

Interviews conducted by Professor William
Helmreich with various Roshei Yeshiva

Table of Contents:

Interviews are in chronological order:

Rav Shneur Kotler	p. 4
Rav Yaakov Perlow	p. 10
Rav Yaakov Weinberg	p. 21
Rav Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman	p. 28
Rav Elya Svei	p. 31
Rav Aharon Schechter	p. 37
Rav Osher Kalmanovitz	p. 40
Rav Shmuel Berenbaum	p. 41
Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky	p. 43
Rav Yitzchak Hutner	p. 44
Rav Moshe Feinstein	p. 46
Rav Gedaliah Schorr	p. 48
Rav Mordechai Gifter	p. 51
Rav Henschel Lebowitz	p. 54
Rabbi Naftali Nueberger	p. 60
Rabbi Joseph Kamenetzky	p. 66

Interview with Horav Shneur Kotler

8-2-77

Translated from Yiddish

It is 4:00 P.M. and I am sitting in the offices of the Beth Medrash Govoha in Manhattan at 1220 Broadway. I have an interview with the Rosh Yeshiva. He is a difficult man to reach. One day he is in Europe attending to an emergency, the next day in New York, and the following in Lakewood. It has taken almost two weeks to arrange an appointment, not because Rav Kotler has been avoiding me but simply because he has so much on his shoulders. In addition to running the Yeshiva and acting as its spiritual head he is also very active in fund-raising.

The office is located on the top floor of a not-especially-imposing building. The office itself, or waiting room is adequately furnished. From where I sit, I can see two women in long sleeves typing and mimeographing in other rooms. The young girl on my left, similarly attired, serves as receptionist in addition to her typing duties. Above her on a few shelves are telephone books from cities all over the United States, a reminder that this is an institution with an international reputation and attendant responsibilities. It is, after all, the Harvard of Yeshivas.

After waiting a few minutes I am ushered into the Rosh Yeshiva's office. He has just emerged from a meeting with his assistants, Rabbi's Katz, Yaakov Weisburg, Simayowitz, and Weinberger. His greeting is effusive as he introduces me to these men. "Sholom Aleichem" they say; "Aleichem Sholom", I respond. I am wearing the traditional Yeshiva Bochur's outfit – jacket and dark hat while they, men in their mid-thirties and forties are dressed in dark clothing crowned by large, black *yarmulkes*.

The Rosh Yeshiva motions me to sit down as I close the door. Before we get very far (beyond pleasantries), it opens again. Rabbi Shimayowitz enters. Rav Kotler introduces me again and I find myself thinking 'not surprising he should do that since his mind is always on Torah (This becomes even more clear during the course of the interview as every answer is punctuated or emphasized by a quote from either the Talmud or Chumash.) "I want you to know that I heard you on WEVD and felt it was really "gevaldik" (tremendous). She seemed to give you many opportunities to discuss what you wanted to say. The only thing" and here he paused just for a moment "was what you said about the dormitory. It sounded a little like the guy in charge was something of a Gestapo guy." At this point Rav Kotler and he both smiled and imperceptibly, it turned into a semi-humorous observation which covered a slight criticism. The rabbi, who functions as one of the "palace guards" shielding the Rosh Hayeshiva from being pestered excused himself and left. At this point the interview began in earnest:

RK: Maybe I should first give you the names of some people who can be of help to you. Tell me what information you're looking for.

WH: Well actually, I think the areas I'm interested in will emerge from the questions themselves and then perhaps the Rosh Hayeshiva would be in a better position to suggest names.

RK: Okay what's on your mind?

WH: First I wanted to know what were some of the problems that the Rosh Hayeshiva's father, Olov haSholom encountered in his efforts to start a yeshiva here in America?

RK: You mean obstacles?

WH: Yes.

RK: I was in Israel at the time that my father went to America. He came in 1935. Upon seeing the situation in America he was convinced that the level of education was such that there was really very little possibility to develop *gedolai Torah* without the creation of more institutions of higher learning. So he went to Mr. Mendelowitz; you know who that is; he's very important for the work you're doing. He was the founder of Torah Vodaas and he always wanted to be called "Mr." not rabbi. Anyway, Rav Aharon gave Mr. Mendelowitz his plans for the type of Yeshiva he felt needed to be founded. It should be in a small town away from the city, a place where people could devote all their time to learning Torah. And we wanted to not just have bochorim but also yungeleit, which was a new thing then.

At this point the Rosh Hayeshiva was interrupted by a telephone call and when he finished he reached into a large manila envelope, pulling out a Hebrew article by R. Sherr zt'l, of the Slobodka Yeshiva. It was a section on yeshivas that was part of a larger discussion of Mussar in general:

RK: This article is very important for what you're doing. It explains the philosophy and goals of yeshivas. The Hebrew is quite difficult and I think you should ask Nosson Scherman, who is a *gevaldike talmid chochom* to translate it for you so that you can get the most out of it.

The Rosh Hayeshiva called in a girl and asked her to xerox it. As he did so I took a quick look around the office. It was a small room, spartanly finished. A plain wooden office desk and some chrome-metal chairs perhaps carried in by the previous occupants. The walls were bare but in the bookcases were a set of the Talmud, a *Mikra'os gedolos* and some other seforim. No fancy carpeting or any other frills.

WH: Since there were other yeshiva gedolos already in the U.S. why was it felt there was such a need for them?

RK: It's true that were some yeshiva here but we felt it was not enough and that even more could be done.

WH: I see.

RK: Getting back to your question, so this was one obstacle. Just the problem of setting up a Yeshiva. My father had to recruit rebbaim from Europe who were qualified. He came here in 1943 again to set up the Yeshiva. For the most part he was involved in *Hatzolah*. The whole week he worked on *Hatzolah*. He gave *shiurim* in New York but only over the weekend. He was extremely busy with *Hatzolah*. But the main difficulty was that the level of learning here wasn't that high and our desire was to develop a generation of *gedolei Torah* who were American trained products and we have done that. There are *gedolim* today who are Americans, not European.

The second obstacle was that my father felt that there should be *Torah Lishmo* and that all practical benefits would come from it anyway. He felt that *Torah Lishmo* raises tremendously the general level of the Jewish community. The problem was that this was against the spirit in the country. The people asked: 'What's the *Tachlis* of studying Torah. What can be gained from it?' This was the attitude. It was hard to explain that sometimes the most lasting things seem to come out from things which seem to have no purpose.

During the next phone call, I heard the Rosh Hayeshiva quote something from the Rambam (Maimonides) as he wished a friend a safe journey. At the same time I took note of the fact that in our conversation Rav Kotler constantly sprinkled his response to my questions with quotations from the Torah but then again his was hardly surprising. It merely served to remind that this man who was answering my relatively secular questions was completely steeped in the Torah. His every word, thought and action drew upon this tradition.

I also noted that his entire attitude toward me and those around him was friendly, warm, and reassuring. No pomp and circumstance. I recalled how when I had been at the yeshiva visiting no one stood when he entered the Beis Medrash because he had asked that they (the students) not trouble themselves so.

RK: The important thing was the spread Torah in America. We built three Kollels --- Detroit, Toronto, and Los Angeles. Now we see that these little places have changed the atmosphere. The whole town has a different view or approach. The outlook on life is changed. There are shiurim and people work with the community. I saw this myself when we visited Los Angeles.

WH: In the Rosh Hayeshiva's opinion, has Orthodoxy moved forward or backward in the last ten years?

RK: In Europe, in the past we had problems with all the different types of movements: Socialism, the Haskalah, and other ideologies came into the community. Today the trend is reversed. Orthodoxy is growing and our yungeleit are helping it spread more and more.

WH: There are hundreds of yeshivas today with thousands of students. I'm counting the *yeshivas ketanas*. What accounts for their success?

RK: This is one of the greatest phenomenons of our time, this growth. It's a very big question (Here the Rosh Hayeshiva paused and his face, eyes staring at the blank wall ahead of him took on the expression of a man deeply in thought). You know, this is a big question and I don't know if this is the time and place to go into it. Perhaps in

future conversations away from the office where I can concentrate more. I'm going to the mountains this weekend. You should check with my wife.

Again, the Rosh Hayeshiva paused, this time for only a minute, and then said: It's really a chain reaction. First there was the churban and this brought all the Gedolim here. (He stopped again and I had the feeling that he was looking for a way to communicate the importance of the issue but wanted to find just the right words) It goes even deeper than that; much deeper. There is a saying that a *Godol* is equalled by a *Tzibbur* (congregation of people). If there are numbers of people learning in a Yeshiva this is equivalent to the power of a Godol. Going back to the growth question, there is a reverse generation gap today and I see it all the time with parents who come to me. Children want to learn more than their parents. And the parents, although many times they are *B'nei Torah* themselves, don't feel that the need for learning is so crucial. This is really interesting. The children are pushing the parents, telling them they want to learn more. We see other signs of the strength of Orthodoxy. Even those who become professionals, uh, lawyers, accountants, I don't know, you went to Ner Yisroel, people like that who went there, they are living in both worlds but their hearts and their way of life is much more in the religious one. The secular is not nearly as important. And you can see this in different ways. First in the education of their children, where they send them to school. Also when it comes to taking a son-in-law. It's a big status to marry a *yeshiva bochor*. Not only here but in Eretz Yisroel too where there has been a big change in this area.

WH: What about the divorce rate?

RK: It's very low in the Yeshiva world. Even though the economic life is very hard, the families have little money, thank God it's very little.

WH: What does the Rosh Hayeshiva think has caused the (-) in the Orthodox community in recent years?

RK: Mostly it's the influence of the outside world. The television, magazine, things like that.

WH: What about the emphasis on materialism?

RK: That is also an important factor.

WH: Does the Rosh Hayeshiva think it is important that *bochorim* study in Israel?

RK: This is really an individual question. It depends on the person. It depends on the stage of learning and where he learns. I have two sons myself in Eretz Yisroel.

At this point I was forced to terminate the interview because the garage where I had parked my car was about to close. I apologized profusely for ending it but it seemed as though it would have ended anyway. Not only was it almost 6:00 but the Rosh Hayeshiva's wife was waiting for him outside and others seemed about to depart. I had taken almost two hours of Rav Kotler's time and considering his schedule that was quite a bit. I expressed my gratitude but he brushed me off saying: "Maybe we can talk again this weekend." Apparently he felt the subject matter to be of some importance for whatever reason.

As we left, he looked out from the room into the hall searching for Rabbi Weisberg. When he found him he said: "Help Dr. Helmreich locate some of the people whose names I gave him. He wants to talk to people. Can you take care of it?" "Surely", said Rabbi Weisberg, and then, turning to me, he said, "Just contact me if you need anything. Also, if possible, I would very much appreciate a copy of your book. I would like to read it."

By now we had reached the door of the office. As I turned to say goodbye, the Rosh Hayeshiva shook my hand warmly and inclined his head toward me while at the same time stepping back. I was deeply moved by this show of respect and certainly did not think myself worthy of it. All I could think of was the humbleness (*Anivus*) of this great man. One of the wisest Talmidei Chachamim of this generation acting deferential to someone who could never approach him in learning or *midos* (ethics). I closed the door behind me and pressed the button for the elevator. The office door opened and the Rosh Hayeshiva emerged simply to make certain I had no trouble finding the way out. As the elevator arrived I said goodbye and thanked him once again.

Part Two

8-7-77

It is 2:00 P.M. Sunday afternoon on a humid, partly cloudy, and warm day. I have arrived at the Glen Wild Hotel in Glen Wild, New York, where Rav Kotler is relaxing with his family for a few days. It is not an especially attractive place compared to, say, the Pineview Hotel, but it is quiet and comfortable enough, and, judging from the *tichels* and beards, seems to attract a quite religious crowd.

I find the Rosh Yeshiva and he greets me warmly. "I am not sure we will have much time to talk today. First, I'm expecting a family that has to discuss an important personal problem with me and I also have to give a talk in Camp Munk. But let's try anyway, at least for a little while." We go out on the porch of the main building and sit down on two hard chairs in a quiet corner.

RK: I notice that today people are more interested in learning and this is true of all religions. In Europe, in the past, a person couldn't many times spend his whole life in a Yeshiva. He had to go out to work. Today this isn't so true anymore.

WH: How does one weigh the question of the yeshiva reaching out to non-observant Jews against the *sakonoh* (danger) that the *bochorim* (boys) might be somewhat influenced by that world?

RK: You know the Torah says *Lilmod ulelamed* (to study and to teach). The second idea is a part of the first, a basic part. I heard a *hesbayr* (explanation) that it's a *kinyan*. The *Lishmor* (to guard) that's also in there means, according to the Brisker Rav, that there is an *achrayus* (responsibility) for *Torah Gufah* (Torah itself). It says "and Moshe gave it (Torah) to Yehoshua. So that meant that Yehoshua had the responsibility to transmit it exactly. So that it's not really a question: 'Shouldn't one learn all the time?' A person has a responsibility.

Quite often people ask: 'So if there's a responsibility for learning, why don't more people go out?' And the answer is: it's true, there's a real thirst for spiritual learning but we have to be careful who we sent out. They themselves have to be ready to teach. It's like a first year medical student. You say to him: "Why don't you go out and do some open heart surgery?" He's not ready yet. He has to study more

Sometimes people, parents are afraid for their children that they might be influenced; but these problems work themselves out.

Still, there is a new generation in America. The Jewish Education Program works in the community. They are mostly *yeshiva leit* (people) who have gone out. Walk into the Ohr Sameach Yeshiva (a Baal Teshuvah institution stressing intellectual development and traditional Judaism) and who are the rebbaim --- *Yeshiva leit*. And there are different approaches for those on different levels. The Jewish Observer gives the intellectual picture, Rabbi Avigdor Miller gives his way, and there is the day school movement. This movement is interesting. We see that other people usually in these day schools teaching, doing other things, acting as principals are not T.I. people who are trained in Jewish history, literature etc. but *Yeshiva leit*, dedicated young people. Every year, I go to the Torah Umesorah convention and I make a mental note of where the representatives come from.

At this point the Rosh Hayeshiva looked out across the lawn, seemingly lost in thought. What was he thinking about? I wondered. Suddenly a small fly landed on the top of the porch railing. Distracted, the Rosh Hayeshiva looked at it and exclaimed "Look at that fly! A simple fly but ah --- such a complex mechanism that can eat, fly around, and do other things. I mean it's just a fly, a creation of *haShem Yisborach!*" And with that his face took on an enraptured expression of total happiness. I saw only inner peace reflected in his kindly eyes. And then, we were back on the subject and he was speaking:

RK: There is a certain way to be mekarev people, bring them closer. More people should go into *rabbonus* (the rabbinate); this should be encouraged. The problem with *rabbonus* was different when I came here in the early forties and the *Chassidim* came here with their *oilom* (group) and started *chinuch* (Jewish education).

The rabbis who were here in the synagogues had not succeeded. We lost a whole generation from *Yiddishkeit* at that time. And this was because they didn't have high enough standards, the rabbis. A shul had a whole *milchamah* (battle, war) every time they changed one inch of a *mechitzah* (separation between men and women in a

synagogue). And the rabbonim compromised to the *oilem*. No wonder none of the *Yeshiva leit* wanted to go into such a profession. But today, things are different. There is an *oilem* or *zibbur* that wants it way, that wants to hear rabbis tell them they should be more religious. And because there is an *oilem*, *Yeshiva leit* should go into rabbonus again. Years ago people said there wouldn't be any money for *Kollels*. Lakewood actually started this idea of older people learning. They said there were no funds but since Torah started there was enough money. You just have to start with learning.

WH: Since there exists such strong support for learning today in the Jewish community is it really necessary for a bochur to study for a secular profession? Should yeshiva leit attend college altogether?

RK: First it's important to understand that Torah is not like an exact science. It's not a discipline that you examine and learn about. Torah is a complete way of life and the learning is only one part. You have to be in it completely. If you want to build up a *Dor* (generation) Torah you need complete dedication. It's even, *lehavdil*, like saying to a doctor: 'You should study a little engineering. Even in such a case he would laugh, because engineering is a big subject. So it's certainly true of the *Yam* (sea) of Torah. Imagine, you tell a person to study a little this, a little that, and what kind of understanding do you come out with?

Rabbi Dov Lesser is responsible in many ways for the recent rise in yungeleit (young people) going out to spread Torah. The young people are looking for places to develop. They have scholarship and so they go out, maybe for one year. They spread Torah and it's like a chain reaction. One should reach out. *Kiruv Rechokim* is like the heart. If it's strong so is the body.

The "modern" rabbis in the Orthodox community, they "fit right in". They spoke English, dressed in the right clothes. So where did it get them? Many of the congregants left the religion. There is no solution in compromise. If you want to succeed you can't compromise, or give in. You have to be strong.

Federation made a survey about Chinuch. Took a college professor to do a survey. He went to Satmar and was impressed by the amount of students they had. This man was a *talmid Chochom* (scholar), name was Levi Ginsberg. He knew my father zt'l and he had studied at Telz and now taught at J.T.S. "Your father should have seen this (the growth in day schools)", he said.

In a number of ways, the Rosh Hayeshiva's actions throughout our meeting exposed a side of the man which explains his position of leadership and the reverence his students have for him. It is more than his learn and the influence of his father. It is a certain gentleness and humbleness that is basic to the man.

While we were speaking, a number of people, perhaps three or four, came by, on their way to another part of the hotel. One was an old woman, another a young man who had, as it turned out, once been a student at the yeshiva. In each case, Rav Kotler greeted them warmly, and half got up from his chair, a traditional sign of deference in the yeshiva world. Moreover, at one point, remarking on his speaking engagement that evening at Camp Munk, I said "perhaps I might too, since I used to be a camper there and was planning to visit it today." "No," he replied. "Don't bother. I won't be saying anything special. It's just for the boys there. They want a Rosh Yeshiva to talk to them." I can safely say that my level of learning is such that I would benefit handsomely from anything he might have to say and I'm certain he knew that. It was simply characteristic of this modest man to make such a deprecating comment.

Finally, there was a point when the family mentioned earlier showed up. He excused himself to me, apologizing for the interruption. Upon his return, Rav Kotler suggested we go to the tea room for a snack. Upon entering, the waiter rushed to take care of this most important guest. When Rav Kotler had finished he ordered more coffee. After the boy had brought it and left, he suddenly noticed my empty cup and asked "Do you want more tea." I did but was reluctant to say so. Sensing this, he said: "Surely you do.", and got up to find the boy. In this and in innumerable other ways one sees that Torah when truly followed shapes the individual's personality as much as it does his intellect.

Visiting Camp Munk later on in the day is a heartwarming experience. The owners have not changed much. They believe in keeping the camp the same size in terms of campers as well. As was the cause when I went there, it is immaculately clean. There is a special feeling of excitement on this day. The great Rav Shneur Kotler is coming to speak and the camp is preparing the boys for this event trying to impress its significance upon them. "Everyone

should wear a jacket.” the head counsellor announces. “Boys over thirteen must wear a hat, while those under thirteen may do so but don’t have to.”

After supper, everyone went down to the camp gate to greet the Rosh Hayeshiva. This was considered proper *kovod* (honor) and when he arrived, the entire camp burst into song. Several counsellors struck up the tune of (-) playing on clarinets, flutes, and an accordion. Everyone crowded around trying to catch a glimpse of the man as he left the car near the top of the hill to walk down to the synagogue.

A small room, the synagogue is crowded and hot with a standing room only crowd. Yet no one seems to mind. Eventually, the younger boys lose the train of the Rosh Hayeshiva’s presentation but the older ones listen intently, never once allowing their gaze to wander from Rav Kotler’s face. After the Rosh Hayeshiva talk, Rabbi Dovid Cohen, the learning director of the camp, translates Rav Kotler’s words in English. Rav Kotler. blesses the group and it is over. The boys leave and go quickly up the hill hoping to be able to see the Rosh Hayeshiva off.

Interview with Harav Yaakov Perlow

12/28/77

WH: How long has there been a post high school level here?

RP: I have something in writing which will answer this question. The *Beis Medrash* here must be about eighteen or twenty years old. It was organized by the previous Rosh Yeshiva (head of the yeshiva), founded by Rabbi Friedler along with Rabbi Schwab and Rabbi Breur as the post secondary branch of the Mesivta Rabbi Shmson Rephael Hirsch. The boys who had already graduated from high school and were going to college or didn't decide to go to college needed a chance to learn on a Beis Medrash level. This was a natural overgrowth.

WH: What accounts for this phenomenal growth?

RP: I think it is a combination of several things. Even though there were several *yeshiva gedolos* (large yeshivas) before World War II in U.S. the center of Jewish learning was in Europe. To some extent in Israel. The great yeshivas of Mir, Slabodka, Telz and so on were considered the fountains of Torah learning and the American yeshivas reflected the level of the Jewish community, say in the twenties and thirties which had not matured to the extent of feeling as a community that a *yeshiva gedola* is place where every frum (religious), orthodox yeshiva boy should attend if he wants to be a *Talmud Chochom* (knowledgeable in Talmud), to grow up to feel that he is continuing in the tradition of his fathers. Those yeshiva boys in America before the war who aspired to the scholarship that a *yeshiva gedola* can give, many of them went to Europe to learn. Of course, there were those who studied in the American *yeshiva gedolos*. The Jewish community in that time was not then both in number and spirit alert to the idea. Probably because Jewish learning was continuing in Europe. It was a thousand year civilization. Somehow, people felt how much can you learn in America. What can you expect? If you want to learn you go to Europe. All that changed after the war. After the war, Jewish survival became centered in America and in *Eretz Yisroel*. That made all the difference in the world. As a result of a number of *roshei yeshivas* (heads of yeshivas) from the old world coming to America, as a result of the yeshivas, namely the Mirrer Yeshiva, which is probably the only yeshiva rescued intact, coming to America the *shearis haplayta* (the refugees), the *Litvaks* (Jews from Lithuania) and the *chasidim* suddenly came to the realization that if Jewish life is to survive anywhere, we are going to have to rebuild that type of Torah society that was in Europe in America. Before the war, the American, Orthodox Jewish society wasn't alert, wasn't mature. It didn't feel it had the resource to do so, because of many different factors. But after the war it was a question of survival. If Torah is going to survive, if you are going to have Torah scholarship continue as it did for a thousand years in Europe, it's going to have to be done right here in this country. And in *Eretz Yisroel* as well. Therefore, the personalities who came here to America, led of course by Rabbi Aharon Kotler, *zecher tzadik levracha* (blessed is the memory of a righteous man), considered it their holy mission to re-establish that type of yeshiva that existed in pre-war Europe and transplant it and rebuild it here in this country. As a result of the personalities, as a result of a new type of society that settled here, that brought along the old country values, a new kind of *hashkafa* (perspective) began to pervade the American society that a *yeshiva gedola*, a *makom Torah* (place of Torah) is a must for every self-respecting Jewish neighborhood and community. And the generation that began to grow up here was raised with this *hashkafa*.

WH: How do you account for the factor of greater options facing the student in America than in pre-war Europe?

RP: The leadership of the *gedolim* (great ones) provided the inspiration in terms of establishing the yeshivas. For example, Lakewood was founded by Rabbi Aharon Kotler. It wasn't only the *gedolim* who came here. It was the general society. The Jews who came here, the yeshiva *bochurim* (the yeshiva boys) themselves. I remember when the Mirrer Yeshiva came here in 1946 after spending 5 or 6 years in Shanghai. When they came here, they provided a tremendous model. Here is a European, Lithuanian yeshiva that was rescued intact and they had all its great *talmidim* (students), people in their thirties and forties who had been in Shanghai for many years and they provided a model for the American yeshiva *bochur*. The *chassidic* communities came with their *rebbeim* (spiritual leaders), the Satmar Rabbi and others. They established their communities in this country. They showed a model. What they did was transplant European Jewish life in America. What the *Litvak gedolim* and *talmidim* did was transplant...The difference was this: What was Rabbi Kotler's great contribution? Before he came, the American yeshivas, as many are still today, had a secular department, a yeshiva *ketona* (elementary school), a *mesivta* (high school). It had to be this way. Otherwise you would have no yeshivas in America. If a yeshiva wouldn't have afforded an opportunity for a father to give his son an English education, he wouldn't send him to a yeshiva. On the other hand, it didn't reach the level of a yeshiva *gedola* in Europe. It didn't reach the level of a yeshiva *gedola* in Lithuania. When the *shearis haplayta* (refugees), *gedolim* and yeshiva *bochurim* and *bechlal* (in general) the Jews, the *balabatim* (the householders), the *balabatim* who came, and the American *balabatim* suddenly saw for themselves a *shtick* (a part of) Europe in this country. And the *gedolim* led the way. They said we have to establish Torah here. We have to raise Torah to new heights. We can't be satisfied with just a yeshiva and mesifita. We have to raise the level of Torah. Rabbi Kotler, for example made the yeshiva in Lakewood. He wasn't a refugee but he understood that Torah in America has come to a milestone, it's time to take the next step. It's time to take a giant leap forward. In the thirties, you couldn't ask for anything more than a *mesivta* and a small Beis Medrash at Torah Vodaath. Then in the forties, they made the Beis Medrash at Spring Valley. In Baltimore, Ner Yisroel had been started earlier, but it was a small yeshiva. Chaim Berlin was a small yeshiva. But the inspiration for limud hatorah (learning of the Torah) came with the society of the *bonei torah* (sons of the Torah) and the *roshei yeshiva* (heads of the yeshiva) who came here.

WH: What do you mean by the yeshiva and mesifita with secular studies being a *brocha* (blessing)?

RP: They were a *brocha* and still are. You cannot expect, unless one lives in New Square, or Satmar community, that are closed off from the rest of civilization, who have to meet certain minimal requirements themselves, the mainstream of American, Orthodox Jews, for instance those who send their children to Torah Vodaath in Williamsburg and Rabbi Jacob Joseph on the East Side, Chaim Berlin in Brownsville, to send their children to yeshiva unless it affords them some basic English education, public school and high school. Who knows is the yeshivas hadn't done so, what the parents would have done. They would have been faced with a *nisayon* (test). Rabbi Yisroel Salanter once said that the worst thing is when you have to confront the person with a *nisayon*. Then it becomes difficult: some do and some don't. The American yeshiva ketana (elementary school) avoided a *nesayon*.

