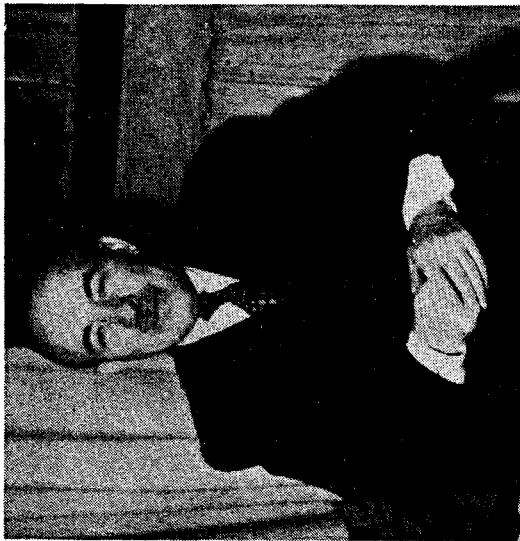


# PINKHOS CHURGIN

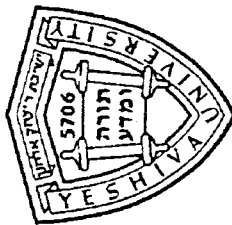
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*An Oral History of the Early Years  
of the Teachers Institute  
and Yeshiva University  
with closing remarks on  
Bar-Ilan University*



A Centennial Commemoration  
1894-1994

Yeshiva University



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### Acknowledgments

We wish to express our warmest gratitude to Menachem Bloch for transcribing this interview. Mr. Bloch, who was a student of our father's at the Teachers Institute, was also the first Registrar of Bar-Ilan University. We are very grateful as well to Dr. Janet M. Levy, Dr. Peter N. Miller and Mr. Samuel R. Miller for valuable assistance with this pamphlet. Rabbi Emanuel Rackman kindly agreed to add a Postscript to this interview contributing further significant information regarding Dr. Churgin's work and influence in Yeshiva University. The text of this interview has been slightly edited for the sake of clarity.

Prof. Bathia Churgin

Prof. Naomi Churgin Miller

This is Hyman D. Grinstein, Registrar of the Teachers Institute of Yeshiva University, interviewing Dr. Pinkhos Churgin, Dean of the Teachers Institute, at his home on Riverside Drive. It is Friday, March 25th, 1955, 9:30 a.m.

### ON THE TEACHERS INSTITUTE

**Grinstein:** Dr. Churgin, we would like to ask you a number of questions concerning the history and the development of the Teachers Institute.

**Churgin:** I will be very glad to answer all questions. I feel that it is particularly important to note the earlier phases of development of the Beit Medrash LeMorim as I found it in 1920 when I came to teach there, and how it rose to the stature it has now.

**Grinstein:** Dr. Churgin, who founded the Teachers Institute?

**Churgin:** The Teachers Institute was founded by the Mizrahi Organization of America in 1917. It was in keeping with the trend at that time in the Mizrahi Organization—in the Mizrahi movement in general—to go out of the narrow program of Mizrahi Zionism into the wider realms of Jewish life; the Mizrahi had always taken cognizance of the importance of Jewish education. At that time there were no Teachers Institutes besides that of the Seminary. As far as I know, it was limited in

scope, the program was limited, and the language of instruction was English. The Mizrahi Organization felt that the first thing to be done was to have an institution train proper and qualified teachers for a higher and more intensive and, of course, an Orthodox type of education.

**Grinstein:** Dr. Churgin, who was the first principal of the Teachers Institute? How many students were enrolled and how many classes were in existence at the time?

**Churgin:** When I came, in 1920, there weren't many students, and there was a reason for it; but, as far as my information goes, the number of students was small; it was an entirely new experiment. If I am not mistaken the first graduating class was in 1920, and among the first graduates were outstanding scholars—later on, of course. And the number of them was very, very small. They usually were recruited from among graduates of Talmud Torahs and very few from the Yeshivos Ketanos, which were not very many in number.

**Grinstein:** Dr. Churgin, who brought you to the institution? I know that you were at Yale in 1920, still working on your dissertation, or perhaps you had already completed it. But how did it come to pass that you came to the Teachers Institute and to New York?

**Churgin:** Before answering that, I think I missed answering

one of your questions. I think that the first Principal of the Beit Medrash LeMorim was HaRav Yaakov Levenson, a very well known Rabbi from Chicago, a good Hebraist, and a leader of the younger set of the Mizrahi movement. Harav Meir Berlin, who was the President of the Mizrahi Organization, invited him to come from Chicago to head the Beit Medrash LeMorim, and with him was Dr. Waxman.

