

Editors' Introduction

The rabbis taught: When R. Eliezer took ill, four elderly sages came to visit him – R. Tarfon, R. Yehoshua, R. Elazar b. Azaria and R. Akiva. R. Tarfon spoke up and said, “You are better for Israel than a drop of rain, for a drop of rain [is beneficial] in this world whereas [our] master [benefits us both] in this world and in the world to come.” [Then] R. Yehoshua spoke up and said, “You are better for Israel than the orb of the sun, for the orb of the sun [is beneficial] in this world whereas [our] master [benefits us both] in this world and in the world to come.” [Then] R. Elazar b. Azaria spoke up and said, “You are better for Israel than a father and a mother, for a father and a mother [create life] in this world whereas [our] master [creates life both] in this world and in the world to come.”
(Sanhedrin 68a)

Rabbi Hayim Shmulevitz, the late sainted head of the Mirrer Yeshiva in Jerusalem, explained the significance of the choice of specifically these three elements in this context of expressing gratitude to a teacher – the rain, the sun, and parents. What they all have in common, he suggested, is the ability to transcend themselves, to bring benefit beyond themselves. Their value is not limited to those objects themselves but each has the

capacity to enable further benefit and blessing; each one of them is in a position to “pay forward.” The rain enables tiny seeds in the ground to grow and create new seeds in their own right, the sun enables the entire universe to flourish for ever and ever, and parents enable children and grandchildren to develop into productive and blessed members and leaders of society. These three items, in particular, underscore the fact that the greatness of teachers is not just that they influence their own students; the greatness of teachers is that they “ennoble and enable” their students to influence yet other students, and so on, and so on, for countless generations.¹

It is thus with a deep expression of *hakarat hatov*, “gratitude,” that we present these essays in honor of Richard M. Joel, a master Jewish leader and educator who has devoted his life to service for the Jewish people influencing generations of students who will, in turn, influence yet other generations of students. In particular, this volume is meant to express our appreciation to the individual who led our institution, Yeshiva University, with wisdom, dedication, and single-minded all-encompassing commitment for fourteen years.

President Joel’s accomplishments at YU are numerous and fit into three major categories that reflect his overall vision: education, community, and leadership:

EDUCATION

- The appointment of more than one hundred new faculty members throughout YU’s various schools;
- The construction of the Jacob and Dreizel Glueck Center for Jewish Study;
- The establishment of the Mordecai D. and Monique C. Katz School of Graduate and Professional Studies;
- The championing of online learning as a fundamental component of undergraduate and graduate education;
- The formation of the Zahava and Moshael Straus Center for Torah and Western Thought and the Center for Israel Studies;
- The establishment of the YU School Partnership to work with Jewish day schools;

1. Rabbi Hayim Shmulevitz, *Sihot Mussar* (Israel, 1980), part 2, pp. 120–21.

- The creation of YUTorah, a leading Torah website that receives 1.5 million visitors per year;
- The conferral of degrees on 28,665 YU students and the ordination of 748 rabbis trained at the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS).

COMMUNITY

- The formation of the Center for the Jewish Future whose mission has been to infuse the student body at YU with a sense of responsibility to the Jewish people and to cultivate and support communities across the world;
- The enrichment of the Shabbat experiences on both the Wilf and Beren campuses;
- The engagement of students, faculty, and staff at least four times every year through open forums such as town hall meetings;
- The enhancement of the Aaron and Blanche Schreiber Torah Tours, a program that has sent more than five thousand students to teach and engage 125 Jewish communities;
- The creation of the 185th Street Plaza, the centerpiece of YU's Wilf Campus;
- The cultivation of community through the Benjamin and Rose Berger Torah-To-Go, a seasonable Torah publication with a current circulation of more than 23,000 copies per issue, reaching more than four hundred congregations and communities in the United States, Israel, and Canada.

LEADERSHIP

- The establishment of a Presidential Fellowship Program designed to provide opportunities for training and professional development to recent YU graduates to further their path toward communal leadership;
- The spearheading of efforts to institute innovative professional education opportunities for rabbinical students, as well as continuing education for rabbis already serving communities;
- The bolstering of multiple service learning programs throughout the United States, in Europe, and in Israel that enable students to exercise leadership;

- The support of nearly two thousand YU students participating in seventy-one service missions and summer learning programs around the world, including Israeli communities in Arad, Dimona, and Yeruham;
- The increase of financial aid for YU students from \$19 million per annum to \$43 million per annum;
- Fundraising totals reaching nearly \$1.2 billion;
- Augmenting YU's total endowment fund by \$265 million.

These areas of President Joel's legacy have inspired the organization of this volume. We have sorted this book's forty-five essays into these three categories: Education, Community, and Leadership, and have added another section that focuses on President Joel's more personal qualities that betoken his role as a leader, partner, and mentor. We are grateful to all those who contributed their insights and wisdom to this important work. In particular, we thank Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander and Rabbi Dr. Joshua Joseph for inviting us to edit this volume and for furnishing to us the list of contributors. We are also grateful to Rabbi Reuven Ziegler, Shira Finson, Tomi Mager, and the Maggid team for their support and expertise. Finally, we acknowledge the help of Caryn Meltz, whose editorial talents enhanced this manuscript.