Why did so few people of the *hamon am* (general public) of the old country send their children to the yeshivas *gedolos*? Why did so few people in Russia fifty years ago? The *hamon am*, the poor people couldn't afford to send their children to anything beyond the *cheder* (Jewish school without secular education). By the time they were 12 or 13 they sent them to work.

WH: In a *shtetl* (small town) where there were 100 children of yeshiva age, what proportion of them might attend yeshiva?

RP: From the *hamon am*, the uneducated mass, a minority. They couldn't afford it. The kids were sent out to work at 15 or 16. They were apprenticed and so on.

WH: In a sense it is a tremendous advancement.

RP: Exactly. Rabbi Shlomo Heiman, I think and you should check with his *talmidim* (students), said, when he came to America to become the Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Vodaath in 1936, in a letter to Rabbi Chaim Ozer in Vilna that in America one is able to avoid the *nesayon*. In other words, you can send your son to a yeshiva, to a *mesivta*, and not worry that he is going to grow up devoid of any general education. This enabled the people in Williamsburg in the thirties, the Brownsville and the East Side in the thirties to send their children to yeshiva ketone and to *mesivta*. And for many of those kids who went on to Yeshiva *mesivta* and to Beis Medrash...

WH: What was your own background?

RP: I went to a yeshiva in East New York, called Yeshiva Toras Chaim. It was founded by Rabbi Shidman, who is now semi-retired. Then I went to Chaim Berlin. I grew up in Chaim Berlin. The fact that the yeshivos and *mesifvas* offered a double program of *limudei chol* (secular studies) and *limudei kodesh* (holy subjects) was a tremendous asset. Now people can take the luxury of saying who needs all that. Let's get the minimum of *limudei chol*. Now you have communities growing up that are able to manage to give their children a very low subsistence diet of general education and pack in as much Torah as they can. That's only today, a phenomenon of the last ten years. But this wasn't the way it was in the fifties, certainly not in the forties and thirties. I remember going to school with kids from plain families. If they didn't get a general education, their parents would have sent them to public school. The kids who went to public school, 95% didn't remain frum (orthodox). Even if they went to a *talmud torah* (Hebrew school) in the afternoon. *Talmud Torahs* were a great failure. They were bar-mitzvah factories. They hardly contributed anything to the survival of Judaism here. Hundreds of thousands of kids attended *talmud torah* in New York City -- 95% didn't remain frum. A kid grew up in public school all day; he had his *goyish* and non-frum friends and *talmud torah* was a burden. He saw no beauty in *Yiddishkeit* (Judaism). That's why there are no *talmud torahs* today.

What I have said about yeshivas affording children a secular education as well as a religious education might be said to hold true for yeshivas that allow boys to go on to college, today. This is, of course, a controversial point. I am not talking about this yeshiva, Shamson Rephael Hirsh, because here the idea of secular education being part of the general society falls into the framework of torah and *derech eretz* (way of the land), which is the philosophy of Rabbi Shamson Raphael Hirsh. This is a special case. I am talking of yeshivas like Torah Vodaath and Chaim Berlin and Ner Yisroel who do recognize the facts of life, that if you refuse the *talmidim* the option of going to college, you are closing the option for them. Many of them won't go to yeshiva because many of them won't give up the option of going to school and training themselves for *parnassa* (livelihood) and getting a general education. You have to give them the opportunity of doing that and yet give them the advantages of learning in a yeshiva *gedola* and growing up to be an *erlicher yid* (a pious Jew) and soon.

WH: Some people feel that once someone is given encouragement to attend college under some circumstances that it gives encouragement to those who are wavering.

RP: That is a risk you always take and you can't help taking that risk. There is some truth to the statement. This might give a stamp of approval to college and would open the door to boys to attend college. Whereas if you didn't some wouldn't go. That is a necessary sacrifice that you have to make.

This is a very touchy issue and let me tell you how I feel. There have to be yeshivas who don't allow their *talmidim* to go to college and there have to be yeshivas who do allow their *talmidim* to go to college. Rabbi Kotler came to this country and he wouldn't hear of establishing any other kind of yeshiva but one that is *kulo kodesh* (completely holy), pure torah. Any kind of secular education has no part in the life of his *talmidim*. He had to do it that way. There has to be a certain standard for torah in its highest form. There has to be certain ideal, established for those who want to devote themselves to torah. It is not a question of college being *mutar* (allowed) or *assur* (not allowed). If it's *assur* no one can do it. Nobody can build torah on the basis of *chilul Shabbos* (breaking of the Shabbos) or *achilas*

treyfus (eating non-kosher food). That's misrepresenting the issue. The question is what kind of standards do you establish for torah. In order to raise torah to the level of the Kletzker yeshiva in Lithuania, to set models of *talmidei chochomim* and are ready to sacrifice whatever blandishments the general society may offer them, there has to be torah without any compromise. Look at the hatzlacha (success) of these yeshivas. Lakewood is the biggest yeshiva in America. There are hundreds and hundreds of *bnei torah* (sons of Torah), *Kollel* members (Post-graduate students of Talmud), young men who have gone in this direction. They sacrificed themselves to learn torah. They have written off whatever successes they could have become in the material world. On the other hand, not everybody is ready for that. There must be a yeshiva like Lakewood -- that is the elite. I said this is our *Beis Medrash* that has *torah* and *derech eretz*, the kollel men are the elite because they have sacrificed. Any of these guys are smart enough to be teachers in colleges and computer scientists and biochemists. They could make a successful living and yet they gave it all up. They are having a harder time than the other fellows who do go to college and are becoming professionals. God makes no contract. Some of the fellows without college are successful in college and some of the fellows who got Ph.D.'s are driving taxis. Nevertheless, by and large, the yeshiva boys who didn't go to college make a big moral sacrifice. Whereas, the boys who do go to college didn't make that much of a sacrifice. They are not making any material sacrifice. Yeshivas like that are the saving grace of our *torah* society. Yeshivas with no alien culture coming in to the society of those people -- purely *torah*. Elementary school, yes, high school, fine, but beyond that *torah* only. Not everybody is ready to live up to that and you cannot write off all of other hundreds of thousands of families of yeshiva bots that are not ready to make that supreme sacrifice and not train themselves for any *parnassa* and forswear any general education, learn only *torah* and hope God will help me find *parnassa*, become a *rebbe* (teacher), etc. There are many dear, righteous yeshiva boys, *talmidei chochomin* among them who do feel that they have to prepare themselves. So they are not on the level of their counterparts in Lakewood. You have to provide them with a *mokom torah* (place of torah), too. That's the rationale for yeshivas like Chaim Berlim and Torah Vodaath who do allow their boys to go to college. Because Yeshiva University is in a class by itself. It is based on a different type of philosophy.

WH: This would be the only yeshiva that allowed college in the same institution.

RP: That institution is based on the so-called fusion of *torah* and *madah* as they put it on their emblem and that speaks of a different type of philosophy. Even the yeshivas like Chaim Berlin and Torah Vordaath allow their students to go to college, but not in the yeshiva. The yeshiva is a *mokom torah* (place of torah). There is no *shatnes* (mixture) in the yeshiva. The yeshiva is a place where you become an *erlicher yid* (pious Jew), a *yarei shomayim* (fearer of heaven) and your *limudei chol* (secular studies) you attend elsewhere. The yeshiva is *kodesh* (holy). The philosophy of Yeshiva University is different. The point I made is very crucial.

There are people in New York City and write circulars, who make propoganda that you shouldn't send your children to college. To a great extent, I think it is naïve. I have no qualms about trying to influence an individual not to go to college. I wouldn't send my children to college. They wouldn't dream of going to college. I've raised them with a different *hashfaka* (perspective) -- with a *hashfaka* of that type of *torah* life where they're ready to sacrifice college. There are two camps but there is a necessity for both. The secret to *torah* in this country is due to the fact that both camps are here and one without the other could not have brought *torah* to the position where it is today.

WH: Could you refer to this as an adjustment rather than a compromise?

RP: What do you mean by a compromise?

WH: It isn't a situation where the yeshivas have compromised, one need not be opposed to the other, but they have adjusted to reality.

RP: That's a fair statement to make.

WH: I have a question that can be answered on a technical level or a philosophical level. To what extent has there been a carry-over of the *Litvisher* (Lithuanian) tradition to the yeshivas in this country? For example, Telz yeshiva tried to arrange the seating as it was in Europe.

RP: Telz is a special case because Telz makes a great fuss about carrying on the tradition of the old Telzer yeshiva. The chief influence of the *litvisher* yeshivas is in the *derech halimud* (way of learning). In *Lita* (Lithuania), chiefly because of Rabbi Chaim Brisker's *gadlus* (greatness) and *gaonus* (genius) and his new way of learning torah, this became the accepted *derech* in the *litvisher* yeshivas. All the great *roshei* yeshivas of let's say two generations ago, Rabbi Isser Zalman and Rabbi Lazer Yehuda Finkel, were all disciples of Rabbi Chaim Brisker. Rabbi Chaim Brisker is the father of the current *litvisher derech halimud*. In other words, the methodology of learning *Gemora* (Talmud) and *Rishonim* (first commentaries), etc. As opposed to the learning in Poland, Galicia, Hungary. By and large these were Hassidic yeshivas.

WH: How do you distinguish between the two ways of learning?

RP: It's hard to distinguish between the two ways. There are various approaches to a piece of *gemora*. Rabbi Chaim Brisker's genius lay in the fact that he created a way of thinking, very analytical, very probing. One based not so much on *pilpul* and dialectic, but on understanding whatever subject matter is being studied with depth. Very in-depth type of study and understanding. It is unique approach to learning *gemora* on a mature level, not on a simple level. The *litvisher derech* is taken by and large from Rabbi Chaim Brisker. It was expanded by his son, Rabbi Velvel Brisker, the late Brisker Rabbi in Israel. This is the way torah was studied in *Lita* for the last sixty years. The American *roshei yeshiva* of thirty or forty years ago, Rabbi Chaim's *talmidim*, for example Rabbi Shlomo Hayman, the Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Vodaath, a *talmid* of Rabbi Baruch Ber who was a *talmid* of Rabbi Chaim, his successor Rabbi Grozovsky was the son-in-law of Rabbi Baruch Ber. Rabbi Aharon Kotler was a *talmid* of Rabbi Chaim's *talmidim*. Rabbi Ruderman was a *talmid* of Slobodka where the *talmidim* of Rabbi Chaim were. That's the *litvisher derech*. To that extent you can say that the American yeshivas have a distinctive *litvisher* feature, in the way the Torah is studied. The *seforim* (holy books) that the *litvisher* yeshivas used are used today. Today there is a mixing. But in the old country the *chassidim* had a different *derech*. An old fashioned *derech*.

Other than that you can say that in a number of yeshivas today, not so much, but some of them want to carry on the *mussar* tradition (study of ethics), emphasizing introspection into oneself, *middos* (virtues), learning certain *seforim* like *Misselas Yeshorim* and *Shaarey Teshuva* -- this is carried on by some yeshivas today like Mirrer Yeshiva, Bais Hatalmud, Lakewood that are in the tradition of the old yeshivas that have *mashgichim* (overseers) who were the *talmidim* of Rabbi Yisroel Salanter. Rabbi Yisroel Salanter was the founder of the *mussar* movement.

To that extent and the fact that the *roshei yeshiva* are *litvisher* in the American yeshivas, the American ones are the *talmidim* of the *litvisher* ones. The *litvisher* hail back to the yeshivas in *Lita*, and so on. That's how the American yeshivas can be called *litvisher* yeshivas. As opposed to the *chassidisher* yeshivas. The example you gave is extreme. It applied only to Telz. That is a *hemshech* (continuation) of a European yeshiva. Mirrer yeshiva in Brooklyn is merely an offshoot of the Mirrer yeshiva. The old yeshiva in Brooklyn is merely an offshoot of the Mirrer yeshiva. The old yeshiva is in *Eretz Yisroel*, where the old Rosh Yeshiva's son-in-law and his son-in-law were. This yeshiva was founded by Rabbi Kalmanowitz. It is a Mirrer yeshiva, but not as tradition conscious as Telz. Bais Hatalmud is the tradition of the Mirrer yeshiva because it was founded by Rav Malin.

WH: Given the fact of the low morality of society as a whole, not only the colleges, given the fact that there are so many opportunities in the secular world for people in this country, how do you account for the

continued ability to attract young people? People in the outside world do not understand why a person should spend sixteen hours a day studying.

RP: There is only one answer to this. This is part of our *emunah* (faith). We see in torah the truths of all truths. God in his infinite wisdom and *chesed* (goodness) has inspired young people today to cling to the truth. So while the world can offer them this that and the other things, the torah is *emes* (truth) and those who are in search for the truth will stick with the torah.

You asked me a very good question and you're right in claiming that divorcing it from its theological grounds a boy has to be stupid. Why should a boy rack his brains over Abaya and Rava when he can go out into the world and have himself a good time and earn a lot of money and be a success socially and materialistically? Those who ask that question don't understand what torah means to a Jew. They don't understand that when we say *ki hem chayenu veorech yomenu* (because they are our life and the length of our days) in *davening* of *Maariv* (evening prayers), many people like to practice what they preach. If you think of torah in this way, that's the answer to this question. If it's considered only as a discipline only of ancient scholarship or studying some ancient culture, it's not *ki hem chayenu veorech yomenu*. I'm sure that nobody studies Shakespeare or Greek and Roman classics *ki hem chayenu veorech yomenu*. It may be a hobby. You may be a scholar, you may be interested in history but it isn't *ki hem chayenu veorech yomenu*. If you're offered something better, you'll do something better. But people who study torah believe that *ki hem chayenu veorech yomenu*, for this we've lived and died. For this Rabbi Akiva was *moser nefesh* (gave his life) and Rabbi Chanina ben Chadya in the *Gemora* was *moser nefesh* and propagated torah at the risk of their lives, when the Romans made the *gezayra* (decree) on learning Torah. This is the answer. That's in our blood. Why did people die on *kiddush hashem* (in the name of God) during the Inquisition? Not to give up the *emunah* (faith). This is our identity. We are identical with *Yiddishkeit* (Judaism). Torah is part of the identity of *klal Yisroel*. The reason why people will sit in the *Bais Medrash* over a *Gemora*, *Rashi* and *Rif* (commentaries on the Talmud), over things that have no relevance to modern living. Why study *Mesachtas Zevachim*, *Korbonos* (Talmudic tractates concerning sacrifices)? How irrelevant it is to everyday life. They don't know the secret of *Ki hem chayenu veorech yomenu*. If you know that, you know the answer.

WH: Some Jews ask that question more than Gentiles. They say they are Jews too and don't feel this way.

RP: Tragically, they became separated from a vital part of their heritage. The Jews who ask this question don't know what *limud hatorah* (study of the torah) is. Their grandfathers wouldn't ask this question. Their great grandmothers who hardly knew how to sign their names. Do you know the song 'Rasins and Nuts'? The ignorant old lady living a hundred years ago just wanted her son to be talmid chochom. You know the Jewish songs about this. The song 'In the fire place' reflected the inner thoughts of every Jewish mother from time immemorial until the *Haskala* (Enlightenment) turned things upside down. Not the *Haskala* a hundred and fifty years ago, but the social revolution in the twentieth century turned everything upside down. You still see it today. Last week, on Monday, I had a family here. They have a problem child. The mother was crying tears to me. She expected him to be a learner. He just isn't. So that's the answer. Our grandmother's prayed at candle lighting that their children should learn torah. These women didn't know anything. They have the basic *yiras shomayim* (fear of heaven), basic inborn *emunah* (faith) that torah is the staff of our lives. As the *maamor chazal* (saying of our sages) goes, *Yisroel ve'oreyso chad* (Israel and the Torah are one). Can you separate yourself from yourself? And thank God there has been a renaissance of this feeling in the last generation after the Second World War. While the rest of the American Jewry, outside of the few centers of urban living, like N.Y., the story is completely different. This is a story of assimilation, the vanishing Jew. But in the Orthodox community, there has been a rebirth.

WH: How is it in proportion to the increase in population?

RP: It's a *chesed hashem* (kindness of God). Of course it has natural causes, too. But basically it is a *chesed hashem*.

WH: There are so many more Orthodox Jews in America today? Does the increase go beyond the numbers?

RP: I won't be able to judge that. That's a question of statistics.

WH: Figures weren't kept in that way. It's hard to separate immigration statistics and...

RP: Certainly we can use as many Jews as we can.

WH: We don't need that as a justification for growth. If you presented a million people with a bad philosophy and a number of followers, it wouldn't matter if they had an increase in population. The Philosophy itself has to be valid. Do you feel that the people in the yeshiva community have a responsibility to reach out to the 88% of the Jewish community that is not part of the Orthodox community?

RP: Theoretically, yes. The question is one of implementation. Every Jew has an *achrayus* (responsibility) for his fellow Jew. The sensitive point about this situation is that we have proportionally speaking, with all the growth of the yeshivas, all the thousands of yeshiva *bochurim* there are, but proportionally, there really are a few. Compared to the entire *klal Yisroel*. It's a question of time and priority. There definitely has to be an outreach to those people who are receptive to one. I don't know if there are 88%. I'll be glad if there are 22%. There are 88% that are outside the torah world. How many of them are receptive I don't know. Certainly there should be an outreach. But the question is one of deciding which individual does what and how much does he do. Because if you're going to take the society of the yeshiva *bochur* and turn them in to work of *keruv rechokim* (Bringing close to the distant ones) at the expense of their *limud hatorah* you're undermining the whole philosophy, the principle that torah is of supreme value, of supreme importance of any given day. There are no rules for this. For example I can see two yeshiva boys: one who is a *masmid* (diligent), gifted, one who is going to make for him he should concentrate his mind on learning torah. The one sitting next to him, not that much of a masmid, has more affinity for *klal* work (public work), is more of an outgoing person. He should be *osek* (concern himself) with *klal* work. Generally speaking, theoretically rather, the answer is yes. But how to implement it is the sensitive aspect. For example to ask a yeshiva *bochur* to take off a *sefer* (session) from yeshiva and go out and speak at a release hour at a public school. There you're confronted with two conflicting, two very worthwhile ideas. What is supposed to give way? So each Rosh Yeshiva, each person in a position to authority has to make a certain decisions for himself, based on circumstances, based on the individual, based on the stakes. *Pikuach nefesh* (saving of life) is *zocheh* (merits) anything. The stakes are also important. You cannot generalize about this. In theory, the answer is yes, definitely outreach. That's what *zeirei Agudath yisrael* (youth of the Agudath Israel party) is doing now and it's JEP (Jewish Education Work) in which I'm involved. The JEP operation of *Zeirei Agudath Israel*. Lubavitch is different in this respect. They have no qualms at all about taking their yeshiva *bochurim* out and sending them out in the world in *mitzva* tanks and things like that.

WH: They in effect have made a decision.

RP: Yes. They do this more than anybody else to the extent that they take their *bochurim* out of the *Bais Medrash*. They yank them out and send them out in the trucks to the colleges and so on to be *mekarev rechokim* (bring near the distant ones). Many people disagree with this basic philosophy. While no one disagrees with the idea of *keruv rechokim*, in principle (I don't think you will find any responsible *ben torah* -- one learned in torah -- who will cast aspersions on the idea of *keruv rechokim*), *veahavta lerayacha kimocho* (love your friend as you love yourself), it's a question of degree. How do you measure the priorities in a given moment with respect to a given individual? That's what it comes down to.

WH: Within your own yeshiva, would that be considered a priority item? In terms of the goals of the yeshiva.

RP: Not a priority item. It is certainly something which is not discouraged. On the contrary, it is encouraged. It is taken for granted. I don't have to speak about it. There are some yeshiva *bochurim* who have more of an affinity for this than others do. They are the ones who do it. For example, I was recently asked, can two boys take an hour off from the *sefer* (session) to go to a day school in the Bronx and speak to the 8th grade class about continuing on to the *mesivta*. I said they certainly can. If it was a question of giving them a week off to do this, I would have second thoughts. You have to measure one thing against the other. You can only decide this based on the circumstances involved. There are a number of factors. There is no absolute rule. In principle, the answer to your question is yes.

WH: What should be the major goals of a yeshiva?

RP: That's a good question. That's the basic question. The major goal of the yeshiva should be to educate its students to achieve the maximum that they can in terms of *yiras shomayim* and *limud hatorah*. Each according to his ability. I say a combination of both. In other words, let me spell what I'm saying. The goals of a yeshiva are not to produce rabbis. Nor to produce *balabatim* (householders). If one has the *kishronos* (abilities) and he wants to be a rabbi, he should be encouraged, if he is an *erlicher yid* (pious Jew). If it is seen by his *mechanech* (educator), the person in charge that he will make a contribution to *klal yisroel* (Jewish nation) by being a rabbi, let him be a rabbi. Let the second one be a teacher. Let the third be businessman and give *tzadaka* (charity) and support yeshivas, and so on. So the occupation of its *talmidin* is secondary, regardless of whether the yeshiva calls itself a rabbinical seminary or not. It's not there as a *Smicha* (ordination) factory. It's not there to produce rabbis or Hillel directors, or teachers. A yeshiva is there to educate Jews. To make them committed Jews, to be the best that they can manage to be. Each according to his own ability. To provide the educational setting for the *talmidin* to grow up to be as great *yirai shomayim* (God-fearing) and *talmidei chochomim* as they can manage to be. That's what the goals of a yeshiva are. Now Reuven may grow up to be a great *talmid chochom* and be a rabbi. Now Shimon may grow up to be a great *talmid chochom* and not be a rabbi. Levi may not grow up to be a *talmid chochom*. He may be a great *osek betzorchei tzibur* (working on communal needs). In other words, if one were to generalize even more, I would say that the purpose of yeshivas is to make conscientious *ovdei Hashem* (doers of God's work). In other words, conscientious *oved Hashem* is learned as best as he can be who is *yirai shomayim* (God fearing). That's the purpose of yeshivas -- to foster *limud torah* (study of torah). The purpose of yeshivas is, as we say in *Birchas Hatorah* (Blessings on the Torah) every morning, *Vehaarev na Hashem Elokeynu, es divrei torasecha, bifinu ubifey amchu, bais Yisroel, venehya anachnu vetzetzuaynu, vetzetzuay amcha, bais Yisroel. Kulanu yodey shimecha, velomdey torascha*. That's the purpose of the yeshiva, with the underpinnings of *yiras shomayim* naturally. Because *torah* without *yiras shomayim* is like a sack full of holes. You can on pouring whatever you want into it and it all spills out.

WH: What about the question of *midos* (character)?

RP: That's a part of *Yiddishkeit* (Judaism). The question of *midos* is part of *yiras shomayim*. Why don't you ask me about *tfillin*?

WH: Do you think that *midos* are emphasized enough today in yeshivas?

RP: I think they are by and large. They certainly are. Certainly in the yeshivas where they study *mussar* (ethics), they are emphasized. There's no question they should be emphasized and I think they are emphasized. I think people have the mistaken notion that yeshivas are interested mainly in *bein odom lemokom* (what is between God and man) and not so much *bein odom lechavero* (between man and his friend). That's somehow a very unfortunate misconception that people have about yeshivas, about them only interested in being frum (Orthodox) and not very ethical. The curriculum of a yeshiva is by and large *gemorah* and *meforshim* (commentaries) -- there you emphasize the intellectual. And that's why the notion came mistakenly. Since you're studying *Bava Kama* and *Bava Metzia* (sections of the Talmud), and you study all day and all night, where does that leave time for anything else. You don't have any

subject matter dealing with *midos*. So all you emphasize is the intellectual, the *Bava Kama*. Someone who is not acquainted with the spirit of torah, with the inner workings of torah, with the genes of torah makes a division. To him it is very strange. He comes into an institution and sees the boys studying the intricacies of how to write a divorce. And this they'll spend all their lives doing, studying the Talmud, the codes, all the books. Or, for example, how to sacrifice on the altar of the Temple. What about all the other relevant subjects that are important to life, such as *midos*. This is mistaken because it is taken for granted that *midos* are a part of *Yiddishkeit*. Just like *tfillin*, *Shabbos*, and *tzitzis* (ritual fringes worn by men) are. A boy who is in a *bais medrash*, a *yeshiva gedola* it is taken for granted. It has to be spoken about. By and large you're working on the premise -- it is a prerequisite for learning in learning in a *yeshiva gedola* -- that his *yiras shomayim* has to be in the right place. And it should constantly be reinforced. It should be inspired. He should become more conscientious about this. It shouldn't be ignored. But you cannot say that it is not emphasized. Maybe in terms of formal structured subject matter it isn't.

WH: Do parents sometimes come in with questions like this?

RP: Not on the *Bais Medrash* level. Not on the *yeshiva gedola* level. On the elementary school level you sometimes find discussion amongst educated parents about whether on the elementary level *midos* are being emphasized enough. Because when children are impressionable that's when *midos* really have to be brought out. They should be. The teacher on the 4th, 5th, 6th grade level should take every step possible to incorporate the teaching of *midos* in the curriculum. By using the *Chumash* (Bible) as an example, and so on. Every good teacher knows how to do these things. When you're talking about *yeshiva gedola* you're talking about graduate level.

WH: I myself have had instances when yeshiva students have been less than honest and have used the justification that it's against the goyim.

RP: That's sometimes a sore point. That betrays a kind of split-level thinking. A split personality in the yeshivas. Where certain attitudes are adopted that it is *mutar* (permitted) to be dishonest against the goyim. That's unfortunate. Very untrue. But it happens. Many people meet up with that and it becomes a sore point. It becomes something that is easily picked up and used sometimes much too often to criticize yeshivas. But the yeshiva community is not without guilt about this point.

WH: I think from your answer about the goals of a yeshiva I derived to train a yeshiva boy for a specific profession is not the goal. The goal is just to learn -- training for a profession would challenge the goal.

