

THE PLAYING AND THE MUSICIAN WERE AS ONE



On October 12, 1997, Professor Isadore Twersky, founding director of the Center for Jewish Studies, passed away. At a memorial service for Professor Twersky held at Harvard-Radcliffe Hillel, three of his colleagues, Professors Jay Harris, James Kugel, and Bernard Septimus spoke about Professor Twersky's contribution to Jewish scholarship in general and Jewish studies at Harvard in particular. In place of our usual newsletter, we thought it appropriate to dedicate this issue to Professor Twersky's memory and to include, along with his colleagues' tributes, some photographs that capture various moments in his more than forty years of teaching at the university.

On October 20, 1998, the Center dedicated its annual conference to a discussion of Professor Twersky's own field of interest and his contribution thereto. A list of speakers at the conference is to be found on page 12 of this newsletter.

The attempt to do justice to the memory of my late teacher, both

the man and his work, is a daunting task: Professor Twersky was complex and enigmatic, and his work, rich and varied. Much will have to remain unsaid, especially on the personal plane. I hope to touch on some unifying strands in Professor Twersky's life and work. For despite his enormous scholarly range and versatility, he was a true "hedgehog": his work was informed by a few master-themes — which were, in turn, deeply rooted in the man.

Professor Twersky was the descendent of a long line of Hasidic masters; so it seems appropriate to

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QUALITY BEFORE ALL ELSE

Although Professor Isadore Twersky did not quite initiate the teaching of Jewish studies at Harvard — credit for that accomplishment belongs to his own teacher, Harry A. Wolfson — his contribution was no less significant for Harvard and the broader scholarly community. An important scholar and interpreter of Jewish tradition in his own right, Professor Twersky was known the world over for his work on Maimonides and other central Jewish thinkers; he was also a significant force in the growth of Jewish learning nationwide, and a builder of institutions and programs. His many doctoral students, now professors themselves at colleges and universities around the country and in Israel, constitute something like the "Twersky

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AMONG THE LAST OF THE ACADEMIC GIANTS

On October 12, 1997, Professor Isadore Twersky, of blessed memory, took his last breath. He was among the last of the academic giants of his generation, and with his passing an extraordinary chapter in the history of Jewish studies in America has drawn to a close. I would like to expound upon what the loss of Professor Twersky means to the academic community in general,

and to the Harvard community in particular.

Professor Twersky's death has deprived us of a remarkably courageous and articulate spokesman for a certain vision of Jewish studies; this was a vision of Jewish studies that even his opponents — and there were certainly opponents — had to respect. He insisted that Jewish studies had its own integrity, its own vocabulary, its own agenda, its own tradition to describe, and that the

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AMONG THE LAST OF THE ACADEMIC GIANTS

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honest person pursues this field of study properly with complete commitment and passion. Further, Professor Twersky refused to do what so many do, namely, to find some way of making the history of Jewish culture conform to an academic vocabulary that was foreign to it. He would not be pushed by his position into describing the Jewish intellectual tradition in terms that could only approximate the truth. In essence, what I think he said to the students of Jewish history and Jewish studies is, if you want to know about the Jewish religious tradition, if you want to know about Jewish culture and Jewish history, then you must come into my tent and learn it the proper way, learn it the way it was lived, learn it the way it was studied. Do not ask me to come into your tent, because that diminishes me and diminishes you.

Now, Professor Twersky certainly understood the importance of what in his mind were ancillary disciplines to

Jewish studies. He understood the importance of demographics and economics and politics. He understood the importance of social history. But, for him, these were all elements of the background, elements of the context. People could engage in these disciplines only if they were trained properly in them. But Jewish studies had to build on the insights of the demographers and economists, politicians, sociologists and literary critics, by focusing not on the ordinary, by focusing not on the day-to-day lives of Jews, however important that may have been, but rather by focusing on the extraordinary. Jewish studies scholars should focus on the leaders, the intellectuals, the elite of the Jewish religious community, because it is in their work and in their struggles that we can find the true voice of the Jewish tradition as it strove to define the life worth living.

Professor Twersky's view of Jewish studies led him to write many pioneering articles on the interaction between law and spirituality, areas that were so often seen as totally antithetical. He understood that talmudists, halakhists, aggadists, kabbalists,

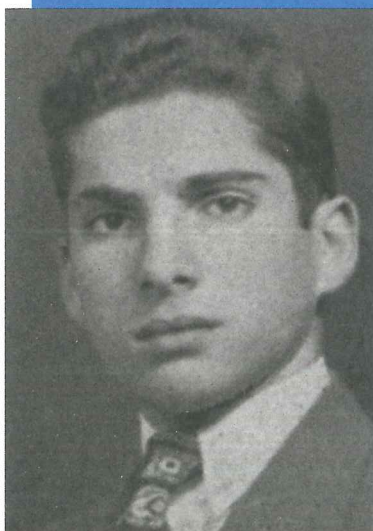
philosophers, Bible commentators, liturgical poets, and Jews whose creative work took them in other directions still, were all motivated by a deep spiritual yearning to come closer to God, each in his own way.

His ability to bring this material together was rooted in an extraordinary and, I believe, really unparalleled, mastery of the texts of the Jewish tradition. More important than his erudition, however, was his analytical skill. With insight and passion, he insisted that these disparate elements of the Jewish past live not in simple contradiction to one another, but rather manifest a deeply creative tension.

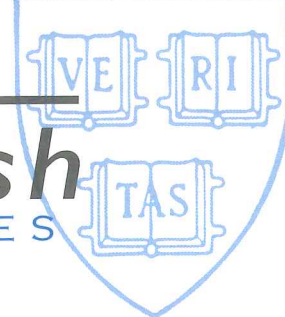
I believe that part of the reason that he was able to achieve this insight was that it flowed naturally from his own being. Over the years many students and friends have asked me (and I know he and his family members were asked this often): "Who was



Professor Isadore Twersky and Romanian Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen in 1981.



