

# RAV BREUER

*His Life and His Legacy*

A BIOGRAPHY OF  
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# THE FRANKFURT YESHIVA

## **TORAH LEHRANSTALT— INSTITUTE FOR TORAH LEARNING**

The very name of our Yeshiva — “Institute for Torah Learning” — reflects its program. The Yeshiva is not to be anything other than a place for learning Torah. It has lived up to its name if it can be identified as one of those “תרביצות”, as described in the צדקה ילקוט: עשה הקב"ה שהקדים והגלה גלות יכני' לבבל עם החרש והמסגר וכל גדולי התורה וירדו לבבל ועשו תרביץ לתורה שאלמלא כן היתה התורה משכחת מישראל (ס' רל"א) Rav Hirsch זצ"ל wrote (*Jeschurun*, IV, No. 5): “A yeshiva is the place where the living spirit of Torah is nurtured and fostered (הרבצה) (התורה on behalf of the Jewish people, the people of G-d, and is distinct from religious seminaries with their training courses.”

In the past it was not that difficult to have an institution so devoted to the spirit of Torah learning, for there was “Jewish public opinion” which kept watch over the activities of teachers and students. There was כבוד התורה, an appreciation of the meaning of Torah knowledge, which reserved a position of respect for young Torah scholarship and afforded the student the means to pursue his studies. It was felt that the “nurturing and fostering” of Torah-study was the foremost task of rabbis. “It was a constant concern of each community to support a group of students who studied with the Rabbi, thus constituting a Yeshiva; תלמוד תורה was the first chapter in the statutes of each community” (Rav S.R. Hirsch, *Collected Writings* II, 349).

In our present time, however, a number of difficulties confront us. To be sure, there is “Jewish public opinion,” which is more

“public” than “Jewish.” And what most Jewish circles today regard as כבוד התורה is not really a reflection of the basic needs and feelings of the Jewish soul but rather a weary respect and conventional mind-set of the modern Jew. And what was considered of foremost importance, namely, that the rabbi is a teacher of students and that the community must attend to their support, has now become quite secondary.

In spite of these hindrances, it is thanks to the willing support of numerous members of the Frankfurt *Israelitische Religionsgesellschaft* that the Frankfurt Yeshiva was established, and with a great deal of pride one can appreciate its accomplishments. By outlining the premises that essentially characterize the Yeshiva, this article aims to broaden the circle of friends and supporters of the Yeshiva, a goal shared by all who understand genuine Torah scholarship.

It would not be right to denigrate the accomplishments of the past generation who, under the leadership of Rav Hirsch and his associates, called for fundamental Torah knowledge in the face of widespread ignorance. Their call was as urgent as the necessity for practical Torah fulfillment. One need only scan the weekly Jewish newspapers of that time to see the numerous announcements for lectures and scholarly presentations. There was a definite awakening, in a receptive audience, of a deep interest in the acquisition of Torah knowledge. However, if there is to be raised a new generation of לימודי תורה, stringent efforts have to be made to establish institutions which reflect a serious program of Torah learning — and not a program in which Torah is just another kind of knowledge that can be incidentally obtained at random. Rather, it is to be understood that the קיום, the flourishing endurance, of Torah and its study will endure for all times only במי שממית עצמו עליה, through those with selfless dedication who sacrifice their personal time, energy and resources for Torah.

A בן תורה is not only defined as such by the official diploma that he has duly received from an institute for Torah learning. Neither was there an official permit necessary in earlier times to be allowed to teach. Every “scholar,” whether employed as a teacher or not, saw in the act of teaching a prime obligation. Since the study of Torah – like no other scholarly activity – is based on a lively exchange of ideas and discussion, it follows that in the incessant obligation to study further, even the most gifted person would need to continue to “learn” with associates and students. Every Jewish person, regardless of station in life or age, is to consider it his sacred duty, as long as he lives, to strive forward in the acquisition of knowledge of G-d’s laws. There can never be an end to learning, and over the centuries “even those in trade or business reserved for themselves ‘a fixed time’ for ‘learning.’ Every Jew was expected to attach himself to another student or to a teacher for ‘learning,’ and so one could truly say that in those days the whole Jewish nation consisted of teachers and students.” (Rav S.R. Hirsch, *ibid.*) But Torah-study – the concern of the entire Jewish nation – must not be lowered to the level of the עם הארץ. The Torah-scholar, whether employed as a teacher or not, will regard his teaching and the sharing of his knowledge as his primary duty – and in that case he will have to be a true scholar.

