual process, the exhilaration of learning, the beauty of Torah study<sup>15</sup>.

The same statement that he made about his grandfather is applicable to him, . . . במה היה כחו יפה.

We should note that the Rov's early חידושי תורה deal with themes of זרעים and קדשים; they are markedly original and completely classical in theme and format. He has appropriated Reb Hayyim's approach and individualized it by his erudition, clarity of insight and mode of exposition. His innovations and acuity—using a method characterized by innovation—are salient. Subsequently, he chose to concentrate on themes of prayer, benedictions, Torah reading, festivals and fast days—these are, of course, the topics of his celebrated Yahrzeit Shiurim. He sought themes that had not been studied in this way; dichotomies between technical-theoretical and popular-practical were not real. Topics considered to be popular, well-known and accessible were transformed by his profoundly original and repercussive analysis.

## 12.

The other major area of his teaching, which is conventionally described as his philosophy, is, in my opinion, best seen—to use traditional religious categories—as his incessant, inspired preoccupation with פנימיות or נשמת התורה. One utilizes contemporary philosophic terminology and phenomenology—that is a stylistic, conceptual requirement basic to the very enterprise—but one's goal is the same as that of the great

