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JERUSALEM:

The Israeli Baal Teshuva

A Denverite finds his way back

The New Stadium

JEW YORK CITY:

Preserving the Communities

*A Moment of Truth for Passengers
on a Capsized Bus*

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THE JEWISH OBSERVER

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THE TESHUVA MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL:

The Israeli Baal Teshuva

Rabbi Mendel Weinbach

"Would you please step into my office for a moment?"

This invitation was from my mobilization officer. Weeks of preparation for a trip to the U.S.A. had seemingly achieved results only a few minutes earlier, when Officer Yossie had consented to grant me a *hetter yetziah* permitting me to leave the country. While his secretary was preparing the forms, Yossie had left the office. And now, accompanied by a young lady officer, he returned and issued his ominous invitation. Had my carefully made travel plans been dashed by Israeli security needs? Did the Israeli Defense Forces somehow decide that national security demanded my uninterrupted presence in the country? (Mind you, to them I'm only a medical assistant in the Home Guard, and no more.) And what was the young lady's role in this decision?

Yossie dispelled my fears by introducing his military colleague to me as a girl who had strayed far from *Yiddishkeit*, and was now interested in attending Torah classes as a means of returning to Jewish tradition. Yossie himself was a *baal teshuva*, and he had mentioned to her that his regiment included the head of a yeshiva which catered to people like herself.

Secure in the knowledge that my exit permit was intact, I described our programs to the lady officer and made arrangements for one of our Israeli students-turned-instructors to telephone her. Her interest soared when I informed her that the caller would be a former star of Israeli stage and screen, comedian Mordechai Arnon (affectionately known by the nickname "Pupik"). Within the hour, an invitation had been extended to Madame Officer to participate in one of the two dozen *chugim* (study groups) operated by the yeshiva throughout the country

Years of Change

This incident dramatized the change that has taken place in Israeli society since a decade ago. At that time I had entered the military reserves as a member of the *Haga* home guard, burdened with the self-consciousness common to observant Jews in an army

RABBI WEINBACH is one of the deans of Ohr Somayach, Israel's largest yeshiva for *baalei teshuva*, with branches in Jerusalem, Givat Ada, Tel Aviv and New York.

The Jewish Observer / March, 1978

whose overwhelming majority looked down upon Torah Jews as akin to yeshiva students, who were despised as "draft-evaders." This was in sharp contrast to the pride I now felt at being invited to impart Jewish values to — of all people — a lady officer, demonstrating that a general *teshuva* movement was indeed coming of age in Israel.

In a broader sense, this encounter told the story of the *teshuva* movement and of the people whose lives have been transformed by it. Yossie is the product of the efforts of those wonderful organizations working among Sephardi youngsters in Israel, some functioning since the creation of the State. The list is a long one and is topped by names such as Zeirei Agudath Israel, P'eylim, Saad Ruchni, Mifal Torah Vodaath, and Irgun Bnos Yisroel. These groups have established religious schools and run afternoon and summer programs for elementary and high school age boys and girls from Afro-Asian backgrounds. Occasionally they touched the life of an adult such as Yossie, but they did not seek to establish an educational program for those of college age and older, perhaps abandoning hope that they could ever be reached.

When Yossie became interested in *Yiddishkeit* there was no yeshiva for him to attend, even for part-time classes. Perhaps there was not yet a need for such an institution, as the efforts of a few dedicated individuals still sufficed for the few of Yossie's generation who had dared to move toward Torah. By the time the young lady in uniform had come to this point, she was one of many thousands searching for some meaning to fill the vacuum created by the bankruptcy of secular Zionism.

The needs of these young people moved Ohr Somayach to look beyond its activities on behalf of hundreds of English-speaking college-age youths and to establish the "Na'aseh V'nishma" movement for *baalei teshuva* in Israeli society.

Enter "Na'aseh V'nishma"

The impact of Na'aseh V'nishma has been phenomenal. Hundreds of young men and women have returned to *Yiddishkeit* through its activities in the past three years. Some 200 young men and women — Sabras all — are involved in its full-time and part-time yeshiva programs in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, while more than a

thousand adults of all ages participate in weekly study groups in two dozen places throughout Israel. Thousands of officers and soldiers of all branches of the Israel Defense Forces have been introduced to Torah ideas through its regular programs in conjunction with the army education effort on a number of army bases. (The Tel Nof Air Force Base distributes clever invitations to its weekly Ohr Somayach Chug with a postscript that "ein knissah ledati'im — no admittance to the religious.")



The *teshuva* movement in Israel sparked by Na'aseh V'nishma has received a great deal of publicity because some of the people in its front ranks were well-known names in the intellectual and entertainment establishment. Reb Yitzchok "Ikka" Yisraeli, the moving spirit of the movement, a man in his mid 40's, is one of Israel's most celebrated artists. He is remembered by an entire generation of Sabras as the king of Tel Aviv's Bohemia who established the first dischoteque in that city.

During a much publicized visit by then-Premier Yitzchak Rabin to the Israeli division of Yeshivas Ohr Somayach (the Israeli and English-speaking divisions of the Yeshiva share dining facilities, but have different

programs and separate study halls and sleeping quarters), he was confronted by Ikka who told him that his visit was long over-due.

Ikka: I was on your side of the fence once. You should realize that you're making a big mistake until you recognize that our country's *true* higher education is the yeshivos — not the universities.

Rabin: Because you study Torah?

Ikka: To be sure. But I had also meant simply in terms of the level of academic quality. It's a shame that you haven't made an effort to know us.

Rabin: Who's fault is it that we haven't met yet?

Ikka: Perhaps both of ours. Every day we do not bridge the gap between our communities is a day lost. What, Mr. Premier, are you going to do?

Rabin: (deeply moved) Well, I am here now.

Ikka: A very good start.

Ikka, Pupik, and film-and-T.V. star Uri Zohar have been canonized and condemned in the Israeli press, but the critics agree with the championers that these famous names have made *teshuva* a popular idea in the country today. One of the most widely-listened to radio shows in recent years was a two-hour program broadcast live several months ago from the Ohr Somayach Beis Midrash, featuring *Ikka*, Pupik, and another Na'aseh V'nishma leader, Rabbi Avrohom Ravitz, as a panel replying to listeners' questions regarding *teshuva*.

When the Rishon Letzion Rabbi Ovadia Yosef recently visited the Yeshiva, he made the following reflection on the phenomenon of entertainers turning to *teshuva*:

"Our sages state that all the theaters will ultimately be transformed into *Batei Midrash*. If Mayor Kollek wants to give us the Jerusalem Theater for a yeshiva we certainly won't refuse, but why is it that G-d should



Uri Zohar Gets Religion

(excerpts from an article by Diane Lerner, in *Israel Digest*, Nov. 4, '77)

Anything can happen in Israel. Take a case that's made headlines here. Hold on to your yarmulkas for this one — *Uri Zohar has got religion!* A top Israeli showbiz star — very funny comedian, popular



find it necessary to make use of such places when He could easily provide us with buildings in another fashion? These words of *Chazal* (the sages) must then be seen from another angle. If all the entertainers will become *bnei Torah*, what sort of performance will they put on for their audiences? They will learn a *daf Gemora* with them, of course. Thus will the theaters turn into yeshivos."

Variations on a Theme

The success of the Chugim is not merely the result of exploiting charismatic personalities for spreading "the word." An intellectual exchange takes place, which the participants find heady and stimulating. The net result

host of Israel TV's "That's My Secret," much in demand as a talk-show guest, a so-called free-thinker who never disowned his drug addicted friends — Uri suddenly

converted" to Judaism. He quietly entered a yeshiva a year or so ago; now he always wears a *kippa* (a *yarmulka*) and *tsitsis* (the fringe upon the corners of a man's garments to remind him of the Commandments, the *mitzvot*). When he first showed up on "That's My Secret" dressed that way, the cast thought it was a stunt. But he meant it and he hasn't backslid an inch. It seems to be the answer to his personal

search for truth, security, a solid place to plant both feet. It has given him roots, he feels, a tradition to be part of and proud of. "People who observe the *mitzvot* are more free," he said on TV recently. "I can't tell you why, but putting on a *kippa* makes you think. Maybe seeing me in one will make others think."

And it has. As an idol of young Israelis, Uri is making a lot of them think, and the *kippa* and *tsitsis* manufacturers are doing very well. Uri hasn't turned to religion as an escape from an unsuccessful career or an unhappy personal life. He is at the height of his profession,

happily married and the father of three. He continues his daily swim off the Tel Aviv beach at daybreak, he's producing and starring in films, appearing on TV and radio, performing at army bases (no charge), entertaining handicapped children (no charge) — all the while studying Torah and practicing the *mitzvot* like any other observant Jew. Two of his friends are also students at his yeshiva — Ikka Israelis, an artist, and Pupik Arnon, a rock and roll singer who was recently ordained a rabbi.

That Uri Zohar's return to Torah is a phenomom, no one will deny.

is that, on the least level, many of the regular participants become better disposed toward Torah Judaism. Others assume *mitzva* observance — in part or in its entirety. Some see their way in enrolling their children in yeshivos. But the results are highly encouraging, and spreading across the land.

A parallel development is a new army program directed by the American Peylim organization. (The description that follows is from the *Peylim Reporter*.)

Begun as an experiment to give Israeli Army officers some background in Judaism, these seminars have been developed to the point where 30 or more officers participate at one time in a program consisting of 39 hours of lectures, study, discussions and tours. Planned and directed by P'eylim's Rabbi Yosef Krupnick, the program is a challenge to the mature army officer who, in most cases, grew up in a secular kibbutz environment and was never before exposed intellectually to Jewish traditions and to Torah as a way of life. The lecturers are Israeli and American Rabbis and educators who pull no punches in presenting the topics under discussion without any sugar coating.

One of the more popular features of the seminar is a day spent in a yeshiva. Each officer is assigned to a senior yeshiva or *kolel* student and together they explore a *blatt Gemora*, tracing the development of a concept in Talmudic law, and the essential contributions of the commentaries to the understanding and grasp of the *Gemora*. This exposure to the intellectual depth of Torah makes a striking impression on the soldiers.

Hundreds of officers have participated in this program. Their reactions upon completing the seminar have been almost 100% positive. All feel that they are better Jews for the knowledge they have gained, and many have decided to give their own children the benefit of a religious education which they never had.

A substantial number have requested more intensive courses of study and several officers have entered yeshivos for *baalei teshuva*.

Agudath Israel's *Reshet Shiurei Torah* (adult Torah network) is basically geared for people with some experience and commitment, but has achieved some remarkable success with people far from *Yiddishkeit* (JO Oct. 74).

Who's Who in the Movement

It might seem that the *teshuva* movement in Israel has drawn a disproportionate number of its adherents from *avant garde* circles. Membership in the *chugim* is indeed composed predominantly of professionals and intellectuals — doctors from Hadassah Hospital; students at Tel Aviv University, Technion and Bar Ilan; instructors in one school or another. In the posh Tel Aviv suburban community of Savyon, the Na'aseh V'nishma Chug meets in the mayor's house. But it would be a misrepresentation of the scope of the *teshuva* movement to focus only on these celebrities or on the army officers. The clientele is varied indeed. In

addition to these activities, Rabbi Reuven Elbaz's dynamic program in Jerusalem's Bukharian Quarter is achieving notable success with the financially disadvantaged residents of his community. (See JO, Mar. 77.) And in the yeshiva, where the student body is basically in its late teens and early 20's, the boys are not necessarily from the "upper crust" of Israel's society. It may be of interest to note the types of young men who came to the yeshiva program and how they are accommodated.

A profile of the typical *baal teshuva* attracted to Ohr Somayach's Israeli program indicates some interesting differences between him and his Western counterpart. Whereas virtually all the American and other English-speaking students come to the yeshiva during their undergraduate or graduate college years, only a minority of the Israeli students come from the campus. The young Israeli, who must first dedicate three years to military service plus additional years to his university studies before he can begin life on his own and found a family, lacks the freedom of his Western counterpart to take off a year from school to find himself. Nonetheless, the ideal candidate for the Israeli

An Interview With Mordechai Arnon

(from *Flight From Fire*
by *Shraga Hoffman*,
featured in
Shma Yisrael Magazine
published in Israel
by *Yeshiva Ohr Somayach*).



The story sounds clichéd: "Idol of millions gives it all up for religion." But in the story of Mordechai Arnon, known on the stage and screen as "Pupik", we become aware of a man who escaped from the clichés of society in an attempt to answer questions that had lain dormant in his mind for many years. Mordechai Arnon's return to Judaism is a potent lesson to a society that canonizes its clowns and ignores its sages.

Mordechai Arnon is thirty-five years old. However if you ask him his age, he will tell you, "I am six months old." It has been six months since what may be termed his "spiritual rebirth" occurred.

He made ten movies and reached stardom with all of the material benefits that it includes. But the whole experience began to leave a bad taste in his mouth. He began to sense a pervasive futility in the lives of the people surrounding him: "Men don't live for any purpose beyond gratifying their immediate desires. They believe that the world ends when they die.

They worship the body, they look for stimulus for the body alone. They are interested in feeding only their bodies and not their souls. I've just read in a newspaper article that twenty million people in the States are mentally unstable. Israel is far too imitative of the United States for that not to be unsettling."

"Israel is a very small country, and during every war you feel like the people are your brothers. In wartime they clutch together, they have something to do together." He became disheartened at the idea that this spirit could only be mustered during war times and that there was nothing equally substantial to sustain the people through routine times. "We just live out our lives without purpose."

It was at this point that he began to re-examine Judaism. "The older I grew, the surer I became that this document of the Jewish people (the Torah), is one of the most important documents of mankind. (I didn't talk about belief or not.) If it's translated into ninety

yeshiva program is of the same age range — the post-army man who is old enough to think for himself, but still unburdened by family and career responsibilities. Former members of youth movements have proven to be the most responsive to a *teshuvua* experience because their early training stressed ideological values, even if those values were Hashomer Hatzair Socialism.

Also among the returnees are young people euphemistically referred to as "fringe youth." They have a vestigial inclination toward *Yiddishkeit* based on the strong religious tradition of their parents and grandparents, but sometimes find it difficult to accept the strenuous demands of a yeshiva regimen in place of the easy solutions to their socio-economic problems offered by the desperate mores of their counterculture.

The American Interval

One significant difference between any of the aforementioned Israeli types and the American *baal teshuva* is the "withdrawal period" following initial commitment. Once an Israeli has decided to be *frum*, he has very little difficulty in going all the way. By contrast, the American may spend challenging months

of transformation during which he often has second thoughts about the course he has taken. This contrast can only be appreciated against the backdrop of the variant cultures from which the two stem. The American must not only assume a religious commitment; he must become Jewish by purging himself of all the aspects of a non-Jewish culture that have become part of him. The Israeli still thinks of himself first and foremost as a Jew, and once he has decided that the Zionist definition of Jewishness is untenable he finds no difficulty in sliding into classical *Yiddishkeit*. Even the much publicized hedonistic lifestyle of the Dizengoff swingers is not looked upon as an Israeli cultural phenomenon, but rather as a Western import of temporary faddish attraction, easily shed for the genuine Jewish experience.

Beyond the cultural difference, the Israeli has an easier time with Hebrew, and the Gemora's Aramaic has common print face and etymology with his Hebrew. The Anglo-American *baal teshuva* also has this language barrier to surmount — which takes several months. Thus, the preparatory period for the Israeli is considerably shorter than that of the others.

languages, and if so many people for so many years are interested in the same document, then there must be something in it. I had no knowledge about it, but I was sure I had to look."

What first prompted you to go to a Yeshiva?

"A friend convinced me to come one *Shabbos*. I was supposed to do a show that night, but he told me, "G-d will pay you more". I canceled the show and since then I've become a millionaire."

What thoughts occurred to you when you first came?

"It was a progression. I knew I had to stay for a while, but I didn't know what it was. I also had many personal problems to solve. It took three months to make the decision to stay in the Yeshiva and fix my life there. In the beginning I often came and went, and I even performed, as I had some contracts to fulfill. But I think if I don't check things out I can die like I am."

Is it perhaps selfish to be in a Yeshiva when there are so many

people who once looked up to you?

"I'm not ready to take on the world yet. But I feel a responsibility to do my part, though I don't know how big or small a part it is.