Isadore Twersky in 1948, photograph from Redbook of entering freshmen at Harvard College.



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Professor Twersky or, rather, Rabbi Twersky? Was he a Hasid? a Misnagid? a Maskil? That is, roughly, was he an enthusiast, a Talmudist, or a University Professor? What was he?

I think, and perhaps this is presumptuous, that the question is simply the wrong question to ask regarding

while Professor Twersky taught us to penetrate to the inner core. He understood, in his own being, that Hasidism, Misnagdim, and Haskalah are not wholly antithetical, even though their representatives may fight in the public arena as if they were. Rather, these are elements of Jewish life and

and those of us interested in modern Jewish studies, are so thoroughly bereft today. For in recent years Professor Twersky was extending his areas of interest and research more and more into the modern period. He showed that many of the themes and concerns that were central to lives of Jews in the Middle Ages also played an important role in the lives of Jews in modern times, although the regnant models of modern Jewish studies often obscure this reality. He was deeply and courageously insistent that one can study modern Jewish history competently only when informed by its dialectical interrelationship with pre-modern tradition. It is unacceptable for someone without deep knowledge of the Jewish religious tradition to study modern Jewish thinkers and Jewish culture, or to specialize in modern Hebrew literature or Yiddish literature, on the assumption that these fields represent something wholly new in Jewish history. However much a particular aspect of modern Jewish life insisted on breaking with the Jewish past, almost all aspects of modern Jewish culture emerged out of the traditions of Central and Eastern Europe and were deeply and profoundly formed and informed by the broad Jewish religious tradition. Without deep knowledge of the tradition, modern Jewish studies could have no integrity. It could never be complete. And it could never be honest — if it were not somehow rooted in profound awareness of both the gaps between and the overlap of modernity and tradition. Now, part of the reason that he could claim this and that he could see this was his vast erudition in areas that many have assumed he did not care about.

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Professor Isadore Twersky with Professor Alexander Altman.

Professor Twersky. To ask the question indicates a failure to appreciate what his work was about. It indicates a failure to understand the greatness of his spirit and the greatness of his imagination. In my view the question is wrong because it assumes mutual exclusivity where Professor Twersky taught us to see tense overlap. It is wrong because it assumes that the external political embodiment of certain communal tensions is central,

Jewish culture that exist in creative tension. And they existed in that same creative tension in his own being. It is, I think, the fact that this is so that allowed him to see what previous historians could not see. The previous historians could not get beyond the political expression to the inner core that existed in creative tension, not contradiction.

Professor Twersky's reputation as a scholar rests for the most part on his many contributions to the study of medieval Jewish culture and history — in particular, the work of Maimonides. And it is precisely for this reason that those of us specializing in modern Jewish studies,

AMONG THE LAST OF THE ACADEMIC GIANTS

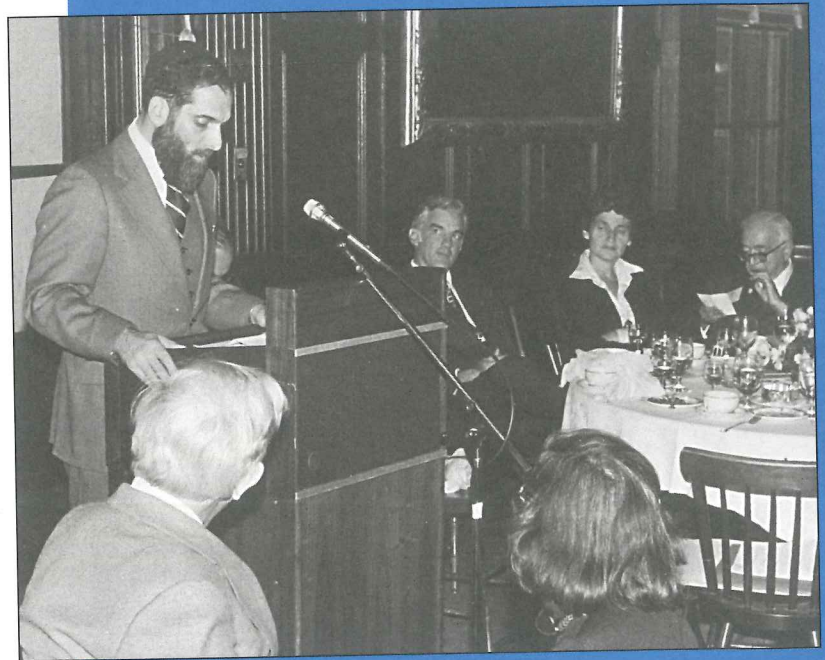
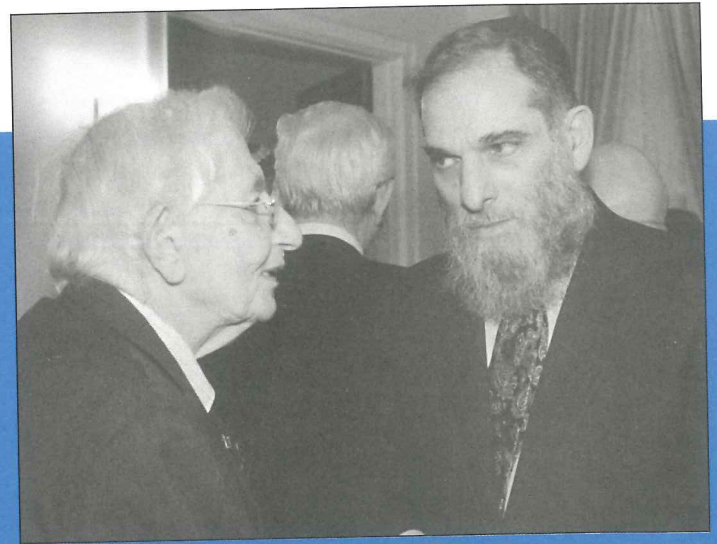
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Those familiar with his work on Maimonides may not know the extraordinary expertise he had in the high Jewish culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, about which, happily, he wrote a little bit. Few know of the profound knowledge he had of Jewish culture in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The evidence of this erudition did not find its way into his written corpus, but will live on in the research of colleagues and students who had the opportunity to soak up his generously offered wisdom.