I was invited by Dr. Revel, of blessed memory. That was a most curious thing and Rav Berlin himself noted that. Rav Berlin knew me since my arrival here in 1915. I was active in the Mizrahi in New Haven and before that in Worcester. And yet when the Beit Medrash LeMorim was established, it never occurred to him to invite me to come to teach. He himself remarked that Dr. Revel, who happened to read some of my contributions to the daily papers and the Hebrew weeklies, asked him about me and he said that he would like to see me. He thought that I could be a member of the faculty. I came here at his invitation and I met with him. We discussed certain scientific matters, and seemingly I didn't make a bad impression on him because he told me that he would be happy to have me on the faculty of the Beit Medrash LeMorim; and, of course, it was understood that if within three months I would not be making out too well, I shouldn't feel badly if I had to leave. But I went down—seemingly it wasn't too bad.

**Grinstein:** Dr. Churgin, what did you teach in the beginning, in those early days; what were the subjects that you were engaged

to teach?

**Churgin:** It was quite a variety. I taught one class in Bible, Isaiah, and one class in History, the Second Commonwealth—I was interested in that period even at that time—and I even had a class in grammar the first year. It was the graduating class. And it was for me, I must say, in spite of the surroundings—which were a little dreary—and the poverty of the equipment, it was for me a tremendous experience to meet the, so to say, more mature students where I could talk to them in a fashion that my teachers talked to me at the university. And each and every time I came to teach, it was for me really a great experience. I loved these students, I loved the work, and I fell in love with the Beit Medrash LeMorim at first sight.

**Grinstein:** Undoubtedly, Dr. Churgin, that love continued throughout the years. And so in those days, if I understand it correctly, both the Mizrachi and the Yeshiva controlled and developed the Teachers Institute, and because of that you mentioned both Dr. Revel and Rabbi Berlin. Would you describe then just how the Teachers Institute went over completely to the Yeshiva?

**Churgin:** When I came, you were right, Dr. Grinstein, the Beit Medrash LeMorim was under the dual control of the Yeshiva and the Mizrachi, and it didn't work very well. The Yeshiva felt that it wasn't in complete control of the institution and that the

Beit Medrash LeMorim was not an integral part of the Yeshiva. The Mizrachi was at that time undergoing a financial crisis and since the Yeshiva was supposed to give its part only when the Mizrachi gave its part, and the Mizrachi was not in a position to make payments, the interest of the Yeshiva could not have been the same as it was later on. On the other hand, I want to point out that while the Mizrachi was already at that time thinking of curtailing its activities including the Beit Medrash LeMorim, a good many in the Yeshiva were not happy at all, not only about the partnership but about the acquisition of a new institution. The dread of deficit was on everybody's face and in everybody's heart. That partnership lasted just one year. In 1921 it was dissolved. Not only did the Yeshiva withdraw its support of the institution, but the Mizrachi at the convention also decided to give it up. Rav Berlin, of blessed memory, however, decided to organize a special committee and not to close the Beit Medrash LeMorim. We the teachers on our part decided that we were going to stick to our guns. And in order to make it easier for some of the teachers who were family people and had no other income, we decided that no one particular member of the faculty should get priority. I, on my part, took at that time quite a full position in the Yeshiva proper so that I could maintain myself and carry on the work in the Beit Medrash LeMorim. There wasn't a single man of the faculty—of course we weren't very many at that time—who deserted. Later on, when Rav Levenson left, after he got a position in the Chōvivei Torah, they seemingly demanded that he should spend most of his time

there. But we managed. It was a very, very hard year for us—for the teachers—but not for the students. The work was carried on in the same spirit and the same effectiveness.

By that time, or later in the year, Dr. Revel decided to leave the Yeshiva and he went to Tulsa, as we understood at that time, at the insistence of the family. The Board of Directors, or whatever it was at that time, invited Rabbi Berlin, who also became a businessman—he entered the insurance business so that he wouldn't have to be dependent on the Mizrahi Organization—to take the Presidency of the Yeshiva. He did so and his first act was to transfer the Beit Medrash LeMorim to the full control of the Yeshiva; and the Beit Medrash Lemorim became an integral part of the Yeshiva. By that time the Yeshiva had moved from Montgomery Street to 301 East Broadway. It is a sad fact that nothing remained of that building; it was removed later on. We moved in there. But in spite of the fact that the President of the Institution was Rabbi Berlin and that the Board approved of the incorporation of the Beit Medrash LeMorim into the Yeshiva, some people in the Yeshiva were so much against it that they did all they could not to let the Beit Medrash LeMorim find complete rest. But we went on in spite of these objections. I remember that we couldn't get rooms at all, so we took the big hall downstairs, and there we divided it into classes, and we sat down and did our work. Of course, it was a very sad situation but I never heard any grumbling, neither on the part of the students nor on the part of the teachers. In these circumstances, as bad as they were, the teachers said it

was a joy and a delight to carry on the work of instruction among the students. Dr. Revel returned to the Yeshiva in 1923. Upon his return the position of the Beit Medrash LeMorim was strengthened. Objections were dissolved. Seemingly, the people inside the administration decided that this institution was here to stay, particularly since Dr. Revel wanted continuously to have the Yeshiva expand its activities and become the institution that it did become later on. So, he supported the Beit Medrash LeMorim. It was a short time after my marriage [1923] that Dr. Revel offered me the Principalship of the Beit Medrash LeMorim.