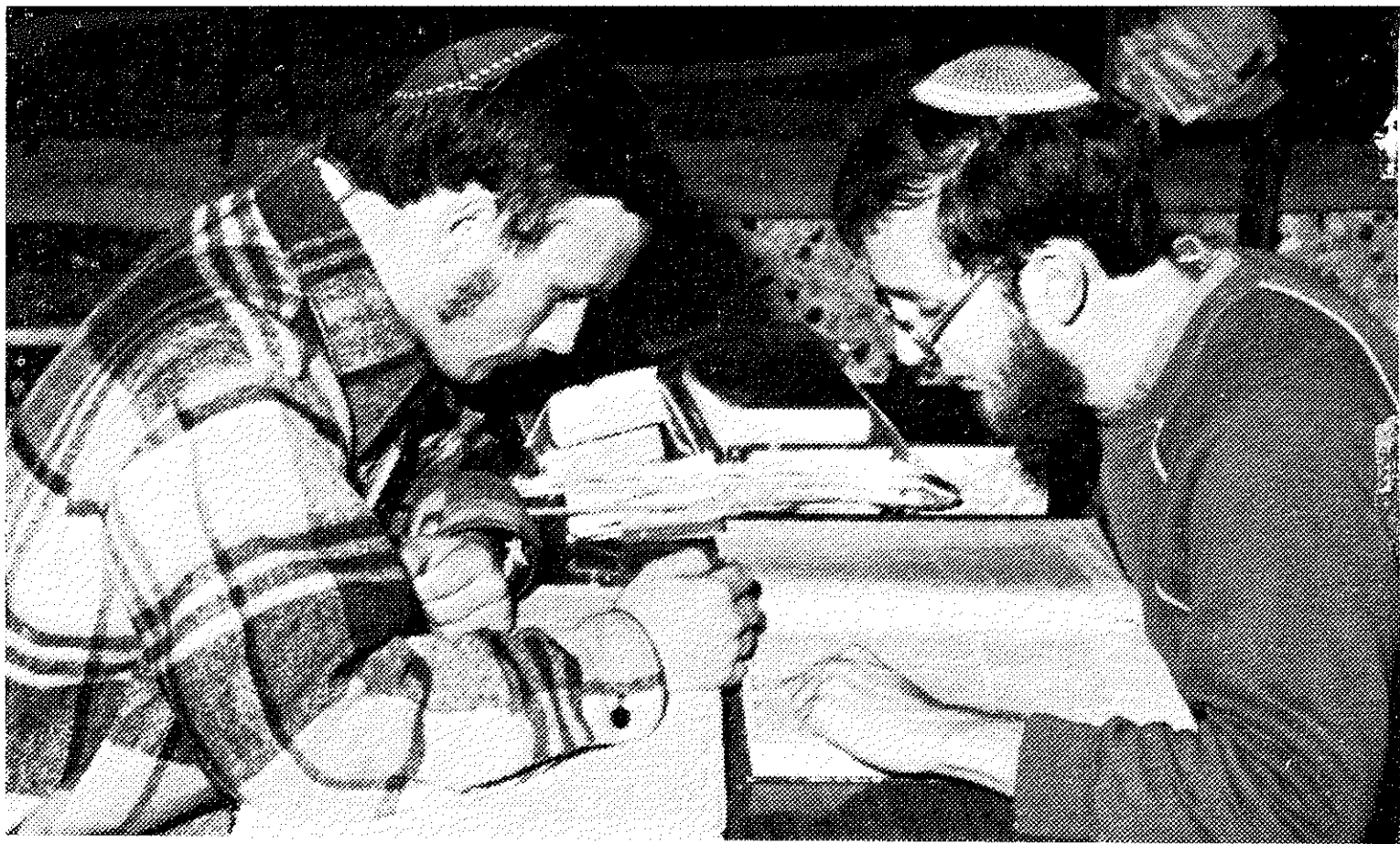
"I had thought that if I'm on the Israeli stage, it means I'm influencing. Afterwards I understood that if I don't change internally, I can't change others from the stage. Now I am changing myself and I want to be an example. Here in Yeshiva it's not only one hour a day that I'm on the stage and telling them what I'm

doing ... and they should learn from that. It's a life that commences from the minute I open my eyes ... it's a complete day, every day. I don't have to act, to show them how a man should live. I live my life and that's the example."

He relates that on arriving at one religious high school, the students stood and applauded even before he began speaking; "applauding, that is, for 'Pupik', not for Mordechai Arnon." The scene depressed him, as he had come to speak to them about more serious matters.

What do you say at these lectures?

"I say that we have two fronts; one is outward against the Arabs, and the other is inward, in order to keep our nation alive. We cannot neglect either. The battle to stay alive as a unique nation must be waged with the ammunition and artillery of Torah. It's clear that we can't survive without an army, but it's equally evident that we can't survive as a people unless our spiritual needs are preserved."



The Israeli Hang-Up

On the other hand, the Israeli has some hang-ups that the Anglo-American does not have to contend with. He must overcome an ugly stereotype of the religious Jews thrust upon him by a hostile secular press — as a residual flotsam washed ashore from some earlier shtetl existence, with no relevance to modern Israel. Now, much to his personal discomfort, he must engage in the very practices that he once ridiculed as archaic. The indoctrination-transition program for him must demonstrate that (a) a Torah life has a deep, philosophical basis; (b) the people whom he deals with in the yeshiva are committed to this philosophy; and (c) the philosophy and commitment are lived in real life. This is the a far cry from the secular world where the ivory-towered university is divorced from the arena of action. Here, ideas are ultimately carried out *halacha le'maaseh*. And great scholars ultimately become great leaders. This is not the case where politicians and academicians occupy separate spheres of existence, seldom touching, never communicating.

To the Anglo-American, the Torah Jew is not so much archaic as non-existent. His first step is to accept that there actually is such a way of life, and that he has a place in it. It should thus be understandable that although the Ohr Somayach programs for Israelis and Anglo-Americans are similar, there is also basis for differences. On the one hand, both are based on complete immersion in Talmudic study — as the classical antidote to the *yeitzer hora* (evil inclination) — thrusting the participant into the mainstream of


yeshiva life as fully as possible. Nonetheless, separate schools are maintained for the sake of effecting different approaches at orientation for Israelis and Americans.

An added difference — and an obvious one, at that — is the need for different languages of instruction: English vs. Ivrit... Incidentally, much the same rationale accounts for the two-track program at the Neve Yerushalayim School for Young Women, which also caters to young *baalei teshuva*.

The Fruits of the Movement

The *teshuva* movement in Israel has not only produced religious Jews — it has produced budding *talmidei chachomim* as well. When Jerusalem's Chief Rabbi Bezalel Zolty recently delivered a *shiur* (lecture) to the Israeli *talmidim* at Ohr Somayach, he was so overwhelmed by the challenges they presented to his thesis that he later confessed, with tears in his eyes, that he would never have believed that *talmidim* with no background could become such *lomdim* (accomplished scholars) in so short a time. This appreciation has been reflected in recommendations by the Steipler Rav, Rabbi Yisroel Yaakov Kanievsky, Rabbi Eliezer Schach, Rabbi Eliyashuv, and Rabbi Shlomo Z. Auerbach directing *talmidim* to this program. Similarly, the Belzer Rebbe, seeking to revive the activist "Machzikei Hadass" tradition of Belz in Israel, offers counsel and financial encouragement to launch a *kolel*, for Israeli *baalei teshuva* (under Ohr Somayach) in Jerusalem and a part-time program in Tel Aviv. When

Agudath Israel leaders met to draft their demands for a coalition agreement, the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah met with Na'aseh V'nishma leaders to determine what must be requested in regard to military deferment for students of *baal teshuva* yeshivos.

The movement has already developed a momentum which could keep on growing until it engulfs the entire land. The old time-tested (albeit unprofessional) *derech* of yeshivos is proving to be effective indeed in meeting the needs of the *baal teshuva*. 

THE TESHUVA MOVEMENT IN ISRAEL:

My Bag: The Yeshiva

David Goldstein

"Well, we're finally in the new building, *Baruch Hashem*." That's a phrase I've begun to use quite a bit since coming to Ohr Somayach. How are you today? "*Baruch Hashem*." How are classes today? "*Baruch Hashem*." What a marvelous phrase to incorporate into daily conversation — what a great feeling to *begin* to understand the meaning, the vast implications of the words, "*Baruch Hashem*." After all, the first step in becoming a Jew who lives up to his responsibilities to mankind, to Hashem, to *Am Yisrael*, and to himself is to realize the existence of Hashem. *Realize* His existence; become aware of the impact of His existence.

I stress "realization" because this is exactly what I was lacking in my approach to Judaism before coming to Yeshiva and that's what was lacking in the communities I lived in back in the United States. "Belief" is rampant in the States; it's "Realization" that's scarce.

Let me explain by telling of my religious thinking and my environment before coming to Yeshiva.

The Science Scene: Brains in Mothballs

I studied at Washington University in St. Louis, Northwestern University in Chicago, and the University of Colorado. I studied physics, computers and electronics. I then worked for the Nuclear Power Industry, designing control systems to monitor and regulate Nuclear Reactors. There — my life story in 50 words or less.

DAVID GOLDSTEIN, a native of Denver, is now a full-time student in Yeshiva Ohr Somayach, in Jerusalem. This article was delivered as a speech at the dedication of the Yeshiva's new building.

The point is, my associates and friends were scientists, engineers, intellectual, well-read people accustomed to the methodology of science and technology; a system that I thought thrived on *questions, quests, and queries* in all manners and directions with, the ultimate purpose of finding truth: at least, that's what they told me in school.

In this environment of Science and Technology, the subject of G-d rarely came up. But when it did, the conversation was usually limited to picking sides; 70% for the Lord — 30% against. But not one of the 70% who claimed to believe in G-d would let such a belief upset his daily routine, or would even think of seeking any understanding of G-d or rapport with Him. Their goals and desires were totally independent of their "Belief." They kept G-d in the back of their minds, to be called upon in times of sorrow or urgent need. Of the 30% who disclaimed the existence of G-d, I would say all but a rare individual or two packed Hashem into the back of their heads to be called upon in the exact situations as the "Believers."

As one of the students described it, "G-d reminds me of the father whose children never write home unless they're asking for money."

Why couldn't my scientific, cultured, intellectual friends and I come to terms with the implications of our beliefs? Could it be that science, which I thought *thrived* on questions, only allows questions — only trains us to ask questions that are within the specifically defined limits of the scientific method? In other words, if it can't be answered by the application of the scientific method, don't bother asking the question. It

was as though a whole portion of my brain was put away in mothballs.

It was in this condition, victimized by Modern Technological Thought, that I was studying Judaism in my spare time, of course. I was trying to discover Judaism without bringing G-d into the picture. To be sure science could argue for the existence of G-d by showing, for example, that an ordered universe resulting from some primeval, homogeneous smear of mass and energy is *most likely* the result of some "force" outside the physical plane; but one doesn't pray with fervor as a result of compared probabilities. There I was trying to put meaning into MY life, for MY sake, for MY peace of mind and happiness, by slowly adopting the rituals and customs that were meaningful to ME. I prayed for myself, by myself, to myself, and I wore a "Chai" around my neck as a symbol of my religiosity. There's a Jew for ya!

The Yeshiva: Facing Up to My Beliefs

But then, in the classic tradition of the contemporary "*ba'al teshuva*," I chanced upon the Yeshiva on my way to Kibbutz Ulpan. Suddenly I had to face up to the consequences of beliefs and disbeliefs. I was forced to *realize, realize* the impact of opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and facts on my life. I can no longer say with cold cocktail party intellectualism, "Sure I believe in G-d."

What does it *mean*, "I believe in G-d"? What are His characteristics? How do we know He exists? How do we know His attributes? In what ways *does* He and *has* He made Himself manifest in our lives and History? If he created us, does He have any obligations to us? Do we have any obligations to Him? A thousand questions I never asked before ... and the old structure of belief came tumbling down. My views of history, philosophy, truth, values, and morals are all in the process of renovation.

The method of coming to realization in the Yeshiva is certainly not one of blind emotionalism, but one of thorough, logical analysis. The Yeshiva has taught me questions, and provided me with the resources to answer these questions. How these questions are answered exactly and how the answers are *absorbed* to a point where they give the individual a power of conviction, is difficult to describe, and I imagine that it's a little different for each person. But for me, it was a combination of two things; first, it was the *genius* of the life style, the value system, and the people it has produced; the people I've had the pleasure of meeting and the homes I've had the honor of visiting. And not only does such a system exist today but it existed back in a time when archaeologists tell us men were running around hitting each other over the head with clubs. When the development of other societies and social systems was in the infant stage, *Am Yisrael* was living Torah — amazing. The second factor is the genius of the Talmud, Gemora; how such a rich fabric of philosophy,

law, and logic can be woven with a few coded words of Aramaic to point to something beyond simple intellect.

I must apologize — I wish I could describe this process better, but I think I'm too close to it. Perhaps in a few months or a year I'll be able to look back and see how all the pieces fit.


The Result: The Big "Chiddush"

The result: Sure I believe in G-d; *G-d* Creator of the universe, on whom the very existence of every one of us is dependent, watching, listening, actively maintaining the world as He sees fit.... Wherever I turn, I see *His* work, whatever I do I do by *His* grace. So my greatest responsibility is to serve Him. Now that may be obvious to many of you, but it was a big *chiddush* — *new insight* — to me.

Suddenly there is order, not only in the movement of the stars, but in the movement of my life. Suddenly there is an absolute reference by which to measure all values, morals, purposes. Life is neither an empty page for each man to compose his own hierarchy of values, nor is it a prison of fate, each one of us locked into the value system of the society or country in which we were born. There has always been freedom of choice but now there is an absolute to direct me to the best choice.

Since we're all so good at asking questions, let's ask one more: why do I even *have* to come to a realization about G-d? Can't I live a happy full life without ever thinking about Him? The answer is simple: NO! We are Jews, and as such believe in Hashem. Love of Hashem, and *Am Yisrael*, are our "*bag*". I don't mean that in the colloquial way. Our Rebbe gave us a parable in class that explains it. Suppose I go to the store to buy some flour, and the grocer asks if I've brought a bag with me. Having no bag I'd be forced to carry the flour home in cupped hands, but before reaching my house the flour would sift through my fingers and would be lost. *That's* what I meant when I said "realization of Hashem is our bag." It's our container for life, without which all experience would sift through our fingers and would be lost.

Back to my life story: What do I do now? I've got a full scholarship to M.I.T. Graduate School waiting for me back in the States, plus a teaching position I've dreamed about for years. But what good is it if I show up in Boston eager to teach and learn and experience, if I leave my bag in Jerusalem? I must finish building my bag here and now, and there will be plenty of room in it for my secular studies, for my profession. But before I go back to the States, I want there to be enough Torah in my bag to share with my "scientific" friends back home.

So there's time enough for M.I.T. and G-d willing I'll get another opportunity to study there when I'm ready. As for now, there are a thousand questions to be asked and a lifetime of realization ahead of me ... but only because I came to the Yeshiva. 

The Jew Faces Urban Problems

Jerusalem / New York



Preserving the Communities, the Building Blocks of Klal Yisroel



Boro Park, Flatbush, the Lower East Side, Williamsburg, Crown Heights, Remsen Village, Far Rockaway, Forest Hills, Washington Heights, Brighton Beach ... New York City Jewish Communities whose residents are tired of running. They are determined to fight the neighborhood decay that has made others run. Some of them have organized to save their neighborhoods.

Why are these people so concerned? What are the goals of these groups they have organized? What are they doing?

Many factors make one neighborhood less liveable than others, and another one more attractive. Once these factors begin to surface, people question if they shouldn't move from the one to the other. But so much is lost in the process — both on the individual level and the communal level. Personal ties, family bonds, institutional allegiances, a feel of one's place in a historical continuum — all of these are strained or

RABBI LEFKOWITZ, a musmach of the Mirrer Yeshiva, Brooklyn, heads the Southern Brooklyn Community Organization which was launched several months ago by Agudath Israel of America under a grant from the Ford Foundation, as a multi-ethnic project to preserve and develop several communities in the southern part of Brooklyn. Boro Park, Bensonhurst, and Flatbush, the three target communities, are basically strong at present but show early signs of decay in housing and physical appearance, and require attention. The goal of this ambitious program is to involve all of the ethnic groups living in these middle class communities to preserve the unique character of the neighborhoods.

severed when a person leaves one neighborhood for another.

And a community's institutions also suffer when their constituents leave. The urban landscape is dotted with countless shells of *shuls*, *yeshivos*, *batei Midrashim*, and *mikvaos* — some with skeleton attendance, some totally abandoned. Some schools succeed in surviving a neighborhood transplant — witness the Yeshiva Bais Yehuda that has been leap-frogging from urban Detroit to further suburban reaches, as well as Mesifita Chaim Berlin, Torah Vodaath, and Beth Jacob Teacher's Seminary in Brooklyn, all very much intact. But some institutions have only retained a name, but none of the original flavor. Yet others — especially synagogues — maintain a dim presence in the fond memory of alumni only.

Most of all, the distinctive ambiance of a specific neighborhood when lost, is lost forever. Go find another Douglas Boulevard for Chicago promenaders, another Pitkin Avenue for Brooklyn shoppers, a duplicate Yesler Way for Seattle hill-climbers ... another imposing Roumanian *shul*, another atmospheric Ryim Ahivim *shtiebel*, another magnificent Bikur Cholim to match the originals. They can never be duplicated.

So in the back of every would-be urban refugee's mind the question should loom: "Will it be worth it?" Thus, residents in many areas have committed themselves to remain and deal with the problems rather than run away from them.

Neighborhood or Community?

Since "community" is so vital a concept, we will in this article define the makings of a community, explore what can be done to preserve the community, and finally, propose an outline for action toward this end.

A city is a group of neighborhoods within a specific geographic boundary. A neighborhood is a cluster of blocks within a more limited geographic boundary. A block consists of a collection of people who live within a small circumscribed area. The people are the prime units in this play. Without people one has neither blocks, neighborhoods, nor cities. Individual people on blocks, in neighborhoods, and in cities, however, are not yet part of communities.

What makes a neighborhood into a community? What do we mean when we say, "that place has a feeling of community"? What kind of community do we want?

Rolland Warren*, a well-known sociologist, explored this and pinpointed a number of factors that go into the making of a community. Many of these points have special relevance to the Orthodox community, and are worth examining for their implications to us.

Five Components of a Community

1- Degree of Primary Group Relationships — For a neighborhood to be called a community, the people who live in it must interact with one another. Without any interaction, people living near each other are isolated, unconnected individuals. Such neighborhoods lack the human element, and — not totally unrelated — have a high rate of suicide.

On the other hand, when people interact too much, and live too closely to one another, their creativity and ability to live as individuals is jeopardized. Such communities are often plagued by a "Yente" phenomenon and also suffer from a "Keeping up with the Jones's" syndrome.

The Torah designed our daily lives in ways which promote and encourage interaction. On the most elementary level, we Jews *daven* with a *minyan* three times a day, we are encouraged to study Torah with others, and we share each other's joys (weddings, Bar Mitzva, *Bris Mila*, *Pidyon Habein* celebrations) and sorrows ל"ע (*Bikur Cholim*, *Shiva*) with others. The interaction is a social-religious one.