To begin to acquire an adequate reservoir of knowledge, the future “scholar” must deem it of utmost importance to devote at least one to two years in his youth to Torah study, spending *most* of his day “learning.” In these student years he will learn to be humble and careful in his judgment. He will delight in the “sea of the Talmud,” and he will personally experience the oceanic vastness of the Talmud. It will affect his entire attitude with regard to כבוד התורה, the appreciation of which becomes the noble characteristic of someone who has been nurtured by the waters of Torah knowledge.

Even the best ישיבה cannot offer its one-to-two year students more than a rudimentary, introductory basis in ריח התורה, so that

he can accustom himself to an ongoing program of "learning." It cannot be said that the youthful graduating student, after one or two years of attendance at a Yeshiva, will be an accomplished בן תורה. But even the relatively limited amount of Torah knowledge which he will have acquired in his short time in the Yeshiva will equip him with a basic facility in Talmud to continue the lifelong pursuit and obligation of Torah-study; however, the student at this stage may in no way harbor the illusion to consider himself a חלמיד חכם. If, then, the Yeshiva, in all the years of its existence, will have accomplished nothing more than imbuing its בחורים with the fact of their rather rudimentary Torah knowledge and the consequent necessity to further pursue lifelong study, it will have truly served its purpose and, more than that, will have proven the importance of its existence.

The entire program of the Yeshiva — the organization of its teaching and learning schedules — is geared to counteract the opinion that Torah-learning is just another subject taken up when there is time for it. The layman will have difficulty understanding how it is possible to spend sometimes nearly ten years with one single tractate of Talmud. In truth, however, painstaking thoroughness of study must be the decisive factor in a Yeshiva.

It is of utmost importance that everything that goes under the heading of a Jewish view of the world and life [*Lebensanschauung*] can only be gained on the basis of careful and thorough study of Torah material. So-called philosophers of Judaism will have to be regarded as unscientific dreamers so long as they do not advocate that the essential way to acquire a relevant understanding of Judaism is to stress the need to devote the greater portion of study hours to the acquisition of Torah knowledge. Intuitive knowledge, be it ever so brilliant, is inadequate.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch זצ"ל was a great Jewish philosopher because he was a profound scholar of Torah. And his scholarly

work can be further developed only by those scholars who, like him, devote their entire life to the study of Torah. Among all the institutions of his Kehilla, the Yeshiva can truly be called the finest heir of his scholarly legacy. Regardless of what great work has been done in the past or will be done in the future in the realm of Jewish scholarship, it always was and always will be Yeshivoth that guarantee genuine Jewish study.

In ספר המדע רמב"ם introduces הלכות יסודי התורה, the first book of his משנה תורה, the great systematic codifier of our religious law sets the intellectual boundaries of Jewish scholarship by limiting our study to what is profoundly termed in the Talmud as פרדס, "garden." He notes that, according to what is recorded in the Talmud, even some of those who were considered גדולי ישראל and לידע ולהשיג כל הדברים על בוריין often lacked the ability חכמים גדולים to fully understand and completely master everything. He then states: ואני אומר שאין ראוי לטייל בפרדס אלא מי שנחמלא כריסו לחם ובשר ולחם: "I wish to say that in order to go forth into the garden one must have filled one's stomach with meat and bread. The words meat and bread refer to the knowledge of what is forbidden and what is permitted and whatever else belongs to the knowledge of the law."

By characterizing the specific area of Talmudic-halachic study with the rather commonplace, almost trivial examples of meat and bread, the רמב"ם aims to underline their absolute necessity vis-a-vis abstract, philosophical conjectures. Bread and meat are household words which are essential to life, while לטייל בפרדס is a luxury in which only a select few can indulge.

