

Rav Dr. Joseph Breuer zt”l

By Dr. Ernst J. Bodenheimer with Rabbi Nosson Scherman

As a six-year old child, Rabbi Joseph Breuer saw his grandfather, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, for the last time. The little boy held the old man’s hand and refused to let go. At the time of his death ninety-two years later, Rabbi Breuer still tenaciously held his grandfather’s hand; not for a moment did the Hirschian ideal depart from his consciousness. From his rise to prominence and leadership in Frankfurt to the Hitlerian vale of tears to the rebirth of his K’hal Adas Yeshurun in Washington Heights, Rabbi Breuer hewed to the vision of Rabbi Hirsch. Indeed, there was a striking parallel between the careers of Rabbi Hirsch and Rabbi Breuer in that both undertook the task of building new communities in their middle years. At the peak of a successful career, Rabbi Hirsch gave up an important position to resuscitate the once illustrious Torah community of Frankfurt. Rabbi Breuer watched his career crumble in Frankfurt, and having come to New York in 1939 at the age of fifty-seven, he organized a remnant of devout German refugees into a new Frankfurt, founded on the teachings and Torah view of Rabbi Hirsch.

It takes an unusual blend of Torah vision and clarity of goals and courage, dedication, and constancy - to create from scratch a model kehillah. Both had it.

Selfless, productive, and dedicated until the end of his remarkable life, Rabbi Breuer achieved the crowning accomplishment of a great leader: at his passing, his world continued in the mold he created, without convulsion or floundering. Because he built with foresight and imbued his handiwork with a vision, K’hal Adas Yeshurun with all its institutions and functions, his life’s work and monument, continues as he left it. In his colleagues and followers, he inspired not only awe, admiration, and affection, but a willingness to become part of his effort and share his unwavering conviction that life, career, and success are worthwhile only if they are based on Torah, and “Man-Israel” attains his true worth only if he subordinates his private desires to the will of G-d and places the common good ahead of personal gain.

Who can assess a giant? An ordinary person cannot appreciate his greatness; an equal cannot measure his influence on people of lesser stature. Rabbi Breuer was a giant who cast a shadow over four generations and whose influence survives, but unless we try - though imperfectly and inadequately - to define what he was, what he meant, and what he bequeathed, we will do an injustice to ourselves and our posterity - and to him, because it was his passion to serve Jewry by passing on the Hirschian legacy.

So, let us review his life and works, and, what is more important and difficult, let us try to understand the man.

Rosh Yeshivah and Rav

On the third of Nissan 5642 (1882), Sophie Breuer, youngest daughter of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, bore Joseph to her husband Rabbi Salomon Breuer, then rabbi of Papa, Hungary. Rabbi Hirsch died in 1888 in Frankfurt, and in 1890, when Rabbi Salomon Breuer was chosen to succeed him, the family moved to Frankfurt. From then on, the names Frankfurt and Breuer became inseparable, virtually synonymous.

Rabbi Breuer continued his father-in-law's work of kehillah building. The main institution still lacking in the refurbished Frankfurt was a yeshivah gedolah for mature young men. He set up the institution and served as Rosh Yeshivah, in addition to his duties as rabbi. The young Joseph became his father's talmid and was ordained by him in 1903. He received a second ordination from Rabbi Koppel Reich, the famous dayan of Budapest.

While pursuing concurrent programs of vigorous Torah study and secular education, Rabbi Joseph Breuer absorbed the intense Hirschian weltanschauung, which subjugated all levels of life, from the so-called religious through the commercial and secular, to the authority of Torah. He attended the universities of Giessen and Strasbourg, earning his Ph.D. in philosophy and political economy in 1905.

Outstanding Scholar, Outstanding Teacher

Upon his return to Frankfurt, Rabbi Breuer was appointed to the faculty of the Realschule, the Frankfurt yeshivah high school, where he taught Talmud and Tanach, as well as German and history. In addition, he lectured in Tanach in his father's yeshivah. The outstanding scholar proved to be an equally outstanding teacher whose dedication and talent attracted and won numerous students. In addition to his mastery of Talmud and Codes, he placed great stress upon the later Prophets and Tehillim, books of Tanach in which he excelled as a scholar, commentator and teacher. In later years, his classes in Tanach and Piyutim (liturgical poems) drew large crowds of listeners from the entire Orthodox community, and he wrote profound commentaries on Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the piyutim of the High Holiday services (all of which have been translated into English).