On a more complex level, there are laws and responsibilities that apply exclusively to the community, thus promoting interaction. It is not necessary to go all the way back to the days of the Second Commonwealth, when obviously "the community" was responsible for everything from daily sacrifices to warning against the growth of forbidden mixtures of vegetation, to paving roads. The day before yesterday in most of the Jewish world — and today, in some parts — the community car-

ried responsibility for *kashrus*, education, burial, and any number of other community functions that assisted the individual in his day-to-day life in countless ways.

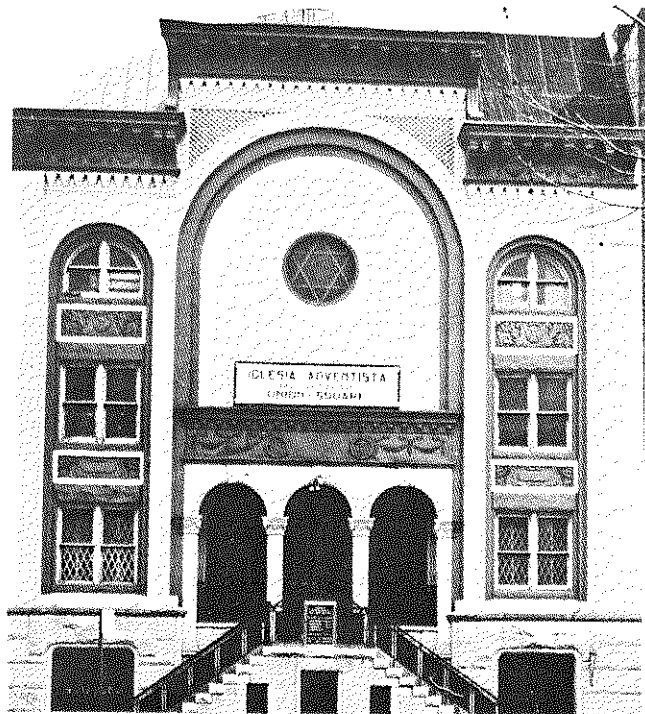
Availing oneself of the community's services does not necessarily involve social interaction, but it surely promotes it. Purchasing meat from a butcher-shop under the supervision of the Kahal Adath Yeshurun of Washington Heights, for instance, certainly makes a person aware of one's dependency upon the Kahal. (On the other hand, this can be done without personal contact, with meats frozen and flown over great distances. Sophistication does decrease interaction, and allows for alienation. Nonetheless, the existence of the *kehilla* in any form whatsoever depends upon some type of interaction and promotes it as well.)

Thus, only communities with a high degree of interaction succeed in achieving some degree of perpetuity. One knows he can sell his house and run and buy another one elsewhere, taking along his family and material belongings, but as long as he realizes that he cannot take along the *heimishe* atmosphere and social relationships nurtured over the years, the more he is part of the community, the less concerned will he be about property values, and the more likely will he stick it out in face of difficulties.

2-Autonomy — A local community should be the master over its own fate, with its members involved in the decisions that affect their lives. The best example of a situation where this was lacking and then corrected is Forest Hills — an upper middle class community in Queens, which was threatened in the early 1970's. The city government drew up altruistic plans to solve poverty housing problems at the expense of the community's stability, completely ignoring the input, concern, and needs of the local populace. The people of Forest Hills united in revolt, and the plans were scaled down to a size and format that the community could live with.

Today the concept of community autonomy is more or less accepted in political life. We have Community School Boards, Planning Boards, Human Resources Administration Advisory Boards, H.S.A. Boards, etc.... Regardless of whether or not it is efficient and effective, community participation is an accepted fact in government. Private enterprise, however, sometimes seems to flourish in spite of the community's wishes. In many Brooklyn neighborhoods, the community level is controlled by the whims of real estate operators. Specifically, landlords may deny services to their tenants, allowing buildings to deteriorate, bringing in undesirables; and yet, if they happen to be Orthodox, they are honored with *Shishi* when called to the Torah on *Shabbos* in the very same community. Some developers, to be sure, do improve a neighborhood by building new homes, thereby expressing their confidence in the area, but there is no trend in the direction of "community control" in the private domain.

*Roland L. Warren, "The Good Community — What Would It Be?" *Journal of the Community Development Society*, —1Spring 1970.



Former Anshe Ileya synagogue, now Union Square Seventh Day Adventist Church.

Photographs on these pages are from the book *The Synagogues of New York's Lower East Side*, which is reviewed in this issue.

Furthermore, a new pattern of blockbusting, which is illegal in regard to private homes, is becoming prevalent with multiple dwellings. There are areas in Brooklyn where seven or eight multiple-dwellings (especially four-floor walk-ups) are creating instability for thousands of homeowners. One might expect the homeowners (whose own homes represent a personal investment that goes beyond finances) to control the landlords (who are basically interested in financial return and not much else), and not vice versa. In some of these areas, millions of dollars were expended to build beautiful yeshivos, synagogues, and *shtieblach*, and yet a handful of landlords owning but a few buildings are able to create instability.

Some people beg off asserting themselves in this undeveloped area, claiming not to be "activists." But, on the other hand, how can anyone afford to risk losing irreplaceable institutions and social-religious connections, and hope to create them again elsewhere — often ending up with but a pale shadow of the original? If necessary, couldn't each family consider contributing towards the purchase of these threatening houses to put them under community control?

Of course, other tactics are possible, but this option must also be considered. It was most effectively used by one group that raised money to buy up a four-story multiple dwelling on the fringes of Boro Park, now in the midst of rehabilitation.

3- Viability — A neighborhood is only a community when it is capable of confronting and resolving its own problems. It is easy to talk about those landlords, it is painful to talk about the crime rate, it is sometimes repelling to walk in the streets. But are the residents capable of doing something about these situations?

Which brings us to the next component of a community:

4- Degree of Commitment — How important is the survival of the community to its members? Are the community members prepared to devote time, energy, and money to resolve their problems? At times, there appears to be a contradiction between people's hierarchy of values and the courses of action they pursue. While everyone agrees that seeking neighborhood stabilization is a worthy pursuit, are they ready to act upon it?

True, the Orthodox community possesses limited resources and must meet a host of highly demanding needs. Time and money devoted to solving problems of stability must be taken from time and money usually spent on families, for yeshivos, and for personal growth in Torah study. One asks — quite justifiably — *Since I'm so strapped for money, what right do I have to get involved with new problems requiring more funds and additional time?*

On the other hand, can members of the community afford to ignore these problems? Are they ready for the consequences of a negative decision? Won't it cost them far more in time and money if they continue to neglect these problems?

To be sure, some people think — and may even say — "We survived as a Jewish community till now; we ran, resettled, and rebuilt, and if necessary we'll do the same again. — Isn't that what *golus* is all about?"

The affluent neighborhood-hopper thinks that he can afford this philosophical attitude. Actually neither the middle-to-upper-income family nor the young families have great difficulty in relocating in "new" communities, in spite of inevitable losses they may choose to ignore. The people who suffer most — and are still suffering — are the moderate-to-low-income families and the senior citizens, who cannot simply pick themselves up and move on.

And less-than-affluent institutions also suffer: for instance, the yeshivos left behind in these areas cannot easily manage financially, and they struggle on until — almost totally abandoned — they may follow their constituency. The yeshivos are rarely able to re-establish themselves in new areas. And, back in the old neighborhood, the moderate-to-low-income families are left on their own.

A community must share in responsibility for all its members. This gives it two options: Either the community as a whole decides to move on and help each

member of the community resettle; or everybody sticks it out together — young and old, rich and poor, individuals and institutions.

One imaginative Boro-Parker suggested that the community organize a block-by-block campaign to persuade every homeowner to sign a *shtar* (contract) committing himself to the neighborhood, and that he will fight for its survival even if property values decline.

Are people ready to commit themselves to their community? Or, are they going to be passive to evolutionary change and allow history to repeat itself?

5 — Degree of Heterogeneity — A newspaper reporter asked me (in my capacity as director of SBCO): "Are you trying to create a ghetto? Why don't you just put a wall around Boro Park?"

To want to live in a ghetto is considered a dirty thought. However — as I pointed out to my questioner — the very people who turn up their noses at the thought also live in communities that are economically, socially, and ethnically homogeneous. People simply want to live with others who share their values. Of course, one must learn how to live with others; but people do have a right to their preferences, and they obviously exercise them.

Some communities may map out an area and limit "membership" to one specific type of person. Most Jewish communities cannot afford to be so exclusive. To survive, they must join forces with non-Jewish residents. The Jewish residents must be willing to help others with their needs (i.e. better quality education in the public school system), and they to help the Jews with their needs (i.e. patrol the streets — especially on Saturdays and holidays); and then common concerns (i.e. clean and safe streets, proper maintenance of homes, yards and the commercial strip) will also be met. Of course, where the values of the Jewish and non-Jewish residents are at variance with each other, working together can be difficult.

Guidelines for Action

We have defined a community by its five components, and we have singled out some of the implications of living in a community — the opportunities, obligations, and imperatives. Accepting the implications I have offered, the next step would be to outline some guidelines for action to take to preserve our communities.

□ *Organization* — There is need for setting up grass-roots organizations (block associations, merchants' associations, tenant associations, neighborhood associations) that will meet regularly to discuss problems and seek solutions, to upgrade and maintain their turf.

These organizations should involve any individual — of any race, color, or creed — who is interested in maintaining a clean, safe, pleasant area.

They should be connected to a coordinating body that handles problems that cannot be dealt with in-



Congregation Bnai Rappaport Anshe Rembrava (abandoned).

dependently, on a block by block basis. These organizations should be supervised by the residents in the area, on a one-man-one-vote basis. In effect, they should be run by the people and for the people.

If it proves difficult to get people organized, one need only wait for a crisis and there will be no problem ... But waiting for a crisis to motivate people to organize reduces by half the ability to resolve the problem.

A community that has an organization with a full-time staff devoted to resolving these problems will probably be more "viable" than others. At the same time, the organization must work with the people and involve them in every stage of its work to be effective.

At one meeting of a Boro Park group, the block as-

sociation captains presented their crime problems to the Police Department officials. The Police Captain in turn explained how the Police Department works, how assignments are made, and the difficulty he has operating with limited resources. The Police Department and the community learned a great deal about each other; it was important for the Police to see that the entire community was involved, rather than just individuals or the organizational staff. As a result, small changes began to appear: Certain crucial buildings, where suspicious activities had been taking place, are now under surveillance, and a number of arrests have been made.

Another example of this: members of the block associations and their elected officials participated in a meeting in which the SBCO staff presented city officials data regarding several abandoned buildings. As a result, these buildings, which heretofore were not attended to, were immediately either sealed up or demolished.

In both examples, it was important to act collectively as a community, to be prepared with all the necessary data, and to convey the message that these problems will be pursued until they are resolved.

Another case problem emerged at a business conference organized by SBCO, in conjunction with the Thirteenth Avenue Merchants Association. A merchant was having problems obtaining his Certificate of Occupancy, due to red tape.

Subsequently, the appropriate agencies looked into the problem to expedite its resolution.

□ *Problem Identification* — After having successfully organized a group, the next task is to identify the problems it will attempt to resolve. This means pinpointing the extent to which the problem exists, when, and exactly where.

In the short history of SBCO, we have found this stage to be most neglected and a part that sometimes requires a great deal of time. In housing problems, for instance, it is often tedious and time-consuming to determine who owns the house in question, the number of violations on it, condition of the building, nature of the services offered and denied, the degree of tax arrears, and so on. But if the problems are to be resolved, they must be approached in a carefully planned, professional manner.

SBCO's experience has been that people perceive problems to be much greater than they really are. One community leader told this author, "You are wasting your time; the problems are monumental."

The data was collected; it turned out to everyone's astonishment that the problem existed on three blocks only. Obviously, a three block problem is not a monumental one.

□ *Definition of Goals* — Immediate and long range. This simply means taking a sheet of paper, drawing a line down the middle, and heading one column "Im-

mediate" and the other "Long Range," then asking: Which problems *must* be resolved immediately? Which problems *should* be resolved, but can wait? Divide the "musts" from the "wishes," and separate projects that must be taken up and can be launched today, from those that require long-range planning.

Some communities find safe streets their most important problem; others feel that decent housing is their most urgent concern.

□ *Possible Solutions* — For each problem, one lists possible solutions. If the problem is safety, one may want to confront the police / organize a civilian patrol / or hire private protection guards ... If the problem is housing, one may want to speak to the offending landlord / picket his house / call a rent strike / invite in inspectors / buy the house / or contact the bank.

It is in this area where values and *halacha* play an important role. One block decided to stop a homeowner from selling his house by demonstrating in front of it: May one embarrass the homeowner? ... Is one permitted to organize tenants to call a strike, and thereby possibly cause the landlord financial losses? ... Is one allowed to call code enforcement inspectors down? Is this *messira* (unlawful informing?) On the other hand, is one permitted to sit by while a landlord drives a neighborhood into ruin? Is one allowed to sit by and let yet another Jewish community go down the drain? Isn't there an obligation to embarrass him, cause him financial loss, if need be, and call the inspectors down to assure the survival of a community?

How do we make these choices? Who is to make the decision? To be sure, a halachic authority must be consulted, and his word adhered to.

□ *Plan of Action* — Having decided which solutions are acceptable and appropriate to the problem, a plan of action must be devised, outlining What's, How's, Who's, and When's.

□ *Evaluation* — On a regular basis, each undertaking must be evaluated to see if the goals were met — and if not, why not — and to pursue the problem by going back to the previous stage: Plan of Action.

Conclusion

Anyone involved in community work knows well that no assignment ends with Evaluation. Problems are constantly emerging, and once one problem is solved, a new one is usually created in its wake. And problems thought resolved have a habit of popping up again in another guise. Experience has also demonstrated, however, that much can be accomplished in terms of making communities secure if intelligent action is taken.

With the attitude that the problems are monumental and cannot be resolved, one can be assured that they never will be resolved. Stabilizing a community is a slow process, an uphill battle, but most definitely worth the effort. ■

*It's sad
To be the Mayor of Jerusalem
How can any man be Mayor of a city like that?
What can he do with her?
He will build and build and build.
(Amichai)*

Dirty Tricks

The flyer, bearing the letterhead of the Jerusalem Foundation, began: "Dear Friend of Israel: I wonder if you could help us out?" The help, it was emphasized, was of a spiritual, rather than monetary nature for a change. It was a plea to share with the city fathers one's vision of Jerusalem, i.e.

As you may know we are planning to build a sports complex of international calibre in Jerusalem. Ever since we have publicized parts of the plan, serious opposition has been raised from many sectors — Government agencies require the money for the pressing needs

NAOMI RAGEN is the editor of the Israel Environment Bulletin. Her articles regularly appear in the Jerusalem Post.

of defense and social welfare; there have been international repercussions from non-Jewish religious leaders, both on international and religious grounds; adamant opposition from residents of surrounding neighborhoods. Lastly, and perhaps the most important, we have been faced with the ever-recurring question of the effect of a sports complex upon the uniqueness of the Holy City ...

We'd like you to help us ponder the question: Is a sports complex part of the heritage of Jerusalem? Even if it is not, we want to enrich the culture of our citizens — but is this the way? Perhaps the Foundation should put its energies into more humanitarian and religious projects? ...

The letter was signed "Teddy Kollek."

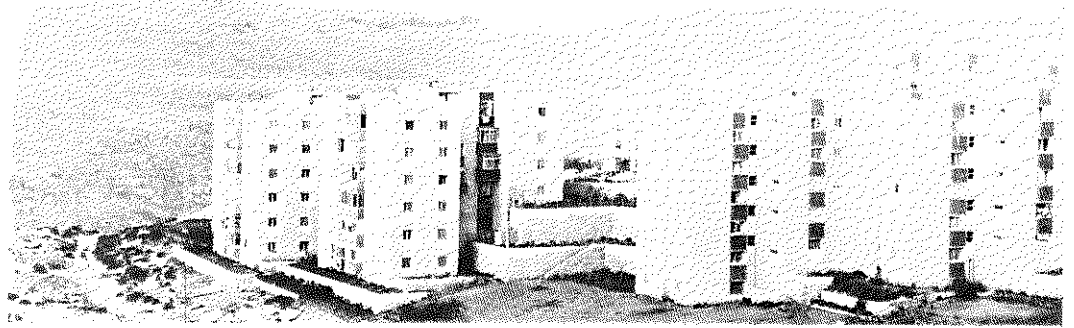
Tourists all over Jerusalem who received the flyer at their hotels were perhaps gratified at this personal attempt to include them in the city's plans. To Jerusalem residents, however, especially those active in the struggle against the new sports complex, it was nothing short of incredible. While some sought to explain it in terms of a diabolically clever plot hatched by th



Naomi Ragen

The New Jerusalem Stadium: Ghosts of Herod Past?

*In the background:
the hilltop where
the proposed
stadium is to be
built, overlooking
Sanhedria
Murchevet
(foreground)...*



mayor's public relations people to undercut growing opposition to the project, those familiar with the mayor's fierce sponsorship of the stadium felt a mixture of exhilaration and utter disbelief at this sudden revelation of misgivings. Their joy was short-lived, however, as a furious municipality hastily announced the flyer a complete hoax and police began to search for forgers of the mayor's signature.

The Complex Scale

This incident, reminiscent of Watergate's "dirty tricks," points up clearly the emotional pitch the battle now raging over plans for the new Jerusalem Sports and Recreation Center has reached in the city. Indeed, opponents of the Center believe that should the mayor realize his goal it will lead to no less than the destruction of the unique character of Jerusalem, turning it from the world's "Holy City" into the Middle East's "Sports City." Nor does the city's brochure describing the Center do anything to convince one that such fears are wholly exaggerated.

