

(It is possible that R' Fishel Behr's "faith" in R' Hayyim was misplaced, because according to the great Torah scholar and historian R' Yitzhaq-Isaac Halevi in *Halevi Letter*<sup>3</sup> "each and every year, [R' Hayyim] sat in [Halevi's] house [in Vilna] for full months". Although Halevi had to flee Russia in 5655 [1895], 15 years before R' Hayyim's meeting with R' Fishel Behr, it is not beyond reason to speculate that R' Soloveichik had picked up information from his Vilna host on the very subject R' Fishel discussed; R' Halevi was the author of *גזרות הראשונים*, the first printed volume of which [published in Pressburg in 5657 (1897)] deals, *inter alia*, with the era and authorship of the *הלכות גדולות*.)

#### § the fourth paragraph

R' Hayyim's mission to R' Ruvallah Denneburger – R' Hayyim impresses his host – R' Hayyim reads R' Ruvallah's mind – R' Ruvallah later serves as *dayyan* in a Volozhin *din Torah* – R' Hayyim is cognizant of R' Ruvallah's thinking through Volozhin *talmid* R' Avraham-Yitzhaq Kook – a wrong version of why R' Hayyim traveled to Denneburg – he is tested on whether he is worthy of his post in Volozhin – he responds bristlingly when this challenge is recalled – R' Hayyim also meets a *talmid* of R' Menasheh Ilyer on this trip

My father continued<sup>4</sup>, "The world says R' Hayyim specialized in anticipating [צוטרעפֿען] a person's thoughts," and related the following: "When the Volozhin Yeshiva opened a *kolel* for the first time, the administration wanted to get approval for it." (Our protagonist added parenthetically, "Unlike the present, at that time one could not do whatever one's heart desired: to open a *kolel*, [one needed] the approval of renowned Torah leaders.") "The Rosh Yeshiva, the *Netziv*, decided to send R' Hayyim to R' Ruvallah [Levin] Denneburger – Dvinsk was called Denneburg then – for a letter of approval. R' Ruvallah was a *talmid* of R' Laiballeh Shapiro, first Rav of Kovno<sup>4</sup> and was held to be the

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, Ch. 3, the second paragraph of Exc. L. <sup>4</sup> In the Salanter Interview " Cf. the fourth paragraph of Ch. 3.1.

greatest scholar of his generation [גרול הדור] at the time,” my father added<sup>v</sup>. Also cf. *Rados Memoirs*<sup>w</sup> that when the *hasidic rav* of Denneburg tried for months to muster the opposition of *rubbanim* and *hasidic rebbes* to a ruling of R’ Ruvallah, R’ Yitzhaq-Elhanan Spector sent the *rebbe* a missive reading, “כבר הורה זקן הגאונים” (the doyen of the *geonim* has already ruled)<sup>x</sup>, and one cannot contest a ruling that he has handed down.” On the assumption that the Volozhin Kolel referred to by my father was the one financed by the Kiev sugar magnate R’ Yisrael Brodski and established in the Volozhin Yeshiva at the beginning of 5646 (end of 1885), we can set the time of R’ Hayyim’s excursion to Denneburg at 5645 (1885), which was two years before R’ Ruvallah’s demise and five years after R’ Hayyim began delivering *shai’urim* in Volozhin. (According to *יעקב וניכרין יעקב* and *Tzino-‘Etz*<sup>z</sup>, the authorities did not forbid the 10 Brodski Kolel members from remaining in Volozhin after the *yeshiva* was closed down seven years later, in 5652 [1892], and these outstanding *yungeleit* were joined after two and a half years by another group of 30 from Minsk, and later by more self-sufficient *talmidim*. The reader will find interesting the appeal on behalf of the reviving *yeshiva* addressed to the *Jews of America* by R’ Yeruham-Yehudah-Laib Perlman, the Minsker “גדולי”<sup>a</sup>, and R’ Elya-Hayyim Meisel of Lodz, as quoted in *Tzino-‘Etz*<sup>b</sup>. [*Megged*<sup>c</sup> states in the name of the author’s grandfather R’ Ya‘aqov Kantrowitz, one of the members of the Brodski Kolel, that it was R’ Perlman who tested the candidates for their acceptance to the *kolel*.] Later still, another group arrived from Telz and other places, and when the number of students reached “close to two hundred<sup>d</sup>”, a *rosh yeshiva* was needed. In 5659 [1899], R’ Rephael Shapiro – back in 5640 [1880], in the era when his father-in-law, the *Netziv*, was *rosh yeshiva* and he his assistant, R’ Rephael had transferred his post in the Volozhin Yeshiva to his son-in-law R’ Hayyim Soloveichik<sup>e</sup> – resigned from his position as