In 1911, Rabbi Breuer married Rika Eisenmann of Antwerp, daughter of Jacob Eisenmann, a former talmid of Rabbi Hirsch. She was to bear him three sons and five daughters, and do her utmost to make possible his uninterrupted devotion to his Torah studies, his students and the community.

He assumed his first rabbinical position in 1919 when he was appointed rabbi of Frankfurt's Klaus Shul, a synagogue of laymen who devoted much of their time to Torah study. There he perfected his classical oratorical style, in which he presented profound Torah thoughts with drama, polish, eloquence and language of epic proportions. He became acting Rosh Yeshivah during his father's final illness and continued in that capacity after his father's death in 1926. Later he was named to succeed his father as Rosh Yeshivah.

Under the Nazi Shadow

From the time Hitler came to power in February 1933, it became clear that German Jewry was in danger, especially institutions so obviously “Jewish” as his yeshivah. In an attempt to anticipate the worst, Rabbi Breuer accepted the invitation of the Jewish community of Fiume, Italy, to become its rabbi and bring his yeshivah with him. From September 1933 to May 1934, he and part of the yeshivah were there, but the experiment was unsuccessful and they moved back to Frankfurt. There the oppression of Jews became progressively worse.

Once, Rabbi Breuer was summoned to police headquarters to respond to charges that the yeshivah harbored Communists. Upon hearing the accusation, the Rosh Yeshivah laughed, but he was warned that it was no laughing matter, and unless he could refute the charges within a few days, the consequences would be most serious. After returning home, he remembered that in 1928, Jewish Communists had attempted to indoctrinate the yeshiva's student body. One student had indeed been converted to their view. The Rosh Yeshivah had acted quickly. The new recruit was expelled from the yeshivah and the students were warned not to fraternize with any Communists from then on. Rabbi Breuer wrote a report of the incident and brought it to his Nazi inquisitor, who accepted the explanation and temporarily ceased his harassment of the yeshivah.

The respite was short-lived, and following Kristallnacht in November 1938, the yeshivah was disbanded. Rabbi Breuer and his family emigrated to Antwerp, Belgium in December 1938, where a former student, the late Jacob A. Samuel of New York - who was to become a major supporter of Torah institutions - persuaded him that he was needed on the American Jewish scene.

The Move to the Heights

He settled in Washington Heights section of Manhattan, where he became the spiritual leader of a small group of German-Jewish refugees. He also began teaching in Mesivta Torah Vodaath, and though he did not remain there long, he formed an enduring friendship with Reb Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, menahel of Mesivta Torah Vodaath who took a lead in anticipating educational and general communal needs. Both were expert in Tanach, history, and the writings of Rabbi Hirsch, and both were superlatively dedicated to the Jewish community, especially the need for Torah chinuch.

On the first Shabbos that Rabbi Breuer davened with his new congregation in a cramped rented room, the gabbai announced the time when services would be held on the following Shabbos. “What about the weekday service?” the rabbi asked. He was told that the small, poor congregation could not afford to rent a room for weekdays, whereupon he announced that until suitable quarters were acquired, the daily minyan would be held in his apartment. At that time, the rabbi and his family, including the children, lived in three and a half rooms, but one of them became a makeshift synagogue for as long as it was needed. It was typical; the community came before family, and certainly before self.

His vision of kehillah required that it serve all the needs of its membership. Synagogue, yeshivah, girls' school, mikvah, charity funds, Chevrah Kadishah, adult

education, kashrus institutions and supervision, general attitude toward life - everything was part of the classic kehillah structure, so it had to be incorporated into Khal Adas Yeshurun as well. Underneath his uncompromising ideology and broad view of the Kehillah's role, the rav was a practical leader. He knew that not everything could be done at once, especially since his congregation was composed almost entirely of immigrants who had left Germany with little more than the clothes on their backs. Though he had his vision of what the kehillah would provide eventually, he also had his priorities. The construction of a synagogue and mikvah, and the establishment of a yeshivah came early, as did kashrus supervision of butchers, but a separate shechitah did not come until much later.

