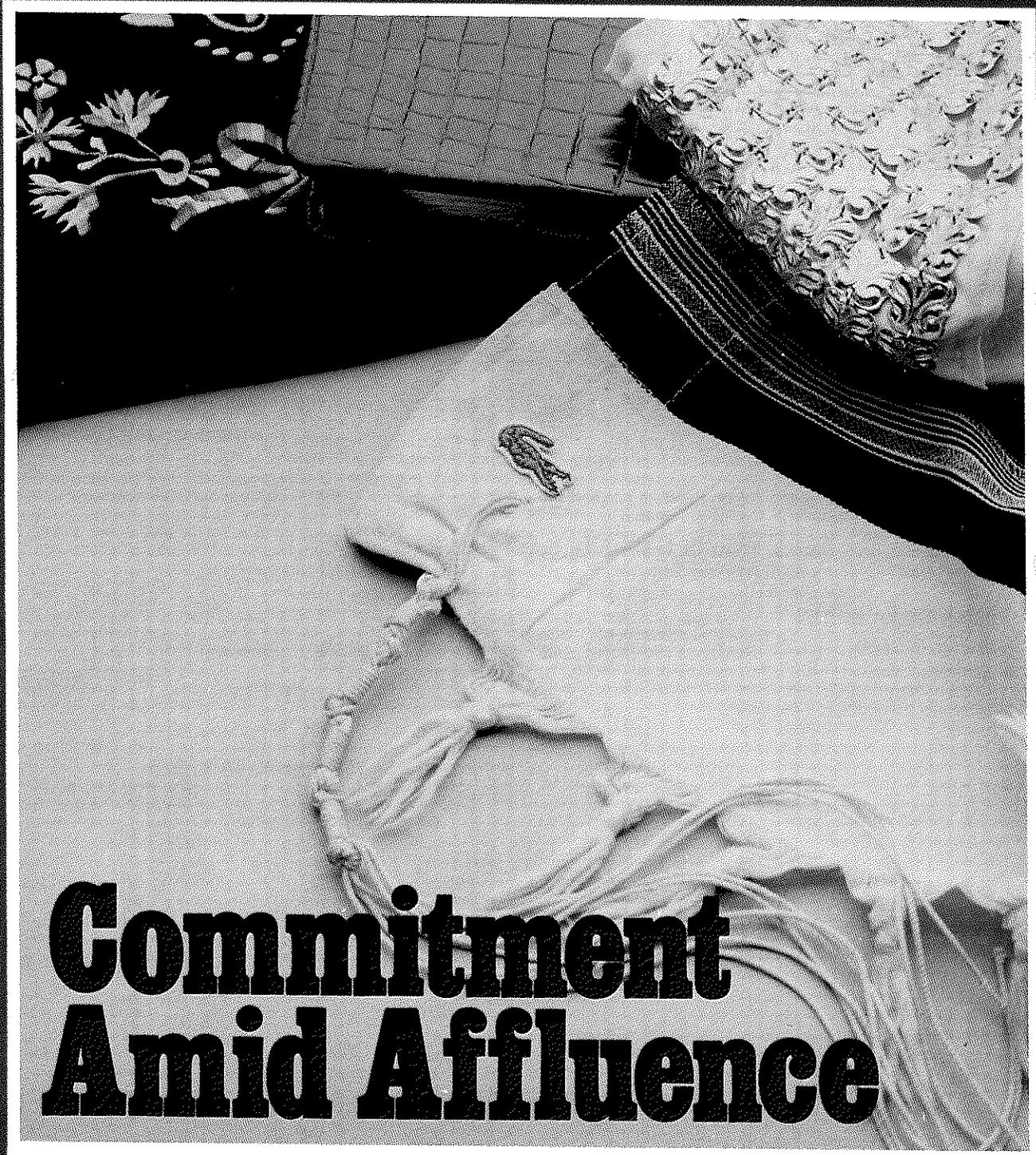


THE JEWISH OBSERVER

ADAR I, 5746/FEBRUARY, 1986
VOLUME XIX, NUMBER 2
U.S.A.: \$2.00/FOREIGN: \$2.50



**Commitment
Amid Affluence**

THE UNDERGROUND YESHIVA IN GILOH

It is located outside the all-new development of Giloh, because no space has been allocated for a yeshiva. When you enter the low building you must stoop down. The floor is of raw concrete, there is one bathroom, and no heat. It is divided into 5 rooms, each jam-packed with children. The chairs and tables look like they were rescued from the local junk dealer.

