

SELECTED WRITINGS

**A Collection of Addresses and Essays
on Hashkafah, Jewish History
and Contemporary Issues**

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YRSRH

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12 ■ Three Times Birchas Ha-Chammoh

I
It was in the year of the world 5685 (1925) in the town of Frankfurt-on-the-Main. We were “bachurim” in the Yeshiva of Rav Salomon Breuer ל”צו. Although advanced in age and occupied with the rabbinical duties of a famous Kehillo, the Rav would still give his two daily Gemoro Shiurim to the faculty and the student body of his Yeshiva. And our young minds had to strain themselves severely to follow the profundities of his talmudic wisdom. Next to the Yeshiva was a palatial synagogue which seemed to have been built to last for a millennium.

These were uneasy times for German Jewry. The ravages of a lost war, revolution, and inflation had left their sorry markings, but the ancient kehillos of Europe, some tracing their origins back a thousand years, were still going strong.

This was the time when Eretz Yisroel was still very holy and remote. America, at the end of the world, was a land reserved for adventurers. Life was simple and austere. Few could allow themselves the luxury of driving an automobile.

The "Trambahn" and bike riding were all that were available and traveling was by train only. Such was the life before the "Mabul." While Hitler was still a joke, anti-Semitism was very real.

In the Torah camp there were rumblings. Youth looked for new directions — more learning, more action, more inwardness. A new generation was growing up unaware that one day soon all they knew, cherished and were used to, would go up in smoke.

On that Wednesday morning, when the day of Birchas Ha-Chammoh dawned, Jews everywhere were gazing at the sky to greet the sun, blessing the One "Who made the Beginning," commemorating the very first sunrise at the inception of the world. From behind the clouds emerged the majestic luminary placed there by the Creator into orbit to "rule by day" as the Shemesh - Shamosh, the celestial sexton of the Almighty, charged with supplying life, light, warmth and energy to the children of men.

II

Twenty-eight years later, in the year of the world 5713 (1953), Birchas Ha-Chammoh was observed in Washington Heights at a time when our Kehillo was in its ascent. Built from the ashes by the survivors of total destruction, it had risen speedily and had experienced success after success. Our late Rav ל"צ was still in his full strength, the neighborhood was growing, new big apartment houses were being built, there was empty space and our Beis Haknesses was always filled to capacity. The Yeshiva was growing. There were no branches. There also was no Mesivta, no High School, no Beis Hamedrash, no Seminary, not yet. The playground next to the Shul was not overshadowed by a high school building on stilts. But there was life, teeming life, with the accent on youth. No guards were needed, no double and triple locks on apartment doors. This was long ago. The streets were clean, the subways safe, and "graffiti" was a word found in the dictionary.

It was again on a Wednesday morning, one generation

ago, and all eyes were lifted up to the sky in search of the sun which had just completed another cycle to return to the position it assumed at the Creation of the world. Everything had changed in the world around us. One generation had gone up by way of the smokestacks of burning Europe and another generation had come, young and full of optimism. But here was the sun, completing its Divinely set course and Jews everywhere blessed Him Who is the Ruler of the universe, Who has called all life into existence.

III

By the grace of G-d we have reached the end of yet another cycle, and another generation has risen to carry the precious heirloom handed down by its forebears. Our Kehillo is still standing in the same place, though battered and bruised by grave losses, but still standing, brave, adamant and full of vibrant energy. And the accent is still on youth, maybe even more so than before. For those who have left the neighborhood others have come to stay and our activities have increased by leaps and bounds. We are even building again, this time a new Mikveh. Activities are going on daily and nightly. Our Beis Hamedrash serves as a rallying station for young and old who dedicate their time to learning. Our fund-raising activities are blessed with ever increasing enthusiasm. Our Kashrus has widely expanded and is recognized everywhere and, with the help of the Al-mighty, we have no intention whatsoever to diminish our forward drive for the glory of the Torah and the benefit of Klal Yisroel.

The old sun reappears again after 28 years in its original place and a new generation pronounces the blessings. Let us remember that we do not say *שעשה מעשה בראשית* (He created) in the past tense, but *עושה* (He is still creating). He never ceased to create and every day is a renewal of *שעשה מעשה בראשית* and we, all of us, are part of the Divine creation process. With this thought in mind, we are full of faith that our Kehillo, striving to serve the Creator, is in good hands, in the hands of the *שעושה מעשה בראשית*; as long as we keep the eternal flame brightly burning, as long as we do not fail those

who have placed on our shoulders the precious heirloom of the past, to hand it down to our future generations.

What is going to be 28 years from now? Will a united and redeemed “Am Yisroel” greet the sun on the mountains of Zion? Or will our people still be languishing in the lands of dispersion? In this case let us say a fervent Tefilla that our Kehillo shall emerge stronger than ever from the ominous fog ahead, proudly bearing the banner of its great forebears, a delight to behold and a source of inspiration to Torah Jews the world over.

All other ברכות הראיה, like the benediction over the moon, over lightning or blossoming trees, are all pronounced when we actually “see” something. We see the ocean, we see the rainbow and we pronounce a brocho. But when we look at the sun every 28 years we see - nothing - that means nothing special, with our physical eyesight. Birchah Ha-Chammoh is an expression of Emunoh, our conviction that the universe was not there all the time and that it did not start accidentally with a cosmic big bang, but that it was created out of nothing by the infinite will and wisdom of the שׁוֹשֵׁה מֵעֵשָׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית — Who created the cosmos, Who called the sun into being, Who fashioned the world and Who made us.

This knowledge gives us our dignity and our stature. For we, Yisroel, are also called בְּרֵאשִׁית. We were called into existence very much like the sun, to become, in G-d’s own time a “light to the nations”. When the goal will have been reached, then the righteous amongst men will have a good look at our people and beholding us maybe they will then proclaim the blessing “בְּרוּךְ שׁוֹשֵׁה מֵעֵשָׂה בְּרֵאשִׁית”.