Let me cite a volume Professor Twersky edited with Professor Septimus on Jewish thought in the seventeenth century. Discussing the life and work of Rabbi Yair Bacharach, he wrote, "Such writers, immediate predecessors or contemporaries of Rabbi Bacharach, such as R. Joel Sirkes, R. Mordecai Jaffee, R. Abraham Gombiner, R. W. Ben Samuel ha-Levi, R. Joshua Falk, R. Me'ir Lublin, R. Shabbetai b. Me'ir ha-Kohen, R. Me'ir b. Jacob ha-Kohen Schiff, R. Samuel Eidels, R. Yom Tov Lipman Heller, tell the story." An extraordinary list — and this is not just a laundry list, it's not some list he pulled out of the air. He is, I believe, really the only person who could not only make a generalization about all of these people, but indeed document every single word that he had to say about them in the primary texts. And it was not only with the Halakhists that he could do this. In the same article he deals with the Kabbalistic literature of the seventeenth century. And, once again, we find a remarkably erudite enumeration of the major figures.

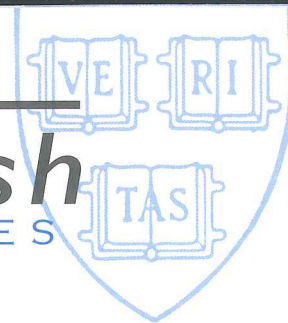
One sees here profound erudition. Here there is no fakery. Professor Twersky knew these texts; he knew them intimately. Indeed, he mastered Jewish culture of the eighteenth through twentieth centuries with the same apparent ease, but I am sure that it was not easy at all, it came to him with extraordinary toil.

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Top Photo: Professor Twersky with Attorney Lou Weinstein in 1994.

Bottom Photo: Dedication of the Center for Jewish Studies: Isadore Twersky, Director of the Center and the Nathan Littauer Professor of Hebrew Literature and Philosophy, described how the new endowed funds will impact Jewish Studies at Harvard. Also pictured are President Derek Bok, Nitza Rosovsky and Henry Starr, Honorary Chairman and President of the Littauer Foundation. (October, 1978)



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Still, the mastery Professor Twersky achieved was so deep that he could share it with ease.

Finally, no reflection on what has been lost with Professor Twersky's death would be complete without focusing on the loss to students — the students who have been here over the years, the students who are here now, and, most of all, the students who will be here in the future who will not get to study with him. All of them have suffered a tremendous loss. As is well known, Professor Twersky could be very demanding of students. This was not always interpreted correctly; I know as a colleague watching him that this was done out of a profound sense of responsibility for them. To Professor Twersky it would be almost criminal to allow students to accomplish less than they were capable of doing; it would be wrong to let anybody graduate having written a good dissertation when he or she was capable of producing an excellent dissertation. He was demanding. He had standards, and he was not compromising in that area.

Some of you know that he also worked tirelessly over the years to raise funds through the Center for Jewish Studies for fellowships to enable graduate students to devote themselves to full-time study. He worked hard to see to it that students had everything they needed, including his time and his mentorship. He saw himself as a real mentor, as someone who was shaping the minds of young men and women, who would, he hoped, continue the field of Jewish studies and allow it to grow. And although I was never privileged to be his student in any formal sense, I would certainly be remiss if I did not acknowledge how much Professor Twersky went out of his way to advance my own academic career — and not just my career, but my own learning, my own access to information, my own ability to understand things. Teaching others and facilitating learning were sources of great pleasure to Professor Twersky.

I saw him for the last time just three weeks before he died. We spent an hour together. He was so remarkably generous, in all of his pain, in making himself available to me. I had just returned from a week in Vilna, and he was eager to hear how it went. Although he knew that his days were numbered, he remained eager to learn whatever he could about Jewish life in Lithuania. The conversation soon shifted, though, because Professor Twersky was even more eager to teach. I spoke to him about two papers that I planned to give in Jerusalem over break. After hearing my summaries of the papers he immediately began pointing out things I had missed, and making clear to me that, while the

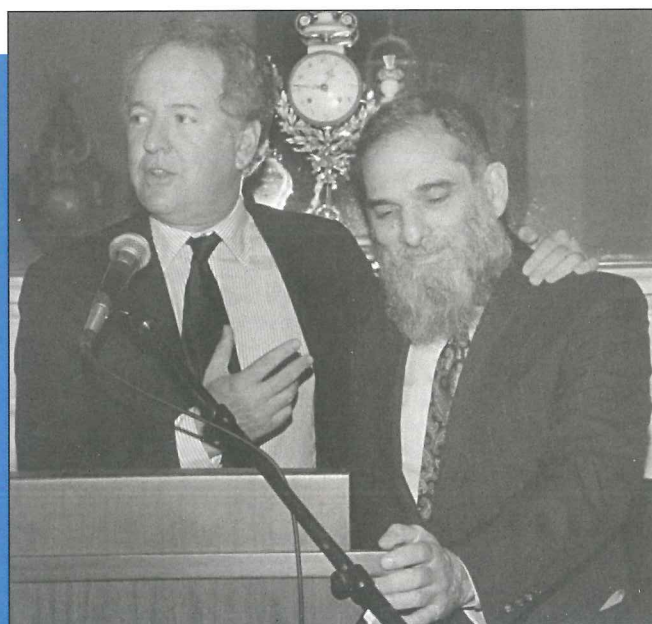
arguments as I had presented them to him were sound, there were areas that needed some fixing up, and specific points that needed to be rethought. Even in illness, he was the quintessential teacher; sharing his knowledge and analytical skills came so naturally to him. I, and all his other students, will forever be bereft.