RP: You could say the basic goal of a yeshiva is the advancement of torah scholarship. Only because torah scholarship is the highest priority in being a Jew. To enable the *talmidim* to reach the maximum in *yiras shomayim* and *limud hatorah*. So this rounds out their personalities as the best types of Jews that there could be. So Jewish scholarship is the aim only because Torah scholarship is the highest expression of being an *oved hashem* (worshipper of God). Along with *yiras shomayim* -- that's the goal. We are talking about the Torah end. The consciousness of Torah is taken for granted within the Yeshiva community. To give people a standard of Jewish living in a yeshiva. What a person absorbs in a yeshiva is the *hashfaka* (perspective), the norms of what is considered positive Jewish life. Again coming back to the same values or to teach the values of *Yiddishkeit*. Normative Jewish living. Torah *u'mitzvos* (Torah and the commandments).

WH: Are there any changes taking place today as opposed to 20 years ago in terms of various problems.

RP: Changes. I don't think so. Yeshivas have not watered down their goals. They have made accommodations to society, but no yeshiva worth its name has diluted its main objectives.

WH: What are the dangers facing the yeshiva community and the Orthodox community at large?

RP: Given that the Orthodox community is growing, the Jewish community at large in the United States may be anything but growing, it may be assimilating. But the Orthodox community on a self-contained group is growing, thank God. The critical question facing it, not so much of a danger, is that it raised its standards of Torah living, ethical living. Its families adopt higher standards of Jewish life, less of an emphasis on materialistic life. More spiritually in the home, in the family. That is the critical question facing the expanding Orthodox Jewish community today.

The yeshiva community, I would say, also faces that kind of a question. For example, in addition to the fact that there are certain critical problems zeroing in in many of yeshivas today, where as a result of the emphasis on secular education and college education, allowing for the fact that boys go to college, they're somehow in many cases making inroads on the inner commitment that some yeshiva boys and some families have to *limud hatorah*. But coming back to the question as to what is the danger, I don't think there is a danger from without that is facing the yeshiva community. I think it is a crisis from within, a general crisis of having our yeshivas, homes, institutions in that sort of environment. It is like the *Navi* (the Prophet Isaiah) says, *vatihey yirasam osey mitzvahs anashim melumadah* (that they fear me is a habit). When things become habitual, routine, ordinary, the richness of *Yiddishkeit*, of Torah, of *yiras shomayim*, of all Jewish Torah values can sometimes become sort of dusty.

WH: The article one materialistic weddings.

RP: Exactly. The weddings are still being made that way. That's one of the things I mean.

WH: There are a number of possibilities that occur. The question can be answered in terms of the need for the community to do some soul-searching. It can be answered in terms of anti-semitism. It can be answered in terms of the influence of irreligious Jews.

RP: There is no danger from irreligious Jews. The dangers are all from within. The danger from anti-semitism is nil. Because when a person can't get a job because of anti-semitism, that's a problem that still does exist. To a smaller extent than it did previously. That's not a danger to the Jewish community. It's a discomfort. The danger is that the values do not become watered down.

WH: In a sense it is paradoxical. The yeshivas have grown so strong in recent times, compared to previous years so many people consider a Torah education of crucial importance, that we should have such a problem. I don't know if it's increasing.

RP: I was traveling with an Orthodox Jewish doctor, a former yeshiva boy. He asked me some penetrating questions. One question he kept asking me over and over again. He has a private practice in a hospital. He sees many interns who are former yeshiva boys. He knows many doctors like himself. How many of these former *Bais Medrash* boys are still learning. Do they a *shiur* twice or three times a week? Do they have a *chevrusah* (study partner)? The problem that Aharon Twersky raised is different. It is of a different nature. It is a problem endemic to the world of yeshivas. Are its graduates, who are out in the world, not in the *kollel* (institute for post-graduate studies in Talmud), living up to some acceptable degree to the ideal that they were taught in the *Bais Medrash*. Is there *tzedaka*? Rabbi Moshe Feinstein said, three years at an Agudah convention and at this last convention, how are they raising their children? Are they giving them a television diet at the age of 3 and 4? That's a crucial question. That's all contained in the answer I gave you before. The critical question facing our community is what the degree of spirituality is in its living diet. Take any fine Jewish family. But if the kid grows up at age four, five having watched hundreds of hours of television, very few hours being devoted to *chinuch* (education), to *kiddushah* (holiness). What are the pictures on the wall? What does he see the father doing? At night, when he comes home. There you see the spirit, the atmosphere in the family.

WH: Are there any specific steps that yeshivas can take?

RP: It depends on the relationship the Rosh Yeshiva has with his *talmidim*. How much contact he maintains with them after they leave the yeshiva. While in the yeshiva, too. It's a question of how far do you get to the heart of your *talmid*.

WH: You shouldn't have to say to someone don't watch television when you leave yeshiva.

RP: It's like a lot thing. One shouldn't have to speak *loshon hara* (gossip) but the world is full of *loshon hara*. The *Mesilas Yeshorim* the simplest things have to be repeated again and again.

WH: What determines the success of a yeshiva boy? I would use a crude measure of success. *Hasmada* (diligence) over a period of years. Regarding religious studies as a primary goal and secular studies as a secondary goal.

RP: The last statement has been practiced more than preached. Normally you might think you measure success by how diligent he is, by how much *Gemora* he knows, and so on. That's one way of measuring success on a strictly scholastic point of view. The measure of success of a yeshiva boy is now so much how he is doing in the yeshiva but what kind of a Jew he'll be when he leaves the yeshiva. Ultimately the success is not to be measured. Experience has shown, with my contemporaries who went to yeshiva with me, you never know. You sometimes find later in life that someone who was inferior in terms of scholarship to a more brilliant student, develops more later, in terms of commitment. There are so many factors. I will give you a case of a peer in the yeshiva, a darling of the Rosh Yeshiva, who turned out to be a conservative rabbi. Apparently he didn't have that inner basic *yiras shomayim* to overcome the *nisayon* (test) of taking a conservative position. But it didn't come to the surface in the yeshiva.

WH: How is that inner quality acquired?

RP: It's very difficult. It's a combination of inborn nature and to what extent has the influence of a *rebbe*, a yeshiva taken over the soul of that person. There are a lot of intangibles in *chinuch* (Jewish education). You cannot measure *chinuch* scientifically. Somebody who sat figuratively speaking in the back of the class, a simple boy, raised a family who went to yeshiva, a *baal tzadaka* (gave a lot of charity), God-fearing, and so on, while the other guy is a conservative rabbi. He probably still learns Torah too. He enjoys it.

Yeshivas have to educate, not so much for scholarship, but scholarship as part of the worship of God, part of *Yiddishkeit*. From a short point of view you may determine success by how good a student he is. From the long point of view you determine success by how good a Jew he is.

WH: What are the kinds of problems that come up on a day to day basis?

RP: One problem is how to adjust their learning to their secular education in terms of time. For example, for the last year or two the city colleges have been cutting back their evening classes. The evening session was a saving for the yeshivas. They can have two sessions at the yeshiva and go to college at night. The problem of the kinds of occupations that Yeshiva boys who want to learn Torah can do. There are some problems involving personality development, social stress. Nothing specifically of yeshiva boys. There is a problem of *hashkafa*. Adjusting society to Torah. This is the experience I have here, and in Chicago previously. In *Bais Medrah LeTorah*.

Interview with Harav Yaakov Weinberg

1/17/78

RW: The yeshiva has had a fantastic effect on the general outlook of the Jewish community as a whole. It has had a fantastic impact, much beyond what could reasonable have been expected. It has changed the standards, the self-assessment of non-yeshiva people, and even of Conservative and reform.

WH: How have you seen that manifested?

RW: Number one you have only to take the atmosphere in *frum* (Orthodox) circles, who are anti-yeshiva even. But their standards in *kashrus*, in *halacha* (Jewish law). The word *halacha* and its meaning are totally different. This has permeated the Conservative. They talk about *halacha* in an altogether different way after the impact of yeshivas than before. *Halacha* has come to mean something They've got to deal with it. They have theories about it. They have whole systematic approaches to it and so do the Reform. And this is clearly the impact that yeshivas have had. They have given a different feeling about the meaning of being a Jew. But just the discussion of *halacha* and the position it has and the writings of *halacha*, this is directly attributable to yeshivas and it has meant a great deal in many, many ways. Before yeshivas, going to the beach, who didn't go to the beach? The *frumest*, the finest. Today going to the beach is a question even in liberal places. Do you go to the beach for mixed swimming? Hair covering. It's a problem -- for or against. But it's discussed. It's a discussable item. It wasn't before yeshivas. Do you wear pants, a mini-skirt? This is the effect of yeshivas. How it's come across. The children, how to eat *matzo*, how to bake *matzo*. Hand *matzo*, the *shiur* (required size) of *matzo*. It's become a matter that just spreads around. I think its clear -- the *lulavim*, the *hadassim*, looking at the *shiurim*, the publications. You have so many books that are written now that were never written before. It's a very highly successful publishing business. Artscroll, Feldheim. There are books coming out that are directly attributable to the fact that yeshivas. The non-yeshivas world is buying these books but it's because of yeshivas.

WH: You're tracing it to people who graduated yeshivas and entered the community.

RW: But even more. They meet the *yeshiva bochur* -- they react against him, they react for him. But he makes them become aware. The Conservatives have to deal with it. They get the *yeshiva bochurim* for teachers. They meet with them. They talk. They have to defend themselves. Justify themselves, attack. It changed the focus of their interest. They have to write *tshuvos* (answers) to justify their *minhagim* (customs). This is because there has been the other point, the yeshivas with their *piskei halacha* (judgment concerning laws). *Roshei yeshiva* have made an impact. *Rav Moshe* means something. It's a name to reckon with. *Rav Moshe* would not have been a name to reckon with if not for yeshivas. If not for the yeshiva world that accepted him and made him an authority. Out of which he became an authority to all and nobody can just ignore him. This is the direct result of yeshivas.

WH: What are your feelings about the yeshiva reaching out to the non-Orthodox community.

RW: Let's put it this way. Reb Yoshe Ber Soliveichik is a genius of the highest order. An orator of first rank. A man of fantastic charisma, who speaks the language beautifully. Almost unrivalled in his command of the language. In his ability to convey. In his ability to evoke emotion. Thousands of people have come to hear him. I don't think that it can be denied that he has had less effect than Reb Aharon Kotler, who couldn't talk a word, who even in Yiddish had a tempo that made it very difficult to follow. And yet out of the people who came to his *daled amos* (4 walls) and went away affected and *baalei teshuva* (repentant) are ten times the number of those who have listened to Rabbi Soliveichik. A person who meets *Rav Moshe* goes away affected. There's no way that not. The impact may not have been by reaching out directly. And this is debatable whether they should reach out directly. But the firmness, the commitment, the sincerity, the obvious involvement, the jobs that they take in teaching afterwards. The

day school movement is a yeshiva movement. No matter how you twist and turn it, the majority of its principals, the majority of its teachers, its driving force, the sense that it ought to be come from yeshivas. It's undeniable. All this are the effect the yeshivas have had without direct outreach. If we had the direct outreach, we could probably add a great deal more. NCSY is staffed by yeshivas. If not for the yeshivas, NCSY could do nothing. They call all the time for people to lead, to help, to advise. All this is from yeshivas. NCSY has had a very definite effect on several thousand young people. There are several thousand young people who have been directly affected in a very meaningful way by the NCSY.

WH: Some people feel that the type of ceremonies NCSY has are not appropriate.

RW: There are two sides to the issue. But the point I'm making is, whether right or wrong, it has had an impact. Should it have done so, they can say it's not worth it. But that it has had the impact is a fact. Maybe they shouldn't have had that impact. But they did have that impact. So yeshivas have affected through this medium. Happily or unhappily, is a matter of judgment. But that it has had an influence is not a matter of judgment, it's a matter of fact.

WH: What are the factors most responsible for the success of the yeshivas? Especially in the last 25, 30 years.

RW: What I believe personally? The fact that Torah is true. If you're exposed to truth it's got to leave and have an effect. I don't believe that there's any rational explanation. As a psychologist or a sociologist one can say the tendency to associate with extremes, the desire to have certainty, the security it gives. You can bring in any of these things. I don't think any of them are real. The cost is too much for any of these periphery kind of considerations to have had the effect that it does. I think they're exposed to a truth. They recognize its truth. Some to a greater degree, some to a smaller degree. They can't just reject it anymore. That's what I believe to be the actual answer. I don't believe that one can find another answer honestly, though I am sure that a psychologist will sit and rationalize it away. In other words you sit down and make your assumption number one. There is no Torah, there is no God. Therefore, one has to find some rational explanation. Therefore, this proves that there is a tendency to seek security in an extreme. And you make up a case that way. I don't believe it's true. Another words, there is such a tendency. It's an explanation of the Jesus freaks. It's the explanation for the Baha'i, for all the Moonies. But they don't have any reality. They can't create an ongoing movement. They won't. It peters out. Another one will come up. That one will peter out. Another one will come up. But to have an ongoing, real thing has to have reality to it. It can't be just a searching for a nirvana. If that won't help, drop it. Another one comes up. Fads. But when you have an ongoing thing that costs and doesn't give quite the security and emotional satisfaction because most yeshivas don't. It's a constant stress, a constant conflict and inner conflict. You don't that for periphery reasons. It's got to be that, somehow or other, there's something you can't escape. It's really there. That's what I personally really believe.

WH: There is the population factor. There was a significant amount of immigration to this country.

RW: That had a very great effect. But much less than people normally tend to ascribe to it. *Ani hagever* (I am the man) who from the beginning all the way through saw the growth of yeshivas. In other words, when I started yeshiva, there were just Torah Vodaath. Chaim Berlin started a couple of years after me. There was Ner Yisroel, which was a very minor little thing out in Baltimore with just a few students. Of course there was Rabbeinu Yitchak Elchanan. In terms of *yeshiva gedolos* (higher level yeshivas) that was about it. Then Chaim Berlin came. Chaim Berlin was built entirely on American-born, American-raised, 2nd generation, without exception. I know the whole development thing. You've always had in each yeshiva a few who are going to stay in learning. But the rest knew that they would finish the yeshiva at 20, 21, whatever it is, and they'd be out. The few who would have to find some way of remaining in the yeshiva. Some way or another. Because there were no *kollelim* yet. There had to be some help, some side job, or something. There were very, very few. Torah Vodaath had 5 or 6. You had Schustel, Shisgal, Shorr who taught a little but as a *bochur* in Torah Vodaath, went to Mir, came back, had a position in the yeshiva. You had these few who found their way. In Chaim Berlin, myself, to some extent Meir

Belsky for a while. Again you had very few until Rav Aharon came up with the concept of a *kollel*. That gave an ongoing-ness. What happened was not just that there were those who were able to continue in greater numbers, but it changed the atmosphere and the outlook of all those who were in the yeshiva on the lower levels too. Torah became a thing in of itself. It changed the whole atmosphere. The fact that there was a *kollel* in Lakewood changed the whole way on thinking and feeling in Torah Vodaath, in Chaim Berlin, and then they started Tiferes Jerusalem. It had a little bit of a meaning by them. Then Ner Yisroel changed its outlook. Then Telz came and became a very meaningful thing. Telz built a great deal more on European immigrants. Mir yeshiva came afterwards. Mir came a couple of years later than Telz. These built heavily on immigrants. But the fact is that the impetus and drive were from the American-born. And that was Lakewood. Yaakov Yosef started sending to Lakewood. All Americans. Lakewood was built on Americans. *Ani Hagever* who lived through it directly and saw 'the who' and 'the what' and was directly associated with each aspect of these various things. There were two central figures in the history of American yeshivas and Torah -- Rav Aharon and Rav Mendlovitz. These are the two central figures. The source and the drive of what later developed. Each of the *gedolim* (great ones) adds something meaningful. I had close contact with both. The closest, from the very beginning. They are the seminal figures of the whole. And both worked with Americans. The Europeans that came with Rav Aharon were totally meaningless. He started the *kollel* with Europeans but they never became anything. Lakewood was never anything at all until the Americans came. The *alter Kletzker* (old Kletzker students) were totally meaningless. In terms of influence, in terms of impact, in terms of making a yeshiva.

WH: Why was that the case?

RW: Now you're talking my personal judgment. They came old and somewhat embittered. Their attitude was cynical by that time. They had undergone a lot. And lived through a lot. They felt they didn't have the opportunity for what they had prepared for there. There wasn't the recognition and position available to them for which they had prepared so long. They didn't see that what they stood for had a place in the new land. They didn't have the outlook to create. A later *Mirrer* did. Of the *Mirrer* who came later from Shanghai there were a larger number of them who had a positive attitude that they're going to create a place for themselves. And those who did made it fine. And those who didn't remained bitter, cynical people. Many of them.

WH: How about the influence of the *balabatim* who came here after the war and felt it important to send their children to yeshiva?

RW: Right. But you see what they did was create a large number of *yeshivas ketonas* (elementary yeshivas). In New York. They're not in the mainstream of the day school movement. They're enormously important but not part of what you're investigating. The *yeshivas gedolos* that they sent to because they saw it success with the American student. And they sent their children because they thought that this is what they would want with their children. While their children expanded its numbers, they did not directly create its theory and its approach. They joined it. Being *nusach s'fard* (use the *s'fard* prayer book) themselves, they came to yeshivas that were *nusach ashkenaz* (use the *ashkenaz* prayer book). And accepted it at a price to give their children...So that the outlook and approach was formed with Americans. And the Europeans joined them. It's not quite as the general popular would have it. Chaim Berlin, Torah Vodaath, Tiferes Yerushalyim, Ner Yisroel. These two figures were the ones who formed the outlook, the approach, the ideal, the sense of undertaking, the sense of a need to accomplish, of responsibility, of awareness that it's within grasp. They worked on the American population because that was the population that was available for them to work with. It wasn't the *shita* to work with Americans.

WH: I have heard that the *yeshivas ketonas* should get credit for a role in the development of the yeshiva. But from what you're saying I suspect that the people starting the yeshivas were beyond the *yeshivas ketonas*.

RW: That's true. And the two people were beyond the *yeshivas ketonas*. And it was through them that the *yeshivas ketonas* were created. It's almost singlehanded. Rav Mendelovitz who urged and taught and helped and provided impetus to the development of day schools. He had ideas. A vision and a sense of responsibility. He brought a busload of boys from Scranton to Torah Vodaath to see what the yeshiva was like to create a day school in Scranton. He had a sense that you can carry it out. I visited a farm of Chasidim in Colchester New York in 1928. It didn't work out. It lasted about 15 years. I lived as a boy in the Bronx, the Lower East Side, Brooklyn. I knew intimately what was going on. I can tell you something very meaningful. I took the chickens to the rabbi when there was *shailah* (question) about them. I could go an extra 15 minutes to ask Rav Moshe the *shailah*. The reason I went to him was not that I knew he was a bigger *gadol* (great rabbi). They were all competent rabbis. But when I would ask a rabbi the *shailah* he would ask for the quarter. Until I gave him the quarter he wouldn't look at the *shailah*. Rav Moshe never asked for the money. He answered the *shailah*. When I left, I left the same quarter.

WH: Is it true that Modern Orthodox people in America told those coming from Europe that one has to compromise in order to succeed?

RW: Yes. You talking in my time, in the twenties. In the forties, absolutely not. There was Young Israel type where they did for convenience. But not as a theory. There was a Conservative movement, nowhere what it became later. The major thrust was among the non-frum, of convenience. Going to college was the thing to do. You had to become Americanized. But the new ones coming in in the late forties, early fifties no longer had this thrust. This was the thrust of those who had come in before. The ones who came in after came in with the determination of building their own *Kehillas* (communities). The only ones who didn't came with the decision already of not remaining frum.

WH: To what extent has there been a carry over to the yeshivas from the European tradition?

RW: The yeshivas are *litvisher* (Lithuanian) because the Roshei Yeshivos were *litvisher*.

WH: What has stayed the same and what has changed?

RW: The *derech halimud* (way of learning) has remained the *litvisher*. The *derech* (way) even of learning *hashkafa* (perspective) has remained the *litvisher*. The emotional life is clearly the *chasidisher*. Yeshivas as a whole live emotionally with the *chasidisher*. Intellectually with the *litvisher*. This has become the norm in yeshivas. With very rare exceptions.

WH: Could you explain what is meant by the emotional?

RW: By the emotional in the sense that the Torah is not able to be self-sufficient, which it clearly was among the *litvisher*. And among the *litvisher* roshei yeshiva who came here. Torah was self-sufficient. It was enough to give you your mode of *davening* (praying). It was enough to give you your *frumkeit* (religious feeling). Your relationships were all built on the learning of Torah. That was it. The new that came definitely not. *Tefilla* (prayer), the fervor, looking into *tzitzis* (Phylacteries), the carefulness of *tzitzis*, tugging outside. This was from the *chasidisher*. The growing beards that became part of the yeshivas. The *litvisher* roshei yeshiva never encouraged it. That didn't matter one way or the other. The clothing didn't matter one way or the other. The thing that mattered was did you sit and learn. The newcomers that came in -- the *tzitzis* outside, the dancing. A *yom tov* (holiday) was different. *Simchas Torah* had a different outlook. The fervor of it, the involvement was not the same. Do you see the *Litvisher roshei* yeshiva joining the dancing with that *hislahavus* (enthusiasm)? They're more reserved. The *ikur* (main thing) is learning. The original *talmidim* (students) would sit during the dancing and look at a *sefer* (book). They would come in, go around four times, and go back to their *sefer*. That was the *chasidisher* influence. And it has had a very great influence. It has made the *davening* and *yom tovim* more Chasidic. Emotionally the *talmidim* accepted *chasidisher* modes, but intellectually they remained on the *litvisher mehalech* (way).

WH: I guess one can still distinguish between the *chasidish* and *litvisher* yeshivas.

RW: But the litvisher yeshivas today don't have the intellectual mode at all. They use intellect as a means, as a tool, but not as an end. But in all the litvisher yeshivas it's still an end. It remains its own justification.

WH: Could you explain that more?

RW: The *chasidische* yeshivas will cover more ground. The analysis they'll use. But that isn't the criteria by which you judge the person. In a *litvisher* yeshiva you'll judge him by the keenness of his analysis. His *lomdus* (learning). In the *litvishe* yeshiva his *yedios* (knowledge) will mean much more, his *frumkeit* will be much more. Who is the typical model role player? In a *litvishe* yeshiva the model role player will be the *lamdan* (scholar). He is still the one who justifies the yeshiva. In a *chasidische* yeshiva it's the *davener* (one who prays), the *frumer* (very religious) who is the model role player. There's been a synthesis.

WH: Do you see a difference in the derech of this yeshiva and other yeshivas?

RW: It has its typical approaches both in what it considers the important thing in learning a *sugya* (subject) and how to behave. A Ner Yisroel boy is generally more polite, less arrogant, more tolerant. A *Telzer* is more fervent, more positive, more secure. You can recognize people from different yeshivas.

The reason I say that Tiferes Yirushalayim is not a very meaningful yeshiva is that it doesn't have a development. There is nothing there that associates them with an ongoing-ness.

WH: How about the philosophy of the yeshiva itself?

RW: I think they vary. Yeshivas vary in their philosophies and therefore the effect on the individual yeshiva *bochur*. One can't deny that the fact that Ner Yisroel accepts college changes its philosophical outlook. Telz does not. It has a different outlook. A gross area of difference.

Mir, for instance, espouses openly a policy of conforming because they believe we are no longer able to afford the luxury of individual development. We don't have the people who can work with individuals and therefore we have to work with the mass.

WH: What is the danger to the Orthodox community?

RW: Anti-semitism is not to them as an Orthodox community. *Midos* (virtues) is to them as Orthodox community because a community must have *midos*. You can't exist without. Is the lack of *midos* a danger? No, of course it's not a danger. Change is not to danger but what would be desirable to strengthen it. Yes, it would be desirable to find ways to strengthen their involvement in *midos*. Which can't be done through any program. You can't have a *midos* program. But there can be a greater emphasis in terms of a personal relationship where this is brought out in terms of the respect given to it. In terms of the judgments about people that it be in terms of their *midos*. The model role players should be the people whose *midos* are found to be superior as well. A *lamdan* without it should not be considered one to emulate.

WH: What areas within the yeshiva community could be improved?

RW: The area that could be strengthened very, very greatly is a greater emphasis on personal, warm relationships. There is not enough. There is another area that I personally think is certainly debatable, a matter of controversy. I think a greater sense of responsibility must be inculcated in yeshiva life to the larger community. To the *Ribono Shel Olom ve'amo* (God and his nation).

WH: Why should that be a controversial issue?

RW: Probably most believe that just sitting and learning Torah and doing *mitzvohs* (commandments) will take care of that automatically.

WH: I guess you've seen over the years in dealing with *bochurim* that it doesn't always work out that way.

RW: I remember there was a very sharp controversy about *mussar* (ethics). It had many great, wise, extraordinary men who felt that the *mussar* was foolish and unnecessary. And the learning of Torah and *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Laws) would accomplish all that the *baalei mussar* (ones who studied *mussar*) wanted to accomplish. And the *baalei mussar* said that it isn't so. And we see it is so. Experience is a very peculiar thing. Experience has a lot to do with how you want to interpret.

WH: What factors determined whether a *bochur* did all right in the yeshiva?

RW: This of course is the controversy. You can ask of me only how I see it. Others will see it differently. The way I found it was very simple. Those youngsters, and they constitute the larger portion, will have a tendency to conform. To them the important thing is to have a clear-cut outlook to which they can conform. They're the majority. If you have to provide for them a clear-cut this is what the yeshiva is, this is what is expected, the *sefer* (session) the way you learn, the way you *daven*, the way you do, the way you talk, the way you dress so that they can associate themselves and become part of a thing that they have confidence in and a sense of security in being in. That's the majority. They're the easy ones.

