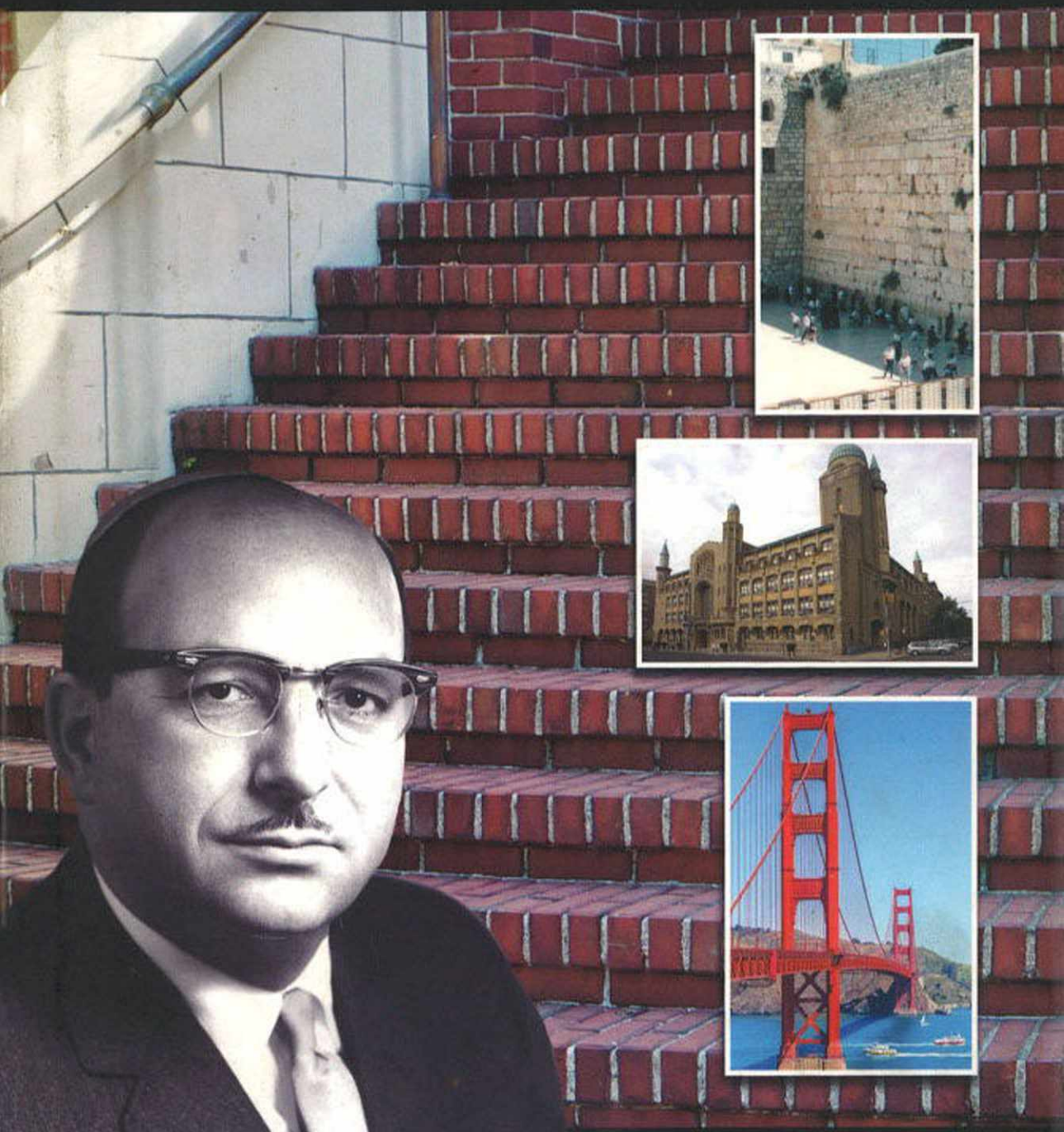
THIRTEEN STEPS

Orthodox Judaism in America Comes of Age: My Life and Times



Rabbi Joseph Karasick

Thirteen Steps

Orthodox Judaism in America Comes of Age: My Life and Times

by

Rabbi Joseph Karasick



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Acknowledgements

This book covers about seventy years of my life. While writing it, it was impossible to recall all of the close friends and personalities and the events that occupied those years. Many of those people and events played only a tangential part in my story but still must be mentioned in my memoirs. I therefore include this acknowledgement to let the reader know that I have not forgotten or neglected important events and figures in my past, and my busy life included even more than I discussed in this book.

My sister-in-law, Anita Walker, has been a consistent and loyal friend all these years, forever devoted to my wife, Pepa, her beloved sister. Her husband, Jack, was my partner in the watch business for many years. For various personal and business reasons, we decided to 'go it alone,' and we followed independent routes in our lives.

Equally, I have maintained a very close relationship with my other sister-in-law, Margalit (Margie), and her husband, David (Zwiebel), who made *aliyah* close to fifty years ago and who have served as a wonderful symbol of American Jews who did more than talk about Israel. It was David who, over thirty years ago, introduced me to the Belzer Rebbe in Savyon, after which we became close to one another. For many, many years, the Rebbe had a great influence over my life and development and to this very day, greets me with empathy and understanding.

I believe the Rebbe's influence over me stemmed from my unique relationship with my grandfather. My grandfather always guided me how to behave and interact with the *rabbonim* and *roshei yeshiva* from Lita. As a result, I was able to really connect with them over the course of our meetings throughout the years when I was OU President. Heeding my fellow officers' advice to retain my rabbinic title proved to be valuable during these meetings and kept the playing field somewhat more level.

A steady and reliable factor in the life of my business was Pepa's cousin, Hyman Kopf, who was with the company from its inception to its conclusion. We are forever grateful for his contributions.

My business partner for several years in the Gilthaven Jewelry Corp. was Reb Asher Scharf, with whom I maintained a close relationship.

Mere words cannot express my feelings of gratitude to my *rebbe muvhak* Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, for his guidance and personal interest in my life and its activities. Even though I have brought the Rav into the body of this work in so many instances, yet, this is a note to advise the reader that the Rav is never far from consciousness and my thoughts. I thank God for that.

At one point, the spokesman for the *yeshivishe* world was Rabbi Elazar Shach, the Ponevezher *Rosh HaYeshiva*. Although Rav Shach was over one hundred years old and frail, he maintained full control. One day, the U.S.-based representative of the *yeshiva* approached me to become the chairman of the forthcoming annual dinner of the *yeshiva*. While I had nothing to do with the *yeshiva*, I felt I could not refuse. I was invited aboard with the full knowledge that Rav Shach did not know me personally, and I told them I would gladly accept but on one condition: that I would be able to meet Rav Shach personally before the dinner. A meeting was arranged in Israel, and I met with Rav Shach for about a half-hour, and the meeting was very successful. He accompanied me to my car and gave me his *sefer* with a beautiful inscription on the inside cover. And even though we held different views regarding the World Conference (described later on), this was not an obstacle to our subsequent friendship.

I am forever grateful for my relationship with Rav Moshe Feinstein, who, in spite of our political differences, became a good friend to me. He did not allow our differences to interfere with our mutual affection towards one another, and towards the end of his life, our relationship was at its highest peak.

I am equally grateful for my friendship to the Suvalker Rav, Rav Dovid Lifshitz. My family in San Francisco established a closeness with Rav Dovid during the Mirrer era in San Francisco in the 1940s. I am especially thankful for the close relationship he had with my younger son, George.

From within the OU, I am grateful for my deep friendship with Rabbi Menachem Genack, the head of OU Kosher, who was always ready and able to support me and helped me fulfill my various duties in the OU. Rav Menachem was directly responsible for the OU's decision to publish this book, and I hope that it will prove to be a project for the benefit of *Klal Yisrael.*

During Steve Savitsky's terms as OU President and after, during his various projects with and continuing interest in the organization, Steve

and I have maintained a mutual line of active participation wherever we've been able to contribute to the OU, using our years of experience together.

My friendship with two couples who worked very closely with me within the OU family but who also remained close, loyal, and enjoyable friends outside of the OU were Marvin and Renee Herskowitz *a"h* from Far Rockaway, as well as *yb"l* Tommy and Leah Scharf, my Upper West Side neighbors.

In the beginning and earlier stages of planning this book, I must wholeheartedly thank Zev Eleff for being the original architect of this project, and Chaya Sarah Fogel for her technical acumen in moving everything along seamlessly.

The team at OU Press, under the tutelage of Rabbi Simon Posner, has been most cooperative working with me, and a great *yasher koach* is due to the editor, Mrs. Yocheved Goldberg.

As a former President who started as a raw freshman, I am most impressed by the strong showing displayed by our new President, Moishe Baine. Moishe has exhibited a strong will and solid understanding of the great task which lies before him. He is most fortunate in having our Executive Vice President, Allen Fagin, by his side as a solid support from within the OU.

My colleagues at the OU included Dr. Bernard Lander, who was personally successful in the creation and establishment of Touro College, and with whom I had a very warm relationship.

I also pay tribute to my fellow officers: Samuel Brenglass, Bernard Levmore, Harold Boxer (the main force behind NCSY), Harold Jacobs (who later became OU President), Morris Green, Lawrence Kobrin, Benjamin Koenigsberg, Herbert Berman, and Julius Berman.

I am ever grateful for my friendship with the late Nathan K. Gross, who apparently recognized in me the important ingredients to become a successful leader of the OU community. It was Nat who guided Kashrus through its infancy and who helped it to become the gigantic organization which it has become today on the global scene.

Also, within the OU family, I recognize the selfless efforts on the part of my Administrator, Saul Bernstein, who literally gave his efforts, wholeheartedly and with sincerity.

Those of you who are reading this book will recognize the hand of my

Executive Vice President, Rabbi Dr. Samson Raphael Weiss, who rejoiced in my successes and worked hard to ameliorate my position at the OU. There was never a better 'right hand' to have by my side than Reb Shamshon.

One of the great gains of coming to New York was my meeting my father's younger brother, David, who owned a wholesale meat business in Newark, NJ. Upon meeting one another. we hit it off, and he became my close friend and confidant. Uncle David was an extraordinarily kind and charitable personality and was always ready and willing to help others.

As happened so often in my life, one who was once an immovable opponent after a period of time eventually became a close friend. This was my experience with Reb Simcha Elberg. Despite our strongly held differences of opinion, he became my close friend, and we worked professionally together on various business matters.

My counterpart during much of my administration was Major Maurice Jaffe, the Director of Hechal Shlomo, and ultimately the Executive Director of the Great Synagogue in Jerusalem. He was aided in this work by his son, Zolly, who manages the Synagogue today. Maurice and I were very close, and we were an extraordinary team. Much about our work together is mentioned in the book.

I had the good fortune of a most efficient public relations connection in Rabbi Bernard Twersky, who had rare contacts, especially with reporters of *The New York Times*, who generally covered my activities in their paper. Almost every other month, there was a major column about me as the President of the OU, a major initiative, and news coverage of the program — something unnoticed during these modern times.

When I was much younger and still active in the Moriah congregation, I was part of a young group of *ba'alei batim* who were determined to make their mark in this unique congregation. This group consisted of Rabbi Sol Trau, Maurice Ehrman, Mark Ratzesdorfer, and Joseph Melohn. One major accomplishment of our group was to influence Moriah's *rav*, Rabbi Samuel Brodt, to permit us to plan special programs for the youth.

As the rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese Congregation in Montreal, I, of course, maintained a close rabbinic and personal friendship with Dr. Solomon Gaon of London, the Chacham of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews of the British Commonwealth, who was very helpful in guiding me during my ministry.

Equally, I am indebted to Reverend Dr. De Sola Pool, the rabbi of

Shearith Israel, the Spanish and Portuguese synagogue in New York, for his patience and understanding as I began my rabbinate in Montreal.

I wish to acknowledge the friendship I developed with Captain William Montefiore, the president of my synagogue, who displayed much understanding when I left the rabbinate.

I became close friends with my neighbor on Ahad Ha'am Street in Jerusalem, Dr. Yitzhak Rafael, who served as both Israeli Minister of Health and Minister of Religions, and who was the head of Mosad Harav Kook, the prominent Jerusalem publishing house.

Also, I had the pleasure of a personal friendship with Moshe Nissim (son of former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Nissim), who became my personal lawyer and adviser in Jerusalem.

I was fortunate in meeting rabbinic personalities who greatly influenced the communities in various parts of the world. From Romania, Chief Rabbi Moshe Rosen and I developed an empathy for and closeness with one another. He faced many problems as a chief rabbi of a difficult country and carried out his task with great skill. In Israel, I was in constant contact with the Ashkenazik Chief Rabbi, Rav Yisrael Meir Lau. I also enjoy a special relationship with Rabbi Simcha HaCohen Kook, the Chief Rabbi of Rechovot.

I also had the honor of continuing a relationship with London *Dayan* Rav Yechezkel Abramsky, who, in his youth, was a *chevruta* with my late grandfather in Volozhin. I recall the particular incident when Rav Abramsky asked me to intervene in the matter of drafting *yeshiva* boys into the army and to express in his name and in others their objection of such a draft. For a period of time, my objection helped.

I am grateful to the Almighty for allowing me to become close with Harav Hagaon Chaim Kanievsky, the *gadol hador*. He always had patience to listen to me and advise me on many difficult topics.

I hasten to mention the great *talmid chacham*, Rav Elya Chazan, who was the *Rosh HaYeshiva* of the Yeshiva Machazeiki Hadas in Montreal, and who invited me to give a daily *shiur* to one of his groups.

Also, as I mentioned in the book, the Telshe *Rosh HaYeshiva*, Rav Mordechai Gifter, took me personally under his wing and influenced me greatly throughout my career.

I pay tribute to my personal friends, first from the past, with whom my dear wife and I enjoyed many years of friendship.

Saba and Lonyk Weinreb were lifelong friends of ours, and we shared years and years of good times, both here and abroad.

Two dear friends were Mitchell and Adelle Turoff, who were our Miami anchors and who joined with us in so many different adventures.

Our very close friends from the West Side were Elza and Leon Weinman and the Platovskys.

I pay tribute to my neighbors in the Boyaner Shteibel, where I have been *davening* for over 45 years. These include: Rav Shea Safrin, Reb Mordechai Hager, Reb Amram Muller, Eli Zicherman, Michael Landau, Shea Schwebel, Judah Wassner, Sam Domb, Avrumi Melohn, Leon Melohn, Dr. Michael Zelefsky, Dovid Golding, Avraham Halpern, Eliezer Klein, Gerald Feldhammer, Jan Buckler, Bill Bron, Yossi Ehrlichstein, and Shimmy Glick. *Acharon, acharon chaviv*, to my very dear friend, Harry Skydell, who has been a lifelong *yedid* and *chevruta* with my son, George, and a decades-long business and *kehillishe* partner with my son, Mark.

The greatest blessing that Hashem can bestow upon us is the *nachat* the we receive from our offspring. My progeny, which now goes into the fifth generation, have all excelled in *kibbud av va'em* to their grandfather and have accompanied me from decade to decade with so much pride and *nachat*. I include them all in my *hakarat hatov* to the *Ribbono shel Olam* for giving me the greatest pleasure in living my life as I hoped I would be able.

Specifically, Bernice and Benjy, Mark and Linda, and George and Denise bring me so much pleasure and satisfaction. Each one in his and her way plays a major role in my ongoing life. I thank them for everything that they do for me and for their invaluable help and assistance in the publication of this book.

Introduction

It is the end of August 2017. I sit in my summer home in Long Beach, New York, which I share with my daughter, Bernice, and son-in-law, Benjy, and write the closing pages of this memoir. I think about title options for my book, and many phrases come to mind: memory, destiny, history, reflections... But these words are too heavy and could be misleading. I thought about my personal condition.

In the beginning of 2017, I suffered an accident due to a fall, which resulted in prolonged recovery, both in and out of hospitals. I am only now slowly getting back to "normal" life. There are thirteen steps that lead from the street up to the first floor of my summer home; the first floor where my bedroom — and much of the living quarters — is located. As summer drew near, I wondered how, in my weakened state, I would be able to climb those thirteen steps. If I could not, would Long Beach be out of the question this year?

Curious, my family and I decided to come to Long Beach. I tested those thirteen steps, and — miracle of miracles — with wise maneuver and strategy, I was able to ascend and descend them! As a result, I was able to finish the rest of this book enveloped in the sounds of the ocean and its waves, sounds which afforded me an environment of inner calm and peace. As a dedication, I decided to call this book Thirteen Steps, which brings up feelings of empowerment and hope, and which teaches me to never give up and to strive ever to move on.

My son, Mark, who happened to be working with me on the concept of thirteen steps, had a "blitz" and exclaimed, "Daddy! I believe that this book, which documents your life and achievements, can form a pattern of the thirteen steps, which form a platform for the soul and spirit of this book!"

1. San Francisco
2. Seattle
3. Yeshiva University
4. Interaction with the Rav
5. Montreal
6. Building a Family Together with Pepa
7. Wakmann Watch Company
8. Orthodox Union
9. World Conference of Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jewry
10. World Jewish Congress
11. Interaction with World Jewish Leaders
12. Israel
13. Personal Friendships

This memoir is foremost meant for our children and their offspring. Pepa and I did not think to request our parents to do something of this kind years ago. As is evidenced by the opening pages of this work, I recounted some stories from the Karasick and Wakmann families, but there is undoubtedly much more that I wish I could include. Those stories, the ones I never had the time to ask about, are sadly lost. In their memory, I have written these pages to ensure that my family should have some idea of their heritage.

I began this autobiographical journey in partnership with my beloved wife. Her uncanny memory of the events of her life, before and after meeting me, pervades these pages. I mourn the fact that as I conclude these recollections, she is no longer here to see the project in its completion. She maintained her grace and composure, even as she was approaching the final days of her life. Most important for her, Pepa retained her place as the matriarch of our family until her very last moments. She was always proud to have developed close relationships with all of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. (A great-great-granddaughter, Sari, has since been added to the chain of our generations.)

It was a study to observe her during the final weeks of her life when our family constantly visited her, and she greeted them with the loveliest smiles and accepted everyone with her trademark graciousness.

Truly, no one expected her to leave us. Those last few days were really remarkable. While we could not bear to consider life without her, Pepa felt

that it was indeed her time. She kept on reassuring us that she had had a wonderful life and beautiful children and grandchildren. In her mind, she was ready.

During those days, she made sure to say goodbye to every member of our family. She spent time with each of her descendants. On a Friday, the day before she died, while my son George was visiting her, Pepa suggested that they recite *Viduy* together. George recited the prayer with her. As he left the room, Pepa closed her eyes, never to open them again. She passed away on Shabbat afternoon, September 4, 2010, at the age of 89. At that particular time, I was celebrating the bar mitzvah of one of our great-grandchildren. I did not know that my wife had died until my daughter Bernice informed me after Shabbat.

We did not have much time to prepare for the funeral. The *Chevra Kaddisha* told us that the funeral would take place Sunday afternoon, the next day. Afterward, we planned to board an airplane to bury Pepa in Jerusalem. Remarkably, despite the dearth of time, my wife's funeral was the largest gathering that Riverside Chapel had witnessed in almost three decades. There were close to one thousand mourners, seated and standing, in attendance. Their affection and respect for my wife was an inspiration for our entire family. Our two sons, son-in-law, and several grandchildren addressed the crowd, and of course, I delivered the formal eulogy. They tell me that I spoke for about a half-hour. I believe myself to be a decent speaker, having over fifty years of experience. I am sure, though, that I never delivered anything as moving as I did on that Sunday afternoon.

My eulogy was not a sad one. It was almost folksy. I introduced the verse from *Yirmiyahu*, "Do not cry for the dead, nor bemoan him." (22:10) Unlike many who are still alive, Pepa led a complete and accomplished life. I therefore explained that although I mourn her death, I do not cry for her. I related the story of our lives together, much of it iterations and summaries of the pages you now read. Pepa and I were married for sixty-four-and-a-half-years. Pepa was by my side for the half-century I was involved in community affairs. We attended banquets, conferences, and retreats together. Pepa was a stunning woman. Whenever she entered the room of some affair, she always made an immediate impression. She was first and foremost dedicated to her family. For decades, as I fielded the phone calls on Friday afternoons, our grandchildren would invariably make small

talk with me for a few moments before asking to speak with their beloved grandmother. She truly led a wonderful life.

I dedicate the pages of this book to you, my dear Pepa, and to our progeny.

Preface

America, a land of immigrants, has been dubbed "The Melting Pot," drawing people from many different countries, races, cultures, and religions. While most did indeed melt into that American pot, there were a relative few who were able to preserve their individual character, culture, and religion with unfaltering determination, against all odds. The reasons for coming to America were as diverse as its people. There were those who fled religious persecution, physical annihilation, incarceration, the perils of war; and yet others who saw America as the land of financial opportunity. Entrance into the American ports was not as free as the song claimed. There were strict criteria and conditions one had to meet in order to be welcomed to this land. One either had to be wealthy and secure to pay his own way, or sponsored by a responsible friend or relative. One had to be healthy and industrious. The rationale was that America would accept you as long as you were not going to be a freeloader, but rather enter society as a productive, contributing member of society. During wartime, even those who met these conditions were in danger of being turned away because of immigration quotas and other biases.

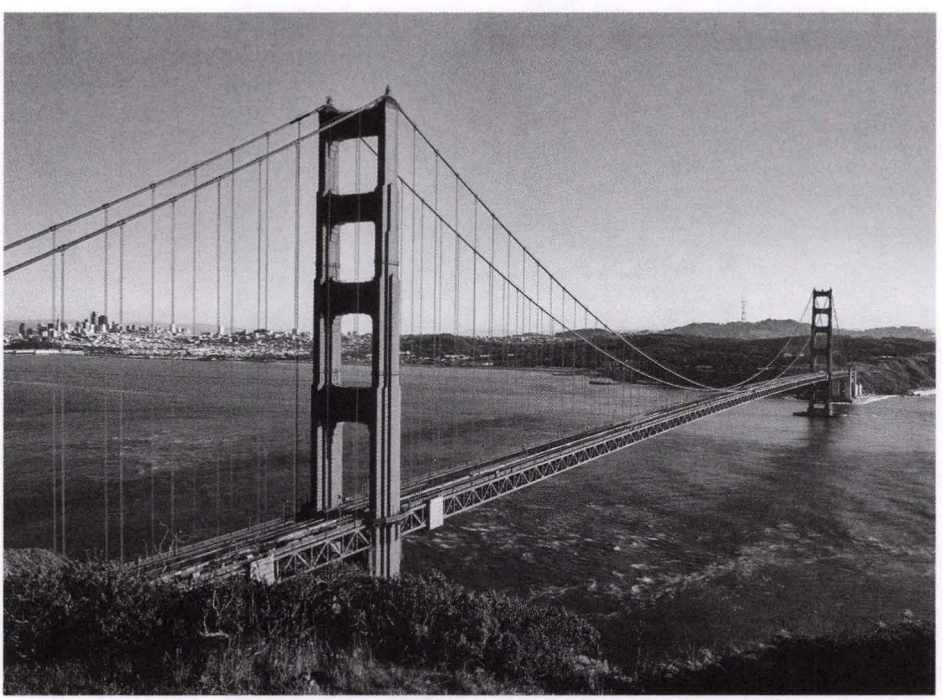
However, it was not for any of the above reasons or criteria that my grandfather, Rabbi Gershon Katzman, arrived on these shores in 1914. He came for one reason only — to seek medical help on the advice of his doctors in Europe. He did not expect to find much in the way of Jewish life — the European Jewish world viewed America as a wasteland. However, he quickly realized there was indeed a Jewish presence and Jewish life. Dedicating himself to the Jewish community, confronting its challenges, and making lasting contributions to its vibrancy had a profoundly spiritual impact on American Jewry, our family, and on me in particular — on my childhood, on my life's goals and ambitions, opportunities and accomplishments. It is my constant prayer that my grandfather's accomplishments and the path that he forged will serve as an inspiration to the lives of my

children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren and will continue to positively influence on all my future progeny. In addition, I hope that my accomplishments in my work in the Orthodox rabbinate and the Orthodox Union will have made their mark on *Klal Yisrael.*

Chapter One

Growing Up in America

San Francisco. The very name of this Californian city conjures up different images for different people. A history buff might picture dusty streets replete with covered wagons and wooden shacks that housed multitudes of fortune-seekers during the California Gold Rush. Others might envision Alcatraz Island with its historic citadel and prison; or perhaps the great earthquake which devastated the city in 1906. Tourists of today will picture the Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco Bay, the rolling hills, the pleasant climate, Chinatown and the cable cars.



The Golden Gate Bridge, San Francisco

Yet there remains a rich Jewish history in San Francisco that is rarely spoken about in the history annals or recorded in the pages of the encyclopedia. Among the gold rush adventurers, there were many Jews who had originally arrived on the East Coast who made the treacherous journey across the country to San Francisco, hoping to find fortune. In addition, San Francisco was an absorption city for Jewish immigrants who came by way of the Pacific Ocean and landed in California. These Jews quickly reestablished their Jewish communities and traditions and built synagogues on American soil. And it was during this historical point in time and place when the story of my family in America began.



Rabbi Gershon Katzman, c. 1916

My maternal grandfather, Rabbi Gershon Katzman, arrived in the United States on August 14, 1914. He had a severe throat condition, and the doctors he had consulted with in Germany suggested that he seek medical help from physicians in the United States, as they felt that they could not do much more for him in Germany. As the rabbi of his community in Puchovitch, Belorussia, it was certainly not easy for my grandfather to leave for prolonged periods of time. However, fearing his medical issues may worsen and turn into long-term problems, his community permitted him to visit America, and he boarded a ship to sail across the Atlantic. Once in America, the doctors in New York successfully treated him.

However, as my grandfather was set to return to his pulpit in White Russia, World War I had begun and was raging. With the passages to Europe blocked, my grandfather, alone and stranded in a foreign country, accepted a position as rabbi of the Orthodox community in San Francisco, at the request of a group of *landsleit* who were living there. San Francisco's Jewish community of some 70,000 supported five Orthodox synagogues, two Conservative synagogues and one Reform temple. The Jewish community in Northern California was primarily run by the wealthy Reform families who settled out west since the California Gold Rush and who respected the culture of the resident Orthodox Jews.

Rabbi Katzman was immediately accepted as a member of the Agudath HaRabonim of America and Canada, as endorsement letters on my grandfather's behalf were sent to America by the most prominent rabbis in Lithuania. These included, among others, Rabbis Chaim Soloveitchik and Chaim Ozer Grodzinski.[1] In fact, my grandfather brought with him pages of his *chiddushim* and *kesavim* which indicated the great level of love and accomplishment of Torah learning and wisdom that he had constantly worked to achieve.

Of course, despite the decent wages my grandfather received in his new community, not to mention his safety in the United States, he worried deeply about his wife and family still stranded in Europe. To make matters worse, the Bolshevik Revolution that commenced on November 7, 1917 closed the door on all emigration from Russian-controlled lands. As a result, it would not be until 1923, during which time his family endured severe hardships moving from place to place

1. Refer to special photo section beginning on page 195.



Rabbi Katzman learning with ba'alei batim *in San Francisco, c. 1940*

in Bolshevik Russia, that my grandfather was finally successful in bringing the rest of his family to their new home in California's Bay Area.

San Francisco was not a good climate for Rabbi Katzman. The damp air there was bad for his health. It was also difficult for him as a leader, as there were very few practicing Orthodox Jewish families in San Francisco. However, Rabbi Katzman remained with his *kehillah* in San Francisco until his last days, and by his remaining there, he helped to introduce and strengthen *halachic yiddishkeit* in the far West. His community there recognized his greatness and respected him for his wisdom, honesty, and humility. Rabbi Katzman remained the spiritual leader of San Francisco, Oakland, and the general vicinity for some forty years, and he was at the forefront of welcoming immigrants. His was always the last word in *halachah*. Indeed, Rabbi Katzman was the *halachic* authority in all phases of Jewish life in San Francisco throughout his life there.

San Francisco was then known as a Reform city with almost no supervision on *kashrut*, *shechitah*, *gitten*, *kiddushin* and conversion. Rabbi Katzman did not eat any beef for nine years until his family came. Trained in ritual slaughter, he would slaughter a chicken for himself for Shabbat. The problem was greatly ameliorated when my father, Reb Yaakov, became the chief *shochet* in town. Eventually, a kosher bakery was opened, but since the bakery did not close for Shabbat, his family baked bread at home.

Rabbi Katzman looked after the *mikveh*. When it had to be cleaned and refilled, he personally observed the task, not trusting anyone else.

Rabbi Katzman helped most to strengthen the Orthodox synagogues in San Francisco. He was very much respected by everyone — Orthodox, Conservative, Reform Jews, and non-Jews alike. Many *halachic* quandaries were brought to Rabbi Katzman by rabbis in America and Canada, and whatever his ruling was, so it remained.

At a certain point in time, my grandfather wanted relief from the strenuous activities of a communal rabbi and decided that the time had come to organize his own *shul* and study hall. In those days, Rabbi Katzman lived in a large two-story private home, with my family living in the upper floor, and my grandparents on the lower floor. He converted part of the lower floor into the *shul* which he named Congregation Beis HaMidrash. The members of the *shul* were mostly *shomrei Shabbat* and came to Rabbi Katzman's *shiurim* twice daily.

For years, I often wondered why God had sent my grandfather to San Francisco. Certainly, one of the reasons was to provide help and guidance to the Orthodox Jewish families who lived there for so many years. But I think the members of the Mirrer Yeshiva and those Jews stranded in Shanghai, China, during the Second World War who finally made their way to the U.S. wondered the same. Most of these men and women came to America through the port of San Francisco, and more specifically, through my grandparents' home. How fortunate they were to have such a rabbi to greet them!

On one occasion, word reached the Jewish community that there was a boat with dozens of Mirrer families docked in the local port. However, since these Jews did not yet have proper visas, the immigration authorities would not allow them to disembark. My mother, who in those days took care of my grandparents' home and was the "angel" to hundreds of these refugees, rushed to the port to see what the Jews needed to be cared for. As it happened, a baby boy was born while the ship docked in San Francisco and was ready for his *brit*. My mother, dressed in an oversized coat, smuggled the baby off the boat and arranged for him to have his *brit* amid much happiness and celebration.

Although my mother was a modest woman and rarely discussed her tremendous good deeds with us, she happened to have related this story to our family. Years later, as fate would have it, this story again surfaced. One day, my son George, whose office is in Highland Park, New Jersey, went to find a *minyan* to *daven* Mincha, He finally found one in a local *yeshiva*.

Noticing a new face, one of the *yeshiva*'s rabbis approached my son to greet him with "Shalom."

"Who are you?" asked the Rabbi.

"My name is George Karasick."

"Karasick?" asked the rabbi with a startled look. "Related to the Karasicks from San Francisco?"

Confirming that indeed he was, George asked the rabbi if he had a connection to that San Francisco family.

"My family came from Mir and settled in America via San Francisco," he replied.

Recalling my mother's story, George recounted the episode to that rabbi.

"I was that baby!" exclaimed the rabbi. George immediately telephoned me to relate the coincidences of his afternoon. Perhaps more than ever before, I knew the reason my grandfather had come to San Francisco.

Chapter Two

Early Beginnings

I was born on June 7, 1922 in a small town in the province of Minsk, called Seliba. I was brought to America in 1923 together with my parents, Rabbi Jacob and Mariasha Karasick; my two older sisters, Gertrude and Rebecca; and my grandmother and Aunt Sarah. The family was finally reunited with my grandfather in San Francisco.



The author, c. 1941 ►



The Author's father, Rabbi Jacob Karasick, c. 1940



The author's mother, Mariasha Karasick, c. 1945

I grew up in the midst of the Great Depression. As the *shochet* of the city, my father received a very reasonable salary for that time. In addition, he was also given a quantity of meat to take home from the slaughter house. The meat my father brought back was always too much for our family to consume and whatever was left over my father was permitted to sell privately to members of the community. Therefore, all in all, we did not suffer from the Depression.

As I remember it, my early childhood was a happy one. As a youngster, I was always one who looked to make friendships. My close circle of friends — about five or six of us — did everything together. On the weekends, we would meet with one another on our frequent trips to Golden Gate Park, the local beaches or the movies. I do not know whether it was just with respect to my family or whether it was the sign of the times, but I was given a tremendous amount of independence at a very early age. At the age of six or seven, I frequently traveled on the San Francisco streetcars on my way to school or to make my appointments to the dentist downtown. My parents apparently were not worried about me and I was not afraid of traveling freely on my own. Further, these independent experiences probably stood me in good stead when I eventually left to New York for my college years, to live completely on my own.

I must note that despite some of the other children's tendency to leave the fold and ignore some of the *mitzvos*, the *chinuch* with which I was brought up, gave me the fortitude to withstand the temptations of forsaking the Torah's laws. To me, Shabbat was sacrosanct and I tried my utmost to avoid being *mechalel Shabbat*. Despite the social peer pressures, I never attended the movies on Shabbat with friends.

My siblings, Gertrude and Rebecca — nine and five years my senior respectively — had little chance for a proper Jewish education. Owing to our significant age differences, our socio-religious differences, and my eventual studies away from home, it became more difficult to keep up as close a relationship as we hoped for as time went on. It can be said that my sisters were products of the times. Although the five synagogues in San Francisco were Orthodox in name, their first-generation American members were not very Orthodox. I should make clear that with the exception of select communities such as Boston, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York, there was a distance between knowledge and observance for so many Jewish families at this time throughout America. For example, it was

common to find that on Shabbat day an individual would arrive on time to synagogue and pray with great *kavanah*. And then after services, he would remove his *tallit* and yarmulke and drive off to work. Consequently, their children, American born, neither knew much nor cared about *Yiddishkeit*, and their practice was very weak. I attended public elementary school and carried on with this kind of education through junior high. After my bar mitzvah, my parents and grandparents, aware of the religious climate in which we lived, feared that if I were to remain in San Francisco, I would fall prey to the same dangers that assimilated so many of my friends to the city's secular culture.

Without much of a Jewish presence in San Francisco, my Jewish education was really in the hands of my grandfather, Rabbi Katzman. San Francisco had about 70,000 Jews and boasted one of the best Hebrew schools in the country, which I attended beginning in first grade at the age of six. The principal of this school was Rabbi David Stolper. He was a very talented teacher, and he and his staff were responsible for some five hundred students. The school met five days a week for two hours a day after public school, and had its own Shabbat synagogue. From him, I learned how to read from the Torah and lead *davening*. I recently came upon my notebook from when I attended that school at the age of twelve. My notes on Jewish history were all in good Hebrew and the material resembled the material I studied later at Yeshiva College. This just illustrates the high level of Jewish education that I received there, contrary to the prevalent Jewish education of Jewish youth across America at that time.

Once, when I returned to San Francisco during my junior year of college, Rabbi Stolper asked if I would like to lead the High Holiday service. When I ultimately finished Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) and visited my family, Rabbi Stolper asked if I would replace him at the Hebrew school as he was about to retire. I was sorry to decline, but I had already accepted, as I will soon describe in detail, my post at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in Montreal, Canada.

As the community's *shochet*, my father woke up very early to travel to the slaughter houses located just outside the San Francisco city limits. Also, he was a real man of the cloth who was completely immersed in the Jewish community. Among several responsibilities, he was the president of the local Mizrachi chapter and held that post for over three decades. Later on, when my grandfather become older and gave up his role as pulpit

rabbi to start a *beit midrash* in his home, my father took on even greater responsibility within the local community.

Perhaps in some part due to his busy hours, my father and I did not have the intimate congeniality that the following generation had with its parents. Nevertheless, my father and I maintained a close and personal relationship. My parents were uneasy and conflicted about my early social life. They were mostly fearful of the influence that my less observant friends would have on my religious well-being. However, at the end of the day, both my parents and grandfather resisted the urge to strongly limit my friend base. Apparently, they felt that even as a youngster, I had demonstrated a sense of independence and devotion to traditional Judaism.

My father's primary language was Yiddish, and that was the language in which he and I conversed. To my mother, with whom I maintained a considerably closer relationship, I spoke English. My grandfather, having arrived on America's shores before the rest of our family, mastered the English language, yet when I spoke English to him, he responded in his native European Yiddish. My grandmother was disabled, having lost her hearing shortly after arriving in America. Therefore, even more responsibility was placed upon my mother, who often commented to me, "I am a Rebbetzin to your grandfather and a wife to your father." Aside from these two roles, she, like my father, was heavily invested in all matters of the San Francisco Jewish community. In particular, I recall that my mother was the head of the community's Mizrachi branch and put great effort in serving as a role model for the women of the community. Mizrachi, established in the late 1890s, was the most important organization to the Orthodox Jewish community at large. Mizrachi directed its efforts and interests to the creation of the State of Israel years before the State was actually created.

Around the time that I was about to enter high school, Rabbi Solomon P. Wohlgelernter from Seattle, Washington paid a visit to my grandfather's home. Rabbi Wohlgelernter was a dynamic personality who had just organized an after-school *yeshiva* program designed for boys of bar mitzvah age and older. He was a strong leader, and it was probably due to him that the Orthodox presence in Seattle remained strong. Although Rabbi Wohlgelernter was a thousand miles north of San Fransisco, he very much considered himself a *"talmid chaver"* of my grandfather. In fact, seeing rabbinic personalities in my grandparents' home was not uncommon. My grandfather was a prized student of both Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan Spector

and Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk. Thus, he was very well known among rabbinic circles during his time in Europe. His reputation carried itself to the United States where so many Orthodox rabbis west of Chicago consulted with him on complex *halachic* matters. It was for this reason that Rabbi Wohlgelernter visited my grandfather in 1936, and it was during this fateful visit that Rabbi Wohlgelernter saw me sitting at the table in my grandfather's study.

Rabbi Wohlgelernter inquired about me. After listening to my grandfather describe the progress he had made with his young grandson in Torah study, Rabbi Wohlgelernter asked, "What chance does he have to truly develop religiously here in San Francisco?"

"I agree, but what can we do? Our family is settled firmly in this city," my grandfather replied.

"This is not the place for him," stressed Rabbi Wohlgelernter. "Let him come to me, to Seattle, to learn."

Fortunately for me, I was introduced to Torah study at an early age by my grandfather. He impressed the importance of *Chumash* study upon me when I first started attending school, and he introduced me to *Mishnah* during the final years when I lived full-time at my parents' home (around the time of my bar mitzvah). I also studied *Tanach* with my father, and thus learned to pay close attention to Hebrew grammar. Despite his busy schedule, he made sure that he imparted to me his approach to learning. If that were not enough, my parents hired a private tutor with whom I met two or three times a week to study various Jewish texts. I was the exception to the rule among my circle of friends. My father was an outstanding educator, and I was fortunate to have him as a teacher. In Europe, he created an elite Hebrew boarding school, where his students came from the finest Jewish families of that region. Parenthetically, I would like to relate a remarkable episode that illustrates my father's extraordinary skill. When the Bolshevik revolution was in the full strength of its violent beginnings, one of the first targets to be attacked by the Jewish leaders of the Bolsheviks were the Jewish institutions of the community and Jewish education. Bands of these Bolsheviks would travel from community to community and burn religious institutions and buildings and brutally execute Jewish leaders. One day a band came to the town where my parents lived and immediately rounded up all of the religious males of the town, including my father, lined them up against the wall, and prepared them for execution. The Bolshevik

leader walked by the helpless lineup, and as he passed by each victim summarily shot him. When he came to my father he stopped, stared in his face, paused and continued without harming him. After the pogrom, the leader summoned my father and said to him: "Gospidin Karasick, don't you remember me? I was one of your pupils in your school and I remember my years there as wonderful ones. I am grateful to you. Your life is spared. Go!"

Once I began studying at the *yeshiva* in Seattle, however, I found that the boys were more advanced than I in Talmudic texts. Despite the fact that Seattle's Jewish community was but 15,000 Jews, which included only a few hundred Orthodox youth, the teenagers in Rabbi Wohlgelernter's small community were of a considerably high caliber of Jewish education. Furthermore, even though San Francisco and Seattle were each populated by Jews who had emigrated from Eastern Europe, Seattle was a much more traditional community than San Francisco. In addition, the Jewish youth of Seattle were more observant in the laws of Shabbat and *kashrut*. Looking back, it is clear that despite my family's educational support, I was starting out in Seattle at a significantly lower learning level than we had anticipated.

When I went to Seattle, I lived a life of independence. In those days, the thousand-mile trip from the Bay Area to Seattle was 24 hours long, and I took these infrequent trips alone. Once I settled in my new surroundings, my father insisted that we correspond in Hebrew. Due to this, I developed my writing style, and my father was very proud of me. I would write to both my parents on a weekly basis (to my mother, though, I wrote in English). While my mother's correspondences were brief and to the point, indicating how much she loved and missed me, I recall receiving warm eight-page letters from my father. Of course, my grandfather constantly communicated with me by phone and through letters.

In Seattle, I attended Garfield High School. I stayed with Rabbi Poplack, an alumnus of the Slobodka *yeshiva*. Rabbi Poplak's home was known to be a warm, inviting home where oftentimes, various *meshulachim* and rabbis traveling would stay. I became familiar with many of them. One such outstanding figure and true *gadol biYisrael* was Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky. During his stay at Rabbi Poplak's house, we had a *seder* together every night after homework, at which we studied the daily English newspaper in order to improve his English. Ultimately, Reb Yaakov affectionately referred to me as his *rebbe*, which he'd constantly remind me about during his visits.

Despite his impressive scholarly background, Rabbi Poplack made his living in America as an insurance salesman. Along with Rabbi Wohlgelernter, Rabbi Poplack was very much a mentor to me during my two-year stay in the Pacific Northwest. Once the school day was through in the mid-afternoon, 20–25 of my new friends and I would study Talmud for two-and-a-half hours at Rabbi Wohlgelernter's *shul*. I had a great group of friends in San Francisco, and some of them had in fact gained a great deal from the local Talmud Torah. But I always felt different from my old friends. With my Seattle group, on the other hand, I fostered friendships that carried on for decades to come.

In Seattle, after serious Talmud study for two years, I decided to relocate to Los Angeles to board at my aunt and uncle's home to study in a new local *yeshiva*. The Los Angeles community of 300,000 Jews was more vibrant than the other Jewish communities I had experienced in my youth up until that point. Boyle Heights, on the east end of Los Angeles' downtown sector — and where my relatives lived — boasted 30,000 Jews and many Orthodox synagogues. I stayed there for nine months and finished high school over a year early. I received my diploma from Roosevelt High School in January 1939. In high school, most of my friends were not Jewish. I recently looked at a yearbook from that period. As is still the custom, many of my friends from that time inscribed messages of good wishes to me as I prepared for college in New York.

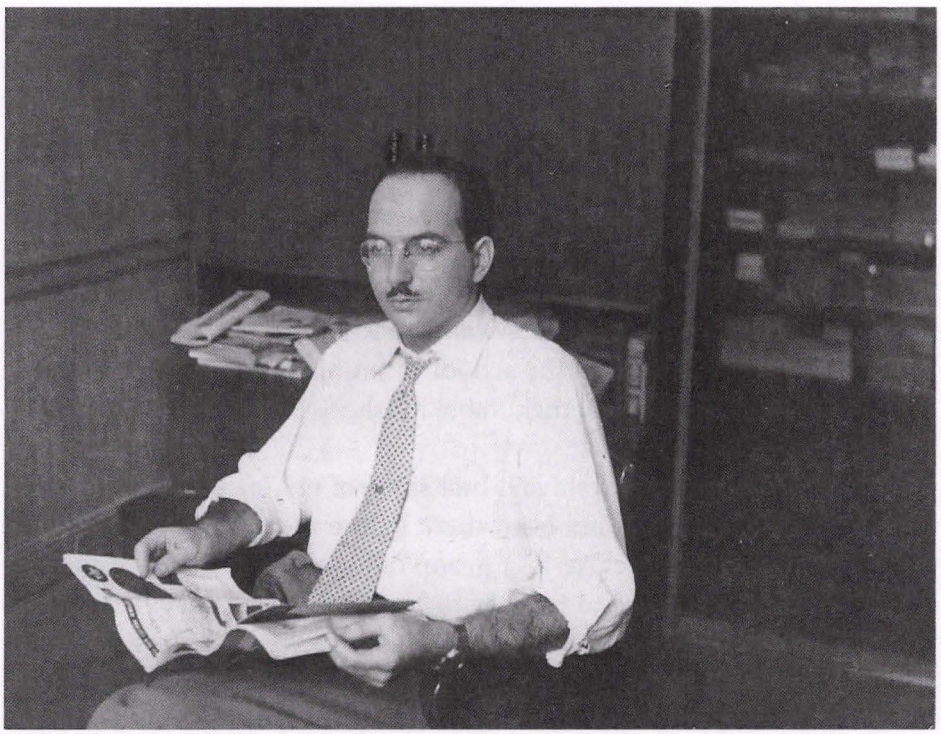
At this point in time, my parents and grandparents were concerned about the next stage of my education. On one hand, if I were to stay in California, I would attend the very liberal University of California at Berkley. However, as my parents wished for me to attend a *yeshiva*, they set their sights on Yeshiva University's Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) in New York. Several of my Seattle friends — Erwin Isaacson and Solomon Maimon, to name just a few — had already left the West Coast for the Manhattan *yeshiva*. When Mother and I arrived at the *yeshiva* in May 1939, Dr. Bernard Revel was still President of Yeshiva University. We had hoped that if I fared well enough in my interview with Dr. Revel, that he would admit me to RIETS. However, it was not very long into our meeting that Dr. Revel turned to my mother and informed her that my skills were not good enough to be accepted into RIETS.

Mother had traveled with me for four days on a train to see that I would be admitted into the *yeshiva*. Dr. Revel's decision had left us both

heartbroken and without options. As we were leaving Dr. Revel's office to exit the building, however, we met Rabbi Chechenovitch, the fundraiser for the world-famous Lomzer Yeshiva in Europe. Rabbi Chechenovitch frequented our home whenever he traveled to the Bay Area to raise funds for this *yeshiva*. Moreover, like many of the European rabbis who settled in America before the war, Rabbi Chechenovitch spent a good deal of his local time at RIETS. Rabbi Chechenovitch immediately recognized my mother and inquired about my interview. Sure enough, Rabbi Chechenovitch, duly grateful for my family's support and hospitality in San Francisco, marched us back into Dr. Revel's office. Shortly after, the chance encounter paid off, and I was accepted to study at RIETS. Truly the hand of God!