**Grinstein:** Dr. Churgin, when you became Principal, what changes did you make in the program, if any?

**Churgin:** First of all, Dr. Grinstein, I want you to know, that at that time there was Dr. Kaplan, of blessed memory, a great scholar and a great individual. He was at that time the Rosh HaMorim, and I went to him to consult him about that. He was a personal friend of mine. I was living with his family. He urged me to take it, because he said he could not engage in administrative work. I took it and, to be very frank with you, I thought I wasn't qualified for it. And at least for a year's time I was ashamed to sign as Principal of the Beit Medrash LeMorim. In different documents and letters I just eliminated the title. What we did was simply this. I wanted to put the worries of some of the administration at rest, so I worked out a budget that was not

too worrisome. I think that the first budget was about \$7000 a year altogether. How did I do it? I divided the Beit Medrash LeMorim in two sections, so that we had only two classes; but in each and every class was a class of two years, so that the promotion was an inside promotion for some time. We occupied just two rooms. And then we found a few more little rooms, so we took possession of them. Of one little room, I said, "this is going to be the office," and we got some chairs and a desk after a great deal of wrangling; and then I took over another empty, dark little room and there we started to build the library of the Beit Medrash LeMorim. I don't remember where I got the money but I think that I must have gotten it from somebody including some kind of registration money that we must have introduced at that time. I went down and bought the first acquisition for the library, and from that time we started to build the apparatus of the Beit Medrash LeMorim. We worked out a new program and some aspects of the program, I am glad to say, were of an entirely new nature. And later on they were copied and I am glad of it. We didn't take out any patent on them, not only here in America but also in the secondary schools in Israel. I went and printed the program in 1926 in connection with the appearance of the first student publication, the NIR. It wasn't a perfect publication—I mean the program; it was full of misprints. I entrusted the supervision of the printing to a good student and seemingly he was inexperienced. But that was probably the first, I would say, printed program in Hebrew of any school of this kind in America.

The situation was not so favorable. We had to contend with a good many difficulties and obstacles. First of all, I knew that the arrangement in the classes, the inner promotion system, was abnormal, so I started to untangle the classes. And I couldn't do it in a formal and open way because that would immediately arouse not only the ire but the fear of the administration that it would involve additional money and enlargement. So whenever I could get an offer from Dr. Revel of a teacher that he wanted to get rid of in the Yeshiva—and he would never just send out a man—or some young person who came from Europe and was looking for a position and Dr. Revel would show particular interest in him—I was always happy to take him in. And I would immediately divide the classes in one subject and in another subject. I want to say that by approximately 1927 I managed to have the classes separated and have complete four-year classes—of course, with the occupation of additional space—and push on to larger concepts.

**Grinstein:** This brings us down, Dr. Churgin, to 1927. What would you say was the general situation in Jewish education at the time in the U.S.?

**Churgin:** At that time, I would say, in the early twenties, and to a very large extent, down to 1929, all through the so-called prosperity years, the main emphasis was the Talmud Torah. The Yeshivas were very few. We had at that time, in the early twenties, three Yeshivas, and they were elementary: Yeshiva Yaakov

Yosef, and the Yeshiva Chaim Berlin and Torah V'Daas—and the number of students were few. It wasn't as yet recognized that such institutions can and should be established, and people were centered around the Talmud Torah institutions. The Talmud Torah of that time was a community Talmud Torah. We didn't have as yet the type of Talmud Torah that we have now, namely the congregational or synagogue type of Talmud Torah, but the neighborhood Talmud Torah. The later, congregational type spread with the spread of the Conservative type of synagogue. The community, neighborhood Talmud Torah was quite a large institution. There were some Talmud Torahs here in New York that had as many as 1400 children, and the program was an intensive one. There wasn't a single Talmud Torah that I knew of that had less than two hours a day of instruction for classes of every description, from the beginners' class up to the more advanced classes. And it was the Talmud Torah from which we drew our students for the Beit Medrash LeMorim. I want to point out also that we didn't have on the whole what we would call today "high school," even afternoon high school classes. The Talmud Torah began usually after the session of the public high school. The program would extend over a period of six to eight years. There were some Talmud Torahs where you had very advanced classes, in which they taught even Gemara. The best Talmud Torahs of that time were Ivris B'Ivris schools, so that some of their students would fit very well into the general program of the Beit Medrash LeMorim. I want to emphasize that the Beit Medrash LeMorim under those circumstances