The death of Professor Twersky is an irreparable loss to the world of Jewish studies. We can be thankful, however, that, while there is much that will be left unpublished and much that will be left unknown, there are many profound studies that are available from which we can learn much. This important written record allows all of us to really live out a penetrating Talmudic dictum to which I am certain he was deeply, deeply sympathetic.

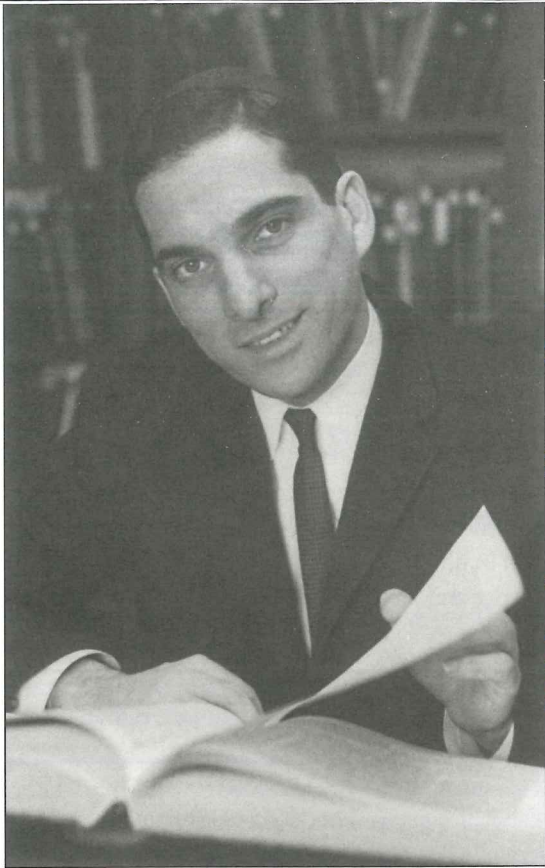
The Talmud Yerushalmi tells us that we do not build monuments to the righteous sages — their teachings are their memorial. We must be thankful that we have such an extraordinary corpus of teachings. While we are all bereft, we can find consolation in the fact that we have much we can go out and study.

Yehe zikhro barukh.

—Professor Jay Harris



Professor Isadore Twersky with Peter Solomon in 1994.



Professor Isadore Twersky in 1965.

EDITORIALS

Rabbi Dr. Yitzhak Twersky

With the passing of Rabbi Dr. Yitzhak Twersky, Boston has lost a spiritual beacon, and yet another chapter in the community's history has been closed. Tributes and accolades for his erudition are how the world defined him — his special place in Boston's Jewish community is for us to appreciate and delineate.

Rabbi Twersky was one of the few persons who knew the community's past, and that empowered him with a comprehension of the present and a vision for its future. He grew up with Boston's Rebbes and Rabbis, its people and its scholars. Born here, he was trained and educated in our great institutions. It was here, too, that he led and inspired. From that town — he appreciated and appreciated to that for the future.

למדעי היהדות
ברסיטת האוניברסיטה
בצער עמוק על פטירתו
נחמי
קטן מברוקלין

Friends remember

Mourners fill Brookline service

By Andreae Downs
TAB Correspondent

A leading light in Boston's Jewish community, who was able to walk in two worlds — that of the emotional and experiential Hasidim as well as of the Harvard scholar — died Sunday, Oct. 12, after a long illness.

Rabbi Isadore (Yitzhak) Twersky, 67, the Talner rebbe, was descended from a long and prestigious line of Hassidic leaders from Talne and Chernobyl, and led the small congregation of Beth David on Corey Road in Brookline.

Twersky served for more than 30 years as the Nathan Littauer professor of Hebrew literature and philosophy at Harvard. He also founded the New Harvard Center for Jewish Studies, which he directed until 1993.

According to press reports, he was instrumental in making Harvard a comfortable place for observant Jews.

A world-renowned scholar in medieval Jewish literature, Twersky published important works on Maimonides and the Talmud — some of the most difficult texts in Jewish tradition.

observance at the highest wonderful level," Cheit garnered respect from people in very different realms — Boston but nationally and as well. It's a combination doesn't often find."

Twersky took his lead from his father-in-law, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, who founded Maimonides School in Brookline.

Twersky was a spiritual guide for the school, and helped develop Soloveitchik's vision of Maimonides as a school where religious observance coexists with intellectual excellence.

"He was open to talk to people, open to secular involvement and secular learning," noted Dr. Bernard Kosowsky, president of Maimonides. "He thought it made you a better Jew to contribute your own knowledge and input to society."

According to Shirage, he and other Jewish leaders, including secular Jews in Israel, came to Twersky for guidance.

"He was the person I would go to with a complicated personal or

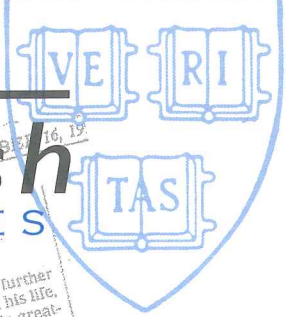


Frank M. Cross, Director of the Semitic Museum; John M. Carman, Acting Dean of the Divinity School and Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions; James L. Kugel, Harry Starr Professor of Classical and Modern Jewish and Hebrew Literature; Isadore Twersky, Director of the Center for Jewish Studies in 1986.

attended services at Beth David and then walked across town to a memorial service at Maimonides, according to several in attendance.

"He quietly accomplished more than most people do. He left a huge void here for the religious community," noted Rabbi Chaim Levine of Aish HaTorah. "He appealed to all kinds of Jews, not just the Orthodox. He tried to unify Jews. There are not many people like him left."