"Bread and meat" are rather ordinary terms – and the רמב"ם was quite aware of that: ואע"פ שהדברים אלו דבר קטן קראו אותן חכמים שהרי אמרו חכמים דבר גדול מעשה מרכבה ודבר קטן הוויות דאביי ורבא אעפ"כ ראויין הן להקדימן שהן מיישביין דעתו של אדם תחלה ועוד שהם הטובה הגדולה שהשפיע הקב"ה ליישב

העולם הזה כדי לנחול חיי העולם הבא ואפשר שידעם הכל קטן וגדול איש ואשה בעל לב רחב ובעל לב קצר.

The materials taught in our ישיבה do not float in the clouds. דבר רבא and אביי are centered right on earth. They do not deal with philosophical speculation. Discussions between רבא and אביי, אעפ"כ ראויין הן להקדימן שהן מיישבין דעתו של אדם תחלה, because it is they who guide the student toward an unskeptical appreciation of Torah knowledge. (See Hirsch Commentary to Psalms 19:8 נפש תמימה משיבת נפש ה' תורה ה' תמימה.) The רבא and אביי reject fruitless and abstract speculation. Instead, they concentrate on the realities of man's world by placing the entire everyday experience under the matchless and life-spanning ruling of G-d's law (יישוב) (העולם הזה). Thereby, the רבא and אביי bestow our life on earth with a reflected splendor of G-d's kingdom in the world to come, the belief in which, by their practical expression, they transform from a vain hope into a real certainty (כדי לנחול חיי עולם הבא). It is the רבא and אביי which make an entire nation into a realm populated by scholars, teachers and students. They offer much to all sectors of our people, without regard to age or ability. (See ר"א: כסף משנה (שם).) (בן חסמא אומר קינין ופתחי נדה הן גופי הלכות וכי

Therefore, ראוין הן להקדימן, it stands to reason that the Yeshiva, to begin with and primarily, can be called a Talmudic technical school, even if it might be criticized for being one-sided by giving preference to רבא and אביי.

The רמ"א — himself having an honorary doctorate from Cracow University — widens the concept of פרדס to include all secular sciences whose study would only be permitted באקראי, as an aside (see שולחן ערוך יורה דעה רמ"ו, ה'). The ש"ך however, limits the extended concept of פרדס to מעשה בראשית ומעשה מרכבה.

At this point we do not wish to enter into a discussion of the halachic basis for יפה תלמוד תורה עם דרך ארץ. The relationship between

Torah and secular study requires its own specific, comprehensive treatment. In this article, in order to clarify what we set out to define, we will consider חוּדוּד only in reference to the basic principles of the Yeshiva.

Secular subjects are studied in the Yeshiva only באקראי, and even then they are not part of the official curriculum. The רמ"א would be truly satisfied. The Yeshiva is not the place for secular subjects. It is quite a different matter for educational institutions, such as Jewish high and elementary schools. We must remember and heed the well-known statement of Rav Hirsch זצ"ל: An elementary or high school is not a technical school. A technical school concentrates its program on one particular area of study while our elementary and high schools must offer a broad program to fulfill their mission in education. And in this sense, the Yeshiva is a technical school. This concentration on a particular area does not preclude any educational value for a technical school. In the final analysis, a technical school has its own particular methods of supplying its students with an education in the area of technical studies.

The teaching structure of a Yeshiva wraps itself around the spiritual atmosphere that pervades its halls. It can cope well with balancing תורה and דרך ארץ. Only ספרי מינים, which the רמ"א in יו"ד forbids, are to be assiduously avoided. It is not the purpose of a Yeshiva to speak out against a Schopenhauer or a Nietzsche. There would never be time for that anyhow. When the nephew of R. Yishmael asked his uncle whether he would be allowed to study Greek, his uncle agreed to have him study at a time when it is neither day nor night – because the duty to study Torah encompasses day and night.

The educational purpose of the Yeshiva is therefore quite clear: The more our elementary and high schools give the same earnest and devoted attention to תורה and דרך ארץ (see *Collected Writings*, VII, 82) – which if only for practical reasons they must – the



more essential it becomes that there should be an educational institution the very structure of which reflects the superiority of תורה. The principle – at the very least, superficially – that תורה and דרך ארץ must be approached with the same attention is of utmost importance for the future well-being of our individual youth, as well as for Jewish life at large as part of the wider world. But, when this principle is misunderstood, it will lead to serious error to which some have fallen victim. It has been eternally true that a broadened outlook, gained by a general education, is not only permitted but “is something which is eminently desirable to the fullest possible extent, for only a mind armed with such a wide panoramic view can draw the right conclusions for his own unique and uniquely Jewish position in the world” (Hirsch Commentary, Devarim 4:32), Still, it must be stressed that study “of history and nature” for this purpose and intent, and with such an outlook, must never for a moment be regarded as a secular branch of the study program. Rather, it must be quite clear from the outset that these studies are helpmates to the study of Torah for a clearer understanding of Torah’s uniqueness and superiority.

