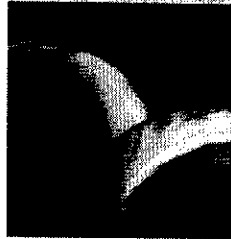
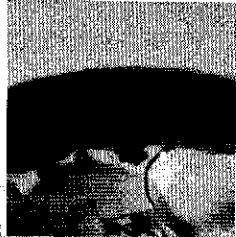
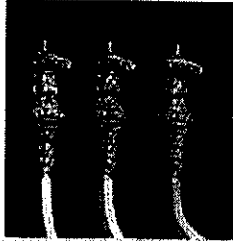




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Appreciating The Rav
The Philosophy & Life Outlook of The Rav – Part 2

Rabbi Shmuel Silber
April 29, 2013

Sponsored by Dr. Gary & Sherri Bauman in memory of Carl Bauman, Yehuda ben Baruch z'l



THIS COURSE IS DEDICATED IN MEMORY OF:

אסתר חנה ז'ל בת צבי ופרומה עלקא פייגא בת מאיר ופשא לאה ז'ל נח בן אברהם ופייגא ז'ל
MAY THEIR SOULS BE BOUND IN THE EVERLASTING BOND OF LIFE תהא נשמתם צרורות בצרור החיים

1. The Soloveitchik Heritage (Shulamith Soloveitchik Meiselman, pages 253-254)

Since the age of prophecy is over, and since the prophets handed their mantle to the men of the Great Assembly to continue the teaching of our Torah—our tree of life—this mantle has become the possession of the great Torah leaders, and they teach it to their students. My father received the mantle from

the great Torah sage Reb Chaim, who in turn received it from Reb Yoshe Ber—going back to Reb Chaim Volozhin.

I accept the mantle of Torah and will continue in the tradition of my family to spread Torah to whoever is eager to learn the ways of our Tree of Life.³⁶

2. The Lonely Man of Faith (pages 3-4)

THE NATURE OF the dilemma can be stated in a three-word sentence. I am lonely. Let me emphasize, however, that by stating "I am lonely" I do not intend to convey to you the impression that I am alone. I, thank God, do enjoy the love and friendship of many. I meet people, talk, preach, argue, reason; I am surrounded by comrades and acquaintances. And yet, companionship and friendship do not alleviate the passionate experience of loneliness which trails me constantly. I am lonely because at times I feel rejected and thrust away by everybody, not excluding my most intimate friends, and the words of the Psalmist, "My father and my mother have forsaken me," ring quite often in my ears like the plaintive cooing of the turtledove. It is a strange, alas, absurd experience engendering sharp, enervating pain as well as a stimulating, cathartic feeling. I despair because I am lonely and, hence, feel frustrated. On the other hand, I also feel invigorated because this very experience of loneliness presses everything in me into the service of God.

3. Halakhic Man (page 19)

WHEN halakhic man approaches reality, he comes with his Torah, given to him from Sinai, in hand. He orients himself to the world by means of fixed statutes and firm principles. An entire corpus of precepts and laws guides him along the path leading to existence. Halakhic man, well furnished with rules, judgments, and fundamental principles, draws near the world with an a priori relation. His approach begins with an ideal creation and concludes with a real one. To whom may he be compared? To a mathematician who fashions an ideal world and then uses it for the purpose of establishing a relationship between it and the real world, as was explained above. The essence of the Halakhah, which was received from God, consists in creating an ideal world and cognizing the relationship between that ideal world and our concrete environment!

4. Worship of the Heart (pages 5-9)

The Emotional Medium (A)

Man is also able to approach God through his great and passionate love for Him, through an ecstatic experience which enables the finite being to transcend the bounds of finitude and to rise above the limited and relative to the heights of absoluteness and endlessness. Man, many Jewish philosophers and mystics maintained, may reach God not only through the intellect but also through the "heart," through a pure and serene mind, however naive and simple; through a passionate, sincere, though not intellectually enlightened love; through craving for God, even when the heart which craves has not been illumined by Divine knowledge and wisdom; in loneliness and despair, even if the lonely and despairing soul cannot interpret its own misery; or through joy and jubilation, notwithstanding the fact that the heart which is filled with gratitude and happiness is too ignorant to analyze its aroused emotions. One may find access to God in ignorance and intellectual want as long as he is truthful and his feelings are sincere and genuine. (D)

(B) The emotional approach to God via the ecstatic leap into the beyond is to be considered a direct beholding of Him. There is no need for additional visionary perceptions characteristic of prophecy.