Twersky had a bachelor's degree and a master's in Hebrew literature from Hebrew College (he was one of the first two master's graduates in 1951) and a bachelor's degree and doctorate from Harvard. He was a



CENTER for Jewish STUDIES

THE NEW YORK TIMES OBITUARIES THE JEWISH OBSERVER 16, 19

Isadore Twersky, of Harvard and the Hasidim, Dies at 67

By ROBERT McG. THOMAS Jr.

Isadore Twersky, who bridged two worlds, making the study and practice of ancient Jewish traditions the thread of a life as a Harvard scholar and Hasidic rabbi, died Monday at a hospital in Boston. He was 67 and had been the Nathan Littauer Professor of Hebrew Literature and Philosophy and the founding director of the New Harvard Center for Jewish Studies.

His friends said the cause of death was lymphoma. In the classrooms and lecture halls of Harvard, Dr. Twersky was a professor personified, a bearded man whose dark suits, occasional tweed jackets and dignified manner bespoke his role as a renowned Jewish philosopher of the 20th-century. He was a medievalist, a scholar of Jewish philosophy and other medieval thinkers.

At home in suburban Brookline and in his long black kapote at the Congregation Beth David (the beis medrash, or study house, as he called it), he was every inch the dynastic Talmudic community leader of a small Hasidic community. His father had led a generation earlier, even as their Twersky ancestors had led congregations in Chernobyl, Ukraine, for centuries.

If simply being a Hasidic rabbi in 20th-century America weren't anomaly enough, Dr. Twersky made it a life's mission to transform the secu-

lar citadel of Harvard into a haven for observant Jews and a center of Jewish studies.

It wasn't easy. Although there had been formal Jewish studies at Harvard since 1925, when Dr. Twersky's mentor, Harry A. Wolfson, became the first Littauer Professor, Dr. Wolfson had been very much a one-man Jewish band on a campus where Friday night faculty meetings, Saturday classes and prevailing attitudes long made Harvard an unwelcoming place for practicing Orthodox Jews.

For Dr. Twersky, a 1952 Harvard College graduate who began teaching immediately after receiving his doctorate in 1955, the conflicts were always resolved in favor of his religious obligations.

He has been widely credited with making Harvard a more comfortable — and comforting — place for observant Jews. But even though he held many prominent faculty positions (among them chairmanship of the department of Near Eastern Languages and Literatures, membership on the faculty council and of the committee on educational standards), he was not the standing chairman of the standing committee on medieval studies. Twersky brought about that change through petitions or through colleagues say, but through the personal force of his personality.

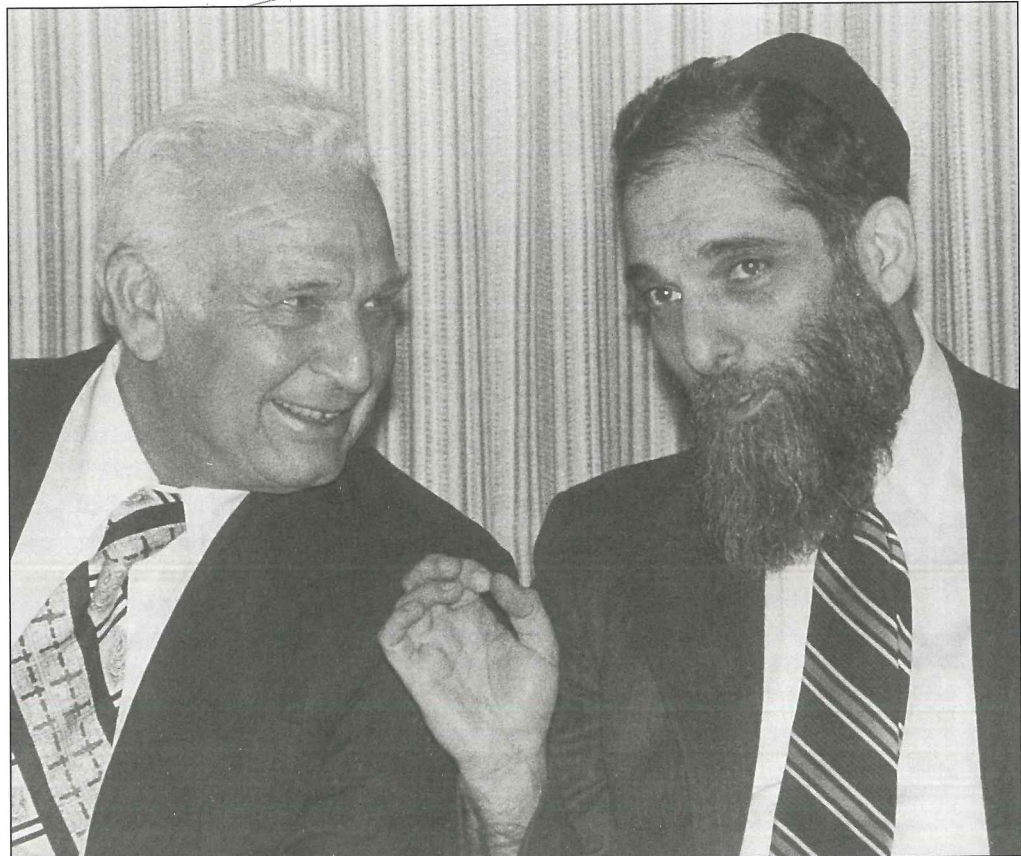
It was a moral force that

rebbe." Indeed, he did, but it is a further reflection of the anomalies of his life, that the man who became his great-spiritual father-in-law, Joseph celebrated

המרכז
באוניברסיטה
מדינת
ישראל
מיסד



Professor Bernard Septimus, Professor Isadore Twersky and Professor Nathan Rotenreich at the October, 1985 colloquium on Land and People in Jewish History and Thought.