In the spring of 1939, I was placed into Rabbi Poleyeff's class and remained there until the summer. I vividly recall the day Rabbi Mordecai Gifter, who lived in Baltimore at the time and who later became the *Rosh Yeshiva* of Telshe, visited Yeshiva University to recruit students for his summer *kollel* program in Baltimore. Not having much on my plate, I volunteered to make the trip down the coastline. In Baltimore, my learning truly blossomed. Rabbi Gifter's unique talent for teaching enhanced my ability to analyze a page of Talmud and forced me to think clearly and critically. Armed with a new sense of confidence, I returned to New York to Yeshiva College. I should say that college tuition was none too small an expense, but I was very fortunate in this regard. Before leaving for New York, my parents arranged for me to meet with San Francisco's Jewish Federation to discuss a scholarship for my educational expenses. Although the organization was by and large controlled by the city's Reform community, the head of the foundation was overjoyed when I relayed to her my career ambitions. The thought of the San Francisco Jewish community producing an American pulpit rabbi — regardless of his denomination — was looked upon with great enthusiasm. The Federation granted me a full four-year scholarship and was so instrumental in establishing my future career.

From Rabbi Poleyeff's class, I transferred to Dr. Belkin's *shiur*. At the time, this eventual second President of Yeshiva University was the Dean of RIETS. As Editor-in-Chief of the college paper, *The Commentator*, I had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Belkin frequently. Also, whenever I visited Los Angeles, he requested that I visit his relatives who lived there. I became very close with Dr. Belkin during the year and a half that I attended



The author, Editor-in-Chief of The Commentator, *c. 1942*

his Talmud lectures, and I became a frequent guest at his Upper East Side home for Shabbat and *Yomim Tovim*. Towards the end of that period of time, I finally felt I was ready for the most advanced *shiur* offered at Yeshiva, and I asked Dr. Belkin for permission to switch into Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's *shiur*. Dr. Belkin was displeased at first by my request but ultimately permitted me to transfer.

When I entered the Rav's *shiur*, my grandfather took the train for the four-day trip to New York for the sole purpose of seeing the Rav personally, in order to ask him to follow my progress. He said, "*El hana'ar hazeh hitpallalti!*" I was his sole interest, and he wished for the Rav to be his partner in looking after my spiritual welfare. The Rav instantly agreed, and this turned into a relationship that lasted over fifty years!

Studying under the Rav, who was then at RIETS for two years, was a very challenging experience. Over the three days out of the week when he delivered his three-hour *shiurim*, the Rav was very strict with his students, especially when they were unable to answer his questions. Most of us just

tried our best to avoid our teacher's stares as we sat in quiet awe and fear of the Rav. Yet, however distant we felt from Rabbi Soloveitchik in *shiur*, the situation was quite the opposite outside of the classroom setting. The Rav, who was shy by nature, kept his distance from people in general and avoided personal contact with most of his students. But the Rav, being in absolutely new surroundings, felt he must have some students with whom he could relate and feel comfortable. To that end, I was part of a small circle of students maintained a very close relationship with this Torah giant. One should not forget that the Rav came to RIETS under difficult circumstances. Several members of the school's administration were opposed to the Rav succeeding his late father, Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik, as the institution's senior *Rosh Yeshiva*.

When I first entered Yeshiva, I met some of my former Talmud classmates from Seattle who had been there before me. They befriended me and took me into their close-knit group of about five or six outstanding *talmidim* who were close to the Rav in New York. I felt very fortunate to be a member of this group, and I was frequently invited to the Rav's home in Boston.

The Rav and his wife, Dr. Tonya Soloveitchik, invited me to stay at their home one winter weekend when my Yeshiva College debate team colleagues and I were scheduled to face off against a few college squads from the Boston area. It was a cold, snowy winter, and it so happened that I caught a cold on my way up to New England. I arrived at the Soloveitchik home dreadfully sick, and without hesitation, Dr. Soloveitchik cared for me as best as she could. From this point forward, I developed a friendship with her, as well.

Mr. Samuel Sar, a major force at Yeshiva in those days, also befriended me. With his help, I found speaking engagements and traveled often to various communities as scholar-in-residence. In addition to gaining experience as an aspiring young rabbi, these opportunities helped support me through my college years. Looking back at my time at Yeshiva, the two individuals most responsible for preparing me for the rabbinate were most certainly Dr. Belkin and Mr. Sar.

I owe a great deal to Rabbi Leo Jung of The Jewish Center. As a philosophy major at Yeshiva College, I was quickly exposed to Rabbi Jung who taught a class in ethics and other courses in Jewish philosophy. Rabbi Jung and I formed a close teacher-student relationship. We took private walks

and ate lunch together in the school's cafeteria. (In fact, I took out two of Rabbi Jung's daughters at various times during my college years.)

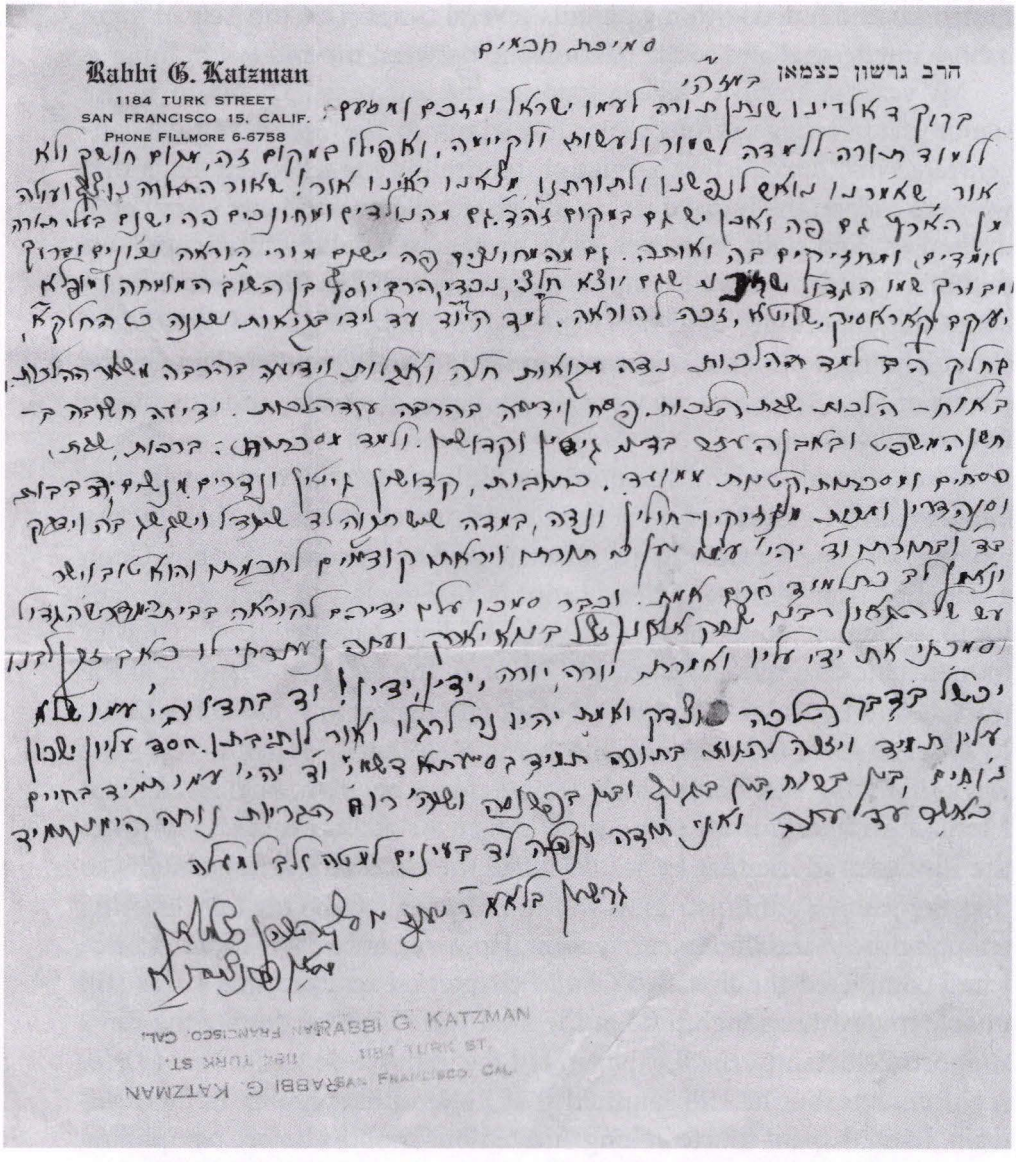
In 1945, the powers of the world were beginning to think about forming the United Nations. As fate would have it, several Jewish leaders took part in meetings about forming this critical assembly of global diplomats. Rabbi Jung was among those who attended many of these meetings held in San Francisco and dined with my parents several times. This too helped forge a close intellectual and social relationship between me and Rabbi Jung.

My years at Yeshiva College spanned the war years. Therefore, in my senior year of college, through my editorial role in *The Commentator*, I concentrated my journalistic energies on reminding my fellow students that we were indeed the lucky ones. In all other colleges, students were being drafted left and right. However, at Yeshiva, an official divinity school, we rabbinical students were exempt. I constantly wrote in *The Commentator* about the importance of always behaving in public like a *yeshiva* student should, being aware that it was rare indeed to find young civilians in the streets of New York; and we were always being observed, and not always in a friendly manner.

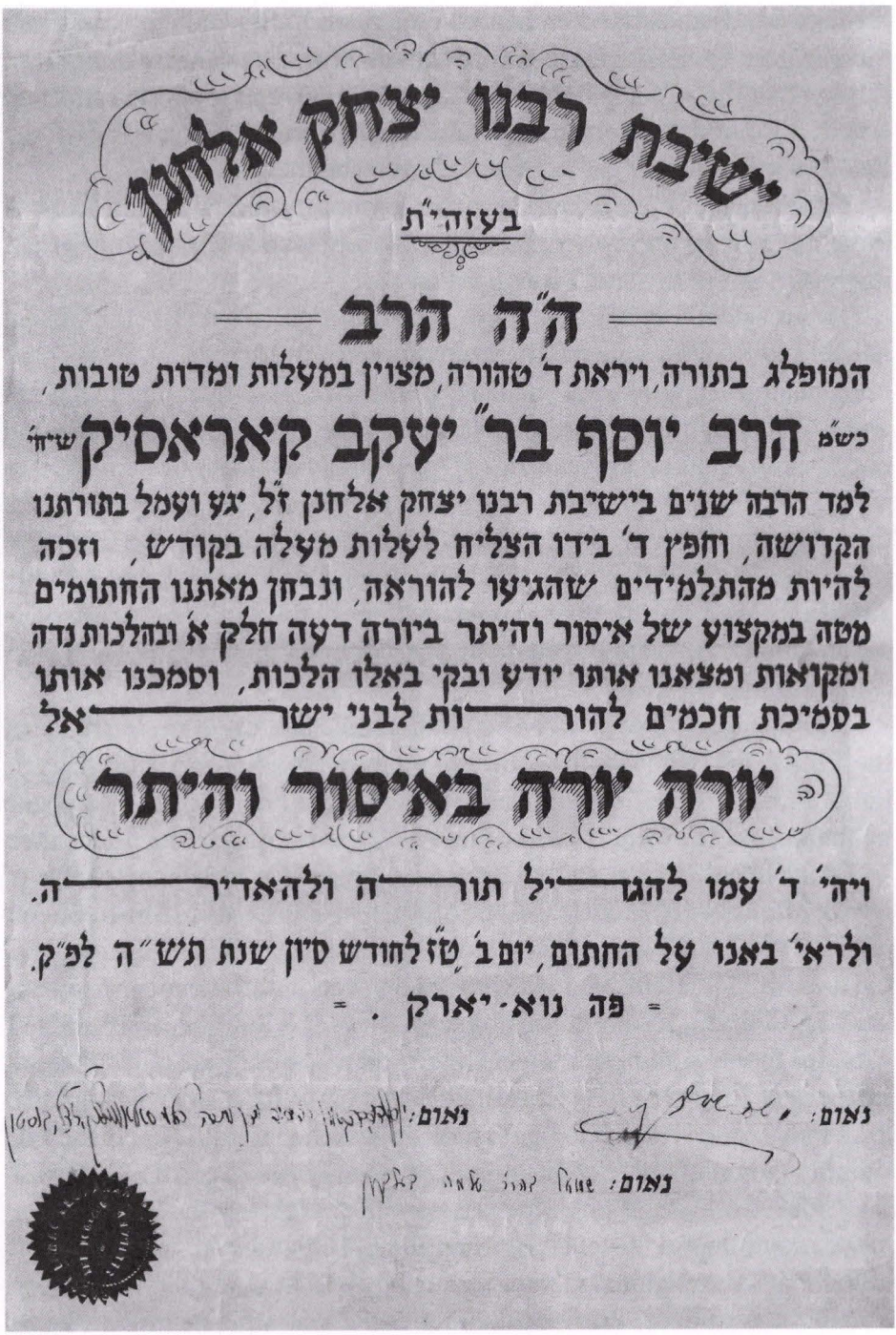
I was a good student. I majored in philosophy with a minor in psychology, and I graduated with honors. However, the lion's share of my energies was spent reaching my ultimate goal of becoming a rabbi. Upon graduation from Yeshiva College, I approached the Rav to discuss my plans for the rabbinate. In those days, *semicha* students were required to master four specific chapters of *Masechet Chulin* — the two first chapters of the tractate and two later chapters — before moving on to study *Yoreh De'ah*. In order to learn these sections properly, I felt that I needed to leave the Rav's *shiur*. The Rav immediately turned down my plan, demanding that I remain in his *shiur* for some time longer. As a compromise, however, the Rav assured me that he would make the necessary arrangements so that the *yeshiva* administration would not penalize me for not devoting enough time to the *Chulin* curriculum. However, after a few months, once I had completed the first two *Chulin* chapters, I realized that I was still unable to devote enough time to the final two chapters, despite the Rav's support. Reluctantly, the Rav permitted me to move on to the *Yoreh De'ah* requirements, but he still required that I attend his regular Talmud *shiurim*. In all, I spent fourteen long and tedious months before completing the requirements for ordination. My final *bechinah* on *Yoreh De'ah* before

the Rav, Dr. Belkin, and Rabbi Moshe Shatzkes was scheduled for May 8, 1945.

Despite the daunting stature of these luminaries, I was fairly confident about my chances. I had become very close to both the Rav and Dr. Belkin during my tenure as a student at Yeshiva. Rabbi Shatzkes, having traveled



Rabbi Karasick's semicha *given by his grandfather, Rabbi Gershon Katzman*



ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן

בעזה"ת

הה"ה הרב

המופלג בתורה, ויראת ד' טהורה, מצוין במעלות ומדות טובות,

כש"מ הרב יוסף בר" יעקב קאראסיק שיחי'

למד הרבה שנים בישיבת רבנו יצחק אלחנן זלל"ג ועמל בתורתנו הקדושה, וחפץ ד' בידו הצליח לעלות מעלה בקודש, וזכה להיות מהתלמידים שהגיעו להוראה, ונבחן מאתנו החתומים מטה במקצוע של איסור והיתר ביורה דעה חלק א' ובהלכות נדה ומקואות ומצאנו אותו יודע ובקי באלו הלכות, וסמכנו אותו בסמיכת חכמים להור——ות לבני ישר——אל

יורה יורה באיסור והיתר

ויה' ד' עמו להגי——יל תור——ה ולהאדי——ר.

ולרא' באנו על החתום, יום ב' טז' לחודש סיון שנת תש"ה לפ"ק.

= פה נוא-יארק . =

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Rabbi Karasick's semicha *from Yeshiva University*

through San Francisco when he first emigrated to the United States from the Far East, became a close family friend. However, as news came from Europe that the Allies had finally accepted the surrender of Nazis, the Rav was in no mood to conduct such an exam. "I cannot test you today," the Rav told me, "I'm just too excited and overwhelmed."

Eventually, at the beginning of that summer, I did appear in front of these three giants for my *semicha* exam. The whole ordeal lasted four grueling hours, but in the end, I was successful.

As an aside, it is worthwhile to mention a related event. The official *semicha* certificates were handwritten by a *sofer* on parchment. As you can imagine, this *klaf* looked particularly impressive, and my rabbinical peers and I were very proud to receive it. As it happened, while I was moving out of the dormitory, my *semicha klaf* got lost during the move. I rushed to arrange for the *sofer* to write a new one, but obtaining the signatures of the three signatories on my original *semicha* certificate proved to be an elusive task. I recall journeying to the mountains in upstate New York where Rabbi Shatzkes stayed during the summers. After obtaining his signature once again, I then traveled to Boston to find the Rav, and then, finally, Dr. Belkin at his summer hideaway.

Another person who had a serendipitous effect upon my early life at the Yeshiva and who was the source of many auspicious opportunities was Rabbi David B. Hollander, the leader of the Mount Eden Center Synagogue in The Bronx. The Mount Eden Center was on the Grand Concourse, then a vibrant Jewish street. At that time, The Bronx was a thriving center of Jewish life. Rabbi Hollander was the brother-in-law of Rabbi Moshe Sherer of Agudath Israel of America. (More importantly, Rabbi Hollander was the uncle of Benjamin Mandel, who would eventually become my son-in-law.) In addition, he led the first delegation of the Rabbinical Council of America in the 1950s to the Soviet Union and made us aware of the difficult situation of Soviet Jews. He was also the head of the RCA when he appealed to eleven *Roshei Yeshiva* for guidance on whether the RCA and the OU should maintain their membership in the Synagogue Council of America.

Rabbi Hollander at one time was the official rabbi of the Flagler Hotel in the mountains of upstate New York. Rabbi Hollander was also in charge of the Flagler's religious operations during Pesach. One year, when I was a rabbinical student, Rabbi Hollander could not officiate at the Flagler and asked if I would take his place. As part of my responsibilities when

replacing Rabbi Hollander, I was also expected to make the *Yizkor* appeal to raise funds for Yeshiva University. I was happy to accept and I did this for several years and derived much experience (and income) from this job. In addition to his responsibilities at the Flagler Hotel, Rabbi Hollander was associated with some popular kosher hotels in the White Mountains of New Hampshire during the summers, and he had them hire me as his replacement when he was unable to serve.

All in all, my parents and grandparents could not have asked for a more fulfilling and positive life for me. As a young boy, alone on my educational journey, they kept up with my progress with great pride. My grandfather was *niftar* in Los Angeles in 1952. I was already married by then, living in New York. My grandmother was *nifteret* in 1950. My parents lived full lives and were privileged to see much *nachat* from my family. My father was *niftar* in 1969 and my mother, in 1984. We received countless letters of condolence when my father passed away. Telegrams, handwritten letters from *gedolim* and friends, typed letters from rabbis and dignitaries from America and from abroad, flooded our mailbox for weeks after my father's *petira*.[2]

2. Refer to special photo section beginning on page 209.



Matzevah of Rabbi Gershon Katzman



Rabbi Gershon Katzman (far right) with a new sefer Torah commissioned in San Francisco, c.1919; to his immediate right is the sofer, followed by San Francisco community members

Chapter Three

My Wife Pepa

From Persecution to Popularity, From Secret Jew to Jewish Socialite

Glikla and Yitzchak Wakmann, Pepa's parents, were both born in Kremenets, a picturesque town in Volyhn, which continuously alternated under Russian, Polish, and Ukrainian sovereignty. Glikla Kopf was a vivacious and outgoing young woman. Aside from being very popular due to her warm personality, Glikla was well known in town because of her family association. Her father was the *chazan* of the local synagogue and a prominent member of the community.



Yitzchak Wakmann, c. 1946



Glikla Wakmann, c. 1946

Yitzchak Wakmann was independent and forceful, most probably due to his difficult childhood. By the age of fourteen, he was twice orphaned. As his two older siblings had already moved to Moscow, Yitzchak was given the responsibility of providing for his five younger siblings.

During the post-World War I period, the religious attitude of Jewish youth was swiftly drifting away. Many Jewish Russian and Polish youngsters affiliated themselves with the Bund socialist movement and secular Zionist groups. Most of the Wakmann children were swayed by these modern concepts and consequently left the fold of Orthodox Judaism. Despite these pressures, however, Yitzchak remained loyal to his faith.

Yitzchak had an ingenious knack for coming up with different ways to find income. Despite his considerable financial burdens, my future father-in-law became a very active member of the local Hachnasat Orchim, an organization that helped provide wandering Jews, often hungry and homeless, with food and lodging as they passed through Kremenets. Another important activity that Yitzchak was instrumental in was assisting the Jews of Kremenets in saving their children from the Russian draft. By befriending local doctors, my father-in-law managed as best as he could to convince Jewish physicians to reject many boys as unfit for army service.

In 1919, when Yitzchak was twenty-three and Glikla was twenty-one, they happened to meet at a local wedding. After almost a year of courting, Yitzchak asked for her hand in marriage. As there was no such thing as a caterer in those days and neither of them had much money, it was due to the Jews of Kremenets' affection for her that Glikla's wedding became such a festive event.

Once settled, the couple found an apartment in Kremenets, not too far from Glikla's parents. In his memoir, my father-in-law related how tremendously difficult it was for Jews to find business in the interwar years due to the anti-Semitic ordinances promulgated by the Polish government. However, there was a period of time shortly after they were married, that the Polish government lifted some of its restrictions, providing the Jews with an opportunity to make a livelihood. Yitzchak specialized in selling armaments, footwear, and government-sponsored lottery tickets. This did not last long, though. After the Wakmanns' fifth year of marriage, the government soon rescinded their concessions and Jews like Yitzchak Wakmann were yet again faced with difficult economic crisis.

Yitzchak and Glikla's first child, Pepa, born in 1921, and her sister Anita,

who was twenty-two months Pepa's junior, were born during Yitzchak and Glikla's early time of prosperity. In her earliest years, Pepa befriended observant and non-observant Jewish children. When she was not playing with friends, she was at home with her parents who maintained a very warm and loving home environment. On Shabbat, the family frequently visited the elder Kopfs, the girls outfitted in their special dresses. From an early age, the girls went with their mother and grandmother to synagogue.



Pepa, engaged to the author, c. 1945

By the time Pepa reached school age, Kremenets was under Polish rule. Quality education was very difficult to come by for Jews, as the Polish government placed a two-Jews-per-class quota on local public schools. Fortunately, Pepa was accepted at a Polish private school. In Poland, there was open hatred towards Jews, a fact that Pepa discovered at an early age. Although Pepa was friendly with some of her non-Jewish classmates, it was a more guarded friendship, and she never played at their homes.

Aside from private school, the Wakmanns arranged for Pepa and her sister to study with a Jewish tutor after school. With this tutor, the girls received a surface education in reading Jewish prayers and the Hebrew alphabet. It was a fact of Jewish life that girls were not typically provided with in-depth study of religious teachings.

Near Pepa's tenth birthday, her father departed Poland to find livelihood in Central or Western Europe. Initially, he looked in Germany and the Netherlands without much success. Whatever money he managed to scrape together was sent back home to support the family, who had moved in with the Kopfs after Yitzchak left. He finally arrived in Portugal. For the better part of a year, Yitzchak traveled from town to town, each time

deciding that it was not the place for him and his family to resettle. Finally, he got word of employment opportunities in Portugal's capital city, Lisbon. On his way there, he stopped in Coimbra, a Portuguese university town some 200 kilometers from Lisbon. He immediately fell in love with the town and decided to start a life there.

While in Coimbra, my father-in-law earned a meager livelihood repairing watches, a trade he picked up at an early age in Kremenets from his father. After securing enough funds, Yitzchak started to purchase damaged watches at auctions, which he then restored and sold for profit. Eventually, wholesalers from Lisbon started to provide him with a line of credit which permitted him to buy timepieces in quantity. Years of searching for the right opportunity had finally paid off, and the people of Coimbra quickly learned to respect the motto on top of the door to Yitzchak's storefront: "Punctuality and Perfect Work." At that point, my father-in-law had been away from his family for two years, missing them dearly each day. In 1933, he sent for his wife and two daughters to join him in Coimbra, where the local townspeople received them cordially, still not knowing that they were Jewish.

With Lisbon as the one exception, no Jews lived in Portugal as open Jews ever since the country's Inquisition at the end of the fifteenth century. Most of the local townspeople in Coimbra did not know any better than to believe the anti-Semitic derision that pervaded Western Europe five hundred years before, and they did not know that the Wakmanns were indeed Jewish. Thus, they received them cordially as foreigners, and the Wakmanns continued to attempt to keep their religion a secret from their neighbors.

The Wakmanns had a housekeeper in Portugal for five years. She first came to them in Coimbra and eventually moved with them to Lisbon. This housekeeper was devoted to the family. To give just one example, when one of the girls was sick, the housekeeper would sleep on the floor of their bedroom just in case the child would wake up and need something. However, when the Wakmanns relocated to Lisbon and Pepa and her sister started to find Jewish friends, things changed. To this day, Pepa can vividly recall how one day her housekeeper put two and two together and ran out of house as if she just saw a ghost! "They're Jews," she cried as she stormed down the stairs on her way to the front door.

Also while in Coimbra, the Wakmanns shared a two-story home with

an ardently Catholic family. Since the Wakmanns kept their religion a secret, this other family was constantly encouraging the Wakmanns to join them at church. Pepa's parents were apparently creative in finding reasons to avoid accepting such invitations. In many of these conversations, my father-in-law carefully explained to his neighbors that where he was from, families observed their religions privately and did not attend church. One day, however, while the rest of the family was away, Anita stayed home and played with the neighbors' young daughter. When the family returned home, they found Anita in tears. The young girl of eleven, in sincere trauma, explained to her father that the neighbors had taken her to church. Yitzchak Wakmann was in a very difficult situation. He could not tell the neighbors that he and his family were Jewish for fear of what the community might do to them. So, as a weaker alternative, my father-in-law reiterated to the neighbors that his family were not church-goers and they were not to take any of his daughters there again.

Aside from that, however, the family was happy in Coimbra. As my father-in-law continued to reach a higher level of financial stability and modest wealth, the women of the family were very taken with the picturesque town, replete with tall university towers and halls. Generally, my father-in-law was always afraid of permitting his daughters to associate with the local Gentile children. Consequently, the two sisters became even closer in Coimbra, as they had no one to play with other than each other. Pepa and Anita spent their mornings assisting their parents doing work and chores. When help was not needed, the girls made their way to the botanical gardens and other picturesque sites nearby. In the afternoons, Pepa and her sister received their formal education from tutors.

The Wakmanns had only one set of dishes when they lived in Coimbra; they simply did not eat meat or fowl. Every meal was bread and fish, which was plentiful. For years, they forgot what it was like to eat *fleishig*. After their fourth year in Coimbra, an Orthodox Jewish professor from Germany, Dr. Carl Shoen, arrived to teach chemistry at the local university. Dr. Shoen had just been married and wanted to leave Germany as quickly as possible. He became skilled at ritual slaughter before he moved so that he could eat chicken in Coimbra. Thus, when Dr. Shoen arrived in Coimbra with his *shechita* capabilities, it was the first time in years that the Wakmanns ate any kind of meat, for he *shecht*ed for them as well.

Toward the end of the Wakmanns' stay in Coimbra, Pepa developed

typhoid fever over the summer when the family went away to the mountains. My in-laws realized that their daughter was very sick and rushed her back to the city. Not soon after, Pepa fell into a coma. Her parents refused to let her stay in the hospital, so Pepa spent two months in a coma, relegated to her bed at home. The doctors believed Pepa had little chance of recovery. "Mr. Wakmann, you are not a rich man," one doctor said to my father-in-law after observing Pepa's state. "You work very hard for your money. Do not spend it on your daughter — she will never make it out of this." Although that doctor — and others too — were wrong, thank goodness, the typhoid fever took its toll. Much of Pepa's memory of the details of her life before the fever were hazy. She had to relearn languages and other more advanced skills like playing the piano. It took time for her to regain these skills, but it would have taken much longer had she not received tremendous support from her parents and sister.

A final story that took place in Coimbra concerns a business colleague of Yitzchak Wakmann. After some time, my father-in-law and this businessman became quite close. Yitzchak never broached the topic of religion with anyone in Coimbra outside his own family at first. After a while, however, it became clear through the businessman's guarded questions that he was interested in learning about Judaism. Finally able to speak freely to someone other than his family, Yitzchak invited his colleague to the Wakmann family's Pesach Seder. The Seder was conducted as usual, with my father-in-law reading the Haggadah aloud; but the man sat silently, never opening his Haggadah. The family member sitting next to the guest turned the pages as the Wakmanns progressed through the night, but the man never looked inside.

"Why aren't you turning the pages of your Haggadah?" Mr. Wakmann asked his guest politely.

"Because my hands are *treif!*" confessed the guest, startling the young girls.

The guest continued to remain silent in his seat for a few more minutes until he could not take it any longer. Suddenly, without hesitation or looking back for a reaction, the guest leaped out of his chair and ran out of the Wakmann's home. It was just too much for him, this Marrano Jew, and the family never saw him again after that night. It was impossible to tell how many Marranos like this man — men and women who were hidden Jews,

still very much afraid of being discovered by the Inquisition — were still in Portugal at this time.

Pepa's sister Anita voiced concern about living in a university town, in that it carried with it considerable disadvantages. By the time Pepa was fourteen, she had grown to be very tall and beautiful. Anita, twelve at the time, noticed that more than a few Gentile undergraduates followed her older sister around, and became quite interested in her. Pepa was a giant compared to the Portuguese women who were notoriously short. My father-in-law heeded his daughter's advice and realized that the time had come for him to pack up his family and business after seven fruitful years in Coimbra, and move to Lisbon.

Like in Coimbra, Pepa received her education in Lisbon with a tutor. But in Lisbon, Pepa now had Jewish friends whom she had met at the local Sephardic synagogue, which her family attended. Pepa became close with the boys and girls from prominent Sephardic families in Lisbon. Most of these Sephardic families had settled in Lisbon long ago, after having emigrated from Gibraltar. Every so often, Pepa and her new friends would go on excursions, picnics, and outings. On Purim and Chanukah, the Jewish youth of Lisbon would participate in formal balls through the clubs and synagogues.

At this time, in 1937, Lisbon — and Portugal in general — was one of a very few countries where Jews could feel somewhat safe from Hitler's growing Nazi terror. It was at this point when my mother-in-law pleaded tearfully with her family to leave Poland. She begged them through telegrams to immigrate to Portugal where my father-in-law had by then established a very successful position in the watch industry and could comfortably support them. However, the Kopfs were parents and grandparents of a large family and adamantly refused to leave Kremenets without the entire family. Aside from two siblings who escaped in time, everyone from Glikla Wakmann's family was killed in the Holocaust.

The large distance between her and her family took its toll on Glikla. At one point, my mother-in-law became very homesick and was determined to leave Lisbon for a few weeks to visit her family. As it turned out, however, eighteen years after her second child, Glikla's doctors informed her that she was pregnant and if she were to travel such a long trek, it would create a potential danger for losing her eventual third daughter, Margalit.

In retrospect, had my mother-in-law ignored the doctors' advice, she surely would have perished along with her family in Eastern Europe.

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The Wakmanns' modern condominium home was located in one of the premier neighborhoods in Lisbon. The Wakmann girls enjoyed their new life in Lisbon, which included fighting constantly with each other for a turn to take care of their new baby sister.

Lisbon's Jewish community was primarily Sephardic. In the late 1930s, Ashkenazic Jews began to settle in Lisbon as well. Intermingling with the two ethnic groups was rare; although Ashkenaz, the girls were quickly accepted equally by both groups. As for my father-in-law, very soon after he moved to Lisbon, the local Jewish leaders recruited him to be a part of their tight-knit fraternity. One of Yitzchak's more important friends was the local president of EZRA, an organization established to help Jewish refugees from Europe who were stranded in Portugal. The Wakmanns made sure to provide these desperate people with money and instruction as to which countries — there were precious few at this time — might be the most likely to absorb Jewish immigration. Also, upon taking notice that Pepa was fluent in six or seven languages, HITSAM (HITSAM is the European name for HIAS, Hebrew Immigration Aid Society, in America) hired her to work with these refugees while in Lisbon. In this new capacity, Pepa was constantly in contact with emigrants looking to escape Hitler by way of Portugal's port city, and was of invaluable assistance to thousands of these refugees.

Shortly after World War II started in 1939, the British Embassy in Lisbon contacted my father-in-law. They wanted him to supply different types of military timepieces — chronographs, stopwatches, etc. — that the British armed forces required. As both Switzerland and Portugal were neutral, it was possible for my father-in-law, who was already importing quantities of watches from Switzerland and maintaining contacts with important factories, to obtain these required timepieces. In return, the English agreed to keep the transaction a secret from various German agencies in Lisbon.

As a result, Wakmann Limitada expanded overnight to an important watch company, even having been awarded the Rolex agency for Portugal.

Wakmann imported quantities of watches for the British military, and besides helping the Allies' cause, also greatly prospered.

With Portugal being neutral, Lisbon was a hotbed of Nazi German agencies operating full blast in this environment. They were bound to find out the activities Wakmann Limitada was performing for the allies. And it could bode badly if the Germans desired to harm this activity.

My father-in-law thus came to an agreement with the British that if the time came that it would be imperative for the Wakmanns to flee Lisbon, the British Government would protect them and arrange for their safety and eventual emigration.

Eventually in 1942, the Germans found out about my father-in-law's dealings with the British and sought to make life dangerous for him in neutral Portugal. While this was happening, his two elder daughters were now of marriageable age, and he knew that he would not find suitors of good standing in Lisbon. These two points compounded and overshadowed the wealth that he amassed from the watch business. The British honored their agreement and provided the Wakmanns with immigration visas to Canada. During the voyage aboard the Serpa Pinto, the ship carrying the Wakmanns across the Atlantic (which occurred during Passover), my mother-in-law prepared enough kosher food to feed the family and another fifty observant Jews on board for a week.

The family landed in Philadelphia and traveled through New York to Montreal, Quebec, as per the agreement made with the British government. Once on Canadian soil, Yitzchak Wakmann spent the next six months making the necessary arrangements to bring his family from Canada to New York to establish residence in the United States. Once he settled in New York, he could finally launch his watch business there. The watch business was still thriving in Lisbon and my father-in-law reached out to all of his contacts in the industry so that he could establish a branch of the company in New York. Finally, a Jewish lawyer in New York (who would also be instrumental in finding the Wakmanns their future Manhattan home in which they lived for the duration of their lives in Manhattan's Upper West Side) successfully helped Yitzchak secure his business and wealth in America. Indeed, Yitzchak Wakmann spoke ten languages (all in Yiddish). Yet, somehow through his very broken English, he managed to only increase his financial success on the high-powered New York scene.

Now living on 465 West End Avenue in the popping Upper West Side,

Mr. Wakmann's eldest daughters assisted their father in the watch business. They soon familiarized themselves with their new surroundings and acclimated themselves to New York life. The youngest, Margalit, was one of the first elementary school students in Manhattan Day School and one of the first high school pupils in Rabbi Joseph H. Lookstein's Ramaz school in the Upper East Side. He took great pride in his family's new life in America. And, owing to his humble beginnings in Europe, my father-in-law was all too happy to send his daughter to a premier Jewish American-style school like the Ramaz School.

When Pepa became seriously ill in Coimbra, Glikla beseeched God for her daughter to fully recover. In her pleas, Glikla Wakmann vowed that her daughter would make a Torah scroll cover. Thankfully, Pepa's health was restored, and she prepared the cover. However, when Mrs. Wakmann and her daughter approached the Lisbon synagogue with the gift, the *shul*'s administrators informed them that they were inundated with such things and had no need for another. Only discouraged for a short while, Pepa and her family presented the gift to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of Montreal, where the Wakmanns prayed during their stay in Canada. The coincidence of this gesture is striking because just a few years after the Wakmanns' stay in Canada, I would receive my rabbinic ordination and relocate to Montreal to head my first pulpit, the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue! The Torah cover, sewn and prepared by my future wife, and I were destined to be united at some point!

Chapter Four

From Rabbi to Rabbinic Lay Leader

I'd always wanted to make the rabbinate my life's career. It was not something I pursued because there was nothing else available. Simply put, I wanted to be a rabbi. I was therefore delighted when, in the spring of 1945, several months before I received *semicha*, Dr. Belkin called me into his office for a private meeting. He informed me that Shearith Israel, known more commonly as the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in Montreal, contacted RIETS about hiring a new rabbi.



Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik's original presentation on Ish HaHalachah; the author is seated in the front row, second from the left

Actually, I had received other offers to interview for Orthodox pulpits. A few months before meeting with Dr. Belkin, the Rav approached me about an opening in Roxbury, Massachusetts, a large Jewish community of Boston. I traveled to Boston to spend Shabbat with the Rav. The synagogue had a grand tradition and many prestigious members including the Hart, de Sola, and Montefiore families. Dr. Belkin asked me if I would be interested in interviewing for the position. I readily agreed, as they would be willing to wait until I received my *semicha* if I was chosen,.

I went to Montreal that winter and was successful in the course of my interviews. I was successful despite the fact that I was an Ashkenazic Jew, from a traditional background very different from the one that permeates every dimension of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue. The synagogue hired me to begin with the High Holiday services the following September of that year, permitting me first and foremost to prepare for my *semicha*, and giving me the summer to learn and prepare to master a completely different synagogue service. I find the following article printed in the August 24, 1945 edition of *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle* very revealing of the type of individual the synagogue was looking for:

> The call and appointment of Rabbi Joseph Karasick of San Francisco, California, to occupy the pulpit as Minister of the Corporation of Spanish and Portuguese Jews, "Shearith Israel" Synagogue of Montreal, 1443 Stanley street, has been announced by the Board of Trustees of the synagogue. He is a graduate of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary and Yeshiva College of New York City, having received his B.A. degree in 1943 and his rabbinical ordination in the early part of the year 1945. He is the grandson of Rabbi Gershon Katzman, who has been the Chief Rabbi of San Francisco since 1914, and who is the dean of the Orthodox rabbinate on the Pacific Coast. His father, Rev. Jacob Karasick, has long been engaged in communal welfare in California.
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> Rabbi Karasick received his early training under the personal tutelage of his grandfather, and in preparatory academies in Seattle and in Los Angeles. Upon graduation he was awarded a scholarship to the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary and Yeshiva College. Whilst an undergraduate, he was a member

> of the varsity debating team, and editor of the college newspaper, *The Commentator* — which won All-American journalistic awards among college newspapers in the United States.
>
> Rabbi Karasick assumes his religious duties as Minister locally on September first. It is expected that an official and formal installation of his ministryship will be held at an early date to be decided upon by the congregation. Congregation Shearith Israel is the oldest synagogue in Canada, having been founded in Montreal in 1768, according to the Sephardic Minhag. It and its membership have a great civic, historical, patriotic and spiritual tradition linked up with 177 years' growth of Canada. Chronologically it is the fourth synagogue established in America, north of Rio Grande.

In my Shabbat Shuva sermon, I made the use of narratives and stories to assist me in teaching the basic principles of Judaism to my congregants. In those days, Torah learning was not what it has become today. A rabbi could not assume that the men and women in the pews understood the simplest of Judaism's essential messages.

Here is the gist of my Yom Kippur sermon:

> "At this solemn moment I wish to take this opportunity to greet you as your new Rabbi. As I stand on this pulpit tonight, I can't help but visualize to myself in my mind's eye, and to transfer myself thousands of miles away to the cities of Spain and Portugal, and many years back in another time and era. And I feel so humble to think that I am speaking to many of you who had the privilege to have heard words of Torah, and teachings from those who were spiritual giants in Israel."

Yet, the role of the rabbi at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue was quite different from that of the rabbi in Ashkenazic synagogues. In the latter, the rabbi is expected to serve his congregational duties during the week and deliver sermons on the weekends. Yet at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, with its unique set of customs, the rabbi is also expected to play the part of *chazan*, in charge of leading the highly nuanced prayer services. The Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue prayer services, developed from the Spanish and North African Sephardic communities, are rich in

tradition and are completely different than the ones heard in Ashkenazic synagogues. This necessitated that I learn and master the Synagogue's customs and difficult melodies. Therefore, during the interregnum summer, aside from having completed my ordination requirements, I spent a great deal of time learning how to lead services in the ways of the Spanish and Portuguese tradition. To accomplish this, I spent time at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue in Manhattan's Upper West Side. There, I came to know Rabbi David de Sola Pool and the Reverend Abraham Cardozo. My primary method of study was to visit the synagogue on the weekends — I rented a room near Central Park West — and to pay close attention to the Shabbat services at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue.

This is where my wife-to-be, Pepa, enters my story. Pepa and I met at a party on New Year's in 1945. When I saw Pepa, I was immediately taken by her beauty. At that time, she was approximately 5'8" with a lovely figure. She had long black hair, beautiful eyes, and olive skin. Besides her physical beauty, Pepa carried with her a continental spirit and approach that one rarely found in American women. Combining these attributes with the fact that she was an Orthodox woman was impossible to find. Yet, there she was. Whenever we went out together, she immediately drew the attention and awe of those present. Another aspect that separated her from the other eligible New York girls was that Pepa had experienced so many varying cultures in Europe. Her life and experience in Portugal in particular did much to mold her captivating personality.

Pepa and I started to go out together shortly thereafter. As the romance accelerated and became more active and serious, I frequently found myself eating Shabbat meals at the Wakmann household. Mr. Wakmann preferred the company and services at Moriah Synagogue over that of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue. Consequently, each week on Shabbat, after *davening* concluded at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, I would hurry over to the Wakmanns for Shabbat lunch.

This went on until the summer of 1945 when I finished my *semicha* requirements and subsequently took a few weeks of holiday to visit my family in San Francisco. While on the West Coast, Pepa and I corresponded constantly through letter writing and even by the high expense long distance telephone call. By this time, I was sure that I would soon propose marriage to Pepa and related my intentions to my overjoyed parents. After the better part of a month in California, I returned to Pepa in New

York. We were officially engaged before Thanksgiving of that year. Again, Montreal's local Jewish newspaper told our story:

> The engagement of Rabbi Joseph Karasick to Miss Pepa Wakmann took place in New York City on Wednesday, October 24th. Rabbi Karasick is the newly-appointed Minister to the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue having first occupied the pulpit two months ago. Miss Wakmann who comes from Lisbon, Portugal, lives at 465 West End in New York City, and prior to her arrival in New York with her family spent several months in Ste Agathe and Montreal.
>
> Miss Wakmann is an accomplished singer and linguist, and while in Portugal worked very ably for thousands of Jewish refugees who passed through Lisbon on their way to other countries. Her father, Mr. Icko Wakmann, is a prominent member of the Jewish community in New York City, and now is especially engaged in helping refugee Jews to become settled in America.
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> Rabbi Karasick is a graduate of Yeshiva College and Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary of New York City, and prior to his coming to New York, delivered sermons at leading pulpits in the United States. The couple will make their home in Montreal after their marriage, which will be held early next year.

Despite all our wonderful news coming out of New York, my focus was in Montreal, where I was hard at work at my new position as rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue. I rented a suite a few blocks away from the synagogue. I was immediately taken by the beauty of the city and the ornate rituals of the synagogue. To give just one example, on the first night of Pesach and on *Kol Nidrei* night, men would appear to services in white ties and coattails and women adorned in expensive evening gowns. I was very happy there. My congregants took me in almost immediately, and several traveled down to Manhattan for our wedding.

As far as American Orthodox Judaism was concerned, at this time, the most prominent face was that of philanthropist Mendel Gottesman. One of the prestigious jobs for students at Yeshiva College was to tutor one of the Gottesman grandchildren. As luck would have it, I was chosen by the school's administration to teach Herman and Frances Gottesman's daughter, Sara. Frances Gottesman was the daughter of another prominent Jewish lay leader, Samuel Stavisky. I became close with the extended family

as well. I mention this point because, concomitantly, Glikla Wakmann, my mother-in-law to be, developed a relationship with Frances Gottesman's mother. Thus, as my relationship with Pepa grew, Mrs. Stavisky, a strong-willed Jewish socialite, took it upon herself to help her "immigrant" friends make the necessary arrangements for the engagement, and subsequent wedding on March 3, 1946 at the Essex House, a prestigious and lavish Manhattan hotel.

The engagement period before the wedding was certainly very hectic. I was firmly rooted in my work in Montreal. To maintain contact with Pepa and my family on various matters — most of which related to the impending wedding — I communicated almost daily by letter, Western Union telegram, and the telephone. I returned once to New York for our engagement, and once more for New Year's Day. Pepa, with her more flexible schedule, made the time — accompanied by her sister — to travel to Montreal on several occasions. Also, it should not go unmentioned that the traveling in those days was not at all like today. Most of the travel was performed by car or train, rarely by plane. Wealthy businessmen and some others under special circumstances paid the large sum of money to fly on the small DC-3s, which, despite the considerable turbulence, could fly one from New York to Montreal in about three hours.

The wedding itself was a magnificent affair. It was simply unheard of for a young *yeshiva* out-of-town student to get married at the magnificent Essex House. More important to me, though, were the attendees. First of all, it was the first time my father had been in New York. (He had a brother, David, who lived in Newark, N.J. whom he had not seen for over fifty years. I became very close with Uncle David during my time in New York, and he was so kind and loving to me.) Of course, my mother and grandfather also came in from San Francisco for the wedding, as well as relatives who were living in New York. My grandfather served as my *mesader kiddushin* with the assistance of the Rav. Many of my other teachers — Dr. Belkin, Mr. Sar, Rabbi Poleyeff, Rabbi De Sola Pool and Rabbi Jung — also officiated. Rabbi de Sola Pool, the dignified leader of Manhattan's Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, who prepared me for my post in Montreal, spoke under our *chuppah*. Of course, it was very heartening to see all of my old friends from the *yeshiva* who celebrated with me with song and dance. As well, even though I was serving as a rabbi in Montreal for less than one year at this point, at least thirty of my congregants made the trip down to New



Rabbi Katzman, center, dancing at the author and Pepa's wedding

York for our wedding. For them, it was especially nice to see their young rabbi being tended to by such great American rabbinic personalities and they made sure to spread this point throughout the Montreal community in the days and weeks that followed the affair.

In those days in the New York scene, the only *Sheva Berachot* observed were the ones that fell out on Shabbat. Our *Sheva Berachot* took place at the Breakers Hotel in Atlantic City, where the Wakmanns were resting up after their first experience with an American wedding. By coincidence, Rabbi Jung and his wife happened to be staying in the same hotel and immediately took it upon themselves to arrange for the *Sheva Berachot* on Shabbat.

Immediately after our wedding, Pepa and I packed our things and headed for our new life in Montreal. As a wedding present, my father-in-law bought us a beautiful brand new car. The model, a Hudson, was a popular one after the War. Since I had not yet learned to drive, my father-in-law hired a chauffeur to drive us for the 11-hour trip up to Montreal.