<sup>v</sup> In Monsey Group <sup>w</sup> N. 12, above – pp. 107-108 <sup>x</sup> *Per שבח נ"א ע"א* <sup>y</sup> The second paragraph of Exc. B, above – Vol. III, p. 146 <sup>z</sup> *Op. cit.*, Ch. 2, the sixth paragraph of Exc. A – pp. 353-357 <sup>a</sup> Ch. 1, Exc. F <sup>b</sup> p. 355. This letter is cited in Ch. 3, Exc. F. <sup>c</sup> *Op. cit.*, Ch. 2, the first paragraph of Exc. B – p. 30 <sup>d</sup> *Tzino-‘Etz*, p. 355 <sup>e</sup> This is discussed at length in Ch. 4, the fourth paragraph of Exc. I.

Rav of Bobroisk [where he had come in 5646 (1886) from his earlier rabbinical post in Novo-Alexandrovsk<sup>f</sup>] and took on the rabbinate of the much smaller town of Volozhin in order to return the crown of Torah to the city's revived *yeshiva*<sup>g</sup>. In summary, it was through the Brodski Kolel that the *yeshiva* in Volozhin was eventually restored.)

R' Meir Lieberman<sup>h</sup> reported that R' Velvalleh Soloveichik told him that R' Hayyim was sent by the *Netziv* to R' Ruvallleh because the latter did not have such a high opinion of the Volozhin Yeshiva, and that after his guest spoke to him, he said – enigmatically, it seems – “When they say that Volozhin has everything, you can believe it.” It may be that there is no contradiction between our protagonist's version of the purpose of the trip and R' Velvalleh's statement, because the ostensible reason for the visit to Denneburg was the Brodski Kolel question, while what lay behind it was to induce R' Ruvallleh to change his mind about the *yeshiva*. If not for the *yeshiva*'s interest in showing the good face of Volozhin to R' Ruvallleh Denneburger, the question of the *kolel* might have been resolved by asking some other leading Torah figure – or letting the *Netziv* himself, certainly a world authority, decide on his own. However, R' Ruvallleh's change of opinion about Volozhin *after* meeting R' Hayyim appears qualified.

My father continued: “When R' Hayyim introduced himself as a son-in-law of his *rebbe*'s son, R' Rephael Shapiro, R' Ruvallleh said, ‘So you are the R' Hayyim they talk so much about? Ask a question [אָרױטאָ]!’ R' Hayyim replied, ‘[I should ask] a question? You ask the question and I will give both your answer and my answer,’ and that is what he did.” R' Shlomo Lorincz repeated this story<sup>i</sup> as he had heard it from our protagonist during the latter's 5623 (1963) visit to Israel: My father said that R' Hayyim explained to R' Ruvallleh why a question of his own would be insufficient proof that he deserved to be “talked so much about”, because “during his studies, *every yeshiva* student comes up with at least one outstanding question!” (According to R' Meshulam-David

<sup>f</sup> See Ch. 4, the end of the fourth paragraph of Exc. I. <sup>g</sup> Cf. Ch. 3, Exc. F. <sup>h</sup> Interview September 25, 1996 <sup>i</sup> Interview September 16, 1994

Soloveichik/, R' Hayyim offered to tell R' Ruvallah what the latter was about to say after he had said, "I was sitting up last night writing a responsum on a certain halakhic problem," and R' Hayyim surmised exactly what his host had written – the incipient response, the difficulty with it, and the denouement. This is not in direct conflict with my father's version, because this may have transpired *after* R' Hayyim had turned down the opening request for a question from him and had put the ball back into R' Ruvallah's court.) R' Shlomo Lorincz also reported in my father's name that R' Hayyim was able to extrapolate his host's response by listening to the way he had posed the question. According to this notion, R' Hayyim figured out R' Ruvallah's way of thinking in a manner identical to that by which he allegedly figured out R' Fishel Behr's – merely by the conversation that ensued at the time they met and preceded the Torah exchange.