Then you have the nonconformists. The question is what you do with them. The nonconformists are in a fair proportion. They're certainly not the majority. The majority are conformists. That's your greatest strength. They push themselves to become a part of it. They're the basic. They you get along with easily, nicely. You enjoy, they enjoy. One should never neglect them and take them for granted. But on the other hand they're the ones that are least neglected because the *rebbe* enjoys them and they get more attention than they really need. The others are the problem. The others always constitute a nice proportion. They usually, in my opinion are the greater potential. The nonconformists are the ones from whom the long run the greater will develop. The bigger *lomdim*, the bigger people, the bigger *kochev hanefesh* (morally strong), people with drive, with visions, with undertaking powers, with sense of responsibilities much more often come from the nonconformist than the conformist. It doesn't say the conformist won't, but the nonconformists provide a heavier proportion of those who are meaningful than the conformist. And they are the greater problem. And as far as I'm concerned there is only one way to deal with them. And that's on a very strong warm personal basis. I don't think there is any real way to deal with them. And this warm, personal basis can be from a *rebbe*, a *menahel* (principal), or a fellow student, an *eltzer bochur* (an older *bochur*). It doesn't have to take any particular form, but he has to develop some relationship with a person that he finds he can talk to, can understand him, and can relate to, that there's a give and take that he hears what he asks, that what he has to say is meaningful to listen to and responded to.

You find in the biographies of *gedolim*, which are meaningless, close to 100% were *shovevim*. And certainly when I find a *shovav*, I have a lot more hope out of him than a *nonshovav*. A *shovav* has initiative, a sense of breadth, a sense of curiosity, will investigate, will deal with, will care. The conformist is generally not that interested personally. He's willing to rest on somebody else. He's not a doer. The conformers create the dictator. The ones who want somebody else to make the decisions. And it is the non - conformers who are the bane of the dictator. They want to make their own. They have a sense that they ought to and they are people and they ought to act like it.

WH: Do you think yeshivas might come to a greater recognition of the need to deal with the student more as an individual and less as a person who's rewarded for toeing the line?

RW: Do I see such a tendency? No.

WH: What kind of problem have you seen on a more recurring basis among the yeshiva *bochurim*?

RW: Two. They provide 80% of all the problems. *Emunah*, crises in faith, crises in commitment in the sense is this the life I have to lead. All my life. There are a lot of things I could live with and still be frum. Is it necessary to commit myself to this kind of involvement in learning, mitzvos, and all the rest? Can I be the Young Israel type -- frum, onshendik (righteous), fine and still be very comfortable? Those are the two. You'll have the psychological kind. They feel deprived of the relationship with a girl.

WH: What kind of a problem with *emunah* comes up?

RW: It will express itself in many ways. The Torah in general. The Torah *Sheba'al Peh* (Oral Torah), the specific ways of the yeshivas in learning. The meaning of *gedolim*. The meaning of *daas Torah* (understanding of Torah). It could be a variety.

WH: What about the psychological pressures of the team competitiveness which is unavoidably a part of yeshiva life? Does a guy say I can't take it?

RW: No, that doesn't exist. It means it expressed itself in some other form. I never had it expressed itself in that form.

WH: What form did it take?

RW: A form of I find it difficult to sit and learn. I'm distracted. How do I get to be more interested? That's the other type of thing.

WH: Could you talk about the significance of the *chevrusa* (study partner) relationship?

RW: When I deal with it, I deal with it on an instinctive basis. I think these people click. I think this one will supply something he needs. I don't know if without some preparation I would be ready to put down the criteria that is actually going through my mind at the time. I'm using them without realizing them. I would have to sit down and say on what basis I reached this, that he and him could help each other, or hinder each other, get along or won't get along. I would have to sit down and figure out what criteria in the background are being used. But I certainly don't figure out what criteria he has these characteristics, he has these and these characteristics. A and B will match, A and B will clash. That isn't what I sit down and do. I see the person. I have a feel for him. I have a feel for the other. My feel is that it will go. You're sometimes right, you're sometimes not. I hope that I'm more frequently right. I think, this is a subjective assessment, that I'm more frequently right.

WH: Have you seen any general change in the *bochurim* over the years?

RW: A very great deal. There is a different acceptance of authority. There is a different drive. You don't have quite as much drive to succeed as you had at one time. The need to push is very rarely there now. Getting along. I attribute it to the general population.

WH: What general changes in the population?

RW: I think it must be that college students as a whole don't have quite the same drive anymore. There's more of an acceptance of being equal with others. Not having to excel. Just getting along. That there's more of a rejection of authority. And it has reflected itself in the students. That's my assumption.

WH: It wouldn't be, for example, because of a lessening of opportunities.

Interview with Harav Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman

Jan. 18-19, 1978 Translated from Yiddish

The *Rosh Hayeshiva's* house, an oversize, spacious ranch, is located on the yeshiva grounds, a modern complex of residence halls, faculty apartments, and other buildings located on 70 acres of land. As I enter, he rises to greet me.

"I think I remember you," he says shaking my hand warmly. 'Does he really', I wonder. Who knows? He is a man of 78 but I am fully aware that he is no ordinary man, having mastered the entire 63 volume Talmud at age 16. The interview takes place in his library, an enormous room filled with scholarly volumes on Jewish law and related topics. As we talk in Yiddish, I feel myself drifting into a world of memories, not mine but his. I feel the gentleness of his soul settling on my own thoughts as he tells me stories of the past in pre-World War Two Eastern Europe. It is only reluctantly (because I feel like an intruder) that I ask him questions about present-day matters. Yet as I do, I am startled to see that he is of that world too, though he may see it through different eyes than mine.

RR: You know that yeshivas have been around for a long time. *Avrohom* had one in Biblical times. There is a tradition not only of learning, but of institutionalization as well. *Meshulachim* collected funds for yeshivas in medieval times too. But the main thing to understand is that the yeshiva is not just a school. It's another world.

WH: Could the Rosh Yeshiva tell me something about how the yeshiva got started?

RR: When I first came here in the early 1930s, many didn't know what a yeshiva was. They didn't believe it could be built. They did not believe that we could raise \$10,000.00 a year to have a yeshiva. We had maybe 15 students who could be *mashpia* (influence) on others. In all of America there were only six or seven who went to Europe to study in a yeshiva. There was Rav Gifter... One fellow came to Europe and they called him *Yudel Americaner*, because it was such a novelty that someone should come to Europe from America. Many who left Europe felt they were leaving a sinking boat. Many came here for *parnoseh* (business). They came to learn English, not to attend a yeshiva. But then they would see a sign in Cleveland for a butcher shop that said "kosher" but was open on the Sabbath and they would want to return to Slabodka. I was in Cleveland but I left. I saw no future there. Rav Moshe eventually took that position. I went to Baltimore where there were about 30 *erlicher* (upstanding) *baal habatim* (householders).

WH: Were the bochorim in the European yeshivas different from the ones here?

RR: The boys here are more sincere because they can actually do other things. In Europe a person often went to yeshiva for *parnoseh*. He had less opportunities so he studied and became a *shochet* (slaughterer of meat) or a *Rov*. Many learned *shelo lishmoh* (not for the sake of learning alone). People didn't go to college, high school, or elementary school. They only had *gemora* in their backgrounds. Thus they couldn't afford to be only into learning (This reverses the argument by some that secular education is a distraction because it takes away from learning. Here a. the professional opportunities free one to learn and b. only the more sincere learn because they have other opportunities.) In Europe, in the yeshiva world, if a person could do three things he was already pretty good. First, to write his name, second, his address, and third to write a card. In sum, however, there was not a tremendous difference between the bochorim in Europe and here.

When I came to Baltimore, MTJ (Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem) urged me to leave Baltimore and come to N.Y. They offered me \$3,000.00.

WH: What does the R.H. feel to be the most important goals of a yeshiva?

RR: First to build *yiddishkeit* in the world. Also to train people how to learn, and finally *kiruv rechokim*. In this country, yeshivas are more influential in the outside world because they're needed more here.

WH: Does the yeshiva community have an obligation to reach out to nonorthodox Jews?

RR: They are. We have the Agudah's SEED program, women learn with women; today people from all over the country beg for *bochurim* to come. And we made a decision to send out only the best.

WH: Has the R.H. seen any changes in the *bochurim* over the last 10 to 15 years?

RR: Today, more come to the yeshiva with a strong background. They are more familiar with *yiddishkeit*.

WH: Are there any differences between the *derech* (approach) of this yeshiva and that of other institutions?

RR: I hold that there is. We try very hard to fit into the student's needs, to be sensitive to them. After all, we are taking them away from their homes. I remember when I was 14 years old and studying in Slabodka. I had a stomach-ache one night and I had to go to the bathroom. It was very cold and you know the bathroom was outside and I was cold and afraid especially because it was very late. So the Alter from Slabodka went out with me and while I was inside, he stood outside the door and was talking to me.

We have a *shitah* (philosophy) that you don't send a boy away from the yeshiva. We try to fit into the student's needs. Other yeshivas hold that the boy has to conform. Only in the *mechinah* (high school) might we ask someone to leave. But boys 18-19, we feel the yeshiva can have a great influence on them. People grow tremendously here; more than elsewhere.

WH: What about the idea of boys going to college?

RR: College gives a person *parnoseh*. We find that our boys stay with learning longer this way. They don't have to kill themselves for a job. In Lakewood, the boys didn't go to college. But if they don't do well in business, than all is lost, for they have nothing else and often don't have enough time. Anyway, in business, you have less time to learn than if you're a professional. Many *baal habatim* didn't go to college and they feel frustrated. If you have a profession you have more time for learning. In *rabbonus*...well there are less good positions in *rabbonus* and for *rebbe*s in schools. We also find that the parents want college...sometimes more than the *bochurim*. Rav Moshe told me --- no job, no *sholom bayis* (peace in the household)

WH: What is the role of the yeshiva in the life of the student?

RR: It often becomes a substitute parent for the *bochur*. It may warn against a bad wedding match or tell him whether or not he should attend college. Often the parents can't understand why a boy should learn after marriage. It's partly because marriage is earlier here than in Europe. The person marries at 18. He has to learn so he can continue to grow. In Europe he married after 25.

WH: What are the greatest dangers facing Orthodox Jews today?

RR: *Am haratzus* (lack of knowledge about Judaism). That's the main thing. A *frum* (religious) Jew tells me his wedding for his child is okay. A rabbi made the ceremony. But it was a Reform rabbi! But to him, a rabbi is a rabbi.

WH: What does the Rosh Hayeshiva feel is responsible for the recent increase in the divorce rate among Orthodox Jews?

RR: Women today are more independent because they work and earn money. They are also more materialistic. And they also get married at a younger age.

WH: Given the deterioration of morality in our society how had the yeshiva been able to attract so many people?

RR: There's a certain *koach* (strength) in Torah that can't be measured. It's surely the work of God.

WH: What factors determine success in the yeshiva?

RR: Desire is the most important, but *kishron* (brains) are also important.

WH: What about the prospects for the future of yeshivas?

RR: It'll get better and better. But if *kollel* guys continue having difficulty getting jobs, this will make the parent afraid to allow the children to study. Bais Yaakov achieved much by the fact that the girls want to marry *kollel* guys.

WH: What is the Rosh Hayeshiva's opinion about the involvement of the Agudah (Orthodox Party) with the Israeli government in terms of joining, for the first time, the coalition?

RR: Begin is a *shomer mitzvos* (observer of the law). It's good that we went into the government because we were able to accomplish a great deal.

WH: Is it the obligation of the yeshiva to reach out to the non-observant?

RR: The fact is we do and the Conservatives see that our *chinuch* (education system) is better. The question is should we teach in a Conservative day school. Will we make the Conservatives stronger? On the other hand we can save people. Until recently we held no but *lemaasah* (in fact) it's a big *sofek* (doubt) by me. The Conservative rabbi will say "You don't have to wear *tzitzis* but our teachers will say yes"

WH: What about the idea of boys learning in Israel for a while?

RR: The *chinuch* there is different. I hold that the American boy is usually far more sincere than the Israeli. The Israeli is often jealous of the American because he has a comfortable life back home. I hold very little from this. Some were negatively affected by this. It often hurts more than it helps. I would not talk someone into it. There are Americans learning in the Mirrer Yeshiva, but they don't mix with the Israelis.

WH: Why do you think there is a serious danger of anti-Semitism in this country?

RR: Everything is possible and you definitely have to be afraid of it. People think the Holocaust made people feel sorry for the Jew but it didn't result in sympathy. It just showed that it could be done. There is more anti-Semitism today than ever before. From Holocaust we learned that you can't even trust educated Gentiles.

Interview with Harav Elya Svei

1/24/78 5:00-7:00

WH: Tell me how the yeshiva in Philadelphia got started.

RS: It started 25 years ago. Rabbi Kaminetzky was here, together with Rabbi Shwartzman. Rabbi Shwartzman was the son-in-law of Rabbi Kotler. They came here with 10 boys essentially. That's how the yeshiva was started basically. They came here at the beginning of the winter. Gradually more students came. They started a high school. It was only a *Bais Medrash* when it first started. The high school was started after two years of existence. They moved here to this section.

WH: What was the reason for starting the yeshiva in Philadelphia?

RS: They felt it would have an influence on the whole city. There was no yeshiva in Philadelphia. It was a community of 350,000 Jews. They felt it could have a tremendous influence on the city.

WH: Has the yeshiva had a significant impact on the city since its inception?

RS: It definitely has had an impact on the city. But the city has more of an impact on the city. The problem is that the city is very spread out and there is no direct contact of the community with the yeshiva. So our influence has to be with the local students who have come to the yeshiva. To a limited number of people who have close contact with the yeshiva. The overall community it's hard to say how great the influence is. There definitely is an influence but with the Orthodox community there is a great influence. The people who are directly closer.

WH: What proportion of the boys who come here come from Philadelphia?

RS: The proportion is a small proportion. We like to think of ourselves as being an exclusive school. And we choose our students. And some of the local students will not be chosen. If we took everybody who wanted to come and they had difficulties in adjusting to what we wanted to accomplish here. It's different when students come from out of town, besides the fact that they have more of a background but they were picked students in ability rather than anyone who wants to come in here. It was a problem.

WH: Because of a desire to get local people?

RS: Because we felt we should do something for the community. For a time we had preparatory classes. But even that did not work out too well. Since then there was a local high school started by the elementary school. The Beth Jacob School. The weaker students could learn there. We've been getting the better students. We've been more successful with the good *bochurim* (boys).

WH: There's no high school?

RS: There is. Some come to the *Bais Medrash*. But many come to the high school.

WH: Is it normally the custom for *bochurim* to learn two years after high school?

RS: We try to encourage them to keep learning after they leave.

WH: The yeshiva is a nationwide movement, the strongest in America and Israel. What can account for this growth over the last 30 years?

RS: The new yeshivas that were formed the last 20 years, many were formed by *talmidim* (students) of the *Rosh Yeshiva*. They should go out and be *marbitz Torah* (spread Torah). Yeshivas like Denver, Scranton. That's one yeshiva. The other yeshivas – Baltimore, Telz. We have to know that there came a new element from Europe that was looking for yeshivas. At the same time there were yeshivas developing. It worked together. You also get from day schools – most from New York. *Yeshiva ketanos* (elementary schools) that have a strong background.

WH: Has there been a change in the *bochurim* who come here over the years? How long have you been here?

RS: 21 years. I don't know if there is a change in the *bochurim*. I feel there is a change in the whole background, in America. We're all affected – by television, by the laws of the community. We try to protect them but I think that the community has a big effort.

WH: Would it be fair to say that the outside community's effect has been greater in recent years?

RS: I wouldn't say greater. I think the outside community has undergone a tremendous change – as far as moral values. It's directly opposed to what we are teaching. Family life is not what it used to be. The number of children a family has changes. All this has an effect on the Jewish community. In Torah Vodaath they have records of how many children the students have. It's going down.

WH: The size of the family?

RS: Yes.

WH: Still it seems to me it's going up compared to the rest of the population.

RS: Yes, that could be. The distance between the yeshiva and the outside community. Everybody likes to make some kind of combination. He divides himself off from the outside. The walls of the outside are so much bigger. It's hard for us to judge. We get an element that comes from good homes, but we still see it.

WH: What does the yeshiva look for when a *bochur* applies here?

RS: We give a personal *bechinah* (test). You see a lot of things. You see how he learns. You see his *derech eretz* (behavior). We had a lot of cases when a boy had a lot of ability but he thought too much of himself.

WH: How do we account for the ability of the yeshivas to attract students even though there are more opportunities today?

RS: The yeshiva answers the basic question that someone should ask himself – why the Almighty put him on the earth. What he wants from him. Who are the people the Almighty is satisfied with. People don't ask themselves this question. But if you come to yeshiva and these questions are posed to you and you don't answer these questions as long as it penetrates. So it gives them a purpose in life. It gives them a meaning to life. So they feel the *emes* (truth) of it. The reason they don't go into secular is because of idealism. They feel that at this age they would like to follow in the footsteps of their *rebbeim* (teachers). They would like to live the same kind of lives. They identify themselves with them. In a yeshiva like ours, close-knit, they identify themselves with their *rebbeim*. So with that identification, they would like to lead such lives. Lately, coming back to what we were talking about before, there is an element here – the economic level of the community has changed. People are much more business people. People are doing well economically. I don't think it's a challenge today to go into investment. They feel it's a gamble to go into his father's business. There's an element like that too. I feel that with the element that does have that challenge of going to college and doesn't give it up because of idealism, with that element we succeed much more. They eventually will go into *chinuch* (Jewish education). We have succeeded that many of our graduates afterwards have gone to Lakewood. But many of our graduates are *rebbeim* and *Rosh Yeshivas* in these new yeshivas that are formed. One of our graduates is one of the Rosh Yeshivas in Denver. On the high school level we have in many yeshivas we have our students. In a way we feel that's a measure of our success. Our students have continued and gone up to other yeshivas, building yeshivas, helping to build yeshivas.

WH: Is there a particular way to yeshiva here on a philosophical, practical level in terms of emphasis?

RS: We try to stress *lomdus*, Torah's understanding, maybe at the cost of greater knowledge, we try to stress understanding to a degree that maybe others feel we overdo. We also stress *mussar* (ethics). The question is how successful we are with that. That combination of Torah understanding and *lomdus* and *yiras shomayim* (fear of God) that's the purpose of all yeshivas. It's hard to say in what way we are unique. Maybe the uniqueness is in the smallness, the closer relationship between *rebbe* and *talmid* (student).

WH: What is the size of the yeshiva?

RS: 180 bochurim. 100 in the high school and 80 in the Bais Medrash.

WH: It's already pretty big. It must take tremendous effort to be able to achieve that closeness. Do any of the *bochurim* feel a need to understand where what they're learning fits in to the logic scheme of things? Where the *sugya* (subject) fits in to the general *halacha* (law) of the question?

RS: They raise it sometimes but it's not the question is understanding it better. If you understand it better, if you know how to analyze it better, dissect it better, so whatever else you've been learning and whatever else you will learn, you will use that method. The question is of understanding, not how it will affect *halacha*, but it will affect in your learning the *halacha*. When you learn the *halacha*, you see the *Shulchan Aruch* (Code of Laws). There's a lot of things in the *Shulchan Aruch* -- analyzing it, being able to analyze the *Shulchan Aruch*. Many more *halachos* come out. You don't have *halachos* in the *Shulchan Aruch* just to sit there. You have *meforshim* (commentaries) on the *Shulchan Aruch*. They analyze the *Shulchan Aruch*. They get more *halachos* from the *Shulchan Aruch*. Analyzing those *meforshim* on the *Shulchan Aruch* you get more *halachos*. This is a question of how you understand, how you analyze. The question is when they are going to use this method. If you continue learning, you'll be using it all over. The question is who the yeshiva is geared to. Is it geared to the *yechidim* (individuals) who are going to spend their life learning, teaching. Or is it geared to a yeshiva who has more success-more of their students continue learning. So maybe if it's geared to the better element, you have success. A yeshiva that has a smaller element continuing, then there might be questions that people bring up about the whole system that it's geared to the majority of the students.

WH: Which category does this yeshiva basically focus on?

RS: The yeshiva is actually focussed for the successful ones. In yeshivas that have tried a two-pronged system. Baltimore was one, it hasn't worked out. Nobody wants to be classified that he's not from the top.

WH: I didn't realize that they tried a two-pronged system.

RS: Such a system of learning more *bekeyus*. A different kind of a *shiur* (lesson), a *shiur* that learns a lot. More stress on *halacha*. From my contact with one of our *rebbeim* who went to Baltimore I know that they tried it.

WH: Like in the secular schools they have an A class, a B class, a C class. How can you deal with the letdown a boy may have when he realizes that he's not that outstanding? If you don't give him the expectation that he may excel it might hurt him also.

RS: It's very difficult. We have a stage here that *bochurim* are here for four years in high school. Then whatever they plan to do, they learn a year (a great percent stays here) but here are some we like to encourage that maybe they should make a change. Maybe the competition is too hard for them here. It's very difficult. Unless we would promptly advise them they should go on their own. They would feel a sense of failure.

WH: What is actually done?

RS: So, some stay longer. Some under a different kind of learning, not so much a stress on *lomdus*, where they learn more *Gemorah*, would use their abilities more.

WH: If a boy has some trouble in grasping certain concepts does he try to compensate for it?

RS: A *masmid* (diligent students) is going to find a place for himself in every *yeshiva*.

WH: Have there been any factors in the *bochur's* home or the yeshiva he went to or his personality that give you a general clue as to what type of *bochur* is more likely to succeed here, granting that there are exceptions to any such rules?

RS: It's a difficult question to answer. *Bochurim* come on 2 levels -- on the high school level and on the *Bais Medrash* level. With *bochurim* who come on the *Bais Medrash* level you could probably judge before how successful he will be because they are already at a more mature age. In the way he's learning. You can tell when you test him, when you tell him to say over something. At the high school level you can see ability but it's harder to tell. The student is still at an immature level.

WH: What in a general sense do you consider to be among the most important goals of a yeshiva?

RS: The most important goal of the yeshiva I feel, the *talmidim* that we are the most successful with I feel are the ones that continue in yeshiva – that they make it their life's goal. But we try to imbue all of our students, even the ones that go into the business world, that they should be active, that they should have influence on others. We tell the students that if our children need a yeshiva, you're going to have to build a yeshiva.

WH: What jobs are available to people when they leave the yeshiva?

RS: That is a problem. It's the same problem that people have in the secular world. It's a question of having ability and knowledge and the goal is to teach at the high school level or the *Bais Medrash* level and when those positions are filled, there are many who can't teach at the elementary level if they're trained to teach on the college or high school level. And many don't want to. Lately it's been a problem.

WH: What way might such a problem effectively be dealt with?

RS: In Lakewood some students organized these yeshivas in various parts. In places where that could be done, they started a new movement for *kollel* (Talmud studies on the graduate level). This movement for *kollel* also helps. You have married people coming into a community. They eventually will form the institutions of higher learning. The people in the *kollelim* will get positions. Not every community can afford such *kollelim*. But if there is a way of limiting. There is the experience of New Orleans where six married people went there and the wives taught in the day school. The community supported them. People do not want to go out by themselves to a community that's isolated. They don't have even a few *shomrei Shabbos* (Sabbath observant). They're very lonely. It's very hard. So we try to encourage them to go to the elementary school several young men together. They should go out in groups.

WH: So the problem isn't just that the *bochur* doesn't want to teach the 4th grade but he doesn't want to do it by himself.

RS: The problem is going away from New York City.

WH: But there's also the problem of people not wanting to do the job itself.

RS: Yes.

WH: How can one deal with that problem?

RS: That's a problem of educating the community. The community does not have respect for the teacher on the elementary school level. It doesn't pay well. Each one of our teachers has an education greater than a PH.D. But they don't get the salary of a PH.D. We are getting along but we feel the rebbeim should get a more adequate salary. The level of the salary is a problem all over. We wanted the Federation to help.

WH: The reason the Federation doesn't want to give money to yeshivas like this on because they feel threatened by the philosophy and commitment that the yeshiva has.

RS: That's a question of the help of the greater community.

WH: When the yeshiva gets contributions are some of the contributors themselves not *shomrei mitzvos* (do not keep the commandments)?

RS: Some.

WH: One yeshiva asks people who are not *shomrei mitzvos* do you want your daughter to marry someone who is not Jewish. They tend to be more approachable.

RS: That's for the community at large.

WH: It seems that in 40, 50 years from now there will only be committed Jews or assimilated Jews. The people who stand in the middle can't survive the assimilation. Does the yeshiva have responsibility to the non-religious people?

RS: There's no way of bringing them in. The *yechidim* who do come in. Or if a *bochur* gets a hold of somebody. But to get out to the community as a whole we don't have the means to do it. We don't have where to bring them in.

WH: It intrigues me how the yeshiva was brought over from Europe.

RS: Lakewood was started after Pesach. I came to Lakewood just before *Rosh Hashana* time. I came from Torah Vodaath. I was younger than my group at Torah Vodaath. I came from Europe. I was born in Slabodka. I went to Rabbi Yakov Yosef for a year. Then I went to Toraah Vodaath but since I had a European background I was ahead of them. But at our level they were *fitting smicha* (rabbinical ordination). And they were finished. When we came to Lakewood we felt we're getting started. That's to give an idea of how the level was raised -- the level of Torah knowledge. Torah Vodaath was a good yeshiva. The question is how it can be brought over. Lakewood started with some European students. There were a few Americans who were in Europe. A group of from 8 to 10. And slowly Americans were introduced to that group. But I think that the fact that there was that European group and Americans were introduced slowly into that group had an effect. We had someone to aspire to.

WS: Leadership, too.

RS: Yes.

WS: I think *mussar* (lecture on ethics) is not always taken that seriously. Reb Dovid's *mussar* in Baltimore made a deep impact on me. This is more the exception than the rule.

RS: Everybody likes to see results right away. And *mussar* is not something that can show you results right away. You don't get up and become a better person. But if somebody would do it for a long period of time you definitely would see the results. A small change in a person's character and feelings takes a long time. So that's why not seeing the immediate results that's why it doesn't have the effect that he does this better, he knows more. This is not the knowledge. *Mussar* has an effect. A person doesn't see the immediate effect. How did *Rabbi Akiva* get started? He saw water making a hole in a stone so he made a *kal vachomer* (made an assumption from minor to a major) that if water makes a hole in a stone gradually there is some kind of effect.