For as detailed in official literature, the complex seems almost Roman in proportion and extravagance. It is planned over an area twice the size of the Old City and is to contain a stadium with a 50,000 seat capacity — the largest in the Middle East. In addition, the plans call for an indoor sports stadium; a sports center with a swimming pool, basketball, tennis and gymnastics facilities; a youth center with a library and club rooms; a Gadan youth movement center, with a target range and obstacle course; youth hostels; motels; and last but not least, a complete amusement park. The area chosen to accommodate this huge project is no bit of wilderness, but a rather part of the Judean hills in Northern Jerusalem, a stone's throw from numerous residential communities including French Hill, Ramat Eshkol, Ramot, and Sanhedria Murchevet.

Even among those in surrounding communities who would welcome local sports facilities, a youth center and new green areas, there is wide-spread bitterness over the scale of present plans, especially the stadium and amusement park. One high level engineering expert also concluded that the idea of combining a huge stadium with sports facilities is a planning nightmare. "People who are trying to play tennis or use the swim-

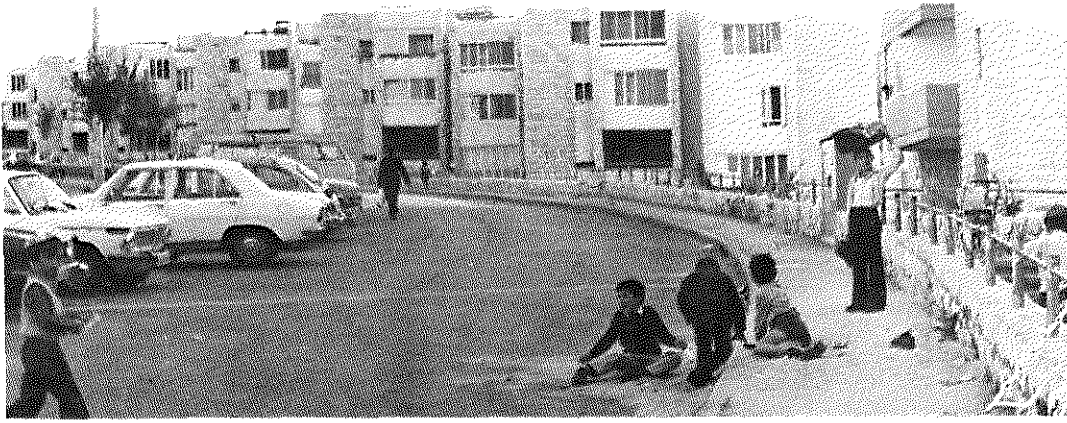
ming pool or the park will get lost in the crush of thousands of soccer fans heading in the same direction. Nowhere else is a stadium place near sports facilities, for very obvious reasons."

Another objection of local neighborhoods has centered on the question of noise from the stadium and the heavy traffic to and from the area. Existing soccer stadiums in Jerusalem, such as the Y.M.C.A. stadium which holds a maximum of 4,500 spectators, are a constant noise nuisance to neighborhoods within a one kilometer radius. Most important, residents feel that the noise of 10 times that number of cheering soccer fans will destroy the Sabbath peace of all Northern Jerusalem.

The Sanhedria Murchevet Objection

The neighborhood council of Sanhedria Murchevet, which has been among the most organized and vocal opponents of the project in the city, even went so far as to enter its own brochure into the fray. Aimed at visiting U.J.A. conventioners, this professional-looking pamphlet is the work of an American public relations expert and an English graphic artist, neighbors who pooled their considerable talents in an attempt to enlist support for their neighborhood's cause celebre. Others involved with the pamphlet include Dr. Joel S. Lafair, Chief of Pulmonary Service at Hadassah-Hebrew University Medical Center and Dr. Nachum Arieli of the Department of Philosophy at Bar Ilan University. It opens saying "We are one. Jerusalem is ours. Jerusalem is yours. Our problems are yours. Yours are ours." It goes on to describe the immigrant community's pioneering days but adds that "Despite its shortcomings, we love Sanhedria Murchevet because of the spiritual life here — the serenity of a Shabbat set in the magnificent Judean Hills, the strong sense of community among the residents, and the feelings that we are helping to build a vibrant Israel." It explains that the new sports complex threatens to destroy the community's life. "The Center will destroy our whole feeling of living in a unique and holy city, a feeling that has sustained us through all of our sacrifices to make our home in Israel."

While most of the residents, who are Orthodox,



... a community consisting primarily of religious residents, where children play peacefully in the streets on a Shabbos, undisturbed.

share this attitude, their indignation is no doubt deepened by the fact that their own 2,000 children do not have a single playground and thus spend their time playing in between cars. Malka Nissan, a Canadian immigrant and a young mother of three small girls says bitterly, "The city's answer to our needs has always been 'we have no money'. Now they go ahead and try to shove this multi-million dollar nuisance down our throats."

The Broad-Range Coalition

Ministry of Absorption workers familiar with the neighborhood are particularly concerned that realization of the sports complex might lead to a sudden exodus for the community which until now has successfully absorbed thousands of Russian and North American immigrants.

Although the Municipality has been attempting to portray the opposition as a group of religious extremists, in fact, the religious question is far from central to most objectors. Stella Saper, for example, President of the French Hill Artists Association, objects on purely aesthetic grounds. "My reaction instinctively, as an artist, is to deplore this attempt to ruin the beauty of the Judean Hills with steel and concrete, parking lots and motels. These hills are one of the most beautiful, ancient landmarks of the city and the damage will be irreparable," she emphasized.

Valerie Brachya, physical planning expert of the Israel Environmental Protection Service, feels that the complex may constitute a definite environmental hazard. After an initial examination of the aerial map of the project she stated that "The noise factor from the stadium could be a serious disturbance to neighboring areas while the amusement park might prove a real noise nuisance to Sanhedria Murchevet and Ramat Eshkol."

Esther Engleman, a resident of Ramat Eshkol, was perhaps the first person to protest the complex hazards of the Center. For as a veteran Jerusalem town planner, Ms. Engleman became aware of the project back in 1973 when it was first brought before the Town Council for approval. At that time she mounted an eloquent,

but almost singlehanded campaign against the established municipal and national powers backing the idea. Today, she feels just as strongly. "I don't find any justification whatsoever for this entire project," she emphasizes. "I don't think Jerusalem has to be a city like every other. It is a [universally accepted] religious center.... Moreover, it isn't justified at a time when thousands of other projects are being deferred throughout the country, like pocket parks, playgrounds, and schools, which are far more important. On social grounds, to shuttle so much vehicular traffic into Jerusalem, when everyone knows that the new road passes primarily by religious neighborhoods and will be used primarily on Shabbat, is to tread inexcusably on the feelings of religious residents. This plan shows a complete lack of consideration for public opinion."

Indeed, there is no question that the planned six-lane highway between Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv will pass most of the religious neighborhoods of Jerusalem's northern fringe, causing a serious daily disturbance. However, its nuisance value will no doubt increase tenfold when swollen with thousands of vehicles headed for Saturday soccer games, creating as seriously volatile situation between religious and secular elements now separated by the thin line of the status quo.

The Municipality's Short-Tempered Reaction

The official municipal reaction to all this has been an increasingly defensive and short-tempered repetition of the city's great need for the Center, especially the stadium. City Spokesman Rafi Devara explained that although the city has several stadiums not one is adequate and sports fans are forced to sit in unpleasant, overcrowded conditions leading to hot tempers and anti-social behavior. This explanation, however, has left many unconvinced. Tel-Aviv resident E. Prayer in a letter to the Jerusalem Post wrote that "the proposed 70 million I.L.* stadium in Jerusalem would be a bit more reasonable if a perfectly fine stadium did not already exist practically unused in the heart of Jerusalem [i.e., the Hebrew University stadium which holds 17,700

*The price has since quadrupled.

people and could be expanded to hold 40,000 N.R.].” The letter went on to say that “as one completely dedicated to the introduction of new sports facilities in Israel and the exploitation of existing ones, I earnestly suggest that everyone involved think a moment before rushing ahead to spend funds desperately needed to spread sports and education in Jerusalem in order to build another potential white elephant....”

In his reply to this, Mr. Devara wrote, among other things, that “before starting to make plans, we investigated all the alternatives including the Hebrew University stadium but discovered that the Hebrew University had built the stadium with contributions from a donor who had stipulated that no matches could take place there on the Sabbath”

As the original “donor” of the University stadium, which was built at Ben-Gurion’s urging in 1958 to serve as a national stadium as well, was none other than the State of Israel, and in view of the fact that the stadium is used regularly for sports events on the Sabbath, Mr. Devara’s answer left many even more unconvinced. Mr. Devara subsequently infuriated many by insisting, along with Mayor Kollek, that it was to avoid disturbance to the Sabbath that the new stadium was being built, so that noisy stadiums in the center of town near Rechavia and Bet HaKerem could be emptied and the games played in northern Jerusalem instead. When it was put to him that the Sabbath-observing communities in the North would have to absorb the Sabbath noise, he pooh-poohed the matter saying, “It won’t be anywhere near them, and anyway, we’d have to put the stadium in Tel Aviv to satisfy Sanhedria Murchevet.” He also made light of the fact that these religious residents would be forced to witness a large-scale desecration of the Sabbath every week when games are played. “These people would like us to close down the city, and we can’t do that. You can see the desecration of the Sabbath from any roof-top in Jerusalem.”

Jerusalem: “International Sports Host”?

The city seems bent on creating an entire mini-Olympic village, not just a stadium, in order to host the The Maccabiah and the East Asian Olympics. As Mr. Devara says, echoing the Mayor, “It is inconceivable that Jerusalem, the capital of Israel should not have a proper place to host international sports events.”

Many Jerusalemites, however, find it equally inconceivable that it should, and find it difficult to understand the Mayor’s strenuous fund-raising efforts abroad for the project at a time when the city has completely frozen the building of all religious facilities, leaving thousands of Jews in Jerusalem without a place to pray, or an adequate *mikveh*. The Chabad synagogue, for example, located in Sanhedria Murchevet, is in a bomb shelter.

Unquestionably, the opinion voiced more frequently

than any other by those opposing the stadium is summed up by Rabbi Nathan Bulman, Dean of Jerusalem’s Ohr Somayach Yeshiva, and a widely known and highly regarded leader in the American Orthodox community, who said, “Jerusalem is not a city of international size with a few million people. It is a city on a relatively small scale. It has a particular character which thus far has been respected by the non-formally religious as well. It was understood that the character of Jerusalem isn’t that of New York or London. The special character of its buildings and its activities reflect how Jerusalem differed from other cities. A sports center on this scale — twice the size of the Old City — will completely unbalance and destroy its whole special nature. To inject the organism of Jerusalem with such a foreign body recalls the approach of Herod to the city.”

Indeed, the one person who might sympathize most with Mayor Kollek’s present difficulties is that ancient Judean king who reigned over Jerusalem almost 2,000 years ago and was, like the Mayor, an avid sports fan. Herod who introduced one of the first Roman-style sports stadiums to the city to host the Actian games, is described by Jewish historian H. Graetz in *History of the Jews*, vol. II. Graetz writes that

“the king’s love of display found satisfaction in the magnificence of his edifices ... Despairing of securing the affection of his own people he resolved to compell the admiration of the stranger. He exhausted the people by taxation, redoubled his extortions ... and lavished all the funds he had gained ... upon the adornment of ... cities. [Herod, Graetz concludes] might possibly have received the admiration and affection of the Greeks, the Romans and Judeans outside of Palestine, but the people of Jerusalem felt nothing but aversion for this grasping upstart who sought to estrange them from the customs of their fathers.

An Idea Whose Time Will Never Come

Although the stadium’s detractors have no illusions that the Mayor might someday issue a letter similar to that drafted by his forgers, they are hoping against hope that the present public outcry will begin to have its effect. In any event, the crisis over the Jerusalem Sports and Recreation Center is not wholly unexpected. It is the outcome of centuries of conflicting visions of the city — visions that cannot be reconciled but only held, perhaps, in a delicate balance. It is a balance between those who view the city solely as Israel’s capital, its largest city and a rapidly growing urban-industrial complex; and those whose vision goes past the particular circumstances of Jerusalem’s present, through the mystique of its rich and varied past, into the heart of it unique, other-worldly beauty, toward its prophetic, soon-to-be-realized glory. For the latter, a huge sports stadium for Jerusalem is an idea whose time will never come. IT

The Lower East Side Revisited

— A Review Article

The Synagogues of New York's Lower East Side,
Photographs by Jo Renee Fine, Text by Gerald R.
Wolfe Introduction by Harry Golden (New York
University Press, New York City 1978).

One leafs through the pages of this book with mixed feelings of sadness and awe. Sadness, at the present decay and destruction it shows; and awe, at the story of past grandeur and dedication that it chronicles. The present sad state of the Lower East Side is demonstrated by picture after picture of *shul* facades with peeling paint and broken windows, gutted *shul* interiors and *shuls* that have, *lehavdil*, become churches. But the pictures also show architecture of great dimension and interest, with beautiful exterior and interiors that attest to the loving dedication of generations of *shul*-going Jews, who devoted a large portion of their meager resources to the building and maintenance of these splendid edifices. This book is also a well deserved tribute to that small band of unsung heroes, both rabbis and lay-people, who struggle daily, again with meager resources, to maintain the remnant of the Lower East Side.

The first part of the book is a brief history of the Jewish community of the Lower East Side, beginning with the Sephardic migrations of pre-Revolutionary times, through the German migrations of the early 19th century, up to the mass migrations from Eastern Europe during the latter half of the 19th century. In this brief history the establishment, closing, and movement of both traditional *shuls* and Reform temples is described.

The main body of the book is devoted to pictures of dozens of *shul* buildings that still remain, and of their congregants and rabbis, accompanied by a brief history of each *shul* depicted.

There are some errors here and there. For instance the Young Israel Synagogue of Manhattan is not the head-

RABBI KAUFMAN is rabbi of the Young Israel of Briarwood, Queens, N.Y. and is assistant principal of the Beth Jacob High School of Yeshiva Rabbi S.R. Hirsch, N.Y.C. He had served as rabbi of the Cong. Chasam Sopher of the Lower East Side, a position his late father, Rabbi Ira Kaufman ז"ל, had once held.

quarters of the national movement; and to say of this synagogue "women now participate equally, no longer screened out by a curtain," makes it sound like a Conservative or Reform Temple, which of course is not the case, for it is indeed as Orthodox as ever. It is, however, obvious that Drs. Fine and Wolfe have invested much loving care and many hours of research into the pictures and the text. To former East Siders, like myself, this book serves as a reminder of the vibrant Jewish community we knew, while for everyone it is a fine introduction to the history of one of the most important Jewish communities on the American continent.

No Final Chapter

A major regret is that the book has an aura of finality about it, which might imply, particularly to those not too familiar with the American Jewish community, that the Lower East Side is the final chapter in the history of a viable Orthodox community in America. One would wish that Drs. Fine and Wolfe would now take their camera and typewriter to such places as Monsey, Boro Park, Forest Hills, and so on, to depict flourishing Orthodox communities.

As an introduction of sorts, this book can only provide the skeleton of the story of the Lower East Side, while the body of the story remains buried in the past. In this Orthodox Jewry has been remiss. A colorful, instructive, and inspiring story could be told going back at least to the turn of the century. A story filled with conflicts and struggle; courage and dedication; and yes, mistakes and anomalies.

Many have the impression that Orthodoxy was not present in any significant way before the Second World War. Yet the fact is that in 1905, by actual count, there were over 350 congregations functioning on the Lower East Side, with about sixty of them in splendid *shul* buildings, and the rest *shtieblach*, in stores, apartments, lofts etc. all of them Orthodox; yet the anomaly is that despite these tens of thousands of regular *shul* going Jews, the number of yeshivos functioning could be counted on the fingers of one hand, and there were no schools for girls at all. While many of these Jews were



observant in some respects, with *shul* attendance and *kashrus* most commonly observed, the social and economic pressures of that era created other glaring inconsistencies in their lives. First, these Jews, no matter how observant they were, considered themselves the "Last of the Mohicans." They were convinced that their children would be "blessed" with Americanization and so a minimal or non-existent Jewish education would be sufficient for them.

Many, in order to make a living, violated the Shabbos, yet put on *tefillin* every day and came to *shul* regularly — *Shabbos* as well as weekdays. Somehow they managed to adjust to the obvious contradictions in their lives.

There was one Jew I knew some thirty years back who always attended the early *minyon* on *Shabbos* morning at the Chasan Sopher Congregation on Clinton St. Before leaving for *shul*, however, he made sure to wake up his daughter so she wouldn't be late for work!

Another acquaintance of mine owned a grocery store. He also attended *Shabbos* services regularly. While he was in *shul*, his wife minded the store. When he returned from *shul*, his wife went upstairs to set the *Shabbos* table. He then came up and made *Kiddush*. His wife then went back to the store while he ate the *Shabbos* meal. When he finished he joined her in the store until he went back to *shul* for *Mincha*. Reb Levi Yitzchock Berditchever (noted 18th Century Chassidic leader who was an eloquent advocate before G-d on behalf of his errant brethren) probably would have been extremely busy on the Lower East Side of that era.

Some Did Not Bow

There were, of course, those who refused to bow to the economic and social pressures nor to the general spirit of compromise common to many, and they struggled and sacrificed to live the full life of the Jew with *Shabbos*, *taharas hamishpacha* (laws of family purity), and providing their children with a maximum Jewish education.

