

2)

- i) "If asked, upon his arrival in the afterworld, to delineate his claim to eternal life, he would point to three factors: (1) He studied Torah with his children, (2) he had founded the Maimonides School in Boston, and (3) he had for a very long time, assumed responsibility for the economic solvency of an eminent talmid *chacham*." (Leaves of Faith, Vol. 1, p. 229).

Rav Chaim Heller zt"l



2

על הצדיקים ועל החסידים
ועל זקני עמך בית ישראל
ועל פליטת סופריהם
ועל גרי הצדק, ועלינו

3)

One cannot achieve a full tradition without personal *d'vekut* to a previous generation. In each and every era, we, the receivers, need at least one individual who can connect the generations, one individual about whom we can say, Here is the witness to the lofty events of the distant past; "Your eyes seeing your teachers," so to say.

This is the primary motif of the legend that Serach, daughter of Asher, survived until the times of Moses (*Sota* 13a; according to another legend, she lived even longer). Even the generation of Moses, the miraculous generation of the Exodus, that witnessed Sinai and accepted the Torah, needed an ancient figure, Serach daughter of Asher, who in childhood sat in grandfather's lap and amused herself with the hair of his head and his beard. Without her, the personal continuity of generations would have been broken. Moses himself proclaimed in his song: "This is my God. . . the God of my fathers, and I shall exalt Him." Even if we are greatly loved by Him, even if He revealed Himself to us on the sea and in Egypt, we must still confront the image of our forefathers

יוסף דוב הלוי סולוביצ'יק - חיים העליר

נוסטון - ניו-יורק

כ"ה שבט, תשי"ט

לכבוד
ראש הסטלה במדינת ישראל,
מר דוד בן-גוריון, שיחה,
שלום וברכה!

כל אחד מאתנו, החתומים סטה, קבל את סכתבו של ראש הסטלה,
מכיון שדעה אחת לנו בנוגע לבעיה אשר הציע החלטנו להשתמש בסטנע הלכהית
אחת בטקום שתי נוסחאות, ולערוך אליו אגרת זו אשר תכיל את חוות דעתנו.

מאז אנו ממהים למה תבא סטלת מדינת ישראל וחקצן בבטיעות ותנסה
לקקע את כירת היהדות העתיקה שנתקדשה בדמיהם וביסוריהם של דורות קדושים,
אשר רק הודות להם נשטר יחורנו כעם קדוש המקושר בחבלי אהבה עזה וקדושה
לארץ הקודש. האם מתורכנה של קדושת ישראל תקנה מדינת ישראל? ילמדנו ארוננו
ראש הסטלה, אשר את שמו אנו סוקירים ואת זכויתיו ההיסטוריות לפען תקומת
מדינתנו אנו מפריכים מאד!

נחיה ובכבוד,

יוסף דוב הלוי סולוביצ'יק, נוסטון

חיים העליר, ניו-יורק

יוסף דוב הלוי סולוביצ'יק
JOSEPH SOLOVEITCHIK
34 HUTCHINGS STREET
ROXBURY 21, MASS.

25 Shevat 5179

His Excellency,
The Prime Minister of Israel,
Mr. David Ben-Gurion.

Honorable Sir:

Each of us, the undersigned, received a separate letter from you. Since, however, our opinions, with reference to the question posed, coincide, we have decided to render one halakic communication, instead of two separate versions.

The question, pertaining to the registration of children born from non-Jewish mothers who have not been fittingly converted according to the Halakah, needs no further probing. There exist two basic rules (Halakot) which have been transmitted to us from time immemorial and which have become the very pillars of Jewish tradition; these set forth the unequivocal answer.

The first Halakah is: The offspring of a non-Jewess bears the same status as herself.

The second Halakah is: A non-Jew, who is circumcized but has not had ritual immersion (Tevilah) or who has been 'ritually immersed' but not circumcized, is not to be recognized as a convert to Judaism until he has been (both) circumcized and ritually immersed.