It is easy to overlook this important difference. One can easily fall into the pitfall of errors, namely, that “the Jewish position in the world” can only be understood by delving into the study of the world and affording equal stature to secular study as to the sacred study of Torah. The Yeshiva will counteract this kind of error by firmly keeping afar anything grown on the soil of non-Jewish thought in the face of the supremacy of Torah.

In stressing the superiority of Torah we also wish to emphasize the importance of countering the enemies of our אמונה by heeding the advice of our Sages: דע מה שחשוב לאפיקורס. We must have broad knowledge to buttress our conviction regarding the unchanging truth of Torah דמלתא, לרווחא דמלתא, to deal with any challenge to our אמונה. Our אמונה rests squarely on the fact that every child born of a Jewish mother is סיני מחר ועומד מהר סיני. Every Jew, from birth onward, is part

of the national purpose – the duty to uphold the Jewish law, the Torah – of the Jewish people. It is the Yeshiva, with its exclusive program of Torah study, that can plant, nurture and strengthen the relationship of the Jew to his duties. Every young person has doubts and searches for answers. The Yeshiva provides the only answer: Learn!

We stressed earlier that the Yeshiva is not to be understood simply as a “Rabbinical Seminary,” or, as Rav Hirsch would put it, “an ethical training institute.” Our Yeshiva counts among its students also those young people who do not plan to make a career of the rabbinate. These “laymen” *בחורים* are regarded on an equal footing with the candidates for the rabbinate. And in fact they even have the opportunity, if they remain in Frankfurt to pursue their careers, to continue to participate regularly in the Shiurim of the Yeshiva (e.g., the “Neben-Shiur” [a repetition in the evening of the main Shiur given during the day in the Yeshiva]). And still, as part of the very basis for its existence, the Yeshiva considers itself a preparatory center for future rabbis. Numerous successfully practicing rabbis owe their training to our Yeshiva.

There is probably no other vocation the successful practice of which requires so varied and many-faceted an education as the rabbinical calling. A rabbi must be the teacher of his congregants. He must have a talent for reaching and influencing the minds and hearts of others. He also ought to be a good speaker, which can be a very demanding quality. The sermons of a rabbi from the pulpit are expected to be inspiring; teachings in the classroom lively and to the point; social conversation friendly; after-dinner speeches humorous; speeches at wedding ceremonies solemn; eulogies moving. In case he has the ability and desire to be a Chazzon for Neila, he must make certain not to disappoint the congregants with a presentation that offends the listening ear. And so he might also be a cantor. He must be able to communicate with the authorities and

to preside at official meetings; that would require certain diplomatic and organizing abilities. It goes without saying that a rabbi ought to be versatile when it comes to literary abilities. A rabbi must be ready to answer any religious doubts of his congregants. He must be well versed in Jewish history. It might be helpful for a better understanding of the Hebrew language to have some knowledge of ancient languages and of the science of archeology. He must be a philosopher and cognizant of modern thought – and such a man of a thousand trades ought, in addition, also to be a חלמיד חכם.

We have such a high regard for the position of a rabbi that we feel certain that he will want to have as broad an outlook as possible. The rabbi is not only, to use a pejorative phrase, “an inspector of ritual slaughter;” he is not only a מורה הוראה for כשר and טריפה. In fact, as guardian of Jewish religious law, every phase of life requires his פסק דין. His interpretations and instructions are to be applied far beyond the mere so-called “rituals” of Jewish life for they extend to the broad reaches of the all-encompassing Jewish religious law, which regulates every aspect of man’s life. It is wrong to say that Jewish religion is only a matter of feeling, and it is equally wrong to say that thoughts and attitudes are personal matters of the individual. Innumerable pages of the Torah appeal to the hearts and minds of our people. He who tries to influence the minds of individuals in a spirit contrary to that of the Torah is as much an אפיקורס as one who treats with contempt one of our “rituals.” If, then, the rabbi is expected to imbue his congregants with the proper knowledge and proper observance regarding Jewish law, he must be able to grapple with the specific practical problems and intellectual trends of his particular time. It becomes clear that the candidate for the rabbinate must acquire a wide area of knowledge in order to be a מורה הוראה for the active life of his congregants.