On one more thing he insisted. The Washington Heights kehillah had to follow its Frankfurt model in every possible way, from time-honored customs of the synagogue to the practice of having a choir composed of members of the kehillah. Rabbi Breuer often made it a point that the choir was sacrosanct, both to beautify the service and to demonstrate that customs are not to be tampered with.

Preparation for Succession

In his seventies, he began to seek a rabbi of stature to assist and eventually succeed him. He chose Rabbi Shimon Schwab, a former talmid who was then serving in Baltimore, and Rabbi Schwab joined the kehillah's rabbinate in 1958. A year later, Rabbi Breuer wrote in an essay he had prepared for posthumous publication: "Already in (his) first year... Rabbi Schwab proved to be the right leader for our Kehillah. May Hashem continue to lend him His assistance."

At the age of 85, in 1967, Rabbi Breuer withdrew from public speaking and writing, although he remained intensely involved in all policy matters of his beloved kehillah. He continued to teach his daily Talmud class at home and still received visitors eagerly and courteously as always. After he lost his eyesight, a student would read the text and he would explain and expound upon it. Well into his nineties, he would rise as a visitor entered his room and escort him to the door when he left. From the time his wife died in 1953, he lived with his daughter, Mrs. Jerry Bechhofer, where he was surrounded by the glory of attentive children and adoring grand and great-grandchildren.

He would tell confidants that his constant prayer was that he be permitted to retain his mental faculties to the end. If his mind could function, he could make peace with the infirmities of age. Self-deprecatingly he would say, "Ayzehu Ashir, HaSameach B'Chelko," who is the wealthy man, one who rejoices in "part of himself" - even if one retains only part of his powers, he should still rejoice.

When the word spread on 3 Iyar 5740 (1980) that Rabbi Breuer was no more, there was a sense of shock that a seemingly eternal bond with the past was gone, and that Anshei Emunah Aveidu, the quintessential man of faith had been taken from a generation that was so short of faith.

The Man and His Views

If any one trait could exemplify this complex man of such magnificent achievement, it was truth! He was utterly and completely dedicated to the truth as it flowed to

him from the Talmud and Tanach and from the writings and teachings of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. Sensitive to human need, he was pragmatic in plotting his course, but never where truth would be ill-served. In no way could he be bribed or influenced.

...To say that money or flattery could not sway him is totally superfluous, even insulting - it was unthinkable that such considerations could even matter to him. But also the more subtle and irresistible forms of bribery - honor, position, sentiment - could not move him, especially when truth and principle were involved.

He lived to carry out a will not his own, sought glory for his Master but not himself, and measured every obligation with a Divine yardstick. In the service of truth, he took unpopular stands and used his pulpit as a potent weapon, and in its service he built - no, created! - a community that has justly earned the respect of Torah Jews everywhere.

True to the Hirschian Legacy

He was his era's leading exponent of the Hirschian concept of Torah Im Derech Eretz. Exemplifying and expounding the teachings of Rabbi Hirsch, he gave the broadest possible definition to the term derech erez. It embraced every facet of a Jew's human existence on earth: his means of livelihood, general decorum, civility, propriety of dress, interaction with his fellow, level of integrity in business and personal relationships, fulfillment of the law of the land, relationship to non-observant Jews, attitude toward purveyors of non-halachic "streams" of Judaism. The definition of derech erez is as broad and varied as human experience, and wherever it applies, derech erez must be subservient to Torah.

In the Hirschian view of the Jew in his world, Torah can never be regarded as parallel with secular knowledge and professional or business life. Even to suggest that anything can be parallel to Torah is a blasphemy of the highest order; Torah is above all, and everything else in life must be conducted in accordance with the will of G-d as expressed in the Written and Oral Torah.

Rabbi Breuer was grieved and infuriated by the common use of the term Torah Im Derech Eretz to legitimate the watering down of classical Judaism. After a visit to a prominent institution that proclaimed its allegiance to the concept, he commented, "It has neither Torah nor derech erez."