served the double purpose of being the first school in Ivris B'Ivris to offer advanced studies in Gemara, in Tanach, in Hebrew—it was the first high school, so to say, in Hebrew. Later on, in the twenties, I think a few schools opened advanced classes. I think the first was the National Hebrew School, the Beit Sefer HaLeumi on East Broadway; it was followed later on by such schools as the DOWNTOWN Talmud Torah, under Mr. Kanovitz, who was an extraordinary educator and administrator. On the other hand, the two Yeshivas, the Yeshiva Chaim Berlin and Torah V'Daas, were conducted in Yiddish, and the Yeshiva of Yaakov Yosef had a parallel system of both Ivris B'Ivris and in Yiddish—so that some students, particularly of the Hebrew department, would be attracted to the Beit Medrash LeMorim. But I must confess that the Beit Medrash LeMorim could not attract very many students from the Yeshivos Ketanos. The parents didn't understand the meaning of such an institution, and would have probably recoiled in fear if they were told that here we were training young men to become teachers. The teaching profession was never popular, particularly in those times, in spite of the fact that the teacher in the twenties rose, as far as his salary was concerned, to quite an important position; some of them would even get as much as \$50 a week. With parents, that was not very attractive or lucrative, while on the other hand they knew that if their boys would enter the Yeshiva, there were better prospects for them to become Rabbis. The Rabbinic position was always an honorable one, in spite of the fact that in the 1920s the life of the

Rabbanim on the whole—with the exception, of course, of a few Conservative Rabbis and congregations or the Reform—was not to be envied very much. So the Beit Medrash LeMorim had to draw from the Talmud Torahs. But on the other hand, we influenced the Talmud Torahs indirectly and directly to improve their program and even to open higher classes. I can say definitely that the Beit Medrash LeMorim not only showed the way for more intensive training of Hebrew teachers but it showed the way for a more intensive advance in Jewish education in this country.

**Grinstein:** Dr. Churgin, in this connection, what influence did the Teachers Institute have on the development of new Yeshivas where the Ivris B'Ivris method was used?

**Churgin:** There can be no question that with the development and growth of the Beit Medrash LeMorim there was a greater willingness on the part of public-spirited educational workers to follow this method. I forgot to say that, if I am not mistaken, the Beit Medrash LeMorim was the first institution in the world to teach Talmud in Hebrew. And it showed how you can teach all other subjects in a very effective way in Ivris B'Ivris. So, at that time, when a group, for instance, of Jewish leaders in Borough Park decided to establish a day school, a Yeshiva, which is now the Yeshiva Eitz Chaim, and they wanted to have a more modern school, there was no question about the language of instruction introduced, Ivris B'Ivris. I must say that the first large

number of students to come from a Yeshiva Ketana was from Borough Park. As a matter of fact, in the first years in the early 1930s, the graduates of Eitz Chaim formed a substantial part of the student body. Then, when the Yeshiva of the Bronx was founded, at nearly the same time, about twenty-eight years ago, the same group of people also felt that the Yeshiva should be conducted in Hebrew, which would be a purely Ivris B'Ivris school. The Yeshiva later on took the name of Yisrael Salanter after it combined with the Talmud Torah of the Bronx, and it carried on that way for almost twenty-five years—and I may say that some of the best graduates of the Beit Medrash LeMorim, who now occupy very important places in Jewish life, came from the Yeshiva of the Bronx. And the same happened in Flatbush, when that Yeshiva was established; they established it also Ivris B'Ivris. I wouldn't say that the Beit Medrash LeMorim had a direct hand in all of this; we hadn't reached in the 1920s the position that the institution is occupying today, and people would not have asked advice from us. But in general, at that time, the movement for Ivris B'Ivris was actually flowing from the national revival and Zionism. An urge to revive the Hebrew language, to make it a spoken language, influenced these people who founded the Yeshivas. But indirectly certainly, because the Beit Medrash LeMorim showed the way. It was the one higher institution that was completely Ivris B'Ivris.

**Grinstein:** Dr. Churgin, in 1928 or 1929 Yeshiva University

moved its quarters from the Lower East Side to 186th Street and Amsterdam Avenue in the City of New York. What effect did this removal have on the expansion and the development of the Teachers Institute?

**Churgin:** It had the same effect that it had on the Yeshiva in general. We must not attribute all the expansion to the physical expansion. Of course, the propaganda for this building that preceded our change of quarters and the building itself—magnificent building, new equipment—had an attraction, made a tremendous impression on the people. I would say that for the first time it brought into focus the implications of the type of learning and teaching that the Yeshiva offered. And I must say, in this connection, that when I came, for instance, in 1920, and later on even for some years, the Yeshiva was little known. As a matter of fact, as I said, everything was concentrated on the Talmud Torah and very few thought of the possibility of developing a really great institution of Jewish learning in the way and in the spirit of the European Yeshivas. You could hardly have a notice about the Yeshiva in the public press. I can describe here an interesting episode. When Dr. Revel, of blessed memory, came back to the Yeshiva in 1923, I was at that time quite a *persona grata* in the *Tageblatt*. I contributed to it from time to time and they knew me very well; they respected me. I came into the editorial room, and met the first man who was editing the English page. I said to him: "Do you know that Dr. Revel has returned to the Yeshiva?" He looked at me and said: "So what?"