WH: What areas could be improved in the yeshiva community?

RS: The problem of moving away from each other -- the community at large and the yeshiva world. The Orthodox community as a whole, the community that's further away from the yeshiva, tends to go along with the community at large. To make some kind of compromise. We can't compromise. We have no way of compromising.

WH: Apparently the fact that the yeshivas didn't compromise paid off. More people come to them.

RS: There is a problem of yeshivas that are being formed now to try to accommodate some of the element. They don't mind if the student goes dressed the way the community at large goes dressed. They don't mind the personal habits. We're now beginning to get the second generation.

WH: What is that like?

RS: It's hard to tell.

WH: But this would determine what the long-range prospects of the yeshivas are. What that generation was like?

RS: We try to keep contact with our alumni. At least the ones that are closer we do have contact.

WH: Does the yeshiva keep records of what happened to the alumni?

RS: There are no exact records. There should be better records. In our *Bais Medrash* level we probably have a better idea. The ones who left on the high school level we probably have less of a contact with them. Less of a relationship with them. On the *Bais Medrash* level, they feel more attached to us.

WH: What is considered the most desirable outcome of the years in Bais Medrash? I know the yeshiva is connected to Lakewood.

RS: Some go to Lakewood. Some go to *Eretz Yisroel*.

WH: What do you think of the idea of learning in *Eretz Yisroel*?

RS: It's not a general idea. It's a question of where to go. What yeshiva to go to. There's no question that a student gains from being in *Eretz Yisroel*. Even without what he gains in the individual yeshiva, he gains from the life in Eretz Yisroel. He gets a different sense of values. He sees a more spiritual way of life. The car doesn't mean that much, and the furniture is not important. And he sees people living in a happy life.

WH: Some people say that Israeli students consider the American students too concerned with materialism.

RS: The relationship might be a problem. Our students tend to go to places where there are a lot of Americans. Two places they go to in *Eretz Yisroel* are *Mirrer Yeshiva* and *Brisk*. In both places Americans are not looked down upon because they make up a good part of them.

WH: Have the priorities of the yeshiva changed in the last 10, 15 years?

RS: No. Our priorities are that most students will make it their life's work to learn and teach.

WH: Especially in the area of *chinuch*. One of the problems that people have noticed in the Orthodox community is a significant increase in the divorce rate among Orthodox Jews.

RS: Why am I laughing? I got into trouble with that.

Interview with Harav Aharon Schechter

4/13/78 3:30-7:30 P.M.

This has been a long week and I approach this interview not really in the mood but, as things turn out, the time spent is well worth my while. Rav Schechter is, after Rabbi Hutner, the main person at the Chaim Berlin Yeshiva, one of the oldest and most prominent institutions of this sort in America.

His home is in Flatbush, an older, well-kept house. I descend into the basement and find myself looking at a man in his mid-forties. He looks older because of the long prematurely grey beard and the old fashioned *beckishe* (long black, gabardine coat) he is wearing. His face is marked by a strong and steady gaze and he is quick to laugh and even quicker to stop laughing.

We spend the first hour with me answering questions about my work. Rabbi Schechter wants to be as certain as possible what my goals and interests are. In addition he queries me about my family. "Oh, so which part of Europe did your parents grow up in? Ah yes, I remember the name Gewirtz (My wife's maiden name). Sure, I know her cousin Aaron Gewirtz well; you *davened* at Shloimie Leifer's *shul* in Forest Hills? Of course." and so on. Having satisfied himself we begin the interview. It will be a long one for, as I soon learn, Rav Schechter thinks long and hard before answering. Sometimes he takes more than five minutes losing himself in thought, furrowing his brow, and staring at the wall to his right that is lined with *Seforim* (Holy Books). The basement is bare except for two medium sized bookcases that cover a third of its wall space and a wide yet thin metal desk behind which the rabbi sits. Behind me the wall is bare except for a large photograph of Rav Hutner, the *Rosh Hayeshiva*. There is a *shtender* to the Rav's left.

WH: What factors account for the success of the yeshivas in this country?

RS: First we have to consider, the Jews who immigrated here. They brought with them their Torah strength from Europe (I found it intriguing that Rav Schechter who is American born and educated at Chaim Berlin, seemed very attached to the idea of European Orthodox culture being far superior to the American brand. His dress was more European than many of his yeshiva counterparts. Naturally it ought to be understood that because of the charismatic leadership of Rav Hutner that Chaim Berlin has both Chassidic and Misnagdic aspects to it. Still, I noted that when I said that I had been born in Europe but had come here at ten months, he beamed. "Even if you were only 10 months old, it's already good that you were born there and that your parents are European." This bias emerged later when we talked about the younger Orthodox generation in this country.

WH: Is this the main reason why yeshivas were successful?

RS: I think the people that came here after the Holocaust (*Churban*) give it major strength. It's really the leadership of those who like Rav Aharon Kotler want to recreate the European environment. Really, much of the credit would go to Mr. Mendelowitz since it was he, I believe, who pioneered the concept of an advanced yeshiva. You see, when I was growing up in America as a child, there was no clear picture that such a thing as, how would we call it, graduate study, could exist. You went to a yeshiva until you got married, at the most, and then you left. These people advanced the concept that going to a yeshiva is not child's play.

Naturally (and at this point, Rav Schechter leaned forward and looked at me intently), I'm sure you understand that this is only the superficial reason. The main reason is *hasgacha* (belief). If there is a *churban* and Torah is destroyed in one part of the world, then it must be built in another part of the world. And so it was lost in Europe and now we have it here and in *Eretz Yisroel*.

By now there is a generation of parents raising children that have themselves gone to yeshiva and this builds on things. Also there is the initial exposure that 20 years ago, these parents had to the greats. I think you also have to give a great deal of credit to the *Bais Yaakov* movement for these women's schools ingrained in their students the idea that it's right for them to work so that their husbands can continue to learn Torah after they're married.

WH: What about the question of jobs, especially in Jewish education?

RS: It's a problem especially in Jewish education. Many don't want to take jobs teaching the lower grades after studying at such a high level. I have no formula to this problem but I would tell someone who is teaching that even if he's

more exhausted than say a lawyer or businessman at the end of the day, that his whole day is spent in holy work (*kedusha*). Then there are people who start *Kollelim* and this is one way of dealing with the problem.

WH: What is the main goal of a yeshiva?

RS: *Lehagdil Torah U'laha'adira* (to make great and to strengthen the Torah. Our goal is to make each person realize his full potential as a *Talmid Chacham*. We should remember however, that Torah is a quality, not a quantity and the idea is to raise that level of quality as high as is possible.

WH: Why hasn't Chaim Berlin Yeshiva set up satellite yeshivas?

RS: Basically, it is a yeshiva in the city and attracts a different type of student --- those who want to come to the New York community because it has so much to offer in the way of Orthodox life in general. It's for those who want Torah without going out of town. People who want to stay close to home. We have people who started yeshivas out of town who came from Chaim Berlin, like in Memphis, but they aren't really part of an organizational effort, but rather they are independent institutions. (At this point Rav Schechter pulled out a yearbook circa early 1950s, it seemed, and began going down the list of graduates telling me what had become of each one. Most, it appeared, had gone into Jewish education.

WH: What about attending college?

RS: *Bochorim* that have a sense of real identity with their learning aren't tolerant of the idea of college and look askance at it.

WH: Why?

RS: Because of the deterioration of the colleges themselves for one thing, both morally and economical. It's also the strength of common experience that the *doros* (generations) of Torah have had over the years. It's one thing when you're a *yachid* (individual) but when you have group support...

WH: Which aspect of college represents the greatest threat; political and intellectual ideas or the social climate?

RS: I never found that the *apikorsus* (heretical or antireligious ideas) wreaked havoc with the fellows. We also try hard to keep *bochorim* away from the social life on campus. I don't have the feeling so much about what he got out of the college as what he left out of the yeshiva. How *Torah'dik* (involved in learning) is he if he went to college? For some, college is an advantage and for others it's a disadvantage but the issue is: How does it affect the yeshiva if there *bochorim* going to college?

WH: And how many guys do attend college?

RS: Oh, about 50% (In view of earlier statement concerning his strong feelings against college, I found this figure rather high).

WH: What about the problem of finding jobs in *chinuch* that are rewarding?

RS: If a person felt no reward in teaching basic stuff to small children, I would argue (a tiny twinkle in his eye) that they have more *kedusha* (holiness) in their work than a businessman.

WH: What do you feel are the greatest problems facing Orthodoxy today?

RS: (very long pause, about 5 minutes). The lack of maturity and leadership. The mature intelligence embodied in Torah has not yet developed. It's a young group in age and in concept. That leadership represented by European thinking. I noticed you said you were born in Europe and I'll tell you that even though you left as a small baby it's still very good that you are from there. There's something about the way the group from Europe brought over with them certain ideas and values...(I find myself thinking about how this man was born and raised here but expressed such a strong preference for the European generation and then suddenly I take note of his dress which is indeed very European in style. I realize, he venerates the past). This lack of leadership shows up everywhere. There are religious modernists who are rightists in their own camp. And what do these rightists say? They establish a young women's *Beis Medrash*. I mean, are we crazy!

Then I also want to say something else: I respect *Lubavitch* and you can't argue with success. They've reached a lot of people. But I think this whole idea of a *mitzvah* mobile, lighting candles, this emphasis on the superficial without understanding and depth --- it cheapens the religion. I guess marketing and integrity don't go together. The integrity that it took a maturity to develop doesn't come cheap and it's not easy to acquire. You don't remain at the same level. You have to grow. Growth, growth, growth! The self must be committed to growth but you must do it within yourself --- by *Divrei Torah* (words of learning).

WH: Thank you very much for your time.

Interview with Harav Shrage Moshe Kalmanowitz

4/25/78 12:30-1:30 P.M.

It has been very difficult to obtain an interview with Rabbi Kalmanowitz. This is because he is a very ill man. We have made a number of appointments only to have to cancel them at the last minute.

The rabbi is one of the Roshei Yeshiva of the Mirrer Yeshiva located in Brooklyn on Ocean Parkway. The yeshiva enjoys a reputation as an outstanding institution of learning and is one of the few yeshiva to be transported virtually intact from Europe via Shanghai after WWII.

WH: How many students do you have?

RK: 400, of whom about 90 are married.

WH: To what do you attribute the success of your yeshiva?

RK: When we came here from Europe, there were about 250 young men who arrived too. They had learned in Mir and when the war came they fled across Russia, Siberia, and finally to Shanghai where they stayed during the war years. But the yeshiva came here in one piece with its faculty and students. Today in America people have contact with the outside world. In China we were isolated and this was good because it strengthened our commitment and devotion to Torah. As a result we were able to preserve our *ruach* (spirit). Upon coming here we were many people and so American boys had to adapt to us, to our way rather than the other way around and, little by little, they did. But we had presence.

WH: What, precisely, is the way of Mir as distinguished from other yeshivas?

SK: Mir is known for *Amkus* (depth) and *Havonas haTorah* (understanding of Torah). One *rebbe* or Rosh Yeshiva can't do it. Rav Ruderman of Baltimore is a great man and he can set an example but not even he can outline a whole program. Here, the American boys saw hundreds of fellows learning day and night as they had done in Europe. You know, of course, that in America it was unheard of that boys learned after marriage. But we did it as did Rav Aharon Kotler, and others too. Those that came had real dedication. There was a guy who suffered terribly from migraine headaches and the doctor told him he needed more ventilation than there was in the Beis haMedrash. But he said: "I can't learn in a room by myself. I have to learn with everyone else." So he bought two little fans that he put on both sides of him in the Beis medrash and they blew on him and everyone saw what he went through to learn. There was also the case of a Hungarian Jew who want to give a bochur \$10,000 and bring in him in the business if only he would marry his daughter and stop learning. But he refused and the man went to every bochur in the Beis Medrash and not one took him up on his offer because they wanted to continue learning after marriage too. Since he was Hungarian he was used to the idea that prevailed in that country --- that you learned until you got married.

You see we don't have a *mashgiach* (supervisor) in the Beis Medrash. We don't need one because everyone learns.

WH: What happens to your graduates?

SK: Most are in *chinuch*. And even those in business stay in contact. We have a fellow who closes his dry goods store on the Lower East Side at one o'clock sharp and leaves for the Beis Medrash here in Brooklyn. On Wednesday we have shiurim in the evening for guys who are in business given by one of the Rosh Yeshivas.

WH: And how do we account for this great interest?

SK: It all started with the European Talmidim. For them Torah was life, not just a book to study and know.

I thank Rav Kalmanowitz for I see he is not feeling well. A short man with a long white beard he looks older than his 55 years. He shakes my hand warmly and asks the people in the yeshiva office to assist in every way.

Interview with Harav Shmuel Berenbaum

April 30, 1978 6:00-7:00 P.M. Originally in Yiddish

Rav Berenbaum lives in a modest yet comfortable attached house in Flatbush, two blocks from the yeshiva which he heads together with Rav Kalmanowitz. I arranged to see him thru his wife, a woman who graduated Brooklyn College which she attended after raising a large family. She works in the yeshiva office and made the appointment after asking me a number of questions about my project.

At first it was I who was interviewed.

RB: Why are you doing this project?

WH: I'm interested in the goals of yeshivas, what they try to do and how they developed in this country.

RB: What do you know about yeshivas? Did you attend any?

WH: Well, I went to Ner Yisroel and Kamenitz for a total of four years.

RB: Aha, so you know something. And then?

WH: And then I went to college.

RB: And now you are a college professor. So let me ask you something. I got a letter from the Skulener Rov asking me about Mayor Koch. Can you deal with such a man? He's a Jew and a good man. It's true, he eats *Chometz* on Pesach but he can't be perfect. I mean what's so terrible about that? He doesn't kill anybody; he doesn't rob?

WH: I'm not sure I follow the question.

RB: My question is there are all sorts of *t'ayas* that people have. What in our view is so bad if they give in to them? Look, there are coed dorms in colleges across the country. So? Big deal! Some people, I heard, say that because *odom harishon* walked naked, that we should also. You're a college professor. You should know.

WH: Well, clearly this runs counter to Torah tradition.

RB: Of course! A human being is born *betzelem elokim* (in the image of God). And he must remember that. A horse eats out of a leather bag. Does a person stick his head into a bag to eat? Of course not. Our yeshivas try to teach boys how they should act in this world by teaching them Torah.

WH: How would the Rosh Hayeshiva compare things here with Europe?

RB: In Europe, the irreligious Jews and the Zionists lowered the generation. Some people say you have to fight them and meet them head on. I say you can't chase away the darkness with a stick. If you turn on a light though, you can. And if you build a yeshiva then you've got light. At least this is what I think.

WH: And in this country?

RB: Before, when the reform came, it was thought that you couldn't have yeshivas in America, because it's not the right environment; because in the U.S., everything is money. But the *Gedolim* (Talmudic scholars and leaders) showed it wasn't so.

WH: How are the students compared to ten years ago?

RB: I would say better. Before you couldn't just say: No college. Now you can. Also in the past, the parents wanted to have college. Now not so much. Finally, of course, God helped us.

WH: Is college really a serious problem?

RB: The whole idea of college is terrible. College is *apikorsus*

WH: If a person goes into business as opposed to chinuch, how much Torah can he really learn, in terms of time?

RB: It's not only learning. He can conduct himself according to the Torah. He can be honest.

WH: But many Orthodox Jews are not?

RB: Yes I know. Money is a big *taavoh* (temptation).

WH: What are some of the major problems facing Orthodoxy today?

RB: I don't know. I live almost completely in the world of the yeshiva.

WH: Thank you very much for your time, Rav Berenbaum.

Interview with Harav Yaakov Kamenetzky

5/16/79

Translated from Yiddish

Rav Kamenetzky, former Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Vodaas Yeshiva, is a member of the *Moetzes Gedolei Torah* and one of the *Gedolei haDor*. Located in Monsey, his home is rather modest. He is a very sprightly 88 years old running to answer the phone, writing down appointments in his little notebook. Besides being very sharp in his responses, he has no problem hearing, and reads without glasses. Not very tall, he has a long grey beard, and wears a long black coat. He greets me warmly "Sit down sit down." but does not wish to be taped: "When you're on tape there's an issue of responsibility." The interview is conducted in Yiddish, since the *Rov* does not feel comfortable in English.

RK: So you're doing a book on Yeshivas. Well, let me show you the *Rambam* in *Mishnah Torah* on yeshivas in Canaan (He spent about twenty minutes showing me passages relating to ancient yeshivas in various texts). So you want to know about yeshivas in later times. Well, you can ask me questions but you should know I'm not really in the mainstream of things. I'm retired, an old Jew who wants to learn a little. The doctors told me twelve years ago to be semi-retired but I felt that at 76 I should be completely retired (Some retirement! The phone rang at least 7 or 8 times during the hour I was there. He gives classes on a regular basis in his home and travels extensively).

WH: How would the Rosh Hayeshiva compare yeshivas in Europe with those in this country?

RK: In Europe yeshivas were more like universities. Places to learn in. Character you got from home. My parents didn't expect me to become a person who made a living from being a *Klei Kodesh*. My parents were in business. In America a person learns homiletics in school, ethics in school. Why? Because he doesn't see it at home. The father is away the whole week from the home and doesn't see the children.

RK: Naturally I'm interested in the yeshivas today. But which one went up, which one went down. I don't know because I'm not really involved.

WH: What accounts for the success of the yeshivas in this country?

RK: Post Holocaust parents were not satisfied with the quality of Jewish education they found when they came here. The Polish, Lithuanians, and Hungarians I mean. And you know, the Hungarians weren't just the *Satmar*.

WH: But today a young man has so many opportunities in an open society. Why should he stay in the yeshiva?

RK: Well, once the Jews started the yeshiva system here it kept going and it became the natural thing to do.

WH: What are the challenges facing yeshivas today?

RK: You can't ask that question generally because each yeshiva has its own challenges. Generally, the goals of each yeshiva should be to make the best people possible. There are those who believe that the goals of yeshivas should be that all ought to sit and learn but I don't agree with them. I feel that if certain people have a talent in engineering they should do that and those who have abilities in other areas should go into things where they'll at least have the opportunity to learn maybe three hours a day or whatever. You know the saying: A thousand went in --- 100 to *mishna*, 10 to *gemorah*, and one to *hora'ah*. I give a *shiur* Sunday morning to a group of professionals who were once my *talmidim*.

At this point I was compelled to cut the interview short because the Rosh Yeshiva had to leave for a wedding.

Interview with Harav Yitzchak Hutner

7/9/78 11:30-1:20

Rav Hutner lives in a comfortable house on Ocean Pkwy. It has taken quite some doing to obtain this interview and I am a bit nervous as I ring the bell. His daughter answers and, after a short wait in the living room, I am ushered in to the dining room. Rav Hutner greets me from his easy chair recliner. He is wearing a *beckishe* and *tzitzis*. After some perfunctory remarks he listens carefully as I explain my purpose and project. "Nu, young man, ask whatever you want."

WH: How can we account for the success of yeshivas in America?

RH: They'll give you all sorts of reasons but in reality it is a mystery just like the mystery of the Jews. How did the Jewish people survive? And this question: How did the yeshivas survive is a mystery within a mystery. And all the reasons are junk. It was the work of God. Do you know Yiddish?

WH: Somewhat, yes.

RH: I ask because I talk sometimes with phrases in Yiddish and Hebrew too which I assume you know.

WH: Yes I do. Actually, I was born in Switzerland and grew up in a home where Yiddish, German, Flemish, Dutch, and other languages were spoken.

RH: Yes, of course, that is the nature of the Jew. A *goy* doesn't know languages like we Jews. Because we Jews never knew where we would be next, so we had to know languages.

WH: What was it like when the Rosh Hayeshiva came here in the 1930s?

RH: It was like a *midbar* (desert). There was almost nothing here. When I first came here I was involved in private scholarship. It wasn't until a little later that I became involved in education. And then we had so much to do. We had to convince the *yiddishe* parents that it wasn't so terrible if the child didn't go to an elementary school here. The parents were only afraid of the truant officer. They taught nothing in these schools. Nothing! That $2+2=4$. It took them eight years to teach what you could learn in one. For our Jewish children it was a joke. Stupidity! And so we built and developed our own schools. And they didn't lose nothing from not going to public school. I have 100s of talmidim who didn't lose from this.and then it's true that we had one yeshiva, Reb Yitzchok Elchonon or, as they say (and here, a note of sarcasm entered Rav Hutner's voice as he enunciated each word slowly and deliberately) the Rabbi Isaac Elchonon Theological Seminary. This word theological...we don't believe in this, that this is the goal of a yeshiva. When they put in the hyphen they ruined everything (meaning Yeshiva University). When you say that you have secular studies together with religious studies this makes everything *mekulkul* (spoiled). You know, our yeshivas don't believe in this whole philosophy.

WH: Well actually, in talking with some of the people at Y.U. I left with the impression that things have changed and that they learn much more now and late at night too.

RH: Yes, yes that's true but we did it! Our yeshivas were responsible for their moving to the right. Dr. Revel would be very unhappy if he saw this. It goes against his efforts at making it more secular. And even so, they have a different idea still. They want to train rabbis and for them a rabbi is a social mixer, a successful man.

Now to get back to your question, I think the success of the yeshivas is a deep mystery. I am *mispaleh* (amazed) more at this than at the *nes* (miracle) of *keriyas yam suf* (the crossing of the Red Sea). And so I think the first thing is the *koach* (strength) of Torah. The second thing is that the colleges lost their charm. It used to be a nice idea thirty years ago that you went to college, that you became a man of culture. But today...college is terrible. There's no education going on there. It's not a place for study. Sure, if a person needs a profession, but that's *parnoseh*. So this brings the bochorim to us.

The boys today; they're like iron. They know what they want and it's not college. In general, they come to us because there is so much emptiness in the world. Not only college. Take sex. There's no more the view that it's romantic. No...today it's so repulsive it smells like a dog making in the street. Forty years ago, they thought of sex

as something beautiful. It used to be poetry, at night, under the stars. But today the world is so *grub* (disgusting, low, etc.). So naturally, the bochorim come to us.

WH: What about the *Baale Teshivah* teshivas?

RH: Nu, this the yeshivas were also responsible for. Where else did they get the idea to start yeshivas not on Wall St. And who runs them? Take Rabbi Freifeld of Far Rockaway; he's from Chaim Berlin. And Rav Weinberg of Ner Yisroel. Did you know he's from Chaim Berlin? And this is a world wide movement. It's in Brazil; it's in South Africa, Johannesburg, everywhere. Hundreds of boys went through Rabbi Freifeld's hands.

I'll tell you an interesting story. You know, now they have a big thing in Israel about drafting yeshiva boys into *Tzahal* (the Israeli Army). And the Roshei Yeshiva there are fighting it. So they asked me if I would give (Moshe) Dayan a *yaasher koach* because he is supporting them and they felt that if an American Rosh Hayeshiva would give him a *yaasher koach* it would mean more than an Israeli. So I gave him one and he told me the following story which I'll recite to you word for word in Hebrew (Rav Hutner then recited the story in Hebrew the gist of which was as follows: When he was a child he was asked to recite before an audience Bialik's poem about yeshivas called 'Hamatmid' (the diligent yeshiva boshur) and he remembers saying "Who is this rock" referring to the yeshiva student and so he thought to himself that the yeshivas should be strong and when the govt came to him, he said "let them wait a little" meaning the army in terms of drafting the boys.

WH: What about Begin?

RH: Begin also wouldn't draft them but this takes us away from our subject which is not politics but yeshivas. I also heard that a Rosh Hayeshiva said to Peres about the draft: Do you know what this will do. It will greatly harm the yeshivas. You know that there were yeshivas under Stalin and under Hitler. Do you want it should be said: But not under Peres? And he cried; tears rolled down his cheeks.

I also have to say that in terms of the *Baal Teshuva* movement there's a whole movement in Russia. It's amazing that after 40 years they want to know about yiddishkeit. But of course we don't know anything about it.

WH: What does the Rosh Hayeshiva mean by "we don't know?"

RH: I mean we don't know what's really going on inside Russia. You think one can believe what's going on in the papers? Never.

And as far as the yeshivas success...we talk about the super-conscious, not the subconscious...This is another *machlokas* (disagreement) we have with Freud. When this superconscious gets in contact with the flame of Torah then pfff! (he made a sweeping motion with his hands) We have today women becoming *tzenuos* (modest) and they came from *tachtis* (the bottom) from *gehainom* (hell). And I can only say that the Jew has a deep mysterious connection to the gemorah that we don't fully understand...but we know it's there. And you never know what will set it off. They say that *Og Melech Habashan* walked on wet ground on Chanukah and he got a cold on Purim.

The problem is the world thinks of Judaism as a religion. It's not. It's a culture. Religion means that on Sunday I'm religious and on Monday I do what I want. But Judaism is not one aspect. It's the whole thing. It's a way of life. And as far as the yeshivas role in this I would say to paraphrase Churchill: "Never did so many owe so much to so few". And I think this trend of the yeshivas influencing things will continue; we couldn't do it in the 1950s because then were still developing.

Interview with Harav Moshe Feinstein

12/24/78

Translated from Yiddish

WH: Why have Yeshivos been so successful in America? What are the important reasons for the growth of Yeshivos in America in comparison to before the war?

RF: Due to the arrival of great people who led the Yeshivos there, which did not have before.

Another aspect of the same idea is that sometimes there wasn't anyone to teach. Even though there were individuals who made Yeshivos then too; there was Reb Yitzchak Elchonon's Yeshiva (Yeshiva University) and other such Yeshivos; there was even our own Yeshiva Tiferes Yerushalayim, also made by those "*baale batim*" many years earlier. There was Reb Yaakov Yosef Yeshiva, made many years earlier. ...Great people made greater ones. However, there were those who did not have the strength to do that, because they themselves did not know how to truly assess Torah, what Torah is ... Some were successful, others not as much. When the people started coming, when the great people started arriving -- the Roshei Yeshivos and the *Menahalim* of Yeshivos -- and the people saw that this was something different, a different type of learning, not the sort of learning that they thought of earlier. Before one knows a little *Chumash*, a little *Gemora*, a little *Mishnayos*. Now they saw it was a broader "*inyon*", one can become great through it. It started attracting people. ...