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, the eminent mashgiach of Be'er Yaakov, in Eretz Yisrael, and a student of Rabbi Breuer in Frankfurt, writes of the Rav's comment to him during a visit in New York. As loosely translated from Rabbi Wolbe's recollection, Rabbi Breuer said:

There is a philosophy that calls for withdrawal from every influence from outside the world of Torah. There is another philosophy that views the entire universe outside the four cubits of halachah as a challenge - the challenge is to find oneself in the midst of the world and to observe the Torah and halachah without any compromise whatsoever. This is the philosophy of Torah Im Derech Eretz.

Clearly, the acceptance of such a challenge is no small task. It is harder to fight and win, than to withdraw. To succeed requires fear of G-d to a great degree. But Rabbi Breuer had it and devoted his life to inculcating it in his students and congregants.

A Timeless Credo, Not a Compromise

He lost no opportunity to refute the frequently heard argument that the philosophy of Rabbi Hirsch was a compromise, a temporary response to the problems of his time, a solution that was valid only in a Torah community under fire. Rabbi Breuer insisted that Torah Im Derech Eretz was a timeless credo. It meant that the Torah must be perceived as G-d's generous gift to His nation, whose very existence must be totally molded and dominated by the Torah. To be a Jew, therefore, means that one must mold his entire existence into a life of purity before G-d - to regard life as possible only in accord with absolute obedience to G-d's will, and to be ready at every moment to submit family and social life to the purifying and sanctifying postulates of G-d's will. To the judgment of the Torah, the Jew must submit his every thought and deed, every phenomenon of life, and anything that can potentially enrich the bounds of his knowledge and achievement. In the economic sphere, the Jew must establish the Torah's primacy over the modes of business and professional life at any time and place so that his behavior transforms even that "mundane" portion of his life into a Kiddush Hashem (sanctification of the Name). The term *derech eretz*, therefore, embraces the entire life style of the Jew who seeks personal fulfillment in accord with G-d's will in all his activities and aspirations.

In his commentary on the Torah's command *Kedoshim Tiheyu*, You are to be Holy (Vayikra 19:2), Rabbi Hirsch stresses that holiness consists of much more than merely refraining from immorality and evil. Rather one must so imbue himself with goodness and so completely place all his desires and talents at G-d's disposal that there is no place for evil. None of man's powers or tendencies is good or bad in itself - they are all given him to use in accomplishing G-d's will on earth. By using them in that manner - to perform even permitted, optional tasks in accordance with G-d's will and without slipping over the line to the forbidden - the Jew brings holiness into his every pursuit, even those that are seemingly mundane and divorced from "religion." This is a degree of holiness that is demanded - and is within the power - of every Jew.

Products of this classic Hirschian philosophy of life could not compartmentalize their lives. They could not accept a "religion" that permitted less integrity in business than in the synagogue or that set different standards of behavior for different people or professions. The Rav's personal behavior was totally consistent with his public preachings, and he expected no less from the humblest tradesman or laborer in his congregation. The key to the Hirschian lifestyle was that every avenue of life had to be lived according to the Torah, and if it was, it represented an embodiment of Torah. That being the case, no one need feel degraded for not being able to devote himself fully to Torah study.

Secular Education: Its Place and Its Setting

However, while Rabbi Breuer did not object to higher secular education, and even encouraged it for most young people, he made a sharp distinction between the

acquisition of knowledge and professional training on the one hand, and the college social scene on the other. "Campus (social) life," he said, "is incontestably immoral." Moreover, the Rav certainly did not denigrate the eminence of one who was able and qualified to make Torah his exclusive pursuit. Quite the contrary. He was fond of quoting the Ksav Sofer - his father's rebbe - who explained Jacob's intention in placing his right hand on the head of Ephraim, instead of the firstborn Menashe, to give him the primary blessing. Menashe was the man of affairs who assisted his father, Joseph, in governing the kingdom, while Ephraim was the scholar who was devoted to Torah study. Though Menashe was great and righteous - and the firstborn - Jacob gave primacy to the Torah scholar, an attitude that remains a cornerstone of Jewish belief. Although Rabbi Breuer bowed to no one in his reverence for Torah, his Hirschian ideology allowed for an exalted view of pursuits that others might consider mundane.