I asked: "Don't you think this is an event that should be noted?" He said to me: "What event? Who cares?" I went up to the Yiddish editorial room and it so happened that the editor at that time was absent and the assistant was there. The assistant didn't know at all about such matters; he knew me very well, and he respected me, and I told him: "You know that Dr. Revel came back?" He said to me: "What do you want me to do?" I said: "You should write an editorial about it." He said: "Go ahead and write the editorial." So I went ahead and wrote a beautiful editorial on its significance, and I understand that later on there was a whole scandal. "How in the world did you permit such a thing to happen, an editorial on such an insignificant matter?" And that experience showed me that we had to do a great deal more about the popularization of the Yeshiva and I urged this on Dr. Revel. I wrote numerous articles. I had some friends on the *Tageblatt* and the *Morning Journal*. I want to point out that we had two good friends on the *Morning Journal*. One of them was the editor, Mr. Wernick, who was later a member of the Board, a very interesting individual. And for some reason or other I would say he had some kind of historical instinct. He was devoted to the Yeshiva. To him the Yeshiva was everything, and his successor Mr. Fishman was a gentleman of the highest caliber. He also helped the Yeshiva in this respect.

The building and the opening of Yeshiva College in 1928 helped a great deal to enhance the prestige of the Yeshiva in general, and of the Beit Medrash LeMorim. By that time I did not have to battle for students for the Beit Medrash LeMorim.

They came to us, and I may say that I did my best to see that the Beit Medrash LeMorim was also popularized. There were, I may also say in this connection, a good many pessimists about the Beit Medrash LeMorim, not only as was the case with Yeshiva College. I remember having once met the late Mr. Friedland, the poet, who was already at that time in Cleveland, and he said to me: "Tell me, Churgin, who are the great men that you produced?" Of course, there was a lot of irony in that. We constantly said that the Beit Medrash LeMorim was going to produce leaders of a different type. I said to him: "Just be patient. You don't produce great men in a few years with a sixteen year-old graduate—that was usually the age—at 16-17 he completed high school." By 1930 the Beit Medrash LeMorim was, I would say, a full-fledged institution, and we had at that time 150 students approximately. And if I'm not mistaken that was the largest number of students in any Teachers Institute in America and probably also in other countries.

**Grinstein:** Dr. Churgin, I understand that the Teachers Institute made a great deal of progress in the 1930s. Just when did the changeover to a five-year and then to a six-year program occur?

**Churgin:** Dr. Grinstein, you probably know that with the beginning of the 1930s, the depression began, which had a terrible effect on all institutions. There was really a panic even in the field of education. It is even tragic to think that some synagogues and centers of opulence decided to give up Talmud

Torahs and their day schools in order to save money, and they handed them over to the teachers. I don't want to name the institutions but it would be a shock to everyone who knows them today. It simply demonstrates the panic that the depression caused for the institutions. And the Yeshiva suffered a great deal from it because the year 1929 left the Yeshiva with a large and very oppressive burden of indebtedness to banks, mortgage; and the financial branch of the Yeshiva was not yet developed. There was always the possibility that the shareholders of the mortgage would close up the Yeshiva. As a matter of fact, we were thinking in those years of preparing a place to move to in case they took over the Yeshiva. It was just a miracle that they didn't do that. If I am not mistaken, they actually had a little foreclosure in their hands and they could always apply it, and they even interviewed certain institutions to take it over for them. But happily enough, this didn't happen; but as far as the institution is concerned, the period between 1930 and 1937 was a time of great suffering for everyone on the faculty. And yet we stood our ground. We carried on not only with our work but with our plans for growth and expansion. I was at that time, in 1931-32, trying to center around the Beit Medrash LeMorim and the Yeshiva, of course, the teaching profession. I invited to a conference representatives of the Agudas Ha-Morim, Agudas Ha-Minhalim, and other educational agencies to the Yeshiva and we had there a conference, and it was a very lively conference. Dr. Revel addressed this conference too. And actually we had the whole profession around the Beit Medrash LeMorim

for one single purpose: to preserve the intensive character of Jewish education, because at that time the movement for curtailment, for a minimum education, started and it spread like wildfire, even to Orthodox institutions. Until that time, nobody knew of a Talmud Torah that had less than two hours a day; now they cut it down to less time and less attendance. A three-day school came into the world. We sensed the danger of minimal education and wanted to concentrate on constructive forces in Jewish education. We organized them but we couldn't expand that organization because of a lack of funds; we didn't even have enough money to pay the salaries of the teachers. Nevertheless, all the faculty stood their ground. None of them left the institution although some of them had offers even at that time.