Shortly before the wedding, I made the necessary arrangements to





The author's and Pepa's wedding, March 3, 1946





move my belongings from Stanley Street in Montreal to our new apartment in Westmount, a more upscale Montreal suburb. My salary from the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue was three thousand Canadian dollars — considerably more than was paid to the average starting rabbi — and was more than adequate to cover the rent for our furnished four-room apartment, and pay for maid service as well. It seemed that the hard work the *yeshiva* and I put into my rabbinical career was finally being actualized — I was ecstatic. The move was very difficult on Pepa, however. During most of her upbringing years in Portugal, she did not live within the kind of Jewish community that we have come to expect in America. As she packed her bags for Montreal, she was filled with anxiety over the prospect of life as a rabbi's wife. My wife was shy by nature. Therefore, thoughts of communal responsibilities and talking to each and every member of her husband's *shul* on a constant basis truly frightened her in the beginning. I was always hopeful that she would adjust. Indeed, we were far from alone in Montreal. I was developing friendships with the rabbinic and lay population. My members were most cordial and took us in warmly. They did everything to make our lives as comfortable and pleasing as possible. Pepa, too, reacquainted with friends and some cousins she had known from the short time her family lived in Montreal. Nonetheless, Pepa missed her family dearly.

Be that as it may, my life in the rabbinate was starting out on a very smooth path. As I reflect on this time in my life, I do not recall entering into a single conflict with my members. Truth be told, there were several practices and behaviors demonstrated by the general congregation which did not please me at that time. Young and confident as I was, I did not hesitate to raise these concerns to the president of the Synagogue, as well as other prominent members, who accepted my decisions in turn. So long as I explained to them which issues were problematic and how they did not conform to traditional Jewish practice, they did not see any reason to argue. Although I was a young fellow, the congregation gave me a great deal of respect.

The Synagogue's traditional Spanish and Portuguese prayer service was sacrosanct. That prayer service, held most dear to Sephardic Jewry, dates back to the Bevis Marks Synagogue in London which was founded in 1701. The Bevis Marks Synagogue is the "cathedral synagogue" of the Spanish and Portuguese communities in Canada, England, Holland and

the United States, among other locations. During my time of involvement in the community, the Chief Rabbi of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews of the British Commonwealth was Rabbi Dr. Solomon Gaon. Despite his title, Rabbi Gaon, known in his circles as the Chacham, was the supreme religious authority of the Spanish and Portuguese communities throughout the globe. On one of his visits to our community in Canada, I had the privilege to host Rabbi Gaon, and subsequently kept a warm relationship with him.

I should also note that it was at this time that Pepa and I traveled to San Francisco on a TWA flight. It was the first time Pepa and I flew on an airplane. The flight made five stops before reaching California, and our flight was more than 25 hours long!

Many of my adventures in Montreal undoubtedly paralleled other young men in the rabbinate. One example quickly comes to mind. One day, I was sitting in my study and a member of the synagogue came to see me with a young female companion. I invited them to sit down, whereupon my congregant introduced me to his French Canadian girlfriend. Then he informed me that she was pregnant, and he wanted me to convert her. I made the wise decision of asking for some time to consult my mentors.

In something of a panic, I immediately called the Rav in Boston, as I had many times during those years. He told me that I needed to convert her. Pepa was incredibly helpful during this episode — the young woman only spoke French, which Pepa spoke fluently. At the time of the conversion, I had assembled a *beit din* of three people to oversee the process. The members were me, Rabbi Wachtfogel (the Senior Rabbi of Montreal's rabbinate), and Rabbi Eliyahu Chazan. When the time came for this young woman to dip in the *mikveh*, the three of us stood behind a sheet to give her privacy. I turned away at that time, and Rabbi Wachtfogel grabbed my shoulder and ordered me to look and observe to assure that she immersed herself in the *mikveh* properly. As a member of a *beit din*, it was no time to be modest, he explained.

Within Montreal, there were over twenty Orthodox synagogues, and just one Reform synagogue and one Conservative synagogue. Early on, perhaps naively, I accepted an invitation extended by the Reform rabbi to address his Temple sisterhood, a move that my colleagues in the rabbinate did not approve of. Montreal's Orthodox community also boasted a well-structured *yeshiva* system. In fact, I took on a teaching position

offered to me by Rabbi Chazan, the great Lithuanian scholar and head of the recently founded Yeshiva Merkaz Hatorah in Montreal. It was truly an Orthodox stronghold. The centerpiece of this community was undoubtedly Congregation Shaar Hashomayim in Westmount. The vast majority of affluent Jews — the Bronfman family, prominent among them — were members of Shaar Hashomayim, by far the most prestigious traditional synagogue in North America at this time.

Although I was not their rabbi, several of the Shaar Hashomayim members more or less adopted me shortly after I started in Montreal. I also became very friendly with the rabbi of Shaar Hashomayim, Rabbi Abramowitz, who, unbeknownst to me, was considering grooming me to be his successor — I vividly recall our conversation when he asked me, formally and straightforwardly, to replace him as the spiritual leader of Shaar Hashomayim. For a young rabbi of 25 years old to lead the most prominent synagogue in North America was a dream come true, in every way. However (and this is an example of how life can certainly play tricks on you), one of the prominent members of Shaar Hashomayim's European Orthodox aristocracy found out the rabbi's intentions and, with his great influence, flattened the rabbi's proposal. The very wealthy congregant argued that were I to leave the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue after so much time and energy was invested into building it up, the congregation would be left in a lurch. This was undoubtedly a reasonable argument which I accepted dutifully, even before I had much time to consider the rabbi's offer. Nevertheless, I often wondered for many years whether or not I would have ever left the rabbinate had I become the rabbi of Shaar Hashomayim.

My leaving the rabbinate was no voluntary action and took serious soul-searching on my part. By now, Yitzchak Wakmann had firmly established the American branch of the watch business he had created in Lisbon. Before the war years concluded, the business was extremely profitable for my father-in-law. Indeed, he was the great beneficiary of circumstance. During the war, both Switzerland and Portugal were neutral. Not willing to jeopardize their neutrality with Hitler in control of Western Europe, it was very difficult for western countries to obtain Swiss-made watches. However, with his partners in Lisbon, my father-in-law was one of the few in America who could arrange for timepieces to be manufactured in Switzerland and shipped to the United States through Portugal. Placed in

this unique position, nearly all of my father-in-law's merchandise was sold before it got off the boat.

While Yitzchak Wakmann had very little competition during the wartime years, things changed greatly once the Allied Forces returned home. When the war ended, many others saw the opportunity to sell timepieces to the American military and civilian population, which was deprived of these commodities during the wartime years. My father-in-law, though well-versed in international language of business, was still struggling to learn English and was somewhat alone with no sons. He also needed more staff to help run his business, Therefore, in the early months of 1947, he approached me and asked for my help in the watch business. The Wakmanns held to the European prejudice against marrying one's daughter to a rabbi. The thought was that a rabbi could never properly support a family. Secretly, Pepa agreed with her parents and gradually convinced me to join her father in his business. It never dawned on me that I would be persuaded to leave the rabbinate, to direct my energies toward the business world — a world about which I knew absolutely nothing. Upon his call for help, I had begun a months-long process of soulful meditation. As for my wife, although she was in favor of the move, she genuinely felt horrible for the internal conflict she knew I was experiencing. She knew that serving as a community rabbi was the mission I had set out for myself, and I had been excelling in the rabbinate, albeit for only a short amount of time. Nevertheless, after great counsel, I reluctantly agreed to work for my father-in-law.

As this was going on, as a result of my success in building up the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, the congregation had come close to finalizing a deal to purchase land in a Montreal suburb. Plans were already in the works to build a magnificent synagogue building, one that could compete with the Shaar Hashomayim crowd. In addition, the synagogue board voted to double my salary. As can be expected, therefore, when I somberly came and informed the Synagogue leadership that I would be leaving, it was as though cold water had been dashed upon their communal dreams. I felt their grief and tried to relay my own frustrations over the matter, to explain my predicament to them. There was simply nothing I could do.

Although the consternation was evident in my composure, I never faulted my father-in-law. Yitzchak Wakmann was the consummate

businessman. As such, he saw this as an excellent opportunity for me, his son-in-law. Moreover, one has to realize that it was a culture shock for the Wakmanns, as mentioned, coming from a European mentality, for their eldest daughter to marry a pulpit rabbi. To them, my aspirations were noble but financially limited. A rabbi is a very nice occupation, they must have thought in their most optimistic of moods, but a rabbi would always be subservient to the whims of the congregation. They could not fully grasp my dream. I understood this.

On the flipside, the one person who could not fathom my decision in this matter was my great teacher and President of Yeshiva University. Indeed, when Dr. Belkin heard that I was going to leave the rabbinate, he was furious. "After all of the time and energy we put into you, one of our stellar rabbis, how could you think about leaving the rabbinate — no matter what the rewards on the other side may be!" he demanded. As a result of that one-on-one meeting, Dr. Belkin called for an internal conference between him and me, as well as the Rav and Mr. Sar. In that fateful gathering, there was a discussion back and forth, and Dr. Belkin, who saw it as his mission to supply North America with RIETS rabbis, adamantly reiterated his refusal to permit me to leave. In the end, my greatest supporter was the practical Mr. Sar who half-jokingly expressed his belief that as a businessman, I would become successful and help support the *yeshiva*. The Rav, too, reluctantly sided with Mr. Sar and gave permission for me to leave, but on the condition that I strenuously not neglect my Talmudic studies. With my side in the majority, I was granted permission to leave the rabbinate, and return to New York to work for my father-in-law.

Truthfully, though, I must say that although I left the rabbinate, the rabbinate never left me. Not a day goes by since that time when I do not consider what my life would have been like had I remained in Montreal and pursued my rabbinical dream. In my humble opinion, I believe I would have continued to succeed in the rabbinate, as my skills and talents were more than adequate.

Later on, I defended my departure from the field when I was invited to deliver a paper before the Rabbinical Alumni of Yeshiva University in 1963. Owing to my communal concerns, I reported that a full 32% of the rabbinical alumni were not advancing to rabbinic positions, opting instead for professional or business opportunities. That said, I needed to first defend my situation. "I recall in my particular case," I explained in that lecture,

"that Dr. Belkin fought like a tiger protecting its cub to do all in his power to prevent it. We spent hours in his office discussing it back and forth. The result was that even though I did ultimately leave the professional rabbinate, I did not leave the 'actual rabbinate,' and I did not leave those fields where I, as a *musmach*, felt I could do the most good given my connection to the Orthodox Jewish community." With that, I continued to discuss those who do leave the rabbinate. I conjectured that those who leave the rabbinate do so for psychological reasons — they feel that they are under qualified or unable to absorb the daily stress and strain of the rabbinate. What is the role of this *musmach* in organizational life? I concluded that his role was two-fold:

1. The role he himself plays in the leadership of the organization
2. His importance in attracting to that organization the involvement of others who heretofore stayed away.

Just two days before we departed Montreal, doctors informed Pepa that she was pregnant. This news — which we shared with our families once we returned to New York — made for a nervous and uncomfortable car ride. Nevertheless, beyond the expected joy surrounding this news, it was even more jovial given the fact that this would be the Wakmann's first grandchild. Our first baby, Bernice, named after Pepa's maternal grandmother, was born. Truth to tell, Bernice was due on June 25, 1947. Incidentally, Pepa was planning a surprise party in honor of my birthday on June 7, just ten days before Jack and Anita's wedding. As fate would have it, I had a wonderful birthday present as Bernice was born on Shabbat morning, on June 7, now *our* birthday. Consequently, instead of celebrating my birthday with our friends, I was placed in charge of informing the invited guests that the party was canceled. Of course, canceling the birthday affair was of little concern, as our family — including my mother who came in by train from California — was stunned with joy over our happy addition.

All this excitement notwithstanding, the first day's entering a business office after the daily thrill of rabbinic life in Canada was traumatic for me. I had descended from the very heights of rabbinic service to sitting with all the other laypeople in the synagogue pews. For Pepa, the move to the Upper West Side was just perfect — she was reunited with her dear family. For the first few weeks back, we moved in with Pepa's parents and then relocated to a hotel apartment on 81st Street and Columbus Avenue. It was

not long before that we found an apartment on West End Avenue. Pepa and her mother spent weeks shopping to furnish our new home.

For me, though, it was a major psychological adjustment. One major issue was to locate a suitable synagogue to make my spiritual home. Just a few blocks from our apartment, there was a modest *shtiebel*, led by a Rabbi Yeruchum, at which I *davened* in our early period on the Upper West Side. Yet I constantly found myself sneaking into the back seats of the sanctuary, hoping no one would recognize me, all the while recalling the days at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue where I sat at the front of the *shul* with everyone's eyes on me. It was distressing.

The one who understood me best was Rabbi Leo Jung, the rabbi of the famed Jewish Center. He grasped my heartache and was very sympathetic to me. To help me cope with this most uncomfortable transition, Rabbi Jung arranged for me to lecture regularly in the Jewish Center, and to serve on other semi-rabbinic projects. For this, I was and will be eternally grateful.

In a sense, I was doing anything I could to get through this transition period, carefully trying to find my place within the West Side community. I was searching to find ways to serve the community in a similar vein to how I had served my congregants in Montreal. I joined several Jewish organizations, including Mizrachi, the Orthodox Zionist organization of which I quickly became an active member. I also became an officer of the Yeshiva University Alumni Association, and soon after took a post as the editor of its quarterly journal. On top of that, for a short time, I served as acting rabbi for a smaller synagogue located on 73rd Street, whose spiritual leader, Rabbi Dym, was getting too old to handle the position. My curse, it seems to me upon reflection, was that I left the rabbinate on very good terms.

During those first years of business life, my father-in-law sent me cross-country to meet our customers in person. During one such trip to Denver, Colorado, I was scheduled to spend Shabbat in that community. The synagogue at that time was well known for its devotion to Orthodox tradition with one exception: the congregation refused to establish a *mechitzah* in the sanctuary. The rabbi of that synagogue, Rabbi Hillel Kauver, was an elder statesman who used to correspond frequently with my grandfather. After getting word that I was in town, he invited me to deliver the Shabbat sermon. I readily accepted.

Apparently, my speech was so effective and so well received that he immediately offered me his post following his impending retirement. The synagogue was very wealthy and offered me the large annual sum of $12,000. This was truly the only time after my stint in Montreal that I considered returning to the rabbinate. However, I eventually turned down the offer, mostly because I believed that the congregation had no intention of ever establishing a *mechitzah*.

Rabbi Soloveitchik was an enormous source of strength for me during this adjustment period. As close as I was with him during my years at Yeshiva University, it paled in comparison to our developing relationship at the current time. From the moment we relocated back to Manhattan, I was in constant contact with the Rav, making sure to attend his lectures whenever I could find the time, and serving as his unofficial chauffeur whenever he needed to attend rabbinic conferences. As I came to be more mature and trustworthy in his eyes, the Rav discussed many personal and professional issues with me, of which very few people, if any, were aware. My father-in-law was particularly proud of my relationship with the Rav, for whom he had developed a profound respect after I introduced them to each other at my wedding.

During these years, although I was no longer a practicing rabbi, I wanted very much to stay affiliated with the rabbinical world by registering as a member of the Rabbinical Council of America. I was well aware that it would be difficult for me, now a layperson, to gain admission to the RCA. Therefore, I asked the Rav if he would lobby on my behalf. Rabbi Soloveitchik tried three times to use his influence to get me RCA membership. However, the powers that were at the RCA were so opposed to my candidacy that they even dared to oppose the Rav, something utterly unheard of in his day.

Another important episode involving the Rav at this time had to do with Moriah Synagogue. Moriah, located on Manhattan's Upper West Side at 80th Street and Broadway, was established in the late thirties, before the Holocaust, by immigrant diamond merchants from Antwerp. It was a most unusual congregation comprised of a very unusual type of Orthodox Jew found in America. These devoutly Orthodox Jews were extremely wealthy, lived in luxurious homes, and carried themselves with pride and sophistication. My father-in-law was most comfortable attending Moriah. I would often accompany him, and I was even elected as a

synagogue officer. Another unusual aspect of this medium-sized synagogue was its spiritual leader, Rabbi Samuel Brot, the former member of the Polish Parliament and Chief Rabbi of Antwerp. A longtime Mizrachi Zionist during his days as a leader in Antwerp's Shomrei Hada'at Zionist community, Rabbi Brot was eager to resign from his position at Moriah in order to make *aliyah*. Therefore, in 1950, Rabbi Brot accepted the call to join the Beit Din HaGadol in newly-established Israel. After Rabbi Brot's departure, I approached the president of Moriah, Mr. Wolf Liebler, and asked him if he would consider hiring Rabbi Soloveitchik as the *shul*'s new rabbi.

"You must be joking," he insisted at what he believed a preposterous suggestion.

"Would you, at the very least, permit me to speak with the Rav to see if he would be interested in the position?" I asked.

Upon seeing that I was truly serious and recalling my close relationship with the Rav, Mr. Liebler saw no need to reject my offer. "Please," he said finally. "Try!"

I then approached the Rav. "*Rebbe*, I have a proposal for you. How would you like to become the rabbi of Moriah?" The Rav responded with a look of utter disbelief. "You would not have to be bothered with the daily responsibilities of a pastoral rabbi and worry about the congregation's problems, *Rebbe*," I continued. "You would simply be expected to deliver *shiurim* and sermons and take over the prestigious post once held by Rabbi Brot." I had managed to coax the Rav into agreeing to give the proposal some thought. After some time to consider the offer, the Rav unexpectedly accepted the position. As per the agreement, the Rav and his wife stayed in the Upper West Side for Shabbat twice a month and a few holidays. When there, the Soloveitchiks would stay at a nearby hotel and eat many meals, among others, at our home. And, that is how, to the shock of the entire Jewish world, the Rav became the rabbinic leader of the Moriah Synagogue.

In addition to his weekend responsibilities, the Rav began delivering *shiurim* every Tuesday night at Moriah. At that time, Moriah, counting both the men and women's sections, could seat about four hundred people in the sanctuary. Many of his students attended, but the pews were dominated by regular laypeople. On those Tuesday nights, every seat was full. Indeed, it was not very long before Tuesday nights at Moriah became the

Orthodox event of New York City. Individuals who would never utter the Rav's name in public would frequently sneak into the back rows incognito. As it was his way to study every nuance of the text before him, it took the Rav twelve years to complete Tractate *Berachot*, and, after that, he spent four years on *Megillah*. All in all, the Rav served as the rabbi of Moriah for a total of seven years. Those Tuesday night *shiurim*, however, lasted for some 28 years.

Thus, during our first years living on the Upper West Side, as I adjusted to my new role in life, our spiritual home was at Moriah. As the children grew, however, Pepa and I became increasingly aware that we needed a synagogue that could fulfill their needs as well. As much as I did not want to leave Moriah while the Rav was there after all my efforts to bring him there, it had been a few years since he served as Moriah's rabbi in 1958. Therefore, confident that our decision was in the best interests of our family, we became members of the Jewish Center.



Mr. Icko Wakmann, Rishon Litzion Rav Yitzchak Nissim, and the author, c. 1968

Chapter Five

The Family

Pepa and I were blessed to have raised wonderful children and watched as our family blossomed into generations of grandchildren and great-grandchildren. We are truly blessed to have such an expansive family in which all of its descendants are so dedicated to living authentic Jewish lives, committed to the furtherance of the traditions of our faith.

My daughter, Bernice, was born on June 7, 1947 on my twenty-fifth birthday. From that moment, Bernice has been the foundation stone of



The Karasick Family, 1962
The author and Pepa, and (clockwise from left) Bernice, Mark, and George



Bernice as a teenager, the author, and Pepa

our lives. Especially during the last years of Pepa's life, Bernice, who is our neighbor, gave all of her energies and love to Pepa to make her last days as comfortable as possible. Now, it is I who is the beneficiary of this devotion. Bernice is totally dedicated to me. She dotes over me like a mother hen and is, no doubt, thereby adding years to my life.

We sent Bernice to Manhattan Day School for elementary school and to Ramaz for high school. Upon graduation, she attended Stern College for Women. I was always moved by Bernice's ability to maintain so many of her friendships as she progressed through her life. Today she still counts her peers from day school, high school, and college among her dear friends.

Bernice met Rabbi Benjamin Mandel when the two were serving as counselors at a summer camp. Eventually, Bernice introduced me to Benjy, as he is most often called. After a few minutes of talking, I told Benjy that Bernice had mentioned that he was a student of Rabbi Soloveitchik. He confirmed and explained that he had attended the Rav's *shiur* for six years. I promptly told him that many young men claim to be students of the Rav — how much of his Torah had he actually absorbed? Benjy did not flinch at my question. He simply suggested that I ask the Rav himself.

And so, I did just that. The Rav's response to my query was exceptional. He could not cease from praising Benjy's ability to learn and his level head. Even though Benjy has been my associate in business for many years, his business activities have merely served him as an avocation, whereas his vocation has constantly been his love for learning. One might paraphrase Spinoza, and state that my son-in-law is a man "intoxicated" with Torah study. He delivers with regularity between eight and ten *shiurim* per week. He is constantly asked by people in the neighborhood to find time to learn with them. Along with Bernice, Benjy is totally dedicated to me and makes himself available to me at any and all times. I have always looked upon him more as a son than as a son-in-law.

Bernice and Benjy were married in 1967 at the Statler Hilton Hotel. The guest list read like a "Who's Who" of New York's Orthodox community. Dr. Belkin, Rabbi Pinchas Teitz, Rabbi Dovid Lifshitz, Max Stern, Ludwig Jesselson, and Charles Bendheim, as well as leaders of the OU and RCA, comprised a portion of the one thousand guests present that day. Rabbi Soloveitchik would have officiated at the wedding, but that was the tragic year during which he was mourning for his beloved wife, mother, and brother. Instead, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein *zt"l* served as *mesader kiddushin*. That he was present is significant since it was around that time that we were involved in the planning of the World Conference. Reb Moshe represented the *Roshei Yeshiva* who opposed the OU's initiative. However, he was a gentleman of the highest order and did not allow politics to interfere with his respect for and friendship with our family.



Rabbi Moshe Feinstein at Bernice's wedding

Bernice is totally involved in her community's *Chevrah Kaddisha* and *Bikur Cholim* divisions and immerses herself constantly in innumerable *chesed* activities. To occupy her time, Bernice is a preschool teacher at Manhattan Day School. I have been told by many that she is one of the most beloved teachers at that institution. She and Benjy are parents to five children and boast a flock of many grandchildren. All of their sons and sons-in-law are successful in their own areas. Yet, first and foremost is their dedication to the continuity of Torah learning for themselves and their children.

Our second child, Mark, named after two great-grandparents, was born on Rosh Hashanah in 1949. Until he arrived, the Wakmanns had had only daughters and granddaughters. Therefore, during Pepa's second pregnancy, we all hoped for a baby boy. Early in the morning, during *davening* at the Moriah *shul* at Rosh Hashanah, I recall how someone had tapped me on the shoulder to direct me to look at the women's section. There was my sister-in-law, Anita, waving wildly at me. I approached her and she informed me of the news. "*Mazal tov*," she said smiling. "You have a baby boy!" I just could not believe it. I threw off my *tallit* and raced to the

hospital to see Pepa and our new baby. As I walked into the maternity ward, I saw our nurse and asked if it was true that we had a boy. She said, "Yes, you certainly did!" After making sure that I really had a son, I realized that I had to rush back to *shul* to finish Rosh Hashanah *davening*. I ran into the *shul*, back to my seat next to my father-in-law, and informed him of the details of Mark's birth. Soon, the whole synagogue joined in a chorus of *mazal tov*s and best wishes. The *brit* was at the Wakmanns' home on *Shabbat Shuva*. They lived in a large apartment on the ninth floor and, although some didn't use elevator, there was a huge crowd present for that joyous occasion.

Mark, like his older sister, attended Manhattan Day School. For high school, we sent him to the Yeshiva University High School and then to Yeshiva College. While in college, Mark was determined to obtain *semicha*,



Mark at his bar mitzvah

to be a *talmid* in the Rav's *shiur*, and to remain very close to the Rav. It so happened that Rabbi Mordecai Feuerstein (the son of Moses Feuerstein, the prominent leader of the Boston Jewish community) served as the Rav's *shamash* for two years. While Mark was studying for rabbinical ordination in the early 1970s, Rabbi Feuerstein recommended Mark as his replacement as the Rav's *shamash*. In this capacity, Mark functioned as the Rav's personal secretary, as well. No one could see the Rav without Mark's approval. As prominent individuals came from across the country and overseas, they first had to schedule an appointment with my son, the Rav's "gatekeeper." Often, these individuals asked me to intervene with Mark for an appointment with Mark to meet with the Rav.

While I was President of the Orthodox Union, I attended one of NCSY's annual conventions. For some reason, Mark decided to join me. He was in college at that time and just started his duties with the Rav. At the convention, he was dazzled by a beautiful young girl, Linda Ulevitch. Linda was from Peoria, Illinois. Linda's family made up a handful of the some four hundred Jews living there. Her father, Joe, was in the furniture business and was one of the leading laypeople of their Orthodox community. In fact, the Ulevitch family built the *mikveh* and the *beit midrash* in Peoria.

It was only a matter of time before Mark and Linda were married after that first encounter. Joseph Ulevitch and his wife came to New York to plan the wedding shortly after the couple announced their engagement. The Ulevitches wanted their daughter to get married in the Waldorf Astoria. Given our wide circle, the cost of a wedding there would be exorbitant. But Joe was insistent. He asked me to give him a day to bargain with the hotel. When he returned the next day, he beamed with pride as he explained how he achieved an unthinkable bargain for the wedding at the Waldorf. I learned from that episode how a good businessman from Peoria could outsmart the bright, tough people of New York.

Mark and Linda were married in 1972. They lived in the Teaneck apartments during the first years of their marriage. Even though Mark was a newlywed, he still maintained his position with the Rav. The Rav constantly told Mark to leave him late at night and go home to his wife. Just as a groom is exempt from participating in war, the Rav explained, so too should Mark be exempt from spending too many hours serving his teacher.

When Mark's first son, Zevi, was born, Mark asked the Rav if he [the Rav] would attend the *pidyon haben*. Despite the Rav's close relationship

with both Mark and me, he could not immediately accept our invitation due to his demanding schedule. But a day or two before the event, the Rav told Mark that he would be able to attend. The *pidyon haben* was held at the Esplanade Hotel on West End Avenue on March 20, 1974. It was truly a beautiful affair, attended by hundreds of guests. As it happened, however, Joseph Ulevitch, my *mechutan*, was very sick at the time with cancer. His family had come in for the event from Peoria, Illinois, but he was not well enough to make the trip. Despite the fact that tape-recording was far from the norm in the seventies, Linda wanted to tape the proceedings to send the discourses to her father. There was really nothing to record — or recount — for most of the affair. Then, I leaned toward the Rav and asked if he would like to say a few words. To everyone's amazement, the Rav acknowledged my request and pulled out of his suit pocket a twenty-page manuscript! It immediately became clear to me that while the Rav delayed in answering our request for his attendance, he was in reality preparing an incredibly thoughtful and riveting discourse, which is one of his most famous. Through recordings and the Internet, thousands upon thousands of people have heard this discourse. I frequently tell my Zevi that his is likely the most famous *pidyon haben* in history. In that half-hour-long lecture, the Rav explicated his famous description of the "Jewish grandfather" and the relationship that each individual has to the *Mesorah*. It was a marvelous speech and a wonderful compliment to Mark and our entire family.[3]

Mark's relationship with the Rav compelled the latter to do something that he rarely undertook. Although he mentored many, Rabbi Soloveitchik rarely interceded on behalf of his students. It was not that it was beneath him. Rather, the Rav was a humble person and was reluctant to get involved in personal matters. However, as Mark prepared to interview for his first rabbinic post in St. Louis, the Rav communicated with Rabbi Menachem Tzvi Eichenstein, the leading rabbi of that city. Because of the Rav's input and recommendation, Mark was welcomed by that community and its rabbinic leaders.

I had actually encountered Rabbi Eichenstein when I was invited by his Vaad Hair to speak in St. Louis shortly before the Six-Day War. That community was a major supporter of the OU, and I graciously accepted

3. Refer to Appendix V on page 185 for excerpts of the Rav's speech.

their invitation. I spoke about Egyptian President Nasser and his role in threatening the safety of Israel. After my analysis of the Middle-East situation, one member of the audience asked if I thought there would be war. I responded that I believed war was imminent. My comments were broadcast throughout the Jewish community and through the Jewish press. As it turned out, I was the first American Jewish leader to correctly predict the ensuing confrontation.

Mark served as rabbi of the synagogue in St. Louis' Chesterfield area for some five years. After that, he decided that the rabbinate was not something he desired for a career, and he returned to New York. Mark joined our business just as we were beginning to invest in the gold jewelry market. Trading gold, a commodity that is always fluctuating in price, was a lucrative but dangerous way of life. But Mark proved to be a careful businessman, constantly monitoring commodities and evaluating our investments. Though Mark did well for himself in my business, he ventured on his own into the world of high-end real estate. Mark and Linda have four sons and many grandchildren.

I preface our next family addition with a related anecdote. My grandfather was not happy that I left the rabbinate. However, he stressed that I maintain a high level of Torah learning and find time for it alongside my other work and family responsibilities. To this end, after relocating to New York, I was very fortunate to find a very fine *chevruta* in Maurice Ehrman, whose family were members of Moriah. A diamond merchant by trade, Maurice had been to *yeshiva* and really knew how to learn. We became close friends and continued our *chevruta* for sixteen years.



George at age four

The following episode involving Maurice is an amusing story. The event took place about a month after our family had moved to our large apartment at 470 West End Avenue. As Maurice and I were

quietly learning in my study, Pepa, nine months pregnant with our third child, knocked on the door. "Joe," she said with a concerned grin. "I think I'm ready." I never forgot the shocked look on Maurice's face as he leaped out of his chair toward the front door. George, our youngest child, was born on Memorial Day (which he amusingly would refer to as "My-Morial-Day) in 1956.

Like his older brother, George attended Manhattan Day School and Yeshiva University High School. However, before commencing his studies at Yeshiva College, George went abroad to study at Yeshivat Kerem B'Yavneh. Although it is very common today throughout the Jewish community, George and his peers were some of the first generation to reserve that gap year between high school and college for study at Israeli *yeshivot*. Pepa was hesitant to allow her youngest child to study so far away, although



Family ice skating outing, c. 1970

she wasn't quite sure that George would gain more in Israel than learning here in America.

As fate would have it, a month after he arrived, the Yom Kippur War broke out. I do not know exactly how he did it, but George managed to hitchhike his way after Yom Kippur to the home of my brother- and sister-in law, Margie and David Zwiebel. But until he made his way there, there was no way for us to contact him. Pepa was frantic, repeating constantly to me, "I told you not to send him away from home." George spent the weeks of the War at his aunt's home. When the fighting was over, George made it clear to us of his intention of completing his year of study. He finished the year and returned to New York to attend Yeshiva University.

Following his undergraduate studies at Yeshiva University, George enrolled in Cardozo Law School, which had just opened its doors the prior year. He practiced law for six months before he decided that he would prefer to join in my business. I asked if he would consider continuing with *semicha*, but he was not receptive. To this day, George often tells me that he regrets that he did not consider obtaining *semicha*.

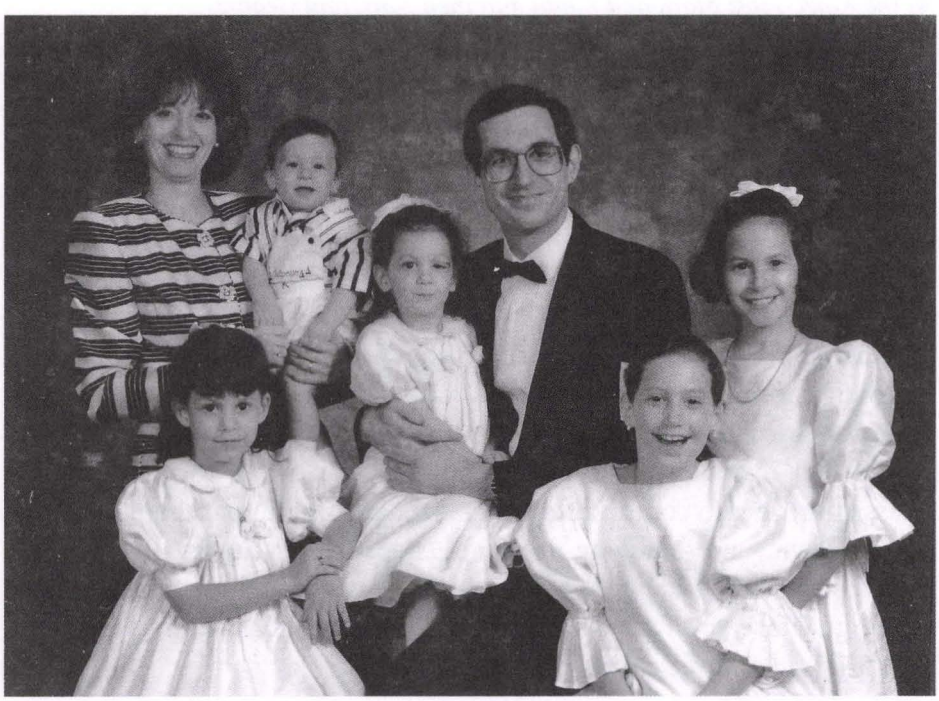
The next important stage in George's life intersects with Pepa's social life and mine. In the 1970s we began spending time in the mountains in



The Rieders (center)

upstate New York. Several of our Manhattan friends had summer homes and apartments up there, and we were frequently invited to travel and spend weekends with them. One family with which we became well acquainted was the Rieder family. Yaakov Rieder was a Hungarian Jew whose entire family survived the Holocaust. His wife, Edith, was a direct descendent of the Chasam Sofer and Rabbi Akiva Eiger. Yaakov was a prominent individual, especially within the Agudath Israel community, of which he was the longtime treasurer. More importantly, he had a charming daughter, Denise. Our son George began courting her one summer and they were married in 1982. As a result of their budding relationship and subsequent marriage, the Karasicks and the Rieders became close friends. And, even though we were on "opposite sides of the fence," so to speak, we never let politics interfere with our relationship.

Shortly after the wedding, Yaakov asked if I would mind if he took George into his very successful real estate company, Rieder Enterprises. George had been working with me for about two years at that point, but I was happy that someone else was willing to further hone his professional



George, Denise, and family, c. 1994



At the Kotel, 1995; Mark and Linda and their sons, and George

development. As it turned out, George had the ideal skill set for this line of work. Currently, he is the CEO of Rieder Enterprises. Originally, Yaakov was partners with his brother, Harry. After Yaakov passed away, George took his father-in-law's place and became Harry's partner. After Harry passed away, George became the CEO of the entire enterprise. George and Denise have six children — five daughters and a son — and many grandchildren.

I cannot conclude my discussion about my children without mentioning their commitment to *chesed* and *tzedakah*. Mark and George are legendary figures in the realm of *chesed*. I recall a time when my sons would joke that they could not escape my shadow. Whenever they endeavored to assist the Jewish community, others would compliment them by saying how well they are following in my footsteps. Now, the situation is completely reversed. Whenever I have the opportunity to participate on the communal level, individuals approach me and speak about the wonderful activities of my three children and their spouses.





The author and Pepa





Chapter Six

The Business

When my father-in-law was away, sometimes for weeks at a time, my brother-in-law Jack Walker and I oversaw Wakmann Watch Co. in his stead. As my father-in-law grew older, he asked me to manage his trips to Switzerland. My first solo trip to Switzerland — and Europe in general — took place in 1954. But even before then, I had begun to travel often and attended the country's largest jewelry show held in Chicago every winter. The major purpose of that 1954 trip to Europe was to resolve some conflicts that had emerged with several of our suppliers.



Wakmann Watches, the new age in watches

During the trip, I was away from Pepa and the children for a month. I had never seen Europe, and a whole different world opened up for me. I stayed in Paris for Purim and clearly recall huddling in a small *shul* one rainy night, while others around me were wrapped in their coats. In

Switzerland, I learned a great deal about the international business world. Thankfully, there was no language barrier for me. I learned to speak German — a language used by most Swiss — at a proficient level at Yeshiva College. English, however, would have been suitable enough for me, as most people in the international marketplace spoke it. After that, I began to fly to Europe for business meetings two or three times annually. And it was not long after, that I succeeded my father-in-law as president of the company, just seven years after my start at Wakmann Watch Co.

As a watch importing company, our entire inventory at that time came from Switzerland. Initially, it was my father-in-law who traveled to Geneva. From his time in Lisbon, especially during the war years, my father-in-law became well acquainted with chronograph watches as well as stopwatches. When he immigrated to the United States and opened up his new company here, he brought with him an inventory of these watches. The majority of Americans had never seen these so-called "complicated watches" in which he specialized.



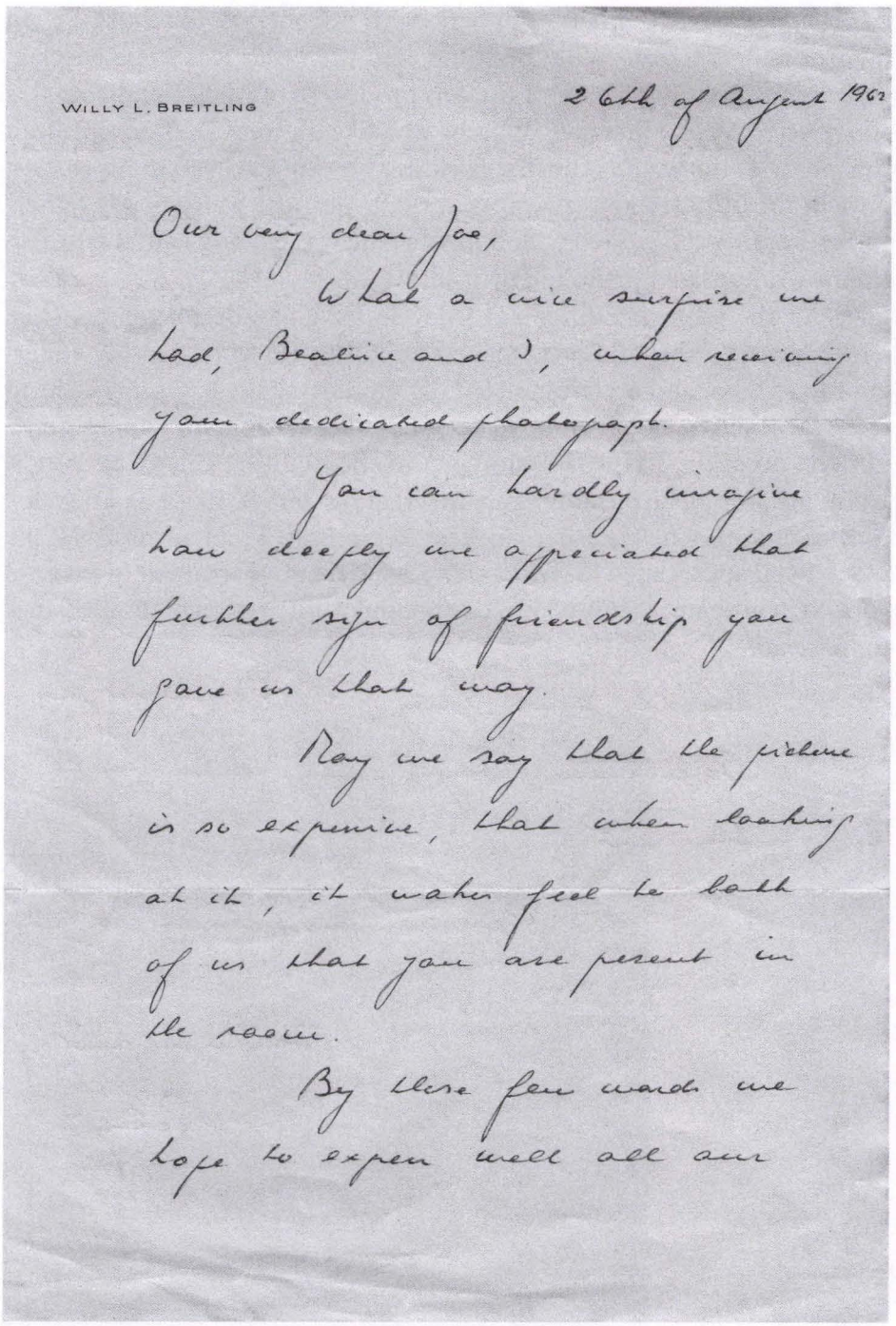
The author addressing international watch conference

There were two main suppliers with whom we did business in Switzerland. One was Willy Breitling, and the other was René Meylan. At present, Breitling is one of the top producers of higher end complex timepieces. When I first met Willy, he was, like us, trying to find a place in this phase of the watch industry. Breitling was known even in his earliest days in the industry as a specialist in multi-purpose watches. My father-in-law became acquainted with him when he was dealing with the British military in the late thirties in Portugal.

Over the years, Breitling and I developed a wonderful relationship, which extended beyond our business ventures. He respected my adherence to religion and accommodated my unique schedule. On my visits to Geneva, Breitling would often invite me and Pepa to join him on his yacht. On one occasion, I visited Breitling at his home in La Chaux-de-Fonds. Upon my arrival, he proudly explained that his wife Beatrice had traveled to Zurich to purchase kosher chicken. Regretfully, I had to inform Willy that while I appreciated his wife's effort, we were not permitted to eat food cooked in his pans. While he was disappointed, he respected my allegiance to *halachah*.



Pepa and Willy Breitling, c. 1960



WILLY L. BREITLING

26th of August 1962

Our very dear Joe,

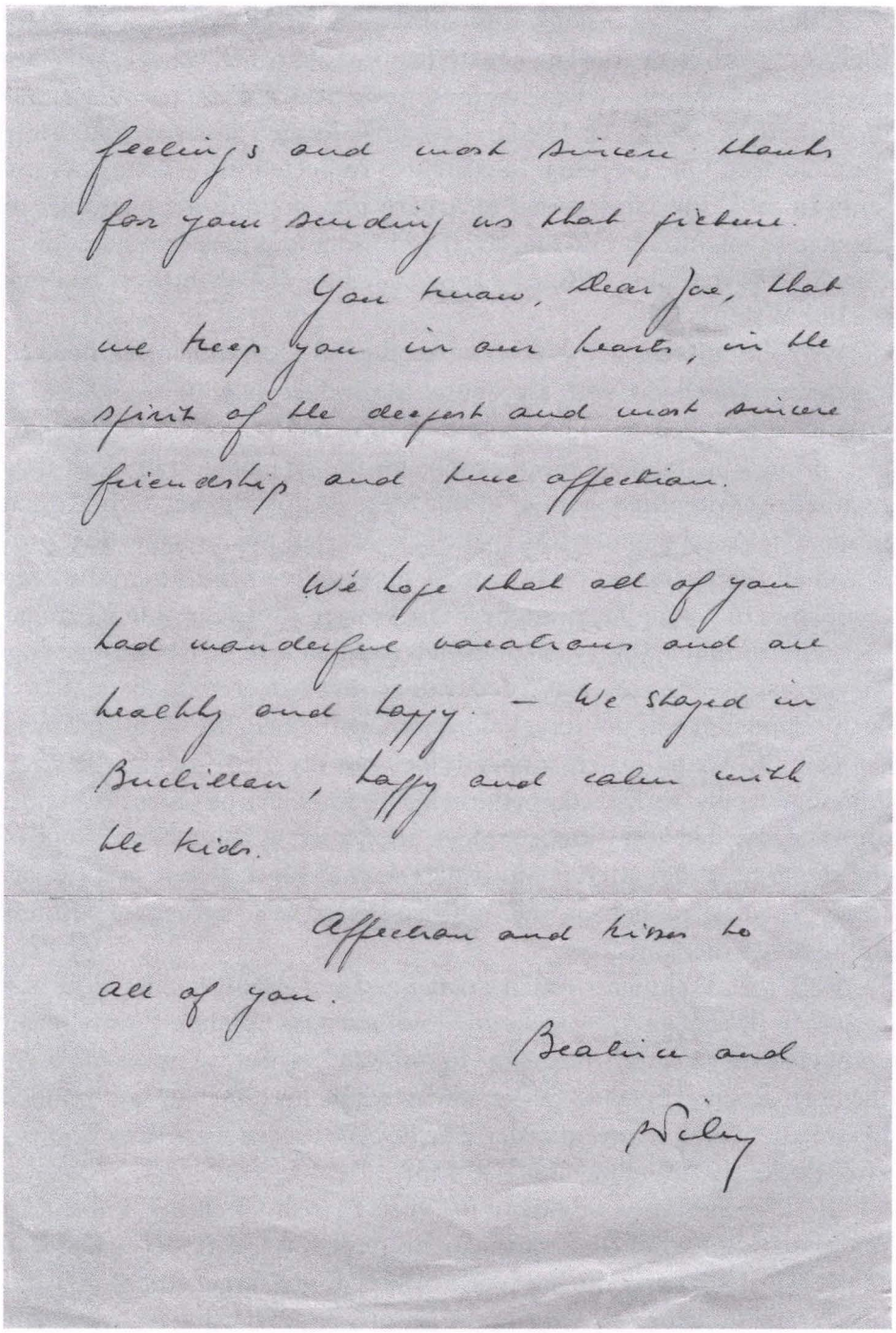
What a nice surprise we had, Beatrice and I, when receiving your dedicated photograph.

You can hardly imagine how deeply we appreciated that further sign of friendship you gave us that way.

May we say that the picture is so expressive, that when looking at it, it makes feel to both of us that you are present in the room.

By these few words we hope to express well all our

Letter to author from Willy Breitling



feelings and most sincere thanks for your sending us that picture.

You know, dear Joe, that we keep you in our hearts, in the spirit of the deepest and most sincere friendship and true affection.

We hope that all of you had wonderful vacations and are healthy and happy. — We stayed in Buckillan, happy and calm with the kids.

Affection and kisses to all of you.

Beatrice and

Wilky

Although they were competitors, Breitling never took issue with my friendship with René Meylan, a manufacturer of normal watches. His factory, Lemania, produced watches for Omega, which was a premier brand throughout the world. He lived in Lausanne, located about an hour away from Geneva. Like Breitling, Meylan also respected the strictures of my faith. In 1968, Meylan traveled to America en route to the Olympics in Mexico. I took him to Lou Siegel's, the most famous kosher restaurant in New York at that time. While he appreciated the Jewish cuisine, he drew the line at gefilte fish.

With the outbreak of the Korean War, the U.S. Government approached Wakmann Watch Co. with a proposal to produce aviation clocks which were to be installed into the panels of their fighter planes. American officials brought us military specifications for the type of aircraft clock they required. Sensing the potential in this area, we quickly met with Meylan to see if he could manufacture that clock. Meylan was a factory that produced all the necessary parts of their movements. Until then, the only companies that manufactured these clocks were American watch companies, and the military was not completely satisfied with their workmanship. Meylan assessed the clock and determined that he too could manufacture such a model. It was not long before we saw the benefits of this business opportunity. We ultimately supplied clocks for the Air Force and the Navy. Although we always had competition for the military's business, we almost always succeeded as the lowest bidder. Soon after, we approached some of the single-propeller aircraft companies such as Piper, Beech, and Cessna to supply clocks to them as well, and also started to do successful business in the non-American arena.