(G) The feeling of His presence, companionship and closeness is vivid and overpowering. One feels the breath of infinity in the stillness of a clear starlit night, when he simply perceives the great miracle of being in touch with the Creator who resides beyond the endless spaces of the flying nebulae. One may feel the "unseen reality," as William James calls it, in the happiness of self-fulfillment, in the embrace of a child and in the joy of spiritual accomplishment. It is not the physical law or the mathematical formula, but the overpowering thirst for God, the great hope for and experience of Him. The craving for closeness to Being as such, with the origin and root of everything, is an *avodah she-ba-lev*.

Reb Eliyahu Feinstein

7.01 Differences Between the Grandfathers

Related by the Rav in his annual Yahrzeit Shiur in memory of his father, Rabbi Moshe Soloveichik, Yeshiva University, January 29, 1952. Published in Yimei Zikaron [17:3], pp. 78-79. (Hebrew).

I refer to my ^(A) two grandfathers: my grandfather on my mother's side, Reb Eliyahu [Feinstein] of Pruzhana, and my grandfather on my father's side, Reb Chaim [Soloveitchik] of Brisk. Both were great Torah scholars and saintly personalities, but they were very different. They differed from each other in a unique way.

^(B) Reb Eliyahu Pruzhaner entered the rabbinate at the age of sixteen. He remained a spiritual leader until his death at the age of eighty-six, devoting seventy years to the rabbinate. His character exemplified piety and abstinence. He was always dressed in rabbinic clothing; no one ever saw him in short clothing [i.e. modern clothing]. Whether it was hot or cold, he always wore the long frock that characterized the traditional rabbi. He never walked quickly; his pace was always dignified. No one ever saw him roar in laughter, and he never spoke at length or had frivolous conversations with people on the street. His words were few and his every action was weighed. My grandfather would rise with the sun every day in order to learn and pray the morning prayers at the earliest hour. Never did he show excitement, and never did he show emotion. You could not tell whether he was sad or whether he was

happy. My grandfather was never too close or too distant from anyone. In a word, he was the total representative of the Golden Path. His deportment totally radiated dignity. . . .

^(C) Reb Chaim [Soloveitchik] of Brisk, my other grandfather, was exactly the opposite. Even though he was the greatest intellect of his generation, he was filled with emotion and sensitivity. At times he would be happy and overjoyed, and at times he would be sad and haunted with melancholy thoughts. Sometimes he would bitterly fight with the strength of a cedar tree, and other times he would be as soft as a reed. Reb Chaim was a person of conflicting emotions and inner contradictions. Throughout his life, he never maintained a set schedule. He never ate at the same time, and he never prayed at the same time. Every day he had to take care to make sure that he recited the Shema at the proper time. Reb Chaim never dressed like a rabbi

When he traveled by train, no one recognized him as Reb Chaim of Brisk. When he recited the Shemoneh Esreh he would be one of the first to finish and would wait for its repetition by the reader. He would always greet people first and would be first to bless his fellow Jews with Sabbath greetings.

^(D) Many times you could find Reb Chaim surrounded by a group of young children at play. He acted as the horse for them on the floor. The children would grab and pull his frock and cry out to him: "Giddy-up, forward!" At all times anyone could freely approach him because he was very democratic. One cannot say that he was a well-organized person, because he did not function in a harmonious, calculated, disciplined, and coordinated fashion. He developed his unique and genius intellect by himself, with almost no help from rabbis or teachers. Through his own abilities he was responsible for a revolution in halakhic methodology. His warm and open heart was developed because of his intense desire to possess such traits. My late father told me that Reb Chaim once said to him: "Moshe, do not think that I am inherently good. My character is actually bad. One must force oneself to develop gra-

6. The Rav (page 200)

5.11 A Scholar, Yet a Child

(A) Related by the Rav in his eulogy for Rabbi Chaim Heller. Originally published in *Ha-Doar*, 5 Iyar 5721 (1961), p. 405; republished in *Be-Sod ha-Yahid vaha-Yahad* [9:3], p. 290; and *Divrei Hagut ve-Ha'arachah* [12:5], pp. 159–160. (Hebrew).

(B) When it came to matters of faith and belief in God, the giants of Torah knowledge and the rabbinic leaders of the Jewish people became like little children. They approached these subjects with all the innocence, simplicity, and charm of unsophisticated youngsters. Their religious experiences were total and satiated with fervor. Whenever you took cognizance of their greatness, you also perceived their youthful exuberance.

