

Foreword

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this most important book on the teachings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, *zt"l*, by Rabbi Reuven Ziegler.

Commenting on the phrase, “and there was evening” (Genesis 1:5), the Midrash (Gen. Rabbah 3:7) states:

R. Judah b. R. Simon said: “Let there be evening (*yehi erev*)” is not written here, but “*and* there was evening (*va-yehi erev*).” Hence we know that a time order existed before this. R. Abbahu said: This proves that the Holy One, blessed be He, went on creating worlds and destroying them until He created this one and declared, “This one pleases Me; those did not please Me.”

The apparently extra *vav* in *va-yehi* leads the Midrash to conclude that this first day of creation was following other acts of creation that preceded it and which *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* did not find to his liking. But the question is obvious. Why was all this necessary? Why did *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* need to create so many worlds until He found the one He wanted, until He got it right? *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* needed practice! He was unable to create the world of His choice the first time!

Taught Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik: Of course *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu* did not need practice. Of course He could get it right the first time. But He deliberately “failed” – and “failed” again – to teach us, human beings, a powerful lesson. Do we not also attempt to build worlds in our personal lives and then they sometimes get destroyed? We put time and energy into relationships, we work to create worlds, and sometimes they get destroyed. We invest time and energy in a business, we work to create a world, and sometimes it gets destroyed. Often we find it hard to pick up the pieces, to muster the energy necessary to go on and to create again. Says *Ha-Kadosh Barukh Hu*,

in the teaching of Rabbi Soloveitchik: “Don’t despair. Don’t get frustrated. Follow in the footsteps of the divine. I did it. You too can do it. I started again. You too can start again. You too can be successful in creating for yourself a world that will be a strong and lasting one.”

Great people are born, and great people die. Worlds are created, and then worlds come to an end. When a great person passes away, a world is destroyed. To borrow a talmudic teaching (*Rosh Hashanah* 18b), “The death of the righteous is equivalent to the burning of the House of our Lord.” And those who remain behind wonder how they will survive absent the presence and direct influence of the departed leader and teacher. But here too the lesson of this Midrash rings true. Don’t despair. Don’t get frustrated. There will be a new generation of leaders and teachers who will assume responsibility for inspiring and instructing the next generation. A world was destroyed, but new worlds will be created.

But while this is true, it is only possible if the new world is predicated upon a deep knowledge of and familiarity with the Torah and teachings of the old. New leaders need to become a link in the chain of the *mesorah*, receiving the Torah of the past and transmitting it to those who live in the present and will live in the future.

One such leader and teacher was Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the Rav. In his lifetime, Rabbi Soloveitchik was well-known and highly respected for his original mind and charismatic personality, his intimate knowledge of and appreciation for the totality of Jewish tradition while enjoying mastery over the philosophical contributions of Western culture, his intense fealty to the *mesorah* combined with a real openness to the best in the world around him, his spellbinding oratorical skills and charming sense of humor, his radical intellectual honesty and demanding search for truth, his dazzling intellect and total lack of pretense, his extraordinary power of self-revelation and deep-seated sense of privacy, the courage of his convictions to blaze his own trail, to do what he felt was right even when it was not easy, and his amazing ability to present our tradition, unadulterated and uncompromised, in a way that profoundly resonated with the modern American mind. He was an extraordinary teacher, a master pedagogue, who challenged and excited young and old alike.

But Rabbi Soloveitchik is no longer with us. His physical presence has passed on and the world that he was is gone. But new worlds remain to be created; new generations, including our own, need to be nurtured and educated. And, for us to be successful at this task, to face the challenges of our times, to inspire the members of our generation and those yet unborn to thrive in the joy of Jewish living and learning, we need to understand his teachings

and appreciate their relevance to us. What needs to endure for the future is the substance of his ideas, the compelling nature of his teachings, and the content of his Torah.

And for this we express deep and profound gratitude to Rabbi Reuven Ziegler. Rabbi Ziegler has devoted many years to studying the works of the Rav and we are the beneficiaries of his wisdom and his efforts. Because Rabbi Soloveitchik's writings can be challenging to the uninitiated, as many can attest, I asked Rabbi Ziegler to present his ideas in a way that could be grasped by the broader public. He has done a masterful job in formulating the teachings and world-view of the Rav in a clear, organized, thoughtful and comprehensive way. Through a careful analysis of the many works of the Rav, Rabbi Ziegler has succeeded in explicating his complex ideas and complicated language in a comprehensible manner and making them accessible to a wide audience interested in more fully understanding and appreciating the world of this spiritual and intellectual giant of Torah. Moving from theme to theme and through essay after essay in the Rav's multi-faceted oeuvre, and with complete mastery of the growing secondary literature on his subject, Rabbi Ziegler's careful and sensitive analysis is extraordinarily insightful, highly compelling and exceptionally well-done. The world of Rabbi Soloveitchik the person has been lost, but the world of Rabbi Soloveitchik the thinker, author and teacher has been gracefully and magnificently preserved.

I also want to express our special thanks to the members of the family of Abraham Levovitz, *z"l*, for sponsoring this volume *le-iluy nishmato*. Abe was a deeply devoted disciple of the Rav who sought every opportunity to spend time with him and to learn from him, and who devoted much of his creativity and talents to insure the success of the Maimonides School, an institution that was founded by the Rav and his wife and remained very close to his heart. Abe was a larger-than-life personality, a giant in his selfless devotion to school, shul and community. This book, about the person he deeply respected and even loved, is a most appropriate and fitting tribute to his memory. *Yehi zikhro barukh*.

Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter
Series Editor

Majesty and Humility

The Thought of
Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

Reuven Ziegler

ממבן Maimonides School



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