One such group, which unfortunately is not mentioned at all in the book, is the Zeirei Agudath Israel, that had its beginning on the Lower East Side. Here were young men during the 1920's and 30's who were workers and small businessmen who never compromised on the *Shabbos*. They even managed after a hard day's work to find the time for a study group in *Gemora* as the first *Daf Yomi* (page-a-day) program in the U.S.A. Youth activities were organized in strict accordance with *halachic* standards. This Zeirei served as the kernel for the flowering of the Agudath Israel



Entrance to Congregation Anshe Slonim, 172 Norfolk St. N.Y.C. (abandoned 1974).

movement of America during and after World War II. Their story should be told as an example of courage and commitment.

One They Missed

One other *shul* unfortunately not mentioned in the book is the Chevra Adas Yisroel (later She'eris Adas Yisroel), or as it is commonly called the *Nein-un Neintziger* (the 99) after its original address, 99 Attorney St. In this *Chassidische shtiebel* one could imbibe the genuine spirit of the *shtetl*. Many of the members still wore the traditional *shtreimel* and *kapotte*, which before World War II were rarities, even on the Lower East Side. The *lingua franca* was Yiddish, with all the meetings and conversations and recordkeeping in Yiddish. I still remember the carrying-on by our elders when they heard us learning Gemora in English (or as they called it "Aingalish"). "How could one learn G-d's law in an alien tongue?" they demanded to know.

The *shtiebel* was not exclusive to any one type of *Chassidim* but attracted a variety loyal to various Rebbeim — Belz, Ger, Satmar etc. This led to many lively conversations as to the relative merits of "my" Rebbe as opposed to "your" Rebbe. There were even a few Litvaks who were members. They were also tolerated, for after all, didn't G-d for reasons these dyed-in-the-wool Galitzianers could not quite fathom, didn't He also include them in the Chosen People? "So we guess we can put up with them too," they sighed.

Beside its fervent and melodic davening, the *shtiebel* was noted for its emphasis on learning. Every night the *shtiebel* was open late to accommodate the dozens of its members who came to study, either in groups or by themselves. The highpoint of learning was on Friday night where the place was packed. The sound of Torah carried all over the neighborhood, as close to 100 persons let their voices mingle into a melodic cacophony of *Chumash*, *Tehillim*, *Gemora*, or *Midrash*.

The Chevra Adas Yisroel merged about twenty years ago with another noted *shtiebel*, the She'eris Adas Yisroel. The organization is still active on East Broadway in a small *shtiebel*, one flight up, but its glory days are in the past, as with the rest of the Lower East Side.

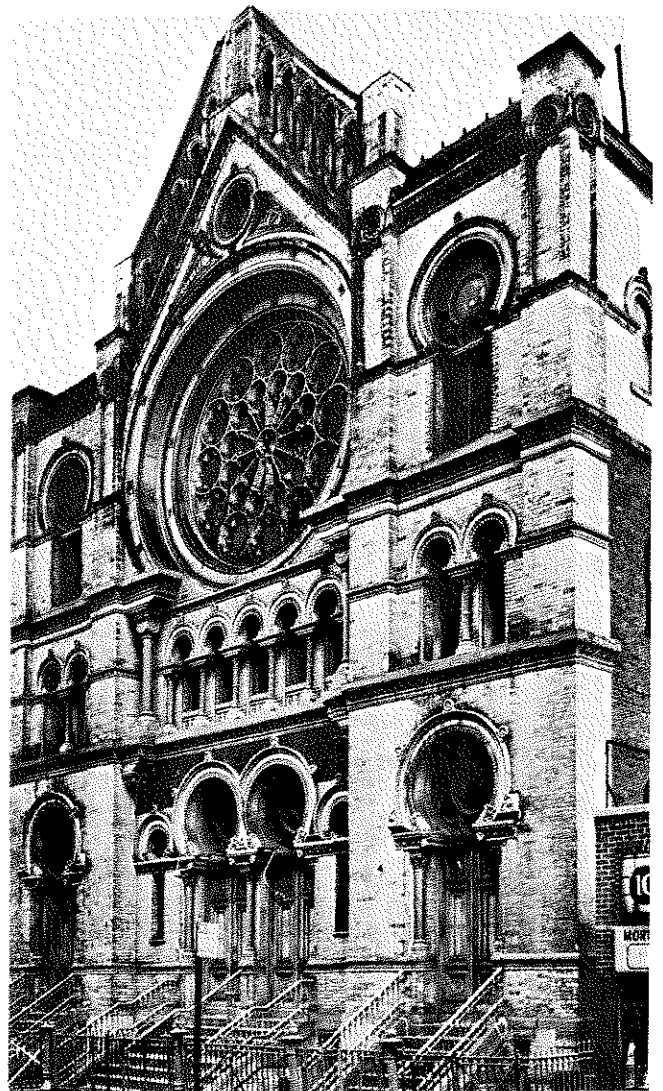
As a sad commentary on the pressures of the times, even this *shul* of devoted Jews was not immune to the influence of the American environment. A number of members found they could not convey the spirit of Torah to their children, and sadly not all of their children carried on with a life loyal to Torah.

More to be Told

It is not only the story of Torah dedication on the Lower East Side that remains to be told. In neighborhoods all over New York — in Williamsburg, Washington Heights, Brownsville — there were those who insisted on swimming against the current to bring

Torah to America. I know of no organization that has undertaken the founding of an archive to preserve the records of the founding of *yeshivos*, *shuls*, and organizations. Some of these pioneers are still among us (until 120); still among us are yet others who personally knew and worked with these pioneers. Yet there is no organization that has undertaken to compile an oral history of those days, so generations to come can hear first hand a glorious story of dedication and sacrifice.

This book *The Synagogues of New York's Lower East Side*, with all its flaws, will be cherished by this East Sider as a monument to what "once was," with the hope that some day someone will come along to really "tell it like it was." 13



Facade of building housing Khai Adas Jeshurun with Anshe Lubz at 14 Eldridge St. Founded in 1856, the building was the first to be constructed on the Lower East Side by East European Jews. The upper sanctuary has been abandoned since the early '30's.

MOMENT OF TRUTH: This is the phrase used to describe a close brush with death. And the description is indeed an apt one, for during that moment a person is forced to see his actions and concerns for what they truly are — petty or grand, selfish or altruistic, mundane or touched with the divine.

The Torah Jew sees even more — and he sees it more clearly, at that. Having entered the "Vale of Death" and emerged alive, he can say "I shall not fear, for You are with me" (Tehillim XXIII). He can tell those who taunt him, "Don't try to frighten me with threats of 'Anything can happen.' Only what G-d wills can happen. Nothing else." For, indeed, every fragment of time, every inch of pavement, every act of generosity and hostility is pregnant with significance.

□ He can search his past for hints of imperfection that earned him the need for a divine signal that "all is not well in our ranks." But at the same time, he can find comfort in that he was worthy of being instructed with a divine signal.

□ He can glory in the new-found knowledge that every moment in life is unbelievably rich in unclaimed opportunities, awaiting development and redemption. And every friend

and companion is of unfathomable worth and inestimable value to him. How much we learn in an hour of anguish! And how important that we not permit ourselves to forget!

Last month, 400 girls from Beth Jacob schools across the continent converged on Cleveland for a four-day convention. The program was an unending exchange of ideas, inspiration, performances, lectures, discussions, and — when the convention was over — addresses, and promises to write. When the girls piled into their home-bound buses, the first flakes of a blinding blizzard beginning to fall.

The next day, on Route I-80 outside Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania, a New York-bound bus with forty six girls aboard — students in the Bais Yaakov Academy of Brooklyn and the Yeshiva Rabbi S.R. Hirsch High School for Girls in Manhattan — skidded off the highway and overturned. Almost all of the girls needed some medical treatment, seven of them requiring hospitalization.

Esther Spitzer, a senior in Bais Yaakov Academy, Brooklyn, was one of the passengers on the ill-fated bus. In the following lines, she records her thoughts during and after the terrible — and inspiring — Moment of Truth.

Thoughts During a Moment of Truth

A FEW SHORT SECONDS that seemed to last an eternity. One moment we were a group of carefree girls talking and laughing as we skimmed smoothly down the highway. Then suddenly our world turned upside down. "I can't stop, I can't stop!" screamed the driver. There was a terrible skid, an overwhelming impression of speed and confusion, a loud crash, and we were hurtling through the air, falling on top of each other in twisted positions. During the interval many of us — as if by plan — shouted "*Shma Yisroel...*" together in unison.... Then everything came to a halt and there was silence.

What a multitude of thoughts were crowded into those few seconds. What *tefillos*, regrets and resolutions! All pretensions were stripped away and we realized how precarious our existence is, how petty our aspirations. "That new dress, that test mark — did I really worry about such trivial things?" "That argument I had with my mother, that bit of *lashon horah* I spoke about my friend — time and time again I promised my nagging conscience that I would improve tomorrow." ... Suddenly we were faced with the frightening realization that tomorrow might never come!

We sat for a moment in shocked disbelief. We were alive! "*Boruch Hashem, Boruch Hashem,*" we said over and over again. Someone began to say *Tehillim* out loud and we all repeated after her.

שיר המעלות ממעמקים קראתך ד'. "A song of ascent: From the depths I called You, O Lord" And sitting there in the bloodstained snow and shattered glass, in the overturned wreckage, the words rang out with awesome truth and clarity.

THERE WAS NO PANICKING or shouting, only quiet weeping as one by one, we climbed out of the wrecked bus through a hole in the ceiling. The bus's sun-roof had blown open in the impact. No one bothered to take their pocketbooks, some had to be reminded to take coats, but many girls clutched *siddurim* in their hands.

One girl put her arm around another girl who was sobbing uncontrollably and told her "Sh, we must

thank Hashem for the good and for the bad." One girl asked, "Why did we deserve this?"; but she was not questioning the righteousness of divine judgment. She was wondering "What *zechus* (merit) did we have that Hashem performed such tremendous miracles for us?" Several girls answered her at once, "It's simple. *צדקה תציל ממות*. Charity protects from death." For in the luggage compartment, along with our valises we had wedding gowns for needy Israeli brides. And in one girl's pocketbook was an envelope containing money which we had collected on the bus for the Hebrew Institute for the Deaf.

I DON'T THINK that anyone will ever forget the girls with bloody hands and faces who argued when the first ambulance arrived. "I'm O.K. really!" each girl insisted. "Let her go first. She's badly hurt. I'll wait." Girls quietly covered their injuries so that others should not be frightened. "Don't worry," they said, "I'm *Boruch Hashem* fine." Their strength and calmness were an inspiration to us all.

Each of us discovered something about the power of *tefilla*. Never had we davened with so much *kavana*. מלך עוזר ומשיע מגן, מחייה מתים, רופא חולים, שמע קולנו ("King Who helps, saves, and protects ... Revives the dead ... Heals the sick ... O, harken to our voices!") We had mumbled these words for so many years. Suddenly they were talking *about* us, *to* us. We poured our hearts into them and they gave us strength. With words of שבח and הודאה (praise and gratitude) we thanked Hashem for his manifest miracles and the *hashgacha* that was revealed to us.

THERE WERE SO MANY unbelievable "coincidences." One girl was all packed to go to the convention and at the last minute developed a sore throat.... Another girl didn't feel well and insisted on getting off the bus and returning home after we had already traveled several blocks.... A nurse "happened" to be in one of the cars behind us.... An ambulance "happened" to pass by. (On the way to another call, the ambulance was delayed by weather conditions, and passed the scene of the acci-

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dent a mere two minutes after it had occurred. — Editor)

"You girls are darn lucky," said a truck driver as he scratched his head in disbelief. "Is it luck that we landed a few feet away from a cliff? (The bus had overturned on an upgrade, several feet beyond one deep ravine, several feet before another one. — Ed.) Is it luck that a girl's head went through a window, and there are fragments of glass on her face, in her hair — a piece of glass, even scratches, on her contact lens — and she walks away with only a slight cut on her finger?"

"If only you had been going more slowly." ... "If only you had stayed in Cleveland one night longer." ... "If only you had left one hour earlier." ... If only — "

We know that there is no such thing as "coincidence" or "luck" or "If only." There was a reason why we were at that particular place at that particular time. We cannot understand G-d's calculations. But we can and must try to learn from what happened.

WHILE WE WERE YET at the hospital in Pennsylvania, we got together to discuss what each of us had learned from this experience. Besides the personal *cheshbon* that each girl made, we made a *cheshbon* as a group. We asked ourselves many questions. Were our motivations in attending this convention really *l'shem Shomayim* (for the sake of Heaven)? Had we exhibited a lack of *derech erez* (civility) toward the speakers at the convention? Had there been excessive rivalry between schools? We resolved to work together to correct these short-comings in our respect for our fellow man.

What gave us the strength to react the way we did? How did we know that there is no such thing as coincidence? How did we know that צדקה תציל ממות How did we know to examine our actions? — We are Bais Yaakov girls.

We remembered speeches that we had heard in school about other crises that had beset *Klal Yisroel*, and we applied them to our situation. We remembered lessons that we learned about *tefilla*, about *bitachon*, (faith), about *tzeddaka* (charity). We had listened to them in classrooms, now we were putting them into action. Although our teachers and principals were not there, we felt their presence. And I think they would have been proud of us.

SEVERAL WEEKS HAVE PASSED. Most of us have settled back into our everyday routine of tests and homework. The trauma of our experience is becoming more and more distant. Yet I hope that we can retain the awareness of G-d's control of our life-situations, the feeling of *achdus*, (unity) that the incident brought, wherein we appreciated every single girl when we were afraid for her safety and her very life; the *hislahavus* (enthusiasm) in *tefilla*. Perhaps, if we each take this experience to heart and heed its message, we won't need a tragedy to awaken us to our priorities. 17

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... ולבני אומר לי — דאריכות הגלות הוא בעבור:

כי בדורות הללו בעוה"ר אין דורש ואין מבקש על מצות הנחת תפילין דמניחים תפילין פסולים... ועוברים ימים ושנים ומברכים ברכות לבטלה בכל יום ומבטלים מצות עשה... והסניכה הוא: דקונים תפילין מבני אדם שאינם מומחים... ואפי' סופר מובהק ובקי בדינים עביר למטעני כ"ש מי שאינו יודע האומנות ולא למד הדינים על בורים... והאי מילתא כל הקורא דברי אלה יהי חרד על דברי ולבקש אופן על דבר גדול כזה... ויכולה היא שתגן דיצמח פורקניה ויקרב משיחיה בבי"א (תנופה חיים, תל"ב, להגה"ק ר' חיים פלאג'י)

"My heart tells me that Galus is so long because ..."

In these days people do not sufficiently search for proper Tefillin... and for days — even years on end, they say blessings in vain, and fail to fulfill these precepts. And the cause? They purchase Tefillin from unqualified people. Even expert scribes err on occasion — those who are ignorant of the law or lack the skills surely do!

Anyone who reads these words should shudder and seek to rectify this situation; this can bring the Moshiach soon in our days.

(Tnufah Chaim, 432 from the Sephardic Gaon, Rabbi Chaim Palagi)

... אין דורש ואין מבקש על דברים כאלו שהם כרומו של עולם...

וכל ריק ופחזו שיודע לכתוב איזה כתב אשורי מקולקל מתלבש בטלית שאינו שלו... ועל ס"ת תפילין ומזוזות מסופרים כאלו יסמכו קהל ועדה מישראל הקרובים והרחוקים... ויהי לנו מן התנומה שאנו צועקין ואין אנו נעניין? לבי ודרי ואין בירי שבט מושלים לתקן, רק להודיע צערי ברבים, אולי יחנן ה' ויבדורות הבאים" המצא ימצא איזה חיקון... (משנת חכמים, רכ"ח, מהר"ם האג"י)

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Mishnas Chachomim, 228, Maharam HaGiz

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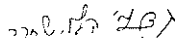
Today, too, many religious Jews who desire to keep these commandments with all their hearts are not observing them correctly because of their lack of knowledge. Not only do they fail to observe these important precepts, but they also recit vain blessings, since the objects they purchase are ritually in valid and utterly useless. Regretfully, many persons who writ Torah scrolls, Tefillin, and Mezuzos are not well versed in th particulars of the law, even when they are able to produce neat and even beautiful script, as attested to by our religio leaders in the Holy Land. In this area, the laws have been nea ly forgotten, even among Torah scholars.

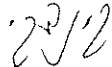
In 1935, the Torah giants and leaders spoke up to remo: this stumbling block from the path of their flocks, foundin an organization known as Shomrei Stam in Europe. Th organization accomplished very much, but with the destru tion of European Jewry by the Nazis, its sacred work w brought to an abrupt end.

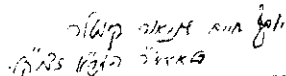
Now again in our time, another organization by the name Vaad Mishmeres Stam has been organized by the Toi leadership of our generations, together with commun workers. Its goal is to restore the crown to its original pl and to generally improve the situation. With G-d's help, t group has already accomplished much, and has successfu educated the masses in the basic laws of Tefillin and Mezu: This has been done both in educational institutions i various congregations throughout the United States Canada, making use of all the most up-to-date informa: techniques.


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Signed with the help c


Rabbi Gedalia Schorr


Rabbi Yaaco


Rabbi Joseph Chaim Shneur Kotler


Rabbi Yitzc

(listed in Alef-Bais order of first names)

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BOOKS

THE FIRST MISHNA, and THE HIGHEST COURT, by Rabbi Dr. David Hoffman, translated by Dr. Paul Forchheimer (Maurosho Publications, New York, 1977).

This volume is an important publishing event. It makes available two important historical studies, written about a hundred years ago in German by Rabbi David Hoffman, head of the Berlin Rabbinical Seminary and author of *Teshuvos Melamed Leho'il* as well as of commentaries to *Vayikra* and *Devarim*. He not only was an outstanding Talmudic scholar, but had the acumen and ability to challenge the scientific pretensions of the proponents of Biblical criticism and halachic innovation. Thus, his writings were largely instrumental in disproving Wellhausen's then-current theory of the *Chumash* as a composition of several different sources.