There are those who went to the yeshivas in spite of their parents. Sometimes the parents claimed it's "*parnosse*"; there is no "*parnosse*" from learning. There are even some *shuls* where a true "*rabbonnos*" is difficult to get because they look for a different sort of "*rabbonnos*", not the kind that the Yeshivos want to produce. ...The yeshivas produce "*Torah Lishma*" and we see it goes on and on and it doesn't falter. That's one thing.

Another is that all physical things have no foundation; there is nothing more to it than he makes a little more money, or he makes a little more something else, or he has a little more honor ... The soul itself is not satisfied with it, that he has a lot of money or honor. The soul is satisfied with things that are of the Torah ... He becomes full and satisfied. He understands better than others. He understands the truth ... All these things where a man had successes and he was happy with himself that he amassed ... money and honor, or other things which pressure him and occupied his mind that he do it. And when he went to rest, he went to all sorts of loathsome places ... The things they portray in movies and theaters, where they teach a person all sorts of corruptions and all the things that are not good ... There are some people who were very far from Torah, far from Yiddishkeit; their parents did not teach them; and yet we see people who became very fine Jews ... Others who were already great in other sciences, secular sciences, and yet Torah attracted them. ... Many began to realize that their parents conducted themselves in a way that is without understanding, without intelligence, with "*hefker*". There came those who had tried for a number of years to live in "*hefker*". But they saw that this is nothing. So they strove to find the Truth. We saw in "*Oleinu*" "The idols will be destroyed, the world will be redeemed with the Kingdom of God. Why? Because first they realized that what I did was no good, what my parents did was no good. When he knew that this was no good, some go insane, some commit suicide, and others become even more "*mufkor*". ... Drowned in the waters of the world. But if he found a way and pulled himself out of it, if he saw there was a place where there is Truth there; ... He wanted to see what it is. He never saw any such thing. The few religious Jews that were here then had little understanding of "*Yiddishkeit*". Who came here from our countries then? It was the refuse, as it's called. Those who were not successful in Torah, and so he went to America. ... But when all the religious Jews were forced to come here when the "*goyim*" threw them out of there and they came here. And God helped ... It started attracting a great number of people. Not only here, but also in Israel. There are plenty of "*massissim* and *madichim*" there, more than here. But a lot was accomplished there too. There are many who return to the Truth and such. It's even more difficult there, where the "Yeshiva" person is even more distant from them; then "*ben Torah*" with his manner of clothing. In spite of that, it attracts. One sees that this is after all the Truth ... Truthfully, now the people who write books ... to be a "*massis u'madiachi*" it has to be intentional ... It's not that they think that they're writing the Truth, that they think it's the truth, he knows there is nothing to be proud of ... The world considers as work, as saving the world, an actor too. What is an actor for, what is he needed for, what would the world miss without him, and what does he give the world? Nothing more than lewdness. People get killed because of it. The "*yetzer harah*" gets enticed to want to fulfill all his desires, kosher and non-kosher ones ... Makes the "*nisoyon*" that man has even greater. Any person with common sense would understand that the world would exist better without them than with them. It existed without them too. This is called by the writers that

they are “doers”; they are not “*batlonim*”, they make a lot of money because of the “*leitzones*” and such where the “*yetzer Hara*” comes in. It makes rich people. That’s called accomplishing, but whoever does for the Truth, where he does not do for money, he does not do for “*parnosse*”, he does not do for honor, but he does for the Truth...From Torah you cannot say that one can get rich, because first of all, Torah does not allow it. There are limitations, because if one does a good deed one has to do it without pay. The Torah says, “I am for free, you should be for free also.” A person, however, needs something to live on, so one is allowed to take money. ...

The greatest people by Jews were not wealthy. These are things that don’t go into wealth. He doesn’t want the wealth, he doesn’t like the wealth; the education of his children is not such that they should look for it. That’s the Truth. That they consider to be “*batlonim*” when one does not go out to be “*massissim* and *madichim*” so one can make much money. To become a doctor to rob the world, not to want to heal people, to do for people, but rather to get rich and such. Or in other fields where one can destroy the world over a little mistake ... For example, an engineer because he wants to have the great honor that his knowledge constructed such a large bridge. And if he had no great honor or money, he would, God forbid, ... If not for his honor, he would not do it. There are many “*tzoers*” from that. Everyone thinks that those are the “*batlonim*” and these are the workers. The one who works for the Truth, and preaches peace and tranquility in the world, that the Torah should be observed

WH: What work remains for the Yeshivos to do?

RF: There is no lack of work. There is a world of work. One can’t be satisfied with what is, both in quality and quantity. There is a world full of children, a world full of people who, unfortunately, know nothing. “Caught among the idol worshippers.” There is, of course there is, in quantity alone; and in quality, there is no limit to becoming good. There is a demand on everyone to be great ... Even in the *Gaon’s* time, there was work to do. Increase the number of students, make sure that they are happy, talk to them outside of learning, talk to them in “*hashkofeh*”, talk about “*emuneh*”, about “*midos*”.

WH: I read a speech by the Rosh Yeshiva. Last year in Boro Park, there is a great problem that people who live Jewish are too materialistic. I wanted to know if this required of everyone, and how great a “*nissoyon*” is it.

RF: Of course, it is demanded not to be too materialistic. It can’t be demanded of everyone alike. *Handwritten note here* it’s a little connected with a “*nisoyon*” with a wife and children ... There are obstacles that do not allow this policy. One has to try as much as one can, according to his situation. One cannot sometimes sit all day on Torah and *avodah* but the time that has available, he should occupy himself with “*zedakah*”, with “*chesed*” that God blessed him with. Everyone has to do his work according to his “*middos*”.

Interview with Harav Gedaliah Schorr

Feb. 12, 1979

WH: What are the reasons for the growth and success of yeshivas in this country since about 1946?

RS: The influx is one point, and what you call today the holocaust; to try to get back to the origin, so to speak. Then I think that the influx had an impact on those people that were close to *yahadus*, closed their ranks and tried to defend their position; strengthen them.

WH: How do the yeshivas deal with people who were returning back to *yahadus*, with limited background?

RS: The majority of the students in this yeshiva come from religious homes, and there are a share of students who come from different homes, and they are influenced by environment, study, and by seeing what living *yiddishkeit* is. They change. At the beginning yeshivas had a different kind of a job altogether; train the parents that the yeshiva is an ideal by itself, they were afraid of anti-Americanism, we had eleven students who went from door to door and convinced them that they'll have *parnasa*, it's not so terrible, you have to do it little by little. First elementary school, then two years high school, then four years high school, then college in the evening, can become a professional even, be a good American, a good Jew. Little by little they changed the outlook on life, in the beginning. Now, for the others, I think this is the approach, and I feel that *Torah Yiddishkeit* is fanning out, expanding its influence. Even we see by the translations in *Tanach* and other words, and we see ourselves; the translations are consumed and are scholarly work, if you ever looked at them. These books have a tremendous influence on the Jewish world (like *ArtScroll*). On *Torah She Ba'al Peh* and *Torah She Bechsav*. The idea is that literature is enriched lately by a voice coming from former students of *yeshivos* who excelled, all those who participate in the undertaking. There's a demand for it. In other words, first they're doing it to create a demand and then they supply the demand. It just proves the point that there is a demand for it. But the demand must have been created by *yeshivas*.

WH: What about the goal of kiruv rechokim?

RS: This is just an offshoot of *yeshivos*. The main goal of *yeshivos* is to involve students in learning. The *mitzvos* and the studying of *Torah* is the mainstay of *yeshivos*. But a certain portion of the time and energy which every person has to have a certain mission in life, goal in life, is to satisfy the instinct of *klal* work, he can then give the main part of his time to *kiruv rechokim*. Yeshivas help *kiruv rechokim* but I think it would be bad if *yeshivos* would concentrate on it. As students, they have certain functions, to be a melareed learn.

WH: Isn't this purpose accomplished by setting an example?

RS: The example has to be – person has to be a *kl'i* to receive the example. He should be able to reflect on it, understand it. It's good to *mekarev* him, get him to want to learn more. If he's with us he sees the *ma'alos* of a *bochur* that sits and learns. Engrossed in his learning. Before he sees that he sees a football game and gets bored. Many distractions.

WH: One of the problems I've discussed is *parnasa*, when they leave the yeshiva, as many of them do.

RS: I think this problem was more or less at the beginning. After the depression, everything looked dim. But today a normal person shouldn't worry about *parnasa*. First of all, there are business opportunities. Second, he could learn and excel himself in a new field after he leaves. Unless he wants the prestige of a college diploma. But if he's honest with himself he'll go into computers, electronics, without having college. He'll make a little less money, less prestige. But I know of a kid, one of our students in our *Bais Medrash* and *Kollel*, and he got a job in computers because he was whiz in math on his own. He never studied formally. He studied in a school shortly. That's one way. And then there is the Jewish field, *Chinuch*, etc.

WH: I found *Chinuch* most problematic; one, the pay was low. Two, after studying many years in the *Rosh Yeshiva's shiur*; it was really hard to enjoy teaching a class of third graders.

RS: Maybe it's true, but I think that it has changed. I think that life in itself changes. Part of it is having the necessity for *parnasa* forcing him in this position. After forcing in this position, we gain by it. It's a force, but that's how life is. Forces him to do it. One of the reasons that he has to studies and that's one of his *chesronos*, looking for different fields of endeavor, not the field of *Yiddishkeit*. Even if it is a little less in financial status; used to say you can't teach a *bochur* how to make \$10,000; so teach him how to make \$25 a week. I think there is another problem. The problem of living out of town for a yeshiva student, in a Jewish environment; there's a lack of enthusiasm to go out into frontiers. Easier among your own. Live in Boro Park or Williamsburg or even Flatbush, than outside in a little town. Out of town is harder for *chinuch* of their children, bringing up their children, etc. Still in all, they are all over; I was in Los Angeles and one of our students is principal there and two of our fellows teachers; and there are two *kollelim*. I think they've changed the scene. They teach the *Baal Habatim* there; the students there, college is common. I think they've changed the scene in a short time. Same thing is true of other cities; Detroit has a *kollel*, terrific effect. Denver there is a yeshiva there. Stanford. This is in the east, but I'm talking about extreme west, where it's hard to find that kind of Yiddishkeit. People like it too. The yeshivas are not stagnant. They are forging their way ahead. You have cities that change. Elizabeth is probably due to the strong personality of Rabbi Teitz; he created a city out of *yesh m'ayin*, out of nothing.

WH: Are there any differences in the *derech* of Torah Vodaas and other *yeshivos*?

RS: No, not much difference. I think yeshivas more or less depend on the personality of the *Rosh Yeshivos*, their *shittos*, per say.

WH: Does the Rosh Yeshiva see any hope in influencing the conservative Jews in this country?

RS: When our group gains strength and stature, and we should [see] results, and our way of life and everything is good by us, they might be helped. It could be *Agudah's* work. The yeshiva's contribution is to show that this education is a positive one and guarantees existence of Jewish life, and it is the only way of Jewish life, for a true Jewish life, then I think just by becoming more or less strong and not too popularized; can't popularize it, because once you popularize it you water it down. I think Jews lost more by assimilation than by other ways. In America especially. Reform and Conservative is one step closer to being assimilated. The only way Jews remain Jews is the yeshiva world's way of life. The trend is to patch up, making certain *halachos*, this just proves the point of their losing ground. None of the *baal teshuvos* are conservative; if they do it, they go to the extreme, they become orthodox. I think at present you wouldn't find an orthodox Jew becoming conservative. Society had at first, years ago, mingling of different groups, but I think this is finished. We can lose to *am haaratzus*, we can lose through assimilation, but I don't think we can lose to conservatism today. One of the things to influence a child is also to see that being orthodox doesn't mean he has to be poor, he doesn't have the same in luxuries to an extreme, but he can see he can have a nice living. He's not an outcast. At the beginning, I think, when the Jews came here, they suffered economically. The father wants to see his son in a better position. My son will become a better doctor, a dentist...it's the only way out. Today, I think you could be a Jew and he'll find his place.

WH: Is there still problem with the parents of the *bochrim*?

RS: Some of them, because of college; not so much because of the profession but I think it's more or less a livelihood. They want them to have an easier life than they had. They think a professional is easier than a business. Although today I think an accountant is just as easy as a working man.

WH: Yeshiva itself permit *bochrim* to go to college?

RS: Yes. It's limited, only allowed two nights a week. Except in cases where he gets older, wants to finish faster. Individual cases. Usually we allow two nights a week.

WH: What proportion of the *bochrim* attend college?

RS: I'd say 40% of the *bochrim*. Parent's pressure, maybe it's his own decision...sometimes he sees the ideal in being a doctor. We have former *bochrim* who went to become doctors as an ideal. It's a by-product, we don't sponsor it. I think it's still cheaper to go to a *goyish* medical school than to make our own. I think they would overtax the Jewish community to make a Jewish medical school.

WH: What are some of the major challenges facing yeshivas today?

RS: Need a lot of teaching to the parents and to the children about the goal in becoming a *lamden*, and knowing Torah...I think we made it half way but there still is a lot of work.

WH: Is anti-Semitism a serious problem today?

RS: I don't observe so much, but the way I hear, things are changing; Jews are becoming a problem to the American gentile.

Interview with Harav Mordechai Gifter

April 1ST, 1979 10:50-11:50 A.M

WH: What factors(s) are most responsible for the success of yeshivas in America?

RG: Mostly the people who came here after WWII and realized that *Klal Yisroel* has to live by Torah.

WH: What about the growth in the last ten years?

RG: The greatest area of growth has been at the day school level. Yeshivas have sprung up in places where you wouldn't believe it to have been possible. Denver, Pittsburgh, Miami. I'm telling you, who would have thought we would have seen so many *Bnai Torah* in these places. The young men who have the *mesiras nefesh* who are coming out of the yeshivas have made this possible by their own example. They are selfless and devoted individuals and the *baale batim* see this.

WH: Does the Rosh Hayeshiva see any hope of influencing the vast numbers of Conservative and Reform Jews?

RG: I don't know. I can't really comment on that. I know that a few have become baale teshuva especially in Eretz Yisroel.

WH: What should be the major goals of a yeshiva?

RG: To create *B'nai Torah*. Not to create "rabbis" or *marbetzai Torah*. The objective is to turn out people who whatever profession they will go into they will learn.

I want to mention that we have had a program three years in succession in Caracas. Venezuela we have a summer camp. Telz has also created a true Torah community in Montreal, Canada.

WH: Does Telz have a particular *derech* that is unique?

RG: Well, we are unique in the sense that we are one of two yeshivas that have absolutely no connection with college. Us and Lakewood.

WH: Do you have problems making this point clear to the bochorim?

RG: Not really. Through *shmoozim* it's explained to him the supremacy of Torah to everything. It's great value.

WH: It seems that there's a real problem in terms of a person being able to make a living in chinuch?

RG: Yes this is a problem although not in Israel where it's a very good *parnoseh* to be a melamed and go from yeshiva to yeshiva --- that is, if you're good you're in demand. Here, even we pay a teacher \$20,000 a year it doesn't really do much good because he lives in a community where \$20,000 isn't enough to live on and support a family.

Another problem is we lack enough dedicated persons. In Newport, Virginia the rabbi built a while community from nothing. Unfortunately he felt he had to leave because of the chinuch needs of his own children. The problem was no one replaced him and the whole community went down the drain.

A major challenge facing yeshivas today is we need to greatly increase the number of yeshiva students. Compared to how many Jews are being lost a lot needs to be done. We lull ourselves into a false sense of security by the fact that numbers exist --- that we have thousands studying in yeshivas. But there are so many more we have not reached.

Part of the problem is also that every yeshiva is financially strapped. They are so overburdened with maintaining themselves that they have great difficulty going out and starting new programs.

WH: How have yeshivas adjusted to the American scene?

RG: Whatever success we have achieved has come about because we have not compromised. As we say --- every compromise is not necessarily falsehood but every compromise is not necessarily truth either. Our failure, and it

has been a failure in many areas, has been where we have in and compromised. I remember a woman saying to me in 1941, a *teyre* woman --- 'How can I entrust my children to foreigners, to foreign scholars and look what has happened since then, how much we grew.

WH: Hasn't the increased birth rate played a role in the growth of the community?

RG: Sure. There's a greater awareness of Halacha. That there's a *mitzvah* to have children. And here we have to give credit to the Chasidic community for making us even more conscious of this. They have their own way of doing things but in this area they have been very influential.

People are always worrying about *parnoseh*. They forget the last Mishnah in Kiddushin

WH: What is the cause of the higher divorce rate today?

RG: For one thing, people are getting married too young. They're not prepared for marriage.

WH: Does the yeshiva try to prepare them?

RG: I do. I always talk about it in my *shmoozin*. But I wish more would come to me. In fact, in all the years, I know of only one case of divorce from those who went to Telz.

WH: That's quite a record.

RG: It is but you can't live in a vacuum. What happens outside affects the yeshiva too. The Torah community isn't insulated completely. The Rambam says if a community is contaminated, then you have to go to a *midbar* (desert) but, of course, one cannot really go to a *midbar*. And so the *Chazon Ish* says what's a *midbar*? A *midbar* is the four walls of a yeshiva. And you can't help but be influenced if you're in the environment. When you stop outside the yeshiva in New York City, you're in Flatbush or you're in Boro Park and I hold that's almost as bad as Times Square. It's not much different. What we need is a new concept in yeshivas.

WH: Is that why the yeshiva was located in Cleveland?

RG: Not really. We moved here to get away from all the hubbub. We did the same in Israel. We're 12 minutes away from Jerusalem because we didn't want to be right in the city.

You know, Reb Elchonon Wasserman was visiting the U.S. in 1938 and there was this fellow named Bloch. I believe he was in business and he took it upon himself to be Reb Elchonon's chauffeur. Once he went past Times Square. As soon as he entered, Reb Elchonon said: 'What's the matter with this place? It stinks here! You have to understand that Reb Elchonon never looked up in a car. He always looked down because he didn't want to see what was around him. But the smell here simply made him nauseous. And finally he said: 'How can we ever learn Torah in such a city?' You'll find this story in *Or Elchonon*. It was written by Surasky and released in Israel about six months ago. This problem, may I say, is everywhere in New York. It's a problem in the candy stores and in the pizza stores.

Now you take college. This is a part of modern day culture too. It's not an intellectual objection today. It's a question of the atmosphere. I'm telling you, I once went to Columbia University to address the Yavneh group there and I saw, as I walked, people lying on the ground in the grass, kissing and it was like *botei zonos* (houses of prostitution) (*illegible handwritten note inserted*) And the Rosh Yeshivas who allow college --- they don't know. I told them --- 'Come let's go visit a college campus. They don't know what the campus is like. Takeh, they're alien to these things. A fellow told me (Moshe Halevi Spiro) that he went to a college class and there's this man, a math instructor, he's naked to the waist and barefoot, the room is dark and he's burning incense. This is an environment for a Ben Torah?

As far as compromise goes, I will tell you I was a student at Yeshiva University and I my love for Torah grew from there, from the rebbaim there. But when I look back and I see the effects of synthesis it bothers me. Because it led to a search for beauty that is wrong. Where is their status now? From a medical school and a psychology school and a law school that's within a yeshiva. And this means that when a person goes there he's studying secular things *lishmoh*. Whereas when he goes to college at night by the other yeshivas he only doing it to get a job. And there, when the yeshiva allows college, at least they know it for what it is.

Finally let me tell you one more story if you have the time.

WH: Of course, please.

RG: I had a fellow from a prominent Mizrahi type family in Cleveland, Spiro was his name. He came to me and said. 'Look, I want to learn for a year and I want to focus on *Mishnah Berurah* and *halachah* not just *gemorah*. Nu, I said: 'You want to learn, okay. Let's see. Well, he stayed for two years and he learned *gemorah* anyway and he learned the *Rashbah* too. And this is someone whose wife would not ordinarily cover her hair, from that type of family and now she does. And he's getting his Ph.D. I think in psychology. And whenever he sees me, he says: 'What's really important is the Rashbah perspective. That's what I need more of. And that's it. Learning of Torah is the key ingredient. Everything comes from that.

RG: I hope I've been a little helpful to you. There's a fellow Rubin, a Satmarer, who wants to do a study of the Telz community too. He won't be completely positive and I feel that while it may not help it certainly won't hurt. He's a frum person. A woman wanted to do something also from Case Western Reserve but she couldn't do it.

WH: The Rosh Yeshivah has been extremely helpful.

RG: Then good. You might also talk to Keller in Chicago and Kirzner, Twersky, and Lundindky in N.Y. They're all really *B'nai Torah*. And *Hakodosh Boruch Hu* should help you that you should be *matzliach* in this work and people should understand better what yeshivas are trying to do.

WH: Thank you again.

Interview with Harav Hensch Leibowitz

April 6, 1979

WH: What factors might be given for the success of yeshivas since World War II?

RL: As far as the day schools are concerned, and the secondary schools too, there has been a resurgence of interest in *Yiddishkeit*; young people have been disappointed with what secularism has to offer, in terms of substitution, in term of happiness in life, especially for the Jewish people; especially in the early thirties, when people were younger, trying to unburden themselves of their Jewish heritage, pursuing the promise of the new world, social adjustments, in pursuit of happiness, freedom, wide variety of opportunities; and when disappointment set in, that there is no knowledge in the world that can develop human character, but it's been great disappointment to know ideological pursuits and the realization that the outside world is not accepting us with great favour and there is narrow-mindedness and corruption, prejudice and bias, especially toward the Jews. And recently, on the national level, the national Jew, so to speak, has come to realize that perhaps to maintain the Jewish identity, rationalism or Jewish culture, in its vague and empty form, without substantive religious content cannot substitute for what has been the lifspring of our existence; there has been a foundation to our existence which has sustained us through the diaspora. Jews have come to realize that to a certain extent. So, in other words, the general disappointment in the secular ideals, the realization there is a more forceful power, and no scientific discipline has been revised to elevate human character. Also, the Jewish identity, in that sense, has not been maintained and it is this resurgence.

Also the fact that people found that with all the material acquisitions, push button conveniences, we have not found the happiness that were so hotly in pursuit of. There must be something more meaningful to mankind. "Lo al halechem levado yishye haodom." Man does not live by bread alone. And that include every physical, material gain. No matter what sort of life you exist in, move in, there has to be some sort of spiritual satisfaction. The great disappointment with the secular culture; it does not fulfill human needs. In short, searching and yearning for something meaningful and significant, and this is why we have this resurgence to *Yiddishkeit*. This comeback; looking to this culture which has given us eternity, which has given fulfillment, and that is still being pursued. Of course, the course is rocky, and we are not enough manpower to guide properly and to charter the beaten path, veering away, and searching and probing; there is a general revival, so to speak, which caused the expansion of the yeshiva movement. It has come up in this generations that have already been so alien to Torah, and therefore they haven't found the exact course in its entirety and its fullfledgedness. The day school movement does not have enough content especially since the older generation has passed and the newer generation is coming up; parents are so totally ignorant of values, of Jewish values, and they are in control of the policies of the Jewish day school. The day school movement has had its number growing.

Also due to the immigration after the second World War, European Roshei Yeshiva had to transplant their Jews upon the shores; we saw a great many, an influx of religious Jews that has greatly contributed to that spirit of "coming back to the source." But we are afflicted at present, as I've said before, by the fact that the day school movement is rather very weak in a substantive due to the general mainstream of life. Those who direct its educational system, due to their lack of knowledge, and also, to a certain extent, a lack of adequate manpower. It's a vicious cycle, because these schools are so vague in their approach to Torah, so they are reluctant to set positions and live in such an adverse environment. On the one hand, they say there is a resurgence, a rejuvenation, a revival, and yet its content is found greatly wanting. Of course it's a vicious cycle; with adequate manpower they could enter into those communities.

WH: One of the problems cited is that yeshiva graduates don't want to go to teach in out of town communities because of the quality of *Yiddishkeit* and the parnasa. How does one instil in such a young person going out, the dedication that will make him persevere?

RL: I'm trying to follow on the imprint established by my father, who a very deep feeling, faith so to speak, in the invincible strength of Torah a great receptiveness which is retroactive in a (-). And his basic premise was that Torah can reach everywhere if it is carried by people, great talmidei chachomim; it isn't sufficient to be infused with a kind of (-) and to feel that we want to disseminate Torah. We try to send men out to the fields who have learned for many many years, who have spent between 12 and 14 years at the yeshiva, post high school, devoting themselves to the profundity of Torah, and also very seriously to the aspect of mussar, which is the area of Torah

that deals with the human element. Relations, and understanding the human, proves into his greatness, nobility, dignity, frailties. And to develop within them the capacity technique to evolve their sources, to glean sources about *Chazal*, the Torah, humanism, and the human potential for achievement. His methods are projected all throughout Torah imbued with the feeling that Chazal give us the totally encompassing view of the human endeavour and every area of human endeavours. So that they're well equipped, when they come out, of maintaining their own strength, as a result of their own high scholarship, an attainment of a high scholarship standard in both halacha aspect, profundity of learning, which we feel is a mystical power to develop the eternal strengths, forces within us, and the capacity to be able to communicate and to unravel and unveil the beauty of Torah. Must know the relevance of Torah that it deals with every kind of human aspect, human strength, human spirit, human relations, so emphasizing, thereby, its relevance to contemporary living today. So it gives them, first of all, a strength to be able to live a Torah world in a secular environment, and to be able to open the insights of Torah to the laypeople. To present it on their level, and to show them the beauty of Torah; to attract them to it; so, in that way, we feel that, *be'ezras Hashem*, with as much protection as they can have, they are equipped to go out and man their ports, and we hope that, rather than be overwhelmed by the environment, exert a positive impact on it, so that they enhance their own, home, their inner strength and feeling that they can reach out to something that people want, yearn and clamor for; and the people are very definitely affected by the positive teachings of Torah; they themselves gain greater inspiration and strength. Furthermore, they are constantly involved in understanding the mussar aspect of Torah, which is surely stressed in yeshiva, and they are given the tools for academic research and exploration into it. So that they are inspired when they go out with that feeling; this is what they get in yeshiva; a faith in Torah, and a faith in the *Yiddishe neshoma*, and that helps them when they go out to have that coating, to maintain their strength and their tempo in trying to disseminate Torah and exerting an influence on the community and in that way recycle their energies and expand upon them to keep having a greater force.