No doubt, President Joel deserves to be celebrated for his labors and successes. But perhaps most of all, we acknowledge the enormous energy he devoted to YU's students. On September 21, 2003, President Joel commenced his investiture address with this point. After acknowledging the various dignitaries present, President Joel went out of his way to note the students who were present, repeating three times, "students, students, students."² It was the well-being and success of the students, in particular, that was most central to President Joel's vision of his role as YU's president; together with his wife and full partner, Esther, they hosted thousands of students in their home. He also took a consistent, deep, and personal interest in their welfare and in their futures.

2. We note with interest that the printed version of these remarks, republished in this volume below, p. 3, includes only one reference to "students."

Most profoundly, President Joel's commitment to empowerment of young people is highlighted in a story he regularly shared at public events, town hall meetings, and with smaller groups of students:

An old man was walking along a shore after a major storm. The prior evening, the sea had pounded on the shore and the waves had dumped thousands of starfish onto the sand. In the distance, the man observed a small child take a few steps, bend over, and fling a starfish into the water. He observed the child move a few more paces, grab a starfish, and hurl it to safety. Again and again, the boy moved along the seashore and threw another starfish into the ocean.

Astonished, the older man walked down to the beach. "What are you doing?" he asked of the much smaller child.

"The starfish are dying on the sand," responded the boy. "If I don't throw the starfish back, they will surely perish."

The man motioned to the miles and miles of beach blanketed by starfish. "Do you realize how many starfish there are along this shore? How can you possibly make a difference!"

The young boy bent down and picked up another starfish. He looked at the man and then hurled the creature back into the ocean.

"I made a difference to that one!" he said.

Then he moved a few more feet and threw another starfish. Then another and another.

Others tell different versions of the starfish story.³ In one instance, a Jewish educator told of an "amazed" and "incredulous" young boy who watched an "old man" undertake this "rather hopeless" effort to save the starfish. In this iteration, the old and more experienced man was the determined soul who "continued his day's work along the seashore."⁴ However, President Joel's version reverses this story. In his telling, it was

3. It originated as a short story titled the "Star Thrower." See Loren Eiseley, *The Unexpected Universe* (New York: Harcourt, 1969), 172.

4. See Tovah-Leah and Gabi Nachmani, *Zemirof from Livot U'Lehibanot* (Safed: Livnot U'Lehibanot, 1999), 47.

the old man who was skeptical and the young boy who taught the lesson. This was – and is – President Joel. It represents his profound faith in the wisdom of youth and his deep devotion to young people who he is confident have the capacity to be “points of light” in shaping a bright future for the Jewish community and humankind, regardless of how challenging and daunting the task may be.

Both of us owe much to President Joel’s mission. We both entered his leadership orbit at the very same moment, as President Joel’s vision was coming into focus. In 2005, President Joel invited Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter to join the YU family with joint responsibilities as a member of the undergraduate and graduate faculties of the university and RIETS and as Senior Scholar of the Center for the Jewish Future. His thirteen years at YU have been most exceptionally meaningful and rewarding for him on many different levels and he is honored by this opportunity to offer President Joel his profound, deep, and personal gratitude for having provided him with these opportunities. Concomitantly, Zev Eleff commenced his education at Yeshiva College in 2005, after two years of study in Israel. He was the beneficiary of President’s Joel’s focus on student-centered leadership, gaining much from the wisdom of Yeshiva University’s *batei midrash*, classrooms and its *Torah U’Madda* culture. His interactions with and mentorship from President Joel were most formative experiences for him at Yeshiva College and RIETS. He is honored to be coediting this volume in honor of President Joel as a small expression of boundless thanks.

A little further along in that Investiture Address, President Joel issued a call to his community: “Let us resolve to fashion a Yeshiva University that ennobles and enables – that ennobles students in purpose, and enables them in capacity to dream and to fulfill those dreams for self and humankind.” Remember Rabbi Shmulevitz’s insight: We liken the contributions and blessings of teachers and leaders to the rain, to the sun, and to parents because each is valuable not only for themselves but because they are endowed with the unique and blessed capacity to “ennoble and enable” others to flourish, to shine, and to take their places in the unfolding of a future world. Throughout his tenure, President Joel repeatedly returned to this phrase, “ennoble and enable,” as the core description of what he considered to be his

primary role as president, and we are honored to turn to it as the title of our volume in his honor.

Thank you, President Joel. May you continue to “ennoble” the Jewish people and “enable” it to benefit from your wisdom and teachings for many healthy wonderful years to come.

Zev Eleff

Jacob J. Schacter

ENNOBLE AND ENABLE

ESSAYS IN HONOR OF RICHARD M. JOEL

Zev Eleff and Jacob J. Schacter, Editors

The Michael Scharf Publication Trust
of Yeshiva University Press

Maggid Books