

THE *YESHIVA*: ORIGIN AND MEANING

Tracing the Evolution of the Procedures Involved in Studying Torah

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

The following is an edited transcript of an address delivered by Rabbi Zvi Yehuda, Professor of Bible and Rabbinics at the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies, at the 1967 annual meeting of the Fund for Traditional Institutions, held at the Jewish Community Federation.

How do we understand the term *Yeshiva*? Historically we define it as a Jewish religious academy, principally dedicated to intensive Talmudic studies; we see it as a "Place of Torah" (*Mekom-Torah*), where devout Jews -- teachers, colleagues and students -- come together, study, recite, discuss, elaborate upon, absorb and perpetuate the everlasting words of Torah. But since when, and why do we call such a place *Yeshiva*?

The literal meaning of the Hebrew noun *yeshiva* is simply "sitting" (as a verb) or "session" (as a noun). In the *Mishna* and early tannaitic sources the word does not refer to an academy or institution of learning. The term, based on its context, may either describe the act of sitting as opposed to standing (*amida*), i.e., there is no "sitting" (*yeshiva*) in the Temple's court except for kings of Davidic dynasty, or refer to an event of a meeting of elders, sages and spiritual leaders, who assemble and "sit" together, occasionally or regularly, to discuss and determine crucial philosophical or political issue, as a respected and recognized body. A respected scholar may be described as "an elder worthy to sit in such a "session" (*zaken veyoshev bi-shiva*); A maxim of Hillel (probably the second) says the one who frequently participate in such sessions increases wisdom.

When and why did the term *Yeshiva* assume the meaning of an academic institution? It is my opinion that the term in this later sense originated in the crucial period of the post-destruction of the Second Temple.

A Talmudic statement (*T Bavli Megillah* 21a) informs us that "from the days of Moses down to the days of Rabban Gamaliel, the Torah was studied while standing." This means that both the teacher and the students used to be standing upright (as we do in the daily *Amida* prayers), while they engaged in the study of Torah.

The reason the Talmud gives for this practice is that at the time of the revelation of the Torah at Sinai, everyone present stood up, and ever since then, when Torah is transmitted from one generation to the next generation, we follow the pattern of Sinai. Thus we attach to the ever-continuing act of studying the Torah, by anyone and at any time and place, the same value and dignity as that of the revelation at Sinai. By the posture of standing, Torah-study becomes in essence a reaffirmation of the Divine revelation. A single, unbroken chain of tradition links every generation, as well as any individual Jew who studies the Torah, with Sinai.

The ancient custom of standing while studying, however, was not only a symbolic reenactment of the dramatic experience of Sinai in the past, but also and mainly an expression of reverence for the ever-living divine words of Torah in the present. Standing is a gesture of

honor. By studying in this manner, students would show their respect for the Torah in general and Torah sages (*hakhamim*) in particular. Another meaningful connotation of "standing" during study is related to the idea of testimony. Torah study is in essence a solemn testimonial (*Edut*)-- to God; to God's love of Israel; to Israel's devotion to God; to the Covenant; to the veracity and authority of the Tradition; to the Eternal Truth. In Jewish law witnesses stand while they testify. This is why in antiquity they stood during Torah study (as we stand in the *Kiddush* during the recital of *Vayekhulu*).

Our sources tell us that the practice of standing during Torah study was followed since Moses until the days of Rabban Gamaliel. Scholarly opinion differs as to the identity of this sage. Some hold that it was Rabban Gamaliel the First, the Elder, who lived in the beginning of the first century C.E., while others believe that it was his grandson, Rabban Gamaliel the Second, of Yavneh, in the beginning of the second century. In my opinion the latter view makes more sense both contextually and historically.