WH: What are the particular points to emphasize in sending a person out as such?

RL: In general, I think I tried to define them; the tremendous application first the potential; that the ground is now extremely fertile, and people are searching for it, number 1. Number two, the (-) application that rests upon the ben Torah, to cater to those needs of *Klal Yisroel* that it is receptive to at this point. Thirdly, as I mentioned before, to be saturated with faith in the strength of Torah and in their receptivity that it will certainly reach its mark. That is constantly taught at the yeshiva through *chazal*; developing their self and independent way of being able to explore their sources of Torah which are applicable to every question that arises; to find the answer and solution within Torah. In terms of halacha as well as human relations, and to give them many many years of this kind of preparation, where they at once become imbued with the ideal, seeing that they are becoming themselves convinced of its power, and it is with that emunah that they go out and try to fulfill their purpose in life; and we try to present to them at this stage of our history that it's most incumbent, the highest objective, the greatest urgency and immediacy of the need, to serve in that capacity, to answer the needs for *Klal Yisroel*; to respond to that resurgence we experience today. And this kind of training, profundity in learning, gives them that feeling that, *beezras Hashem*, they will be able to serve in that capacity and to relate to all spheres, all circles, the layity, and they will be blessed, with that mystical fire that will protect them from becoming contaminated. They will have a very forceful impact on their community, and thereby give even greater protection to their own anomalies, with this kind of environment in the home, which is saturated with purpose of bringing Yiddishkeit as the highest ideal in life.

All the *ballei teshuva* yeshivos in the Eretz Yisroal are a testimony in that resurgence. It's like we're seeing the prophecy of the *navi*, "*Lo rov l'lechem v'lo tsome la'mayim*." "Not hunger for bread, or thirst for water, but for Hashem". My father had foreseen that many many years back. He made the effort to implant Torah in his students and in a way that will not just give them an emotional inspiration which passes and fades, and is not long lasting, but an inspiration that comes as a result of many many years of Torah study where one is imbued with the beauty and profundity and the mussar aspect which is very much stressed in the yeshiva, as my father learned in Slabodka. So this feeling contributes greatly to the feeling that the students get that its moral values and teachings as derived from Torah directly, can exert a tremendous impact to those one comes in contact with.

WH: What about the question of compromise, that many felt it was necessary to compromise in America? Haven't the years proved this untrue?

RL: That is correct. Torah has the answer to all problems. First we have to consider ourselves part of the *mesorah*. It seems hard, rather to say, that this is something we mentioned in terms of the Torah's outlook. *Mesorah* means

that we proceed in the future with the teachings that we had in the past. It isn't just the printed word that we turn to, but we have had the assistance and guidance of our *Rebbeim* who hasn't turned his learning from the past and in that way we can interpret properly. In other words, even though we have the access to much of the written *Torah Shel Ba'al Peh*, nevertheless, it comes from the mesorah. And that is extremely important, because then we're on the right course. (-) recognize *Daas Torah*; it's not explicitly codified so to speak, but it's the Torah concept, *Daas Torah*, what we call, and those people that carry that with them, that outlook, that conviction, that there is *Daas Torah*, and that we submit to the greater *talmid chachomim* of the previous generation, with their outlook, and that keeps the checks and balances in place. So through them we have an answer to all the problems that confront us. So when we send our men out into the field, we feel very strongly that we must provide faculty for learning institutions throughout the states; there is an equal need for providing rabbinical leaders for every community. The day school movement is suffering from the fact that they have no proper guidance; the parents must be parents who have control over the educational systems in their communities; they too have to be taught, as well as their children what Torah Yiddishkeit is and what their program should be and what should be expected of a day school education to provide for its student body. So we have to work with them; the rabbi from the community is supposed to be the lay teacher; for the adult people, the parents, they must act together with the school of education, with the young, and in that way we can guide them properly in the course of Torah. An additional aspect that would (-) the strength of an individual who is out in a rabbinical capacity or a school setup, if he is attached so to speak to that chain of communication, and he accepts *Daas Torah*, and he is willing and understanding to consult superior judgment in Torah and all its aspect in relation to the world, then it's additional insurance for the world for greater protection from the depraved pressures that may be exerted upon him. Because, in that way, we are enlightened as to the Torah view where to stand and where to give. It requires great judgment, superior judgment, with *Daas Torah*. Sometimes it's not clearly defined in the Shulchan Aruch, but as a result of a cumulative understanding of Torah, how to act under certain given situations, as you find in the . In the early chapters where he says you've got to be very knowledgeable to understand when you're dealing with, engaged in bringing back people who have strayed, be careful in how to approach it; where to give and where to stand; which issues cannot be compromised and where you can resort to certain methods to bring them back, which will not be detrimental, but will, on the contrary, enhance it. It requires great wisdom, great understanding, and superior judgment. So both the fact that one is a great Talmid Chochom and knows a lot of mussar he will be able to employ his intuitive sense of daas Torah that we expect from him, plus the fact that he will following with his superior judgment his predecessor, and in that way we find an answer to all complicated problems that present itself. Whereas one who is now so deeply imbued with the faith in *Daas Torah* and the superior judgment of this line of communication, or who is not himself well versed, might take the wrong steps and in that way, not only not achieve his objectives in the community, but himself be falling prey to the pressures and become victimized by the circumstances and cease to be of any contributing value for the course of Torah in the community that he is trying to serve.

WH: How does the Chofetz Chaim yeshiva differ from other yeshivas today?

RL: That's a difficult question, I'd rather not discuss. I think I've tried to present it. It poses a great danger to themselves and subsequently to the community they're attempting to serve. This feeling that more depth and more understanding aids against the formidabilities of going into the field to confront the difficult situation, and it gives him so much more strength, that will buy him the greatest satisfaction in life, doing what he is doing. Continuously inspired by drawing upon the sources that he has been exposed to, given the tools and instruments to constantly derive from its sources, to open a chazal and to see its beauty and to be able to communicate it to others and to know what their view would be on any given subject, to understand the superiority of Torah judgment of our teachers which follows their interpretive skills of Torah, which

WH: What about the type of guidance they need for their everyday life?

RL: Mussar is misunderstood to mean just when you lecture someone a wrong that he's committed. Understanding of chazal, ramban, seforno, rashi, medroschim, gemoras, to deal with the human element as composed of three parts: chochmos hamussar, which we use the same academic approach as to learning itself, reading between the lines, glean and probe into its depths, and extract that meaning which we can unveil as a world of beauty and secretive insight into human makeup; this is the *chochmos hamussar*, an academic discipline to be able to train one to be able to decipher and delve in depths into the commentaries, chzal. Especially that deals with the human aspect. Then we have the limud ha (-) . Which is the emotional aspect of these concepts which we have to apply in our daily life, in situations where we don't have too much time to think, as we are engaged in the busy traffic of

life, and to conduct ourselves in a pattern of Torah, following in consistency with its ethical and moral values. It has to become part of you for the reason that one has to have reflex action under certain circumstances; secondly, must be sensitized to a certain feeling because these human values are not codified, and it is only from the beginning depth that it becomes part of our emotional makeup, and we can translate under different conditions. Becoming part of us, through the limud hamussar vehisvaylus, it gives us the strength to be able to dispel rationalizations which would make our actions and behaviour consistent with our desires, so that we can look within ourselves, with an emotional internal absorption of these ideal; then we can find the truth and dispel certain predispositions that we have. Then we have the chinuch hamussar, which is the third area, which is to implement into action those ideals that we've derived emotionally; so that it's carried over from the emotions into the act, out stage. It deepens it further that way and gives us greater strength. We do place a lot of stress on the *chochmos hamussar*, on the knowledge on the academic discipline, delving into *chazal* and seeing the depth and relevance and this opens up our understanding to what limud hamussar means, which is derived emotionally and chinuch hamussar to implement it in our daily lives.

WH: How extensive is the program of *chumash* and *tanach* at the Chofetz Chaim yeshiva?

RL: In the *chochmas hamussar shmuss*, we train them, with the instruments of learning rahi and raban in depth and we're giving them the capacity to be able to learn on a higher level of torah, nevim, and cesvim; of course, with the limited time we have, we try as much as we can, and when they come out of yeshiva, they have the equipment to teach in that fashion, to deliver sermons relating to Torah, resort to foreign sources without having to buy manuals for public speaking. Because public speaking is right in chazal, and it comes across with the greatest force because this is what the Jewish heart really wants; what the Torah has to say about living and the intricacies of life, and its meaning.

WH: What is the reason, for the learning of *inyonim* in gemora, rather than covering ground?

RL: Actually, we follow a program that combines both the development of the student into getting into depth maturely and to be able to come out with a degree of proper understanding, to be able to maturely render a decision in halacha, based on sources, with a mature understanding. We also have the afternoon and night *sedorim* dedicated to covering, going through a *masechta*; but we feel that certain hours of the day have to be spent in the style of a laboratory form, to develop the capacity of a person to think and to understand and to translate in depth a line of sequence from Sinai, so that he can maturely handle everything that is in print, with the feeling that we can rely on his judgment. That takes a great deal of work, and concentration, and development of the thought process. Therefore, it's slow movement; more of a discussion type than a lecture call, whereby we indulge in showing the student the process by which certain judgments are achieved, giving him the ready made revelations that we feel are gleaned, that the teacher feel he's gleaned from the commentaries, from chazal. But we go into it, show him the method by which we arrive at it; we challenge his own individuality in training, how to guide him; show him a way to use the system of self-development, gaining that skill.

WH: How does the Rosh Yeshiva deal with a parent who comes to the yeshiva and says, "What is my son going to do for a *parnasa*?"

RL: We feel that we are not neglecting his future. We don't believe in depriving a student of the facts of life he will have to face in the future. We try to get him involved in Torah and mussar with a clear understanding of what life is and what the problems might be that he will have to face if he goes out. He should not live without thinking of what his future might be, unless he's so strong in faith and *bitochon* and understanding of Torah. Together with the understanding of life, if he feels it's not necessary for him to prepare himself for any kind of livelihood, to gain a livelihood, he is realistic; first, and foremost, I've been trying to convey realism to the student, so that he faces the world with a clear view, as much as possible, of what it means, and he estimates his own inner strength that he has to meet it, the challenges he will face. We feel that the training that he gets at the yeshiva, and given training in skills that are essential to enter in a classroom situation, and the field of Rabbinics, such as public speaking, practical Rabbinics. This year we had classes in methodology and homoletics that last couple of years, and we hope to resume it.

WH: What people going into business, and other areas?

RL: Very few of our students go into other areas than the fields of chinuch and rabbonus. Very very few.

WH: What percent?

RL: Definitely more than half. Perhaps more than eighty percent.

WH: What is the main goal of the yeshiva?

RL: A yeshiva today must serve the spiritual needs of *Klal Yisroel*. Whoever is qualified to serve indirect capacity of teaching of Torah, whether it's through the pulpit, adult education classes, or through the classroom situation, this is its primary obligation; of serving *Hashem* in *klal Yisroel*. This is what we try to incorporate into our student body and we've had a good success. When we see people are not suited for the above mentioned fields, there may be some personality problems or speech defects, whereby we feel that he will not be able to communicate, these young men we try in the same manner to inculcate within them a predominant and primary appreciation of the need to life today, to be melamed Torah, but in view of the fact that they cannot serve full time in terms of a Rabbinate or a teacher, when they go into other fields they should recognize it that this is only a means to an end, and any spare time must be dedicated to meeting the needs of the community, in terms of giving classes, leadership in the community, in terms of being involved, being mekarev rebhokim, give our home to college students to show them the way of life of frumkeit, Torah.

WH: What is the current position of the yeshiva with respect to college?

RL: We limit it very much; only two nights a week, so that this will not interfere, to any great extent, with his pursuit of Torah. Our way of life requires total concentration, mental capacity to be able to be part of a competitive society. Secondly, we allow people to go to school because in order to avoid parental friction, which can in turn reduce concentration. A psychological pressure bearing effect. Which is disruptive, Thirdly, in situations where we feel that this particular student is not equipped to earn a livelihood in the fields that we promote so strongly, then he must have a profession to be able to engage in. Fourthly, one has to make his own decision. If he doesn't feel secure enough in being able to maintain himself, to earn a livelihood in the profession that we have. Of course, the profession is only minor, it's gaining a livelihood while dedicating himself to his purpose in life; if he doesn't feel secure in that, then, in order to give him peace of mind, menuchas hanefesh, and we allow a student to make his own decision as to whether he would like to pursue a second line of defense.

WH: What about the college's negative influence upon the student?

RL: From our experience, the great concentration upon the depths of Torah puts one on the pulse of Sinai, mystically speaking, he's involved in depths of Torah, of learning, mussar, which is also psychological, besides mystical, and we give him this exposure to chazal, together with humanistic values, we've found that, Boruch Hashem, students are sufficiently protected against secular influences by seeing in a comparative way the beauty of Torah which dwarfs everything else which the secular world has to offer.

WH: Someone suggested we have a separate college, where yeshiva guys could go.

RL: That also has inherent dangers. We've felt had no need.

WH: There's been a significant rise in the divorce rate. What might be some of the contributing factors?

RL: This is a very explosive situation. There are many contributing factors; the society we live in, divorce is not considered tabbo anymore as it is used to be; the young age at which married is a contributive factor, when not mature. I'd rather not mention more.

WH: How does the yeshiva give the students to deal with the reality that not everyone can be a *Gadol Batorah*?

RL: To give them that selflessness, to understand that it is our duty and our obligation to develop our potential, and this is the definition of achievement of the greatest success. It's not on a comparative basis, being the greatest, being the best, but to try to develop my potential to the utmost, and that is my fulfillment; and also to understand and appreciate the value of every mile gained in learning of how much it means and how much it adds to a personality, how much it adds to his capacity to disseminate, to appreciate that, and then one finds satisfaction without feeling this vanity, this false illusion. We know that Hillel had 80 students, and the least, number 80, was Reb Yochana ben Zakai, the one who survived as being the worst student of the class, and he contributed so lavishly to the Klal Yisroel. He had the greatest happiness in what he was doing.

WH: Have you seen changes in the bochrin over the years, in terms of type of bochrin, their aspirations?

RL: This opens up a new area altogether. In terms of the aspirations of the boys that are in yeshiva now, part of the yeshiva society here is, as I've mentioned, we try to acquaint them, help them to dispel any kind of illusions of their capacity. The reality of life, the reality of his capacity. However, in viewing the appreciation of Torah that he is getting, his potential, it is the greatest achievement, the greatest satisfaction, and one should feel in that achievement. We try to stress constantly that we must be able to feel satisfied only when it becomes our Rosh Yeshiva. If opportunity does not present itself, or his capacity is limited, if he's reduced only to teaching aleph bais in a day school, then he is happy because he is doing his utmost and is serving his *tafkid*, fulfilling his purpose. He is contributing to the cause of Torah, following Hashem. In today's day, chazal say there aren't enough people to serve in that capacity, it's amitsva to go out and do it. This has to be stressed and constantly emphasized that illusions are to be dispelled about one's capacity. Must appreciate the steps taken forward in understanding Torah better and clearer. This is invaluable. Responsibility and epitomy of achievement is to serve Klal Yisroel in whatever capacity it might be. We constantly repeat what I've learned from my father, Reb Chiya taught students who were on a very basic level, tinokos shel bais Rabon, though his knowledge reached far beyond that.

WH: People seem to know this but it doesn't seem to sink in.

RL: It's very very difficult of course, but somehow, we hope we get this across to a great extent through mussar, personal contact, and especially when one dispels his illusions about his grandchildren, so he comes to grips with the situation that he is in. He begins to see his own real place in life. So he becomes adjusted to that. It's not just a certain bitter experience that he confronts; he lives though with it all through yeshiva. It's brought to him through the learning, rebbeim, etc.

Interview with Rabbi Herman Neuberger

RN: You not only should look at the system of the *yeshiva gedola* but also the high school. You should also note the effect that it has on the total Jewish community, in Baltimore. The difference between the community 20 years ago and the community today is striking. What I'm referring to specifically, before you go into details, of the yeshiva as it is now, let's look at the community. There are over 350 families that are *Shomer Shabbos*. 90% of those came from other communities and stayed in Baltimore. There are professionals. There are lawyers, accountants, they work for social security, professors in different schools. And they settled in this community. The fact of it is that every education endeavour, every Jewish endeavour is led today by former Ner Yisroel fellows. For example, *Chofetz Chaim*, *Bais Yaakov*, *Vaad Hakashrus*, *mikve*. While 20 years ago the *balabatim* in all those enterprises were European-trained people who unfortunately were passed their prime of life and gradually passed on. There wouldn't have been any following because the American-trained people outside the yeshivas weren't ready to take over and didn't take an interest. And so if it wouldn't have been for the yeshiva, who knows what would have happened. They stepped in and took over these responsibilities and discharged them. And were effective. And today it is an environment of not defensive *ben torah* – he's on the offensive. He's proud. He's very satisfied. He has a very good family life. You used to have to excuse yourself that you're *frum* (Orthodox). Here it's a matter of fact. They're leading the community. To a point where the organized Jewish community, the Federation people take very much part of this. I feel that this is very much today an integral part of the community.

WH: Are they happy about that development?

RN: I don't know if they are happy or not. They take it as a matter of fact. Of course there is still a lot to be done. They are not taking an active role in the Federation's fund-raising. They simply don't have the means. But from a sociological point of view, they are very noteworthy. So much to be said about that, which is an interesting phenomena.

WH: I've been coming to the realization that the Orthodox community as whole over the U.S. tends to be more of a yeshiva centered community than a community centered community. In other words, it seems to me, with notable exceptions, many communities revolve around the yeshivas that are affiliated with them. And that's especially true out of town. In, Cleveland, in certain parts of New York.

RN: Would you specify closer. They're only concerned about the yeshivas or the communities through the yeshivas.

WH: It seems as though the portrait of the community and the responsibilities that the community attributes to the yeshiva in many cases give it more of a community orientation. For example, I think the community expects the yeshiva to do more about finding people jobs, people who go to yeshivas.

RN: That's a natural thing. But I thought you were talking about yeshivas that are isolated but take an interest ... The Jewish Community center wants to open its new facility, not its existing facility, on Shabbos. Baltimore is the only community of the 18 largest communities in the United States and Canada which has the Jewish Community Center closed on Shabbos. There is a strong movement to open it. The people around the yeshiva are spearheading a drive that it should not happen, and we have a better than fair chance to be effective in that area.

WH: Partly because people from the yeshiva are involved in the community itself?

RN: That's right. We are in the process now of getting over 6,000 signatures on a petition, protesting the possible opening.

WH: A lot of the guys I went to yeshiva with are active in the community. One of the facts which is undeniable is that over the past 20, 30 years, since World War II, yeshivas have grown tremendously in size and in numbers. Obviously it's partly due to a natural increase in population. People came here after World War II, they had children, and their children began attending yeshivas. To what extent is the growth of yeshivas, in terms of students attending, due to the increase in population? To what extent would you say that it's an absolute increase irrespective of population? Simply more and more parents feel it's incumbent on them to send their children to yeshivas.

RN: The increase in population, I don't think, is the product of boys who go to yeshivas now, at this particular time. The families, which were started 25 years ago, did not have the number of children which the families started 10 years ago had. So we're getting the benefit now of the children of the families started 25, 30 years ago.

WH: The baby boom is over.

RN: Yes. But right now the guys who got married in the last 10 or 15 years have many more children than those who got married 20 and 30 years ago. So right now we are not the beneficiary of this increase. We are the beneficiary of another necessity. And this is that 30 years ago an observant Jew could think of a choice of sending his son or daughter to a secular college and he or she may remain as *frum* as he was. Today the chances have tremendously diminished in that area. So the choice of not sending to a yeshiva has been reduced to a very, very small number. So any conscientious Jew who wants his child to grow up to be at least as much as he is has very little choice but to send him to yeshiva. This realization has come about with a great number of people.

WH: What other factors would you cite to account for the success of the yeshivas?

RN: The degeneration, the polarization of our society. This is one of the facts of the... Either it is the total loss of values or a definite acceptance of a prescribed set of values. I think that the uncertainties of the sixties has disappeared in an area where people want to know where they're going.

WH: I guess I could explain at this point that the focus of what I'm doing now is to deal with, if we take it as a given that Jewish people survived because of their following of Torah, then it follows that the institution which has been responsible for conveying the essence of that religion is a very important one within the community and has been historically. I was rather amazed to find that there are no sociological, contemporary views of yeshivas and there seems to be among Jewish academic intellectuals very little awareness of the contribution of this institution. For example, Lucy Davidowitz who did extensive work on the European Jews knows very little about yeshivas. It's a surprising gap and should be filled. Unfortunately, many people tend to think of Orthodox Jews in terms of Chasidim only. They're exotic. My aim is to show how much the survival is geared to the religion.

RN: Anyone who went to yeshiva who is not a *shomer Shabbos* even if he goes to *Shul* on *Shabos* does not consider himself an observant Jew. People who don't go to yeshiva think we are an establishment of old values.

WH: You might want to go a little further and ask how many times a week do you go to *minyan*. You might want to ask as a way of assessing what was the last book you read. Those are more indirect measures that give us clues as to what a person is doing. If you ask people generally they respond in a way they feel they ought to respond.

RN: Another question you should ask is what organizations are you active in.

WH: That's not a value question. That's a factual question.

RN: How many hours a month do you spend on the work?

WH: If you agree, I could show you the questions. And you could add any questions that you have.

RN: You should write that you're making a study of American yeshivas. And you singled them out to find out what happened to them afterwards. In the book, refer to Ner Yisroel as a yeshiva. It would be self-serving.

WH: What I'm interested in is making a series of in-depth interviews with Roshei Yeshivas, with faculty, with present and former students of yeshivas, but more representative in terms of getting an idea of the scope of the issues. It would gain far wider acceptability if people would see some figures. Figures can only focus on more superficial questions. They can't ask questions like how do you feel the yeshiva experience has affected you.

RN: This will become a very subjective answer.

WH: A lot of people who contribute to yeshivas are themselves not observant. How does this come about? Do they see it in terms of Jewish survival?

RN: This is something I'd like to say off the record.

WH: Is it possible to say what proportion, generally speaking, of contributions that come into a yeshiva are raised from teas and dinners as opposed to individuals?

RN: In our case, 90% are not from dinners and teas.

WH: What is the purpose of these teas and dinners, if only 10% is raised from them?

RN: It depends on the institution. Some institutions have their whole income from them.

WH: Do you have a reading of what's the case in institutions in general on this particular score?

RN: People like to be known that they are giving support. This can be done by being honoured. They give because they are being honoured. You have to have a dinner. This is off the record again. This is not normally the case. I would say it depends from institution to institution.

WH: What proportion of contributions to this yeshiva have come from anonymous donors?

RN: Very few.

WH: It's considered to be the highest form of *tzedaka* (charity).

RN: Do you mean anonymous to the institution?

WH: No. I mean someone who want to give but doesn't want a plaque.

RN: Oh, that's quite frequent. I would say it's half and half.

WH: What proportion comes from people who used to go here? Including parents.

RN: Over 25%. Alumni and parents.

WH: What proportion of students who come here receive some sort of scholarship?

RN: 85%.

WH: In many cases is it part of federally-funded programs like work-study?

RN: I would say that the federally-funded programs cover less than 20% of our tuition. The program is not benefitting the yeshiva. All the programs that you have benefit the student. It enables the student to pay tuition.

WH: Do you take in *baaley tshuvah* (Jewish people who become religious) at the beginning level?

RN: Yes. Both at the high school and at the yeshiva level. There is a special *shiur* (session) for late-starters.

WH: One of the things I've become aware of is the problem of jobs. If a student learns in a yeshiva for 8, 9 years, there aren't that many jobs available. Let's say he wants to continue learning after *kollel*. He wants to continue to be in *chinuch* (education). There aren't that many jobs available at the high school or *Bais Medrash* level. He's presented with the opportunity of being a *rebbe* in the 4th grade.

RN: Let me divide up the question. Half of our students go to secular schools. Their professional goals are determined by the subjects they take: accountancy, law, and social services, whatever. For them, the yeshiva does very little in finding them a job. The other half is in a different category. Whenever someone comes to us and says that this is the last year he will be in *kollel*, we try to help him find a proper place. However if we approach a boy or young man who is in the *kollel* five or six years and tell him now about looking for a job, it is a most devastating experience for him. It breaks him down spiritually and morally.

WH: Even if that's an accepted pattern. If most people are told after a certain time.

RN: This is the point. These young men go under the assumption that they have to learn as long as they can. And the initiative that they stop learning must come from them. Because if the yeshiva tells the man he should look for a

job it means that we are voiding his standing as a *kollel* young man. That we are voiding his existence as a potential *godol betorah* (great in knowledge of Torah) which he may never achieve. That we just don't believe in his future. After all, he feels that he is making tremendous sacrifices, whether it is by necessity, circumstance, or conviction, but the fact is he is living on absolute minimum. He has foregone much of the economic opportunities which he could have had in order to sit and learn. His learning is not appreciated.

WH: Do you have any students here whose parents or in-laws are wealthy enough so he can learn for 20 years, if he wants to?

RN: Yes.

WH: Are there some who are doing this?

RN: Very few. There are some, but very few. This is a certain possibility. This is a difficult task. However, if you have someone who wants a job we will go all out to try to get him a job.

WH: But the demographics of it would seem to indicate that there are fewer choice jobs available today than there were before. And I expect that one of the motivations for opening up branch yeshivas on the part of other yeshivas has been to provide jobs for people.

RN: That is correct. It poses a problem.

