

THE JEWISH THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY OF AMERICA
3080 BROADWAY NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10027
212 678-8000

OFFICE OF THE CHANCELLOR
212 678-8073

CABLE ADDRESS: SEMINARY NEW YORK

Handwritten on Sunday, September 4, 1983

September 12, 1983

Dr. David G. Roskies
Seminary

Dear David:

So that you do not harbor even the suspicion that my expressions of gratitude to you last night, after your Selihot talk, were merely pro forma, let me put it in writing.

I said that last night marked the beginning of a new age at the Seminary liturgically, and I meant it. In the first place, we had a rabbi who took the recitation of the service seriously. For the first time, at least to my knowledge, we read together in English. Frankly, I can do without that, but there was a message there that we welcome a wider public as active participants in the service and co-congregants.

Your own remarks could have been construed as a set-up for that new age in the Seminary synagogue. I have often spoken to our students, faculty, and wider constituency of the Seminary being the only Jewish institution of higher learning that seeks to embrace -- i.e. to study, teach, and interpret as part of the ongoing process of Torah -- the whole of the Jewish experience. Your remarks blazed a new trail, for you did that. Imagine the J.T.S.A. finding a religious message in Glatstein, Sutzkever, and Sholom Aleikhem. You did it, and I feel in your debt religiously.


I find it impossible to describe to you the impact of your peroration through a nigun. You broke through ice for us and with us, and we were all enriched spiritually by the addition of a new dimension to our worship.

I would have felt just a bit more enriched, if somehow you could have found a way to tie up the modern with the classical-rabbinic tradition. Somehow that would have validated my belief that you were showing an unfolding of tradition into modernity and a reestablishment of links between modernity and the past. That is a trivium in the light of what you did and achieved, but since you gave new meaning and dignity to homiletics, I take this liberty.

Finally, your style is so beautiful and lucid in any language you speak that you must not allow it to be marred by misquotation. In Isa. 62.5, Jerusalem is feminine, and so is the attribution of its walls -- homotayyikh, not homotekha.

Best to Shaina, and a gemar hatima tova to both of you.

Yours,



Gerson D. Cohen