What is the reason for this dramatic shift in the manner of study, from standing to sitting, that occurred, reportedly, after the death of Rabban Gamaliel? The Talmud provides us with a short and enigmatic explanation, that then "Infirmity descended upon the world" (*yarad holi la-olam*). Apparently this means that the post-Destruction generation was not firm enough (physically and mentally) to sustain anymore the tasking method of studying Torah while remaining in an erect posture; hence, the permission granted to sit. This is just the surface implication of the official reason. On a deeper level, it points to a change in the role and scope of Torah in Jewish life. Following the devastating Destruction, the leading Sages envisioned and reconstructed a revitalized idea of Torah study to dominate Jewish life. Torah study had thus become more central, more intensive, and more demanding. The generation was too "weak" to adequately perform this renewed task of Torah study in the classical mode of standing upright; moreover, retaining this formal mode would restrict and "weaken" the prospect of intensive all-encompassing, study. Inevitably a radical change occurred in the mode of study at Yavneh -- the center of Torah study established by Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai after the Temple's Destruction. Torah study had become more intensive and widespread, evolving as the center and focus of Judaism in its enduring survival after the calamity of Destruction.

That is why a new type of institution -- the Yeshiva -- had to emerge. True, standing during study expresses greater honor and glory to Torah, but sitting is more practical. This new institution is an inevitable result of reinvigorated persistence and intensified diligence in Torah study. The establishment of *Yeshivot* in that period is an indication of the increased dissemination and popularization of Talmud Torah (Torah study) among a wider segment of the Jewish people. The study of Torah was no longer an act, easily performed while upright, but rather an established vocation demanding more time and energy. That is why it was necessary to establish *Yeshivot* ("sitting" academies) where scholars, students and teachers, would be able to fully "settle" themselves into intensive learning; *la-asok ba-Torah*, namely to be occupied with the study of Torah, to deeply penetrate the complicated discussions and intricate issues of Rabbinic law.

Following the death of Rabban Gamaliel [of Yavneh], the Sages decided that the old procedure of studying in an upright posture should be changed and that teachers and students should be seated (on the floor, cushions or benches) while studying the Torah. Thus the Sages introduced into Jewish life a new type of institution, a "sitting" academy, which ever since then became known by the name *Yeshiva* (a sitting place). This new name *Yeshiva* for the renewed

academy -- with its defiant ring and undisguised and unabashed boldness -- suggests that the mood and role of the academy is from now on different. No more formal, theatrical standing! We shall now all -- in a striking "break" from the classical mode of the past, ever since Sinai -- simply "sit" and study, with due concentration mind, in a proper order of rank and authority (like judges in a court "session"). The term may also suggest a blend of two institutions, an academy, for structured learning, and a court of law, for intensive deliberations and decision making.

Thus this term "*Yeshiva*" emerged as another, exchangeable, name for the long established school of Torah study in Jewish life, the "*Bet Midrash*" (House of Inquiry). The term "*Yeshiva*" in this institutionalized sense emerged then (around or after the Second Destruction) and not before. Aggadic references to an institution of study by that name "*Yeshiva*," attributed to earlier periods (even to pre-patriarchal) are clearly anachronistic.

The manner in which study takes place appears to be an important factor in shaping the image of any academy and in giving it its name. For example, the ancient Greek school of study developed by Aristotle, the Lyceum in Athens (335-322 BCE), is known to us as the Peripatetic School, meaning the "walking-about" school, since both the teachers and the students wandered and moved about from place to place.

Perhaps we might have rather expected that the wandering Jews would establish such a type of an "itinerant" academy. But, in strikingly poetic irony, it so happened that the wandering Jew became a "settled" student. The restless Jewish people had resolved to establish a "sitting" school -- a *Yeshiva* -- perhaps indicating thereby the people's indomitable quest for stability and rootedness, achievable, if not politically, at least academically. The term "*Yeshiva*" indicates not only physiological "sitting" but also, and mainly, psychological equilibrium, intellectual stability, spiritual firmness. The current idiom "to sit and learn" means to immerse in a thorough, deliberative study, in complete engrossment and a well-composed ("settled") mind (*yishuv hada'at*).