The story of R' Hayyim's meeting with R' Ruvallah is also recorded in *Rabiner-RMS*<sup>k</sup> with two major variations, to wit, 1) R' Hayyim came to Denneburg to raise funds together with his father-in-law, and 2) R' Hayyim told R' Ruvallah that his cognizance of the latter's way of reasoning derived from a Volozhin student hailing from Denneburg who had repeated several of his *rav's* Torah novellae to him. (Two other, slight alterations in *Rabiner-RMS* from my father's version are that R' Hayyim did not tell R' Ruvallah *in advance* that he would surmise his response, nor did R' Hayyim warn R' Ruvallah that his own solution would be different from his host's.) *Rabiner-RMS* attributes its version to R' Naphtali-Zvi-Yehudah Riff and adds: "About the discussion between R' Ruvallah and R' Hayyim, I also heard from R' Mikhel Feinstein in his father-in-law R' Velvalleh's name" – a wording indicating that R' Velvalleh's version was, like our protagonist's, not exactly the same as R' Riff's. R' Velvalleh's version of R' Hayyim's introduction to R' Ruvallah may, however, not be the same as our protagonist's. It may be the one quoted in R' Velvalleh's name in *שמושה של תורה*<sup>l</sup>, which claims that the meeting

<sup>i</sup> Interview February 25, 1998 <sup>k</sup> *Op. cit.*, Ch. 3, the second paragraph of Exc. H – pp. רעז-רעט

<sup>l</sup> The second paragraph of Exc. B, above – pp. טר-טט

of the two occurred when “Volozhin Yeshiva was represented by R’ Hayyim at a *din Torah* it conducted against the Kovno Kolel concerning fundraising rights”. The opening of the Brodski Kolel and the *din Torah* did, in fact, occur at about the same time! But while it is true that R’ Hayyim represented the Volozhin Yeshiva at the *din Torah* – where the exchange of harsh words with R’ Avromchik Tannes took place, as related in the first paragraph, above – our protagonist maintained that the reason for R’ Soloveichik’s (maiden) visit to R’ Ruvallah was, as stated above, connected with the *kolel* question, because it is unlikely that R’ Hayyim paid a call on an appointed *dayyan* in the absence of the other litigant. This, of course, does not preclude R’ Velvalleh’s assertion that the *din Torah* was conducted before R’ Ruvallah – but some (short) time *after* R’ Hayyim’s unconnected, initial visit to him. The testimony in *Rabiner-RMS* that R’ Hayyim’s visit to Dvinsk was for fundraising purposes is also questionable, though his being accompanied by his father-in-law is reasonable, inasmuch as Novo-Alexandrovsk, where R’ Rephael was *rav* for another year before moving on to Bobroisk, as above, was only 20 kilometers from Denneburg. My father’s statement that “R’ Hayyim introduced himself as a son-in-law of... R’ Rephael Shapiro,” indicates, however, that our protagonist held that R’ Rephael was not present at the meeting.

In regard to *Rabiner-RMS*’s claim that R’ Hayyim’s cognizance of R’ Ruvallah’s way of reasoning derived from hearing the latter’s novellae from one of the Volozhin *talmidim*, this author was told by R’ Yoseph Soloveichik<sup>m</sup> that in the Soloveichik family there is such a tradition (though the claim that R’ Hayyim *told it* to R’ Ruvallah is, of course, moot). The Soloveichik tradition has it that the student from whom R’ Hayyim heard R’ Ruvallah’s Torah words was R’ Avraham-Yitzhaq Kook (later the first chief rabbi in *Eretz Yisrael*), who hailed from Griva\*, a town near Denneburg, and had spoken to its *rav* often. R’ Meir Lieberman also reported in R’ Velvalleh’s name that in advance of his trip, R’ Hayyim asked a *bahur* (unidentified) from Denneburg to write

<sup>m</sup> Interview March 21, 1993    \* This *shtetl* is in Courland; it is not Gra’ycveh, near Bialystok.

some questions to his *rav*, and by looking at the answers R' Soloveichik knew how R' Ruvallah's mind worked. R' Meshulam-David Soloveichik confirmed this<sup>2</sup> but also elaborated that R' Hayyim had at first asked a *talmid* to repeat things he had heard from R' Ruvallah, and when R' Hayyim did not receive a satisfactory response, he asked the young man to write a certain question to the *rav*. The latter wrote back a response to the question with the following introduction: "Knowing you, I can tell that the question is not yours. The question is hard as steel [קשה כבדול] and it comes [not from you but] from some person who is hard as steel [ל' אדם שהוא קשה כבדול]." (Also cf. *ל' שמושה של תורה*, which records that the [unnamed] *bahur* called on R' Ruvallah to ask the question during a visit home [rather than writing it to him from Volozhin]. Also cf. *ל' הרב משה צבי נריה*, where the author states that because R' Avraham-Yitzhaq Kook had been indoctrinated with R' Ruvallah's method of study, R' Kook preferred the *Netziv's shai'urim* over R' Hayyim's. That author quotes R' Kook as telling him that R' Ruvallah's injunction that "every סברה (idea) in the world is suspect – it must be explicit, or almost explicit (in *Shas* and *Rishonim*) to be valid" precluded the acceptance of R' Hayyim's method of study<sup>3</sup>. Perhaps R' Ruvallah's enigmatic conclusion about Volozhin – "Volozhin has everything" – quoted above, reflects a certain moderation of his objection to R' Hayyim's method; the Denneburg Rav meant that