We organized at that time the system in the Beit Medrash LeMorim on the basis of five years—I think it was introduced in 1935—because we wanted the students to get better training and to give them an opportunity to study longer in our College. The six-year system came into being about four years later. The reason why we could do that was very simple: the College gave us the opportunity to keep the students longer. Before that time, because of the absence of facilities inside the institution for college training, it was quite impossible to keep the students, particularly in the morning, for longer than their high school period. Every student wanted to enter a day college. And they would not, or very few of them would agree to study at night. But now that we had our own college and it developed

nically—in 1932 they had their first graduation—we thought we could afford to keep the students longer. As a matter of fact it helped a great deal to give the students a better and a more deeply grounded training.

I may also point out here that most of the students in the 1920s were Europeans; they came from Europe and they had a better basis in Jewish studies. As a matter of fact, four years was more than sufficient for them to get a really grounded and substantial Jewish education; these young people of sixteen were absolutely qualified to go and teach. Later in the 1930s, most of the students were Americans and they didn't have that basis. That is why they needed more time in order that they should be fully qualified as Jewish educators from the standpoint of knowledge as well as from the standpoint of pedagogy.

Even in those years we maintained, on a voluntary informal basis, classes for post-graduates. A pretty fine number of students would come to Dr. Kaplan at his house and he would give them hours of instruction in Gemara. I must say that those students who are now occupying very high positions in Jewish life repeatedly told me of their experience with this informal teaching. They said that the devotion of the teachers and the eagerness to give them any instruction that they wanted was really moving and they can't forget it to this very day. One of them was Dr. Kaplan, of blessed memory, and a few other teachers participated.

## ON YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

**Grinstein:** Dr. Churgin, at this point I should like to ask you to elaborate and tell us about your activity in connection with the institution as a whole, as Dr. Revel took sick and upon his death.

**Churgin:** Dr. Grinstein, I never limited myself to the Beit Medrash LeMorim, particularly from the moment when it was decided to open the College and to move into new quarters. I can say that I was taken by the prospect, by the vision, of the emergence of a great institution. I was trying to do my best, as I said before, to popularize the Yeshiva. While I had to center in the 1920s on the development of the Beit Medrash LeMorim, I never lost sight of the Yeshiva and its greater vistas. And all through the 1930s, during the crisis years, we were brought into the play of the events that affected the Yeshiva proper. We had at that time general meetings of all the faculties and we were trying to find ways and means of keeping the institution together. But even during these years, Dr. Revel, of blessed memory, asked me to do certain things outside the Beit Medrash LeMorim, which I gladly did. We started to organize at that time the Graduate School which now carries his name; even in the late 1920s we were planning the general program for the Yeshiva. There were continuous demands on the part of the students of the Yeshiva to widen the program and to stabilize the program. I was asked to prepare such a program and I

prepared such a program for the whole institution. Of course it was never carried into reality. But about 1935 the graduate school was organized—or rather, reorganized—in a fashion that assumed the character of an institution.

In 1936 Dr. Belkin became the Secretary of the Institution or rather, for all intents and purposes, its Dean. Later on, on account of the crisis in the leadership of the College, a committee was formed representing so-to-say all departments. Dr. Belkin, myself, and Dr. Isaacs were on this committee, and I believe that this committee for the four years when it was in control of the College did an exceedingly wonderful job. The program was reshuffled, hours were reshuffled. In the 1930s there were classes that were running up to 11:00 o'clock at night. We abolished that, and we put it down on a different basis. We limited the time to 6-7 o'clock—after 7 o'clock there should be no classes except laboratories; and also, with regard to the salaries of the teachers, and the general program—and we were planning on expanding the Graduate School, although we still had a few of the mortgages hanging over our heads. I may say that the turn to the better started in those years, in 1936, when the Yeshiva launched the first campaign for redemption of the mortgage, with Rabbi Miller as the chairman of the campaign. The campaign was not very successful because we didn't have the means to conduct it, and we knew very little at that time about the intricacies of fund-raising, but it started the ball rolling, and by the time Dr. Revel died, the mortgage was redeemed and we began to see the light of day. Before telling

about what happened after the death of Dr. Revel, I may say that there were so many tragic aspects to those years. When Dr. Revel would invite some richer Jews interested in the Yeshiva to his office and invite some of the Rosh Yeshivas and teachers to tell them of the greatness of the Yeshiva and the difficult situation, he asked them for their help but they would just give us their sympathy.

