

P
60

A-60

"A RABBI'S TRIBUTE TO YESHIVA UNIVERSITY"
On the Eve of the Smicha Convocation

Tomorrow afternoon, at about three o'clock, 85 young Rabbis, ordained by Yeshiva University within the last three years, will gather in the University's Lamport Auditorium for the official convocation celebrating their Smicha, or ordination. This Rabbi will be one of those so honored. And at an occasion of this sort it is no more than right that some sincere words of tribute be said in public.

In truth, no expression of thanks can sufficiently describe the undying gratitude, and no tribute, no matter how well worded, can properly express the great debt, which we alumni of Yeshiva feel towards our alma mater, that veritable Fortress of Holiness and Sanctuary of Wisdom. I can well remember that day, some eight years ago, when I made my first pilgrimage to Yeshiva. The 8th Ave. subway, despite its reputation as New York's best, is not calculated to pacify the pains, fears and anxieties of a young student making his first trip to Washington Heights, and terrified with the knowledge that he was now going to be examined, by the President of the University himself, to see if he would qualify as a student. That trip on the "A" train, which I have made about a thousand times since, was for me the prelude to a most profound and thrilling adventure. I remember distinctly that when I knocked on the door of the Office of the President, not only was my heart in my mouth, but somehow my brain was also anatomically displaced. But Dr. Belkin, whose admiring and worshipful student I have since become, immediately put me at ease. He made me forget that he was one of America's finest Talmudic scholars. He made me forget that he was an expert in Greek and Hellenistic literature. He made me forget that he had the reputation of America's youngest and one of its finest college presidents. I had to forget those facts because I was overwhelmed by the warmth and friendliness radiated by one of the most ^{and distinguished} humane personalities it has ever been my privilege to meet.

I can now report, that with the help of G-d and a lot of cramming, I passed the examination and was admitted to the Yeshiva. The four years I spent in its college and the six that I studied in its Theological Seminary, were the finest, most gratifying

5309

and soul-stirring that any student could ever hope to experience.

But Yeshiva means infinitely more than the satisfaction of one man's intellectual cravings and spiritual searchings. The implications of its welfare and progress reach not only the Jewish community of the United States, but Jewry of all the world. Through its own social services, and through the leadership its alumni provide both for the religious and secular elements of our people, it has become established as the institution representing Traditional Judaism at its best and finest. Allow me to invite you with me in an analysis of Yeshiva's contribution to Religious Jewry, Past, Present and Future.

Yeshiva's contribution in the matter of the Past of Judaism has been that it has made the Past alive, it has drawn it into the Present. Whereas the major school of the Conservative movement prides itself most on its Jewish Museum, Yeshiva points with pride to its Beis Hamidrash, its Study Hall. For it is precisely this that Yeshiva has done: it has demonstrated to a somewhat skeptical generation that Judaism is not a museum-piece; that it is, rather, an active and dynamic factor in the existence of all Jews. It proved to despairing immigrants that the Torah was not left to smoulder in the Ghettoes of Europe; and to sophisticated first-generation American Jews, that the Talmud belongs not in the attic with Dad's other old books, but in the living room where it can be studied daily. As the foremost teacher of Orthodox Judaism, Yeshiva has not attempted to push the Present into the Past; rather, it has pulled the Past into the Present.

Perhaps the achievements of Yeshiva in making the Past so meaningful and vivid to today's Jews, can best be described in the words of our Sages. Commenting upon the words of King Solomon that DOR HOLECH U'DOR BA, "a generation comes and a generation goes", they say: DOR SHE'BA KE'DOR SHE'HOLECH..... DOR SHE'BO BEYAMECHA KE'DOR SHE'HALACH VA'CHACHAMIM HA'RISHONIM SHE'HAYU LEFANECHA. "The younger generation is like the older generation...the generation which comes in your days is no worse than the generation which has passed away with its wise men, pious men and scholars". When Yeshiva came upon the Jewish scene 5 1/2 decades ago, the prophecy of the Rabbis did not seem realizeable. The situation was grim indeed. The "younger generation" was an uncultured one, an uneducated one, and a profoundly unJewish one. It did not seem that that generation could live up to DOR SHE'HAYAH LEFANECHA VA'CHACHAMIM HA'RISHONIM, to the

glorious, pious and spiritual generation which was evaporating from the accursed soil of Europe. But equipped with the gift of courageous vision, Yeshiva's leaders went to work - against all odds - and today, two generations after its inception, Yeshiva can boast of over 500 musmachim, Rabbis who are the spiritual leaders of countless communities in the United States, Canada and Israel. By teaching the tradition of the Past, Yeshiva has created a great Present. Orthodoxy in America is no longer a vestige, a fossil. It is the most formidable force in the religious life of American Jewry. An almost-second-generation American like myself no longer considers the Jewish Past an archaic museum-piece. To us, who are not strangers to the English language, to the culture of the Western World and to the technology of America, to us the Past is not antiquated and old-fashioned. In a Rabbi Shatzkes we have seen the historical figure of a Rashi; profound Talmudist, meticulous student, aristocratic bearing and subtlety of intellect. In Dr. Belkin we have experienced the presence of a Yehudah Halevi, ~~sort of person, which can give~~ the sort of personality which combines thorough scholarship and intimate knowledge of both Jewish and Greek worlds, with an essentially poetic character. We have seen in him the Yehuda Halevi sort of person, which can integrate brilliance with goodness and balance it with sobering common-sense. And in Rabbi Soloveitchik, that greatest of contemporary Talmudists, we have felt the overwhelming presence of a RAMBAM, Maimonides. We have seen in him the same Maimonides who flourished in Spain of 800 years ago, the same dazzling genius, the same grand sweep over all spheres of intellectual endeavor, from Halacha-Jewish Law - to philosophy, and from facility in languages to modern science. The Past has been indeed pulled into the Present. The younger generation has been taught that it can be as Jewish, and even more Jewish, than the old, despite the modern setting.