With that, Wakmann Watch Co. defined and established its niche as a major supplier of aircraft clocks and multipurpose watches. We no longer competed very heavily with name brand watches, but we never did leave the normal watch business. Never having a son, my father-in-law branded his watches "Wakmann" in order, I believe, to leave a namesake. The aircraft clocks also bore the name "Wakmann."

In the early sixties, on one of my visits to Willy Breitling, I noticed a multipurpose aircraft clock sitting on his desk. It was a model he had sold to the Royal Air Force during World War II. It was larger and more complicated than the one we were in the process of purchasing from Meylan. I asked Breitling if I could take a sample of this clock back with me to

the United States to see if there was a market for it. Not thinking that he had much use for such a model which was by then obsolete, Breitling happily provided me with several samples. Upon my return to the States, I had to consider to whom I would show this clock. I made an appointment to see Scott Flowers, the head pilot for Pan American Airways, the largest American airline in those days. In a meeting at his offices in Long Island City, Flowers expressed his initial interest in the Breitling clock. As it turned out, we could not have picked a more fortuitous moment to introduce this clock. At this time, the major aircraft companies, Boeing and Douglas, were transitioning to jet aircraft. Boeing was preparing to introduce its 707 line, and Douglas was putting the final touches on their DC-8 aircraft. Pan American was in the process of ordering new jets and was very interested to see if our clocks could be added to its new fleet. Unlike previous models, our clocks were mechanical "wind-ups" and could independently operate for eight days without any electrical support from the aircraft's engines — a quality very desirable, since the clocks would continue to operate even if the electrical support failed.

Flowers placed an opening sample order of ten clocks with precise specifications so that he could show the clock to his engineers at Boeing and Douglas. The two aircraft manufacturers, together with Lockheed, ultimately supplied airlines with thousands of planes that used our aviation clocks exclusively. Very excited by the Pan Am interest, Willy Breitling produced each of these ten clocks by hand in short order, and I delivered the completed products to Flowers. Pan Am's senior official was so satisfied with the models that he agreed not only to purchase these clocks with several modifications, but persuaded Boeing and Douglas to invest thousands of dollars in the production of these clocks. He was ready to place an opening order for the clocks as soon as they were approved by the airframe manufacturers. I then set out to meet with Boeing and Douglas, whose chief engineers were truly impressed with our Breitling clocks. Boeing and Douglas invested heavily in our tools which were needed to manufacture these remarkable new clocks and ultimately ordered clocks to be put in the panels of the commercial jets they were producing for the entire airline industry. They initially ordered three clocks per plane for hundreds of aircrafts.

We, as well as Mr. Breitling, were ecstatic with this dramatic new business. As a result of this one sample clock, we ultimately began to supply



Wakmann-Breitling aircraft clock

the entire aviation industry with a revolutionary new aircraft clock. From that point on, the Wakmann-Breitling clock became the true standard in the aviation industry. Through our developing partnership with Willy Breitling, our companies formed the Breitling Watch Corporation of America, and the company remained in business for over forty years.

Today, all the major Swiss brands offer a variety of chronograph watches. In fact, sixty to seventy percent of the watches produced and sold today are chronograph watches. Ironically, while we were selling chronographs for hundreds of dollars per watch, these very same watches that are produced by major brands range from $7,000 to $15,000 per watch.

The watch business went through something of a crisis in the 1970s when Japan began developing the quartz watch, the technology of which was quite innovative, but which nearly crippled the Swiss business in general and the chronograph business in particular. This type was an electronic watch that kept excellent time. With just a few pieces of silicon and a tiny battery, it was a very affordable and effective device. Eventually the industry moved from Japan to China, where watches could be made even cheaper. I think it is safe to say that we unveiled our technology too early for the watch market, though we *were* a major venue for chronograph and complicated watches.

Regardless, to remain in the normal watch business, we had to quickly make crucial decisions on how our company would adapt to this new

technology. We had no firm contacts in the Far East, so I set out for Hong Kong, which was then the commercial center of quartz watches. I hoped to meet some quartz manufacturers to gain a foothold in the quartz watch business.

In Hong Kong, I found that there was — and still is — a large Sephardic community, led by the Kadouri family. They, along with the Sassoon family, built the Ohel Leah Synagogue. During my stay in Hong Kong, I was in contact with the community and, amid my business dealings, I utilized my position as President of the Orthodox Union to assist them in locating a Sephardic rabbi from the New York area to become their spiritual leader.

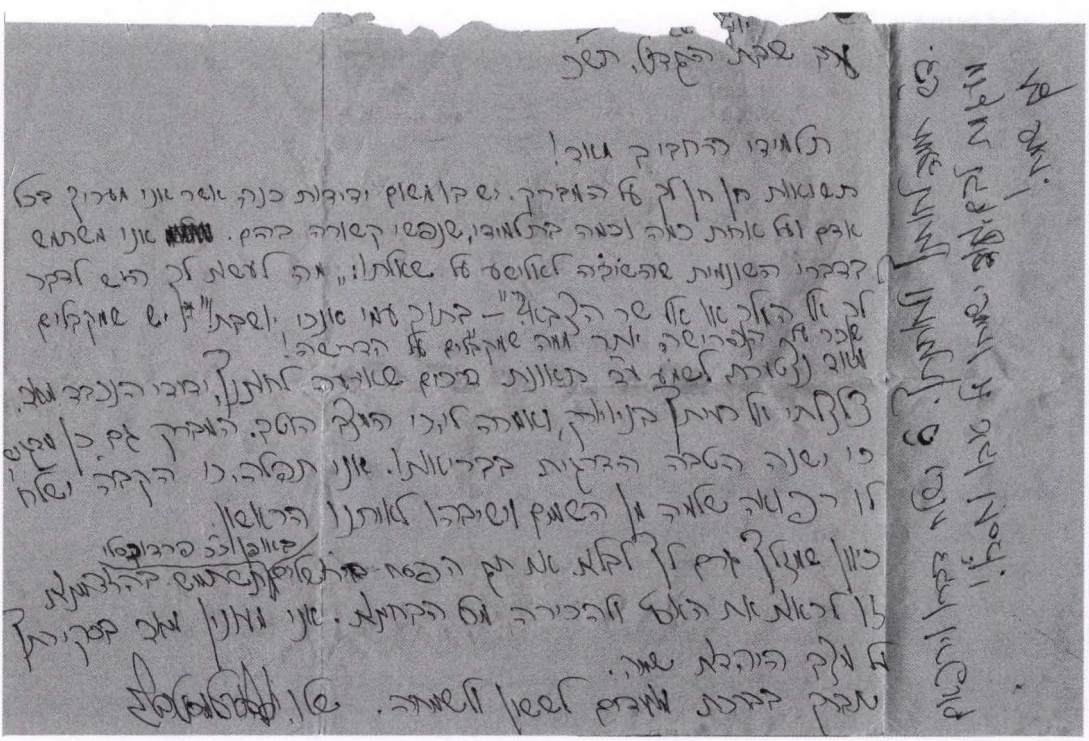
During my two trips to Hong Kong, I successfully established contacts to supply us with quartz watches for the United States. Since then, however, Far East quartz watches have remained in the low end range of the watch business and Swiss brands have reemerged as the top of the line brands. I did my best to stay on top of the ebbs and flows of the industry. Indeed, our business was like any other enterprise. We had our ups and downs just the same.

My unique challenge at that time was negotiating the politics and leadership of the Orthodox Union while trying to run a profitable business. Much of this dilemma was avoided with the installation of an intercom in my office that connected directly with senior staff at the Orthodox Union's headquarters. Often I made use of this line of communication between 10 and 15 times a day.

Meanwhile, my father-in-law enjoyed his retirement years and made good use of his time. In 1960, a month before Pesach, my in-laws traveled to Israel. After a visit to the Hechal Shlomo on a Friday afternoon, as my father-in-law was exiting the *hechal*, he tried to go around a bus parked at the exit and was hit by a cab. He suffered a severe concussion and was immediately taken to the Hadassah Hospital, which was at the time housed in the Bikur Cholim Hospital on Strauss Street. Those facilities were so small and overcrowded that there was not enough room in the operating room to do the surgery. As a result, preparations were made in the doctor's office, where the brain surgery was successfully performed. He remained in the offices of the surgeon during intensive care and convalescence. Back in New York, where it was still Shabbat, the phone rang incessantly, and I finally decided to answer it. Moses Fradis, my father-in-law's business associate from Portugal, was on the other end. He informed us that my

father-in-law was in a serious accident and that I should come immediately. I took an El Al flight to Tel Aviv that Saturday night.

As distraught and nervous as I was over my father-in-law's condition, I was also thrilled to visit the Holy Land for the first time. In addition, I took the opportunity to see if I could be of service to my great mentor, Rabbi Soloveitchik. Rabbi Yitzchak Herzog, former Chief Rabbi of Israel, had died a year earlier. At the time of my trip, many members of the Israeli government were working hard to convince the Rav to take over the position of Chief Rabbi. The Rav was reluctant to give the matter his undivided attention at that particular time and deferred his decision for a later date. Rabbi Soloveitchik was very close with Moshe Shapira, a powerful member of the Israeli government and the head of Hapoel HaMizrahi. He also served as David Ben Gurion's first Minister of Health and his Minister of Immigration. Minister Shapira was one of the principal politicians in support of the Rav becoming Chief Rabbi.



The Rav's correspondence with the author concerning the Rav's nomination to the Chief Rabbinate in Israel

Once I settled in Israel, I telegraphed the Rav to ask him if he felt I could assist him at all in deciding on this matter. He responded that if possible, I should try to scope out the political landscape to see how other religious and secular leaders in Israel felt about him. I immediately contacted Zev Gotthold, a former student of the Rav who was well-connected in Israel, who seemed to be connected to prominent people. I asked Zev if he would arrange appointments for me. Among the prestigious religious leaders with whom I met were Rabbi Zvi Pesach Frank, the Chief Rabbi of Jerusalem, and Rabbi Yechezkel Sarna, the *Rosh Yeshiva* of Hebron. As well, we arranged appointments with several secular leaders including Ben-Gurion's senior advisor and bureau chief, Yitzchak Navon, who would later become President of Israel. Navon and nearly all of the others relayed to me their deep respect for the Rav and were very enthusiastic over the prospect of his presence in Israel as Chief Rabbi. I promptly called the Rav after concluding my interviews to give him the favorable report.

Amid all of this, my father-in-law was released from the hospital on *Erev* Pesach. My in-laws and I relocated to Herzliya to spend Pesach at the luxurious Acadia Hotel. Meanwhile, in my absence, Pepa and the children, along with other members of the family, spent Pesach at the Pineview Hotel in the Catskill Mountains, one of the few strictly kosher hotels in the United States at that time.

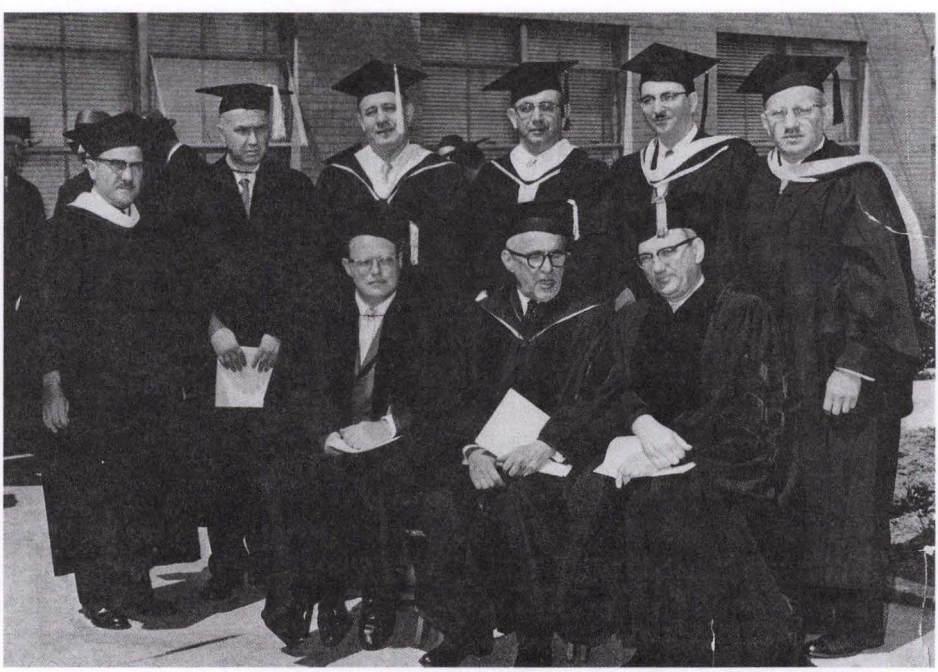


The author and Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, c. 1968

Chapter Seven

Entering the World of the Orthodox Union

Sometime in the late 1950s, I became president of the Yeshiva College Alumni Association. My main accomplishment while in this position, was fundraising to establish a chair in Yeshiva College's Political Science department. Just a few years prior, on July 15, 1956, one of the star



The author participating in YU commencement
Standing, from left: Rabbi H. Schacter, Rabbi Bernard Bergman, unknown, Rabbi Israel Miller, the author, unknown
Seated, from left: Dr. Jacob Goldman, Dr. Samuel Belkin, Rabbi Emanuel Rackman

students in the early days of Yeshiva College, David Petegorsky, had died. Petegorsky was a brilliant student who dedicated his short life to developing the research in the political science field, and it seemed to me fitting to

The Yeshiva College Alumni
BULLETIN

VOL. XIII, NO. 3 AUGUST, 1962

Dean Samuel L. Sar Suffers Fatal Attack

"One day, I'll knock at his door. There will be no answer. I will ask his secretary. She'll say, 'Dean Sar has gone away . . . ' " With these words Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik expressed the sentiments of the myriad of friends of Dean Samuel L. Sar, of blessed memory, who passed away on Thursday, June 21, 1962 after completing his opening



Dean Samuel Sar

remarks at the "semicha" exercises for thirty new rabbis. Dean Sar was 69 years old.

Dean Sar, Dean of Men and Professor of Bible, was a member of Yeshiva's family for 43 years. In his words of eulogy, Dr. Samuel Belkin, President of Yeshiva University, recalled that when he offered to arrange a pension program for him two years ago, Dean Sar replied that he would never leave Yeshiva, but would have to be carried from it. He expired in the institution he loved amidst his colleagues and friends.

Born in Ligniany, Poland, on March 15, 1893, he received his early education at the famous Yeshiva of Telz where he was ordained, and pursued secular studies at the gymnasium. He came to this country in 1914. Settling in Baltimore, he headed the Jewish educational system

(continued on page 3)

Besdin, Mandelkorn Honored At Dinner

Morris J. Besdin '36, and Joseph Mandelkorn '47, received the coveted Bernard Revel Memorial Awards at the annual dinner of the Yeshiva College Alumni Association held on Sunday evening, May 27th. Rabbi Besdin received the award for his contributions to Jewish education and Mr. Mandelkorn for distinction in the arts and sciences. The award in community leadership was awarded posthumously to Louis Muss '36, who passed away a few weeks before the dinner. The citation was accepted by his daughter.

David Mirsky '42, was chairman of the selections committee and introduced Rabbi Besdin and Mr. Mandelkorn. Elihu Kasten '36, a former alumni president, eulogized Mr. Muss before presenting the plaque to his daughter.

In the most moving and briefest acceptance speech ever delivered by a Revel Award winner, Mr. Mandelkorn thanked the University for making his education possible. He singled out Dr. Lowan, for directing him and Mr. Norman B. Abrams for encouraging him and giving him financial aid. Rabbi Besdin stated he was accepting the award in behalf of his colleagues in Jewish education.



Revel Award Winners: Seated (from left to right)—Morris Besdin '36, Marion Muss, Joseph Mandelkorn '47. Standing: Elihu Kasten '36, Max Etra (chairman of Yeshiva University's Board of Trustees), Louis Bernstein '47, David Mirsky '42.

Karasick '43, Elected President of Alumni



Joseph Karasick

Pass Insurance Plan

The Yeshiva College Alumni Association at its annual meeting on June 14th, 1962, approved a comprehensive group life insurance plan to be made available to all its members. The plan contains an exceptionally low rate for insurance purchased individually because of the group rates.

Details and applications will be mailed to the membership in the early fall. Those interested in information prior to the printing of the letter, may write to the chairman, Al Roth '51, at the Alumni Office.

Joseph Karasick '43, was unanimously elected president of the Yeshiva College Alumni Association at the annual meeting held on June 17, in Klein Hall. Elected with Karasick were Jerome Willig '38, First Vice-President; Emanuel Greenwald '47, Vice President; Jacob Lebowitz '57, Vice-President; Stanley Rudoff '48, Vice President; Joseph Feder '50, Corresponding Secretary; Felix Glaubach '50, Recording Secretary; Judah H. Klein '56, Recording Secretary; Gilbert Davidoff '55, Treasurer. Joseph Feder '50, was chairman of the nominating committee. Serving with him were Milton Kramer '42 and Mark Press '61.

Karasick served previously as first vice president of the alumni. During his long service with the organization, he has held various offices and committee chairmanships. He was chairman of the successful drive to establish the David Petegorsky Chair in Political Science. He served as chairman of the Sarei Hameah dinner honoring Dr. Belkin in the early part of the year.

Willig was the Alumni fund raising chairman for the last two years. He has served as vice president for many years. His column "Then and Now" has been a regular feature of the Alumni bulletin for many years.

The newly elected executive committee includes: Hyman Muss '32, Israel Friedman '33, Elihu Kasten '36, Israel Miller '38, Eli Sar '41, David Mirsky '42, Harold Lowell '43, Israel H. Friedman '45, Morris Silverman '45, David Maeir '45, Robert Blau '51, Alfred Roth '51, Steve Jaffe '52, Herbert Scheinfeld '52, Manfred Fulda '52, I. Robert Rozen '53, Marvin Bienenfeld '53, Macy Gordon '53, Abraham Kramer, '54, Sheldon Rudoff '54, Gerald Nissenbaum '54, Arnold Enker '55, Marcel Weber '56, Jerome Blau '59, Mark Press '61, Tobias Berman '62

The author elected as president of the Yeshiva College Alumni Association, summer 1958

raising the twenty-five thousand dollars, a fortune in those days, needed to establish a chair in his memory.

To help support this effort, I organized an alumni gala dinner. One of the major benefactors in attendance was the young Moses I. Feuerstein. Petegorsky and Feuerstein were close friends during their days at Yeshiva College. Moe, who was then the President of the Orthodox Union, was very impressed with the turnout and my presentation at the dinner. At that time, Moe and I knew each other to some extent, having met a few times while both of our families were vacationing in the mountains in Upstate New York. On this occasion, Moe was particularly charmed by the tone and sophisticated level of this dinner and asked me to serve as chairman of the upcoming OU dinner. In all honesty, I knew nothing of the OU at that time except that Heinz Ketchup and Sunshine Crackers were under its *kashrut* supervision. Nevertheless, I agreed. I organized the dinner in a way that was very different than previous OU dinners, and it was very successful both organizationally and financially. After the dinner, Moe asked me to chair the forthcoming OU Biennial Convention. I knew very little about conventions and even less about OU conventions. However, here too, I agreed, hoping for some kind of success. I was quoted in *Jewish Action* that "with the National Convention only a few weeks away, plans were shaping up to make the Biennial conclave an unforgettable experience for the more than the 1,600 delegates and guests expected to attend, and an event of unparalleled importance for the entire American orthodox Jewish community." Incidentally, the event was a most defining one for me, since, acting as chairman of the convention, I learned so much about the OU and its inner workings, and just how important this organization could be. From that point forward, Moe Feuerstein and I became inseparable. My involvement in the Orthodox Union grew into a passion for me and I was elected treasurer in 1962.

When I became a core member of the Orthodox Union in 1960, I was the youngest of a group of men who surrounded the organization's president, Moses I. Feuerstein. When Moe took over the presidency of the OU in 1954, the Orthodox Jewish community was virtually nonexistent. Remember, this was less than a decade after the end of the Holocaust. The survivors who were arriving on America's shores did not have the head, mind, or funds to form necessary infrastructures to raise the level



Private Dinner with Rishon Letzion Rav Yitzchak Nissim; other leading figures of the OU in attendance

of functioning Orthodox Jewish communities. Their primary worry was to find jobs and homes and to rebuild their broken lives.

Moe was a dynamic, unique leader in American Orthodox Jewish history. Throughout Moe's tenure leading the Orthodox Union, he mainly remained at home, in Brookline, Massachusetts, to run his business. For this reason, he required a confidante he could trust to discuss matters of *kashrut*, *mechitzah*, and broader Jewish politics; to relay his decisions to his officers and many individuals outside of our organization when he could not be present. As our relationship swiftly developed, I became this close friend. Thus, when he left Brookline to tour the American frontier to inspire Jewish communities, I was very often the one chosen to accompany him.

As for the so-called established "Orthodox Jewish community," it suffered from lack of leadership, organization, and purpose. Most of all, it

suffered from an inferiority complex which inhibited it from playing any significant role in the thinly organized American Orthodox community. Orthodox rabbis were primarily still the Yiddish-speaking rabbis of Russia, Poland and Hungary. Its lay leadership had not a clue how to compete with the non-Orthodox leadership of the various organizations which existed at that time. Besides, the lay leadership was poorly educated to inspire a new generation that was growing up in America. Very few had a higher Jewish education, with many having no more than a weak Talmud Torah education, which made them ill-equipped to lead this new generation.

It was truly fortuitous that a man like Moe appeared on the scene and, knowingly or unknowingly, created an immediate ripple-like effect. The Orthodox Jewish community began to speak more in a unified voice and placed American English-speaking rabbis, mostly from RIETS, in communities that would have surely crumbled without multi-institutional support. Moe was the first to articulate clearly the need for Orthodox rabbis and lay leaders to come forward from behind the scenes to the foreground. He convened conferences to let the world, both Jewish and non-Jewish, hear Jewish Orthodoxy's new voice.

Spending the majority of his time in the Boston area, Moe developed a very close relationship with Rav Soloveitchik. It was during Moe's administration at the OU that the Rav became its official *halachic* decider. Just one example: When the Catholic Church's Vatican II reversed their anti-Semitic policies in 1965, there was much talk about convening an interfaith dialogue. It is well known that the Rav opposed such dialogue between Jewish and Christian leaders, and the Rav remained a central figure in the Orthodox Union's policy making.

Convinced that Orthodoxy had a great future in America, Moe insisted that Jewish laity be present at all inter-organizational meetings, wear yarmulkes at all times, and wear them with a great sense of pride.

Throughout his twelve-year tenure as OU President, Moe remained in close contact with the organization's regional branches. Major Jewish hubs in the Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, Southern and West Coast regions of the United States established regional boards that were in charge of fundraising, and they represented the Orthodox communities in those specific regions. For example, in the Midwest Region, the OU boasted synagogues in over thirty communities. Moreover, in Montreal alone, the Orthodox Union had 21 affiliated synagogues. To make sure that the Orthodox

synagogues in the city spoke with a united voice, we staffed that particular community with two regional presidents. These regional offices would be in constant contact with the OU office in New York. Back in New York, the national officers would meet on a nearly weekly basis.

At that time, the OU greatly expanded its *kashrut* supervision. The key people at that time were Nathan Gross, an OU Senior Vice President and the Chairman of the Kashrut Commission, and Rabbi Alexander Rosenberg, Director of OU Kashrut. Together, these two men played a major role in *kashrut* in America, in every sense. More important, perhaps, is the foundation they cemented for Jewish organizations in America to uphold the highest standards when it came to supervising kosher food. Early on, the Orthodox Union's *kashrut* situation was a very political one. Originally, *kashrut* supervision belonged to the Rabbinical Council of America. However, without the broad base and the funding to cover warehouses and farms across the country, the RCA handed over this role to the OU. After some time, now in Nat Gross's hands, the OU proved that the organizational *kashrut* certification was a realistic endeavor. Upon observing the OU's success, the RCA wanted *kashrut* back in their hands and argued that it was still their rabbis who were authorizing supervision. To assuage matters, Nat agreed to continue using RCA rabbis as *mashgichim* wherever possible and to financially support the RCA. Today, the situation is much different, with the OU being the "General Motors" of *kashrut* throughout the world.

Although the Kashrut Division may have been the most formidable section of all the OU's enterprises, other officers were most essential in achieving its goals. This inner group included Herbert Berman, Harold Boxer, Samuel Brennglass, Reuven Gross, Harold Jacobs, and Bernard Levmore. To this day, I cannot explain how all these talented and successful men became a part of our organizational machine. Aside from that, I find it even more difficult to explain how I joined their ranks some fifty years ago. I was at least seven or eight years younger than everyone else and in no way a major player of the new-age Orthodox Union. I had neither the experience nor the renown for acceptance into this group, yet they accepted me, thankfully, with open arms.

Also at this time, Rabbi Dr. Samson R. Weiss was recruited from his position as Executive Vice President of National Council of Young Israel to run the Orthodox Union's New York office. Incidentally, Dr. Weiss was

responsible for the rule in the Young Israel constitution that states that affiliated synagogues could not become a member of the OU. Years later, I made sure to annul that rule by placing the president of Young Israel on the OU Board of Directors. That said, Dr. Weiss, a German Jew with a Mirrer Yeshiva background and a penchant for being a real stickler, was a perfect choice to serve as the Orthodox Union's top professional.

The other important members of the professional staff were Rabbi Rosenberg and Saul Bernstein, who handled the OU's personnel and publication matters.

In the fifties and sixties, the president of the OU had absolute power over the organization. A misunderstanding took place between Moe and Dr. Weiss. Dr. Weiss was a veteran in the nascent American Jewish organizational work and felt competent to make policy decisions on his own. On the other hand, no one ever dared dictate to Moe, a member of the prominent Feuerstein family of Brookline, what to do. By 1964, the two leaders found it difficult to work with each other. Their relationship further deteriorated, and in time, I became their liaison, and I was the sole line of communication between Moe Feuerstein, the OU's lay president who lived in Brookline, and the OU's office Manhattan. I must have spoken with Dr. Weiss nearly twenty times a day from my office, just twenty blocks away from OU headquarters — and an equal number of times with Moe. As I reflect back to that time, I learned a great deal about running a major organization in those two years between 1964 and 1966 when, in a very real sense, I was forced to deal with the day-to-day activities of the Orthodox Union under less than ideal circumstances.

It is important to stress here that I never viewed these phone conferences as a burden. In addition, as an OU officer, I periodically made use of my business trips by making detours to speak with synagogue rabbis and presidents and ensure that their communities were represented by the OU's national offices in Manhattan. I visited Orthodox communities in Chicago, St. Louis, Dallas, Seattle, Los Angeles, Charleston, and San Francisco, among other still-developing communities. In attempts at efficiency, I would ask synagogue leaders to bring to our regional meetings distant presidents of communities, sometimes twenty miles away. Thus, I took my job as an officer in the OU ranks very seriously. More importantly, I was very anxious to find my own place within the New York Jewish community. I was beginning to find my way in this regard when Moe selected

me to serve as Chairman of the OU National Convention in 1962. The event was held in Washington, DC, attended by thousands. It was at this convention where I met with some of the most powerful laypeople within the Jewish community, as well as prominent Orthodox rabbis outside of New York, such as Simon Dolgin of Los Angeles, Emanuel Feldman of Atlanta, Emmanuel Lederman of Denver, and Charles Weinberg of Boston.

One must understand that the national conventions in my day were quite different compared to subsequent ones. Conventions in the sixties and seventies lasted for many days, and were attended by as many as two thousand delegates and guests. Sessions and discussions were lively and focused on major issues of the time. To provide an example, here is an outline of the seventieth annual convention that took place on Thanksgiving weekend, 1968: opening sessions were held on Wednesday, November 27. NCSY officials and other senior educators in the Jewish world led discussions on the state of Jewish schooling. Later that evening, we listened to remarks offered by Yitzhak Rabin, serving at that time as Israeli Ambassador to the United States. The night did not conclude before a *shiur* delivered by Rabbi Menachem Eichenstein of St. Louis, and addresses delivered by myself and finally by Dr. Nahum Goldmann, the President of the World Jewish Congress, of which the OU was a member, and I was on the governing board. Thanksgiving Day was filled with more activities. Rabbis Mordechai Gifter, the Telshe *Rosh Yeshiva*, Marvin Hier, Simon Dolgin were just a few of the renowned personalities who lectured over the course of that day. Shabbat programs were highlighted by Rabbis Norman Lamm, Emanuel Feldman, Bernard Lander, and Israel Miller. While Sunday included even more sessions, the focus was primarily on plenary sessions and the adoption and presentation of that year's resolutions.

By 1966, it became clear to those within the OU's inner circle that twelve years was too long a term for a president, and a new leader was to be found. Unclear, however, was the question of who could replace Moe. Most of the veteran officers, though very capable, were involved in many other professional and organizational activities and had little interest in taking on the responsibilities of leading the OU. One exception was Harold Jacobs, a wealthy Long Island industrialist. Jacobs was a first-rank politician within the Jewish circles and had close ties within right wing Chabad and Torah Vodaath circles, and he knew the ins-and-outs of secular New York politics, especially Brooklyn.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that Jacobs was fifteen years my senior, the rest of the OU officers believed that I should succeed Moe as president. For almost six years, Moe groomed me for organization leadership, but he thought that my time would come only after Harold Jacobs's administration. It was Nat Gross, the most influential of the OU officers and very content to control the *kashrut* empire behind the scenes, who informed me of the consensus that I should be the next candidate to succeed Moe.

"What about Harold Jacobs?" I asked, having fully expected that my turn, if ever, as president would not arrive for at least another six years.

"Leave it to me," Nat replied. A few days later, he called me at work to request that I meet him and Harold Jacobs at a restaurant on the Lower East Side. I agreed. Only minutes into our meal, Gross turned to Jacobs and told him matter-of-factly, "Harold, Joe is going to be the president of the OU."

"What about me?" asked a stupefied Harold Jacobs.

"You'll be after him."

Nat Gross was so powerful and respected by our entire group that Harold gave in without a challenge. Naturally, there was a formal vote — but it was of little consequence; I was the only candidate on the ballot.

When I came home from the meeting, I was completely overwhelmed. All this had transpired in a matter of four or five years. To reach a position like that in an organization today, one has to put in at least ten or fifteen years, and he or she would have to compete with several other capable candidates for the top post. The moment I was inducted as President of the Orthodox Union on Thanksgiving Day, 1966, I knew that I would do all in my power to transform the OU into a world organization. To accomplish this, I made sure that our officers and leaders remained a very close-knit and loyal group. Thus, when I became president, I scheduled evening officers' meetings on a weekly basis. The national officers were privy to whatever I did; I would not hire a secretary without their approving it first. We were a marvelous team.

Looking back on that scene nearly fifty years ago, it was a very strange time in American Jewish history. Still before the Six-Day War, Israel had not yet imprinted its major mark on American Jewry. In the United States, Jewish organizations just started to form, and Jews, regardless of observance level, felt a strong desire to affiliate themselves with national institutions. At that time, the main Jewish umbrella organization in America was

The National Community Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC). Samuel Brennglass, a longtime officer in the Orthodox Union, made sure that our organization, which was a NCRAC member, would be heard by the secular leaders who affiliated themselves with NCRAC. Conversely, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, today the major mouthpiece of American Jewry, just got off the ground in 1965 and had not yet become a political force. This incipient stage in Jewish organizational life allowed me as the new head of the Orthodox Union to observe the developing institutions and choose just how I wanted the OU to play its role within this context of the organizational world. Therefore, I felt I was coming into this position at a very propitious point in time.

An interesting event happened in the summer of 1965, which shaped me and my approach to the Orthodox Union. The most outstanding world Jewish leader at that time was Dr. Nahum Goldmann. He headed several Jewish organizations including the World Jewish Congress, an institution that in every sense spoke as world Jewry's official representative in the Diaspora. Dr. Goldmann was a brilliant diplomat, fluent in over ten languages. He knew every prominent Jewish and non-Jewish leaders, including Konrad Adenauer, Germany's Chancellor from 1949 to 1963.

As leaders are inclined to be, some Jewish figureheads were jealous of Dr. Goldmann's influence. In turn, some opportunists established the



The author and Dr. Nahum Goldmann, c. 1968

Council of Jewish Organizations (COJO) to compete with the WJC. By initiating this new organization, these individuals would include those involved with various Jewish organizations that, for whatever reason, were not affiliated with the WJC. And more importantly, the heads of COJO, if the organization proved successful, could operate beyond the influence of Dr. Goldmann. Concurrently, I represented the Orthodox Union at the Conference of Presidents. I do not recall exactly how it happened, but the Conference of Presidents was invited to attend a high-powered meeting in Strasbourg, France, where COJO's stance regarding Dr. Goldmann's position with WJC would be discussed. Anxious to see whether either WJC or COJO would be a good fit for its affairs, the Conference of Presidents eagerly accepted the invitation to attend. Accordingly, a representative from the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and I were selected to travel to Strasbourg, France to be the official observers of this meeting. The leaders of the Presidents Conference in New York asked us to attend COJO's inaugural meeting in order to assess its viability. The trip was truly revealing for me. Even though I returned with a negative report on the short-lived COJO, I was deeply affected by the notion of international Jewish affairs.

As she had done many times before, and for a long time after, Pepa flew with me to Europe for this business trip. It was the first time either of us had visited Strasbourg, a beautiful French city in the contested region of Alsace-Lorraine, adjacent to the German border. I recall that while I attended a business appointment in Paris, Pepa made arrangements to meet me in Geneva. One of my French business associates offered to drive Pepa by way of the German Autobahn superhighway from Strasbourg to Geneva. Halfway along the Autobahn, the driver asked Pepa if she would mind stopping en route in Germany to eat lunch. Twenty years after the Holocaust, the very thought of spending even one minute in Germany made her stomach turn. "I'm in a rush," she coolly explained. "I just have no time to stop for lunch."

A report I submitted to Moe Feuerstein after the meeting sums up the important issues that were discussed and handled by Dr. Goldmann: German war reparations, Jewish-Vatican relations, and anti-Semitism in Russia. For me, the result of the meeting was several-fold. The meeting was truly an eye-opening experience for me. For the first time, I sat among Jewry's world leaders — Dr. Goldmann and Gerhart Riegner to

name just a couple — and gained greater understanding of what organizational leadership — even the kind outside of Jewish institutions — was all about. These international leaders were much more sophisticated and knew so much more about Jewish organizational life than the kind we had back in America. Indeed, the only organizations very active in America to this point were B'nai Brith and the Zionist organizations — Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), Hadassah, and Mizrachi. In France. I also met leaders from the Conservative and Reform organizations, such as Joachim Prinz, who at that time was the Vice Chairman of the WJC and a prominent Reform rabbi in New York. Above all, that meeting planted in my mind the seed of an idea that the OU would have to become a part of the world scene and not just an American domestic organization. In order to become a member of the WJC's central body, an organization had to be an international institution. When I arrived back in America after our trip to Strasbourg, I was determined to make the Orthodox Union a member of the international Jewish community.

In the months preceding the start of my administration, I faced a major problem, as I saw it. How could I, still a relatively unknown personality, preside over the OU after someone as prominent as Moe Feuerstein? Moe was the face of the OU; during an age when the Orthodox community carried with it a severe inferiority complex, Moe Feuerstein began to transform the OU into a major force. I was very fortunate that the other officers of the OU did not hold it against me that I simply wasn't Moe — some of my anxieties were allayed as I later found out from others that my fellow board members supported me unconditionally. Many rabbis and professionals approached me to relay the kind words they had heard about me from my officers. Also, it was the decision of my fellow officers that even though the OU was a lay organization, I should keep my title of rabbi. There would be times that I would have to face important rabbinic personalities, and my title would allow me a measure of equality. Thus, although I was elected to the top spot of the Orthodox Union as a lay leader specifically, they believed that it would be useful to wear my rabbinic title to strengthen my new position.

In addition, I was pleasantly surprised by the reception I received from the Feuerstein family. The family, including Moe's parents, Sam and Mitzi, and his brother, Aaron, were all very cordial and cooperative toward me. As for Moe himself, it had become increasingly difficult for him to let me

loose. The outgoing always looks at the incoming with a certain sense of unease. And while Moe had mentored me and trusted my intelligence and direction, he found it trying to let go of the organization he had so adeptly built up. For months into my administration, Moe made sure to phone me at least one or twice a week to offer advice.

I was inducted as President of the Orthodox Union at the 1966 National Convention, which took place on Thanksgiving in Washington, DC. Over the course of these almost week-long annual events, over two thousand people would participate. Over eight hundred men and women would be present for Thanksgiving dinner, alone. The Orthodox Union typically honored synagogues from across the country. In addition, there were usually sessions with prestigious speakers, which pesented opportunity for those within the Orthodox community to strengthen their national network. Although our budget was limited, including the Kashrut Division, Orthodox rabbis and laymen flocked from all corners of the country to attend that event in 1966. It is difficult to describe the palpable feelings of loyalty and respect that Orthodox Jewish Americans held for the OU in those days, especially compared to the disconnect that many individuals and communities feel today.



איבער צווי טויזענט דעלעגאַטן אויף גרעסטער קאַנווענשאַן אין 84־יאָריגער געשיכטע פון דער „ארטאדאקס יוניאן"

ספעציעלער באריכט צום „אלגעמיינעם זשורנאל"
פון ניסן גאַרדאַן

אויב דער גורל פון דער רעליגיע פון פרעמיער מנחם בעגין אלט געדארפט אדער געקענט וואלט זי געקראגן! די גרעסטע צוטרוי־אפשטימונג, וואס א רעליגיעזע קהל זיך וויינטשען, אנגענדיג פון דער דערעפענונג רעדע פון דעם פרעזידענט פון דער „יוניאן", יהודה בערמאן, אנטשיידט ווערען אויף דער ערשט־אפגעהאלטענער 84־טער יובל־קאנווענשאן פון דער „יוניאן ניאן פון ארטאדאקסישע קהלגרעמיישאנס", בעסער באקאנט ווי די „ארטאדאקס יוניאן", וועלכער איז איצט אויך פארזיצער פון דער פרעזידענטן קאנסיסטאריע פון שיקאגא, ווי אויך פארזיצער פון דער ישיבה פון שיקאגא.

(פארזעצונג אויף זייט 17)

Rav Aharon Soloveichik addresses OU Convention, c. 1978; the author and Pepa are seated to his left; OU President Julius Berman and his wife, Dorothy, are seated to his right

Chapter Eight

The Making of an OU President

Although I had been effectively functioning as head of the OU during the final years of Moe Feuerstein's administration, I was officially elected President of the Orthodox Union in 1966, serving three successive two-year terms until 1972. In 1972, I transitioned to Chairman of the Board, a position I held until 1978. Consequently, I held a leadership position at that organization for over a dozen years.

Perhaps my greatest accomplishment was unequivocally establishing Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik as our *halachic* leader and *posek acharon* of our national community. I did this by involving him in our communal concerns as much as possible, and also by presenting him at our major conferences. At one particular OU biannual conference, I introduced the Rav with the following remarks:

> "I want to thank the General Chairman for extending to me the honor of presenting to this convention my revered teacher and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik.
>
> The *ish halachah*, the Rav of *halachic* Jewry, is Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, and to him do we turn — not only as our *Yad Chazakah*, as a strong supporting hand, but also as our *Moreh Nevuchim*, a guide to the ever-complex and perplexing problems of today. And may I add parenthetically that the Rav also finds himself to have become the *rebbe* of many former *talmidim*, both here and abroad, who were left very thirsty sitting at the feet of their own teachers, who did not receive answers to their questions, and who were even rather more confused and perplexed. It was ultimately the Rav, and the Rav alone, to whom the entire

Jewish community turned for direction and guidance vis-à-vis the Ecumenical Council, and may I state here and now that a tremendous vote of gratitude should be given to your representatives, both from the RCA and the Orthodox Union, who carried out the guidance of Rabbi Soloveitchik around the Conference table, and literally single-handedly obtained the unanimity of the entire American Jewish Community to act and issue statements with sense and dignity in these historic times.

We are living through momentous times and are beset with problems on all sides which demand our constant and careful attention each day. What is to be our relationship as Halachic Jews vis-à-vis the non-Jewish world? Vis-à-vis civil rights? The Ecumenical Council? Federal aid? Integration?

And what is to be our relationship with respect to the Jewish world: Israel; the non-Orthodox national Jewish organizations? And most important, what about our closest brothers, those who are united with us in thought and belief by the Torah and Halacha? In a word, by the subjects being considered by this very Convention.

Rebbe, there is no need to introduce you to this huge assembly this evening. You have sitting here before you men and women of the Orthodox Union who upon hearing the appellation, "The Rav" immediately know it refers to you. They are here at this historic session tonight to hear directly from you, your charge to the leaders of American Orthodoxy!

May I, therefore, in closing, rather introduce them to you?

In the audience you have representatives, both rabbinic and lay, from the length and breadth of America and Canada who each day of their lives are sanctifying the name of Hashem. You have here Jewish men and women who are unsung heroes in the struggle of Orthodoxy to maintain its identity in the midst of a hostile environment. These are truly men and women who have, for example, single-handedly in isolated communities, prevented the *shul* from destroying its mechitzah, or persuaded a recalcitrant board to install one, or encouraged an indifferent community to build a Mikveh.

The UOJCA was once only a desk; then it became a room;

> then it became an office. Now it is a movement, a great movement standing in the very forefront of American Jewish life. The mantle of leadership has been placed upon your shoulders, as Yehoshua looked to Moshe, as Elisha looked to Eliyahu. In short, as a talmid looks to his Rebbe, we, tonight, look to you.

One of the major issues during Moe's presidency was the *mechitzah*. Moe traveled across the country, urging dozens of synagogues, many under the umbrella of the Orthodox Union, to reform their *shul* practices to the traditional criterion. The *mechitzah* issue served as a microcosm for the agenda of the OU under Feuerstein. Moe desperately wanted the OU to become a household name in America's Orthodox communities. He wanted to make the OU the prime organization of American Orthodoxy, and in this he was successful.

After Moe, it was my intention to take the Orthodox Union to the next level, to transform the OU into an international organization. My first opportunity to reach abroad came directly before my election as president, with France's Jewish population. At that time, there were two organizations that handled the needs of French Jews: the Consistoire Central de France and the Consistoire Central de Paris. The first provided for Jews living throughout France with the exception of those residing in Paris, and the other, as can be discerned from its title, confined itself to the needs of Jews living in France's capital. Strangely enough, the Consistoire Central de Paris was the more influential and powerful of the two bodies.

The head of the Consistoire Central de France was Baron Alain de Rothschild, a direct descendent of the Rothschild dynasty and heavily involved with the family's Paris branch. Jean Paul Elkann, a major industrialist, led the Consistoire Central de Paris. I do not recall who approached whom first, but somehow Jean Paul and I were introduced to each other. Jean Paul was an extremely charismatic man and had the most unusual type of personality. It was decided, between the two of us that the Orthodox Union could be an asset for his community in France.

France's Jewish community was in a state of emergency, having just tripled in size. A few years earlier, the French government had decided to withdraw its control over Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia. Now under Arab rule, the Jews living in those North African countries feared for their lives. More than five hundred thousand of those Jews fled to Israel while

the remaining hundreds of thousands migrated to France. To their credit, French officials allowed these families to resettle and gave them the necessary resources to integrate into French culture. Still, meeting the religious needs of these Sephardic Jews fell heavily on the Ashkenazic Jewish community of Paris and the greater French Jewish community. That is where the Orthodox Union, with our knowledge of community building and leadership training, came into the picture.

After several meetings with Elkann, he thought it would be beneficial for me to meet Alain de Rothschild. As I was already traveling to Europe on business several times a year, it was simple enough to reroute my upcoming trip in 1966 to make a stopover in France to meet with both Elkann and Rothschild. From a religious perspective, it was not always easy to see eye to eye with these men, or with any of French Jewry's leaders. At the time, the little more than two hundred thousand native French Jews could be classified as traditional — meaning, all of their synagogues were physically closer to Orthodox than any of the other Jewish denominations in America, yet they were lax in many of their practices and ignorant of Jewish texts and customs. In all of France, one could find little more than a few hundred families that would be considered Orthodox by our standards today. All this meant that French Jewry's leadership was fully unprepared to integrate their North African cousins, with all of their disparate ways of life, into their society. Although all North African Jews were French-speaking, their arrival in France threatened to change the entire dynamic of the community. There were now close to 650,000 Jews in France, and they were overwhelmingly Sephardic. Balance and order desperately needed to be restored. All of the current Jewish institutions, the synagogues, schools, and community centers needed to reconsider the way in which they supported and related to members of their community.

But I was not discouraged. I figured that all this translated into a great opportunity for American Orthodoxy to have a tremendous influence in raising the level of observance of one of Europe's most important Jewish communities. Therefore, when I met with Elkann and Rothschild, I offered whatever services the OU could provide that might help strengthen the Jewish community of France. I outlined several steps.

First, I implored Rothschild to visit America's Jewish community. Since Elkann had studied as a graduate student at Columbia University, he was familiar with the New York Jewish scene. However, Rothschild, then in his

early forties, had no inkling of the reality. Rothschild may have come to the United States on business from time to time, but he never had contact with the Jewish community there. As the major player in France's Jewish community, it was imperative that he understand the nuances of community-building that were prevalent in America. So, in autumn of 1967, Alain de Rothschild, serving as the ambassador of French Jewry, visited America as my personal guest. An editorial in the June 6, 1968 edition of the *Jewish Weekly News* well relates the nature of Rothschild's visit. "Every day, we read about the antics of that bashful billionaire, Howard Hughes, of whom it is said that when he cashes a check, the bank bounces. But when Alain de Rothschild came to this country in December, his errand was not fiscal. It was purely religious."

Rothschild met with the Orthodox Union's leadership and all of the OU's department heads. In addition, Rothschild visited Yeshiva University and met with its then President Samuel Belkin. In another important stopover, I escorted Rothschild to Boston, where he met with the Rav and attended the Maimonides School Dinner as the guest of honor. Rothschild's eyes truly opened when he saw what was going on in America, particularly in New York. Although he was by no means an observant Jew, he was more traditional than others in his family and consequently more sympathetic to Jewish religious life. Upon his return to Paris, the French leader brought back with him a greater sense of what authentic Jewish life could be like. Rothschild made sure that his Consistoire was better equipped and had the necessary personnel and facilities to handle its reconceived tasks. In fact, Rothschild believed that he had made such a quick impact on French Jewry that he desperately wished that the Rav would travel to visit France. In response to this request, I wrote to Alain de Rothschild on February 16, 1968: "I shall, of course, do my utmost to persuade Rabbi Soloveitchik to accept your invitation. In fact, I already met with him last week and we discussed it and all its ramifications. I informed him of my visit with you, and of all I saw, and of the tremendous potential of your community." Yet, I reiterated a point that I had made to Rothschild several times previously. "I would like you, however, to be aware of the fact that he is very shy and personal like many great men, and that he is therefore very reluctant to involve himself to a new public. Furthermore, he is also physically not too well, and that militates against travel."