To be sure, even before the death of Rabban Gamaliel, the Jewish people had already established schools for Torah, by various names, "*bet sefer*" (House for the study of the Book) for both young and old who would study there Scriptures (*Mikra*), the Written Torah; "*bet midrash*" (House for the study of *Midrash*), for more advanced study of the Oral Torah; or in Aramaic *ulpena* in the generic sense of place of learning.

The Jewish people were never separated from the study of Torah and its very existence has always depended on Talmud Torah. Indeed, the history of the Jewish people is the history of education and study; the geography of the Jewish people is the map of the centers of Torah learning dispersed around the globe. Torah and Israel are inseparable; wherever the Jews wandered and settled, the Torah accompanied them; wherever the light of Torah was kindled, there Jewish life flourished.

We may find a keen reflection of the ancient custom of "standing" while studying, in the well-known account of the proselyte and Hillel the Elder (T Bavli Shabbat 31a): This stranger first came before Shammai and asked the master to teach him the "entire Torah" while "standing on only one foot." This phrase entails more than a picturesque idiom for a flimsy, insincere approach to learning; seeking (as so many do today) a brief and "instant" lesson in Judaism, in a hurried and impatient manner, asking for, so to say, "fast" and "ready-made" spiritual food. Rejected as expected by the stern teacher Shammai, the persistent stranger appeared before Hillel who did accept him, thereby demonstrating (1) that the very essence of Torah ("*What is*

hateful to you do not to others") can surely be expressed in one pithy statement; (2) that even one who comes to learn the whole Torah while "standing on one foot" deserves loving attention and serious guidance; (3) and most importantly, that after this brief introduction, one must continue to study the rest of the Torah, apparently while standing on two legs. The phraseology in this old dialogue bespeaks the old reality. In the usual posture of study, of course, the student's both feet must be firmly kept on the ground. While in our own days we take this imagery metaphorically; in antiquity, they took it also literally. They all stood up while engaging in Torah study.

The establishment of schools (called later *Yeshivot*) represents the fulfillment of the visionary plan of the Men of the Great Assembly (*Anshe Kenesset Ha-Gedola*), the spiritual leaders who guided Jewish life after the return to Zion (*Shivat Zion*) from the First Babylonian exile. One of the three principle they had promulgated and bequeathed to us (as preserved in *Mishna Avot* 1:2), which have continued to inspire Judaism and mold the character and culture of the Jewish people throughout the ages, is: "*Raise up many students*" (*ha-amidu talmidim harbeh*). The Hebrew verb "*ha'amidu*" for "raise up" is more than a metaphoric idiom. Its pristine sense is rather the literal one: "make them stand up before you," since this was the classical form of Torah learning in antiquity. But the enduring message of this seminal proclamation is clear: The Torah should be disseminated and propagated among all levels of society.

This concept stands in sharp contrast to the prevalent system among other peoples of the ancient world. These peoples would only permit the elite to be privy to the mysteries and secrets of their religious teachings. They regarded the study of their cultural heritage as a privilege granted only to a select group of aristocrats and priests.

The Men of the Great Assembly, whose aim it was to establish a new Jewish society based upon the democratization of Torah, did not really invent a new idea; they just more fully developed the concept explicit in the *Shema*: "You shall diligently teach [the words of Torah] to your children." Every parent is obliged to teach and every child is entitled to learn. This crucial verse, entrusting the transmission of tradition to the family, has paved the way for the ultimate and overall transfer, that occurred in post-biblical Judaism, of the educational role from the priestly establishment to the parents and teachers. This democratization of Jewish education means that all the children of Israel would share the duty, the right, the joy and the advantage of learning the words of Torah. All Jews would benefit from Torah's enlightenment; all would claim the right to grow and delight in the wisdom of Torah. This verse of the *Shema* is in the very core of the later concept of *Yeshiva*.