(C) Who was my grandfather, Reb Chaim of Brisk? On one hand, he was a master of abstract thought who introduced basic changes in talmudic methodology and analysis. This was the mature Reb Chaim. On the other hand, he was like a simple, tender child who could not control his intense emotions and his yearnings for the sublime, refined realization of his dreams and expectations. The

(D) mature Reb Chaim totally disciplined his intellect, and his incisive logic redefined the rich world of halakha in precise terminology and razor-sharp distinctions. This same person would also be completely swept away by an outflow of simple, emotional faith which flowed in often-confusing directions to hidden spiritual and mystical realms. This was characteristic of Reb Chaim when he functioned as a mere child.

Who was my late father, my teacher, if not simultaneously both a great scholar and a tender child! Both exacting intellectual brilliance and emotional simplicity merged in his personality.

7. The Rav (page 178)

4.06 The Singing Maid

Related by the Bostoner Rebbe, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak ha-Levi Horowitz, April 29, 1993.

The Rav spoke about his great-grandfather, R. Yosef Baer Soloveitchik, the author of the *Bet ha-Levi*. When in Warsaw, he decided to visit R. Yaakov Gesundheit (1815–1878), the community's rabbi. They were seated in the living room and suddenly they heard the Jewish maid in the kitchen start to sing. Reb Yankele immediately stood up and angrily walked in the direction of the kitchen to stop the maid's singing. Reb Yosef Baer also rose and pulled his host aside. The rabbi of Warsaw asked the *Bet ha-Levi* why he had stopped him.

"I will explain my actions," said Reb Yosef Baer. "Your maid works hard. The only enjoyment and pleasure she has is singing. It is true that we are enjoined from listening to her singing, but we can step outside or go into a different room. However, you want her to stop singing.¹ That is not fair. It is her only enjoyment!"

1. Cf. *Shulhan Arukh*, Even ha-Ezer, 21:1.

8. The Rav (page 171)

3.05 Unresolved Questions

(A)

Related by the Rav in his annual Yahrzeit Shiur in memory of his father, Rabbi Moshe Soloveichik, Yeshiva University, January 15, 1956. (Yiddish). Summarized and published in Yemei Zikaron [17:2], p. 54.

(B)

In my youth I asked my father, Reb Moshe, why the sages left so many questions unresolved and simply ended the talmudic discussion with *teku* [i.e., “the question remains unresolved”]. My father answered me by asking why there were *hukim* [statutes without any apparent human rationale] in the Torah. He explained that God wished to teach us that not every event and happening can be comprehended by the limited mortal mind. Just as the Torah remains our eternal document even with the *hukim*, similarly a Jew must continue his eternal march before the Almighty even though at times he does not comprehend the events that transpire around him. Likewise, my father held that the rabbis instituted the concept of *teku* so that a Jew would understand that his faith must remain complete even when there are unresolved questions and events in his life.

(C)

Even when a Jew is unsettled by problems, he must retain his Torah commitments. A mourner rends his clothes and is haunted by attempting to understand why his beloved one has departed this world, but he must still recite the blessing praising the “True Judge” [the blessing recited on learning of a death]. Even after the Holocaust and so many vain attempts to understand the tragedy of the six million, the Jew must still declare: “Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the mighty?” [Exodus 15:11]. God has many questions and criticisms about the behavior of the Jewish people, but nonetheless He is merciful toward them. Similarly, a Jew must emulate God and his faith must remain firm despite his doubts and inner conflicts. This is the secret of the talmudic *teku* and the Torah’s *hukim*.

D

At times the teku in a person's life can be very great. It is the eve of Passover and the mourner has just returned from burying his beloved parent. His anguish is overwhelming. His home is exactly the same as it had been when his parent was still alive. All the furniture is in place and all the possessions of the departed are still intact. Only the deceased is missing, and he will never return. Yet the mourner must rise from shivah, because the festival abrogates its observance. He must dress in his holiday clothes and join his brethren in the synagogue. The mourner must declaim the joyous verse of the Hallel: "This is the day that the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice on it" [Psalms 118:24]. How can so sad a soul at such a grievous moment be required to say such words? The soul must do so because this is the halakhah! This is the lesson of the teku and the hukim. We must break down our emotions and surrender to the Divine Will.

E

Once, on the first night of Shavuot, the students of the Volozhin Yeshiva had returned from the festive repast to the bet medrash [study hall]. The building was aglow with illumination and spiritual fervor. Some four hundred students were engrossed in talmudic study. Suddenly, the fatherly figure of the Neziv [Rabbi Naftali Zevi Yehudah Berlin, 1817-1893; the rosh ha-yeshiva of Volozhin] appeared in the the bet medrash. In a loud voice he declared: "Let us join together in a dance in honor of the Almighty's giving us the Torah." Soon the entire student body was caught up in an ecstatic dance with the Neziv.