In the essays translated by Dr. Forchheimer, the

author turned his attention to the history of the *Mishna* and the Sanhedrin. With great erudition he sought to establish that the Sanhedrin was not an institution dating from Greek times but the governing body of the Jewish people, and the guardian of the Torah, ever since the days of Moshe (*Devarim*, Ch. 17). Likewise, he tried to demonstrate that the *Mishna*, the code of Torah Law, though edited by Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi, had its first formal recension much earlier, in the times of Rabban Gamliel Hazaken.

The antiquity of the Sanhedrin and the *Mishna* is not merely of historical interest; it is an important factor in the proper understanding of the Oral Law and its unbroken and faithful transmission by the Sages. Thus the history of the Sanhedrin and the *Mishna* were also crucial themes in the writings of Rabbi Isaac Halevi (*Doroth Harishonim*), though his conclusions differ in a number of points from those of Dr. Hoffman. (For instance, the *Doroth Harishonim* tries to show that the first version of the *Mishna* dates back to the Men of the *Knesses Hagedola*, in the time of Ezra, who first arranged the Oral Law in systematic fashion. Concerning the Sanhedrin, the *Doroth Harishonim* argues, in contrast to Dr. Hoffman, that the central high court came to an end in the time of Gabinius.)

Many other important ideas are put forth in the two essays before us, such as how the Torah was studied and transmitted in the earliest days, and the origin of halachic controversies. There is a reconstruction of how the *Seder* was conducted in the oldest times, and a penetrating analysis of the authority of the Rabbis in relation to Torah law.

Needless to say, scholarly material of this type is hard to translate, but Dr. Forchheimer has done very well, though the volume is plagued by a few Germanisms and printing errors. It was photo-offset from a typescript, in order to minimize expenses, but is very readable and should hold the interest of anybody seriously concerned with Jewish history.

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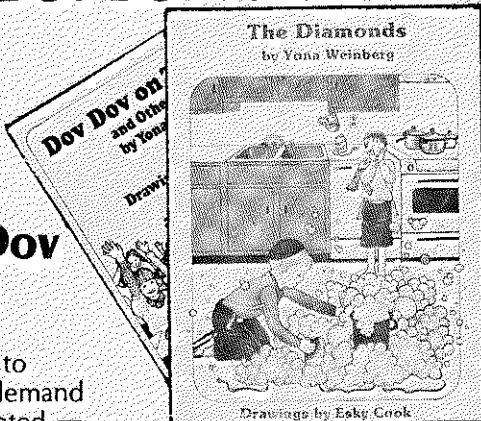
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Ever Since Sinai by Irving M. Bunim
(Feldheim; Jerusalem, 1977 \$12.50)

These essays, by the author of *Ethics from Sinai*, are based on a series of lectures which he delivered to students of Yeshivat Rabbi Jacob Joseph, to school them in the art of sermon-writing and preaching. They benefited from being edited and expanded by Rabbi Charles Wengrow; but in essence they reflect the mind — and heart — of Irving M. Bunim. For decades past, and now again in this volume, he has succeeded in translating fundamental values of Torah Judaism into the popular idiom of American Jewry. Businessman and communal leader, Irving Bunim knows this idiom very well — and he has the gifts of using it to present the most basic Torah concepts in an interesting and convincing manner.

The five sections of this volume deal with the purpose of man's life, serving G-d; the dignity of every man; the American scene; *Eretz Yisroel*; and war and human conflict. Each of the essays draws on Talmudic and later Rabbinic sources — homilies and anecdotes — down to comments and stories which the author heard from Rabbi Aaron Kotler ל"צ.

At the same time, to make his point, the author utilizes non-Jewish material. Sometimes he does so in order to show how Torah ideas in due course appear in the non-Jewish world (a useful device though, for one, this reviewer would gladly have done without e.g. Chesterfield's letters). On other occasions he seeks to show the glaring contrast between Torah thought and the outlook of the secular world. Perhaps the most striking essay in this volume is the one that juxtaposes

Gilbert's "Yarn of the Nancy Bell" with, *lhavdil*, one of the *Teshuvos Tzemach Tzedek*, to illustrate diametrically opposed attitudes toward human suffering.

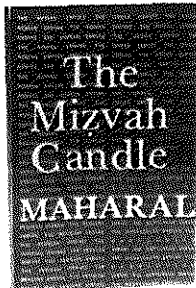
The author's approach is expository rather than philosophical. He does not seek to provide searching analysis-in-depth, but a warm hearted and inspiring statement of what we cherish. In one instance this proves somewhat unsatisfactory. The author emphasizes the incompleteness of the secular Zionist program for solving the Jewish problem — the Torah is the key to *Eretz Yisroel*. However, in his enthusiasm for the miracle of Jewish resurrection on the holy soil, he does not adequately come to grips with the actual threat to Jewish survival inherent in secular nationalism and statehood; perhaps the author's outlook on this point reflects his indirect admiration of Rabbi Kook's approach. Here a more incisive analysis would have benefitted the reader.

At the end of the volume there is an index of Biblical passages quoted. In view of the wealth of material in these essays, this reviewer regrets that there is no index of topics and of personalities in the text. It is to be hoped that this omission will be remedied in a second edition — which this work richly deserves.

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WHY IS THIS NIGHT DIFFERENT? by Rabbi Zev
 Schostak (New York, 1977; Otzar Hasefarim, \$3.95).

This volume offers a guide to the preparation of Pesach and the Seder, the text of the Haggadah, together with a smooth-flowing translation, and selected explanations to the Haggadah culled from over thirty different authorities and rendered in a very readable style. The author has succeeded in producing a Haggadah that should enable even the unlearned to conduct a Seder in the best traditional spirit and with due emphasis on the main ideas of Seder night.

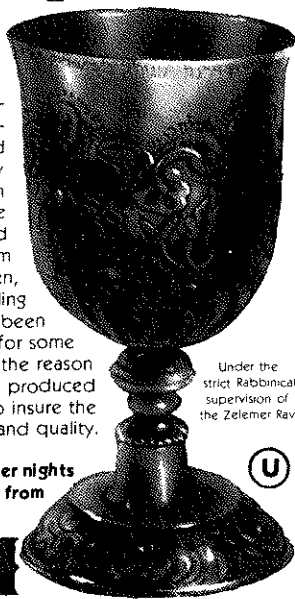
In his desire to provide clear and concise directions, the author usually avoids mentioning differences of halachic custom or practice. Thus he bases his directions for the amount of *matzah*, *maror*, and wine to be consumed upon the measurements given by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, without indicating that there are other opinions. He indicates that the fourth cup should be drunk immediately after the *Birchas Hashir*, and identifies the *Birchas Hashir* with *Yehallelucha*, although there are basic differences on these two points between different *nus'cha'os*.

More importantly, the *Bracha* concluding *Yehallelucha* is omitted, and instead the preceding paragraph (*Yishtabach*) concludes with a *Bracha*. This must be a printer's error, and calls for the inclusion of a correction slip, to prevent mistakes on the part of users, until — hopefully — a second, corrected edition appears.

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THE RAV, by Naftali Herz Ehrman, translated and adapted by Karen Paritzky (Jerusalem, 1977; Feldheim, \$5.95).

This reviewer read Ehrman's biography of Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liady, the founder of Chabad, when he was a boy and was then deeply impressed by the sweep and the drama of the narrative and the grandeur of the hero of this book. It is to be welcomed indeed that Feldheim Publishers have undertaken the publication of this classic in English, adding it to their distinguished list of historical novels, such as *Baal Shem of Michelstadt* and *Light from the West*. Moreover, the translator has done her work with great sensitivity, thus preserving all the qualities of the original work. Without doubt, this book will become a warm favorite of young and old.

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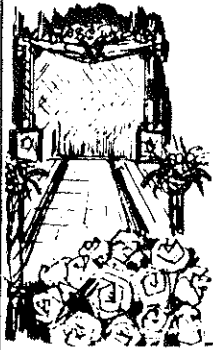
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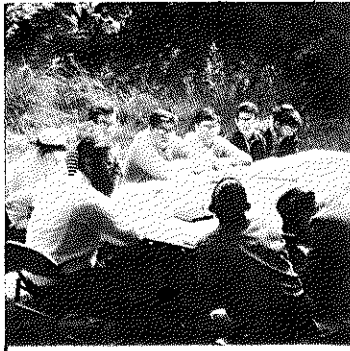
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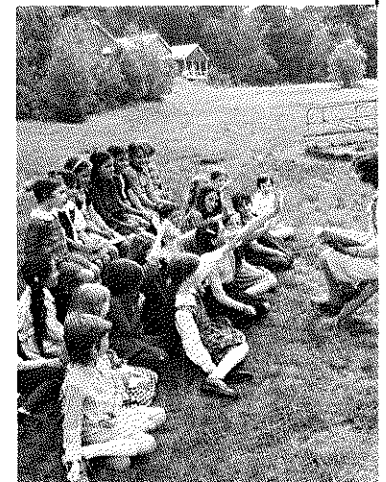


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RUACH COUNTRY

second looks at the jewish scene

RCA: Friend of the Family?

The rising divorce rate is shocking. The extent to which it has become a fact of Orthodox Jewish life is also alarming. Much has been written about this, and to be sure the last word on the topic has not been said.

A remarkable phenomenon is the low incidence — almost total absence — of divorce among struggling young *kolel* couples. From the outside, one might guess the opposite to be true: two young people who hardly got to know each other, married and now pursuing two separate careers — she at work and he with his books — trying to form a family during those first volatile years of married life. Don't they perform grow further apart, vying for top position on the matrimonial see-saw?

No, they don't. The marvel of it is that they do manage בלע"ה, notwithstanding the wife's double load: working to support her family, and tending to the needs of her house, her husband and their children; and the husband's taxing ambitious program: three full-time *sedorim* (morning, afternoon, and evening sessions) devoted to striving for greatness in Torah — no mean task. The touchstone of the success of the *kolel* marriage is that what are ostensibly separate lives pursuing separate goals are in fact members of one unit dedicated to the highest calling: The wife's career — or job — or position — her housekeeping and the husband's learning are elements in the creation of a Torah house, in which Torah

study is of uppermost value, second to nothing else. Wherever the activities of the members of this household may take them, it actually brings them closer to each other — as long as the overriding goal remains supreme of their values and uppermost in their minds.

Now, why this hymn of praise to the *kolel* couple? Those close to the scene witness it daily; and those far removed probably never give the matter much thought, anyway. But there is a need for this discussion because of some adverse publicity. At their most recent convention, the Rabbinical Council of America (the R.C.A., rabbinical arm of the UOJCA) tackled, among other weighty problems, the disintegrating Jewish family. In fact, the deliberation made the Family Page of *The New York Times*, highlighting the spread of societal diseases of infidelity and divorce into the Orthodox camp. (While I'm not certain how many crumbling families were held together by the *Times* story, that is not the topic of this discussion).

More — or worse — a JTA (Jewish Telegraphic Agency) story that was carried in virtually dozens of English language newspapers across the country, as well as in the Yiddish press, had much more to say on the topic. And we quote:

**RABBI SAYS JEWISH FAMILY
BREAKDOWN REACHES
CATASTROPHIC PROPORTIONS**

Hasbrouck Heights, N.J., Jan. 31 (JTA) — The head of the Rabbinical Council of America expressed grave

concern over the widespread breakdown of the Jewish family which, he said, has reached catastrophic proportions. "This is the most formidable threat to Jewish survival facing us today," declared Rabbi S. Wurzbarger, president of the Orthodox rabbinical organization.

Wurzbarger made his remarks at the Council's special three-day Torah convocation which opened yesterday at the Sheraton Heights Inn here. He cited statistics of the Rabbinical Court of America (Beth Din) which indicated that alarming numbers of Jewish marriages are being dissolved and in some areas of the country is approaching the "shocking" rate of four out of 10 marriages.

"This weakening of marital bonds," he said, "is also surprisingly manifest among young Orthodox couples, though admittedly in lesser numbers."

Wurzbarger pointed out that the "relative isolation in the past of the Orthodox Jewish community has been considerably weakened in recent years. With Orthodox Jews assuming important roles to an ever larger extent in the economic and industrial life of the secular community they are exposed to values alien to traditional ways."

The pattern in some Orthodox circles during the early years of marriage of young wives taking jobs away from

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home while their husbands continue their Talmudic studies is also acknowledged as a contributory factor, he said. "Those developments have weakened the fabric of the traditional Jewish family and have contributed to the alarming increase of divorce among Orthodox Jewish couples."

So goes the JTA story, making no mention of any other factors at work in the alleged weakening of the fabric of *kolel* families.

A group far from Torah circles could be faulted for talking out of ignorance, as opposed to "talking

out of *cheder*." But this cannot apply to the RCA, some of whose membership is fathering a generation of *kolel* students, supported by working wives. So I wrote Rabbi Wurzberger in personal correspondence:

Dear Rabbi Wurzberger:

I have just read your statement on the Growing Divorce Rate Among Orthodox Jews (JTA Feb. 1), and I am absolutely stunned. I can't believe that you actually said that you find the practice among young *kolel* wives working to support their husbands at study a contributory factor in the rising divorce rate.

Did you actually make a statistical analysis of this trend, pointing to the *kolel* wife working as a contributory factor? I would like to see your findings. We have always known the contrary to be the case — that homes where this situation exists are among the most stable; and we are prepared to back up our contention.

Further — as I believe I've said in regard to another RCA criticism against the Yeshivos — is the proper medium for sounding off on alleged faults of the Yeshiva community the JTA, and as a result, the entire Jewish press, nationwide? Shouldn't this vilification against a common practice in *kolel* homes better have been brought directly to those involved in this situation, or at least to those responsible for it?

We all have friends whose children are currently in (or on the threshold of) such situations — such as Rabbi — 's and Rabbi — 's. If, then, you think Rabbi — should not permit his . . . (daughter) to plan to work to support her intended husband's learning, or his . . . (son) to

continue studying while his wife works, doesn't that belong between the two of you — or does it belong in a JTA release?

Wouldn't your strong opinions on the matter better be aired in a private chat with Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman, Rabbi Shneur Kotler, Rabbi Baruch Sorotzkin, who encourage the practice where they believe it worthwhile — rather than in a press release to Ben Gallob (of JTA) and George Vescey (of the Times)?

Doesn't your approach consist of Hotzo'as Shem Ra and Chillul Hashem?

I am writing you in anger and dismay — yes; but in brotherhood, too. I would very much welcome your withdrawing your statement through the medium where it appeared (not JO); and then Jewish Observer will be spared the necessity to comment about errors in statistics and the faulty judgment of fellow Orthodox Jews, who are leaders and spokesmen for our people.

I am truly looking forward to hearing from you.

Most sincerely,
Rabbi Nisson Wolpin
Editor, The Jewish Observer

Rabbi Wurzberger favored us with a personal reply in which he asks: "Let the record be straight," for contrary to what I seemed to have inferred, he does appreciate the *kolel* society. It would surely be a service to the RCA — and Klal Yisroel, too — if tens of thousands of readers of JTA syndicated stories would learn of the RCA's positive attitude toward *kolelim* — regardless of what press releases seem to say. I do not have direct ac-

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cess to JTA, but it is a privilege to print the explanation in our pages, so we quote in full:

Dear Rabbi Wolpin:

I have your letter of February 8th. I believe you and others are displaying an inordinate sensitivity to the issue and a complete misunderstanding of the thrust of my remarks.

There was no criticism of Kolelim made or intended. I do not have to defend my reverence for those who make Torah their "umanus". We were, however, dealing with the topic of the weakening fabric of the Jewish family and the fact that it has reached into our observing Orthodox community and even into the rabbinate. We were seeking a sociological reason for family discord, and among dozens of factors, the working wife who is exposed to the non-Torah community and even to a hostile environment was one factor. We did not imply that these women should quit their jobs but similarly one doesn't close his eyes to realities. I am sure that it is an issue of which the leaders of Kolelim are well aware, and perhaps one should point out the situation varies from one Kolel to another.

Let the record be straight, we do not and have not criticized any Yeshivas. All of them are our most precious possessions as the disseminators of Torah. That does not mean that the comment is completely forbidden. We have an interest in their well being, we help them and we have a duty to comment with love and admiration.

We would love the opportunity to confer with some of the Roshei Yeshiva you mention. We have never avoided it and often sought it.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Walter S. Wurzbarger
President of Rabbinical Council of
America.

We surely agree that comment is not forbidden. Problem areas must be exposed and discussed with the responsibility that "love and admiration" usually breeds. But that

only applies if there really exists a problem of family discord in kolel families — providing a legitimate starting point for a discussion. In reality, however, the opposite procedure was followed here. The RCA was "seeking a sociological reason for family discord," claimed to find it in the one area where there is generally a remarkable absence of family discord, and then proclaimed its existence to the whole world through the media, instead of a whisper in the kolel's ear — which is the accepted procedure where "love and admiration" are the only motivations for one's conduct. (We went through this once before in regard to a N.Y. Times story about an RCA criticism of "too many

yeshivos" in one section or another of Greater New York — see JO: June '77 and Sept. '77.)

Nonetheless, Rabbi Wurzbarger's letter should still be taken as a salutary indication. It does state unequivocally that the RCA leadership has the highest regard for Torah institutions. In addition, we have been familiar with how some of its members permit their children to conduct their lives . . . Now, if only the RCA press releases would reflect these realities, instead of using the public media to misrepresent the crowning glory of the yeshiva experience — the kolel years, perhaps discouraging others from emulating the noble example they represent!