The *Yeshiva* is based on a unique philosophy of education. This philosophy may be summed up in the following four principles.

I. The Inherent Right of Every Individual Jew to Study Torah

This concept was particularly developed by Hillel in the last century before the destruction of the Second Temple. Hillel's opponent, Shammai, maintained that only those endowed with special qualities and status were entitled to enter the House of Study. Herein was the basis for the ongoing controversy between the two sages and their corresponding schools. Hillel opened the doors of study to everyone, regardless of status, ability or character. His motivation was his

great love for every human being. Hillel said: "Love all human beings and bring them close to Torah" (*Avot* I:12).

What Hillel implies here is that our love for every individual person provides the real motivation for teaching Torah to everyone. Hillel's view has prevailed and dominated Jewish outlook and practice. In this spirit we find various talmudic statements that underscore the right of everyone to Torah. A teacher who withholds Torah from a student is deemed by the rabbis as one who robs him of his heritage. Similarly, the rabbis adjured us to be solicitous of the children of the poor, for from their midst may indeed come the scholars of the future.

The Sages' recognition of the right of every individual to study Torah and aspire to achieve greatness in the mastery of Torah knowledge is illustrated by their remarkable metaphoric interpretation of the idea of the Crown of Torah (*Keter Torah*). A crown is a symbol of royalty. It is something that only a chosen few can aspire to attain. But the Crown of Torah is unique, being in a different category; it is open to all. Rabbi Yohanan, who flourished in the land of Israel in the 3rd century, says (*Talmud Bavli Yoma* 72b): There were three crowns (in the Temple): of the Altar, the Ark, and the Table. That of the Altar symbolizes priesthood; it belongs exclusively to Aaron and his descendants. That of the Table symbolizes royalty; it belongs exclusively to David and his descendants. But the crown of the Ark, symbolizing Torah, is still open and available to all, and whoever wishes to acquire it is welcome to do so. This is the case not because this crown is unimportant. On the contrary, its importance far exceeds that of the other two.

Rabbi Yohanan's statement indicates that while heredity is a most fundamental determinant of status and role in priesthood and kingship, it is totally irrelevant in the domain of Torah scholarship and authority. Personal dedication and excellence, not social class or filial ties, are the only key for earning the crown of Torah. The Torah was given in the desert, in a public, free and open terrain belonging to no particular owner, to show that the Torah belongs to all. Everyone is entitled and qualified to study Torah and wear her Crown. On the other hand, the Sages also insist that the Crown of Torah must be earned. It can be acquired by dint of the "forty-eight" qualifications listed in a Tannaitic source (*Avot* 6:6).

II. The Personal Bond Between Teacher and Pupil

Torah study is not merely a method of acquiring knowledge, accumulating data, or memorizing passages. It is rather a living personal experience. The Hebrew noun *torah* derives from the root-verb *yaroh*, meaning "to shoot," "to aim." A teacher is called in Hebrew *moreh* (masculine) or *morah* (feminine) -- one who "shoots" or "aims" -- namely, one who points the way, who directs and guides. Torah is Judaism's Teaching; it means direction, guidance, and not (as improperly derived from the Greek *nomos*, and commonly, yet wrongly, perceived by outsiders) -- Law. Unlike the latter term, the Hebrew term Torah does not imply imposition or compulsion of any sort, nor dictatorial commanding in any way, but rather loving, protective, instructive edification -- by showing, guiding, illustrating, and enlightening, thus leading the students to realize themselves the truth and follow it.