The Importance of Kehillah Involvement

A year before his death, a young man came to him for advice. He was a successful professional who had a rigorous daily program of Torah study. His original goal was to practice medicine, but he chose a different career because he thought that he would have too little time for Torah study as a physician. But as the demands of his career took more and more of his time, he began to feel guilty. Demanding though medicine might have been as a career, at least he would have been helping people. Now he was neither contributing to society nor studying as much as he wanted to. Perhaps he should give up his career and let others support him so that he could study Torah full time.

Rabbi Breuer counseled that every field of endeavor is worthwhile if it is pursued in accordance with the Torah. For one who is no longer in a yeshivah setting, the commandment to "meditate upon the Torah day and night" means to apply Torah Law to everyday life. Thus, the ben Torah who devotes several hours a day to Torah study and pursues his vocation in an honest, sincere Torah fashion is giving practical expression to his learning. Both his days and his nights are expressions of the Torah while he fulfills his obligation as a husband and father to support his family.

Rabbi Breuer concluded that a compatible, chavrusa (study partner) is of prime importance in helping a young person cope with troubling times. Finally he urged that active involvement in the local kehillah will provide a sense of purpose and enduring spiritual reward.

His advice to that particular supplicant was truly a statement of his creed. Torah study is supreme and must have several hours a day. Carrying on one's professional life in consonance with the halachah is in itself a practice of Torah. And the crowning touch in a truly Jewish life is active involvement in the community. Without such involvement, not only the community but the individual suffers. His gain of a few hours a month at the expense of Kehillah involvement is truly a loss for he has forfeited the spiritual reward of the "merit of the community" and lost the sense of purpose that makes man more than an island.

As Rabbi Breuer wrote in a 1967 essay that he asked to have published after his passing:

Torah study is the highest duty of the Jew and we welcome with great joy its intensified practice in our Kehillah. But are our members familiar with the famous essay of Rabbi Hirsch regarding the sacred duty to participate actively in the work and affairs of the Kehillah?

The doctrine of service to the Kehillah was uppermost in Khal Adas Yeshurun. The caliber of the people who served on its various boards and committees bears testimony to that statement. Even to become a member of the Chevrah Kadishah (burial society) for example, was a high honor, one that was sought by many of the congregations' most distinguished people. A candidate for membership had to study the laws and customs of the congregation and be on call whenever his services were required.

In a typical case, a congregation member died on Shabbos in a hospital a hundred miles away from New York of injuries suffered in an automobile accident. Two hours after Shabbos, a carload of Chevrah Kadishah members arrived to care for his final needs. Among them were wealthy businessmen and prominent professional men; none was there for pay or because he happened to be free that evening. In the way of life taught by Rabbi Breuer, their hours in the office were ennobled by their readiness to leave a meeting and close a ledger book when called upon to render the final honor to a fellow Jew.

Interestingly enough, Washington Heights became one of America's strongest Agudath Israel communities, although the Rav never formally mentioned or supported the movement. To most people, Agudah's growth in Washington Heights seemed to be an independent phenomenon, but after his death it came to light that this, like virtually everything in his community, had not just "happened." Apparently, Rabbi Breuer considered Agudath Israel as essential to the Kehillah role of the Jewish people as an entire Torah community. In 1955, he wrote an essay to be published after his death. In it he set forth "the basic principles that motivated him in carrying out the duties of his office."

Principle 2 states:

The religious political heritage of Rabbi Hirsch is deeply rooted in the fundamental principles and demands of the holy Torah as outlined in his literary work. This heritage 1) was to find its realization in Agudath Israel. While I never mentioned Agudath Israel in my public sermons, I have endeavored to place the Agudistic stamp on our Kehillah, thereby making a not insignificant contribution to Agudath Israel. This policy must continue to prevail in the future.

Women in the Kehillah

In his view, women, too, had a vital and active role to play in the life of the community. The women of Frankfurt and Washington Heights are active in sisterhood and charity projects, as are the women of other communities, but there is an added dimension in the frequency of lectures and classes for them and their participation in tefillah and the range of mitzvos that they perform scrupulously.

Part of the Rav's master plan for the Kehillah was the establishment of a seminary, and he insisted that it not be treated as a step-daughter.