And Yeshiva has made its mark in the Present, per se, too. Its contribution to the present is more than quantitative, more than just so many Rabbis ordained, so many lawyers or scientists or psychologists graduated. It is, in a deeper sense, the Conscience of our day. Few students have passed through its portals unchanged. Some few may have left the fold. Some may have failed to finish their courses and receive their degrees. But all have emerged inspired. They have gained themselves a Conscience. Like Joseph of old who, caught in the morass of immoral Egypt and tempted by the sinful wife of Potiphar, sees ^a DMUS DIYUKNO SHEL ABRA, the image of his father Jacob, the ^a santly patriarch who was his

and

towering guide in Canaan; so too the alumni of Yeshiva, wherever they go in whatever situation they be, remain supremely conscious of the fact that they are the sons of this saintly Yeshiva which was their towering guide in that Little Cannan on Amsterdam Ave. between 186th and 187th Streets. We have been made aware of the needs of our fellow-Jews. We have been made sensitive to the moods of our correligionists. In short, Yeshiva has become the active DMUS DYUKNO, the active Conscience of American Jewry.

Third, Yeshiva means insurance for the Future. By acting towards its own students in a spirit of friendship, cooperation, and personal interest, and not in a spirit of cold financial figures and empty counting of credits and awarding of automatic degrees, Yeshiva has made its graduates love it so that they will ever strive to accomplish its most cherished dreams - the establishment of a Torah-true, orthodox, respectful and ~~enlightened~~ enlightened Jewish population. The bond which ties its alumni to Yeshiva is not made of the unravelled pigskin of a football. It is made of the lines of a Talmud, placed end to end, and glued with affection of a Rebbe for his Talmid, and of a father for his son. I can personally recount ~~numberless~~ ^{many amazing} instances of Yeshiva offering to do things for me and other students that no other school ever dreamed of doing for its pupils. And all this in the most gentlemanly manner conceivable. As a result, the spirit of loyalty and devotion which we feel towards Yeshiva will ensure the fact ~~x~~ that at every time in the Future, wherever we may be, we shall strive to act in accordance with the noble principles with which Yeshiva^h has imbued us.

The symbolic words of today's reading from Parshas Parah summarize the attitude of its graduates to Yeshiva. When the priest in charge of purifying and cleansing those defiled by contact with dead bodies, would perform his ritual of TAHARAH or purification, he would sprinkle some drops of the sacrificial blood with his finger. And the direction in which he would do this is significant. VE'HI ZAH EL NOCHACH PNEI OHEL MOED, the Priest would ^{sprinkle} ~~splash~~ it in the direction of the front of the Tabernacle. MELAMED, our Rabbis say, this teaches us that HAYAH MISKAVEN VE'ROEH PISCHO SHEI HEICHAL, he would face and see the door of the Tabernacle. Even if the priest were in the other end of Jerusalem, no matter how far away, he could still carry on his work of purification - provided that he kept in his mind's eye the doors of the Temple.

The KOHANIM, the Rabbis and lay leaders graduated by Yeshiva University, know that

their mission in life is to carry on the great work of TAHARAH, of purification. In a world defiled by contact with death and the spirit of death; in a world gripped by fear of extinction by atom bombs; in a world contaminated by the deadening effect of ignorance and prejudice; in a world in which thousands are lost souls, borne aimlessly by the currents of the times like dead-wood by tidal waves; in a world dominated by death and the fear of death, the sons of Yeshiva regard it as their sacred duty to cleanse and purify, to breathe a spirit of life, to get rid of the dead blood and to inject new blood. But if this work is ever to be accomplished successfully in the future, we know that we must constantly face PISCHO SHEL HEICHAL, that our hearts and minds must constantly be directed towards the interior of that Sanctuary of Wisdom and that our souls ~~xxx~~ must constantly return to be replenished from that infinite source of holiness and dedication, Yeshiva University. No matter where it shall be our fate to minister, no matter how many years will separate us from the great day of the S'micha, Convocation, we know that the sublime process of purification from the deadly elements of ignorance and cynicism ~~x~~ can continue only by reference to that Tabernacle known as Yeshiva.

So long as Yeshiva flourishes, so long as it gains the support of the Jewish community which it serves, so long will it remain the source of our inspiration and director of our efforts at purification. We are powerless without it; we can move worlds with it.

Yeshiva's greatness then, extends in three dimensions: Past, Present and Future. It represents to us the model of our History and Tradition; it is our Conscience; and it shall ever remain the inspiration for whatever purity we can achieve in times to come.

As its youngest graduates gather tomorrow in Yeshiva, they shall be keenly aware of the destiny which beckons them onward. And their hearts shall be ebullent with profound feelings of gratitude to that hallowed institution and its inspired leaders. Tomorrow we shall be privileged to close another link in a long chain. And we shall do so with the combined prayers of our teachers, ourselves, our congregations and all our fellow-Jews that we shall some ~~xxx~~ day our selves be privileged to forge yet another link and extend this holy chain into countless generations to come, into Eternity itself.