In the traditional procedure of Torah study there is a personal bond of reciprocity -- intellectually as well as emotionally -- between master and pupil. The Rabbinic analogy between teacher and father, student and son, is more than a fancy imagery. It metaphorically captures the special spiritual dynamics between teacher and student in the traditional talmudic

school. It is not as if the master just transmits the knowledge and the pupil just accepts it; the former merely imparts and the latter merely absorbs, but that both are enriched one by the other. More one ever learns from teachers and colleagues, one learns from students; this the way of a true scholar (T Bavli Ta'anit 7a). The Talmud tells us that attending to and watching the teacher's practice (*shimush*) is more important than listening to and memorizing the teacher's discourses (*limmud*). That is to say, that being close to and waiting upon the master, thus observing the his every motion and basking in the presence of his personality, is more important -- and certainly more effective -- than memorizing or repeating his sayings. One learns not only by hearing what the teacher says, but by realizing what the teacher is. That is one of the reasons why the Torah was studied orally during the Talmudic period.

The Sages were insightfully judicious in insisting, for many centuries, to transmit the Rabbinic tradition exclusively orally, resisting a most impulsive scholarly tendency to inscribe and cherish their precious treasures of knowledge in books. Indeed, for long they refused to permit a routine scriptural recording of Rabbinic teachings, be it their own or their predecessors, until historical circumstances compelled them to gradually allow a restrained mode of literary transcription of the Oral tradition, culminating in the compilation of the Mishna (c. 200 C.E.), and afterwards both Talmuds (c. 500 and 600 C.E.) and other midrashic, halakhic, and aggadic works. But even the Mishna was never truly perceived as scripture. The Mishna was never published as a written text to be read in the academy (as Scriptures) but rather as a backup transcript for verification of oral recitation. The distinction between the "Two *Torot*" (the phrase, patently pharisaic, first appearing in the classic Hillel story) was staunchly preserved even during the post-Mishnaic era. The rule prevailing within all Talmudic *Yeshivot* (apparently in force to the ninth century if not later) is clear-cut: "Words of the Written Torah may be recited only by reading from the written text, and not orally by memorization; Words of the Oral Torah may be recited only orally by memorization, and not by reading from a written text" (*Talmud Bavli Gittin* 60b). Why so? While fully devoted to protect and preserve the minuteness (in form) and the sanctity (in spirit) of the *masoretic* Written Torah, the Sages were also no less dedicated to safeguard and maintain the unique dynamics of the Oral Torah, its inexhaustibility (in content), boundlessness (in scope), endlessness (in growth), and intrinsic vitality. They must have feared that if the oral tradition would be committed to writing, students would no longer feel the need to come to the Yeshiva, to hear the voice of the teacher with their own ears, to behold him with their own eyes, and discuss the issues with him in person face to face in a living drama. A scroll, any scroll whether ordinary or sacred, is always a dead object; what brings it to life so to say is the living experience of the Oral tradition. Many students might be satisfied to memorize and recite written passages, which might lead to error and misunderstanding. The Sages stressed the importance of the personal confrontation between student and teacher,

While the Oral Law is now committed to writing, emphasis in the Yeshiva is nevertheless still placed upon the personal bond between student and teacher. The act of study consists in the achieving of a mutual partnership between the scholar and his disciples.

3. The Emotional Aspect of Torah Study

In the Yeshiva the study of Torah is not merely an intellectual exercise but a deeply emotional experience as well. We tend to distinguish between houses of study and houses of worship, but the Yeshiva essentially combines both. Here the process of study is a form of

worship, an expression of religious devotion. This is so for many reason: Primarily, perhaps, because the Yeshiva students regard Torah study in itself as a *mitzva*, and thus their own engagement in study as a religious fulfillment of a divine precept. Moreover, they regard the words of Torah as pristinely Divine (*Devar Hashem*), investing the very experience of study with a numinous quality of awe and reverence. Logical and sophisticated as a talmudic discourse may be (and often is), it nonetheless can never be fully free of its mystical marks. Inevitably the discussants will be aware that they are dealing with sacred texts and divinely ordained precepts; an awareness which perforce sublimates their intellectual discussion to the level of a devotional experience. Torah study thus becomes a form of participation in a human-divine encounter, as the human mind grapples to grasp some sparks of divine wisdom. In the Yeshiva the study of Torah is a form of worship. Recitation of paragraphs from the legal Codes is done in the intonation of prayer. Logical speculation becomes a ritual act, as mind and heart merge into one. Engaged in intense analytical deliberation, the Yeshiva student is also filled with a spirit of enthusiasm, joy and ecstasy. Torah is studied with a chant. Students melodiously intone passages from their texts, and conduct their discussions by singing their arguments. Enter the halls of any Yeshiva and you will marvel at the bizarre blending of recitation and song, argumentation and incantation, words and melody, speculation and emotion, quiet meditation and fiery disputation. A passage of dry law becomes a piece of liturgy, a list of rules of conduct turns to a sacred hymn of praise. Citations from the Codes are recited like prayers and precepts of law like love songs. The most prominent quality that pervades the atmosphere of the Yeshiva is that of the joy of learning. Study is an act of devotion, a way of cleaving to God.