The second step that I outlined involved France's rabbinical seminary,

the Seminaire Israelite de France, headed by Grand Rabbin Henri Schilli. Truthfully, the level of the French rabbinate did not compare with the level of the American rabbis. Grand Rabbi Jacob Kaplan was the Chief Rabbi of France, and although he was well meaning and gracious, he was not equipped to mentor a new generation of French rabbis. In 1968, Rabbi Schilli visited America so that he could gain the same appreciation for American Orthodox life that Rothschild had gained a year earlier. But France's rabbis needed even more than that. Therefore, I suggested that several young French rabbis should travel to the United States so that they could become familiarized with the American Orthodox rabbinate. In contradistinction to his American colleague, the French rabbi at that time seldom participated rabbinically in the social and communal activities of French Jewry. He was limited to his ecclesiastical role of being in charge of the worship in his synagogue and officiating at religious ceremonies. By observing the day-by-day activities of the American Orthodox rabbi and his involvement in virtually every phase of communal life, and especially his leadership in the area of social action, these young French rabbis gained an entirely new concept of rabbinic leadership. Since the French Jewish community had tripled during the 1960s because of immigration from North Africa, this was happening at the perfect time — the exposure of young French rabbis to the approaches and methods of the American Orthodox Jewish community was now considered of great value by French and American Jewish leaders.



The author and Rabbi Schilli, c. 1968

The RCA and OU agreed to provide training for these French rabbis and host their families. In 1969, the French leaders readily agreed to my proposal and selected their most promising young rabbis to spend a half-year immersed in American Orthodox life. These rabbis studied

our Orthodox infrastructure, from synagogue organization, to NCSY, to Yeshiva University. The young French rabbis saw America and were affected deeply by this experience. Consequently, they returned to France and immediately implemented changes to better their Jewish communities back home. A press release from the Orthodox Union related the following:

> Three graduates of the Seminaire Israelite de France, the Orthodox rabbinical seminary of the French Jewish community, located in Paris, arrived last week at New York's Kennedy Airport from France for post-graduate study and rabbinical fieldwork in the United States. The program, marking the first time ever that foreign rabbinical graduates have come to America for this purpose, is sponsored by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. It is part of a program of inter-communal cooperation arranged last year between this organization and the Consistoire Central, the central synagogue body of French Jewry, as announced by Rabbi Joseph Karasick, UOJCA President.
>
> The first group, to be followed soon by others, consists of Rabbi Claude Zaffran and Rabbi Roger Touitou, accompanied by their wives, and Rabbi Alain Guedj. They were received upon their arrival by a delegation of leaders of the Orthodox Union. In welcoming them, Rabbi Karasick said: "This program, the first of its kind, offers great challenge and opportunity to the American and French Jewish communities. We are confident they will respond appropriately. All of us sharing in this project feel it will set new standards for a fresh, dynamic approach to the problem of intercontinental religious cooperation."

The third step was far more political. The Orthodox community was not the only one vying for French Jewry's partnership. I had found out that the Jewish Theological Seminary, under Dr. Louis Finkelstein, extended an invitation to bestow an honorary degree upon Rabbi Kaplan. This was not just a mere honor. Finkelstein and his close circle saw French Jewry as a community that could very easily submit to Conservative ideology and practice. Indeed, the Cathedral Synagogue of Paris on Rue de la Victoire, the seat of France's Chief Rabbi, boasted a mixed choir (men and women, Jews and non-Jews) and an organ that was used on Shabbat. These features fell in line with teachings espoused in Finkelstein's school. By contrast,

England's Jews, though on a lower level religiously, would never allow such practices in their synagogues. Therefore, while JTS would not think to approach England's Chief Rabbi with such an honor, they were hopeful that Kaplan would accept and agree to use his influence to convert France's community to a Conservative one. When I received word about this, I told Elkann and Rothschild that the OU would not be associated with the French Jews unless they restructured their choirs and removed the organs. Most importantly, I refused to help them if Kaplan made the trip to the Jewish Theological Seminary. Thankfully, they, along with Rabbi Kaplan, agreed to my demands.

And, as a result of this episode, French Jewry became officially Orthodox. Had JTS prevailed, there would have been two communities, the Conservative Ashkenazic Jews and the Orthodox Sephardic community originating from the North African countries. To this day, I firmly believe that we won that day, because French Jews had the impression that the OU was a gigantic organization with international potentials. In the end, we established Orthodoxy in France, and as one powerful French layman put it, "Rabbi Karasick, you saved French Judaism!"

The media agreed with this accolade. The *Jewish Press* announced: "In a historic and momentous decision which will determine for decades to come the direction and cast of the Jewish religious community of France, the Consistoire de Paris, the representative religious organization of the Paris Jewish community, has dispensed with the use of the organ and the mixed choir in the Great Synagogue on Rue de la Victoire. This is the famous main synagogue of Paris and traditionally the pulpit of the Chief Rabbi of France. I was quoted saying the following: "This startling and, for French Jewry, revolutionary development has come about thanks to the ever closer ties between the French Jewish community and the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. This is a step of historic significance not only for French Jewry but for all continental Jewish communities."

❖ ❖ ❖

Let me digress for a moment and relate a story about Jean Paul Elkann that occurred years later. He and I had lost close contact with one another since I was no longer the active president of the OU. I was sitting in my

office when I received a call from Jean Paul. He said to me, "Joe, I need your help." So I answered him, "I would be very happy to help you, but what is the problem?" He began to tell me a very fascinating story. His son, Alain, had married none other than Margaret Agnelli, the daughter of Gianni Agnelli, who was the head of the FIAT automobile company in Turin, Italy and one of the outstanding and leading industrialists on the European continent. Obviously, Margaret was not Jewish and her family were all very important Catholics and very close to the Pope and to the Vatican. In spite of the fact that Alain was the son of Jean Paul, one of the leaders of the French Jewish community, Margaret did not convert to Judaism. I asked Jean Paul again, "So what is the problem?" He answered that Alain and Margaret were living in New York, and she had just given birth to a little baby boy. Jean Paul, the grandfather, was insistent that the baby be converted to the Jewish faith. I asked him, "Why are you coming to me? You are the leader of the French Jewish community in Paris. Why don't you approach the Chief Rabbi of France, Rabbi Kaplan, or to the Beth Din of Paris?" Jean Paul answered me that in spite of the fact that he was the leader of the Paris Jewish community, the Beth Din of Paris would not convert the child since the mother refused to be converted. "So," said Jean Paul, "I am turning to you as my dear old friend to help me out in this situation to see that my new grandson should be converted to Judaism." I answered him that this is a very difficult problem, and if the Rabbinate of France and Beth Din of Paris did not want to convert the child, how could I possibly find a Beth Din in New York who would agree to convert the child in the face of the objections of the others. Jean Paul pleaded with me and said that it would be impossible for him to remain as head of the Paris Consistoire if he had a grandchild that was not Jewish. I concluded the phone conversation by telling him that I would look into the matter and get back to him as quickly as possible.

The first thing I did was visit Alain and Margaret, in their Park Avenue apartment. I went together with Pepa to see if we could have any influence on Margaret to convert and avoid all the difficulties. Margaret advised us that since her parents were so prominent in the Catholic community, it would be impossible for her to convert. Seeing the dilemma, I began to investigate the situation in New York to see if I could find any authoritative rabbi who could find a *heter* in this situation where the conversion could be carried out here in New York. I met with the head of the Beth Din of

America, the official court of the RCA. He told me he would look into the matter to see if anything at all could be done. A short while after, the rabbi contacted me and said that he found a *heter* in the responsa that could enable this conversion. Then I asked if a *beth din* could be arranged, and he agreed to do so. I immediately called Jean Paul in Paris and told him the great news, and he advised me that he and his wife would be on the next Concorde jet from Paris to arrive in New York as quickly as possible for the conversion. I also contacted Alain and Margaret and told her that she would have to give me a letter testifying that she would unconditionally agree that the child would be raised as a full Jew and that she would see to it that he would be able to adhere to all the requirements of the Torah. She agreed to this, and I drew up a letter which she signed and which I still have in my possession. In order for Margaret to live up to her promise in her letter, my wife Pepa had met with her several times to advise her of the important things that she as the mother of the child, even though she was not Jewish, had to provide for the child's future education.

When Jean Paul and his wife arrived in New York, we arranged for the conversion to take place at the *mikveh* in the Upper West Side on West 78th Street off Broadway. Present at the ceremony were the three of us who made up the *beth din*, Alain, the grandparents, Pepa, and a *minyan* that I had prearranged to meet us at the *mikveh*. There was also a *mohel* present for the *hatafat dam brit* necessary to complete the *brit*. (The child had already been circumcised at the hospital; however, it was purely a surgical procedure performed by a doctor.)

It was an incredible sight to see the baby's father, Alain, go into the *mikveh*, take his son in his hands, and dip himself and his baby in the *mikveh* after the *mohel* had performed his duty. He was then named Yaakov in contrast to his given name, Jean Philip. It is really impossible to describe the *simcha* that was felt in the *mikveh* room on the Upper West Side, where the potential heir to one of the great fortunes in Europe was being converted to Judaism. You can imagine the joy and gratitude of Jean Paul and his wife on this occasion, and right then, at the *mikveh*, Jean Paul wrote out thousands of dollars of checks to *tzedakah* to celebrate this wonderful event.

Time passed and again, we lost contact with one another and Jean Paul subsequently passed away. I do not know what happened to Alain. Several years later, I read in the New York papers that Alain was in New York and

was seen very often with Dianne Von Furstenberg, who is Jewish herself, and apparently there was some romantic connection between them. I learned that he was staying at the Carlisle Hotel, so I called him, and he was delighted to hear from me. We were supposed to have lunch with him the next day, but I got a call from him shortly after that he had to return to Europe immediately, and we cancelled the lunch date.

We come now to the year 2002, and the newspapers and magazines all over the world were full of the news that Gianni Agnelli was appointing his grandson, Jean Philip to become the head of FIAT Motors. Jean Philip, now known as John, was then in his early thirties and had become one of most important industrialists in the business world over night. When I read this news, I was very excited, and I placed a call to John at the headquarters of FIAT in Turin, Italy and was immediately connected to him. I introduced myself to him as of course the last time we met, he was the infant in the *mikveh*. I told him very briefly our history. He was very surprised because he told me that his parents Alain and Margaret had divorced and his mother had married someone of old Russian nobility. He told me that he had a brother and sister and they had all been brought up in the Russian Orthodox tradition. Upon hanging up, I immediately wrote him the following letter:

> Dear Jean Philip,
>
> After speaking with you yesterday, I was upset because I explained to you that at the insistence of your late grandfather, I performed your conversion. I did so against my better judgment especially because the Grand Rabbin of France and his rabbinical court refused to do so, since your mother herself would not convert. I therefore asked your mother to sign the letter you'll find appended to this. On the basis of her letter, after many difficulties, I was successful in organizing a Rabbinical court in New York after explaining to them the important position your grandfather had in the French Jewish community as President of the Consistoire of Paris. I also explained to them the close relationship your grandfather had with Baron Alain de Rothschild who was President of the Consistoire of France. As I explained to you, I am the Honorary President of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, representing over one million Jews in America. It was in

> my position as President that I became close to your grandfather. It was because of our close friendship that your grandfather turned to me to have you converted since your mother was not Jewish. As you can see from her letter, your mother made a promise to me. Apparently, she ignored her promise and as a result, I have been placed in a very embarrassing situation, both with respect to my position, and more importantly, my religious responsibilities in that I converted a child whom his mother had no intention to raise as Jewish. (Incidentally, did the Russian Orthodox Church realize that legally you are Jewish and they were baptizing a Jewish child?)

I did not get a satisfactory reply to my letter and we move forward to the year 2013. Subsequently, FIAT had purchased the Chrysler automobile company and became one of the largest automobile companies in the world, with Jean as the chairman of this new giant corporation. One day, I received a phone call from none other than John Elkann, who advised me that he was in town for a short business visit and could I have breakfast with him the next morning in one of the small boutique hotels in downtown New York. I was, of course, very surprised and shocked at this sudden invitation after not hearing from him for so long, and receiving such a strange invitation. I told him that I would be delighted to meet with him and the following morning at nine o'clock we met at the Beekman Hotel.

When I met him, I was overcome by this six-foot-four, unbelievably handsome young man who was the head of Chrysler-FIAT. After the initial formalities, I asked him what the purpose of this meeting was. He told me something most remarkable. He took my hand and then said, "Rabbi Karasick, I am having this meeting with you to tell you that I have decided to live and remain as a Jew. In spite of the fact that my wife and children are not Jewish I will always identify with the Jewish community and act accordingly." You can imagine the emotions that went through me after hearing that statement from him. I thanked him profusely and especially for validating my action in permitting him to become converted when there were so many objections to such an act. We said that we would be in touch with one another in the future. and I left a very happy man.

Several months ago, in the middle of the Year 2015, I received a call from an Italian Jewish gentleman who had a business in New York. He was trying to find me and he knew Rabbi Genack, the head of OU Kashrus,

and asked him if he knew a Rabbi Karasick. Rabbi Genack and I are old friends, and he gave the gentleman my phone number. This man called me and said I have a strange request for you. "I received a call from the Chief Rabbi of Milan, Italy asking me to get in touch with you and to determine if a Mr. Jean Philip Elkann is really Jewish." It seems that a relative of Mr. Elkann was having a bar mitzvah at the *shul* of this Chief Rabbi in Milan and the bar mitzvah boy insisted that Jean Philip get an *aliyah* at the bar mitzvah. The rabbi was contacted by Jean Philip and was told that I would verify that he is truly Jewish and that he could be called up to the Torah. Now the rabbi wanted a confirmation from me directly.

I immediately emailed the rabbi and briefly told him the story of my relationship with and Jean Philip and that he was truly a Jew and could be called to the Torah. Subsequently, I found out that he indeed attended the bar mitzvah, got an *aliyah*, and most surprisingly of all agreed to be the guest of honor at the Grand Banquet of the Milano Jewish Day School which was going to occur the following month.[4]

4. I e-mailed Mr. Elkann advising him that the OU was printing my memoirs and that if he did not object, I would include this story.

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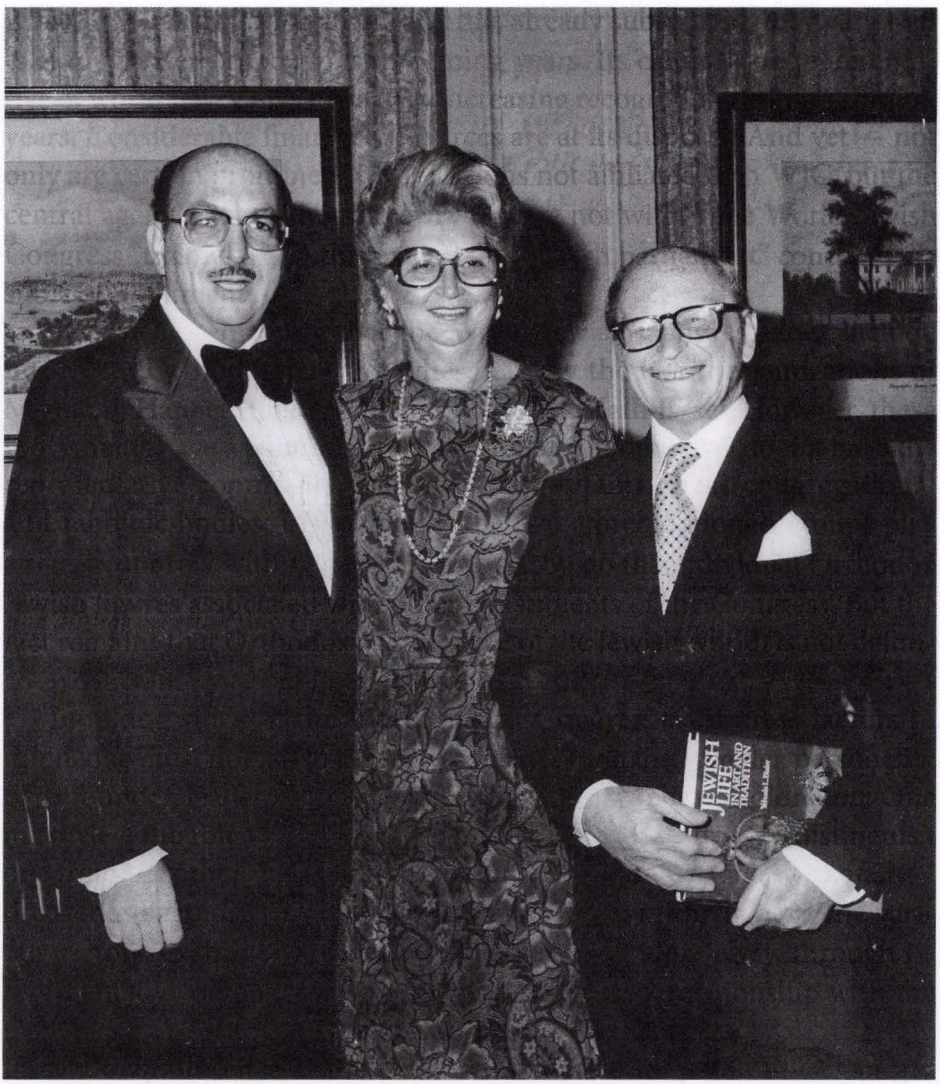
Letter from Rav Moshe Feinstein to author regarding the World Conference of Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jewry, 1971

Chapter Nine

World Conference

Concurrent with our efforts in France, the Orthodox Union had entered into talks concerning the possibility of convening an international conference of Orthodox Jews. The idea of an international forum was of great interest to me, and something I had considered dating back to those years serving under Moe Feuerstein. Indeed, talks about holding some sort of conference dated back in the early sixties, but no one ever formulated a detailed plan. The key player in all of these discussions was Dr. Maurice Jaffe, the director of Hechal Shlomo in Jerusalem. Jaffe, an authentic Lubavitcher who could not have measured taller than five feet, was from Manchester and was well connected to England's Jewish elite. He was uniquely dynamic and an extremely proactive individual. In 1958, Jaffe, with the financial support of Sir Isaac Wolfson, established Hechal Shlomo as the official seat of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate. Jaffe had spent the better part of the next ten years trying to institutionalize Hechal Shlomo as the center of Jewish religious life and authority, but he had only garnered moderate success. Therefore, it was quite sensible on Jaffe's part that he desperately promoted the plan for an international conference to be held at his site, with the Ashkenazic and Sephardic Israeli Chief Rabbis serving as the official sponsors of the event. In his initial attempts to form an international conference, Jaffe tried to rally English Jewry. However, England's Jewish community was considerably smaller than the ones found in America or France. Moreover, English Jewry lacked the institutional structure to mobilize into action. Upon my officially taking the reins of the OU, Jaffe immediately reached out to me. I began holding serious conversations and correspondence with him during the first few months of 1967.

Jaffe felt that leaders from among Jewry's Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities should be brought together to consider the most challenging issues of the day. By convening a conference under the sponsorship of the



The author, Pepa, and Maurice Jaffe, c. 1967

Israeli Chief Rabbis, he hoped to bring clarity and unity to the international Orthodox community. As plans started to progress, albeit slowly, it was agreed that Jaffe would work to mobilize Israeli leaders while the Orthodox Union searched for ways to convince the Jewish communities of England, France, the United States, and other countries to attend the conference.

To my dismay, the leaders of the *yeshiva* world immediately came

out publicly to oppose our initiative. Years before, the *Roshei Yeshiva* in America and Israel, led by the Brisker Rav and the Chazon Ish, had opposed Hechal Shlomo from its very inception. They feared that if the Israeli Chief Rabbinate ever became too powerful, it would eventually attempt to reinstitute a *Sanhedrin*. As a result, the Israeli Chief Rabbis had never felt comfortable, always acting with a sense of inferiority to the *Roshei Yeshiva*. Little had changed by the time I got involved in trying to unite Orthodox Jews under the auspices of the Chief Rabbinate.

Rav Shach, who was for many decades the final authority in Israel, was uncompromising in his objection toward the conference. In America, the Agudath HaRabonim, as well as several leading rabbis protested against my involvement together with the OU in the planning. Their forum, more often than not, was *Hapardes*, a Brooklyn-based Torah journal edited by Rabbi Simcha Elberg. Eventually, Rabbi Elberg got Rav Moshe Feinstein involved. Just the same as the others, Rav Moshe published a letter in *Hapardes* calling on me to withdraw the OU's support of the conference. Rav Moshe was known to be a very reasonable man, so I decided to meet with him at his Lower East Side office. Rav Moshe received me very graciously and listened carefully to what I had to say. I affirmed that neither the Israeli Chief Rabbinate nor the Orthodox Union was interested in restarting the *Sanhedrin*. We were not attempting, as others had accused us, to "take over the Jewish world." As a result of this meeting, Rav Moshe and I developed a close relationship. However, at this juncture, Rav Moshe was not convinced by what I had told him. He did not retract his letter and continued to insist that I withdraw from the conference. I, in turn, told him that I firmly believed that we were on the verge of unifying the Orthodox world and that I could not back down. It became known to me that several months after that meeting, Rav Moshe along with Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky and other leaders of the Agudath HaRabonim established the Igud HaRabonim, a national organization of "genuinely Orthodox Rabbis." The move was clearly an attempt to provide the Orthodox Union with the opportunity of leaving the Synagogue Council. However, the new umbrella organization never materialized.

It must be noted that as a God fearing Jew who was uncompromising in the observance of Torah and *mitzvot* and, above all, one who reveres and has the utmost respect for and awe of *talmidei chachomim*, it was not with any defiance of *da'as Torah* that I continued with my plans. As

was mentioned many times, the OU had been graced and gifted with the presence of our *mara de'asra*, Rav Yosef Ber Soloveitchik and I, personally and as the voice of the organization, always deferred to any and all of his *halachic* decisions, never wavering one iota from his word. When I consulted with the Rav on this matter and extensively explained our position, our goals, and our motives for the Conference, he clearly gave us his approval.

Hoping to assuage matters, I invited the leaders of the National Council of Young Israel to attend the event. Even back then, Young Israel was heavily influenced by the so-called *yeshiva* world. Even though Young Israel in some sense was our competitor, the Orthodox Union at that point had become a much larger institution, and I felt free to invite their people to our program.

With the pressure continuing to build, Rabbi Isser Yehuda Unterman, the Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi, withdrew from sponsorship. Rabbi Yitzchak Nissim, the Sephardic Chief Rabbi, who was very much indifferent to our project in the first place, followed suit. Not only that, we were left without a venue with the Chief Rabbinate's Hechal Shlomo no longer an option. We quickly scrambled to locate a new sponsor and location for the conference. The OU itself could not sponsor it because we were to this point still a domestic organization and could not purport to host an international conference. Finally, we came up to a resolution. Rabbi Sir Israel Brodie, Chief Rabbi of England, agreed to be the official sponsor and convene the weeklong program. Rabbi Brodie was a very congenial and kind man, but he was certainly not to be regarded as a top tier Torah authority. Nevertheless, he was a neutral and very agreeable figure. Also, we secured Binyanei Hauma, the largest convention center in Jerusalem, to house the conference (Although, a few plenary sessions were at Hechal Shlomo).

Undoubtedly, the turning point for the Conference's planning was the Six-Day War, which took place in June, 1967. Suddenly, the whole world had changed. Israel had claimed territories from the Sinai Desert up until Syria and the Golan, and much of Jordan. Israel grabbed headlines throughout the international press and instantly reclaimed its place as the center of Judaism in the minds of world Jewry. From where I was situated in America, Jews of all stripes beamed with pride as the newspapers ran photos of white flags hanging from Arab windows. The feeling of what it

meant to be a Jew at that moment was simply indescribable. In the weeks that followed immediately after the war, we called for a meeting of the international committee. All those involved in the conference's planning up until that point regrouped and redoubled their efforts. Sensing the energy permeating Jewry at that time, we were now sure that our conference would not only be possible, but essential to the further development of Orthodox Judaism the world over.

Indeed, those feelings are encapsulated in the spirit of the Orthodox Union as evidenced by the first resolution passed at the 1968 National Convention:

> Tremendous changes have occurred in the seven decades since the establishment of the Orthodox Union: the upheavals of two world wars, the rise of the Communist regime now ruling almost half of the globe, the annihilation of a third of the Jewish people, the establishment of the State of Israel and its endurance, proven so recently again in the miraculous Six-Day War — these are some of the cataclysmic events which have reshaped Jewish life and profoundly influenced contemporary Jewish thought and action.
>
> In the wake of the almost continuous catastrophes that befell the European reservoirs of Jewish strength, American Jewry emerged in the 20th century from its former unenviable passive role to become the mainstay of Jewish relief and rescue. Slowly too, American Jewry materialized in a truly miraculous development as one of the two Jewish centers which began to replenish the unspeakable spiritual losses of the Holocaust.
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> Torah life began to flourish in North America. The Orthodox Jewish community grew in stature and in strength. Instead of its former defensive role, it developed entirely new, independent and fruitful approaches to the reality of the American Jewish existence. It also developed an indigenous spiritual and lay leadership of high caliber, producing Talmudic scholars, authors, and inspiring teachers, as well as men of great prominence in the sciences and in commerce, all deeply immersed in Jewish affairs. The North American Orthodox community had reached a position where it had to share its spiritual riches with less fortunate Jewish communities domestically and abroad.

> The Orthodox Union played a major role in all of these developments. Above all, as the spokesman of the Orthodox synagogue and as the articulate voice of Torah, the Orthodox Union created the climate in which this significant rise of the Torah community was possible.
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> Momentous events have further changed the Jewish landscape over the two years since the Orthodox Union met last at that convention in 1968. The miracles of the Six-Day War and the equally miraculous response of Jews in all parts of the globe, who rose to unprecedented and deeply moving heights of sacrificial giving in support of Israel's defense, resulted in a new assertion of the indestructibility of Jewish unity. The lethargy and indifference of those who until then had lived on the very periphery of Jewish consciousness were replaced by a genuine, active willingness to accept active Jewish responsibility.
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> Not only were the Old City and the Western Wall liberated in the Six-Day War. Entirely new sources of Jewish vitality were uncovered and set free, while at the same time many pretenses and illusions of the escapists and assimilationists were revealed in their irrelevance, and thus shattered. The eternal covenant between Israel and its God who will not forsake His people has again become a living and operative concept in the lives of Jewish multitudes.
>
> Thus, a new yearning for the sources of the Jewish essence came to light, thereby imposing enormous shared responsibilities upon the Torah community to strengthen Torah faith and observance. In response to this, it was imperative to develop entirely new approaches to reach out to the suddenly increased numbers of men and women who began to seek acquaintance with, and instruction in, the teachings of Torah. It was crucial to respond to the uniqueness of the Jewish role among the nations and to the grave social issues which confront humanity by articulating a Torah position and formulating a Torah program of action.

But the protests from the *yeshiva* world never ceased. Two month before the conference, *Hapardes* attempted to blitz us with another wave of attacks. The Agudath HaRabonim "opposed the conference with full force"

and "commanded all of its members to boycott the event." Rabbis Moshe Feinstein and Yaakov Kamenetsky wrote in, yet again expressing how "troubled" they were by the conference. "This conference stands against the basic tenets of world Jewry and is a grave danger for its future. Therefore, we turn to all of the rabbis and righteous *balebatim* and ask that they not participate in this conference." Finally, the Lubavitcher Rebbe, after speaking with many of the leading rabbis of the *yeshiva* world, made up his mind to oppose the conference as well. The Rebbe was convinced, "after speaking with many of the *gedolei hador* and reviewing the positions taken by the leaders of the past generation," that such a conference was undesirable. "And if the previous generation of *gedolei Yisrael* opposed it, how much more so should our generation!"

A few days after the Sukkot holiday concluded in 1967, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein wrote a short but powerful note to all members of the Agudath HaRabonim. He made it known that the leaders of that organization have "decided to oppose with full force" the upcoming World Conference. He asked his fellow rabbis to speak out against our program and to forbid their constituencies from partnering with World Conference leaders.

I immediately wrote to Reb Moshe to plead our case. The response I received during Chanukah rendered me speechless. Rabbi Feinstein explained that the editors of *Pardes* did not speak on his behalf. In fact, as Reb Moshe further explained in his letter to me, he had never even seen the article printed in that journal! Moreover, his opposition to the conference was based upon what had been communicated to him by the rabbinic leaders in Israel: that it was to be hosted in Hechal Shlomo. Moreover, Reb Moshe clarified to me that he was supportive of our mission and hoped that in the end we would succeed in uniting the world's Orthodox communities.

A few weeks later, the following open letter from Israel's two leading rabbinic scholars to the Orthodox Union was published in Hebrew in the December, 1967 issue of *Hapardes*. Here is a translation of the letter:

> Lately, we have heard repeatedly that various groups are planning to organize and unite the world's Orthodox synagogues. Their intention is to reach consensus for a unified code of practice and a central spiritual authority for the all of the world's synagogues.
>
> It is well known that the *Gaonim* of the past generation, most

notably Rabbi Yitzchak Ze'ev Soloveitchik, the Brisker Rav, steadfastly opposed the establishment of the so-called spiritual authority vested in the Hechal Shlomo. In their view, such an institution would cause direct and glaring danger and incipient reform to Torah-True Judaism. Through their opposition and great influence, these *Gaonim* were able to prevent the Hechal Shlomo from reaching its desired goals and making an impact on world Jewry.

At the moment, arrogant individuals claim that the time has come for the Hechal Shlomo to take its place as the authority for all of Orthodox Judaism. We find it our obligation to publicize our unequivocal position and to make a statement to all those in the Exile that joining in such a convention presents great and imminent danger. Even if the convention is not officially sponsored by the Hechal Shlomo, the convention is still in line with the institution's principles and goals. The entire program would only help the institution realize its impure goals towards steps to reform Torah-True Judaism. Nothing has changed since ten years ago when our *Gaonim* forbade any cooperation with the Hechal Shlomo. May Hashem save us from this threat and potential destruction.

Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky
Eliezer Menachem Man Shach

Again, I refused to back down. In the end, the conference, which was ultimately held in January 1968, was immeasurably successful thanks in large measure to Maurice Jaffe and the Orthodox Union's Executive Vice President, Samson R. Weiss. No seat was left vacant for the opening sessions held at Binyanei Hauma, and it was a struggle to make room for all of the delegates and dignitaries over the course of the week. Over a dozen chief rabbis of various countries and regions joined delegates from nearly fifty communities in attendance. More than five hundred people, including the entire leadership of the OU, traveled from America to participate in the grand unification of Orthodoxy. The OU delegation to the World Conference included 484 synagogue leaders from 32 states and three Canadian provinces. Among the American rabbis who spoke at the conference were Rabbi Norman Lamm, then the spiritual leader of the Jewish Center; and Rabbi Simon Dolgin of the Beth Jacob Congregation in Los Angeles. Jean Paul Elkann and Baron Alain de Rothschild led a sixty-person

delegation from France. Others came from Italy, South Africa and England. Sephardic communities from across the globe, led by Chacham Solomon Gaon, joined us as well. Among the Israeli politicians who attended and spoke were Prime Minster Levi Eshkol, President Zalman Shazar, and Foreign Minister Abba Eban. Without any exaggeration, every important individual one might wish to see at such an event made an appearance. As the *New York Times* reported, our meeting showed off "the rich heritages and spiritual treasures of the Ashkenazic world with the strength and glory of the Sephardic community." Further, we made sure that the "powerful voice of traditional Judaism will be in a firmer position to expound and interpret the values of the majority of world Jewry, which still clings to the basic Orthodox affiliation, rituals and observances." We held another conference in Israel during my last year in office, in 1972. However, it did not hold the same sway as the first one had. As it turned out, we launched that first conference just at the height of Jewish history.

Before the Jerusalem conference took place, the Orthodox Union had been known as a domestic organization, very successful in organizing the American Orthodox synagogues. However, by the end of the conference, we had become something much more. I, along with my fellow officers, left a tremendous impression on the Israeli and Diaspora communities. As co-sponsors of the conference, we were quickly becoming a world trademark. And this gave me hope for much more. The media understood the magnitude of our project. Accordingly, I was quoted in the *Jewish Press*:

> The response of traditional Jewish communities across the globe to the World Conference call is a clear demonstration of the recognized need for intercommunity exchange of thinking on the questions facing all alike at this time of world upheaval. Today, the spiritual foundations of civilization are under basic challenge, society is threatened with the shattering of moral standards, the technological revolution sweeps away the guideposts of the ages. Amidst the ferment of these times, we of the Torah faith know that true, unfailing direction is to be found in the sacred tenets and teachings which have come down to us from on High through the ages of Jewish history. The very diversity of communities represented at the World Conference underlines our unity of belief and purpose. Coming together from the four corners of the earth,

> we shall seek coordinated approaches for gearing our respective community programs to contemporary needs.
>
> To most Jews, the unity of the Jewish people is a deeply religious, mystical experience. Many more Jews flock to the Western Wall, Israel's most sacred religious site, than to the Knesset, the Parliament, and the seat of Israel's government and the most symbolic expression of her sovereignty. The World Conference will tend to remind Israel of this fact and will underline the need to sustain the Holy Land character of Israel, on which its attraction to Jews all over the world is based. Significantly, the World Conference will open with Minchah Services at the Western Wall, before the Conference is called to order in the evening at the Festive Opening Session at the Binyanei Ha-Umah, Jerusalem's public auditorium.

Shortly after the Conference, Maurice Jaffe sent me a note with the following message: "The Conference was indeed a tremendous undertaking, and while I have not been able to take any rest since it concluded, I have been compensated by bathing in the sunshine of compliments which have been pouring in from all over the world. Evidently it has had a bigger impact than either of us anticipated or have since realized." The World Conference inspired others to follow suit and seek out similar programs. For example, Rabbi Abraham Hershberg, President of the Union Rabinica de America Latina, wrote the following:

> I came back last week from my trip and have been very busy with a lot of work, as usual, but I want to write to you and tell you that I still feel the inspiration which I received by the International Conference of Synagogues in Jerusalem. Using this inspiration, I would like to mention to you that I suggested calling a hemisphere conference of Ashkenazic and Sephardic synagogues of Latin America, the United States and Canada, to take place in Mexico or in Rio de Janeiro.

Of course, I was busy reliving the World Conference as well, both in conversation and in writing. Upon returning back to New York, I wrote to Alain de Rothschild: "A new cohesion of Orthodox synagogues all over the world has been created, and they have become cognizant of their

responsibilities and of their strength." Nearly a month after the Conference, I wrote to ten rabbis of major countries and communities to let them know the conclusions drawn from the Americans who attended the event: "The conclusions reached by the American participants and especially by the leaders who were members of the Conference Steering Committee, can be summed up as follows:

- Orthodox synagogues everywhere have become aware of the great potential and the inherent strength of the Torah community.
- A sound basis has been laid by the World Conference for an ongoing, sustained process of cooperation through which this strength can be shared by all components of the Torah community.
- Thus, a new era in the annals of the World Orthodox Jewish Community has been initiated.

My memo seemed acceptable to all of its recipients. Just to provide one example, Rabbi Bernard M. Casper, the leader of South Africa's Jewish community, wrote the following to me:

> Your summing up of the results of the Conference seems wholly acceptable to me. Many of the participants would, as we know, have been happier if the foundation had been laid for a World Body. In the absence of such a possibility, it is important to stress — as your summing up does — the strength of "The Torah Community" as well as the arrangements "for an on-going, sustained process of co-operation" between the various Communities. This can be of the greatest significance, and we shall now have to turn our attention to the most effective means of developing this co-operation.

❖ ❖ ❖

In truth, an earlier event aided the OU's rise to internationalism: the OU's acceptance into the World Jewish Congress. The principle of the WJC was that each member organization operates as an international entity. Otherwise, national organizations would be incorporated into regional districts.

The basis of my OU platform was to place the OU as an international entity. I would not rest until I accomplished that, and I realized that the best

way to make this happen was to gain entry into the World Jewish Congress. The WJC was founded in Geneva, Switzerland in 1936 by Dr. Nachum Goldmann and his loyal aid, Gerhart Riegner. I first met Dr. Goldmann in 1965, a year before I took the helm of the OU when I represented the OU at a meeting of the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations.

The early attempts to convince my fellow Orthodox Union leaders did not go well. Most of my peers did not see a reason to expand our operations. Eventually, though, they came to accept my point of view. Even more difficult was convincing the leaders of the WJC that the Orthodox Union belonged within their ranks. I attended a WJC meeting where I implored its members to consider our application and where I first encountered Dr. Goldmann.

It cannot be said that Dr. Goldmann was a religious man, but he certainly respected the Orthodox community. He told me that once when he was young, his father, a Hebrew school teacher, took him to receive a *beracha* from Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik. The episode, brief as it was, deeply impacted Dr. Goldmann. Therefore, he was incredibly interested when I told him that I could introduce him to the Rav. Although I gently told him that it would take much urging on my part to convince the Rav to attend such a meeting, Dr. Goldmann understood and, for some reason still unknown to me, accepted the OU's bid to join the WJC as an international body.

As a result of all this, the Orthodox Union was accepted to the international governing board of the WJC, and eventually, I was elected chairman of the American section of the WJC. It was also at this time that Nahum Goldmann established the Memorial Foundation. The purpose of this organization was to recreate and remember the lost world of European Jewry. Its considerable budget came from the German government. Goldmann made sure that the OU and I were involved in this important endeavor, as well. From that point on, Dr. Goldmann and I grew quite close. We maintained our relationship at various plenary sessions and meetings. And on a personal level, our families would visit one another when we traveled to Europe and when he would visit America.

At the World Jewish Congress, I felt that it was my role to speak on behalf of Orthodox Judaism. Very few attending the meetings had a full conception of what Orthodoxy truly stood for, and I made sure that its voice would be heard among the multitude of issues discussed at each gathering.

Often when I approached the podium to speak, some of my opponents would mutter under their breaths, "Here comes another sermon." Despite these disparaging remarks, I continuously persevered in relating to the group of leaders the Orthodox perspective of world matters.

On the other hand, Dr. Goldmann over time became quite interested in Orthodox ways of life. Dr. Goldmann lived a very lavish lifestyle in his fashionable Paris condominium. Up until this point, his secularism really prevented him from having any sort of deep understanding of Orthodoxy. In 1973, while my son Mark was still serving as the Rav's assistant, I inquired with Rabbi Soloveitchik to see if he would be willing to meet with Dr. Goldmann. He answered in the affirmative. Dr. Goldmann's recognition of my part in introducing him to the Rav was recorded in a 1973 issue of *Panim El-Panim*. Incidentally, the article also captures my personal stance on the importance of a Jewish organization representing an authentic Torah position:

> ... את הציבור החרדי בארצות־הברית ייצג הרב יוסף קרסיק, מי שהיה נשיא "איחוד הקהילות החרדיות" באמריקה. הוא הצביע על־כך שהיהדות־החרדית באמריקה מצליחה ללחום נגד הטמיעה מפני שהיא אינה גורסת פשרות, או ויתורים ביהדות "כל עוד הלכנו בדרך של פשרות, או ויתורים, הפסנו. הירידה שלנו נעצרה רק מאותו רגע שבו קבענו לעצמנו את תחומי ה"הלכה" כתחומי־החיים". אך, למרות עמדה זו, הורגשו במשך כל ימי הכינוס יחסי־קירבה בין הרב קרסיק לבין נשיא "הקונגרס היהודי העולמי" ד"ר נחום גולדמן, המצייג השקפת־עולם הרחוקה מאוד מעקרונות ההלכה. מתברר, כי ד"ר גולדמן אינו יכול לשכוח עד היום את הפגישה המרשימה שלו עם הרב יוסף דוב סולובייציק "הגאון מבוסטון," שנערכה בביתו הנאה של הרב יוסף קרסיק, וביוזמתו של הרב קרסיק, לפני שני אחדות, בניו יורק.

Translation:

> ...The Orthodox community in the United States was represented by Rabbi Joseph Karasick, who was President of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. He pointed out that Orthodox Judaism in America has been successful in the fight against assimilation because it does not allow for compromises or leniencies. "Once we open ourselves up to compromise, we lose. Our downfall stopped the moment we established for ourselves the parameters of *halachah* as our parameters for living." Notwithstanding Rabbi Karasick's strong views, throughout the

> conference, the good relationship was palpable between him and Dr. Nahum Goldmann, President of the World Jewish Congress, who represents views toward Judaism which are quite distant from the principles of *halachah*; it's clear that Dr. Goldmann remembers to this day the impactful meeting that he had with Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik of Boston, that was held several years ago in Rabbi Karasick's home in New York at Rabbi Karasick's initiative.

I recall that meeting with vivid clarity. I was seated at the head of the table in my Upper West Side apartment, the Rav was to my right, and Dr. Goldmann was to my left. I remained mostly quiet during the exchange. That was to be expected. What was very interesting, though, was that the Rav too remained silent for the majority of the meeting. Instead, it was Dr. Goldmann, that great raconteur, who described in detail his perception of the Jewish world. The Rav was so impressed that he agreed to hold these meetings twice yearly with Dr. Goldmann. Perhaps most amazingly was that at each subsequent meeting their relationship grew closer, and Dr. Goldmann's fondness for Jewish tradition developed stronger. As a result, Dr. Goldmann announced at a conference meeting that the official religious advisor for the WJC would be Rabbi Soloveitchik. Practically, this did not have direct impact, since the WJC was a secular body; yet Dr. Goldmann's tribute to the Rav was a significant statement at that time,.

When Edgar Bronfman succeeded Dr. Goldmann as the head of the World Jewish Congress, I immediately arranged a meeting between Bronfman and the Rav. Bronfman was more than amenable to this request and had a luncheon prepared for their first meeting. Moreover, he sent his personal Rolls-Royce to Washington Heights to fetch the Rav to this first meeting in 1979. It is interesting that when Bronfman escorted the Rav back to his office at Yeshiva University in that same car, he offered to fly Rabbi Soloveitchik home to Boston in his personal jet. The Rav, already stunned by this sort of wealth, gently objected and explained that he preferred to fly commercially.

My most important contribution to the WJC undoubtedly was the facilitation of the Ceausescu Affair. This important article was disseminated by the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* on December 10, 1973:

> President Nicolae Ceausescu of Rumania told a Jewish delegation here Friday that although Jews who wish to emigrate would

continue to have their applications for exit visas granted, he hoped the 50,000 to 60,000 Jews still in Rumania would elect to stay and participate in the building of a strong social and economic system. The 40-minute interview, believe to be the first of its kind between American Jewish leaders and the head of a Communist European country on a visit to the United States, was marked by cordiality and frankness, according to the delegation.

The visit to the President was arranged by the New York office of the World Jewish Congress. The delegation consisted of Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, Rabbi Joseph Karasick, Max Melamed and Jacob Stein.

Ceausescu emphasized that Rumania's treatment of Its Jewish community, which the delegation praised, was in accordance with its constitution and its policy toward all religious minorities. Expressing regret that some Senators had linked his country's request for most-favored nation status to its immigration policies, he commented that the presence in Israel of some 400,000 Rumanian Jews testified to the freedom of emigration extended to "Rumanian citizens of Jewish origin."

Ceausescu presented a lengthy analysis of the Middle East situation and referred to his discussions with Premier Golda Meir and Foreign Minister Abba Eban. Stressing that Rumania's friendship toward Israel entitled it to speak candidly, he expressed the view that Israel could not continue to exist in virtually total isolation and with the hostility of the 100 million Arab people. He said Israel had missed some valuable opportunities in the past and must not now fail to take advantage of what he considered a unique opportunity to achieve peace.

Members of the delegation questioned some of the assumptions underlying the President's analysis of Israel's past diplomacy but both sides agreed that the focus should be on the present and the future, especially the upcoming peace conference in Geneva. Ceausescu several times asked that American Jewish leaders assist Rumania's efforts to expand its trade with the United States.

In truth, Ceausescu's interest in meeting with us concerned the proposal that would become the United States Senate's Jackson-Vanik Amendment

of the 1974 Trade Act. The Act awarded special trade status to the countries that were considered "Most Favored Nations." Any country that wished to have this designation in order to effectively do business with the United States needed to support America's pro-Israeli efforts to the Middle East against the Russian-Arab alliance.

As Chairman of the American sector of the World Jewish Congress, I received a call from the Romanian Ambassador to the United States. In 1973, Ceausescu was in New York for a meeting of the United Nations. The Romanian President, I was told, wanted to meet with a small delegation to discuss the Jackson-Vanik proposal. Apparently, the Chief Rabbi of Romania, Rabbi Moshe Rosen, a very smart, old-time rabbi, recommended me to the Romanian ambassador, hoping to improve Jewish life in Romania.

Ceausescu was staying at the Waldorf Astoria and only had time to meet at 3:00 p.m. on Friday. As it was the winter season, Shabbat typically came in just after 4:00 p.m. Therefore, I agreed to the ambassador's request but told him that it was of the utmost importance that the meeting should conclude by 3:45 so I could take a cab back to the Upper West Side.

Our delegation appeared at Ceausescu's suite on time, but he was late. More time passed, and the President still had not returned from his prior meetings. Finally, at 3:40, Ceausescu, a man no taller than five feet, walked into the room. Realizing the importance of this meeting, I stayed.

"I am talking to you because I know that you Jews have all the power in America," Ceausescu began. "I want you to see to it that Romania receives Most Favored Nations status."

His message was as straight as that. We discussed the importance of support for Israel and Romania's Jewish community. He understood our position and gave his word that he would increase his support of Jewish life. Our meeting adjourned at 4:15 — it was almost Shabbat. No time to hail a cab.

I had to walk from 50th Street and Park Avenue to my Upper West Side home. It was at least a 45-minute walk. And there was still the matter of my belongings. I saw a vase in the foyer outside of Ceausescu's suite at the Waldorf and I thought to hide my wallet behind it. Nervous about what I had done, I left the hotel empty handed. I entered our apartment at 5:30, not showered and unshaven. Immediately after Shabbat, I returned back to the hotel and thankfully, my wallet was still behind the vase.

Two other interesting occurrences took place during our participation as part of WJC delegations. In must have been in the eighties when one of the conferences of the WJC took place in Budapest. Few could have imagined that over one hundred delegates would ever assemble in a country that witnessed the near-complete extermination of a half million of its Jewish population. The meals were catered by the lone kosher restaurant in the city. On top of that, the Hungarian government gave us the highest level of respect and offered police escorts to all of our conventions and events.