Professor Ephraim Katzir, former President of Israel, with Professor Isadore Twersky, director of the Center for Jewish Studies in June, 1982. (Fall 1982 newsletter)

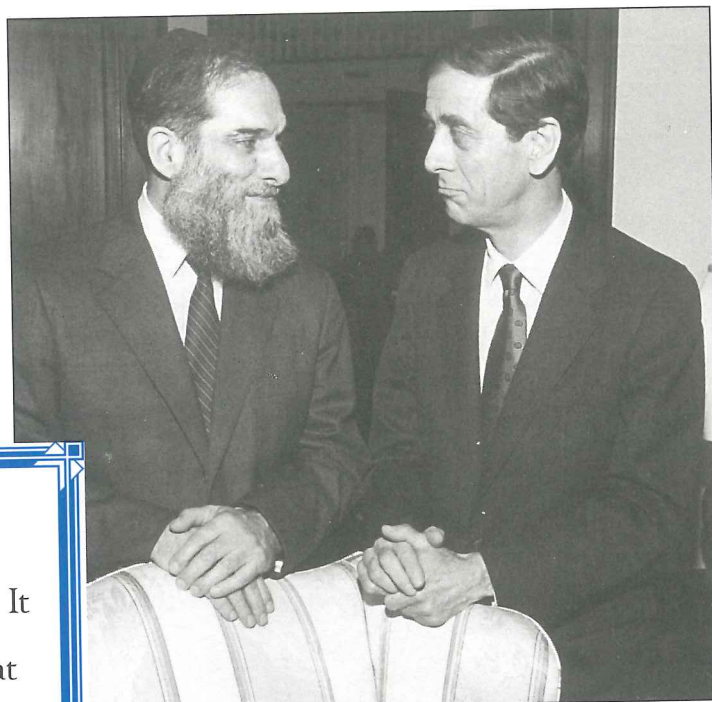
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open with a bit of Hasidic exegesis — where I heard or saw it, I can no longer say. In 2 Kings 3:15 we read (of the prophet Elisha): *ve-hayah ke-nagen ha-menagen va-tehi alav yad hashem*. Literally: “as the musician played, the hand of the Lord (i.e., the prophetic spirit) came upon him.” But application of some “Hasidic philology” yields the following remarkable translation: *ve-hayah ke-nagen ha-menagen* — “when the playing and the musician were as one [the hand of the Lord was upon him].” In other words, the inspired man is one whose work and self are as one. It is just this sort of oneness that gave Professor Twersky’s work its exceptional power — it sprang from the inner core of the man.

There was, first of all, his integrity: he held students, colleagues, and especially himself, to the most exacting standards of scholarship. It was crucial to the field of Jewish studies to have such a person at Harvard. Beginning in the late sixties, we entered into a period in which Jewish studies at American universities were booming, but immature. Professor Twersky was both articulate and adamant about the need for rigorous standards in our field. His stance was not always popular and has not yet triumphed, but it has contributed enormously to the professionalism of Jewish studies — both at Harvard and elsewhere.

Professor Twersky was the star pupil of the legendary Harvard historian of philosophy, Harry Wolfson. As a promising young academic, it would have been natural for him to follow in his teacher’s footsteps, and to make his reputation by documenting

Jewish contributions to Western thought. Instead, he did something risky: he launched his academic career with the first serious book on a talmudist to be written at an American

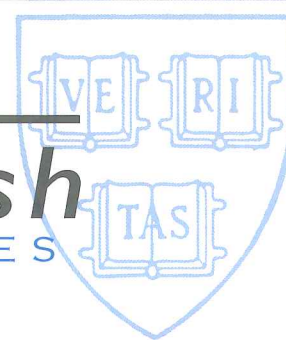


With Jeremy Knowles, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, in October 1991

university (*Rabad of Posquières: a Twelfth-Century Talmudist*).

Western thought had (to put it mildly) shown little appreciation for the talmudic tradition. Professor Twersky, however, had no patience with that prejudice: he loved the talmudic tradition, realized that it had been ignored by academic scholarship, despite its undisputed centrality through centuries of Jewish history, and determined to give it its due. For a young, untenured scholar, writing when the status of academic Jewish studies was still precarious, that was a bold, even defiant move. It sounded a theme that would become characteristic of his work as a scholar, teacher and academic

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statesman: the agenda for the scholarly study of Judaica should reflect the realities of Jewish cultural history, not just the tastes and appetites of those outside the field.

When studying the talmudic tradition, Professor Twersky's attention would invariably turn to the historical relationship of law to *other* disciplines. He discovered a crucial key to the understanding of these relationships by exploring what he termed the "tense dialectical relationship" between law and spirituality. This was a subject on which Professor Twersky expressed himself with transparent engagement. Jewish law, he wrote: "is the ... manifestation and ... concretization of an underlying ... spiritual essence, a volatile, magnetic and incompressible force.... Tension flows from the painful awareness that manifestation and essence sometimes drift apart, from the sober recognition that a ... finely chiseled normative system cannot regularly reflect ... or energize interior, fluid spiritual forces. Yet if the system is to remain vibrant it *must*."

This is where the other disciplines entered into the picture. Professor Twersky showed how mysticism and philosophy, pietism and biblical studies, all attempted in different (and often incompatible) ways to keep the law rooted in spirituality — to insure that it was infused with inner meaning. This was a new and fruitful way of viewing Jewish intellectual history as a whole. It allowed Professor Twersky to look at different fields, which had once been studied disconnectedly, in relation to one another. Professor Twersky is best known for his work on Maimonides. Some thought it odd that a Hasidic

scion should devote himself to the study of that arch-rationalist. In fact, it was not so odd: Professor Twersky was able to uncover the passionate quest for spirituality in Maimonides' rationalism, and to show how it connected to Maimonides' other passion — the law.