There is a hasidic story about a diligent Yeshiva *Bocher* (youngster) who studied the same page of his Talmudic tractate day after day. To his teacher who asked him why he did not move on to the following page, he gave the following reply: "I feel so comfortable here, in this page, why go elsewhere?"

This proverbial student represents a typical exception. In reality the typical student would certainly move forward to find new horizons of spiritual satisfaction. One factor that would kindle the excitement and joy of study in the Yeshiva was the prevalent motivation to innovate, the burning desire of the students (which their teacher would strongly encourage) to discover new insights and interpretations (*hiddushim*) to resolve complex texts and intriguing apparent contradictions. In the Yeshiva the achievement of a student was measured not only by his ability to absorb from the teacher, but mainly by his skill in uncovering new interpretations which he had never before heard from his teachers. In that way the Yeshiva student would ecstatically experience the joy of creativity. This is the way of Torah.

4. The Idea of Torah Study for Its Own Sake

The Talmudic concept of Torah study "for its own sake" (*Torah Li-shema*) remains both intriguing and enigmatic. Assessing personal motivation for any human deed, good or bad, is a complex matter. Why does one study in general? Why does one study Torah in particular? If it is because one **enjoys** it, is it then still study for Torah's sake or perhaps for one's own sake? If it is because one feels a sense of **duty** to study (be it religious duty, civil, moral, or personal); or a **need** to study, in order to learn to fulfill its precept, to teach others, to preserve Judaism's cultural heritage, to satisfy intellectual curiosity, to derive inspiration, to experience spirituality - does any of these motives fit the Rabbinic definition of "Torah's Sake" (*Li-shemah*)? To study for the sake of material gains, social status, preparing for a gainful or respectful job, achieving

honors and acclaim, or "that people shall call me 'Rabbi' and treat me reverently" -- all these reasons are clearly paradigmatic of the very antinomy of "Torah's Sake." Even so, ideal, purely selfless behavior is rare; it is almost utopian. In the real world, then and now, whether in secular or religious pursuits, people act primarily for their own sake.

In our modern, "practical" world, which is largely goal-oriented and success-motivated -- rooted as it is in pragmatic thinking and utilitarian considerations -- it is hard to imagine any human activity without some purpose or aim that transcends this activity, whether one is aware of it or not. Human nature in the Talmudic age was probably not much different than today. Our Sages recognized human predilection for seeking and expecting rewards for efforts. While they considered Torah study "for its own sake" (*Li-shemah*) an optimal ideal, they nonetheless, in their characteristic practical mood, insisted that "As a rule, one should engage in [studying] Torah and [performing] Mitzvot even without the quality of *Li-shemah*, for eventually one will learn to act with the quality of *Li-shemah* (*Bavli Pesachim* 50b; *Nazir* 23b; *Yerushalmi Haggiga* 1:7).