<sup>2</sup> In the February 25, 1998, interview <sup>3</sup> Per *ל' מנחות צ"ה ע"ב ודש"י שם* p. 10. Published by *ל' חש"ט*, תל אביב, חשבון מורשת, -- הוצאת מורשת, ע"א. *ל' שמושה של תורה*, *ibid.*, incorrectly asserts that R' Ruvallah had R' Hayyim in mind when advising a (unnamed) *bahur* going off to Volozhin to study under the *rosh yeshiva* "who learns *pshat* well"; it was the *Netziv* he had in mind. Also cf. Exc. A, above, that R' Hayyim had reciprocal criticism of the young Kook. The *Netziv* also had reciprocal *admiration* for R' Kook, as indicated in *ל' הרמב"ם*, (כפר הרואה, ה'תשמ"ה), by משה *ל' הרמב"ם*, ע"ב נריה, p. 10, which records that R' Hayyim-Yankev Levine reported in the name of fellow Kamenitz *talmid* R' Zvi Serniker that his father, the Rav of Sernik (probably R' Avraham-Peretz Tzibolnik), who had studied in Volozhin at the same time as R' Kook, stated that the *Netziv* had said in superlative praise of R' Kook. "A student such as the Griver (Kook) had never before been in Volozhin." In this statement, the *Netziv* seemed to be referring to the Volozhin Yeshiva from the time he became its Rosh Yeshiva, i.e., from 5613 (1853). But *ל' שלשה באלול*, a pamphlet issued by R' Kook's son, R' Zvi-Yehudah, for the third anniversary of his father's death (ירושלים, ה'תרצ"ח), goes further when it records, on p. 10, that the *Netziv* had said about R' Kook, "The establishment of the Volozhin Yeshiva was worthwhile just for this *talmid*."

although the *Netziv*'s method was preferable, there did exist another method of study in that *yeshiva* that had some merit. (Conversely, the followers of R' Hayyim's "Brisk" method claim that all their novellae are in reality merely the simple, though profound, *pshat* in the Talmud and its classic commentaries.<sup>4</sup>) According to *שיחות הראי"ה*, R' Avraham-Yitzhaq Kook studied in Volozhin for one year – exactly the year conjectured above as the time of the Denneburg meeting, 5645 (1884-1885) – and according to *מגדל אלהים*<sup>5</sup>, the diary of R' Kook's father-in-law, the *Adereth*, it seems that R' Avraham-Yitzhaq studied there for an additional half-year, the first half of 5646 (1885-1886).

R' Yoseph Soloveichik offered yet another version of the purpose of the visit to R' Ruvallah, viz., that before R' Hayyim began delivering *shai'urim*, there was a question in the Volozhin circles as to whether he was worthy of the position, so he had to get approval from a recognized scholar. But this suggestion is erroneous, because R' Hayyim had already been giving *shai'urim* for five years *prior* to the arrival of R' Avraham-Yitzhaq Kook and had long proven himself eminently up to the task. It is historically true, though, that there was a discussion among the great Torah scholars on whether R' Hayyim was worthy of delivering *shai'urim* – cf. Ch. 4, the fourth paragraph of Exc. I, and *נפש הרב*<sup>6</sup>, where this is reported in the name of R' Yoseph-Ber Soloveitchik, who had repeated it in his father's name. In *נפש הרב* the criticism of R' Hayyim's appointment is reported to have been raised not in Volozhin circles but by the outstanding scholars themselves, and it was due to his novel method. (This was also the problem R' Yitzhaq-Elhanan Spector had with the *hadran* of R' Itzel Rabino-witz [Ponivezher] in Kovno a decade later, as reported by our pro-

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *נפש הרב* (the second paragraph of Exc. B, above), p. יז, n. 23; *תורת חיים*, pp. גרינט in the second pagination; and the eighth paragraph in Ch. 4, Exc. I. Also cf. the quotation from R' Baruch-Ber Leibowitz in *Megged*, p. יז. The fifth-, sixth-, and seventh-to-last lines on R' Hayyim Soloveichik's monument (set down in the ninth paragraph, below), which read, "הפיץ את האור והאיר על דרכה של תורה וגילה לתלמידיו דבריו כמו שהם" [he diffused a new light on the way of Torah and revealed to his students its words *as they are*] (emphasis added), reflect this attitude to his novellae on the part of the author of the text – that R' Hayyim revealed to his students the correct *pshat* of the Torah words. <sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, Ch. 1, Exc. F – pp. 63 and 64. <sup>6</sup> P. 7.