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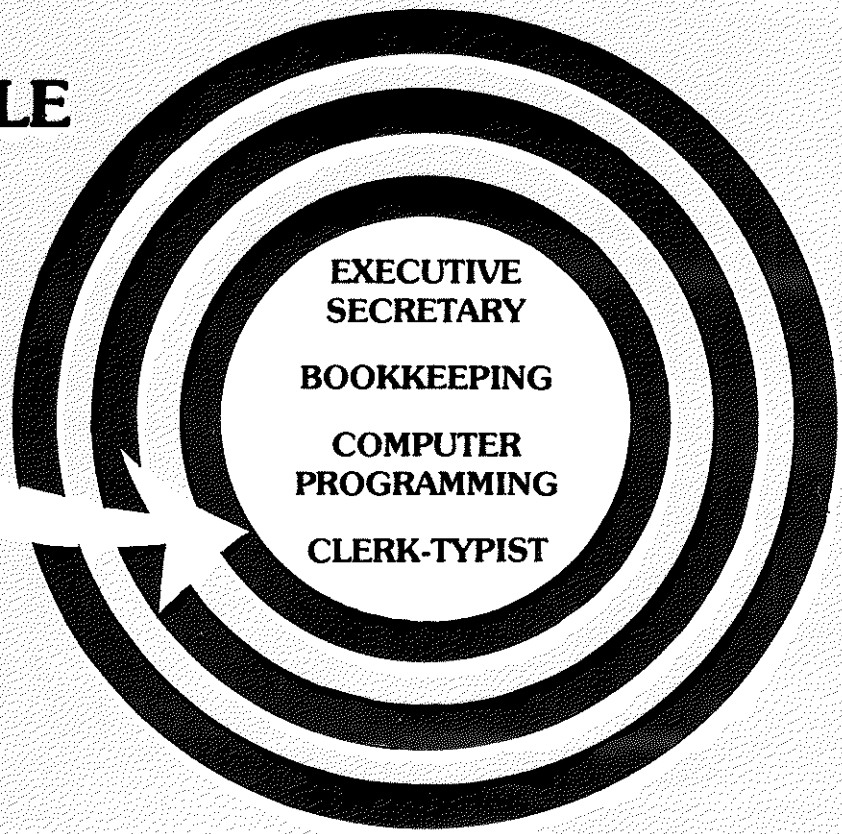


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Letters to the Editor



"Holocaust" and American Yeshivos

To the Editor:

Whether it was so intended or not, the articles by Sylvia Fuchs, Rabbi Brenner, and Rabbi Kaplan in the January issue were correctly presented with the material on the Holocaust, in line with the *Midrash* that explains the inserting of the story of Yehuda and Tamar in *Parshas Vayeshev* at the point of the sale of Yoseif: "Before the first enslaver was born, the final redeemer was born" (*Midrash Rabba* 85:2). Since the descent of Yoseif into Egypt led to enslavement under Pharaoh, the birth of Peretz to Yehuda and Tamar led to ultimate redemption by Moshiach ben David.

Similarly, before the flames of destruction turned the Torah landscape of Europe into ashes, the sparks were being slowly struck in America for the flames of construction that would later forge a Torah landscape in the New World. Just as we can view the growth of Torah living in America as a consolation for the loss of Torah life in Europe, so may we soon view the redemption by Moshiach as a consolation for the enslavements by the Pharaohs of so many generations.

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"Partnership" Dividends

To the Editor:

In his article "The Partnership," Rabbi Kaplan highlighted the share Zevulun would again in the *sachar* (reward) for Yissachar's Torah study. His share in another area that is even more exciting was hardly touched upon.

According to the Chofetz Chaim in *Shmiras HaLashon Sha'ar HaTorah*, Chapter 6: "In the sacred literature it is recorded that one who supports a scholar, even if he is an *Am Ha'aretz* (ignoramus) in this life, also will possess (the other's) Torah knowledge in the World-to-Come. How much wouldn't a scholar in a specific section of the Talmud give to have command of other sections of the Talmud or parts of the *Shulchan Aruch* (such as *Yorah Deah* or *Choshen Mishpat*) which another, impoverished scholar is studying!

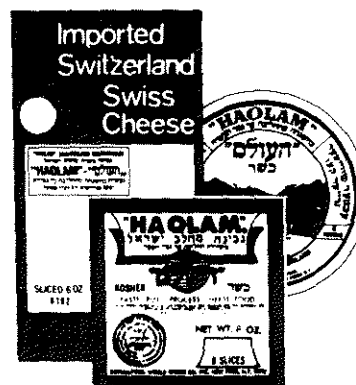
"If a person would but contemplate this and really think into it, imagine how he would pursue scholars and endeavor with his utmost to cleave to them and support them, far beyond the manner in which he pursues a lucrative partner in worldly matters."

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LETTERS CONTINUED

The Prerequisites of Yissachar-ship

To the Editor:

Aryeh Kaplan's "Yissachar and Zevulun" article in the January issue was excellent, as his articles always are. I would like to comment on one point that he makes.

"But Providence endows every individual with special gifts. While Yissachar had a talent for Torah study..." True, people are endowed with different degrees of clarity and depth of thought, quickness of mind, power of memory, and so on, which can only be labeled as gifts from above. Chazal tells us, however, that the

key ingredient in the study of Torah is "סיועתא דשמיא" assistance from Hashem Yisborach and this corresponds directly to the amount of effort a person puts into his learning and the sincerity with which he studies (what Chazal term Torah lishma).

The Steipler Rav, Rabbi Y. Kanievsky, שליט"א, in his ספר חיי עולם expounds upon this point and stresses the fact that one should not use intellectual capacity as a means of measuring his chances for success at becoming a Torah scholar. He recounts the story of a boy who came to the Chasam Sofer, Rabbi Moshe Sofer, (19th century leader) זצ"ל, and asked if he could be admitted to his yeshiva. Not only was the boy devoid of Torah knowledge, but worse yet, it was soon apparent that his degree of intelligence was below average. The Chasam Sofer felt that if the boy had a desire to learn, he was

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obligated to help him, and so the boy was admitted to the yeshiva. He studied diligently and blossomed into a brilliant Torah scholar. He eventually became a *rosh beisdin* (head of a rabbinical court of law) and is often quoted in the works of the Chasam Sofer.

This story is not one of a kind, the Steipler Rav says, but one of many. (He quotes the *Meiri* on *Mishlei* who makes the same point.) If a person studies Torah with the proper intentions and desire, G-d often grants him new gifts and raises his degree of intellect. And so, the study of Torah is much more than a talent. "געתי ולא מצאתי אל" — תאמן — If one claims that he has struggled to understand the Torah and has not succeeded, do not believe him."

SHIMON FINKELMAN
Lakewood, New Jersey

Partnership Exchange

To the Editor:

The article by Rabbi A. Kaplan in your Shevat issue about the Partnership between Yissachar and Zevulun was an impressive eye opener. I hope it will help make such partnerships a dynamic force in furthering the growth of Torah.

The relationship of these two tribes can be seen by their corresponding stones on the *Kohein Gadol's* breastplate. Each stone was a symbol of one of the twelve tribes, by which to show that tribe's righteousness to HASHEM.

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LETTERS CONTINUED

qualities identical to those of the ideal *talmid chacham* (see *Yalkut Me'am Loez* and *Rabbeinu Bechaya* on *Parshas Tetzaveh*).

When viewing this stone, one sees a reflection of a dense cloud, as by the giving of the Torah "there were sounds, and lightning, and a dense cloud over the mountain." But this serves as a dual symbol; the darkened mind of the *talmid chacham* in need of financial support to help him continue his learning.

The pearl is the symbol for Zevulun, a sign of success in business. It is round to demonstrate that all worldly possessions are like a wheel: a man may be wealthy today but in poverty tomorrow. To prevent this, he must use his money

wisely. By supporting Yissachar, Zevulun was successful in all his business endeavors. But if a person does not do this, his wealth is not guaranteed (*Yalkut Me'am Loez*).

It would seem from this, that a Yissachar-Zevulun relationship is not just a one-side-at-a-time relationship, in which Zevulun supports Yissachar in this world and thereby shares the merit of his learning in the World-to-Come; but rather Yissachar's part is active immediately causing Zevulun's success. Literally the best business partner in the world!

(A point in question would be: Does Zevulun merely provide Yissachar with adequate financial support to get an equal share in Yissachar's merit or must he share his income equally to get an equal share?)

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More on Kiryat Shmona

To the Editor:

It was with keen interest that I read Hanoch Teller's account of his personal experience with Sheirut La'am. His criticism focuses on but one facet of a program which suffers from a lack of definitive goals and even worse, from a failure to perceive its incredible potential impact upon the State of Israel.

What exists is but a vague consensus that the program should be of domestic and external benefit. Domestically, Sheirut La'am should and could augment the Government's developmental efforts, particularly those associated with the absorption and acculturation of new immigrants. Externally, the program should and could develop strong support for the state; at minimum, volunteers return to their communities and governments to support Israel. The maximum gain, of course, is a substantial increase in aliya.

A vague consensus is not sufficient to maximize the program's potential. Those of us who have worked as professionals in the field of voluntarism recognize why the program has failed to the point that Americans and Israelis connected with aliya discourage involvement in the program lest it have the opposite of its intended effect.

Sheirut La'am's problems were discussed with me while consulting with the the Israeli Government in September and November of 1976. I was there working with some very innovative staff members of the

Ministry of Welfare to establish a volunteer program for the elderly. Unfortunately, the convoluted nature of politics or perhaps the labyrinth that is inherent in so many efforts, has frustrated my attempts to offer my expertise to restructure the program. Indeed, the unprofessional management of opportunities for professionals is a major obstacle for many who want to make aliya; however, that is another story. JEFFREY M. HAMMER
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For T.R.U.T.H. in Labelling

To the Editor:

In his recent article "Who's Saving American Jewry?" (J.O., Dec.

1977) Rabbi Wolpin quite correctly points up the positive actions that have been done to bring Torah to those in our midst who have been kept from its life-giving waters. My heart is filled with gladness when I see praise in the pages of J.O. for the work of Orthodox organizations other than the Agudah movement. Perhaps someday our presently-divided Orthodox leadership will form a council for Operation T.R.U.T.H. — Timely Return to Unity through Torah and Halacha.

Meanwhile, in the Diaspora, the rate of intermarriage and assimilation continues to move upward. The peril of these twin evils to Jewish survival threatens us now more than ever because the proportion of those separated from Torah observance and Torah knowledge is so great, and because there are organized groups within our own ranks who have sanctioned and legitimized intermarriage. Reform clergymen have been most guilty of this practice; but even where Reform and Conservative clergymen are sincerely opposed to intermarriage, their emphasis of "social religion" has remade their Judaism into a kind of humanist faith, obliterating Jewish particularist standards. Logically, the idealistic Jewish youth, acquainted with this blurry Judaism, can accept a non-Jew as a marriage partner as long as this partner is a "decent human being" and has "high human and social principles." The

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misguided youth can well ask, "Isn't that the purpose of religion anyhow?"

Another terribly serious danger that is eating away at our religious unity is the acceptance by many Orthodox rabbis and organizations of the "rabbinical" status of those who call themselves rabbis and publicly exercise rabbinical authority while at the same time they are diminishing, negating, or destroying the very halachic traditions that have been and are protecting the integrity of the Jewish people. The public elevation and recognition of such "rabbis" has made a mockery of Torah principles and is a gigantic consumer fraud upon the Jewish People. These "rabbis" preach a "Judaism" divorced from *halacha*, and thus they constitute a stumbling block in the path of their sincere Jewish followers who are thereby deprived of the opportunity to return to authentic Judaism. This deviant clergy, now more *chutzpadik* than ever, is even threatening *Eretz Yisroel* and demanding the right to tear asunder the religious unity of the People of Israel.

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"Song Of Faith"

To the Editor:
 I read with great interest Rabbi Brenner's article "Song of Faith" (Jan. 78). My grandmother sung that song to me! I had never heard it from anyone else and I thought it was unique to her. I wonder if any J.O. readers know something about the origins of this song. Apparently it was wide spread as my grandmother came from Lithuania and Rabbi Brenner's from Austro-Hungary.

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A Note of Gratitude and a Plea for Further Help

The adjoining notice has appeared several times in the pages of *The Jewish Observer*, pleading with the readers to extend themselves to help a tragedy stricken family survive trauma and cope with every-day existence.

Your response has been most encouraging and has enabled us to forward substantial sums of money to the children of this needy family. They have asked us to convey their thanks to their many unknown benefactors.

May we ask you to take their plight to heart once again, in the spirit of "One who begins a mitzva is urged to complete it." With the approach of Pesach, the joyous Festival of Redemption, this orphaned family must not suffer the added hardships of poverty and loneliness. Please demonstrate your continued concern for this family with a generous מעות חיים contribution to

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Two By Rotbard

The Sign

in and out, in and out
all morning through
and nobody closes the door
in America we used to say
were you born in a barn or something,
but that's not the point
it's just that all too often
we don't stop to think
yet that chilly wind
keeps pouring in
spilling down our backs
you know, we're catching a cold in here
and certainly don't have a mind to study
so we scribble out a note
and tape it to where everyone can see
"Upon leaving or entering,
Please close the door!"
and you know something,
it works!
after all, we're only people
and it's the nature of this
fine and fickle intricate machine
that it tends to forget
and so the Holy One Blessed-be-He
gave His people the Shabbos
to keep for a sign
that in six days He created
heaven and earth and all the hosts therein
as well as to remind
us of that moment at Sinai
and that there soon will come a time
which will be forever Shabbos
when all famine and crime and sorrow will cease
on that day will the Lord be One
and His Name One,
after all,
we're only human
and tend to forget.

The Jewish Observer / March, 1978

The Subtle Element

*This poem is dedicated to the "thinkers" of our age
who have made men out of monkeys and monkeys out
of men.*

O.K. so you think
rocks flew out from rocks
or light fostered light
or the most elemental elements
started from naught
yet, even after your claim
at having settled
the matter
just how do you, still and all
account for
the thought!

AVRAHAM YISHAYAHU ROTBARD, a native of Milwaukee,
studies full-time in Yeshivat Dvar Yerushalayim, in Jerusalem. His
poem "Wailing Wall" appeared in the Sept. '74 J.O.

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Zucker, Rochel (with Suri Rosenberg) The Mexico City Junket, Oct. '77.

MOETZES GEDOLEI HATORAH REVIEWS COALITION AGREEMENT

JERUSALEM — Commendations to the Agudath Israel Knesset deputies for their role in realizing the fulfillment of various points of the organization's coalition agreement with the Begin government, and a request that its further implementation be speeded up was adopted at a meeting of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah (Council of Torah Sages) after hearing in-depth reports on recent developments. The meeting, which was chaired by the famed Ponovezh Rosh Yeshiva Rabbi Eliezer Shach, sanctioned the continued participation of Agudath Israel in the coalition, and adopted a series of other resolutions on religious issues.

The first formal review by the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah of the religious coalition agreement took place at a time when its members were deeply upset over the abortion law, which the Agudah deputies voted against. The Agudist Knesset deputies are pressing for a quick ratification of an amendment that the government is pledged to pass, abolishing "Clause Five" of the abortion law, the most harmful section of the act which permits abortions under the huge loophole of "social conditions." The Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah is calling upon religious doctors and nurses to refuse to participate in any abortions required under this law.

Among the other items considered at this conference of Israel's foremost Torah sages were the new large-scale nationwide Torah study program for adults launched by Agudath Israel, under the direction of three prominent Roshei Yeshivos, the urgency of helping Agudath Israel in Argentina in erecting its new Torah center for Latin America; and the necessity of obtaining government approval for apartments to be made available on a rental basis (instead of outright purchase) for newlywed couples. The Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah also issued a proclamation calling upon former Yeshiva students to devote their life careers to the furtherance of Torah education, and urged broader public support of the registration efforts of Chinuch Atzmai to gain masses of new students of this unique Torah network.

Among the participants in the conference were the Gerer Rebbe, Rabbi Shach (who chaired the gathering), Sadigerer Rebbe, Modzitzer Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom Noach Brozofsky (Yeshiva Bais Avrohom), Rabbi Pinchas Menachem Alter (Yeshiva Sfas Emes), Rabbi Yochanan Sofer (Erloyer Rav), Rabbi Moshe Shapiro (Yeshiva Ber Yaakov), Rabbi Nisson Karelitz (Yeshiva Chazon Ish), Rabbi Avrohom Yaakov Zaleznick (Yeshiva Etz Chaim), and Rabbi Simcha Zeisel Broyde (Yeshiva Chevron).

KNESSET LAW BANS GRAVE DIGS BY ARCHAEOLOGISTS

Jerusalem — Archaeologists will no longer be permitted to desecrate ancient graves in the Holy Land in pursuit of their scientific inquiry, as the result of a law passed in Israel's Knesset by a vote of 35-29. The bill was sponsored by Agudath Israel, as part of its Knesset coalition agreement. Premier Menachem Begin came especially to the Knesset in order to vote in favor of the bill, which was supported by the Likud and the religious parties. The Labor parties were joined in their opposition to the bill by the Democratic Movement for Change, whose leader, Professor Yigal Yadin, a renowned archaeologist, bitterly fought its passage.

This legislation is an outgrowth of the worldwide protest by Orthodox Jewish leaders against the free reign which archaeologists have enjoyed in Israel for the past few decades, when in pursuit of artifacts of ancient life they exhumed and desecrated graves containing the remains of revered Torah scholars, including those of the *Tannaim* and *Amoraim* (sages of the Mishna and Talmud). When Agudath Knesset member Rabbi I.M. Abramovitz sponsored a bill outlawing grave desecration by archaeologists during the previous Knesset session, the active opposition of Professor Yadin served to keep the measure from passage. Because Agudath Israel included the sanctity of these graves as one of the important points of its

coalition agreement with the Likud, this new "Law of Antiquities" was now passed with the backing of the Begin government. When the Orthodox victory was announced from the Knesset tribunal, the rabid anti-religious Knesset member Shulamit Aloni shouted in frustration: "Agudath Israel has taken over the Knesset!"