Now, what precisely does "*Li-shemah*" mean? This question is still open to debate. For the "old-type" Yeshivot (pre-Volozhin; see below) the issue was essentially mute; one simply tries to follow the Talmudic dictum which leaves motivation pretty much to the student's personality and discretion. But during the 19th century a bold debate on this issue -- on a highly sophisticated level -- took place. One position (devotional-hassidic) was articulated by Habad leader, R. Shneur Zalman of Lyady, in his classical *Tanya*. An opposing view (intellectual-mitnaggedic) was advanced by R. Hayyim Volozhiner in his *Nefesh ha-Hayyim* (*Vilna*, 1924). Since both views rely on kabbalistic sources and phraseology, both may be (technically at least) termed "mystical." Hassidism -- as its opponents saw it -- posed a dire threat to both the centrality of Torah study and the exalted status of the Talmudic scholar in Jewish life; in one word, a serious challenge to the continuity and viability of the traditional Yeshivot in Jewish life. Many inspired and pious students, touched by Hassidic teachings, would wonder: Isn't communion with God by prayer and ecstatic meditation more meritorious and spiritually rewarding than discussing the minutia of the laws pertaining to an ox that gored a cow or an egg produced by the chicken on a Jewish holiday?

The debate on the meaning of "*Li-shema*" was essential in order to rekindle and shield the spiritual dimensions in Torah study. The academic debate followed a most crucial, historical event that invigorated Torah study and leaving an enduring impact on modern Judaism: The establishment of a new type of Yeshiva.

A phenomenal revival of the Yeshiva as a potent institution and vigorous movement within East European Jewry occurred at the very beginning of the 19th century with the founding In 1802 of the Yeshiva of Volozhin by R. Hayyim Volozhiner (1749-1821), leading disciple of the Vilna Gaon. This dramatic move by Reb Hayyim, the most respected leader of the *Mitnagdim* (non-Hassidic Jews) at the time -- apparently initiated as a counteraction against the sweeping spread of Hassidism and the threats of secular Haskala --involved a most innovative restructuring of the Yeshiva, reformation of its philosophy of education and reformulation of its ideology. This daring, revolutionary reshaping of the Yeshiva, as a school of thought and a spiritual-political movement, continues to impact (and/or haunt) Jewish life to this day (for better or for worse).

The Volozhiner Yeshiva (specially under the Netziv), produced great students, prominent among them are the Chief Rabbi of the (pre-state) land of Israel, Rav Kook, and the national poet H. N. Bialik. The latter described his "old School" as "the place where the soul of the nation was molded" (bet ha-yozzer l-nishmat ha-umma). The newly shaped Yeshiva transformed the whole religious and intellectual character of Lithuanian Jewry. Imbued with Reb Hayyim's educational philosophy, it raised religious scholarship in Lithuania to the unique status it was to enjoy there until the Holocaust. The famed Volozhiner Yeshiva became the prototype and inspiration for the great talmudic academies of Eastern Europe of the 19th and 20th centuries, and similar schools in Israel and elsewhere.

R. Hayyim considered study of Torah -- in an objective and rational manner, rather than a subjective-experiential -- as the most direct form of unmediated communion with God. He defined *Torah li-Shemah* as study for the sake of understanding, rather than as ecstasy or mystical theurgy.