When Dr. Revel died the situation was very grave. The institution was in great danger of, I would say, disappearance. There were a good many people who were after the Yeshiva. The Agudas Ha-Rabbonim was never happy with the Yeshiva because the Yeshiva gave Smicha. It is tragic that some of the leaders of the Agudas Ha-Rabbonim didn't foresee the need for modern Orthodox rabbis who could take their place in the modern synagogues that were rising all over the country, and they continued their objections. I sometimes heard outstanding Rabbonim expressing themselves about the Yeshiva in ways that would shock me. I remember at one time that at a gathering of some Rabbonim I was sitting with them and some of them expressed themselves that the Yeshiva was even worse than the Hebrew Union. It shocked me and I told them: "You are shortsighted—the Yeshiva is saving Orthodoxy, is saving you and your heritage." They couldn't see it. And they couldn't see it also when it came to the appointment of Rabbonim. I remember in the 1930s whenever a Yeshiva Musmach would be invited to some town, the Rav of that town or synagogue would come running to Dr. Revel protesting, and demanding that they

shouldn't appoint him, and in a good many cases he had to give in. So, the Yeshiva was not the institution that the Agudas Ha-Rabbonim was happy to support. So after Dr. Revel's death the Agudas Ha-Rabbonim wanted to take it over. And we knew what that meant. Rabbi Turoff sent at that time a wire to the Yeshiva informing them that they had appointed a committee of seven to take over the Yeshiva. Fortunately for the Yeshiva, Rabbi Lookstein immediately brought into play Mr. Samuel Levy. Mr. Samuel Levy at one time was very active in the Yeshiva and he continued his interest all through the years. He was the chairman of the Campaign Committee for the Building in the twenties, and he continued his interest, but later on, with the crisis and the depression and with court trouble, court actions, he withdrew. But the urgency of the situation brought him back to the leadership and Rabbi Lookstein was instrumental in that. Immediately a committee was appointed, a committee of eleven, I think, and the committee constituted itself as the Central Board of Directors of the Yeshiva. We immediately answered the wire by telling them that the Yeshiva has a Board of Directors and it was not, so to say, on auction. Then, of course, there were inside fears and inside confusion. A committee was formed and Rav Moshe Soloveitchik was also on it, an inside committee, and this committee also kept the Agudas Ha-Rabbonim informed but out of a possible take-over.

I for one had always watched Dr. Belkin; I looked upon him as a great asset for the institution because of his combination of Talmudic scholarship and general culture. He was

known for his great scholarship from the moment he came here from the European Yeshivas. I always urged upon Dr. Revel to bring him to the Yeshiva and in a short time he made a name for himself as a Rosh Yeshiva. His system was different from the general system of pilpul, and he really aroused enthusiasm among the students for the Torah and the Gemara and the Rishonim, and he also gave a class in Greek, and that made a good combination. As I said before, we also brought him into the leadership of the College. That gave him a special status. I may say here that at one time Dr. Revel wanted to appoint him as assistant to the President in charge of the Yeshiva. I urged him to accept it; others urged him not to, and he didn't. I thought that he was the proper man to succeed Dr. Revel and I found support among the so-called "inner circle", —Dr. Sar, Rabbi Lookstein, and also Dr. Isaacs, with whom he was associated in the conduct of the College. So, in order to create some kind of order immediately, we couldn't wait very long. We came to the committee and recommended that Dr. Belkin should be appointed Dean of the Yeshiva, and in order to satisfy some fears we added to him two more of the Rosh Yeshivas. But that was just a formal matter. As soon as he was appointed Dean of the Yeshiva, I mean a short time after that, or before that, Rav Moshe died all of a sudden. So there was the question of making new appointments, and in a short time. Dr. Soloveitchik was brought into the Yeshiva to take his father's place and new appointments were made. Even Reb Chaim Heller was appointed as a Rosh Yeshiva; he later on withdrew,

and another, Rabbi Rosen, a great man, a great Ruv, couldn't accept it. Then they brought in the Lomza Ruv, and an Executive Board was created consisting of representatives of the Board and the higher level of the inside circle. Before the Board was appointed it was decided to have Dr. Isaacs, Dr. Belkin, and myself elevated to the Deanship: I of the Beit Medrash LeMorim, Dr. Belkin of the Yeshiva, Dr. Isaacs of the College, and Dr. Sar as the Dean of Men. The Executive Board consisted of the Deans, plus the representative of the chairmen, who was Rabbi Lookstein, and Dr. Jung. The Board decided that it should carry on, at least for some time, to do the work of reorganization. The finance office was moved from the Yeshiva to new quarters downtown, and other things were instituted; plans were worked out, the Board of Directors was established on a permanent basis, checks began to be paid on time, and the financial office, of course, was expanded. At that time the mortgage and the indebtedness to the bank were entirely removed. Now the mortgage was to this very day held by the endowment foundation just as a matter of expediency, so that the Yeshiva should not go to borrow money on the institution. That was made as a condition. We started even at that time to begin paying back salaries and it wasn't very easy because the Board couldn't understand why we should pay back salaries before we stabilized the present salaries. But we convinced them slowly. I must point to the fact now that Rabbi Lookstein and Samuel Levy were the most important factors in saving the Yeshiva for the future.