KNESSET APPROVES LAW FOR SEPARATED BEACH FACILITIES

Separate swimming facilities for men and women who seek this accommodation will soon have to be provided by local municipalities at all beaches, as the result of a law sponsored by Agudath Israel and approved in Israel's Knesset. With the exception of the Tel Aviv beaches, observant Orthodox Jews in other parts of Israel could not until now use the mixed public swimming facilities for religious reasons.

According to the new bill now before the Knesset Committee on Internal Affairs, where its approval is expected because of the formal government support it has received, all beaches will be required to cordon off special sections for segregated swimming. The Orthodox Jewish public applauded this action, especially since Agudath Israel was able to obtain its approval despite the fact that the measure is not among the forty-three religious concessions which Agudath Israel hammered out in its coalition agreement.

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**"DON'T TAMPER WITH YESHIVOS' INDEPENDENCE"
AGUDATH ISRAEL TELLS BOARD OF REGENTS**

ALBANY, N.Y. . . . The Board of Regents of New York State was urged "not to interfere with the independent functioning of non-public schools" through seeking to license their teachers, by Dr. Bernard Fryshman, chairman of the Commission on Legislation and Civic Action of Agudath Israel of America. The Agudath Israel

spokesman testified at hearings held here last week, on proposals of the Commissioner's Task Force on Teacher Education and Certification calling for state licensure of teachers for non-public as well as public schools.

"Empirical evidence shows that there is no correlation between teaching abilities and teaching programs," Dr. Fryshman pointed out. He declared: "To force all teachers to first obtain a license would ignore the success of the non-public schools and force everyone into a methodology which has proven to have glaring failures. The net result of this action would be to prevent yeshivos and other non-public schools from hiring the best individual, irrespective of his or her having achieved a post-secondary degree in education."

The Agudath Israel representative also noted this step would improperly subject religiously-sponsored non-public schools to State control in a manner contrary to the intent of various U.S. Supreme Court decisions. He urged that the choice of qualified teachers be left to the criteria established by principals tailored to the needs of their students.

**EIRUV INSPECTION SERVICE
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Home owners and other community residents in the Flatbush neighborhood of Brooklyn who need expert advice on the laws of the *Eiruv* (a halachic devise that permits carrying in specific areas on the Sabbath) can now take advantage of a new service by the Flatbush Coordinating Committee of Agudath Israel of America. Many Flatbush residents have already called on the committee, which dispatches an authority on the *halachos* of the *eiruv* upon request, to inspect and help construct a kosher *eiruv*. In addition to this service, the committee is also circulating a community newsletter which contains important illustrations and information about the *eiruv*.

The Flatbush Coordinating Committee was organized six months ago to coordinate the services and projects sponsored by Agudath Israel and to provide other meaningful services to the Orthodox Jewish community at large. In addition to its main chapters, Agudath Israel also has a large network of youth groups and social service programs in the community. The coordinating committee publishes a monthly newsletter which contains Torah messages by local *rabbonim* and information on neighborhood activities.

The Eiruv Committee was formed several months ago in response to the demands of community residents. Rabbi Dovid Seeve, coordinator of the project, said that other programs for Flatbush residents were now in the planning process and would be announced shortly. He invited residents with any problems in respect to an *Eiruv* or other Jewish communal concerns to call the central number of the Flatbush Coordinating Committee at 964-1620 or to write to the Agudath Israel Flatbush Coordinating Committee, 5 Beekman Street, New York City 10038.

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WOMEN TORAH TUTORS IN DEMAND IN AGUDATH ISRAEL PROJECT

Following an urgent appeal for volunteer Torah tutors for men several weeks ago, the Torah Education Network (Reshet Shiurei Torah) of Agudath Israel of America has now sent out a call for women volunteers. The appeal for help is in response to a growing number of women who are interested in the basic Judaism learning program. Project TEN was launched more than a year ago to provide Torah study companions for Jews desiring to become familiar with every level of Jewish knowledge ranging from the *Aleph-Bais* to the depths of the Talmud.

Several weeks ago, Torah Education Network of Agudath Israel reported that more than 150 Jews in New York City were

awaiting tutors. At the same time, the project has successfully arranged for more than 200 study groups through personal tutors, group learning, telephone hook-ups and correspondence teams. While the response to the call was encouraging according to Rabbi Shlomo Oppenheimer, project chairman, and Rabbi Yaakov Bender, director, there is still a need for volunteers and especially for the women.

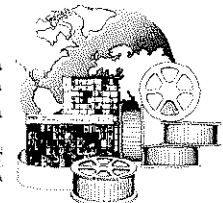
Rabbis Oppenheimer and Bender stressed that because of the shortage of volunteer tutors requests were currently being answered only with literature and tapes so that the "thirsty for Jewish knowledge applicants" can at least begin Torah study on their own.

A special appeal was addressed to Bais Yaakov students and graduates to volunteer several hours for the women's program and to individuals with yeshiva backgrounds to volunteer several hours for the program in general. Volunteers should call (212) 964-1620 or write Torah Education Network, Agudath Israel of America, 5 Beekman Street, New York City 10038.

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DON'T ABANDON MIDDLE CLASS, AGUDATH ISRAEL TELLS SENATE

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Senate was urged to consider the interests of the hard hit middle class at hearings conducted before a Senate Human Resources subcommittee on March 2 by Rabbi Menachem Lubinsky, director of Project COPE, the career guidance and job training agency of Agudath Israel of America. The hearings, chaired by Senator Gaylord Nelson (Wisconsin), dealt with the reauthorization of the major national job training legislation, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA).

Alluding to attempts to restrict the eligibility of CETA applicants to the poor, Rabbi Lubinsky emphasized that abandoning the middle class would have dire consequences, adding, "CETA has prevented a sizeable number of Americans from becoming the 'new poor'." He continued, "Its mission should not be ended at a time when it is doing so much for the social and economic stability of our nation, and especially as the

squeeze on the middle class continues. While CETA may have taken on many amendments which are clearly targeted for the poor and the long-term unemployed, such as Public Service Employment, it should also continue to function as the national training institution for those who cannot receive such assistance elsewhere."

Rabbi Lubinsky in his testimony emphasized the high stakes of CETA's reauthorization for the Jewish community. He said, "What we have learned in more than three years of providing services is the extent of the myth of Jewish affluence. In New York City, for example, 15% of the Jews are poor, a substantial number of working age. During the Recession, Jews were in fact hard hit: the traditional areas of Jewish employment were among those most affected in recent years. Examples are the loss of jobs in local government, education, and the garment industry. *The New York Times* recently reported that in some sections of the

Jewish community, namely Hassidic Jews, unemployment was as high as 18%. Jews also suffered more than other groups because of their substantially higher living costs such as for kosher foods. Once again, CETA proved to be a lifesaver in this situation and continues to be a source of hope and practical assistance to an ethnic community to overcome a problem to which it was not accustomed."

In addition, the Agudath Israel spokesman also called for the inclusion of training elements in all CETA titles, raising the \$10,000 wage ceiling that is currently permissible under CETA by \$2,000, permitting community based organizations to serve the unemployed without linking them to other agencies, a Public Service Employment program which is open to all unemployed and not necessarily only to the poor, and new programs for certain youths, middle and older aged unemployed, and displaced homemakers.

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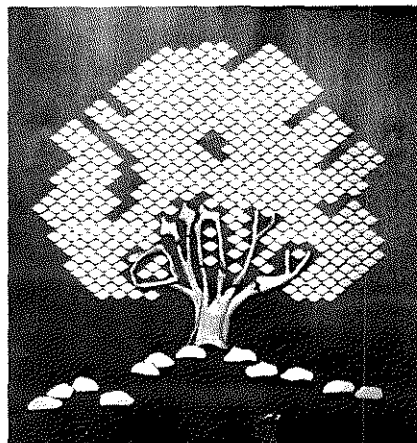
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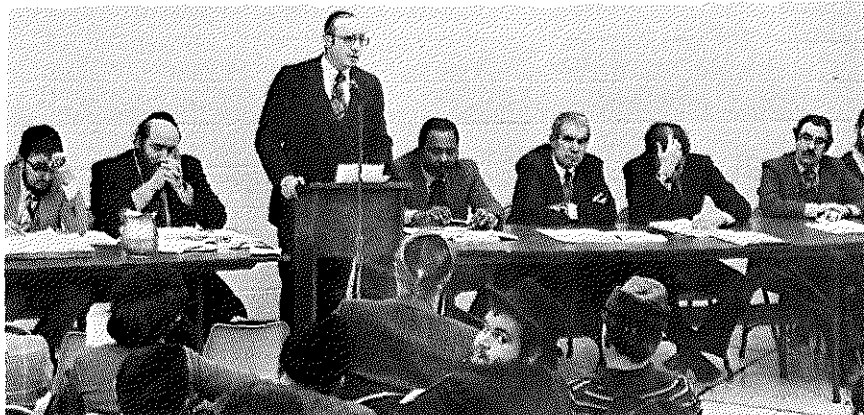
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RUSSIAN EMIGREES GET TAX HELP

Soviet Jewish emigres who are already working in this country and are required to fill out a tax return are receiving help from a joint project sponsored by Agudath Israel of America and the Cheshbonot Society. Volunteers from Cheshbonot, the Orthodox Jewish accountants' organization, have set up desks in Agudath Israel branches, synagogues, and other central locations throughout the city to help Russian Jews cope with the forms, which are strange to new immigrants.

BORO PARK MERCHANTS UNITE TO HELP SAVE COMMUNITY



Over one hundred retail merchants from 13th Avenue in Boro Park attended a special conference to revitalize the neighborhood's commercial district, sponsored by the Southern Brooklyn Community Organization (SBCO), a division of Agudath Israel of America, in conjunction with the Thirteenth Avenue Merchants Association. The conference sought means of maintaining the commercial strip in Boro Park, as part of the overall efforts of SBCO and community leaders to stabilize the neighborhood. As the director of SBCO pointed out, this effort is the first time that a neighborhood seeks to deal with its problems before they become of crisis proportion, by uniting all elements for securing the safety and economic viability of the community. Speaking at the conference are: l. to r.: Rabbi Lefkowitz; Robert Katz, president of the Thirteenth Avenue Merchants Association; David M. Singer, Chairman of SBCO at podium; Joe Roscoe, National Development Council; Edward Dulcan, Director, National Center of Urban Ethnic Affairs; Melvin J. Matlins, Deputy Director, NYC Office of Economic Development; Richard Drucker, Assistant Deputy Commissioner, New York State Department of Commerce. SBCO, a division of the Commission on Jewish Ethnic Affairs of Agudath Israel of America, is located at 4520 — 18th Avenue, Brooklyn, N.Y.

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XII 1-2 **HASHEM** said to Abram, 'Get yourself from your country, from your relatives, and from your father's house to the land that I will show you.' And

— Rashi interprets: Go לְרַחֵק for your own benefit, for your own good. [And what is this benefit? and good? (Mitzachi)] That I will there make you a great nation, but here you will not merit the privilege of having children. Moreover, I shall spread your fame throughout the world.¹⁾

Hirsch notes that parallel usage in Scriptures of the verb רָחַק, go, followed by לְרַחֵק, go for yourself, usually has the meaning of 'go by yourself, isolate yourself.' (Thus, the similar usage by Jehoi (Ezra 10:27) לְרַחֵק, he went for us, and requested the advantages which his connections with Israel had brought him. See also Joshua 21:4) So here לְרַחֵק means: go for yourself, detaching yourself from all your previous connections.

Thus the very isolation was the purpose of Abram's departure. (See also Rosh Hashanah 16b where according to one view it was Abram's change of country that enabled him to have children — because immediately after leaving his former locale, childless, he was assured of becoming a great nation, according to another view it was the merit of Eretz Yisrael that benefited him.)

According to Ramban, however, Rashi's stress on the word לְרַחֵק is unnecessary because the addition of לְרַחֵק merely reflects common idiomatic

usage in Hebrew. Cf. e.g. Song of Songs 2:11 לְרַחֵק לִי רִגְשִׁי [lit. the rain is over and gone to itself], Deut. 2:13 קָמוּ וְעָבְרוּ לְנֶגֶד הַיַּרְדֵּן [lit. rise up and get you over the brook Zered].

Ramban adds that the Sages, however, assign Midrashic interpretations to such usage only when it is plainly not idiomatic. Examples are such commands to Moses, as עָשֵׂה לְךָ אֲרוֹן עֵץ זָבַח [lit. make to you an ark of wood] (Deut. 10:1) and עָשֵׂה לְךָ שְׁמֵרֵת כֶּסֶף [lit. make to you two trumpets of silver] (Num. 10:2), in contrast to the command concerning the Tabernacle, which states simply עָשֵׂה כַּעֲשֵׂה עֵשֶׂה וְעָשֵׂה [lit. make to you as you have made, and you shall make the covering for] Tabernacle (Exod. 26:11).

[Ramban apparently refers to Yoma 3b, where the Talmud discusses that the addition of לְרַחֵק means מִמֶּנִּי, from your own (funds). The unusual use of לְרַחֵק in the commands to Moses implies that G-d intimated to Moses, I prefer that which is made from yours in that which is from the community's.]

In a dissertation fundamental to Torah exegesis, Mitzachi disagrees with Ramban's opinion that generally לְרַחֵק is an insignificant idiomatic usage. He cites laws derived from such usage concerning succah, lulav, and tzitzit (see Succah 29b and 41a). There are also such Talmudic discussions in Kiddushin 4b, Pesachim 24a, and Baba

1. The numerical equivalent of לְרַחֵק is one hundred. This intimates that the blessings mentioned in the following verses, that He would become a great nation, etc., would be realized when he would be one hundred years old (when Isaac was born) [Yalkut], or also intimates that Abraham would live an additional one hundred years after his departure at age seventy-five, from Charan [He died at the age of 125 (25-7) // Baal HaTurim]. Furthermore, G-d's command get yourself out had the implication of get out and experience first-hand the tribulations of travellers, and then you will practice hospitality with the greatest of sincerity and compassion (Ziv-haseh d'Atarot). The Midrash compares Abraham to a tightly closed vial of myrrh, lying in a corner to protect its fragrance. As soon as its lid was taken off, however, its fragrance was disseminated. Similarly, G-d ordered Abraham to get out of his country and travel from place to place so his name would become great in the world. It was to that that Solomon referred when he wrote [Song of Songs 1:3 ArtScroll ed. p. 23] 'Like the scent of goodly oils is the spreading fame of your great deeds.'

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים לְרַחֵק מֵאֲרָצְךָ וּמִקְדוֹתֶיךָ וּמִבֵּית אָבִיךָ אֶלְהָרָצָן א

1. G-d's call to Abram.¹⁾ But when he reached Charan [and no longer feared them], Terach went no further. Therefore the command was worded in the singular, only to Abraham, as if to say: Give life to yourself and to all that follow you from now on. Terach, however, saw not the light and repented only late in life [see comm. to 11:32 and 15:15].

According to Ibn Ezra and Radak G-d had already said this to Abram in Ur Kasdim, and as a result, he and his family set out for Canaan [see 11:31]. According to them the words וְרַחֵק לְרַחֵק should be rendered in the past perfect: Now HASHEM had [previously] said . . .

Cf. Zohar. Since Terach, an idolater began the journey because he wanted to accompany Abraham, why did G-d, who delights in the repentance of sinners, not command them in the plural וְרַחֵק לְרַחֵק yourselves, thus including Terach and the others who were to comply? Rav Shimon replied: If you think that Terach left Ur Kasdim in order to repent of his past life, you are mistaken. The truth is that he was fleeing in order to save himself from his countrymen after the incident of Abraham in the fiery

furnace [see comm. of Ramban in 11:32]. But when he reached Charan [and no longer feared them], Terach went no further. Therefore the command was worded in the singular, only to Abraham, as if to say: Give life to yourself and to all that follow you from now on. Terach, however, saw not the light and repented only late in life [see comm. to 11:32 and 15:15].

[According to Rashi and Ramban [but for different reasons], this command came to Abram when they were already in Charan. This is the view shared by most commentators.

[The addition of the seemingly superfluous word לְרַחֵק to you, is noted. Since nothing in the Torah is without specific significance, and since if the Torah merely wanted to say 'leave Charan and go to Canaan' the imperative לְרַחֵק, should have sufficed. Therefore, the inclusion of לְרַחֵק requires interpretation:]

1. This is one of the ten trials of faith with which G-d tested Abram, all of which Abram withstood. The commentators differ on the precise identity of the ten trials. For more than ten incidents in Abram's life could be so designated. According to Avot d'Rabbi Nissim 33 he was tested: 1) Terach when he had to move [once here, and again in 11:19 when, after G-d's glowing promise of a good life in Canaan, Abram was forced to go to Egypt in the face of a famine]; 2) Terach in connection with his two sons [the difficult decision to heed Sarah's insistence that he drive away Ishmael (21:10), and second, in the supreme test of binding his beloved son Isaac to the altar in preparation to sacrifice him (22:1-2)]; 3) Terach with his two wives [when Sarah was taken from him as Pharaoh's palace (11:15) and when he was required to drive Hagar from his home (21:10). (An alternate interpretation includes the banishment of Hagar with that of Ishmael as a single test. In its place among the list of the trials is the abduction of Sarah to the palace of Abimelech 20:2); 4) Once, on the occasion of his war with the kings (14:14); 5) Once, at the Covenant between the Parts (15:7ff) when he was told that his descendants would be enslaved and exiled for four hundred years; 6) Once, in Ur Kasdim [when he was thrown into a fiery furnace by Nimrod (see comm. to 11:24)], and 7) Once at the covenant of Circumcision (17:9) [which was an unprecedented act, at his advanced age, a dangerous operation].

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