WH: Financially it seems that part of the problem is that they spend an inordinate amount of money on starting the yeshiva in order to provide jobs for a few people, when the question is the return worth the investment?

RN: That's a pertinent question. I have some very strong opinions about it. It's a very valid observation. The point is I feel that a yeshiva should grow not because people need jobs but because the locale needs a yeshiva.

WH: On this question, what happens? What job? Say he's not trained to be an accountant or an attorney.

RN: So he's looking for a job. We're trying to analyze his capabilities. And try to fit the capabilities to the job. There are openings in high schools, not necessarily in *mesivtas*. We make inquiries. We get constantly demands for teachers. On the elementary level we certainly don't begin to have enough people as the jobs are open.

WH: A principal of a high school told me that there are certainly jobs for *rebbeim* on the elementary school level. The problem is to find good *rebbeim* who can relate to students at that age. And he perceived that there was a problem in terms of yeshivas in general successfully imparting to their own *bochurim* the idea it's a laudable goal to want to teach on an elementary school level. But as far as I can see, if you're going to spend 6 or 7 hours teaching elementary school students you're exhausted by the time you come home. It's easier for a person who is a lawyer to sit down and learn in the evening than it is for someone in *chinuch* who deals with 8-year-old children. Because he has more time to spend. Part of the value of this policy that Ner Yisroel is pursuing of sending people out to the community in all walks of life has been to give them professionals that enable them to learn a couple of hours a day.

RN: The point is this. It is extremely important for the personal development of an individual that he has time to learn. You cannot make this the center focus of his professional intent, however. From an over-all point of view you have to figure where is this individual most effective. If you delineate his area of effectiveness, then it has to work around in such a way that he not lose his personal worth by not learning, and so on. You work in such a way that he has time, energy, and willpower to learn a few hours of the day.

WH: What proportion of the *bochurim* who learn here for 4 or 5 years go into *chinuch* related occupations and what proportion go into other areas.

RN: I would say that between 60 or 70% go into the rabbinate and *chinuch* related areas. And between 30 and 40% go into non-*chinuch* areas.

WH: Then I'd like to get back to another area. You said that the baby boom is over. That means that there will be less students and less jobs.

RN: Yes. This is true. However, there is another element. There is a wider circle of people who send children to yeshivas than before. So that will maybe offset.

WH: That's an interesting question.

RN: My concern is with this. My observation is that with few exceptions a male teacher who is over 50 is not very effective in elementary school education. The enthusiasm you need you just cannot produce at that age. So how do we assume the responsibility of advising people to go to elementary school when their effective professional life ends much earlier than the normal retirement age of 65 or 70.

WH: No one has raised this issue.

RN: It does not apply to high schools. Where the enthusiasm of the teacher is the major factor in being effective is an elementary school teacher. And this cannot be produced. A number of suggestions have been made. One is that they should be given an opportunity to grow so that when they become 50 they would be removed to high school. Or at least to 8th grade.

WH: What are the problems with that suggestion?

RN: The problem is that you demand a much greater competency in the subject matter, more commitment in 8th and high school than in 4th or 2nd.

WH: I suppose it's possible that a person teaching 3rd grade for 20 years his mind has been functioning on a lower level for a long time.

RN: Right. But knowing that in 10 years from now he will have to teach a higher grade, provisions be made. That he be given the opportunity to grow into a situation. This is one solution.

WH: I see some immediate logistic problems. The yeshivas are not contractually affiliated with one another.

RN: Exactly. We have failed to a great extent to make Jewish education professional. It is still an idealistic enterprise. This may help a 22-year-old boy to say I want to do something for the world. I want to become a *mechanech* (educator). But as he gets older and gets more of a feeling of obligation for his family, to give his children certain opportunities, and so on, he may feel sorry for himself because of its limitations, so he may go to school and become an accountant, an insurance salesman, or what not. And the teaching becomes a stepping stone till he has this opportunity which is very unfortunate. These are things which have come of age. Will become very pertinent. I don't have the answers for anything.

WH: On a broader level, but somewhat related to his question, what do you perceive as being some of the most important goals of the yeshiva?

RN: A yeshiva has one main obligation. To create the basis on which can be founded a full and meaningfully Jewish Torah type life. That's very broad. That means that you know the pertinent *hashkafas* (view-points), how to learn, that you have the tools to learn yourself, teach your children, that you have the formula to take advantage of the world and the best of our heritage. We are definitely not primarily a professional school. We are not primarily to train for any profession. Our task is to make thus type of tool which I tried to describe before. The profession is secondary. It is very important. Because if he is in the wrong profession all that the yeshiva has tried to do for him will be destroyed because he doesn't have the right environment in which to function. It becomes important, but only as a secondary factor. It cannot be the influence which decides the guidepost or the perimeter of the first.

WH: How about the issue of *kiruv rechokim* (bringing near the far ones)?

RN: This is part of being a Jew. This is part of the whole package. Because if you don't have the *achrayus* (responsibility) for your fellow Jew, you lock yourself in your own Yiddishkeit.

WH: If one had to give a priority in terms of the growth question, between the role of the home, between the changing factors of the outside world, the strengths of the community, the role of the yeshiva *ketonas*, is there any factor that you would say is primarily responsible among those? One that led into the others.

RN: It's very difficult to generalize it.

WH: I guess I should add one other thing. The leadership role played by various people in the Jewish community. The *roshei yeshiva* have been instrumental in the development of the yeshivas, in this country. A charismatic leader can have a tremendous effect on the community.

RN: Yes. I think it would give an erroneous picture if we would generalize the answer to your question. I interview every parent who comes in...

Interview with Rabbi Dr. Joseph Kaminetzky

9/18/77

RK: It's a very good question and I don't know how to answer it. I think that anybody who wanted to go to a yeshiva found a place to go. Unfortunately my experience was that quite a number of fellows who landed up in the Seminary that was one of the problems. But I don't think they went to the Seminary because they didn't have a yeshiva to go to. They were tempted by what the Seminary offered. As against those who went to the yeshiva. I'm talking about Y.U. They were given more money. They were given more opportunities. Many of them didn't go out of conviction. I mean I don't think they changed their point of view until they went to the Seminary. But I think there was dissatisfaction with the program at the yeshiva. And that's one of the problems you're going to come up against. And that is that they felt the yeshiva program was too *Gemora*-centered and they didn't have too broad an understanding of the rest of Judaism. I can give you my experience very frankly.

WH: You grew up here?

RK: I grew up in this country. There was not enough *mussar* (ethics). There was not enough *hashkafas* (viewpoints). As a matter of fact the thing that saved me was that somebody in the yeshiva picked me up and I got to meet Reb Isaac Sherer of Slabodka and things of that sort. But I couldn't answer that question. I think that before World War II there were enough yeshivas. New yeshivas were equipped.

WH: One of the things that people have been telling me that the arrival of so many people to the shores during and after the Holocaust fundamentally affected the growth of Orthodoxy in this country. What direction were things heading in before this massive influx?

RK: I'm convinced and I'm biased in this point of view the job was done by influx but the job was done by Torah Umesorah. By Reb Mendelovitz and his conception. I always put this very dramatically and I would say even poetically. The thing that Torah Umesorah did through Reb Mendelovitz and the founding of Torah Umesorah was that I always like to say the lights went out in Europe, the lights of Torah, and there was a conviction that they had to be put on here. And it started before. Although it started in 1944, by then the influx was beginning, but I think there were a number of forces which contributed to the growth of the day school movement. And it was this, the day school movement, which more than anything else, and I say I'm biased, contributed to the growth of Orthodoxy. There is no doubt that the influx of so many of the Jews who managed to get here after Shanghai and so on also did a great deal but things had started before.

WH: When was Torah Umesorah started?

RK: 1944.

WH: Actually it was started around the time many of these people started coming.

RK: That's right. Mendelovitz could not have founded Torah Umesorah spiritually without Reb Aharon Kotler, without Reb Reuven Grozovsky, without Reb Elya Meir Bloch, without the Lomzer rosh yeshiva, Rabbi Gordon. These were all of the people who are on our charter. I think you ought to get hold of Dr. Simson Weiss while he is still here. I think he's now here at Touro. He was really the founding person, professional in Torah Umesorah.

WH: I would like to know how Rabbi Mendelovitz helped enhance the growth of yeshivas in America. I'm thinking more of the *yeshivas gedolos* (higher yeshivas).

RK: I think that he was the one who really founded Torah Vodaath. I don't know the history of Torah Vodaath, but he not only founded Torah Vodaath but he was in the tradition, and this is the important thing to emphasize about Rabbi Mendelovitz, of Reb Chaim Ozer Grodzinsky. He was in the tradition of the Chazon Ish. He wasn't partisan. He wasn't only concerned about his own yeshiva. He was interested in the yeshiva movement. As a matter of fact the first biography that was written, not a very good biography, about Rabbi Mendelovitz was written by a Dr. Lefkowitz. His son has a series of homes here. In it he indicates the selflessness of Rabbi Mendelovitz. He felt that he was building the yeshivas in America. "In the Matter of the Spirit." That's available in the reprint of Torah Umesorah.

WH: You're saying that the growth of yeshivas has to be due to a large extent to Torah Umesorah. Are you saying it was the organizational structure, the vision of particular individuals, the times themselves? How would you break that down?

RK: There were a number of reasons, for the founding of Tora Umesorah, for its work. I always say that when Torah Umesorah got started and I started to have personal experiences I always refer to the first trip across the country. My first trip across the country, somewhere it's written up, was in 1947. I came to Minneapolis. I happened to be working for a *yeshiva ketonah* (elementary school) and getting the people interested. They took me one night to the hotel where there was a UJA or something gathering. A famous singer was singing *Ani Maamin* (I believe) and everybody in the room was crying. The mood was a very desperate one, a brown mood, like I say. But then when I came back, after 1948, it was a combination of the Holocaust and the reaction of the Jews to the Holocaust, reaction to the State of Israel, express desire for identity which sent the kids to our school. So these were the forces that were at work. At that time the *yeshivas gedolos* were pretty much limited. One a large scale. To Reb Yaakov Yosef, to Reb Yitzchak Elchanan, Chaim Berlin. I don't know if Chaim Berlin was as such a force as Torah Vodaath, in those days.

WH: Why do you say that?

RK: Because Torah Vodaath brought a few fellows to go because of, I don't know whether I want you to quote this. Rabbi Mendelovitz was much more popular than Rabbi Hutner, who had not yet settled himself, so to speak. Rabbi Mendelovitz was, in my estimation, a much more charismatic personality. So I think Torah Vodaath was a great factor. I come back to your first question. This is only from recollection. I don't know how scientific or objective it is. The idea was to do away with the *amaraztus* (ignorance) that was prevalent in the state of Jewish education in this country. The whole emphasis was on getting the children. The *yeshivas gedolos* were in a way in their formative states. They weren't at that time before World War II as popular as they are today.

WH: It must have been difficult to convince the parents of the importance in a situation where they didn't have a clear image of that being a direction to pursue.

RK: That's right. Our emphasis was on getting them into the *yeshivas ketones*. At that time you didn't even think in terms of *mesivtas* (higher yeshivas). That was the thing that came later. I can't pinpoint exactly when.

WH: What proportion of the growth of yeshivas today is attributed to actual real growth and what proportion to a natural increase in population? Would the figures have been the same in the 1940's as they are today if there would have been the same population then as there is in the 1970's? Or is it due to the persuasiveness and power of the yeshiva movement itself in attracting new converts to its movement?

RK: That's a good question. I can't give it to you statistically because I'm not interested in statistics. I get the feel and we get the feel as we travel. I may answer that question very obliquely. But I want to tell you I don't think it had anything to do with population. I mean offhand. It wasn't demographic. I don't know the birthrate. It's gone down considerably. But what were the factors. This is important. When you say yeshivas do you mean gedolos or ketonos?

WH: The two seem to have gone hand in hand.

RK: What happened here? Who were the fellows we were able to get interested in yeshivas? Some of them had been in yeshiva. For instance in Camden, New Jersey, to give you an example. My greatest help was a person who had once been in Torah Vodaath who had once met Rabbi Mendelovitz. He wasn't a religious fellow. But he felt that for identity you had to have a *yeshiva ketana* in his neighborhood. Another factor was a graduate of Torah Vodaath or Y.U. who was in the city. He had a *talmud torah*. He saw boys who were sent away to yeshiva and that was hard. He had his own children. He didn't want to send away his own children. So he said I may as well found a yeshiva in my town. So I won't have to send these boys away. It was these cells of people who had maintained, this is a very important sociological factor it seems to me, their Orthodoxy in spite of everything.

One of my own men want to Vancouver and I was trying to console him that he was so far away. I developed a whole theory of encapsulation. That you can watch the growth of your boys here and you're the rabbi in the community. It may be a diversion but it's an interesting point. If you would be in New York there might be all kinds of forces that would take your kids away from Yiddishkeit. It was these people that had a feeling for

Orthodoxy who against tremendous odds, and it didn't matter how many children. Some communities didn't have enough children. But they decided to save our community and to continue the survival of this community.

WH: Geographically leaving the safe world of New York City results in the spread of Torah beyond the boundaries of the city. Would you say that there has been growth in New York City beyond the natural increase in population itself?

RK: The growth of yeshivas in New York City is ascribable to the influx of more Orthodox Jews. I come back to your other question. Orthodoxy became more popular. There is a great deal of difference between the average even modern Orthodox Jew today than there was before, the war. Because he's much more intensive. My friends for instance, in our youth we weren't frankly as careful as we are today. This is another reverberation of the meaning of the day school movement. *Lehashiv lev avos al bonim* (to return the heart of the fathers on the sons). *Al yidey bonim* (through the sons). Through our children. It was my children who made me personally more religious, more observant, more devoted to Torah. These were all the forces.

WH: What do you yourself see as the most important goal of the yeshiva, at the *yeshiva gedola* level?

RK: My conviction is that a yeshiva student has to perfect himself, in learning, in *hashkafa*, and in *mussar*. *Beyn adom lamokom, beyn adom lchaveyro* (between a man and God, between a man and his friend). And I feel that he should then go into *chinuch* (Jewish education). I mean I'm very much disappointed frankly in the lack of yeshiva students who are going into chinuch. In England for instance most of the yeshiva students go into legal professions. Over here they go into a *kollel* or some of them go into computer. But I don't think they have that sense of responsibility. I recommend the *mechonim* (institutes) when I go into the yeshivas. We have *mechonim* -- teacher training institutes. I make them read Rav Yosef Yoel Horowitz's *Mezake Es Harabim*. I think Mendelovitz was very much inspired by that to found Torah Umesorah. I think frankly that there is not enough emphasis on working for the *tzibur* (public). I think that the yeshivas today are much self-centered. It's a very critical point. Which I must say I don't think they are geared to serving the community. I think they're geared in developing their own personal satisfaction.

WH: When you say self-centered, centered on what goals?

RK: They want to become *gedolim*, which is fine.

WH: It seems that after a certain amount of time the yeshiva *bochur* (boy) comes to realize on his own that he's not going to become a *gadol*. The odds are that only a few make it to that particular status. They come to the question of what they're going to do with themselves.

RK: I don't find that frankly. I can't give you the statistics. I feel that in the *kollelim* (post-graduate institutions) they stay on and on and on. They stay on and on and on in Lakewood. It's very hard to get a Lakewood fellow to go into *chinuch*. There's only one Dunkirk so to speak where they get out and that's if they build a *yeshiva gedola*. But they don't go into *chinuch* on a low level. I'm talking about Lakewood which is the *kollel* par excellence. If Rabbi Lesser who works in mesivtas in my office will open a mesivta they'll go into it. But we haven't been able in all these years to form a *machon*. We talked a million times of a *machon* in Lakewood.

WH: What is a machon?

RK: This is one of the very, very important aspects of the yeshiva movement. I don't know how you can write about it without referring to it. This is where I am grateful in a way to Ner Yisroel. Although frankly they disappointed me with their *machon* today. For 15 years I had resistance from the *roshei yeshivas* about opening any kind of program for training teachers. I was able to succeed in doing that in Telz through one of the miracles of Torah Umesorah. Ben Gold, who lives in Borough Park, was the president of the day school in Minneapolis. He worked for Bell Telephone Company. He was an accountant. He told me I have to close the yeshiva unless you produce a miracle. I said I don't have the money and I'm not a *baal moifes* (miracle maker). In those days we didn't fly. We went by train. So I stopped off in Cleveland. I heard there was a *Vaad Lemaan Hafratzas Hatorah* (a council to spread Torah). I think it was in Mottel Katz's home. I came in there and the fellows were talking about going out to spread Torah. They wanted to go to Denver. I said why should you go to Denver? Why don't you go to Minneapolis? They picked it up. That was a miracle. They decided to send *bochurim* (boys) who didn't get any salary beyond subsistence and they stayed there and they saved the day school, the Torah Academy. And they

taught there. As a result they met a fellow named Mr. Kaufman who gave the money to found the *machon*. So they founded a *machon* within the yeshiva. They picked out 10 or 15 fellows whom they gave a special course.

WH: Could you tell me a bit more about the machon?

RK: At the present time Irving Stone and the Sapirstein Foundation in Cleveland gives us \$25,000. And we have a *machon* in Ner Yisroel which isn't as effective as it was. In Telz. In Staten Island. In Torah Vodaath. In Chofetz Chaim when they're here. In Mir. In New York City. I pay all the instructors. In Telz and in Ner Yisroel I pay half of the thing. My understanding is they take out 10 or 15 fellows and we give them a 2-year course. We teach them pedagogy. We teach them Ivrit (Hebrew language), historiya (history), Chumash and Nach (Bible and Prophets) with meforshim (commentaries). They take that course for 2 years. They do student teaching in a local day school. Many of them go into *chinuch*. It's not foolproof. Because let's say they give me a fellow from Ner Yisroel at 18. He goes through the machon from 18 to 20. Then he stays on in the yeshiva from 20 to 23. By the time he's 23 he has forgotten what he studied in the machon. I'm being very frank with you.

WH: Why do they send them at 18?

RK: Because they want the fellows at 23 who are learning *Yoreh Deah* or are closer to tachlis (purpose) who have to sit and learn. We get some of them ... I am grateful to Ner Yisroel. They started a *machon*. I was fighting and fighting. When I started in Ner Yisroel I could get the New York ones started. Nevertheless Ner Yisroel sends more fellows to chinuch in my opinion than any other yeshiva even though they don't go to the machon.

WH: Why do you think their record there is so high as opposed to the other yeshivas?

RK: I think Rabbi Neuberger understands. He has a sense of responsibility for the American Jewish community. I happen to think very highly of him. He's one of my brain trusters. I think he has become a little more rightist than he used to be. Ner Yisroel was in my opinion the best yeshiva and that's why I worked with them. I think they're becoming more rigid now because of Telz. Telz is very rigid. Although Rabbi Gifter was very close to me. He was one of my *chaverim* (friends) in Yitzhak Elchanan. But I felt in Ner Yisroel a greater sense of responsibility for klal Yisroel (the Jewish nation) than I felt in any other yeshiva.

WH: Why should the yeshivas resist?

RK: They resisted it because they want the fellows to learn. The problem is this. Let's say in Ner Yisroel there was a fellow interested in education but he had a very good head. They wanted him to learn. So they took him to the *machon*. The fellows who go to the *machon* frankly are the fellows who the *roshei yeshiva* feel are not going to become gedolim. In other words we were doing a terrific job. Another reason for the success of Ner Yisroel, a very important reason, is that Ner Yisroel has a tie-up with Loyola. I feel for a fellow to be an educator, *mechanech*, he has to get secular learning. There was not the resistance to secular learning in those times at Ner Yisroel as there was in other yeshivas.

WH: What about Mirrer Yeshiva where they don't want fellows to go to college and yet they have the machon?

RK: We have the machon there. I don't know why it succeeds. We don't get too many. I think that, frankly, Rabbi Kalmmanovitz felt that he gets some money from Torah Umesorah. I had a lot of difficulty. Maybe it's because Rabbi Shurin in my office who takes care of the *machonim* is a good friend of Rabbi Kalmanovitz. But in Chofetz Chaim there is a great desire. And in Ner Yisroel. In Telz there is a beautiful machon because they have a person running it there, Rabbi Shoshana, who believes in it. In Ner Yisroel just to finish the picture. Now the machon is limited. Fellows go to college some of them between semesters. I'm having a terrible time. Teitz said this is not a machon if you're going to have courses between semesters.

WH: How many hours is the machon?

RK: The machon in Ner Yisroel used to be six or seven hours a week.

WH: How good a grounding did the students have?

RK: Not a good grounding, you know that.

WH: My perception is that it is taken for granted that they know the basics and are ready to move on the *Gemorah*. And they don't know the basics as well as they should. This affects them sometimes.

RK: That goes into a very substantive question. There are many fellows who are in the yeshiva who feel that the program is too *Gemorah*-centered. There are many people who are very critical of yeshivas now. It's true that many of them pick this up. They're getting to know other things.

WH: Do you see any prospect for a shift in the emphasis on Gemorah?

RK: I don't think so. That's a very moot point. One other aspect of this, that's another question entirely. It's a question of not enough personal inspiration. From the Rosh Yeshiva in a big institution. Do you know what a pashkvil is? I think it's a Russian word. Here in Borough Park I have a pashkvil circulated against Touro College. A friend of mine working for Michlala, very brilliant. Rabbi Oratz, when I was in Israel, tried to organize a teach-training institute for men. They have one for women. Chinuch Atzmai has one evening course, for teachers. So he wanted to organize a teacher-training course.

WH: What's the pashkvil in relation to yeshivas?

RK: The pashkvil in relation to yeshivas relates to Rabby Frishman and his AARTS organization to determine what is a yeshiva and what is not a yeshiva. This is politics.

WH: Where did this appear?

RK: It was sent to me unsigned. I showed it to one of the fellows in the office. There's been a tremendous impact. It has to do with government funding. I don't want to go into that. I'm a senior citizen, semi-retired. My only big beef is that we don't have teachers. We don't have principals. They are interested. We have a SEED program. Summer Education Environmental Development program which is terrific.

WH: I don't know if you have figured, but what proportion of Hebrew day school teachers are graduates of these type of yeshivas? Excluding Y.U.

RK: That's the biggest source. The only source. They're all graduates practically. That's the only source we have today. Y.U. doesn't produce many teachers. Ner Yisroel, Telz, Torah Vodaath, Chaim Berlin, and so on and so forth. They're the only source.

WH: What about the conservative movement?

RK: The conservative movement uses our teachers. Again it's a bigger *parnasah* (livelihood) the conservatives.

WH: What about the Israelis?

RK: Israelis don't work out.

RWH: That I've seen. What proportion are teaching at the moment?

K: Less and less. With each passing year less and less. I wanted to say something else about the yeshivas. I think that the situation is changing. There are more and more going into chinuch. But it hasn't been to that standard that...

WH: Are you saying that over the years there has been an increasing trend towards going into chinuch?

RK: Yes.

WH: Yet at the same time you're saying there aren't enough people going into that area.

RK: But there are problems of course. There are communities which have day schools where there is no *mikve* yet. There are communities which have day schools which have no kosher shuls. I don't blame them. This has been written up over and over again in the Jewish Observer. You have all the articles.

WH: Are there enough jobs for yeshiva graduates? In Jewish education today.

RK: There are enough jobs.

WH: If every person wanted to go in you could find a job for everyone.

RK: I want you to know it's an exaggeration. There are many teachers in the field who don't belong there. We need trained ones.

WH: One of the suggestions that was made to me along the line was that granted that the average yeshiva bochur would like to teach at the highest grade level possible because of his expensive training. Someone suggested to me that there has to be a way found to deal with the fact that there are teachers teaching who are not as capable who have been in a position for 20, 30 years who are blocking the opportunities of younger people who might be excellent teachers to move into the system. Have you approached this matter in a concrete manner at this point? Or is it necessary to simply accept this as a fact of life?

RK: If a man has been in a school for 20 years and the school wants to get rid of him, this happens with principals, there is a matter of severance pay. So it's very expensive. But the school has to pay him off. So they wait till he retires.

WH: How about early retirement?

RK: The schools don't have the money for pension plans and early retirement and all these problems.

WH: Yeshiva bochurim say the majority is the problem in going into chinuch. They say that as a computer programmer they can make \$20,000 a year and as a teacher they would make \$10,000. And by the time they finish teaching in the yeshiva if you're doing your job you're so exhausted where are you going to find a job for 2 hours in the afternoon besides driving a cab. And it's not a realistic alternative.

RK: First of all out of town they pay much more. They have to be ready to go out of town.

WH: What is the median pay for out of town.

RK: Sometimes a teacher can make as much as \$20,000. On a single job. Because out of town there are 2 sessions. You could teach all day. The morning session and the afternoon session.

WH: The different grades switch.

RK: They switch. My only argument is, they come here all the time, don't they have any ideals. I could have been a director of Barton's Company today. Stephen Klein, when I worked with him in Tora Umesorah, offered me 5 times my salary. I'm talking for myself. I had 5 kids and I helped my family and so on and so forth. It's the measure of idealism. Is the only measure how much money you're going to make. Or how much you're going to contribute. How many people do you know in your field or any other profession that go into business and make much more. But they want to contribute to humanity. We all go through that.

WH: Where do you think the most can and ought to be done in terms of working on this problem?

RK: The only ones who could solve this problem are the roshei yeshiva.

WH: But they have a resistance to it.

RK: They have a resistance to it.

WH: Is there a different view of ideals and goals of a yeshiva that enters into this situation?

RK: Yes. They want to train *lomdim* (learned men). And we need *lomdim*. I had that argument with many, many people. Reb Aryeh Carmel, who was in England and now lives in Eretz Yisroel, I told him about Reb Chiya and Rab Chanina. He quoted the Gemorah on the same page -- the story about the talmid (student) who wasn't ready and he doesn't understand. He goes out and he says I'm finished. You're doing more harm than good. We overcome the initial resistance and on paper... But they can't so it. It's very hard to Rabbi Ruderman to change gears right now. He tells me he loves me and you're right but he can't change gears.