In other words, the mother establishes the child's 'sanctity' and (the status of) his 'belonging to,' or identification with, the Jewish people. True and proper conversion is gained only by means of circumcision and immersion for a male, and through ritual immersion (alone) for a female.

Hence it is impossible for any person—minor or adult—to be considered or to be registered as a Jew if the mother is a non-Jewess, so long as he (himself) has not been converted to Judaism

Responsa: AMERICAN RABBIS

according to the laws of Moses and Israel. Parental assertions or even the declaration of the grown-up himself (that he wishes to be known as a Jew) will never avail.

These Halakot are basic principles of our Torah and commandments. They do not rely upon rationalizations or reinterpretations. Therefore we need not present quotations or sources to substantiate our opinion; such would be superfluous.

Concerning this basic approach to Torah, our great teacher, Maimonides, has already written in his Yad (Hilkot Hobe' u-Mazik 1.6):

"Though these (elements) are evident in the Written Law and all have been thoroughly explained by Moses at Sinai, to us they are (in the realm of) decisions of practical conduct. Thus did our forefathers rule in the Judicial Courts of Joshua and the Prophet Samuel and in every Court of Justice (Beth Din) that has arisen from the days of Moses till our own day."

We are indeed perplexed that the State of Israel now seeks to hew down our traditional branches and thereby smear the ancient glory of Israel which has long been sanctified through the spilt blood and sufferings of preceding generations. It is only because of these roots that we preserve our uniqueness as a ho'y people and that we are inextricably bound to the Holy Land.

We therefore ask you—your Excellency—you, whose name we honor and whose historic accomplishments for the establishment of the State of Israel we acknowledge:

Will the present State of Israel be built up by (maintainin'g a threat of) destruction to its very sanctity?

Most respectfully,

(RABBI) JOSEPH SOLOVEITCHIK
Boston

(RABBI) CHAIM HELLER
New York

Intro. to
The Rav

1) When Reb Chaim [Heller] told stories about Torah luminaries, both those he knew and those who had lived hundreds of years before him, he did not just relate them in meager words. These stories became living experiences filled with warmth and movement. Longstanding but forgotten stories came to life as Reb Chaim laughed and cried with the worthy people he portrayed. The images came back to life and crowded into his modest room as he spoke. Do you know what was the foremost strength of Reb Chaim when he narrated these stories? It was not his rhetorical or oratorical ability. He never utilized flowery language to enhance the tale he related. His greatness was in his reliving of the story as he spoke!

—The Rav's Eulogy for Reb Chaim Heller

9.03 Learned Drashot and Simple Jews

2) Related by the Rav in his annual Yahrzeit Shiur in memory of his father, Rabbi Moshe Soloveichik, Yeshiva University, January 18, 1972 (Yiddish).

In my youth I saw the love of Torah possessed by the masses of Jews in the hamlets of Eastern Europe. . . .

My father always gave these two drashot [on Shabbat Teshuvah and Shabbat ha-Gadol] each year. What did the drashot consist of? My father dealt mainly with difficult texts in the Rambam [Maimonides]. He always analyzed complicated and complex rabbinic topics. Yet the shul in Khaslavichy was packed. It was a large, spacious Bet Medrash. It could accommodate over one thousand people, but it was always crowded beyond its capacity. Among the people there were some *lomdim* [rabbinical scholars] who could follow the intricacies of the drashah. Perhaps there were anywhere between a hundred and a hundred and fifty such scholars. Yet hundreds of non-learned Jews were also present. Many were poor Jews who barely knew how to pray. Peddlers, shoemakers, tailors, and porters were in the huge crowd. You should have seen how their eyes were totally fixed upon my father. You might imagine that my father was telling them a simple story instead of a profound drashah. They seemed to have endless joy from his presentation and the atmosphere in the shul during the drashah. Yet I can guarantee you that most of these Jews did not understand one word of my father's drashah.