It is no coincidence that his work on Maimonides focused on Mishneh Torah; for it is in that great code that Maimonides' devotion to law and philosophical spirituality most clearly intersect. But what is clear now, was not always clear: Maimonides the lawyer, and Maimonides the philosopher were often studied as if they were two different men, by different sets of specialists, each group ignorant of the work of the other. That

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Professor Twersky with his doctoral advisees through 1988. Back (left to right): Lois Dubin, Talya Fishman, Bernard Cooperman, Charles Berlin, Hillel Levine, Bernard Septimus. Middle (left to right): Roman Foxbrunner, Jeffrey Woolf, David Fishman, Lawrence Kaplan, Eddie Breuer, Mark Verman, Jacob Schacter, Daniel Frank, Adena Tannenbaum. Front (left to right): Aaron Katchen, Benjamin Ravid, Alan Nadler, Isadore Twersky, Marc Saperstein, Ira Robinson.

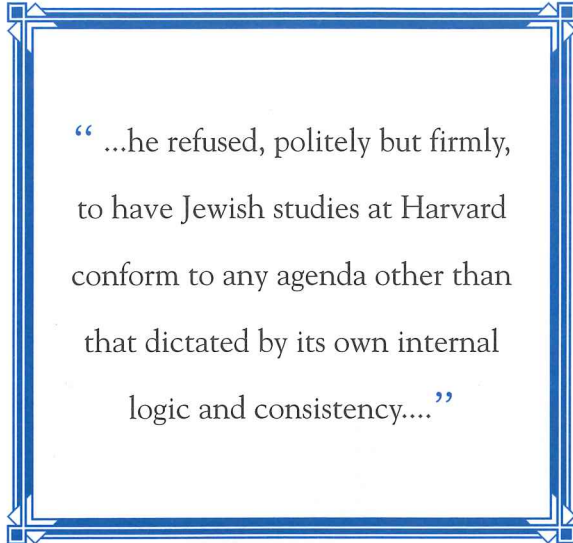
QUALITY BEFORE ALL ELSE

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school” of Jewish scholarship, distinguished by their common background, method, and characteristic approach. In addition, Professor Twersky presided over the founding of Harvard’s Center for Jewish Studies and over the expansion of Jewish studies at the University from a one-man enterprise to a full-scale program, one that ultimately has resulted in the creation of six new full-time positions in Jewish studies at Harvard. In considering the breadth and quality of his contribution in all these domains, it is difficult to overstate its importance or lasting impact.

Perhaps the word that best captures Professor Twersky’s approach to Jewish studies at Harvard is the same one that came to the minds of all who encountered him personally: integrity. Isadore Twersky wished Jewish studies to grow at Harvard, to gain its deserved importance in the curriculum, but he also insisted on quality before all else. All too often, in other surroundings, the study of Jewish texts and Jewish history has been fashioned to suit someone else’s agenda: the discipline of Jewish studies has been turned into the handmaiden of some other pursuit, such as the study of early Christianity, or one or another aspect of the study of world religions, or European intellectual or political history and the like. No doubt there were those who envisaged a similar role for Jewish studies at Harvard. It is not difficult to imagine the pressures to which Professor Twersky was subject from the

time of his joining the Harvard faculty, pressures that increased with the founding of the Center for Jewish Studies and the creation of additional professorships in



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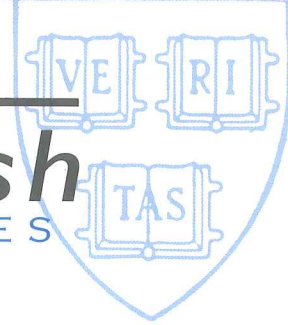
the field. But he refused, politely but firmly, to have Jewish studies at Harvard conform to any agenda other than that dictated by its own internal logic and consistency. Similarly, while he welcomed students of all backgrounds to study with him, he never compromised on quality in teaching them, nor sought to package his material in conformity to whatever was popular or highly touted.

In this instance, high standards did not — as they sometimes can — lead to isolation or paralysis. On the contrary, Isadore Twersky was a vigorous promoter of the field of Jewish studies, and his attention as a researcher and educator was directed not only to immediate colleagues and students, but also to others more

distant in both the literal and metaphorical senses. At Harvard he strengthened the ties between Jewish studies and departments like History, Philosophy, and Comparative Literature. One of his regular courses was in Harvard’s Core curriculum, where students from every undergraduate concentration had an opportunity to learn from him. As founding director of the Center for Jewish Studies, he consciously sought to build a bridge between Israeli and American scholarship, inviting Israeli colleagues to work at Harvard on projects in Jewish history, literature, and religious thought. The significance of this undertaking can hardly be gainsaid, and its impact on scholarship in both Israel and America is ongoing.

He accomplished all of this with characteristic modesty and understatement. His quiet tone and pursuit of the *via media* in all things were evident to all who met him; in this sense his demeanor was — *eo ipso*, as he might have said — a proof of his Maimonidean affinities. All the University, and the whole world of Jewish scholarship are in his debt, and together we mourn his passing.

—Professor James Kugel



THE PLAYING AND THE MUSICIAN WERE AS ONE

continued from page 9

changed in 1967 with the appearance of a short piece by Professor Twersky entitled “Non-Halakhic Aspects of Mishneh Torah” — one of the most influential articles ever published in the field of Maimonidean studies. It thoroughly overturned the old fractured view of Maimonides’ work; the field has never been the same. That article was also the germ of what became Professor Twersky’s magisterial *Introduction to the Code of Maimonides*.