In 1943 we decided that the time had come to select the President of the institution, and after discussing the matter thoroughly we decided to recommend Dr. Belkin. Other candidates were of course in the running in other plans. There was, for instance, a plan of dividing the College and the Yeshiva into two parts each with its own president. We rejected this view. We thought that the Yeshiva must be kept intact, that this was the uniqueness of the institution and that we must not permit a separation, and that made it important that the head of the institution should be both a Talmudic scholar and first-class in general scholarship. We found that in Dr. Belkin. Just a few days before his selection, which we intended to have done in a very festive manner, the leaders of the Yeshiva College Alumni started a movement to stop it. We don't know to this very day why and wherefore such a thing was done. It caused us a great deal of pain. We sent wires to the members of the Board not to worry. It actually divided the Board to such an extent that they acted against the election of the President at that time. We had very trying days, critical days, because we felt that if that would have happened—if no election were held—then the institution would be heading toward chaos. Happily for the institution, the majority was for Dr. Belkin and it was made unanimous after the election, which was an open election, unconditional and without limitation of time. Now we can say that the institution was really happy in doing that, because he immediately showed his ability, determination, devotion, tirelessness, and selflessness in the work for the Yeshiva. I don't have to tell you, Dr.

Grinstein, what the Yeshiva is now, the great strides that it has made since he came to the Presidency, the different departments that were added, and I hope that the Yeshiva is not going to remain stationary now.

With regard to the Beit Medrash LeMorim, of course, it continues, I would say, its progress toward a central position in Jewish education. It became more and more recognized as the institution that could provide teachers with a real background in their studies. Now in this connection I forgot to tell you that we were also instrumental in organizing the Board of License here in New York twenty-five years ago, which is still in existence. At one meeting of the Board of License, when the types of license were discussed, one type or two types, Grade A or Grade B, one Rabbi, another member of the committee, stood up and moved that we should have an A and B, and that the only people to get an A license should be the graduates of the Beit Medrash LeMorim. That shows our strength. And, I may say, that from that time down to this very day the Beit Medrash LeMorim, was shown the highest respect by all shades of educators.

#### *Summary and Remarks on Bar-Ilan University*

**Grinstein:** Dr. Churgin, this statement that you've made to me clearly reveals how you came thirty-five years ago to the institution as a teacher, then how you moved on to become Principal and ultimately Dean of the Teachers Institute. You have also

indicated how the institution grew and developed and established itself within the walls of the Yeshiva as an important institution, as well as in American Jewry as a whole. It is also clear to us now that you not only devoted your time to the Teachers Institute but that you came out from within the walls and the narrow precincts of the Institute to help Yeshiva University assume its grand position in American Jewish life. It is clear to us that in the beginning, in the 1930s, after the resignation of the Dean of the College, you took an active part as a member of a committee to continue the work of Yeshiva College, and that associated with you were Dr. Isaacs and Dr. Belkin. And then upon the death of Dr. Revel, of blessed memory, you joined a group to continue the work of Yeshiva University as a whole, and that you directed, aided, and abetted the ultimate appointment of Dr. Belkin as President of Yeshiva University.

May I say at this point that Dr. Churgin leaves for Israel on Monday, March 28. Today the graduates of the Teachers Institute begin a three-day conference at Yeshiva University, in which they will discuss the various phases of Jewish educational endeavor in the U.S.A. and present a resumé of the activities of the Teachers Institute and of its graduates in this milieu that has been created by Yeshiva University in the Jewish community in the U.S. On Sunday, Dr. Belkin, President of Yeshiva University, will confer upon Dr. Churgin the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters. Following that, the Friends of the Teachers Institute, its alumni, its faculty, will assemble at a

farewell dinner to Dr. Churgin. On Monday, he will fly to Israel to assume his position as President of Bar-Ilan University.

Dr. Churgin, I wonder whether you would like to make a brief statement concerning Bar-Ilan University, its hopes, its place in Israel.

**Churgin:** I would say, Dr. Grinstein, that Bar-Ilan University represents actually an extension of what we were doing in the Yeshiva. We went through Bar-Ilan University to train a cultured generation in Israel, intellectual leaders, who at the same time will be based and rooted in Judaism, to guard the coming generations from an annihilating secularism. We believe that Judaism can go hand in hand with science and general culture, and we believe in the strength and the power of Judaism. It has enough strength in itself to not only recreate its past glories but to fashion new glories, and to bring new revelations, spiritual guidance, spiritual light to itself and to the world. And that is mainly the purpose of Bar-Ilan University. Personally, I believe that Bar-Ilan University will not only be a sister institution to Yeshiva University, but—I would not say part of it, because we cannot have a part in Eretz Israel—but it will become a partner with the Yeshiva in the work of bringing about a great renaissance of the Jewish spirit.

**Grinstein:** Thank you, Dr. Churgin. May G-d give you long life and may He help you carry out this noble mission.