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In the midst of this dancing, a gentile entered with a telegram for the Neziv. The telegram had already been opened, for the messenger knew that the recipient could not open it on the holy day. The Neziv read the telegram, placed it in his pocket, and continued dancing.

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Both days of the holiday continued in this joyful fashion. Finally it ended as the concluding evening prayers were chanted and the Havdalah was recited. The moment after it ended, the Neziv broke down and began to sob without restraint. The telegram had informed him that his only sister had passed away on the

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(A) day before Shavuot. Nevertheless, mourning can only begin after the festival and not on it. This is the demand of the halakhah to which we must surrender.

(1) Only at the conclusion of the festival did the Neziv remove his shoes and break into uncontrollable tears. This is the demand of the tekum. With all his broken heart and unanswered questions, the mortal must yet exclaim "Who is like unto Thee, O Lord, among the mighty!"

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9. The Rav (page 147)

2.03 Do Something Simple

Related by the Rav in his eulogy for Rabbi Moshe Dovber Rivkin at Congregation Moriya, New York, N.Y., December 14, 1976. (Yiddish).

I heard the following from my father in the name of my grandfather Reb Chaim. As you know, Reb Chaim was not a hasid, although he was closer to hasidic thought than most people would imagine. Reb Chaim stated about a certain hasidic rebbe that when he recited a blessing those listening would cry because of the emotional experience. This was the heart of hasidut; to teach a Jew how to properly recite a blessing.

What do I know about Habad? I know quite a bit, since as a child I had a melamed who was a Habad hasid. Instead of teaching me Gemara, he taught me hasidut. Even today, I still know sections of the *Tanya* by heart, especially the Sha'ar ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah, dealing with faith and the attributes of the Almighty. It was my father who taught me Gemara and enabled me to master the rabbinic idiom. Nevertheless, if not for my Habad melamed, I would today be lacking in an entire dimension of knowledge. Many of my drashot are based upon the knowledge imparted to me by that melamed. Those who enjoy my drashot owe him a thank-you. His name was Reb Baruch Yaakov Reisberg, and I remember that he told me that he was a descendant of the author of the *Tanya*, the founder of Habad.

I vividly recall how Reb Baruch would teach *Tanya*. During this period, my father would visit the hadarim in Khaslavichy on either Thursday or Friday. The melamed had lookouts who would inform him when the rabbi was on his way. Immediately, the volumes of *Tanya* would be hidden. The *Tanya* was a small book, and it was easy to hide. We would quickly take out the large gemorot and shout as if deeply involved in talmudic study. Somehow we always shouted when we studied Gemara. My father would look around and not notice anything out of the ordinary.

Once, however, when I accompanied my father to a wedding in Brisk, my grandfather Reb Chaim tested me. Instead of reciting portions of Merubah [the seventh chapter of Baba Kama] which we were supposedly studying, I recited sections of the *Tanya* by heart.

My father and grandfather may have been angry, but I am in debt to the melamed. His teachings broadened my horizons in Judaism. The melamed inspired me with his descriptions of the Kingship of God and of the sefirot, or emanations, from the Divine Presence. The melamed had studied in the Yeshiva in Lubavitch, and his method of speech uplifted and transformed me. At the time I was too young to truly comprehend many of his teachings. Only later did I understand and appreciate the lessons in their full depth. He taught me how to pray with emotion and ecstasy, and gave me an appreciation for the High Holy Day prayers. I often think of him on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

"Do something simple," he would say, "but do it with emotion and feeling." That is the basic message of Habad. Do something mundane and simple, but do it with divine inspiration and meaning! That is the general message of hasidut and certainly the touchstone of Habad.

I would like to illustrate the influence of Habad on me by citing another childhood experience. This too happened in the old hasidic bet medrash where the Rav [the founder of Habad, R. Shneur Zalman of Ladi, 1745–1813] once prayed. There was an alcove in the northern wall where I would find a place on Friday night before the Minhah prayer. Most people congregated at the eastern wall, but something drew me to the northern wall. The hasidim in Khaslavichy were generally very poor. They were peddlers who barely eked out a living going from door to door and hamlet to hamlet. They came to shul on Friday evening still dripping water from the mikveh. I observed their intense devotion as they recited Psalms, running up and down the bet medrash. They could not stand still because they were overwhelmed with emotion and inspiration. While observing them, I felt, not only that they

were reciting Psalms in preparation for the prayers, but that the redemption was actually happening at that moment. All their weekday tribulations were behind them, and they were entering a world that was entirely good—"a world that shall be altogether Sabbath with repose in eternal life" [Grace After Meals]. As a child I was convinced that the presence of God rested upon them in their every movement in the hasidic bet medrash.

