

## FOREWORD

In a talk given in the Maimonides School in Brookline, Massachusetts in 1974, the Rav reflected on the significance of the Pesach Seder to him as a child:

In my experience – that is, in my experiential, not intellectual, memory – two nights stand out as endowed with unique qualities, exalted in holiness and shining with singular beauty. These nights are the night of the Seder and the night of Kol Nidrei. As a child I was fascinated by these two nights because they conjured a feeling of majesty. As a child I used to feel stimulated, aroused, and deeply inspired. I used to experience a strange peaceful stillness. As a child I used to surrender, using the language of the mystics, to a stream of inflowing joy and ecstasy. In a word, as a young child I felt the presence of *kedushah* [holiness] on these nights....

Paradoxically, I must say that these emotions and experiences, however naïve and childish, have always been the fountainhead of my religious life. My religious life has always been a colorful life. This achievement I derived from my childhood experiences and not from my intellectual accomplishments.<sup>1</sup>

Almost twelve years have elapsed since the passing of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik זצ"ל and our sense of loss has only grown with the passage of time. How important it already is, and how much more important will it become as the years pass, to convey what the Rav was to a generation *asher lo yada et Yosef* (*Shemot* 1:8), a generation which did not have the *zechut* to experience first-hand his extraordinary qualities – his vibrancy and dynamism, his brilliance and total lack of pretense, his radical intellectual

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<sup>1</sup> Aaron Rakeffet-Rothkoff, *The Rav: The World of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* 2 (Ktav Publishing House, 1999), 172.

honesty and demanding search for truth, his extraordinary power of self-revelation and deep-seated sense of privacy, his unswerving commitment to the *mesorah* and intimate knowledge of and appreciation for the philosophical contributions of Western culture.

But, of everything the Rav was, he was first and foremost a student and teacher of Torah, exposing thousands of students in New York, Boston and elsewhere to the depth and richness of our tradition. And, as a result, there is simply no better way to remember him than to study his Torah and give others the opportunity to do so as well.

The Rabbi Soloveitchik Institute is happy to join with Urim Publications to present eleven themes of the Torah of the Rav on aspects relating to Pesach, *sefirat ha-omer* and Shavuot. This is the first of a projected series of books on the Rav's Torah relating to all the holidays in the Jewish calendar. We chose to begin with Pesach not only because of its formative role in shaping the Rav's religious consciousness but because it was in the midst of that *yom tov* that he passed away.

Each theme was comprehensively researched and carefully formulated by Rabbi David Shapiro. He researched the disparate sources presenting the Rav's teachings on the subjects he discusses and synthesized them in a clear and cogent fashion. Each of the chapters focuses on a theme that has the following characteristics: (1) It is an area of *Halachah* to which the Rav contributed significantly to our understanding; (2) It is a topic whose study will enrich the religious experience of all who will read it; (3) It is a theme that has relevance beyond the immediate context in which it is presented. We are very grateful to Rabbi Shapiro for his undertaking this project and for the care and concern, dedication and devotion, and skill and sophistication with which he completed it. We look forward to benefiting from his next volume on the Rav's Torah on Chanukah and Purim.

May we all be *zocheh* to witness the transition to illumination, *mei-afelak le-or gadol*, for Jews individually and for *Klal Yisrael* as a whole.

Rabbi Dr. Jacob J. Schacter  
Brookline, Massachusetts  
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מאפלה לאור גדול

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik  
on Pesach, *Sefirat ha-Omer* and Shavu'ot

David Shapiro



The Rabbi  
Joseph B. Soloveitchik  
Institute

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