There was one area in which Professor Twersky must have been conscious of the gap separating him from his Hasidic forbears. I refer, of course, to his commitment to a broad and deep general education and to his proud membership in a community of scholars comprising all of the disciplines. That commitment provided a second overarching theme that animated much of his writing on Maimonides: the quest for a unity of Jewish and general learning. Professor Twersky succeeded in describing Maimonides’ synthesis so eloquently and convincingly precisely because it resonated within him. In discussing the medieval Jewish controversy over philosophical rationalism, he minced no words:

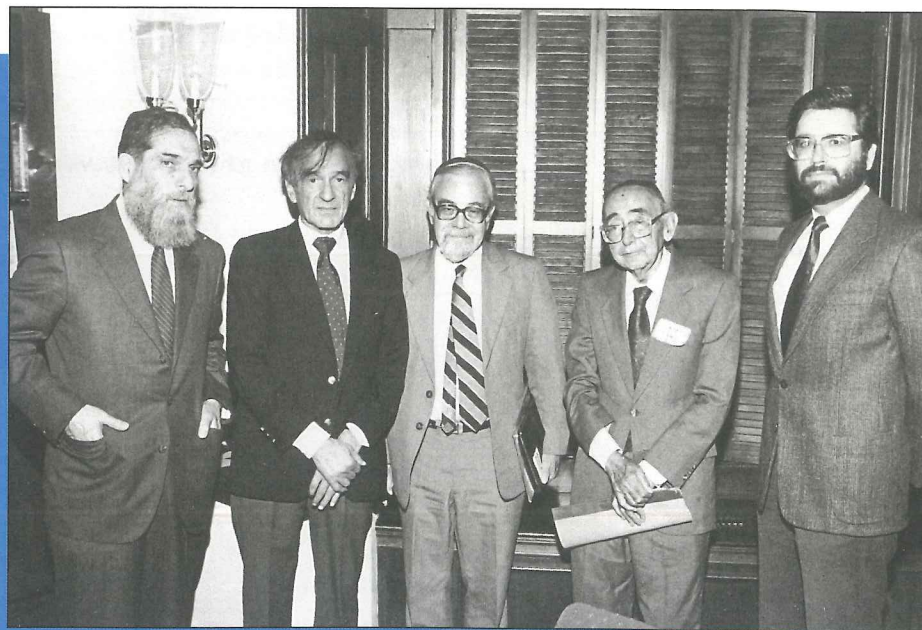
The whole debate revolved around Maimonides — and in many ways still does. For Maimonides represents a type of mentality and suggests a direction of thought concerning which neutrality is impossible. In the final analysis, two conflicting ideal types were juxtaposed: a traditional puritanism which is distrustful of secular culture and insists on the absolute opposition between divine wisdom and human wisdom; and religious rationalism which is convinced of the interrelatedness and complementarity — indeed the essential identity — of divine and human wisdom, of religion and culture, and strives doggedly for their integration.

Neutrality is indeed impossible, and there can be no question as to the side Professor Twersky chose: he stood unequivocally with Maimonides. His whole career at Harvard exemplified that.

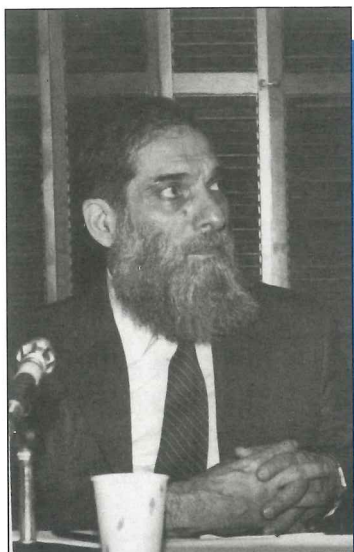
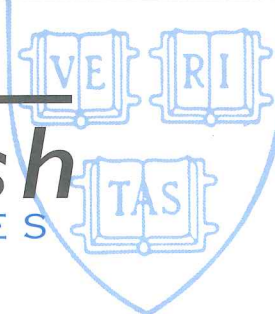
Only once did I hear Professor Twersky actually *speak* of emulating Maimonides. Professor Twersky, most of you probably know, had a “second career.” Like his Hasidic forbears, he stood at the head of a community of worship and study, one in which I was privileged to participate. This is not the place to discuss Professor Twersky’s rabbinic role, but I cannot pass over it in complete silence. Professor Twersky once remarked to me that he had always been determined to emulate Maimonides by refusing to accept payment for the rabbinate. That selfless service set the tone for the emergence of a remarkable community — without politics, officers, membership dues, or any of the institutional trappings of synagogue life. It was held together by a common commitment to prayer, study, acts of kindness — and by the riveting character and learning of the man at its center.

Professor Twersky can serve as a model to any human being struggling with a challenge that is fast becoming universal. He showed how one can be passionately committed to one’s own tradition while still embracing all human wisdom, whatever its source. May his memory be for a blessing.

—Professor Bernard Septimus



Some of the speakers at the *Aspects of the Modern History of the Jews of Hungary* conference in October, 1991 (left to right): Profesors Isadore Twersky, Elie Wiesel, Mordechai Breuer, Jacob Katz, and Michael Silber.



THE ISADORE TWERSKY FELLOWSHIP FUND

To honor Professor Twersky's memory and his great contribution to Harvard, the Center for Jewish Studies is seeking to establish a graduate fellowship in his name. Professor Twersky often said that graduate fellowships were the Center's highest priority, since they most directly insured the creation of the next generation of Jewish scholars.

Endowments

The Isadore Twersky Fellowship Fund will be endowed in the amount of \$250,000, for which we presently have

commitments of more than \$150,000. We hope that all friends of the Center will join in supporting this worthy tribute. Checks may be sent to the Center for Jewish Studies, 6 Divinity Avenue, Cambridge, MA, 02138. Contributors should be sure to indicate that their donation is to the Twersky Fellowship fund.

THE SCHOLARLY LEGACY OF ISADORE TWERSKY

On Tuesday, October 20, 1998, a conference on Isadore Twersky's Scholarly Legacy was sponsored by the Harvard University Center for Jewish Studies at the Harvard Faculty Club.

Speakers included:
Joseph R. Hacker, Hebrew University; Warren Zev Harvey, Hebrew University; Bernard Septimus, Harvard University; Israel Ta-Shma, Hebrew University, and Jay M. Harris, Harvard University

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