His last sermon in Frankfurt included the proud declaration that German Orthodoxy has given three things to Jewry: its particular type of Orthodox merchants, Orthodox professionals and Orthodox women. Indeed, he pointed out to a visitor with whom he discussed Jewish education for women, that when Sarah Schenirer set about creating the Bais Yaakov movement, she traveled to Frankfurt to study the legacy of Rabbi S.R. Hirsch in person.

Stern Visage, Warm Heart

His powerful self-control and sternly dignified bearing tended to convince those who did not know him that he was a rigid, dispassionate person. His unrelenting diatribes against granting religious or community recognition to falsifiers and impugnors of the Torah sealed the case for the unknowing. Actually, he was warm, friendly, and understanding in the extreme. Children loved to file past him for his fatherly blessing and former students never forgot his tenderness even though, like the best fathers and teachers, he could be stern when need be.

A former student of his had drifted far from Torah observance, but he still visited Rabbi Breuer at regular intervals, and invariably received a friendly reception. Asked why he received the wayward guest so graciously, the Rav explained that he may have gone astray due to the failure of our education or difficult situations with which he could not cope. Our responsibility, therefore, is to show him warmth and friendship, and perhaps we will be worthy of winning him back.

This approach reflected a by-law of Rabbi Hirsch's constitution for the Frankfurt community, which was adopted by K'hal Adas Yeshurun as well. The only personal requirements for membership were that men be circumcised and that applicants be married in accordance with Torah Law. Were they lax in religious observance? - That is surely lamentable, but it was the responsibility of the community to deal with that in a positive manner.

Many years ago, the Rav heard about a disturbing incident: A volunteer member of the yeshivah's tuition committee pressed a widowed mother until she broke down in tears. Rabbi Breuer had the man dismissed from the committee. True, the yeshivah needed funds - and K'hal Adas Yeshurun parents and members are among the most generous and heavily taxed Jews anywhere - but need does not confer carte blanche the right to ignore human decency.

There is a practice in Washington Heights that whenever a person dies, the Chevrah Kadishah brings a liberally filled charity box to the home of the bereaved. If the family is in need, it may take money - and no one will know because the contents are not counted or removed except at rare intervals. In addition, trusted members of the community have the responsibility of finding out whether such families or others in difficult circumstances need help, and if so, to find ways to provide it discreetly.

“Austrittsgemeinde”

Perhaps the most characteristic of the Frankfurt kehillah's battles for religious principle was the "Austritt" struggle that was fought by Rabbi Hirsch and continued by his disciples and successors. In nineteenth century Germany, as in most European countries, religious communities were recognized by the state and had certain powers, including the right of taxation. In the climate of mid-nineteenth century Germany, the governing bodies were dominated by Reformers. So powerful were the communities under Prussian and local law, that an Orthodox synagogue could not exist without their sanction. Rabbi Hirsch's institutions in Frankfurt had to be called *gesellschaft* - association - not a synagogue or community, in order not to be declared illegal. He fought a long and difficult battle on the legislative front to gain legal sanction for his *Austritt Gemeinde* (separate community).

When his victory was achieved, the Reform communities offered an important concession. They would permit Orthodox synagogues to have autonomy within the community structure. Some of Germany's leading *gedolei Torah* and lay Orthodox leaders accepted this proposal, holding that a person should be permitted to maintain membership in both communities, providing there was no infringement on his religious practice and he was not required to contribute toward the cultural institutions of the Reform movement. To Rabbi Hirsch it was inconceivable that an Orthodox Jew could voluntarily belong to a body purporting to represent the Jewish Kehillah, if that body was directed or controlled by people not loyal to the very foundations of Jewry - the unchanging nature of the Torah and Rambam's Thirteen Principles of Faith. The fact of membership in such a body implied recognition of its legitimacy as an expression of Judaism, and this was something no Orthodox Jew had the right to grant.

In Rabbi Hirsch's words, "What [such membership] amounts to is this: Orthodox Judaism recognizes the complete validity of the Reform Movement so long as it tolerates and shows consideration for Orthodoxy. Nowhere in all the Jewish past will you find anything like this hybrid community."