One night during our stay, our delegation — Pepa and I included — attended a concert in Budapest's opera house. There was a tenor, a baritone, a soprano and a mezzo-soprano. All in all, it was a nice concert, but nothing too memorable. That is, until at the very end of the performance, when we believed the performance was over. Something extraordinary took place. The tenor, a young man, not yet forty, with a beautiful voice, stood up and made his way to the piano. He sat down, and to our astonishment, pulled out a yarmulke. He began to play and sing the loveliest rendition of "*Vilirushalayim Ircha*." As we later found out, this courageous tenor was the scion of a family of Hungarian cantors.

For the first part of our trip, Pepa and I stayed in the Buda section of the city, in the Hilton Hotel. Having not much to do one evening, we made our way to the hotel casino upstairs. As we approached the entrance of the casino, I asked my wife if she thought it was a good idea to remove my yarmulke. She and I agreed that it was a better idea to remove it as long as we were in that sort of place. As it happened, Edgar Bronfman, the head of the World Jewish Conference at that time, was socializing in the casino and spotted us. He wished us a good evening, and promptly asked why my head was bare. I explained that I was resistant to wearing my yarmulke in a casino. He swiftly reprimanded me and told me to replace my head covering. Although Bronfman was not as religiously observant as I, his lesson in intellectual honesty stayed with me from that moment onward.

Later during our trip abroad, we took part in a WJC Conference in Vienna. In the midst of our conference, the Austrian government was preparing to accept a former Nazi general who was just released from prison. Appallingly, a grand parade was being prepared to mark his arrival. Edgar Bronfman was beside himself. Fortunately, he used his significant contacts

to urge Austrian officials to cancel the parade so long as our delegation was in Vienna. We learned later that Bronfman threatened to disband our conference, forcing the Austrian government to back down.

Chapter Ten

Life in the Spotlight

One of the more difficult tasks of my OU presidency was navigating the politics surrounding the Synagogue Council of America. For many years, the Synagogue Council was an influential umbrella organization that included institutions that represented all three of America's major Jewish denominations. Tension surrounding Orthodox participation in the Synagogue Council mounted after Rabbi David Hollander, a mentor of mine during my days at Yeshiva University who was President of the Rabbinical Council of America at that time, petitioned the leading *Roshei Yeshiva* about the propriety of Orthodox Jews aligning themselves with other sects of our faith. In 1956, a group of eleven prominent *rabbanim*, foremost among them Rabbis Moshe Feinstein, Yitzchak Hutner, Yaakov Kamenetsky, and Aharon Kotler, issued the following decree in response to Rabbi Hollander:

> We have been asked by a number of rabbis in the country, and by alumni and *musmochim* of yeshivos, if it is permissible to participate with, and be a member of the New York Board of Rabbis, and similar groups in other communities, which are composed of Reform and Conservative "rabbis."
>
> Having gathered together to clarify this matter, it has been ruled by the undersigned that it is forbidden by the law of our sacred Torah to be a member of, and to participate in, such an organization.
>
> We have also been asked if it is permissible to participate with, and to be a member of the Synagogue Council of America, which is also composed of Reform and Conservative organizations.
>
> We have ruled that it is forbidden by the law of our sacred

> Torah to participate with them either as an individual or as an organized communal body.
>
> May Hashem Yisborach have mercy on His people, and seal the breaches [in Torah life], and may we be worthy of His elevation of the glory of our sacred Torah and our people Israel.

Despite Rabbi Hollander's attempt to adhere to the decree of the *rabbanim*, both the RCA and the OU maintained their seats at the Synagogue Council's table.

The Rav was concerned that the support of the US Government for Israel should always be strong and positive. As a result, he wanted the *chutz*, the outside non-Jewish world, to perceive that the Jewish community at large was united and solidly supporting the fledgling Jewish State. Therefore, Rabbi Soloveitchik believed that so long as *halachic* matters were not discussed, Orthodox leaders should cooperate with other Jews in matters of *chutz* for the betterment of Israel.

While my track record at the OU and at other institutions certainly reflected the Rav's sentiments, this was an uneasy position to maintain within the OU. In 1964, as treasurer, I had become involved with the OU's Synagogue Council debate. I led a committee that was assigned to determine the feasibility of joining the OU, RCA, the Religious Zionists of America, the Rabbinical Alliance of America, and the Agudath Israel as a cohesive Orthodox group. As reported by *The New York Times*, our "resolution focused attention on a controversy over whether Orthodox religious groups should be affiliated with other branches of Judaism in dealing with religious and social issues." Although we determined that this plan was not a feasible one at this time, I drew upon this investigation later on during my own presidency. Despite the lack of progress achieved by my committee, I made sure our community heard my position on the Synagogue Council matter. As one of the leading officers of the Orthodox Union, I went on the record at the 1964 annual convention that I was resistant to the OU's participation in the Synagogue Council. "There is implied in such association," I stated firmly, "the ipso facto recognition of non-Orthodox philosophies as legitimate alternatives to the historic and authentic Judaism of Orthodoxy."

On the eve of my election as President, the OU's top officers participated in a five-hour meeting. The focus of our meeting was a resolution

calling for the OU to withdraw from the Synagogue Council. It was defeated, and we remained a part of that organization until it dissolved in the 1990s. Once elected, one of my first moves at the helm of the OU was the establishment of a Spiritual Task Force in April, 1967. This committee was charged with reinforcing authentically traditionalist moral support for the North American Orthodox community. The new group was composed of spiritual leaders, with many years of experience in congregations in the larger cities, who have volunteered to serve for four weeks each year in smaller communities in all parts of the country that could not afford rabbis of their own. The RCA and other Orthodox rabbinic groups had indicated their support for the project, and 25 spiritual leaders were selected for the program. I was not prepared for Orthodox and non-Orthodox leaders to believe that the OU stood for anything but *halachic* Judaism. In so doing, we were able to give much needed help to the smaller Orthodox communities.

Another initiative, with which my administration dealt with extensively, was the fight for Soviet Jewry. Like many politically charged endeavors, this was a somewhat difficult one to navigate. Founded in 1964, the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, known as the SSSJ, had taken great strides to make America aware of the plight of Jews trapped behind the Iron Curtain. The mostly college age members inspired many within our Orthodox community to do all that we could for our brothers and sisters under Communist regime. In hindsight, the effort seems like an obvious one to support. However, keep in mind that many of Orthodoxy's leading *Roshei Yeshiva* were opposed to these public outcries and petitions. These men, indoctrinated by European mindsets, were fearful that public display would endanger Russia's Jews. Despite that, without alienating those to the right, I organized many projects through the OU on behalf of Soviet Jewry.

As one might expect, one of the most difficult components of my leadership career was engaging with rightwing sectors of the Orthodox community. Indeed, one recurring problem I had with the OU was our relationship to the *yeshiva* world and the Agudath HaRabonim. Since they viewed the OU as a spokesman for Modern Orthodoxy, the "Torah-Only" community always looked down on us. On a certain level, our organization was in competition with the Agudath Israel of America. For a period of time, we competed to host some of the most prominent rabbis to address our respective conventions. One individual who shared his wisdom

with the men and women of the Orthodox Union was the Telshe *Rosh Yeshiva*, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter. He attended many of our conventions until sometime in the 1970s when politics from the right forced him to align with their positions. In fact, Rabbi Gifter originally agreed to attend the World Conference but pulled out after getting word of certain French Jewish involvement. "I cannot identify with the spiritual head of the French Consistoire," Rabbi Gifter wrote to me. "This makes my participation in the convention absolutely impossible. You must immediately cease all further publicity about my participation."

Another respected member of the Agudath HaRabonim who participated in OU functions was Rabbi Eichenstein, the Chief Rabbi of the St. Louis *kehillah*. Members of the Agudath HaRabonim constantly called on him to defect from the OU's ranks, but Rabbi Eichenstein held to his laurels. He was strong enough to withstand their demands.

Despite my difficulties in maintaining certain positions with the *yeshiva* world, personally, I always had strong associations with the leaders of that community. For example, here is a personal note sent to me by Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner, the *Rosh Yeshiva* of Yeshivas Rav Chaim Berlin, around the conclusion of my presidency:

בג' אדר תשל"ב

מעלת כבוד ידידי הרב ר' יוסף קרסיק נ"י

שלום וברכה!

קבל נא בזה את תודתי הלבבית על פעולתך היום לטובת תכניתנו. פעולתך זו מעידה כמאה עדים על רגשי הידידות המקננים בלבך כלפנו. הנני מבטיחך כי גם ביחסים שלנו שולט הוא החוק של "כמים הפנים לפנים".

יודע אני עם כמה משתוקק הוא לבך להרבות מעשים טובים ולרומם כבודה של תורה. יחזק השם את כחך למען תוכל להוציא לפועל תשוקתך זו. בברכת שמחת פורים!

בהוקרה באמנה,

יצחק הוטנר

Translation:

To my esteemed friend, Rabbi Joseph Karasick,

Please accept my heartfelt thanks for your efforts to improve our program. Your efforts serve as a testament, one hundred-fold, to

> your strong feelings of friendship toward us. I assure you that our feelings of friendship toward you are also governed by the maxim [Prov. 27:19], "As in water, face answers to face, so the heart of man to man..."
>
> I know how deeply you aspire to do achieve positive accomplishments and to advance the honor of Torah. May God continue to give you the strength to fulfill these aspirations.
>
> With best wishes for a Happy Purim and with deepest esteem,
>
> Yitzchok Hutner

There was at least one exception to the rivalry between our Modern Orthodox community and the *yeshiva* world. The Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations was becoming more prominent in those years. Initially it was truly a meeting of organizational presidents and personalities. I had gained much from these meetings and I thought that the Orthodox community could use its own collective group for institutional presidents. I knew full well that my one obstacle to creating such a body would be the Agudath Israel of America. Despite our organizational clashes, I had a very good relationship with its leader, Rabbi Moshe Sherer. I announced my plan at our Thanksgiving Convention in 1970. The following was printed throughout the Jewish press:

> Rabbi Joseph Karasick of New York, President of the Union, told the convention that "American Orthodox Judaism should be represented by an articulate, unified and united voice." He said that he expected in the near future to call a national conference of Orthodox Rabbis and lay leaders to discuss his proposal for the establishment of a single Orthodox agency that would end "duplication, rivalry and wasteful fragmentation." He said that "precious manpower" was being wasted because of "the lack of coordination and efficiency."

To my enormous delight, Moshe agreed to my plan, and we recruited about a dozen Orthodox groups to join our ranks. I was voted Chairman along with Rabbi Sherer, who never did miss a meeting in the few years that this group existed.

My administration oversaw tremendous growth in youth education. The National Conference of Synagogue Youth was founded in 1954 but

underwent several false starts before it stood on firm ground in 1959. NCSY had hundreds of participants when I began my tenure as President of the Orthodox Union. Upon the conclusion of my administration, NCSYers numbered in the thousands. Of course, the spike in numbers forced OU officers to search for more funds and resources to support this all-important institution. In the early 1970s when fundraising became more difficult, our leaders needed to become more creative in our financial outreach programs. One prime example of our ingenuity took place in 1972 when we asked the Rav to help our cause. Rabbi Soloveitchik wrote to selected philanthropists that "an urgent and pressing matter has come to my attention which seriously hinders the work of NCSY, a movement dear to me and vital to the furtherance of Torah Judaism." The Rav explained in that letter, sent to men of the stature of Max Etra, Joseph Gruss, Ludwig Jesselson, Max Stern, Arthur Belfer, Joseph Mazer, and Herbert Tenzer, that he has "asked a small group of intimates to meet with me in the hope of resolving the problem ... at the home of Rabbi Joseph Karasick."

In my leadership position, I was fortunate to interact with many prominent figures, Jewish and non-Jewish, and deal with a variety of important matters. In 1967, I had dinner with the Romanian representative to the United Nations to discuss matters of world Jewry. Also, an important issue that OU leadership dealt with that year was the matter of funeral standards. Harold Jacobs (Chairman of the Funeral Standards Commission), Rabbi Sidney Appelbaum (Administrator of the Funeral Standards Commission), and I worked hard to put together a contract that could be agreed upon by the RCA and the Association of Jewish Funeral Directors. Matters which ranged from pricing to ritual were not standardized and caused much consternation for grieving families and community rabbis. Although we were unsuccessful in publishing a manual that achieved a sense of accord, we paved new ground by bringing many divergent views to the same table for discussion.

Also during my tenure as OU President, I was invited to speak in many major and minor Jewish centers across the United States. For example, in 1968 I served as the keynote speaker at a Memorial Day weekend conference in Baltimore, Maryland. I addressed a packed audience and discussed challenges facing the Orthodox Union and international concerns of American Jewry. A year later, the OU held a National Leadership Conference at Chicago's Ambassador Hotel. The Chief Rabbi

Immanuel Jakobovitz of the British Commonwealth and I were the keynote speakers.

In July 1968, Hubert H. Humphrey, the Vice President of the United States, wrote a personal memo to me to inform me of his "new statement dealing with my views of Near East policies." Humphrey was a true friend of America's Jews and Israel and was a staunch supporter of the State of Israel after the Six-Day War. As he explained to me, his views were "motivated by a sense of justice and concern for all the inhabitants of a region that through the centuries has contributed so much to our spiritual and philosophical development."

It was also around that time that I received a letter from Rabbi Dr. Abraham Hershberg, President of the Union of Orthodox Rabbis in Latin America. He wrote to me to see what I could do about providing kosher food to soldiers fighting in Vietnam. "It should be possible to send kosher food to Vietnam, as it is a war zone. There are many soldiers who do not eat kosher food in their homes, but they would eat it in the army," he observed. "When people are in a great danger like in a war, they turn to God and to His demands."

Touching on the topic of Vietnam, it is important to state that this was a tricky topic for Jewish leaders. More specifically, the Orthodox opinion on the Vietnam War was completely divided. It was therefore impossible to speak about the War without alienating some of our constituencies. The following quotation from the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* does well to show how we tactfully dealt with this conundrum:

> Rabbi Joseph Karasick declared here yesterday that "it is no longer possible to speak of a consensus of the Orthodox Jewish community concerning Vietnam." The statement was a departure from the previously solid support by the Orthodox Union for the Vietnam policies of former President Lyndon B. Johnson and of the Nixon Administration.
>
> Rabbi Karasick told the National Leadership Conference of the Orthodox Union that "all American Orthodox Jews are vigorous opponents of Communism, in all its variations and disguises. All of us therefore want to stop the tide of Communist aggression from engulfing another country. On this there is complete unanimity" in the Orthodox community. However, he added, "we are split on

> whether the war in Vietnam can succeed in accomplishing this and whether this war does not offset all possible gains by weakening the unity of the American people."

That same year, I received a personal invitation from Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol to attend a meeting with leaders of American and Israeli Jewry. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss how Israel could improve its relationship with world Jewry. It was serendipitous that I was extended such an invitation, as it was around that time that the Orthodox Union was becoming more involved with Israel affairs. Here is a portion of the meeting minutes of the Executive Board during the late 1960s: "President Karasick remarked that the growth within the Union of what used to be the Israel Committee into what is now the Israel Commission reflects UOJCA interest in Israel and its religious affairs. He then opened the floor for discussion. Various Board members posed question, to the honored guest [Israeli Minister of Religion Zorach Warhaftig] on such issues as autopsies, confrontation between the *dati* and non-*dati* segments of the community, El Al flights on the Sabbath, and other points, to which the Minister responded."

In the December 1, 1968 edition of *The New York Times*, Irving Spiegel reported on the OU's plans to aid the struggling Orthodox communities in Latin America. "Rabbi Joseph Karasick, who was re-elected president of the Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, major congregational movement holding its biennial convention, said that an organization similar to the Orthodox Union would be established in Latin America. He said it would be organized by the United States group and staffed, after United States training, by Latin Americans." I was quoted as saying in front of two thousand delegates at the Washington Hilton Hotel that Jewish religious communities below the border "are weak, isolated from centers of Jewish life, and their youth is being lost to assimilation."

My keynote address at the 1969 National Convention dealt with the emerging quandary of affirmative action. On one level, the Jewish community well understood the humiliation for those groups that were excluded from college education. Since the 1920s, major universities like Harvard and Columbia regulated the number of Jews they accepted into their colleges each year. As a leader of a major Jewish organization, I consistently noted my support of the Civil Rights Movement and fair treatment for all

people and communities. At the same time, however, the Orthodox community was not prepared to watch our youngsters get rejected from major universities in favor of lesser qualified applicants. This view was the focus of my address that year:

> Our sages tell us that we have been dispersed among the nations to rebel against evil, against injustice, against paganism, against bloodshed and cruelty but we have always refused to expunge and to extinguish one evil or one discrimination by the substitution of another evil or another discrimination. And this is precisely what happens all around us today.
>
> Let me simply state that we are opposed to any kind of quota system for college admissions. The only test for such admissions must be merit and ability, black or white, Jew or Gentile. If our society has wronged and disadvantaged the Blacks and the Puerto Ricans, the answer is not to now disadvantage other minorities, or, for that matter, the majority. The answer is to create the needed facilities which will provide the proper training and schooling of the formerly disadvantaged so that they shall have the same fair and even chance, by merit and ability, as anybody else. Only this is justice.

In 1970, Dr. Moses Rosen, Chief Rabbi of Romania invited me to visit his country. A few months later, I wrote a letter to New York Mayor John V. Lindsay. Anti-Semites had firebombed Crown Heights' Jewish community. I told the Mayor that this was a "sinister threat to the existence of an outstanding Jewish community renowned throughout the country and the world for the fertile strength of its religious life." I further reminded him of his prior commitment to work with the police force and the fire departments to ensure that Jews would be safe in Gotham and asked him to renew that pledge in a private meeting in the summertime. In less than a week's time, Lindsay wrote back to me, describing his shock over the events in that Brooklyn neighborhood. He explained that he visited the area twice since receiving my letter and met with appropriate personnel, and he would be happy to meet at my convenience.

That same year, I wrote to the Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Isser Unterman, about my concern about the standards of *kashrut* being held in many Israeli hotels, especially those most frequented by American

Orthodox travelers. For months, we were receiving reports from laypeople of meat and dairy being served on the same dinnerware (of course, not together). I implored him to consider that many secular Jews flouted the authority of the Chief Rabbinate, and offered everything in our power to support him and maintain the OU's partnership with his office. I suggested that "an immediate and stringent investigation of all hotels be launched." If Rabbi Unterman's office could not comply, the OU would have to take measures to inform its constituencies. Thankfully, in the end, no such notice would be necessary. I received the following letter from Rabbi Yitzchak Nissim, Rabbi Unterman's Sephardic counterpart:

> שלום וישע רב,
>
> קיבלתי מכתבו בב' בסיון ש"ז. יישר כוחו על יוזמתו הברוכה להעיר ולעורר את הרבנים בארץ – וביחוד את הרב הראשי הגרי"א אונטרמן שליט"א – ולדרוש מהם להרים מכשול מכל המבקרים בבתי המלון, לבל יתכאלו במאכלות אסורות ח"ו.
>
> ביום ראשון הבא, ח' בתמוז, מתכנסת מועצת הרבנות לדון ולמצוא דרך לתקן את המעוות כפי בקשת כב'.

Translation:

> Shalom Rav.
>
> I received [your] letter on 2 Sivan. Yasher Koach on [your] admirable initiative to apprise the Rabbinate in Israel — in particular, Chief Rabbi Untermann *shlit'a* — and to exhort them to remove all stumbling blocks from the tourists who patronize these hotels, in order to ensure that they do not eat forbidden food, God forbid. Next Sunday, on 5 Tammuz, the Moetzet HaRabanut will convene to investigate this matter and find an approach as to how to remedy this situation, per [your] request.

Just as is the case today, the President of the Orthodox Union may run for two additional terms — three in total. In 1970, upon re-election to my third term, I vowed to pay close attention to internal matters of the OU: "We will place the greatest emphasis on our domestic program, especially in our council's and region's and synagogue's servicing activities; in our concern for neglected communities; in youth work; in strengthening campus-synagogue relationships; and in concern for the campus itself." I continued:

> The success of our program, which has served as an example and inspiration to Jewish communities in other parts of the world, has in turn forced us into new dimensions of overseas activities. UOJCA must maintain and further its relationship with Israel and France and answer the call of various communities in Latin America to assist them towards the establishment of UOJCA-equivalents.

I corresponded with dozens of senators, White House representatives and governors, on crucial matters facing American Jewry. These included draft exemption for divinity students, financial aid for private schools and acts of anti-Semitism. Obviously, we were more successful with some over others. Other issues included the situation of Jews in Israel and the Soviet Union. Accordingly, the JTA reported on March 30, 1972:

> Rabbi Joseph Karasick, president of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, warned that the "vision of human freedom rooted in the American concept of life must not be set aside in seeking peaceful co-existence with nations governed by totalitarian regimes." He cited the experience of Jews in the Soviet Union as demonstrating how "over fifty years of totalitarian terror could not succeed in extirpating the will to freedom from the hearts of men." Rabbi Karasick also called upon American Jews to further strengthen ties with Israel and particularly its religious development.

During Moe Feuerstein's administration, it was clear that the president of the organization had complete control of the Orthodox Union. It was seldom that there was a conflict between the president and his officers. Therefore, Moe could essentially institute policies at his discretion. When I took the helm, I added another point of power for the president. I enforced a rule that whenever our public relations team released a press release, the president must also be quoted. This ensured a greater sense of unity for our entire organization.

One of my officers was a devoted communal leader and an extremely talented lawyer. However, he frequently issued statements on behalf of the OU on his own without consulting me. I was forced to restrict him for the rest of my administration. I had warned him several times, but it seemed that my words fell on deaf ears. No one within our administration objected

to my decision. I am happy to report that when he was eventually permitted to rejoin the OU many years later, we patched up our relationship and became quite good friends. He admitted his mistakes, and we moved on from there.

Of course, the OU was not my only concern during those years. While I was associated with the OU, I made sure to remain connected with Dr. Belkin and Yeshiva University. In the sixties, I became a member of the Board of Directors of Yeshiva University High Schools. Charles Bendheim, the Chairman at that time, extended that honor to me. During my time on the Board, we expanded Yeshiva University's high school program to the Brooklyn area. In 1960, I was appointed First Vice President of the Yeshiva College Alumni Association.

Even as late as 1983, when I was much less active in communal affairs, I received a letter from Mabel H. Brandon, Social Secretary to the White House, inviting me to "a meeting of Jewish leaders" with President Ronald Reagan. Apparently, the White House still considered me a Jewish Leader.

Chapter Eleven

A Charmed Life

I figure that most people will take three or four major trips in their lifetime. Perhaps they will visit Europe, arrange for a bus tour of London or Paris, and make this, for themselves, the highlight of their lives. For a variety of reasons, Pepa and I were very fortunate to have had many experiences seeing the world.

Foreign languages were never a problem for us — especially for Pepa. She spoke English, Yiddish, French, and Portuguese like a native speaker. She was also fluent in Spanish, German, Polish, and Russian. I had a serviceable German and Hebrew vocabulary and could get around most of Europe's Jewish communities with my fluent Yiddish.



Pepa in Vienna, c. 1970

There were several reasons that we had occasion to travel. The first was business. In contrast to my wife, for the first part of life I had never left the continental United States. I was very much an American guy. My first opportunity to fly overseas came in 1954, when I went to Switzerland and France at the behest of my father-in-law to take part in some business dealings. The very first time I was in Europe, I was immediately struck with the sensation that I was in a different world. Looking back, this marked impression set the foundation for all future trips that Pepa and I took together.

When I started out in the watch business in the late 1940s, it was part of my role in the company to travel to Switzerland anywhere between two and four times a year. Whenever I went on a business trip by myself, I made sure to make a stop at the local Swiss designer shops to purchase five or six dresses for my wife. Pepa joked that she was the envy of all of her friends, sporting a completely new wardrobe every couple of months. Trusting my taste in clothing, she did not step into a department store in America for many years. And at a certain point, the Swiss fashion store owners recognized me whenever I stepped into their store and greeted me warmly. They thought the Messiah was coming! Here comes the American!

Very often these business trips became springboards for enjoyable trips for me and Pepa. One example sticks out in my memory. Sometime in the middle of the 1960s, Pepa and I took the opportunity to return to Portugal to see her old home and reunite with friends. We first took care of some business matters in Geneva and then took a direct flight from there to Lisbon. When we arrived in Lisbon, Pepa was amazed that while some things had changed since she was last there some thirty years ago, most things remained more or less the same. I too was amazed that so many of her childhood friends still lived there in the Jewish quarter of the city. We visited the building in which the Wakmanns lived and spent an afternoon catching up with neighbors who still resided there. Pepa was very excited throughout the trip, and it was exciting for me as well to explore the scenes of her youth. The highlight of the entire trip was a grand Shabbat reception, held at the home of the community's leading family, in Pepa's honor. We made the trip to Portugal several times after that initial trip, oftentimes singlehandedly supporting the Portuguese silver merchants! We found that Portuguese silver is truly magnificent.

Aside from combined business-pleasure travel or trips I made on behalf

of the Orthodox Union and the World Jewish Congress, we made time for strictly recreational trips during the summertime when the children were away at camp. Bringing the children along with us was difficult, mostly because in those days there were not many options for food in foreign countries. Pepa and I were happy to get by on fruits and vegetables, but the children could not.

Instead, we sent the children to San Francisco as much as we could to visit with my parents. They enjoyed these trips very much because they rarely got to spend time with my father. My mother used to travel to New York twice a year, but my father only visited the East Coast for special celebrations. In addition, we used to take the family to the Brunswick Hotel in Lakewood during the winters.

Mark and Bernice got their chance to travel overseas while they were in college. During one trip in 1965, we met up in Rome with Bernice, who was at that time traveling on a mission with a group of her fellow Yeshiva University students. Later on, we established a custom to take our grandchildren to Israel for their bar and bat mitzvahs. The custom, short-lived as it was, as we only did it three times — started with our youngest son, George. We started out in London, where the three of us watched Neil Armstrong land on the moon in 1969.

We then traveled to Switzerland, Israel, and France. Something very interesting happened while we were in Paris. It was at this time that my friendship with Baron Alain de Rothschild was at its peak. I sent him a cable, telling him that we were coming to Paris and staying at the Hilton Hotel. At George's request, I asked Rothschild if he could arrange to have a car show us around the city. When we arrived at our hotel, we found Rothschild's personal car and chauffer waiting to take us around the City of Lights.

Rothschild was not the only friend we made time to visit on our trips. We also made time to visit Rabbi Frankfurter, one of the prominent Jews of France at that time. He had *semicha* but made a fortune manufacturing a line of children's clothing. He had a marvelously elegant apartment in one of the most exclusive sections of Paris. We became very friendly with them and traveled together in France and in Israel.

In addition, my wife and I developed strong ties to our European business partners, all of whom were not Jewish. They would show us the sites and were always very happy to tour around with us. The Breitling family

had a glorious estate on Lake Geneva and took us sailing on their yacht. As well, when they would come to America, we offered to take them out to a kosher restaurant. Invariably, they half-jokingly complained how they suffered with our strictly kosher diet that did not compare to their cuisine back in Switzerland.

One place I almost never visited was Germany, for obvious reasons. One time, I reluctantly traveled to Pforzheim, the watch and jewelry capital of Germany. I detested the notion of traveling to Germany, but I had no choice because of my occupation. It was Chanukah, and I wanted to find a synagogue to light my *menorah*. Unfortunately, the local rabbi was unreachable, and it came time to light. My hotel overlooked the main center of the city, and I could see all of the stores and malls lit up for the Christmas season. I vividly remember standing at my window and lighting my Chanukah candles. Looking down at the crowd below, I said to myself, "Look where I am now! You wanted to destroy my people, and where am I now? In one of the richest hotels your country has to offer!" I felt it was very fitting that I lit my candles in that specific window for all passersby to see. Whoever looked up could see that the Jewish people were far from extinguished!

The next day my business trip took me to Milan, Italy. Still Chanukah, I searched my hotel room for matches. When I could not find any, I went down to the front desk for some but they did not have any either. As it happened, a well-dressed man was standing nearby and offered me matches. "You must be looking to light your *menorah*," he commented. At my surprised expression, he continued, "If you're in a non-smoking room, the only reason you would want matches is to light your Chanukah candles." The man, clearly an Englishman judging by his accent, explained that he was in Milan for a bar mitzvah celebration. That Chanukah still remains a defining one in my mind. It confirmed to me that our people had emerged from the ashes of the Holocaust. The Jewish people were free to live and travel anywhere. We were once again a presence. Our light could be seen from the tallest, most elite buildings — even in a place like Germany.

There were other trips, not necessarily our own, which made impacts on our lives. In 1960, when my father-in-law was involved in that car accident in Israel, the incident was published in a local newspaper. A man named Mr. Abir had read the story and recognized my father-in-law's

name. Abir rushed to the hospital and entered my father-in-law's room. Without introducing himself, Abir asked, "Are you Itzhak Wakmann?" After my father-in-law confirmed his identity, the man announced, "I'm Bieberman!" It turned out that Abir — who had since changed his last name from Bieberman and had established a very successful construction company that, among many projects, was responsible for building the King David Hotel — and my father-in-law were childhood friends. The two began talking for quite a while, catching up on each other's lives. At one point, Abir asked my father-in-law if he had visited his siblings in Moscow. My father-in-law exclaimed, "Siblings?! I thought my whole family perished," he answered. It turned out that three of his siblings — two sisters and a brother — had escaped Hitler by resettling in Russia. Once my father-in-law recovered, he and my mother-in-law traveled to Moscow to reconnect with his family. His siblings had very little contact with religious life, preferring instead to discuss Marxist philosophy. Still, my in-laws were thrilled to reacquaint themselves with long lost family members, and they went back to Russia several times to visit.

Soon thereafter, Pepa got the chance to meet her relatives when they came to America for three months. Some of her cousins eventually emigrated to America. We were very helpful to one relative by finding a job for him as an elevator engineer. Incidentally, we found out that this cousin and his young son had not yet been circumcised. As a result of our efforts, we connected the two with a Chabad organization and arranged for the circumcision of the child.

Finally, my mother went to Israel in 1974 to live near her sister. My father had died some years back and she had become very lonely. My mother moved into one of the few senior citizen homes in Israel at that time. So, it became our responsibility to visit her there to make sure she was well. Consequently, our trips to Israel became more frequent. All in all, Pepa and I traveled to Europe and Israel more than thirty times together.

Although Pepa and I loved to travel, we often craved the company of fellow Orthodox Jews. Miami was the ideal location to visit and ensure that we constantly felt at home in an appropriate religious community for us. 1984 was a year when we particularly enjoyed one of our many vacations there. We were told, and friends of ours who were involved in real estate in the area were informed, that there was a condominium available in Tower 41. At this time, we were frequent visitors and decided that if the price was

reasonable, we would buy it. To our delight, the condominium was quite affordable, and we would make use of it several times a year.

In addition to our Miami getaways, our family used to spend our summers in Long Beach. Unfortunately, it never really developed to its full potential, but back in the late 1950s and early 1960s, a fairly large group of upper West Siders, including us, purchased vacation homes there. We finally made our way out there sometime during the first years of the 1960s. The community comprised Modern Orthodox Jews, yet members of the *yeshivish* community were always most accepting of our family. We sold our first Long Beach home to buy another one when it became clear that our family needed more space. The friendships we developed during those summers were very special to us.

During the World Conference, my wife and I became close to the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yitzchak Nissim and his family. As was the case throughout my life, I found myself easily communicating best with leaders much older than I. Rabbi Nissim, who was some forty years my senior, reminded me of my grandfather, Rabbi Katzman. They had a similar appearance. Also, like my grandfather, Rabbi Nissim had wonderful charisma; it was a pleasure to be in his presence. It is my understanding that when he lived in Iraq, he was a businessman. He was therefore a man familiar with money and Torah — something to which I could very much relate.

After the World Conference, in May of 1968, Rabbi Nissim spent two weeks in North America. His main purpose in visiting the States was to promote the *aliyah* of Jews to Israel; especially to observant Jews; even more so to observant youth. His trip, which included his presence and address at the annual OU national dinner, among other aspects of of his stay, certainly served that objective. The change of atmosphere during the aftermath of the Six-Day War, in Israel and among Jews everywhere, prompted the Chief Rabbi to take this necessary trip.

Rabbi Nissim arrived on April 29 and stayed for two weeks. He visited our home and met with OU national officers later on. The Chief Rabbi met with NCSY leaders, and it was at that point in time when Rabbi Nissim came face-to-face with American Jewish youth. Those present never forgot the rapport that the revered guest established with his audience. The youngsters expected some formal remarks but were surprised and delighted to be immediately told by Rabbi Nissim: "I am not here to speak,

but to listen. Ask me questions, anything you want." And they did, which gave them an illuminating experience.

Rabbi Nissim also met with the RCA leaders at the Fifth Avenue Synagogue, including the Rav. After that, I accompanied the Chief Rabbi to Montreal, where he met with influential members of North America's Sephardic community.

One of the benefits of my activities in Israel was ultimately my purchase of an apartment on Rechov Ahad Ha'am, which was a direct result of my developing relationship with Rabbi Nissim. Over the course of several visits to Israel in 1968, Pepa and I were the Chief Rabbi's personal guests on Shabbat. During one of those visits, Rabbi Nissim took hold of my hand and made me pledge that I would buy an apartment in Jerusalem. That bug had already been planted in our heads before Rabbi Nissim made his request of me. Before the Six-Day War, there was not much by way of hotel stay in Jerusalem. People would generally stay in Tel Aviv and take day trips to Jerusalem. Accustomed to spending time in hotels, our favorite was the Tel Aviv Hilton. In the late 1960s, however, there was a tourism shift in favor of Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv became secondary. Noting this, Pepa and I had already had some preliminary discussions about purchasing real estate in Israel's capital. It was also a sensible choice because more of the Orthodox Union's operations were taking place in Jerusalem, and I was gaining more access to Israel's officials who were based there.

Rabbi Nissim, eager for us to find real estate in Jerusalem, volunteered his son, Moshe, to help locate a reasonable condominium. Interestingly, Moshe Nissim was married to the charming daughter of Yitzchak Korn, one of the most prominent left wing Zionist leaders. I had met Mr. Korn at a plenary of the World Jewish Congress, an organization that greatly valued his opinions and support. It would be no stretch to suggest that the distance between the Korns and the Nissims is wider than the North to the South Pole.

Moshe Nissim told us matter-of-factly that the best neighborhood in Jerusalem was Rechavia, and the best block in that neighborhood was Rechov Ahad Ha'am. I knew absolutely nothing about Jerusalem real estate at that time, so I asked Pepa to weigh in. She thought it was important to own property in the relative young State of Israel. The decision was also made easier by the fact that the builder of 23 Ahad Ha'am was a Mr. Lipshitz, who had quite a reputation as a master builder.

Pepa and I decided that our prospective apartment must have at least three bedrooms, a proper living room, and a dining room. At that time, the Israelis tended to build small apartments, even in the more luxurious areas. The builder told us that he could accommodate that number of bedrooms but we would have to settle for a combined living room-dining room. While we were collaborating on terms of the building details of our apartment, my father-in-law became swept up with the idea of making *aliyah*, and he too wished to purchase property. I negotiated a total price of sixty-thousand dollars for the two apartments, and the Wakmanns paid 26 thousand dollars for theirs. After almost two years, the building construction was complete. Our apartment was located on the second floor from the street.

My apartment on Ahad Ha'am was directly across the street of the apartment of Dr. Yitzchak Raphael, whom we had met in 1964 when he was serving as the Deputy Minister of Health. Dr. Raphael was the son-in-law of Rabbi Yehudah Leib Maimon. Raphael was also the head of Mosad Harav Kook. As neighbors, we became very friendly.

As time moved on, after thirty years, we came to the conclusion that we were getting older, and the apartment became more of a burden. When my in-laws died, their apartment was inherited by their three daughters. Subsequently, my son George bought out that apartment and kept that for several years before he ultimately sold that and in turn built his current apartment in the Keren Kayemet area. When our family sold the apartments three decades later, the buyers agreed to pay almost a million dollars. Today, those apartments are valued well in the millions.

Epilogue



Pepa and the author with Rabbi Hershel Schachter at the 108th Anniversary OU Dinner in 2006 where the author and Pepa received the Lifetime Leadership Award

At this point in my life, I still do my best to remain involved with communal affairs. Since my days as President of the Orthodox Union, the organization graciously honored us by naming its Synagogue Services Division after my wife and me. As the elder statesman, I am still involved in individual activities at the OU, but I pick and choose, so to speak, based on my compunctions and interests.

My presidency began a new era for the Orthodox Union. During the previous administration of Moses Feuerstein, no one ever challenged the president — Moe's was the only voice, and the OU acted at his discretion. While this worked well for my predecessor, I was acutely aware that the next generation of OU leaders required more balance in the governance of the institution. Therefore, upon my election, I initiated a six-year term limit for OU presidents and made sure to include other, sometimes differing, voices in the OU's leadership. Nearly fifty years after my administration, the six or seven presidents who have led the Orthodox Union have consistently sought my support and guidance. In every administration, I have been welcomed, and I have maintained contact with those leading

the organization. In this way, my mark on the OU seems to have had a lasting impression.

Thus, with the OU very much vibrant and strong, I have turned more of my available energies to participation in the World Jewish Congress. About a decade ago, there was a tremendous upheaval, and insiders were unsure whether the WJC would survive. Thankfully, under the tutelage of President Ronald Lauder, those of us in the higher ranks have brought back some dignity to Nahum Goldmann's coveted organization. I believe I am the oldest living executive member of the World Jewish Congress. I suspect that few, if any, recall the Goldmann or Bronfman eras. In order to make sure that the work of those great men are not squandered, I have happily taken an active role in this organization and can report that it is moving towards stable ground once more.

Perhaps my greatest efforts are being poured into maintaining healthy lines of communication between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities. In 1964, when the Vatican sought to connect with Jewish organizations, the Synagogue Council performed this function. As the years went on and the Synagogue Council began to crumble, this responsibility to maintain dialogue between Catholics and Jews fell upon the International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations. IJCIC was founded as an umbrella organization that included representatives from the leading Jewish denominations, such as B'nai B'rith, Anti-Defamation League, American Jewish Committee, and American Jewish Congress. The three religious dominations are represented by their lay and rabbinic groups. I represent the OU. The devoted members of IJCIC meet regularly with representatives from the International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee. These conferences and conversations serve as the official meeting ground between these two religions.



◂ *The author at the United Nations, c. 2017; seated behind the author is OU Kosher CEO Rabbi Menachem Genack*

Appendix 1

An Appraisal of the World Jewish Congress Conference in Strasbourg in 1965

After my return from the World Jewish Congress Conference that took place in Strasbourg in 1965, I was amazed and enthusiastic. Many of the activities and methods employed at that conference inspired me to implement them when I took over the leadership of the Orthodox Union. In addition, the opportunities I witnessed at the World Jewish Congress motivated me to share my observations and thoughts with my fellow leaders and lay people in the pages of Jewish Life *(September-October 1965, pp. 31–38). What follows is the full text of the article that appeared in* Jewish Life.

Strasbourg: An Appraisal

"The World Jewish Congress is the Jewish parliament of the Diaspora," said Dr. Nahum Goldmann to me, during one of the discussions that we had in Strasbourg at the recent meeting of the World Executive of the WJC. This organization, he continued, remains the only medium today through which representatives of all shades of opinion from Jewish communities throughout the entire world can communicate with each other, exchange ideas, and — most importantly — let each another know that they are not alone.

The Strasbourg meeting demonstrated that Dr. Goldmann's claim is not without basis. With representatives of Jewish communities of various countries attending, and with spokesmen for a wide cross-section of Jewish ideologies participating, the comprehensive character of the World Jewish Congress was evident. One might say that the mere existence of the organization is justified for this reason alone. But one cannot dispose of the *raison d'etre* of the WJC so simply, tacitly approving its existence and purpose. It must be noted that this is an agency of wide influence, an entity

whose impact on Jewish affairs and life, already substantial, may very well take on greater proportions in coming years. Its claim to be representative of world Jewry may even gain increasing recognition through coming years. Considerable financial resources are at its disposal. And yet — not only are certain prominent organizations not affiliated with WJC, but the central agencies of Orthodox Jewry too are not within the World Jewish Congress "umbrella." To this extent, the "Jewish parliament" concept falls short of fulfillment.

Let me hasten to say that the World Jewish Congress does include important Orthodox Jewish bodies, namely the world organizations of Mizrachi: Hapoel Hamizrachi and Poalei Agudath Israel. However, these movements have a particular focus within Orthodoxy and do not have the representative communal character that pertains to the congregational and rabbinic bodies. Undoubtedly, the two aforementioned groups play a significant role within the WJC, and so too do the individual Orthodox Jewish figures associated with other constituents of the Congress. But the fact remains that Orthodoxy, as the core of the Jewish world, is not definitively part of the World Jewish Congress process.

In taking stock of the World Jewish Congress with these factors in mind, one must not fail to take into consideration the complex personality of its founder, leader, and dominating figure, Dr. Nahum Goldmann. One must view the role which he/it (for it is impossible at times to distinguish one from the other) has played in recent Jewish history. One must analyze the trends shaping the organization's future and, in the light of the various factors, examine the question whether Orthodox Jewry, through its representative organs, can have a direct or indirect relationship with the Congress.

My own presence at the Strasbourg conference was in the capacity of an "observer" on behalf of the Committee on Scope and International Affairs of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations. Recently, the above-mentioned Committee recommended that the Presidents Conference enlarge its frame of reference to include international areas of concern in addition to Israel, heretofore the main field of interest. The recommendation was approved. There followed a proposal to consider possible affiliation of the Presidents Conference with "international Jewish bodies," and thereafter came an invitation from Dr.

Goldmann, duly accepted, to designate two observers to the forthcoming Strasbourg meeting of the World Jewish Congress Executive.

It need hardly be said that while there I also wore a yarmulke, literally, of my office with the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America. Availing myself of opportunity to confer with other Orthodox participants, I took particular care to explore their views and was thus in an advantageous position to appraise the World Jewish Congress from a traditional Jewish vantage point.

From Near and Far

There were delegates from all over the world present at the Conference — many of them, top names in their respective communities. It is interesting to note that the following were among them: the President of the Associated Jewish Organizations of Argentina — the DAJA; the Secretary of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry; the President of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Austria; the Vice President of the Federation of Jewish Communities of Brazil; the Chairman of the National Executive Committee of the Canadian Jewish Congress; the President of the Central African Jewish Board of Deputies; the President of the Consistoire Central des Israelites de France, the main Jewish representative body of France; the Secretary General of the Central Council of Jews of Germany; officers of the British Board of Deputies; representatives of all shades from Israel — from Mapai to Poalei Agudath Israel; the President of the Union of Italian Jewish Communities; the Chief Rabbi of Romania; leaders of communities of Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand, United States, Yugoslavia, India, etc. In all, communal bodies of over forty countries were represented.

During the Conference, Dr. Goldmann dominated every session he attended and was constantly the center of interest. He truly is the "last of the Mohicans" who, more than any one leader living today, represents the transition from the generation of outstanding figures — and rugged individualists — of yesteryear to the new type of "organization men" we have today. With his restless, agile, and creative mind and untiring persistence, he has made an extraordinary impact on Jewish affairs, developing a network of key positions in world Zionism, the WJC, German reparations, COJO, President's Conference, and a variety of other channels.

In evaluating the work of the WJC in the years since its creation in 1936 against the backdrop of Jewish life today, one must realize that the human mind is short on memory and long on presumption. Too few of us think back to a world without the Jewish State of Israel, and certainly most of us have forgotten those sad, bewildering days in the mid-1930s and 1940s. Nahum Goldmann, in Geneva in 1936, gathered around him the remnants of the Committee of Delegates, which had been originally formed at the close of World War I, to present the problems of the Jewish minority rights in Europe to the Versailles Peace Conference, in an attempt to organize and represent the Jews of the world.

In a world which comprised a mournful symphony of depression; a world that was marked by the terror of Hitler in Germany — and Father Coughlin in America; by the unending succession of perfidious "White Papers" from the British Foreign Office; the despair and Blum in France; Peron in Argentina; the treacherous Mufti in the Middle East; Mussolini strutting in Italy; Stalin glowering in the Kremlin; in the midst of all this, the World Jewish Congress ambitiously proclaimed that it was prepared to guarantee the survival, and foster the unity, of the Jewish people. To that end, it would coordinate the efforts of its affiliated organizations with respect to the political, social, and economic problems of the Jewish people; secure the rights, status, and interests of Jews and Jewish communities and defend them wherever they are denied, violated, or imperiled; encourage and assist with the creative development of Jewish social and cultural life throughout the world; and represent and act on behalf of its affiliated organizations before governmental, inter-governmental, and other international authorities with respect to matters which concern the Jewish people as a whole.

And come into being it did — with the result that sixty-one representative Jewish organizations, large and small, did become affiliated with the WJC. During dark, difficult years the Congress gave communities throughout the world, if nothing more, an address to write and turn to.

How much WJC actually has accomplished during its 29-year-long existence is hard to say at this point, but there is no denying that during this time it informed, advised, cajoled, threatened, and warned Jew and non-Jew alike of the happenings to the Jewish community in the Diaspora. Its various headquarters in London, Geneva, Paris and Rome formed sensitive radar attuned to the status of the Jew and world over. The guiding hand and

spirit were those of Nahum Goldmann, and like a computer he absorbed all the information coming into headquarters, simultaneously issuing the corresponding directives.

After the war, the establishment of the State of Israel did not bar the activities of the World Jewish Congress, but on the contrary, where Israel embassies and legations could not act without compromising the State of Israel, the various representatives of the WJC throughout the world could, and did, act freely, and many contacts were made by Goldmann and his key men which stood them in good stead in later years.

Nevertheless, with the achievement and reality of the Jewish State, the role of the World Jewish Congress was far overshadowed and it began to languish, with much more head than body. A likely development overtook the world Zionist movement, with Israeli leaders dominating the center of the Jewish stage to the minimization of even so dominant a figure of Diaspora Zionism as Dr. Nahum Goldmann. It was at this point in his career that Dr. Goldmann achieved his most decisive accomplishment, a veritable tour de force — the successful negotiation, practically single-handed, of Jewish material claims against Germany.

This was a task from which others shrank. To negotiate with the successor government to that which had set itself to exterminate the Jewish people; which had brought unimaginable suffering and death to millions of Jewish men, women, and children; to deal with a German government at all, not to speak of discussing with them terms of material and monetary loss — this was something abhorrent to all. It was, no doubt, fully as abhorrent to Goldmann, yet he knew that if the culprits were not to remain with their stolen wealth, the job must be done. He did it.