Half-knowledge in a rabbi is unacceptable – it borders on blasphemy. The study program in the Yeshiva is geared to avoid

this, for its central aim is to make of the rabbi a genuine *בן תורה*. No Yeshiva sees its program as one in which *גדולים* and *גאונים* are systematically produced. Rather, the Yeshiva provides the opportunity for the qualified individual student to gradually develop into a *גאון* or *גדול*. And the Yeshiva, the Talmudic training school – in contrast to other places of study with multi-faceted programs – is the only guarantor for such development.

A powerful speaker, a brilliant author, a profound thinker – all very impressive. But this powerful speaker, brilliant writer, profound thinker must also be a truly eminent *חכם*, *תלמיד חכם*, for otherwise his rabbinical qualities will just be those of a lifeless puppet. *כל המעמיד דיין שאינו הגון ואינו חכם בחכמת התורה ואינו ראוי להיות דיין אף על פי שהוא כולו מחמדים ויש בו טובות אחרות הרי זה שהעמידו עובר בלא תעשה (שולחן ערוך חושן משפט ח', א').* “Whoever puts in place an unworthy teacher of the law who is not distinguished in Torah knowledge and lacks the qualifications for a religious leader, even if he has other wonderful qualities and abilities – he transgresses a Divine prohibition (לא תכירו פנים במשפט).”

In accord with this Halacha, the Yeshiva takes a ranking place among the teaching institutions in Germany, providing the type of study as the Halacha demands to produce worthy rabbis such as was offered in former times and as must be everywhere followed today. The students entrusted to us take their teaching with them as they go out into the world. No matter how widespread his realm of activity, be he the most accomplished rabbi or be he in another field of endeavor, the student of our Yeshiva is never exempt from the duty to improve and perfect himself in his study of Torah and to remain “in learning.”

We are pleased that the effective and rewarding work of the Yeshiva has been duly recognized and will be appreciated more as time goes on. The Yeshiva will continue to welcome into its midst all children of parents who shudder at the thought that their

children will have only a superficial knowledge or might even be ignorant of our sacred sources. Our doors will be open to all, in addition to those wishing to take up rabbinical careers.

We can not acquiesce to ignorance. It is a tragedy that individuals think of themselves as “learned” in גמרא when in fact they are unaware of their inability. We are saddened that rabbis are content to satisfy the requirements for Torah teaching with elementary material, and the “main Shabbos afternoon Shiur” consists mostly of stories. Except in those few fortunate communities with proper spiritual leadership and educated members, it is a sad, tragic comment on our times that in many small German-Jewish communities the study of Talmud has almost ceased. To remedy this problem, we need a sufficient number of מלמדים who are תלמידי חכמים. Germany, in contrast to the East, sorely lacks them. Thus it is obvious that one of the aims of the Yeshiva is to provide for future מלמדים to become תלמידי חכמים and thereby appropriately raise the level of “learning” in our communities.

To foster Torah-true Judaism – by way of speech or with the written word, with personal commitment of time, energy and money – is laudable. But the fulcrum of the pendulum of Jewish life is Torah study. We do far too little to further its growth; it should be our highest priority.

Whenever the need arises to hasten to the aid of suffering mankind, to raise up those bowed down by sickness or misfortune, to build or beautify synagogues, to organize choirs, and so forth, we find hearts and hands open. *Avodah* and *gemiluth chassadim* have no cause to complain of neglect in our communities. But not so the function that our Sages have emphasized first and foremost: our communal efforts for Torah, for the teaching and dissemination of G-d’s Law. And yet precisely this task once was the primary concern of both

the community and the individual. It is a task which must be attended to before any other.

Every Jew knows that the “learning of Torah” is the very soul of Judaism.

Rav S.R.Hirsch, *Collected Writings*, II, 346-7