



## Whitewashing Gedolim

Why do we whitewash the lives of our *gadolim*? Why is that we feel that if we say a *gadol* made a mistake, or wasn't the smartest person in the room, or wasn't always ecstatic that it in some way takes away from their greatness? Why does every *gadol* story go something like this; He mastered *chumash* by age three, *Mishnah* by age five, and *Shas* by age ten. He never was unhappy a day in his life. Even when his child died he never was unhappy etc. How can we look up to these imaginary, unfeeling angels? How are we supposed to be inspired to be better people when we are told that the greatest among are so different from ourselves and our life experiences?

The books published by CIS written by Yaakov Dovid Shulman are classic examples of these problems. They are poorly written, novelized, whitewashed versions of the lives of the *reshonim* and *achronim*. The book on the Rambam doesn't mention once that his *seforim* were burnt in protest. It's mostly a sensationalized story of the Rambam's flight from persecution. The Rambam's life, however, has great relevance to the lives of modern Jews across the globe. He studied medicine in a Muslim university and studied philosophy. Still he became one of the greatest *halachists* ever. He did all this while being the royal physician to the vizier of Saladin. This life style is very similar to the lives many Jews live today; splitting time between studying *torah* and getting college level educations and high paying white-collar jobs. These experiences should speak to us but we cannot possibly relate to the Rambam if we only see him as a perfect angel.

These thoughts were brought about from the book *My Uncle the Netziv*. This book was written by the son of Rav Yechiel Michel HaLevi Epstein the author of the

*Aruch Hashulchan*. The author himself wrote a *sefer* on *chumash*, the *Torah Temimah*. His book is a very candid, honest recollection of his time in the Volozhin *yeshiva* and the lives of his uncle The Netziv and Rav Yosef Dov Soloveichik, author of the *Beis HaLevi*. He hides nothing, from the near depression that Rav Yosef Dov Soloveichik felt from the plight of Jews in Eastern Europe after World War One, to the perception that the Netziv wasn't brilliant, to the influence and prevalence of the *haskalah* movement on his fellow students. Yet the book is inspiring and only increases one's respect for those *gedolim*. If anyone has not yet read this book I highly recommend it.