Establishing the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany as his instrument for the purpose, Goldmann secured the restoration by the government of West Germany of over $5,000,000,000 to individual Jewish survivors of the Nazi holocaust, and to the State of Israel and various Jewish institutions as moral heirs to the heirless.

Changed Goals

With this achievement Dr. Goldmann's career took on fresh volition, and the enterprises in which he was engaged — particularly the World Jewish

Congress — assumed new essence. His key position with regard to the reparations funds was naturally not to the disadvantage of his various undertakings. The World Jewish Congress blossomed with renewed activity; but soon it became apparent that there were grave ills in the Jewish world which the accustomed type of activity was inherently incapable of solving.

Mention should be made at this point of the formation in 1958 of the Conference of Jewish Organizations — COJO. Another of Dr. Goldmann's creations, COJO represented a renewed attack on the problem of Jewish unity by bringing B'nai B'rith together with the forces grouped in the World Jewish Congress. Whether or not it was Dr. Goldmann's aspiration to enlist the participation in COJO also of the American Jewish Committee and of its French and British counterparts, the Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Anglo-Jewish Association, such participation did not materialize, the latter three organizations remained grouped in a unit of their own, the Consultative Council of Jewish Organizations (CCJO). On the other hand, the participation in COJO of the representative organizations of Orthodoxy was not solicited.

With these limitations, COJO maintained an ad hoc status, serving as an advisory or consultative body rather than as a functioning organization. Its primary role has been to demonstrate the importance of having a Jewish world body which could speak responsibly for world Jewry — something that even the State of Israel could not, and perhaps should not, do; and something that, by the fact of the establishment of COJO, the World Jewish Congress itself apparently then felt it could not do — as yet. Perhaps the most important action of COJO was to terminate its formal existence early this year, reconstituting itself into what may yet be Dr. Goldmann's most ambitious and far-reaching program, the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture.

Before discussing this new undertaking, let us return to Strasbourg for a few moments, to better understand both the significance of the Foundation and its relationship to the World Jewish Congress.

Since the WJC is organized into four basic commissions — Budget and Finance Commissions, Organizational Commission, International Affairs Commission, and Cultural Commission — the Strasbourg agenda naturally revolves about debates on these four topics.

The deliberations of the Budget and Finance Commission are not germane to our present discussion.

The general political debate of the International Affairs Commission included discussions on human rights, West Germany's statute of limitations on the prosecution of Nazi criminals, Soviet Jewry, and anti-Semitism. One was very impressed with the caliber of speakers from all over the world, who carried on the debate at a high level, and whose discussions were both informative and sophisticated.

The session devoted to organizational problems concerned itself with the particular issues facing the WJC itself, and was routine up to the point when a "bombshell was exploded." One of the most important executives of the Congress made the statement (doubtless with the knowledge of Dr. Goldmann and other leaders) that the WJC cannot continue to remain in the shadow of individuals and personalities," but must look ahead and reflect the complete evolvement of democratic structure, and must provide for future leadership! The underlying fear of "after Goldmann, what?" was expressed, with the view that the WJC should start providing for that day when their central figure would no longer be around, and with intimation that it would be wise to prepare for that eventuality as quickly as possible. I was told that this was the first time that such "heresy" was expressed.

The most important sessions — and here I come to the crux of this article — were the debates of the Cultural Commission. The debate was started by a distinguished Orthodox Jew, Prof. Andre Neher, professor at the University of Strasbourg and head of the French Section of the WJC. A brilliant personality, this striking full-bearded and yarmulke-capped figure set the tone for the debate which followed. (Considered one of the leading Jewish intellectuals in the world, Prof. Neher will, I feel, certainly be heard from more and more in the days to come.)

Speaker after speaker thereafter intoned one central theme: There is no question about the WJC's continuing deep interest in, and practical concern for, problems of Jewish defense — whether these apply to anti-Semitism in Germany, the difficult life of Jews in Russia, anti-Jewish feelings in Argentina, or any other such situations. The WJC, all insisted, still must stand ready to alert and protect communities which are in physical and material danger as a mother protects her child. But, it was made plain, there is a deeper apprehension and discontent — the fear that "before we shall be successful in destroying the anti-Semite, assimilation will destroy

us." Said delegate after delegate: We speak of anti-Semitism in Russia, but simultaneously we fear for a community in danger of being spiritually destroyed within one or two generations. We speak of the defense of the corpus Judaica, and we fear the suicide of the soul.

And one speaker after another — from India, from Rhodesia, from Australia, from Israel, from Romania, from Argentina — pleads with the Executive: "Help us; send us teachers; send us rabbis; send us *shochtim* and *mohelim*!" Those without yarmulkes speak of the danger to Jewish "culture;" those with, of the danger to *Yiddishkeit*. And I listen in wonder and ask myself, "Are these then the old secularists of the WJC, who would run the other way at the mere mention of the word 'religion'?" And when Goldmann takes the floor and makes the now-famous statement: "I find myself coming closer and closer to the Orthodox point of view — and this worries me;" and speaks of the greater importance of synagogues than Yiddish in Soviet Russia; and announces his intention to consult with *Roshei Yeshiva* as well as college professors; and speaks with reverence of such a person as Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik; then one sees quite clearly that we have a Congress that is operating under a set of guidelines much different from those of heretofore.

Field for Orthodox Action?

The Orthodox figures present with whom I discussed these expressions corroborated my own observations. Raising the topic of participation in WJC by forces of Orthodoxy, they explained their own association with the WJC as motivated by the feeling that through WJC, they can bring a Torah-committed influence to bear on its direction. Furthermore, they maintained, their association with the Congress lends more weight to their own activities. According to these Orthodox leaders, WJC will now place primary accent on cultural, religious, and educational activities. Whereas the Congress previously functioned as a political organization geared to external Jewish defense, it is now evolving into a movement of internal Jewish life, addressed to Jewish perpetuation. And whereas the threat facing world Jewry at the time of the foredays of the WJC was primarily anti-Semitism, it is now felt in WJC circles that anti-Semitism today is more a nuisance than a danger, and that the real problem now is that of

Jewish culture and education. The Congress, they said, is deeply concerned with the fact that while we Jews possess a wealth of intellect and talent, there is a shocking disinterest in Jewish affairs and ignorance of the Jewish heritage among the intelligentsia.

These exponents of Orthodoxy in the WJC and advocates of the WJC in Orthodoxy urged me to convey to the leaders and to the rank and file of American Orthodox Jewry the need to take active leadership in such collective Jewish agencies as the WJC. Among all Jewish circles, they noted, it is becoming recognized that the Orthodox Jew alone has answers to the problems which are plaguing world Jewry today. It is the ranks of Orthodox Jewry which have remained steadfast in the face of assimilation. It is the Orthodox who can supply the leadership personnel which are so desperately needed the Jewish world over.

And, they maintained, an instrument such as the World Jewish Congress can serve incomparably for strengthening of world Jewish life on Torah foundations — if Orthodox Jewry awakens to the opportunity. Dr. Goldmann himself appealed to Orthodox Jews to come out from within their "fortress of isolation and join forces with their fellow Jews." (Dr. Goldmann's outlook has not yet ripened to the point of calling upon the non-Orthodox to come out from within their fortresses of separation from the fundamentals of Jewishness and join forces with the ranks of Orthodox Jewry.)

In his memorable closing address to the Conference, Goldmann laid out the guidelines of what may be his last, and greatest, contribution to world Jewry. Having run the gamut from minority rights to Zionism to German reparations to Jewish political unity, Dr. Nahum Goldmann is now embarking on the capstone of his long career — a major offensive against Jewish indifference and ignorance. Through his newly formed Jewish Memorial Foundation, he is working to establish a central instrument "for clearing the great problems of Jewish survival." After a lifetime of effort concentrated on the problems of the Jew in relation to the surrounding world, he has been compelled to realize that, in the meanwhile, the inner life of the great portion of the Jewish people has been drained of Jewish content. He is appalled by the indifference of Jews to their heritage, to Jewish existence itself. He is concerned, too, by the complete lack of understanding about Judaism and Jewish history among non-Jews, even the most intelligent.

The key to the problem, Dr. Goldmann has belatedly concluded — and with him, many others who have gone through a similar evolution — is Jewish education. So a vast frontal attack is to be made through the medium of education at all levels. To this end, the Foundation — with several millions of dollars of material claims funds as its initial basis — will spare neither effort nor expense. An international advisory group consisting of the outstanding contemporary Jewish thinkers and leaders is projected, to guide the program of the Foundation. To be included in this group, it is Dr. Goldmann's hope, will be *Roshei Yeshiva* and leading figures in Orthodox Jewish affairs.

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What shall be the response of Orthodox Jewish leadership to this project? Is it a case, as some see it, of an opportunity unique in our time for traditional forces to secure a — perhaps *the* — key role in a decisive theater of world Jewish endeavor? Or is it, as others may fear, a case of giving a *hechsher* to yet another enterprise for the siphoning of Torah strength into non-Torah channels?

The answer will not be easy to find. And it will not be found until there will have been determined just what is the "foundation" of the Jewish Memorial Foundation. Education, all may now agree, is the key to Jewish need — but on what must Jewish education rest if it is to be truly Jewish education? Many, many millions after all, have been expended on Jewish education in recent decades throughout the world. *But the only Jewish education that has borne meaningful results has been Torah education — education, of, with, and for Torah belief and commitment.* Let no one compound this great Jewish error of our time by pouring yet more millions, yet more elaborately organized effort, down the drain.

Dr. Goldmann and the forces led by him in the World Jewish Congress and the Jewish Memorial Foundation are undoubtedly motivated by a sense of profound Jewish need. Groping with sincere purpose for an answer to the Jewish dilemma — a dilemma which all their efforts heretofore have only made all the more stark — they have envisioned a program which seems aimed in the right direction. But the right direction is not good enough; a miss, in this case, is as good as a mile; the program must be

aimed at and reach the precise target if it is to really work. Torah Judaism and Torah Jews must be included to make it work.

The plans of Dr. Goldmann, therefore, greatly depend upon Orthodox Jewry if they are to achieve their purpose. But Orthodox Jewry in turn must view with clear understanding the potential in these plans for Torah achievement. It would be well for both sides to ponder the matter, and ponder it very deeply.

Appendix II

Excerpt from OU Annual Dinner Speech Delivered on Thanksgiving 1968

Below is part of a speech I delivered at the Annual Dinner on Thanksgiving 1968 to the assembled delegation of Orthodox Union members and delegates several months after I first took office. Note my comments on cooperation with non-Orthodox organizations.

Distinguished Rabbis, Mr. Chairman, Guest of Honor, Dignitaries on the Dais, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Six months ago at the most memorable and exciting National Biennial Convention of the Orthodox Union, I was entrusted by the delegates with the high office of President of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, succeeding my illustrious predecessor, Mr. Moses I. Feuerstein. The temptation is great to utilize this opportunity to render a report on these eventful past six months. However, I must refrain from doing so and limit myself to give but a few highlights of the challenges the Orthodox Jewish community has, and is, facing and of the positions we of the Orthodox Union have taken.

The need for greater cohesion and unification of the Torah community in all parts of the world is beyond debate. I consider it my duty to foster and to nurture the most valuable contacts established in the past. I met in London with Sir Isaac Wolfson and his fellow officers of the United Synagogues to discuss not only the coming World Conference of Ashkenazic and Sephardic Synagogues but also the establishment in England of a synagogue youth movement on the model of our own National Conference of Synagogue Youth. I offered to the leadership of Great Britain's Orthodox Jewish community not merely our literature but indeed our personnel to guide them in the initial stages of this vital endeavor. The fact that Chief Rabbi Jakobovitz worked so closely with the Orthodox Union during the

eight years of his spiritual leadership of the Fifth Avenue Synagogue, will certainly make for effective and productive cooperation.

Likewise, I met in Paris with Grand Rabbin Kaplan and Baron Alain de Rothschild, the leaders of the French Consistoire. French Jewry has more than tripled in the last several years due to the Jewish immigration from Algiers and Morocco. They are faced with tremendous problems, especially in the educational field. The overwhelming majority of the new immigrants come from an Orthodox background and to create for them the necessary facilities for a life of individual and communal observance is the great challenge the Consistoire is facing. Our organizational experience may prove most helpful for them. A process of ongoing mutual consultation has been established and our friends in France have been greatly encouraged by our participation and by our willingness to share their responsibilities.

This willingness must, of course, express itself by the initiations of tangible projects. I suggested to the French leaders two projects. One would bring members of our youth staff to France, for a period of six to eight weeks, to train their youth leaders and to help them set up a nation-wide synagogue youth organization. If we succeed, both in England and in France, to organize the synagogue youth of these countries, they would mutually strengthen each other and work in closest cooperation with each other.

The second project I suggested to the leaders of the Consistoire involves their sending to this country young men who are about to receive their rabbinic ordination or who have already completed their rabbinic studies. They would come for a period of not less than six months and become acquainted here with our techniques of congregational organization, with our system of Torah education, and our youth work. I am sure we can count on the full cooperation of our rabbis and congregations, of our Yeshivot and Mesiftas and of our regional leadership to receive these young men with warmth and friendship and to provide for them the best possible training ground.

Only a few days hence, I hope to meet again with our friends in Paris and to come with them to a final agreement on those projects. We also plan to set, at this meeting, the date for a visit of Baron Rothschild and some of his fellow officers to this country. A few days ago we received a cable informing us of their intention to follow up our impending Paris meeting with such a visit.

This will be after I meet, *be'ezrat Hashem*, on June 1, in Geneva with Chief Rabbi Emeritus, Israel Brodie, the President of the European Conference of Orthodox Rabbis and Associated Religious Organizations, and with the leading representatives of the Israeli and European national synagogue organizations. The purpose of this leadership meeting is to prepare the establishment of the World Conference of Ashkenazic and Sephardic synagogues which is scheduled to take place in Jerusalem, the Holy City, shortly after Chanukah, in January of next year. I take great pride in telling you that it is the Orthodox Union that has been the initiator of the concept of the World Conference, under the Presidency of Mr. Moses I. Feuerstein, and that we are the prime movers towards this sublime goal.

I must mention here with deep appreciation Mr. Ivan Salomon who has been so inspiringly active in the field of international cooperation, and whose friendship with leaders of European Jewry has been an invaluable asset to us.

We have enjoyed in this area, as in so many others, the cooperation of the Rabbinical Council of America who, with the Orthodox Union associated itself with the Conference of European Rabbis at the historic London Convention in March 1965. In the main, we were represented at these meetings by Dr. Samson R. Weiss and Rabbi Simon Langer, the distinguished spiritual leader of Congregation Orach Chaim who has an influence on the French rabbinate second to none. I also would like to acknowledge the cooperation and participation of the National Council of Young Israel which also joined the Association at the London Conference.

American Orthodoxy has reached a point in its development where it must give instead of receive, teach instead of being taught, lead instead of being led. It is our sense of *Klal Yisrael*'s responsibility which motivates us to put this new strength of the American Torah community at the disposal of our brethren abroad.

This is an age of Jewish decision and the fact that in the United States, there exists a dedicated, loyal and flourishing Torah community, this in itself is a source of encouragement to all other Jewish communities, in South America, in Australia, in Europe and, of course, in Israel.

This heightened ideological awareness of American Orthodox Jewry understandably also creates its problems. And this is the price we should be willing to pay and patiently to endure. There can be no doubt whatsoever that we are witnessing the birth of a new type of American Jewish

community and there is no birth without the pangs of labor. It is in this context that we must consider, for instance, the current controversy on dialogues and the entire ecumenical movement. Our withdrawal from the Boston Conference has been greeted with exultation by most Orthodox Jews, I believe. However, there are some who have misunderstood this decision and who are accusing us of wanting to return to the ghetto. As so often, the truth is the very paradox of this easy, obvious and unfortunately shallow assumption. Refusing to participate in a project or endeavor which tends even in the slightest measure to blot out or to blur the separate distinctiveness of the Jewish faith and of the Jewish faith community, is not a step of cowardly withdrawal but of courageous assertion of our independence and sovereignty, the very opposite of the so-called ghetto spirit.

There are, of course, wide areas of social concern in which our religious leaders will and must raise their voices in concert with spiritual leaders of other faiths. When and how to do so is a *halachic* decision, a decision reserved by Jewish history, and most of all by Jewish law, to the great of our people.

Appendix III

Joint Statement by the Author and Baron Alain de Rothchild, 1968

The following was issued as a joint statement by me and by Baron Alain de Rothschild, President of Consistoire Central of France. Our monumental program was recorded in The New York Times *as well as throughout the American Jewish papers.*

The current state of Jewish religious life in France requires that it draw upon the experience and resources of the American Jewish world. The Orthodox Union, with the full cooperation of the President of the Rabbinical Council of America, Rabbi Pesach Z. Levovitz, will undertake a program arranging visits of American trained rabbinical personnel, youth leaders and social workers to France. There, working with the French community and particularly its young people, in the larger centers and in smaller provincial areas, they may share their Torah learning and administrative expertise. Such experiences will serve to encourage these same leaders in their work in their home communities.

These efforts will add a new dimension to the work of the Orthodox Union and its Overseas Commission. The measure of the Orthodox Union's success in its efforts in France will serve as the pilot project for its fulfillment of its overseas responsibilities in other parts of the world as well.

We have also set in motion plans to give French rabbinical students graduate training and apprentice experience in the United States. Here, we hope that they will gain some measure of understanding of the American Jewish experience in forging a synthesis of religious tradition and secular culture which has proven so vital in the renaissance of Jewish life over the past several decades. Perhaps these joint and reciprocal efforts may lead to American assistance in the further expansion of French Jewish educational institutions.

The need for emphasis on Jewish educational experience for youth and

the emerging university leadership has occupied a substantial part of this visit. By visits to Yeshiva University and leading day schools, and by conferences with outstanding personalities in the educational world and student leaders, the leader of the organized French religious Jewry was given some insight into the mechanism of these important sources of strength and continuity in the American community.

Our joint plans now include a series of visits of youth leaders from France to the United States where they will be given the opportunity to work with the existing youth movements of the Orthodox Union at all levels of its activity. We have adopted plans to arrange for the translation of the unique library of youth publications developed by the youth department of the Orthodox Union for use in France. In these ways, we would hope that the development of the French Jewish world in the coming decades may parallel the growth in strength and Jewish renaissance in the United States.

Our common concern for Jewish development has led us to agree that we shall seek to consult in all matters of common religious concern in the future. We hope to continue our mutually fruitful discussions at the forthcoming World Conference of Ashkenazic and Sephardic Synagogues in Jerusalem in January. There, our mutual exposure to the vibrant Torah culture of Israel will give us renewed courage and ability to discharge our tasks to Jewish history and continuity.

Appendix IV

Impressions in the Immediate Aftermath of the Six-Day War

I traveled to Jerusalem shortly after the Six-Day War. So moved by the miracles of that War, I could not wait to share my experiences with my family. I wrote a letter to Pepa and asked her to share it with her parents and our children. She did, and then submitted it for publication in Jewish Life *(September-October 1967, pp. 12–13).*

My Dear Ones,

I'm exhausted, but I must write down my impressions while they are still fresh in my heart and in my mind.

We left New York City at 10:00 p.m. and arrived In Tel Aviv at 2:15 p.m. local time. At Lod Airport, we rented a car for Jerusalem — and here the story begins.

Instead of taking the regular road to Jerusalem, we went by way of Latrun, which used to be Jordan. Everywhere you go the contrast between Jordan and Israel hits you in the eye. In one week the Israelis have paved part of the road already — and when you reach the unpaved (formerly) Arab roads, they are primitive, rocky, dusty, and terrible. All along the road you meet trucks of soldiers — all singing, laughing, and happy. The motorists, you pass on the road are all in wonderful humor, and all are in a state of euphoria.

The young soldiers look 10 feet tall — sunburned, handsome, strong, and very formidable. The cab driver tells you of this miracle and that experience — and the entire populace keeps pinching itself to make sure it's true. "Two weeks ago this was Arab, and now it's ours," he says. "Look to your left and see how the Arabs have kept their country — dry, rocky, barren; and look to the right and see how we have transformed the land," he shouts. "Here is where a bloody battle took place, and our boys

fell," and he becomes sad for a minute, "but we annihilated them over there!"

And finally, we arrive on the outskirts of Jerusalem and the streets are packed. Today is the day! Today, Jerusalem is formally united into one city, the Old and the New, and not only are the streets full of Jews from all over Israel, but a remarkable sight hits you — the streets are full of Arabs by the thousands; on foot, on mule, and in cars with Jordan license plates. For the first time Jordanians are streaming into the New City, and on the faces of the adults you can see surprise and envy at what they see — and the children look around as if they are on another planet. And on the streets are co-mingled modern Jew and old-fashioned Arab, and Jews with beards and peyoth together with modern Arab, who seem to be on a holiday. What a stunning sight! The eye is assaulted by movement and color and you don't know where to look first.

I finally get to the hotel around 5:15 p.m. and can't wait to check in and unpack. I must get to the *Kotel HaMaaravi* for *Minchah*. I rush to a cab about 6:00 p.m., but the streets are packed, as the Arabs have a 7:00 p.m. curfew and they are all rushing back to the Old City. He finally gets me to the Mandelbaum Gate, but the guard tells us it is closed. (In the meantime we pass a fenced-in area full of captured tanks, cannon, trucks, and guns. I want to photograph them, but in a split second I'm surrounded by a dozen Israeli soldiers who stop me. Boy, do they look young, tough, and handsome!)

Finally, he says I must walk and walk to the Jaffa Gate, which is the beginning of the Old City's bazaar and marketplace, and I am transplanted back into history. The streets are narrow, dark, smelly, and dirty. They are literally crawling with Arab children who are filthy and stunted. And in the midst of the Arab crowds walk thousands of Jews — young, old; men, women, children; with yarmulkes and without; boys, girls; soldiers and *yeshivaleit* with *peyot*, *bekishes* and knickers. The Jews are all proud and fearless; the Arabs are afraid to look at them. We walk through the winding streets — streets where a Jew hasn't stepped for years and where a Jew hasn't stepped without fear for two thousand years.

We walk up and down the winding narrow streets and suddenly we come to an open space full of rocks and boulders. The Israel Army has knocked down entire blocks to make room at various points. My shoes are all white from the special Jerusalem dust. My suit is powdered with

dust — but who cares. The road becomes more and more difficult to walk, and finally I meet a "Meah Shearim" Jew and ask him if he's going to the Kotel. He answers, yes. I ask him if I can go along with him, and he agrees. Finally, we reach the place, and before my eyes stands THE WALL! In front of it all the houses have been knocked down and it's difficult to walk. A whole platoon of soldiers is there. Israeli flags are flying from many heights.

I rush up to the Wall and kiss the stones. They are smooth from countless kisses and touches. They are as cool as cool, comforting, living flesh. And I begin to *daven* and I talk to the stones, and I know they listen. I place a *kvittel* that I have in the cracks. Before I know it, I am friends with the Wall, and I remain there for about three-quarters of an hour to *daven Maariv* also. I kiss the Wall goodbye, and I realize that it is dark. How am I going to make it back to the hotel in the dark, on foot, through strange roads, through Arab streets and quarters? I meet two Meah Shearim *yeshivahleit*, and I ask them the way out. They tell me that they're going my way and I can walk with them. We are in a wonderful mood and they are so friendly. These young men would probably not even have said hello to me last month, and now we're wonderful friends, and almost brothers. They talk about "our army," "our soldiers," and only last month they were isolated in Meah Shearim. I just pray to G-d this spirit lasts and is not dissipated too soon.

I return to the hotel about three hours after I started out — physically and spiritually exhausted. I didn't sleep the entire night before on the plane — but I don't care, for this was a moment to be captured and never to be lost.

ברוך שהחיינו וקיימנו והגיענו לזמן הזה

All my love,

Joe

Appendix V

Excerpt from Rabbi Soloveitchik's Speech Delivered at Pidyon Haben of Mark's Son, 1974

Below is part of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik's speech delivered at my grandson's pidyon haben. *Until shortly before the occasion, we were unsure if the Rav would attend, let alone address the guests. The following speech was recorded and redacted many times over:*

"Rabbi Akiva declared that the father transmits to the son comeliness, strength, wealth, wisdom, years, and the number of generations before him [*mispar hadorot*]" (*Eduyot* 2:9). In the *Mesorah* community, in this fraternity of the committed, there need not be any generation gap, any splintering of ranks. There is, rather, a sharing of ideas and ideals which span and unite countless generations. This is the secret language of *mispar hadorot*, of uniting generations. Each newborn Jewish child enters an extended historical family where he will be reared by the wisdom and teachings of great Torah personalities.

Whatever I have said now is not just an abstract idea but an ongoing experience for me. Let me say that I constantly experience the secret of *mispar hadorot*, of combining, uniting, and merging many generations into one community. This idea becomes real every time I enter the classroom at Yeshiva. In Yeshiva, years play no role, centuries have no significance, and different generations can successfully communicate with each other.

My classroom is crowded with boys who, as far as age is concerned, could be my grandchildren. I enter the classroom as an old man with a wrinkled face and eyes reflecting the fatigue and sadness of old age. You have to be old to experience this sadness. It is the melancholy that results from an awareness of people and things which have disappeared and linger only in memory. I sit down; opposite me are rows of young beaming faces

with clear eyes radiating the joy of being young. When I enter the classroom I am filled with despair and pessimism. I always ask myself: Can there be a dialogue between an old teacher and young students, between a Rebbe in his Indian summer and boys enjoying the spring of their lives? I start the *shiur* without knowing what the conclusion will be.

Whenever I start a *shiur*, the door opens and another old man walks in and sits down. My students call me the Rav. He is older than the Rav. He is the grandfather of the Rav. His name is Rav Chaim Brisker. Without his method of study, no *shiur* could be delivered nowadays.

Then the door opens quietly again and another old man comes in. He is older than Reb Chaim because he lived in the seventeenth century. His name is Reb Shabtai HaKohen, the famous Shach. He must be present when civil law, or *dinei mamonot*, is discussed when we study *Baba Kamma* or *Baba Metzia*. Then more visitors show up, some from the eleventh, twelfth, or thirteenth centuries. Some even lived in antiquity. Among them are Rabbi Akiva, Rashi, Rabbeinu Tam, Ravad, and Rashba. More and more keep on coming in.

What do I do? I introduce them to my pupils, and the dialogue commences. Rambam states a *halachah*, and Ravad disagrees sharply. At times, Ravad utilizes harsh language against Rambam. A boy jumps up to defend Rambam against Ravad. In his defense the student expresses himself rashly, too outspoken in his critique of Ravad. Young boys are wont to speak in such a fashion. So I correct him and suggest more restrained tones. Another boy jumps up with a new idea. Rashba smiles gently. I try to analyze what the young boy meant. Another boy intervenes. Rabbeinu Tam is called upon to express his opinion, and suddenly a symposium of generations comes into existence. Young students debate earlier generations with an air of daring familiarity, and a crescendo of discussion ensues.

We all speak one language — "The whole earth was of one language and of common purpose." (*Genesis* 11:1) We enjoy each other's company, speak one language, and pursue one goal. All are committed to a common vision, and all operate with the same halakhic categories. A *Mesorah* collegiality is achieved. It is a friendship, a comradeship of young and old, spanning antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modern times. The Mishnah (*Eduyot* 2:9) concludes that "the number of generations before him" leads to "the appointed end" — *vehu haketz*. This unity of generations, this march of centuries, this dialogue and conversation between antiquity and

the present will finally bring about the redemption of the Jewish people. *Vehu haketz*! The messianic realization will come about become of this great dialogue of the generations.

Let me tell you, at the conclusion of the *shiur*, which can sometimes last three or even four hours, I emerge young — younger than my pupils. They are tired and exhausted. I feel happy. I have defeated age. I feel young and rejuvenated. In the *Mesorah* experience, years play no role. Hands, however parchment-dry and wrinkled, embrace warm and supple hands in a commonality, bridging the gap which separates the generations.

Thus, the old ones of the past continue their great dialogue and rendezvous of the generations. This forges an enduring commitment to the *Mesorah*. *Vehu haketz* — this is the secret that will lead to the messianic redemption.

Appendix VI

Thoughts About Yeshiva University

To mark the centennial celebration of Yeshiva University, I contributed an essay to Amit Woman *(September-October 1985, pp. 16–17). In it, I discussed the history of the institution, and to my mind, its purpose and mission within the prism of American Orthodoxy. To my surprise, Rabbi Norman Lamm, then President of Yeshiva University, was quick to relay to me his thanks for a candid and exemplary description of Yeshiva University. What follows is the full text of the article that appeared in* Amit.

Yeshiva University and Modern Orthodoxy

On the passage in *Jeremiah*, "Thus says the Lord: I remember your youthful devotion, the love of your bridal days, how you followed me through the desert, through a land which was not sown," the commentators note a redundancy in the phrases "desert" and "land which was not sown." Are they not the same? After all, nothing grows in the desert and nothing in a land is unsown. The commentators do, however, find distinction: In a desert, nothing can grow, but in unsown land, nothing grows because nothing was planted. When one prepares the land properly, however, things will grow.

The turn of this century was a time in American Jewish history when the immigrant Orthodox rabbinic and lay leaders bewailed America as a desert in which Torah could not grow. They felt powerless to lead their communities through the dangers which were lurking on all sides. The small Torah communities of that time were splintered into rival and hostile factions whose members were ambivalent about the great potential America offered their sons and daughters. Yes, America offered opportunities for the material advancement of the immigrant Jews — but at the expense of their spiritual values and heritage. At best, one had to compromise the

Torah principles which had sustained the Jewish people throughout the millennia; at worst, one adopted a watered-down Judaism which almost inevitably led to complete assimilation.

What type of Jewish education could one fashion for such a chaotic period in our history? A secular education could only hasten the deterioration of the already shaky foundation upon which the native Jewish community uneasily rested. For the young immigrant Jew, the threat was even stronger as a he wrestled with the inducements of the open society in which he suddenly found himself. The existing *yeshivot* of that period, because of their lack of understanding and fear of the society about them, strove to segregate their students from the outside community, protecting them from the spiritual destruction of "*treife* America."

At this time of extreme need there appeared a leader, a man of genius by the name of Dr. Bernard Revel, who came to our shores directly from the Lithuanian *yeshivot* and fathered the concept of the phenomenon we know today as Modern Orthodoxy.

Dr. Revel established the first American *yeshiva* high school and adopted a Teachers institute to train the future educators of these high school students. But the focus of his creative genius was Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, which he had been called upon to reorganize. Dr. Revel recruited some of the greatest Lithuanian *Roshei Yeshiva* of the day to come and help him establish the standards upon which this great Torah institution would be based. A *semicha* program was formed which began to produce indigenous American rabbis who for the first time could deliver the message of the Torah in the language of the young generation.

But in order to prepare rabbis who could lead their flocks on all intellectual levels, it was necessary to give these spiritual leaders a well-rounded secular education as well. Dr. Revel created "within the walls of the *beit hamidrash*" an institution which would produce excellent examples of *Torah im derech eretz*. Thus, Yeshiva College was founded in 1928, launching the greatest Torah education concept of the twentieth century.

As the late Dr. Samuel Belkin, *z"l*, the second President of Yeshiva University, wrote, "Dr. Revel [felt that] the main purpose of Yeshiva is to produce both laymen who are imbued with the spirit of the Torah and rabbis who will serve not merely as ministers, but as Jewish scholars who will teach and preach in accordance with the authority of the Torah and our sacred traditions."

And indeed, YU's most outstanding accomplishment under the direction of Dr. Revel and his successors, Dr. Belkin and Dr. Norman Lamm, has been to serve for decades as a center of Torah and learning for thousands of students. Men and women, rabbis and teachers, sociologists, doctors, and lawyers have utilized their YU training when joining the mainstream of Orthodox Jewish life throughout the United States and Canada.

The early years were not easy ones, especially for the YU-ordained rabbis who went forth determined to deal with the demands and problems specific to American Jewry. The 1940s, '50s and '60s were both a holding and a forming period for these rabbis, who had to defend their communities against the powerful onslaughts of the Reform and Conservative movements as well as the forces of secularism. Concurrently, they had to build or rebuild their local synagogues and day schools; prepare students for *yeshiva*; and help train and educate local laymen to become the pillars of their respective communities.

It was a slow, often heart-breaking process, and on the surface progress could often not be discerned. But as water can wear away stone, so did the untiring efforts of these young spiritual leaders begin to succeed. By the early 1980s, there were more than five hundred American Jewish day schools.

Throughout this time, thousands of young men and women were attending Yeshiva College and Stern College for Women, and Yeshiva University's other professional schools. Elsewhere, their contemporaries studied in other *yeshivot* and seminaries that had sprung up in the fertile soil first sown by YU. All, as graduates, established themselves and their families in communities across the length and breadth of the land.

The products of Yeshiva University's colleges and many among its professional graduates have consistently been knowledgeable and observant in the areas of Shabbat, *kashrut* and family purity. They insist on having local day schools and *mikvaot*. They want their synagogues built and run in full accordance with *halachah*, and so on. They realize the importance of individual study, *shiurim* and adult education. They want to participate in all facets of the community, as well as offering their hearts and means to the State of Israel. And yet they live very much in this world, participating to a great extent in the surrounding community — with the appropriate modifications of dress and behavior prescribed by traditional Judaism.

Similarly, the products of other Orthodox educational institutions

have taken their places throughout the country, armed with the kind of dual education pioneered by Yeshiva University. The spread of these communities has made life as an Orthodox Jew easier and more accessible in America — even for those who retain the isolationist concepts held by the Orthodox leaders at the turn of the century.

Dr. Revel's dream is being realized. He foresaw that American soil was not sterile, but merely lying fallow. He saw that with love, effort, tears and dedication this land could be fertilized and cultivated to yield a rewarding and glorious crop. Because of Dr. Revel, his successors and the products of Yeshiva University, the American Torah community is thriving as never before.

Appendix VII

The Lubavitcher Rebbe

One of the most interesting experiences that I had in connection with the preparation for the World Conference was a remarkable meeting with the Lubavitcher Rebbe. The *Roshei Yeshiva* and the Agudath HaRabonim mobilized anyone and everyone that they could to try to make sure that this conference would not take place. One of the personages whom they contacted was the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

One day, I received a call from Chabad headquarters inquiring if I could possibly come to meet the Rebbe. I must mention that this was at a time before the Rebbe handed out dollar bills, when he was more available to the public. This was at the time when only a chosen few could have what was known as "*yechidus*," a private meeting with the Rebbe. I, of course, said that I would be delighted to meet the Rebbe. I asked when they would like me to come. They answered, "Come on a certain evening, at midnight!" I was taken aback hearing that I should come at midnight. Anyway, it was a cold, winter night. It had recently snowed. The streets were slippery, and the air was frigid. I drove my car to Crown Heights in bad weather, and I arrived at Chabad Headquarters sometime between eleven-thirty and a quarter-to-twelve. After parking the car, I went up to the Headquarters and notified the person in charge who I was. It was very interesting. The outside offices of the room were literally packed with dozens of people, especially women, who were coming to the Rebbe with their personal requests and problems. As I sat down, I wondered how I would ever get in to see the Rebbe with so many people ahead of me. At about twelve-thirty, Rabbi Chodikov, the man who was closest to the Rebbe, saw me and indicated that I should follow him into the Rebbe's office.

I entered the room and for the first time, I met the Lubavitcher Rebbe. I was very impressed with his appearance. He had such charisma and his personality was so strong, especially his eyes. They made a tremendous impression upon me. We gave each other "Shalom" and I sat down.

Chassidim do not sit before the Rebbe, they stand. However, since I was not a formal *chassid* of the Rebbe, I was permitted to sit. He asked me some questions about myself. He mentioned that "Karasick" is a very familiar name in the Chabad world and he wanted to know about my background. I told him that my father was born in Babroisk. Babroisk was the intellectual of Chabad in the province of Minsk. He was very impressed. I told him that we had come to America in the very early years and there was no Chabad at that time in America. Although, from birth, my father came from a Chabad family, there was no opportunity, certainly in San Fransisco, which was so far from the center of the Jewish world in New York, to practice as a Lubavitcher *chassid*.

We began to talk and talk. Time was passing by. Eventually he started a conversation about the forthcoming World Conference. I already was familiar with the type of conversation and dialogue which would follow, having experience from speaking with other *gedolim*, and we discussed the issue back and forth. As I had held my position with other *gedolim*, I did with the same with the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

At one pause during the conversation, I said to the Rebbe, "Rebbe, I have a personal *shayla*, question, to ask you. He said, "Yes, please ask." I said, "When I *daven Shemoneh Esreh*, at times, my mind wanders, and I begin to think of other things, as well. What does the Rebbe recommend for me to do to have more proper *kavanah*?

The Rebbe answered in a very practical fashion. He said, "It doesn't only happen to you. It happens to all of us. During *Shemoneh Esreh*, it is very difficult for one to maintain one's *kavanah*. I would suggest that you pick out, from the *Shemoneh Esreh*, one of the *berachot*, and that *berachah* becomes your special *berachah*. When you come to that Brocha, you put your mind to it, and concentrate, only on that *berachah*. Do not let your mind wander in any direction during that time. Time after time after time of repeating that, that *berachah* will belong to you and will be your *berachah*. When you succeed with that one, take another *berachah*, and so on until over the course of time you will be able to concentrate on *Shemoneh Esreh*." Then he added, "The same thing applies to *mitzvot*. It is very difficult to be *mekayem* all the *mitzvot*, and even the *mitzvoth* that you are *mekayem*, to do them with the proper *kavanah*. So my suggestion is, that you adopt one particular *mitzvah* and that *mitzvah*, you do with the greatest *kavanah*. Repeat that *mitzvah*, over and over again, just like the *berachah* which I

previously discussed, let this *mitzvah* become part of you. As you become the *ba'al habayit* of this *mitzvah*, you will move on to another *mitzvah*. In that way, both in your *davening* and in your *kiyum hamitzvot*, you will be able to concentrate on at least a few, and they will become part of you. Don't be too concerned about your *kavanah* that you feel is slipping away, because that is human nature. It is very difficult for one to concentrate for a long period of time.

Before I looked around, it was quite late. I realized that I had the *zechut*, privilege, of being with the Lubavitcher Rebbe for two hours. During that period, Rabbi Chodikov knocked on the door, opened it, and the Rebbe waved to him and said, "I understand, come back later." I felt very bad knowing that outside, there were, by now, hundreds of people waiting to consult with the Rebbe, and he was devoting all this time to me.

When I left his office about two-thirty in the morning, to drive home to Manhattan, I was on such a high that I didn't remember driving home. When I got to the house, I realized what an incredible experience of *yechidut* with the Rebbe that I had just had.

Special Photo Section

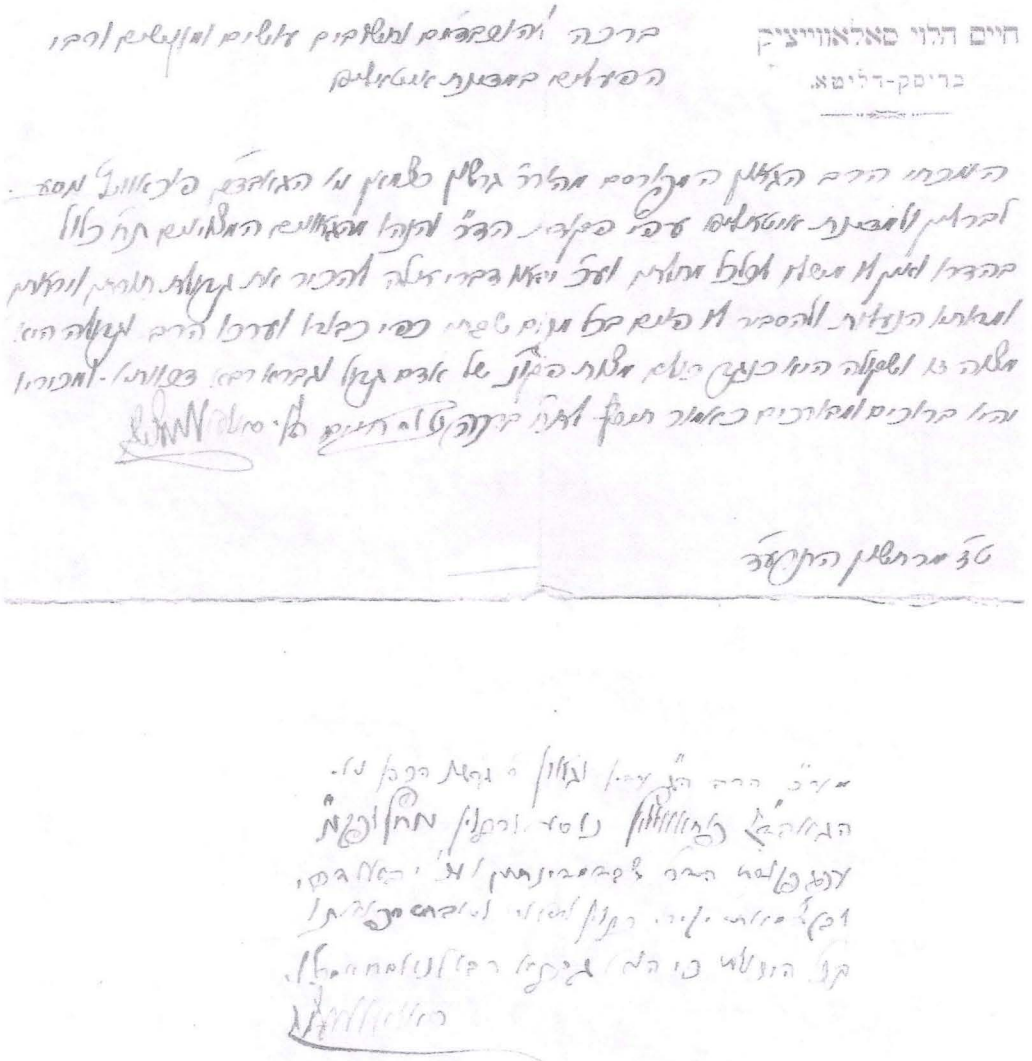
Letters of Approbation on Behalf of Rabbi Katzman

יוסף דוב הלוי סולובייצ'יק
JOSEPH SOLOVEITCHIK

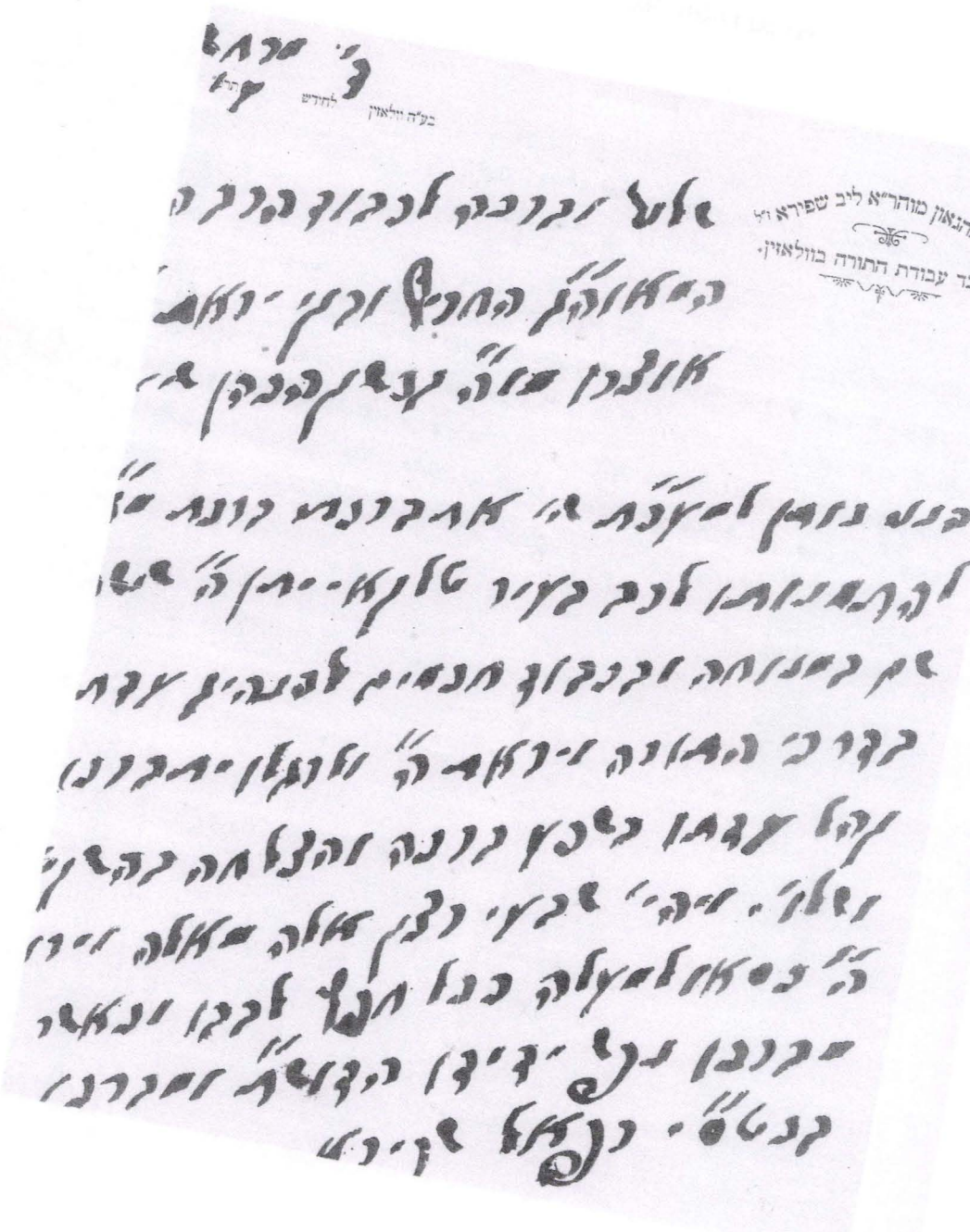
Letter from Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik (the Rav) on behalf of Rabbi Katzman's sefer

Letter from the elders of the Puchovitcz community in White Russia, where Rabbi Katzman was the rabbi