In the world of the New-Type Yeshiva, Torah study "for its own sake" (*Torah Li-shema*) enjoys high esteem as the supreme ideal. This idea, from the *Yeshiva* point of view, has a purely intellectual meaning, neither mystical (as in Hassidic pietism), nor rational (as in "*musar*" ethical literature). In the Yeshiva world the idea of "*Torah Li-shema*" implies that Torah study is an end in itself, not a mean to an end. Thus, one should study Torah solely for the sake of comprehending it, exploring and discerning its various meanings, and gaining an understanding of Torah's mysteries and implications, and not in order to achieve any other goal besides the very lucid knowledge of Torah and the intellectual mastery of its teachings. The mystical interpretation of "*Torah Li-shema*" advocates study as a way of "communion" (*devekut*) with God, by following His Will and cleaving to His Words. The old *Musaric* approach, on the other hand, promotes Torah study for the sake of its edification, namely, in order to learn how to live by Torah's rules, and as an effective instrument for the refinement of human character. Although both these lofty goals -- the mystical and the ethical -- are highly meritorious in themselves, they are not considered in the Yeshiva as part of, and conducive to the ideal of *Li-shema*, in its true sense. Torah study in itself is its very end. We do not treat Torah (or "use" it, "exploit" it) as a mean for any other end, lofty as it may be. Yeshiva learning is essentially non-pragmatic, non-utilitarian; it is neither goal-oriented nor success-motivated; it is totally free of any "practical" consideration or application. The students immersed in their learning and the teacher in his teaching detached from any concern with mundane affairs. They seek to be removed from the banalities of daily life. Surprisingly enough, the student who has in mind the goal of earning a Rabbinic ordination (*semikha*) would be discouraged and shunned. Knowledge was never regarded as a mean for achieving any thing besides Torah, whether material success or power or spiritual growth. Torah is indeed a way of clinging to God and an instrument of spiritual growth, but in the Yeshiva they aspired to study Torah for its own sake, and this in its pristine unadulterated meaning.

At a time when education is generally pursued with practical considerations in mind, the Yeshiva can serve as a model of purity in intellectual pursuit and a source of inspiration for a non-materialistic approach to learning. For when knowledge is subjugated to material needs it is divested of its intrinsic value and moral essence and it loses its vitality. In our society knowledge has become subservient to power and a gap has been created between the intellectual and the ethical. The Yeshiva offers a model of bridging between the two.

The only practical aspect of Torah study in the Yeshiva is the deep conviction that this study is an instrument for preserving the world entire.

The Netziv, last Dean of Volozhyn Yeshiva, would insist that Torah study in his Yeshiva should go on constantly for the entire 24-hours of the day and should not be interrupted even for a single moment, in order to ensure that the world should not be bereft of its only basis for existence.

Even if the vision of constant Torah study as guarantor for cosmic survival may seem to us somewhat esoteric and mystical, the reality of the Yeshiva as the source and mainspring of Jewish life -- poetically expressed by Bialik as "bet ha-yozer l-nishmat ha-umma" --is indisputable.

Our Sages have expressed a similar idea by comparing Torah to life-giving water. Which leads me to relate a Tel-Aviv story. Meir Dizengoff, the first mayor of this first modern city in mandatory Palestine, relates in his memoirs an anecdote about an Arab sheik who was once his guest in the city. The sheik was impressed by the modern conveniences of the new, all-Jewish city. Upon departure the Mayor in a gesture of Middle-Eastern generosity, offered his distinguished guest any gift of his choice: "Whatever your eyes behold in my home and your heart desires to have is yours. Just ask for it!" said the mayor.

Without much hesitation, the sheik pointed to the kitchen faucet that held his fascination throughout his visit. He exclaimed: "The faucet! That is what I want. When I bring with me this faucet back to the desert I will be the richest man alive."

"What do you mean?" asked Dizengoff.

"Whenever I'll need water, I will take the faucet out of my pocket and turn it on, and I'll be able to supply water without limit to all my people and flocks in the desert."

Dizengoff replied: "This faucet can give water only when it is connected to pipes which lead to the source of supply. Once the faucet is detached, you can turn it and twist it again and again, and it will yield nothing."

At a time when we are seeking to maintain our Jewishness and we seek new forms of identification, it is worth recalling that no faucet can quench our thirst if it does not derive its life-giving water from the source.

Our generation witnessed the holocaust that reduced to ashes the glorious centers of our Yeshivot in Europe. Our generation also witnessed the revival of Israel and the establishment of the Jewish State of Israel and the establishment there of new Yeshivot, fresh and vibrant in spirit and peopled by significant numbers of students. They derive their inspiration from the past. At the same time, they face the future with renewed resolve to add new meaning and relevance to Torah study for the strengthening of the fabric of Israeli society and the enrichment of Jewish life.