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10. Majesty and Humility: The Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (pages 32-33)

Ⓐ The year 1967 was extraordinarily trying for the Rav; within months, his wife, mother and brother all passed away. Although he did manage to return to a productive career of teaching after this period of crisis (and in fact said that the study and teaching of Torah had helped him overcome it), echoes of it reverberate throughout his later writing.

Ⓑ Many attribute to this period (early- to mid-1960s) a significant change in the Rav's temperament. In an address at Yeshiva University at the conclusion of the Rav's *sheloshim* (thirty-day mourning period), his son Prof. Haym Soloveitchik related his different experiences in the Rav's Talmud *shiur*. In the 1940s and 50s, the Rav had been "a volcano, a storming lion in the classroom . . . he could crouch like a tiger and leap at the slightest error that a student would make." However, when he entered his father's *shiur* in 1969, he was shocked to find him "gentle, forbearing; very little upset him." Why the change?

Ⓒ According to Prof. Soloveitchik, the Rav's father had trained him with the assumption that everything was superable through effort. Indeed, contrary to most people's impression of a meteoric career, the first forty years of the Rav's life had been an endless overcoming of obstacles – war, poverty, antisemitism,

politics, etc. Thus, both Rav Moshe and the Rav believed that, generally, intellectual error was tantamount to a moral failure – a failure of will and effort. Rav Soloveitchik responded to error with fury because he believed it to be a mark of laziness and self-indulgence: if his students would try harder, if they would care more, then they would reach a better grasp of the material they were studying. (Of course, he held himself to the same high standard, devoting long hours of intense preparation for his classes.) However, in the 1960s Rav Soloveitchik had to cope with his own, ultimately successful, bout with cancer, and his wife's, ultimately unsuccessful, struggle with the disease. At this point, he discovered a sense of helplessness; not everything could be accomplished by sheer force of will. This caused a shift in his attitude to his students. He came to terms with human limitations and vulnerability.

Ⓓ This change in temperament may also reflect a shift in emphasis in the Rav's writings. In the writings of the 1960s and 1970s the themes of surrender, humility, the heroism of defeat, and childlike dependence on God assume heightened prominence. Although these themes may be present in his earlier writings, they are certainly not as central.

Appreciating the Rav - Part II

Rav Yosef Dov HaLevi Soloveitchik was born in Pruzhana, Poland in 1903

- He was the son of Rav Moshe Soloveitchik
- Grandson of Rav Chaim Brisker
- Great-grandson of Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik - Bais HaLevi
- Great-great grandson of Rav Chaim Volozhiner - primary disciple of the Vilna Gaon

The Rav's mother was Pesia Feinstein - daughter of Rav Eliyahu Feinstein - rav of Pruzhana.

- Rav Eliyahu Feinstein was the uncle of Rav Moshe

The Rav moves to Khaslavitch, White Russia with his family - Rav Moshe Soloveitchik is the Rav of the city.

In 1920 Rav Moshe accepts position as head of Talmud dept. in Tachkemoni rabbinical seminary in Warsaw

In 1929 Rav Moshe is invited to become Rosh Yeshiva at RIETS

Rav attends Free Polish University and then goes on to University of Berlin.

In 1931 Rav marries Tonya Lewitt

In 1932 they come to US

Rav is invited to head up the Vaad Hair in Boston

Encounters many difficulties

1937 founds Miamonidies - first Jewish day school New England

Rav Moshe dies on January 31, 1941

1. The Soloveitchik Heritage (Shulamith Soloveitchik Meiselman, pages 253-254) (The Rav 39)

The Rav passed away on April 18, 1993

The Rav was a man of contradictions (conflicting ...)

2. The Lonely Man of Faith (pages 3-4)

The Rav acknowledges that he is surrounded by people and yet feels alone

3. Halakhic Man (page 19)

A Priori - relating to or derived by reasoning from self-evident propositions

4. Worship of the Heart (pages 5-9)

I think that we have to spend a few minutes appreciating the Rav's upbringing:

5. The Rav (page 238)

6. The Rav (page 200)

7. The Rav (page 178)

8. The Rav (page 171)

The Rav's primary Rebbe was his father

9. The Rav (page 147)

10. Majesty and Humility: The Thought of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik (pages 32-33)