Our great teacher made his own special contribution to the Torah study of the generations. His unique and innovative derech halimud, his mentoring of thousands of students, his shiurim and his writings have enriched and expanded the scope of the gift we have received from Sinai. His efforts of a lifetime allowed him to light Torah up with a precious aura, and it was transmitted to its students more luminous, more systematic, more pleasant and more gratifying. It that sense he made his mark on the entire world of Torah in general.

But it is impossible to detach the Torah from the students of Torah. In Israel, Rav Aharon was the greatest teacher of Torah within the community of Religious Zionism in the last generation. I would like to focus on his unique contribution to the students of Torah in the hesder yeshivot, those who brandish the saifa – the sword as well as the sefer. His accomplishments and influence in molding the image of yeshivot hesder in general (and not only Har Etzion) can be seen in two aspects.

First, in establishing the highest standards of learning and of Torah stature.

Rav Aharon zatzal set goals and challenges for learning that were the gold standard for the hesder world. He was unwilling, indeed incapable, of expecting from his students anything less than the maximum. In his eyes, Yeshiva students who serve in the IDF should not see their service as an excuse to slacken their devotion to learning. The opposite is the case: they are called to higher dedication, both in quantity and in quality. Our teacher offered a new perspective, which was different from the view that was previously prevalent in yeshivot hesder. He emphasized that the hesdernik was not second grade, somewhat inferior to bnei torah who choose to avoid army service. His expectations and exhortations set a standard which cultivated numerous talmidei chachamim who formed the basis for religious leadership as rabanim and rashei yeshivot.

On numerous occasions I had the zchut to see Rav Aharon zatzal in visits to his students in the army. He would quench their thirst for Torah with a shiur on a sugya, with a thought on the Parsha or the Midrash. All this happened in the middle of a rocky training ground or under camouflage nets. He brought the atmosphere of the beit midrash to those who were in uniform and in that way was able to extend its scope. Indeed, vhaye olam nata btochenu He implanted in us eternal life.

But this is one side of the coin of the hesder yeshiva, that relating to Torah study. In addition, our great teacher defined and formulated the obligatory nature of army service and saw it as an important religious and moral value. Why indeed should we divest ourselves of the priestly garments of the bet hamidrash and don the olive-grey of the IDF uniform? What is the purpose of interrupting our study of Torah, that invaluable treasure which nurtures and permeates our life?
We are all familiar with the words of the Mishnah that all are required to partake in an obligatory war, as well as with the words of Rambam that a war of self-defense falls into that category. Rav Aharon saw an additional dimension.

His broad worldview brought him to see service in the IDF as a quintessential *gmilut hesed*. Just as the entire world stands on Torah study, service of God and *hesed*, so the world of the *yeshiva bachur* in the State of Israel must be grounded on those three pillars. Thus our teacher accorded to IDF service and to those serving in it a unique religious and moral status.

There are two facets to the Torah. One expresses the pristine truth, eternal and unbounded by limits of space and time. The other reflects Torah as it is studied and realized in a given situation.

My teacher and father in law, Rav Amital zatzal, who was Rav Aharon’s partner in leading the yeshiva would often quote the *psukim* in the beginning of Dvarim:

אֵלֶּה הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶּּר דִּיבֶּר מֹשֶּה אֶל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵבֶּּר הַיַּרְדֵּן בַּמִּדְּבָּר בָּעֲרָבָה מֵוְּלָסְו וּבֵין פָּארָן וּבֵין תֹפֶּל וּלָבָן וַחֲצֵרֹת וְדִי זָהָב:

אַחַד עָשָּׁר יוֹם מֵחֹרֵב דֶּרֶּךְ הַר שֵעִיר עַד קָדֵש בַּרְנֵא:

וַיְּהִי בְאַרְבָעִים שָנָה בְעַשְּתֵי עָשָּׁר חֹדֶּשָׁי בְאֶחָד לַחֹדֶּשׁ דִּיבֶּר מֹשֶּה אֶל בְּנֵי يִשְׂרָאֵל כְּכֹל אֲשֶּּר צִוָּה ה ‘אֹתוֹ אֲלֵהֶּם:

These are the words that Moses addressed to all Israel on the other side of the Jordan.—Through the wilderness, in the Arabah near Suph, between Paran and Tophel, Laban, Hazeroth, and Di-zahab, it is eleven days from Horeb to Kadesh-barnea by the Mount Seir route.— It was in the fortieth year, on the first day of the eleventh month, that Moses addressed the Israelites in accordance with the instructions that the Lord had given him for them,

Why should we care, would ask Rav Amital, where exactly Moshe Rabeinu was situated as he transmits the word of God? What difference does it make if we were eleven, ten or twelve days away from Horev? Rashi quotes midrashim who answer the question but Rav Amital would add that this teaches us that the Torah has a unique message for every time and every place. It is precisely the eternal value of the Torah which allows it to confront the challenges posed in each epoch. Rav Aharon zatzal whose mastered Torah in all its breadth, could show the way to teach this generation of Torah students how to understand the significance of the State of Israel in general and service in the IDF in particular.

This project of creating a world of Torah among soldiers, and molding a world of *bnei Torah* who are part and parcel of Israeli society, owes an enormous debt to he who was so devoted to educating and inculcating to this goal, to he who set the standards and left a great mark.

And yet there is one additional point.

Delivered by Rav Shlomo Brin, Shloshim Azkara for RAL ztl at the Jewish Center, NY
Translated by Dr. Kalman Neuman
Our teacher, who had a panoramic view of history, was aware of the historical drama in the establishment of the State of Israel, unprecedented in two millennia. He heeded the voice of the knock of the beloved, kol dodi dofek, coming in the wake of the tragedy of the holocaust.

I was asleep,
But my heart was wakeful.
Hark, my beloved knocks!
“Let me in, my own,
My darling, my faultless dove!
For my head is drenched with dew,
My locks with the damp of night.”.

The land of Israel is being rebuilt, Jerusalem is inhabited and the prophetic words of its roads filled of playing children has been realized.

In that vein, Rav Aharon wrote in the ending of his essay on "The ideology of hesder"

> Animated by vision and yet chary of danger, we, of yeshivot hesder, pray that He may grant us the wisdom and the courage to cope with the challenges of time. Impelled both by commitment to Torah and compassion for Knesset Yisrael, we strive to fulfill it with a sense of broader spiritual and historical vision.

As is well known, the Ramban came to the land of Israel and was taken both by the sanctity of Yerushalyim its dismal state of destruction.

In a letter to his son Nachman he writes,

> Many are [Israel's] forsaken places, and great is the desecration. The more sacred the place, the greater the devastation it has suffered. Jerusalem is the most desolate place of all, but nevertheless it is goodly. There are only two Jews living in it who are joined on Shabbat by a minyan. And He who let us see it in its desolation will show us in its rebuilding.

At the end of the letter he writes: "I have gone up to the Mount of Olives which faces the Temple Mount and there facing the temple I cried.

Rav Aharon zatzal was a great admirer of the Ramban, as he discussed at length in his printed conversations with Rav Haim Sabato. How beautiful and sensitive, how revealing of his inner feelings is the coda of the essay on "The Ideology of Hesder"

> As he stood weeping on the hights of the Mount of Olives, with the terrible sight of "that which is more holy is more desolate" laid out before him, what would the Ramban have given to be the head of a yeshivat hesder?

Delivered by Rav Shlomo Brin, Shloshim Azkara for RAL ztl at the Jewish Center, NY
Translated by Dr. Kalman Neuman