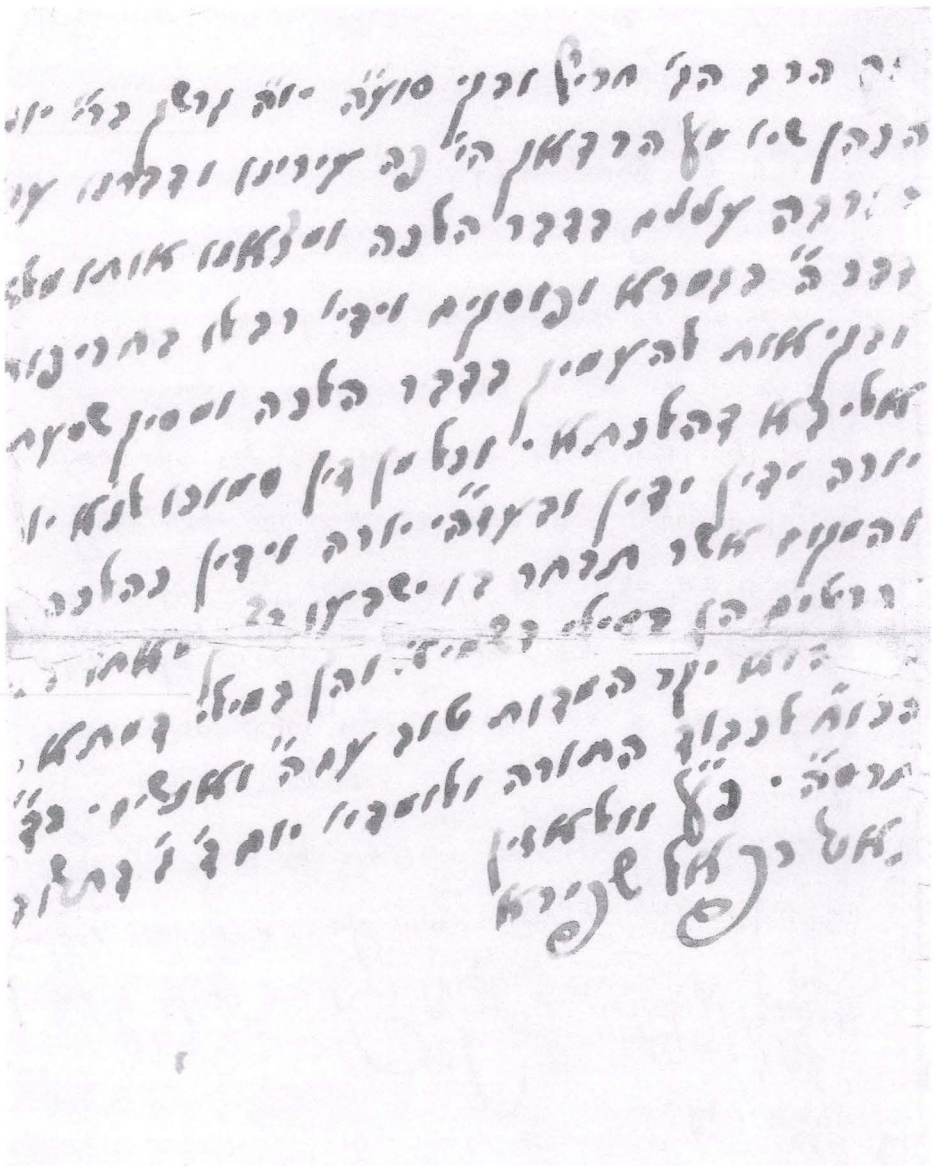
Letter from Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Lublin



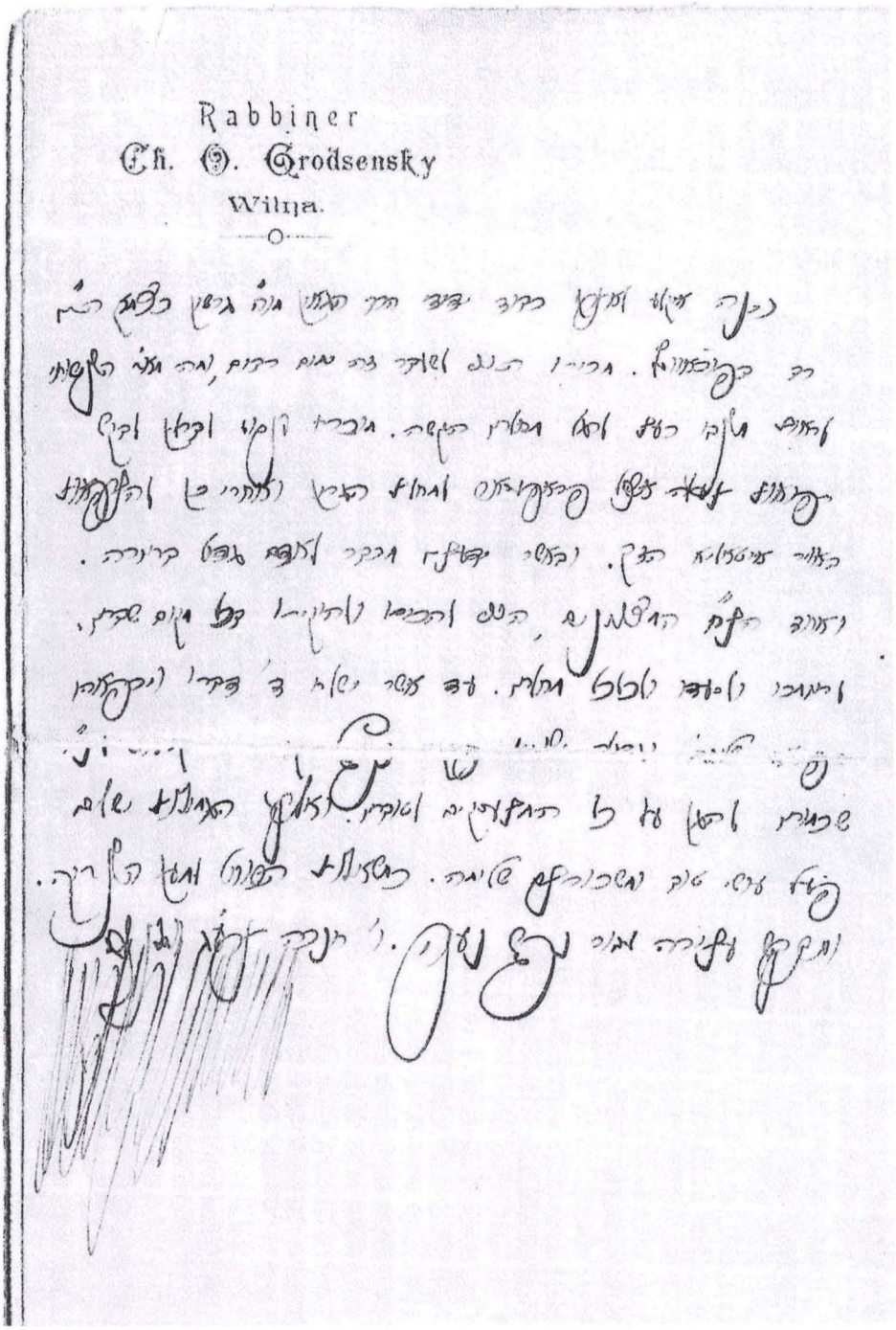
Letter from Rav Chaim Soloveitchik (the Brisker Rav)



Letter from Rav Raphael Shapiro of Volozhin

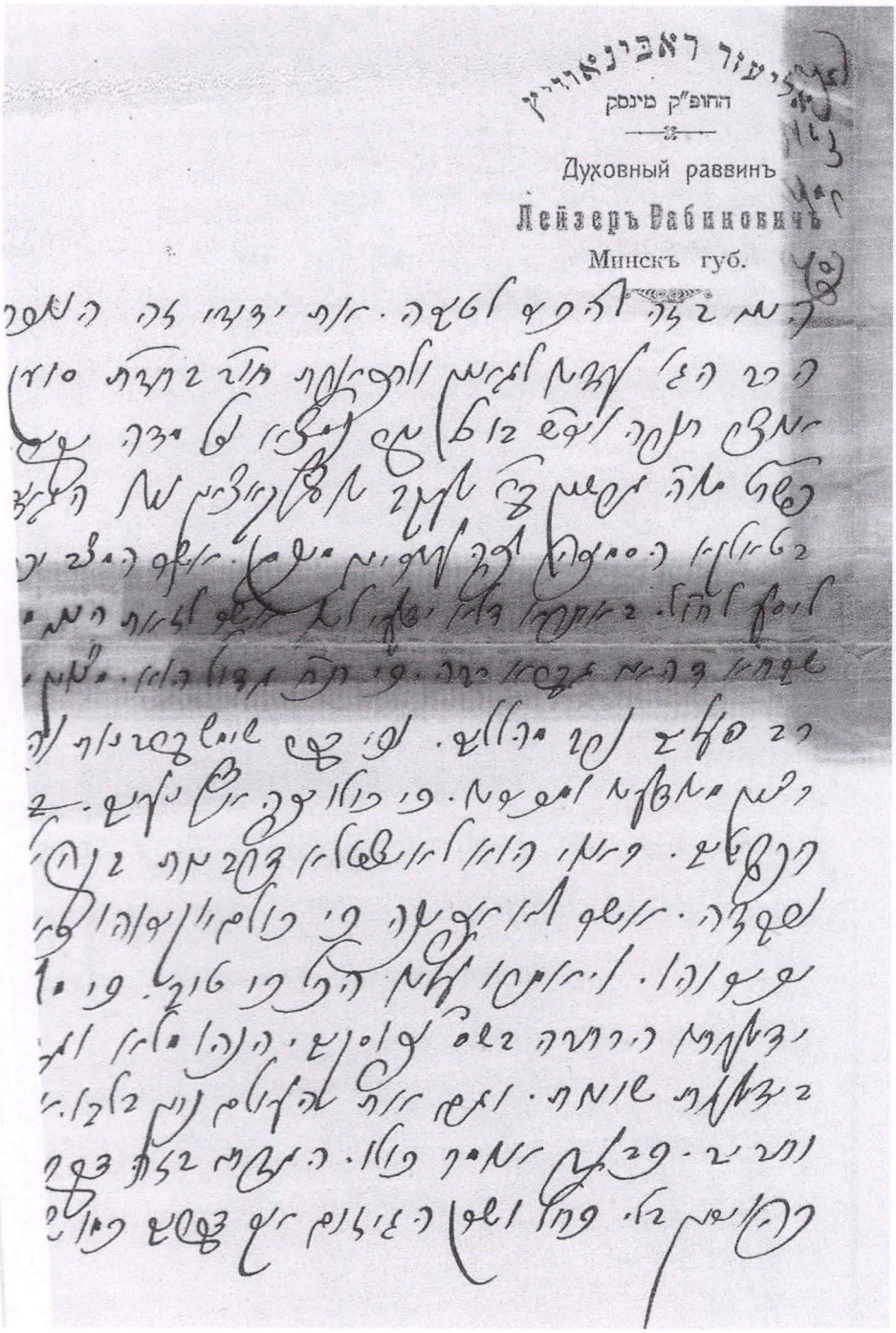


Letter from Rav Raphael Shapiro of Volozhin

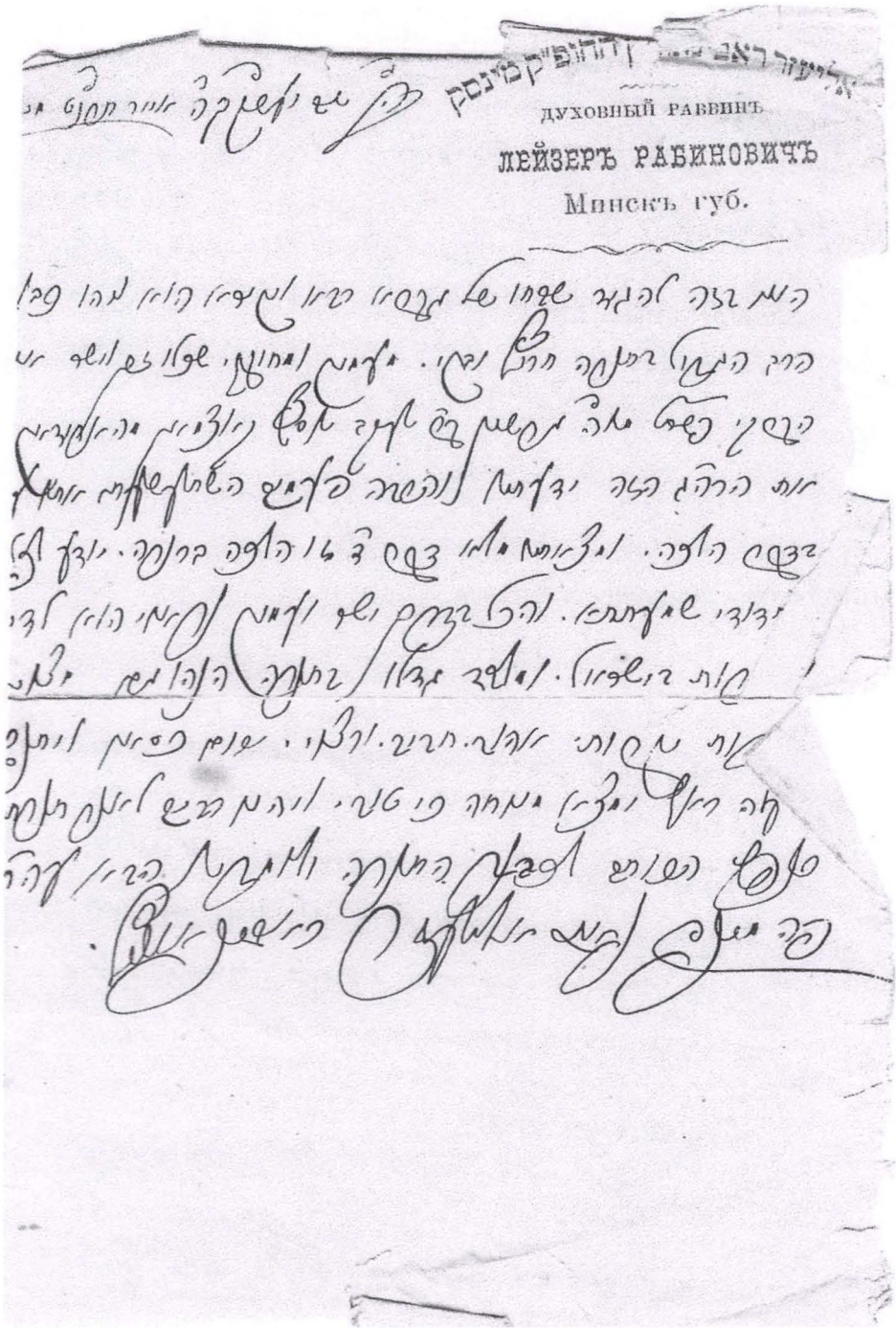

Rabbiner
Ch. O. Grodzensky
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Letter from Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky

Letter from Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky



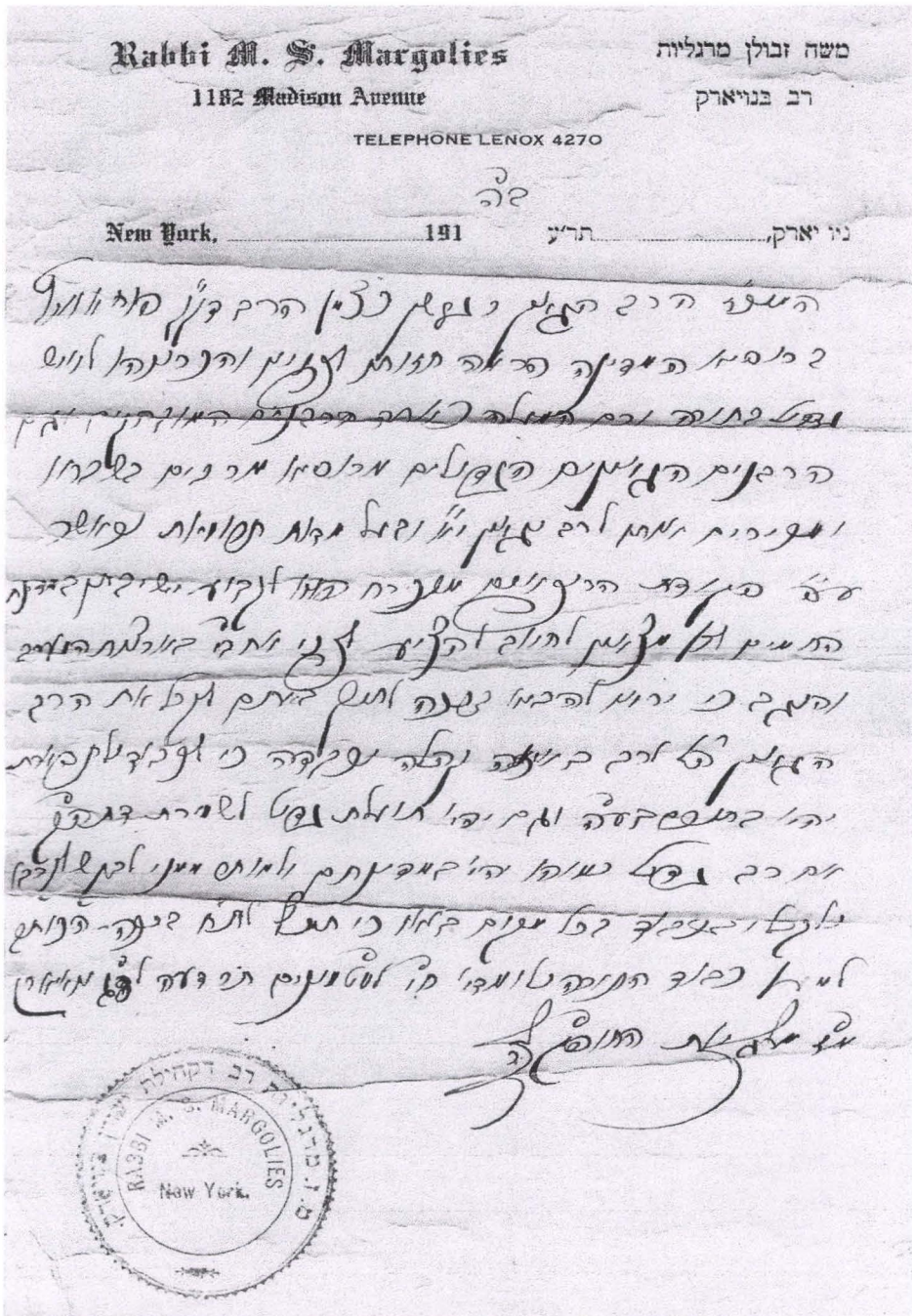
Letter from Rav Eliezer Rabinowitz of Minsk



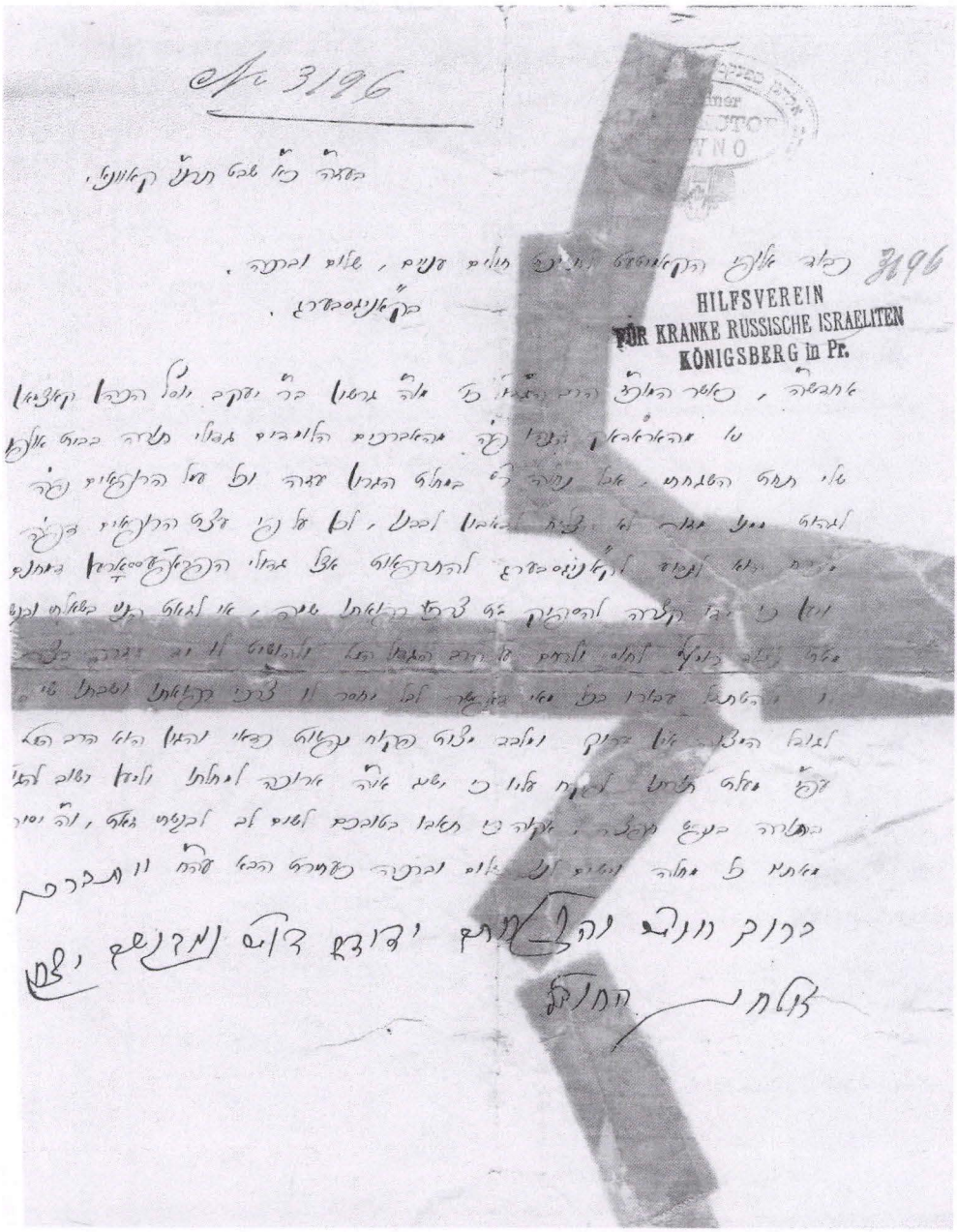
Letter from Rav Eliezer Rabinowitz of Minsk

Letter from Rav Binyomin Zev Zakheim

Letter from Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman



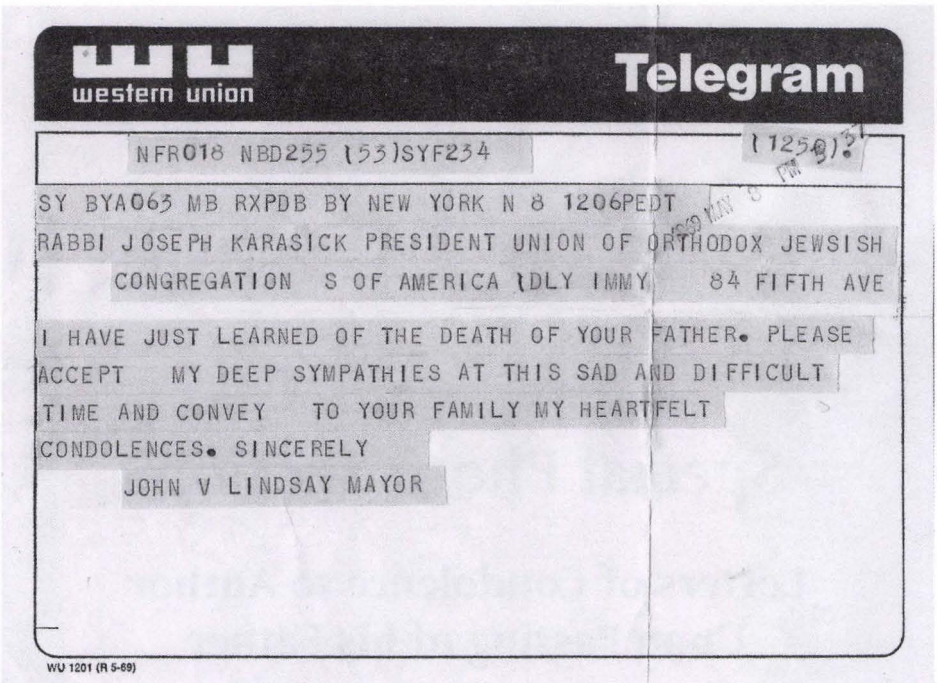
Letter from Rabbi Margolies (rabbi of Kehilath Jeshurun; father-in-law of Rabbi Joseph Lookstein)



Letter from Rav Yitzchok Elchanan Spektor

Special Photo Section

Letters of Condolence to Author Upon Passing of his Father



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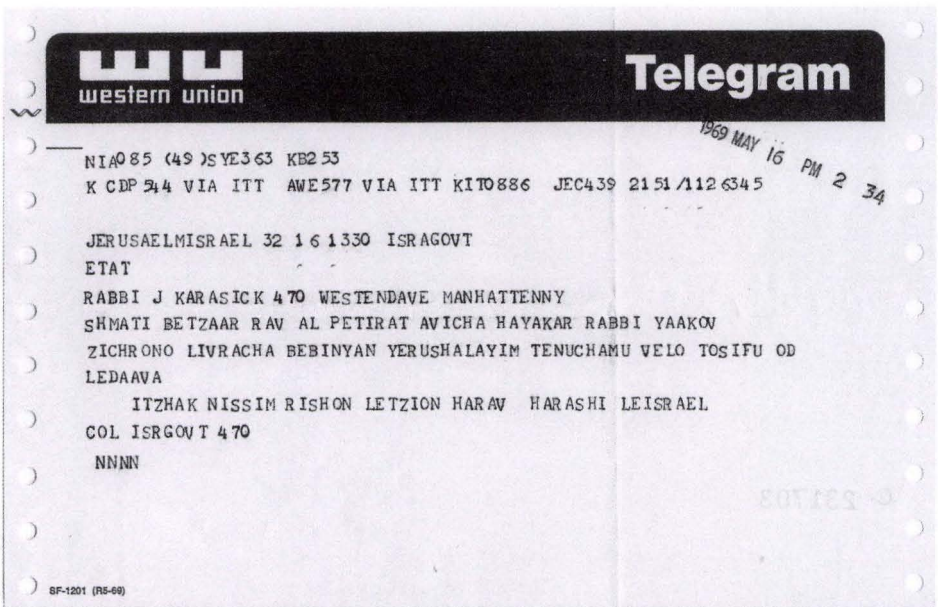
RABBI JOSEPH KARASICK PRESIDENT UNION OF ORTHODOX JEWSISH CONGREGATION S OF AMERICA (DLY IMMY 84 FIFTH AVE

I HAVE JUST LEARNED OF THE DEATH OF YOUR FATHER. PLEASE ACCEPT MY DEEP SYMPATHIES AT THIS SAD AND DIFFICULT TIME AND CONVEY TO YOUR FAMILY MY HEARTFELT CONDOLENCES. SINCERELY

JOHN V LINDSAY MAYOR

WU 1201 (R 5-69)

Letter from Mayor of New York



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SF-1201 (R5-69)

Letter from Rabbi Itzhak Nissim, Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel



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ב"ה

May 22nd, 1969

Rabbi Joseph Karasick
470 West End Avenue
New York, New York

Dear Rabbi Karasick:

It is with deep regret that I have learned of the recent death of your father. I know that with such a loss fresh in your mind, words of consolation may seem rather hollow. However, I want to express to you the feeling of sorrow which all of us in the Jewish community feel for you and your loss. When someone who has served us so well and faithfully suffers a grievous sorrow, it becomes our sorrow too.

May you be comforted with the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

Sincerely yours,

Yitzchak Greenberg

IG:ek

Irving Greenberg, Rabbi

Letter from Rabbi Yitzchak Greenberg



Torah Umesorah NATIONAL SOCIETY FOR HEBREW DAY SCHOOLS
156 FIFTH AVENUE. NEW YORK. N. Y. 10010 - YUKON 9-1717

DR. JOSEPH KAMINETSKY
National Director

Dear Joe:

Your words of ... touched me to the core. As a Jew myself, the "same situation" occurred to me as I entered the auditorium. ...

You know that there will be a new Day School in San Francisco in the Fall. We - all of us - shared think of some implications and perhaps some steps to take - after the period of mourning.

May the Almighty give you the strength to bear this great loss and grant you abiding consolation in your continued work for ...

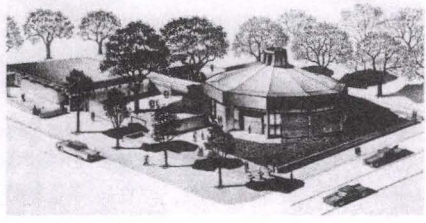
... ...

... ...

Joe Kaminetsky

Letter from Rabbi Dr. Joseph Kaminetsky

Congregation Kneseth Israel
EMPIRE AVENUE & SAGE STREET
Far Rockaway, New York 11691
FA 7-7545



ב"ה

Ralph Pelcovitz
Rabbi

Joel Schneierson
President

כה אייר תשכ"ט
May 13, 1969.

Mr. Joseph Karasick,
470 West End Avenue,
New York, N. Y.

Dear Joe,

In the name of our entire Congregation, we extend to you our heartfelt condolences upon the passing of your beloved father, יעקב ע"ה, Yaakov, of blessed memory.

Although most of us were a continent apart from his community, nonetheless most Torah Jews know of his outstanding sterling character as a Talmud Chachom, a builder and moving force in the Jewish community, and one who personified the 'midah of 'chesed.' Above all, his zechus lies in the fact that he reared his son in the way of Torah, inspiring him to assume national leadership of the Torah community, thereby benefiting all of us.

We share with you your moment of sorrow and your grief. We know that his memory will ever be a source of inspiration and blessing to you and your entire family.

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלם

Sincerely,
Ralph Pelcovitz, Rabbi
Joel Schneierson,
President.

Letter from Rabbi Ralph Pelcovitz

Vaad Hoeir
OF ST. LOUIS

ועד העיר דסט. לואיס, מא.

UNITED ORTHODOX JEWISH COMMUNITY OF ST. LOUIS
6128 DELMAR BOULEVARD • ST. LOUIS, MO. 63112 • PARKVIEW 7-0380

ב״ה

May 14, 1969

Rabbi Joseph Karasick,
470 West End Ave.,
New York, N.Y. 10024

Dear Rabbi Karasick:

Please accept our most sincere sympathy upon the passing of your dear father. We join you in mourning your loss.

May the Almighty comfort you among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem and may He spare you of all sorrow in the future.

Sincerely yours,
Vaad Hoeir of St. Louis

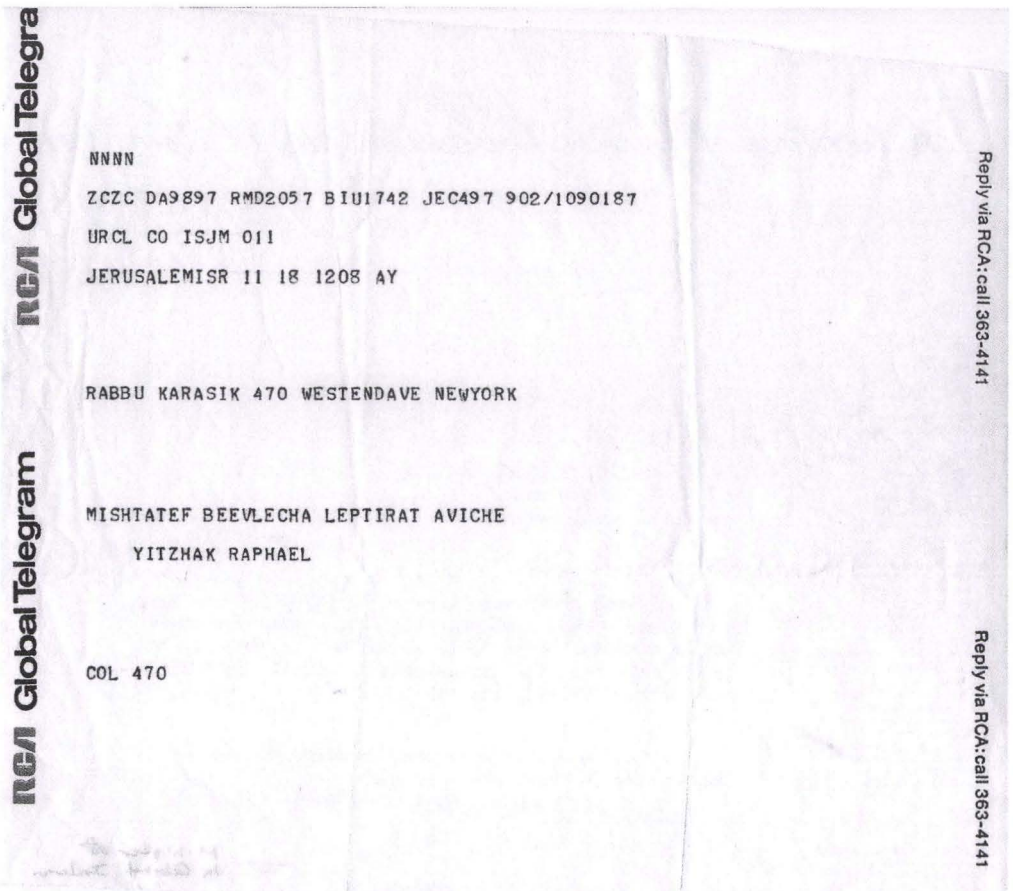
M. H. Eichenstein,
Chief Rabbi

Ben Hoffman, President

Hyman Flaks, Exec. Sec'y

HF:fz

Letter from Rabbi Eichenstein, Chief Rabbi of St. Louis


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RABBU KARASIK 470 WESTENDAVE NEWYORK

MISHTATEF BEEVLECHA LEPTIRAT AVICHE

YITZHAK RAPHAEL

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Reply via RCA:call 363-4141

RCA Global Telegram

Reply via RCA:call 363-4141

Letter from Yitzchak Raphael, member of Israeli cabinet and dear personal friend of author

Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York

130 EAST 59 STREET
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10022
751-1000

May 21, 1969

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COMMUNITY SUPPORT
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Rabbi Joseph Karasick
470 West End Avenue
New York, New York

Dear Joe,

Sol Litt and I were grieved to learn of your loss. We sincerely hope that you will find comfort not only in the memories of so noble a soul but in your day to day immersion in the life stream of activities dedicated to the spiritual and moral elevation of Jewish life.

May you and your dear ones be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

המקום ינחם אתכם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים.

Sincerely,

HC

HC:mf

Rabbi Hyman Chanover
Consultant on Jewish Education

Whether your legacy is a hundred dollars or a million — when you leave a legacy to Federation or any of its institutions, you are an important part of the promise and progress of tomorrow

Letter from Federation of Jewish Philanthropists of New York

בה

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF RABBI

TELEPHONE:
EUSTON 1066 (4 Lines)
CABLES:
CHIRABINAT LONDON W C 1

ADLER HOUSE,
TAVISTOCK SQUARE,
LONDON, W.C.1

22nd May 1969.

Rabbi J. Karasick,
470 West End Avenue,
New York City,
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

My dear Rabbi Karasick,

I was deeply distressed to learn of your sad loss, and I hasten to offer you my המקום ינחם on hearing of the news, even though it reached me rather belatedly.

Although I was not privileged to know your revered father personally, I know from the wonderful reputation he enjoyed how acute is your loss and indeed the loss of numerous friends and admirers.

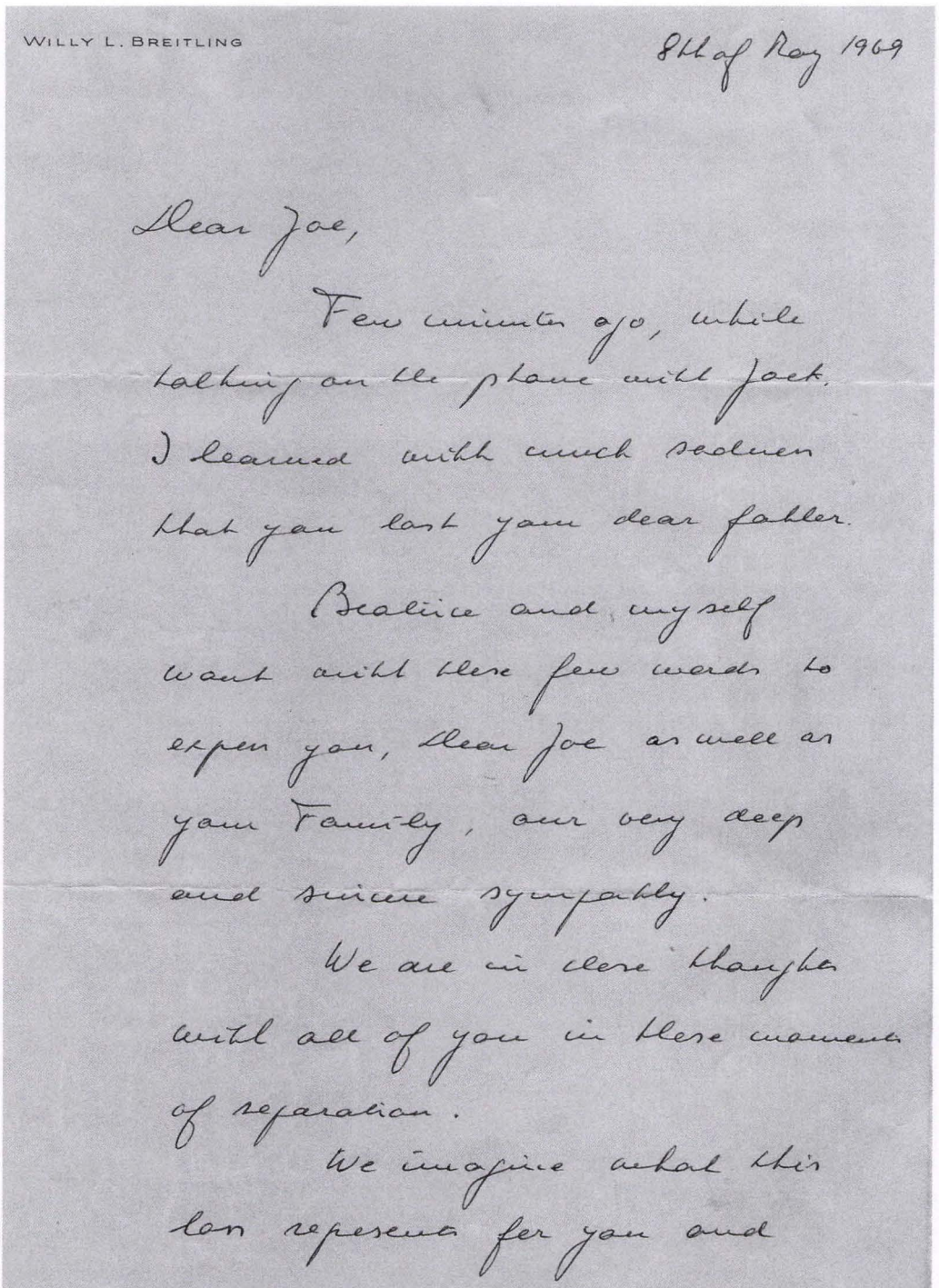
May his memory serve as a continued inspiration to you in your own dedicated work for the ideals he instilled in you, and may the Almighty spare you and all those mourning with you from all sorrow in the future.

Very sincerely yours,

I. Jakobovits

Dr.Immanuel Jakobovits
Chief Rabbi

Letter from Rabbi Dr. Immanuel Jakobivitz, Chief Rabbi of the British Empire



WILLY L. BREITLING

8th of May 1969

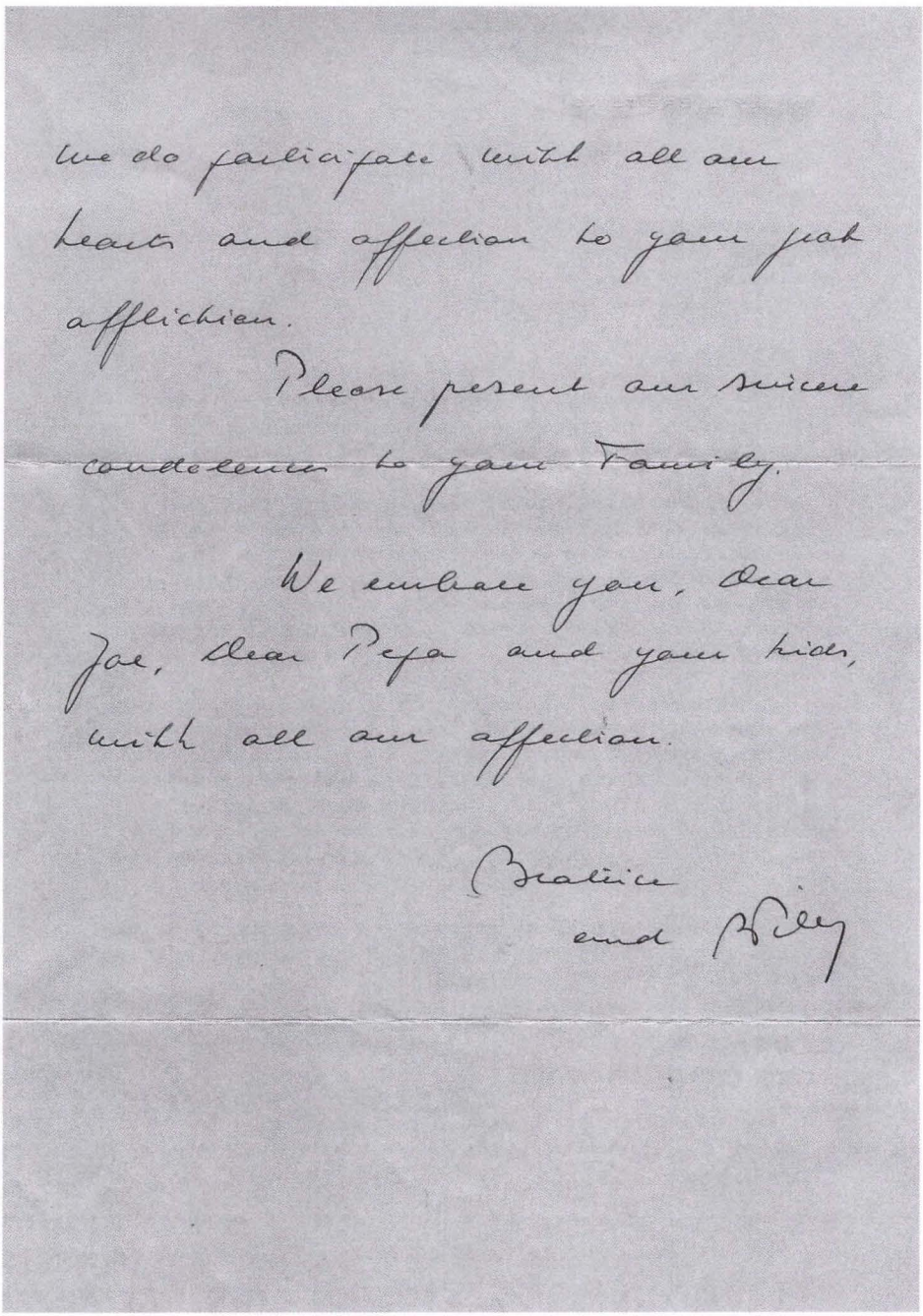
Dear Joe,

Few minutes ago, while talking on the phone with Jack, I learned with much sadness that you lost your dear father.

Beatrice and myself want with these few words to express you, dear Joe as well as your Family, our very deep and sincere sympathy.

We are in these thoughts with all of you in these moments of separation.

We imagine what this loss represents for you and



We do participate with all our
hearts and affection to your great
affliction.

Please present our sincere
condolences to your Family.

We embrace you, dear
Joe, dear Peya and your kids,
with all our affection.

Beatrice
and Willy

◀▲ *Letter from Willy Breitling*

RABBI JOSEPH H. LOOKSTEIN
117-125 EAST 85TH STREET
NEW YORK, N. Y. 10028

THE STUDY
HANOVER 7-1000

May 9, 1969

Mr. Joseph Karasick
470 West End Avenue
New York, New York

My dear Joe:

I just received word of the passing of your dear father whom I knew so well, and whose hospitality I once enjoyed when I visited San Francisco.

Under normal conditions, you know that I would have attended the funeral and certainly would have called upon you during Shiva in person. You might have heard, however, that I have been confined to my home for the last six weeks by orders of the doctor. I am only now being released slowly for very limited work.

Forgive me, therefore, if I cannot call on you and convey my sentiments to you. Your father was a wonderful human being, of piety, of learning and, above all, of true Jewish gentleness. He had great "nachas" in his life. Above all, I am sure that he derived great joy from seeing his son grow to such prominence and renown, as a recognized leader of the American and the world Jewish community.

Please convey my expressions of sympathy to the entire family." May God comfort you all amongst all who mourn for Zion and Jerusalem".

Very cordially yours,

Joseph H. Lookstein

JHL/ak

Letter from Rabbi Joseph Lookstein of Kehilath Jeshurun Congregation

RABBI MENACHEM M. SCHNEERSON
Lubavitch
770 Eastern Parkway
Brooklyn 13, N. Y.
HYacinth 3-9250

מנחם מענדל שניאורסאהן
ליובאוויטש
770 איסטערן פארקווי
ברוקלין, נ. י.

ב"ה, ל"ט למתמונים, ח'חשכ"ט
ברוקלין, נ.י.

הוו"ח אי"א נו"נ
עוסק בצרכי ציבור וכו'
הרב יוסף שלימ"א קרסיק

בצער נודעתי על דבר פטירת אביו ע"ה, והנני להביע
לו ולכל אבלי המשפחה שיחיו ברכת תנחומין בנוסח
המסורתי ועפ"י תוכן -
המקום ינחם אותם בתוך שאר אבלי ציון וירושלים,
ולא יוסיפו לדאבה עוד.

בכבוד ובברכה למר ולכל בני
המשפחה שיחיו שמכאן ולהבא
אך טוב וחסד ירדפם תמיד כל
הימים בתוכ הנראה והנגלה.

Letter from Lubavitcher Rebbe

Special Photo Section

Significant Occasions and Accomplishments



The author and Pepa with Mr. and Mrs. Tommy Scharf and family



The author and Rabbi Dr. Samson Raphael Weiss



Rav Chaim Kanievsky and his son-in-law Rav Yehoshua Tzivion



Foreign Minister Abba Eban addressing World Conference in Israel



The author with Elie Wiesel (second from right) and OU Officers



The author with President of Israel Zalman Shazar



The author with Chief Rabbi Israel Meir Lau (center)



The author and Pepa with Rabbi Pinchas Stolper (left) and Vice President Hubert Humphrey



The author presenting an award to Baron de Rothschild at an OU dinner in 1968



The author greeting Rav Unterman, the Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel



The author with Rav Levin, Chief Rabbi of Moscow. Rav Levin is holding a Wakmann Watch.



The author with Chief Rabbi Sir Isadore Brody of the United Kingdom (center) and Moses Feuerstein, c. 1967



Rabbi Emanuel Rackman, Dr. Samuel Belkin, Mr. Max Etra, and the author



The author at an NCSY Convention