Rabbi Breuer continued the fight of his grandfather and father. He could not countenance recognition of a non-believing body as a legitimate representative of the Jewish people, even though that body granted religious independence and autonomy to its religious subsidiary body. For this reason, he was unalterably opposed to the *Mizrachi*, which remained affiliated with the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency.

Living With the Prophets

He lived with the prophets. He treasured Tanach and knew it by heart with an astounding depth and thoroughness. And he deeply lamented the trend away from the study of Tanach among yeshivah youths. He would ask his young visitors what they were studying, and after hearing their recitation of tractates and codes, he would often ask, "Have David and Isaiah nothing to say to you?"

To him they had much to say, and he shared their message unselfishly with every visitor. Anyone who came to see him went away with a new insight into a verse of Tanach or *tefillah*. The tone and timbre of his voice, the elegance of his language, the eloquence of his rhetoric, and the profundity of his understanding combined to

make such visits adventures in the exploration of the timeless messages in ancient texts. His more perceptive guests went away feeling as though they had been in the presence of a modern-day counterpart of an ancient prophet - at the very least that they had been privileged to share a glimpse into the visions of old.

He would unashamedly speak of emunah (faith) and the presence of G-d in a manner that would have seemed pretentious and been intolerable in others; but from him it was natural, for he lived with faith and closeness to G-d. During these conversations he would often speak slowly and pause, as if carefully considering every thought and how to phrase it.

Nothing about him was more inspirational than his emunah and loving acceptance of G-d's will. At the funeral of his beloved wife he addressed her saying, "You asked me once if I would eulogize you. Yes, I will eulogize you." And then he continued by saying: "HaTzur Tamim Pa'alo Ki Kol Dirachav Mishpat," The Rock, His deeds are perfect, for all His ways are the government of justice." His sense of loss could be appreciated only by those who knew the family best, but his acceptance of G-d's will was total and unquestioning

During the shivah, he repeated a story about his parents: Dr. Rosenbaum, physician, and head of the Frankfurt Kehillah, came to tell them that their only daughter, who lived in Gelsenkirchen, was very ill. The Rebbetzin exclaimed, "I must go to her immediately."

Rabbi Salomon Breuer silenced his wife saying, "Don't you understand what he is trying to say? It is all over, "Rabbos Machashavos B'Lev Ish V'Aytzas HaShem He Takum." Many are the thoughts in man's heart, but only the design of G-d will endure.

The Rav concluded, "And no one ever heard another word from him about it."

Rabbi Breuer repeated that same verse when he wrote of the loss of his wife...

His will asked that no eulogies be held. His tombstone lists only his positions, but not a word about his personal greatness. How typical of his modesty. But could any eulogy do him justice? Could any eulogy say more than the magnificent monuments of community, institutions and individuals that he erected?

His funeral bore testimony to the universal esteem in which he was held. The outpouring of people from his own Kehillah and others of German background was to be expected: he was their Rabbiner and the last authentic link with Rabbiner Hirsch. But the others! En masse they came from every major Torah center within traveling distance. Chassidim, Misnagdim, Europeans, Americans, Roshei Yeshivah who disagreed with his philosophy traveled for hours to render final homage. Chassidic rebbes and rabbanim whose life styles could hardly be more different were there. Why did they come? Perhaps Rabbi Wolbe explained it best:

The definition of a gadol be'Yisrael is one who is great in Torah and great in piety, one whose personal views and conduct are based exclusively on those twin pillars. Such a person is acknowledged as a peer by the other great men of his era. Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch was revered by the Chassidic leaders of Galicia and by the rabbis of Lithuania. That his views did not accord with theirs was immaterial;

his philosophy grew out of his G-d-fearing understanding of Torah, and therefore it was legitimate for him. So it was with Rabbi Salomon Breuer and so it was with Rabbi Joseph Breuer. Their greatness transcended community. They belonged to Klal Yisrael, so they were honored by Klal Yisrael, all of it.

There was a sense of his worth and a profound, painful sense of loss. One of the few remaining links with the last century was gone. The world's greatest interpreter of Torah Im Derech Eretz was gone. The man to whom Isaiah and David spoke, and through whom they spoke to us, would be heard no more.

Will we see his likes again? Almost certainly not. So let us enshrine him in our memories and never forget what he had to tell us.

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