Yet the children are there willingly. They could be sitting in a school near their homes, an ultramodern facility filled with a gym, swimming pool and computer room, but empty of the spiritual existence of our nation—empty of Torah.

This school is but one of many.

A tour across Israel will make one think he has returned to the *shtetl* of 150 years ago in Eu-

rope. Basements, old farm houses, barns, some with the barest facilities, are the scene of dedicated Rebbes and women teaching groups of children. They are seated on benches—some with the rain dripping from the ceiling, the wind blowing through broken windows—freezing in the winter. They are sitting and studying our cherished heritage so that Torah should continue for their future. But while the physical facilities are so poor, their Torah and academic education is rated among the finest in Israel.

This is Chinuch Atzmai today.

40,000 children from kindergarten through eighth grade—many with parents who themselves have no religious education—gladly sacrificing comfort for a life of Torah Judaism.

Thousands more are trying to get in.

And into those dilapidated facilities are streaming ever more children every day. They throw glances of contempt at the modern edifices of secularism that stand partly empty. They are partly empty because hundreds of thousands of secularly educated Israelis have made "yerida" to other parts of the world— their spiritual ties to Israel being meaningless.

This year we had to turn away not hundreds but thousands of children for lack of money.

Last year we had requests to

open 38 new schools in communities across Israel. By scraping together all available resources, we have opened four new schools. While we speak of dollars, we are dealing with Jewish souls, with the future of our nation, with the future of Klal Yisroel.

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Address _____

17 Teves, 5746

Dear Naomi,

Greetings from Sanhedria! You responded so quickly to my letter, I felt I just **had** to reciprocate (same old, guilt-ridden Shaindy).

Sorry I didn't explain about Nochum's involvement with **Mifal Hashas** - I thought the whole world knew about it already.

Anyway, in addition to his regular daily "sedorim," Nochum also learns 30 blatt of Gemorra each month in order to qualify for participation in **Mifal Hashas**. On or about every Rosh Chodesh, Nochum takes a 3 hour written exam on the learning he just completed. The test is given here in Yerushalayim to about 500 men, as well as in 7 other cities in Israel. I understand that there are also several test sites in the States too, including Monsey (so tell Mordechai to check it out).

At each test, Nochum receives his previous exam, graded, and a check, if he really did well. Twice he got a 96%, Boruch Hashem, although last month he just cleared 70% (he had been sick for almost 10 days, just after Zvi's bris).

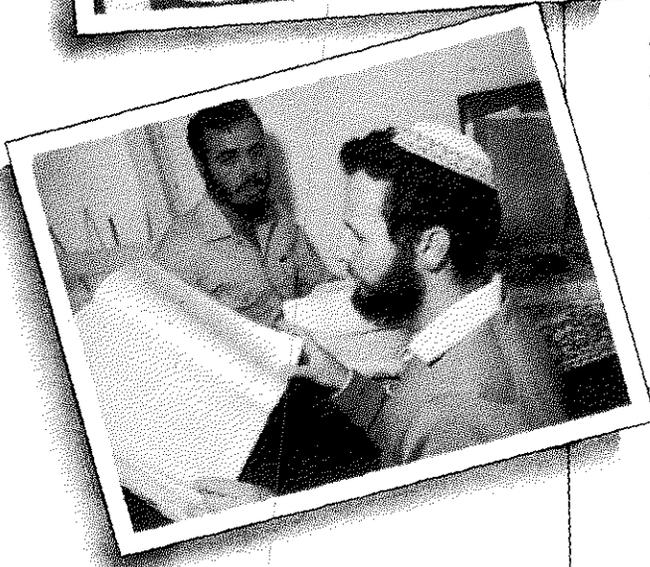
He says the monetary incentive is not the real motivation for him. But when Nochum walks through the door with a 96% or 92%, and a check in his hand, a really special glow surrounds him, as do our four little ones, who let their Tatti know that they understand and feel proud too.

Don't get me wrong, the extra \$150 or so per month certainly helps, but the truth is, that I have never seen him learn with so much "hasmodoh," desire, and fulfillment. And he's **never** been happier.

Last week I overheard him tell his 'chavrusa' that before **Mifal Hashas** he was learning **how** to learn...but now he's **learning**. I guess we can all learn from him.

Enjoy the pictures and write soon.

Shaindy



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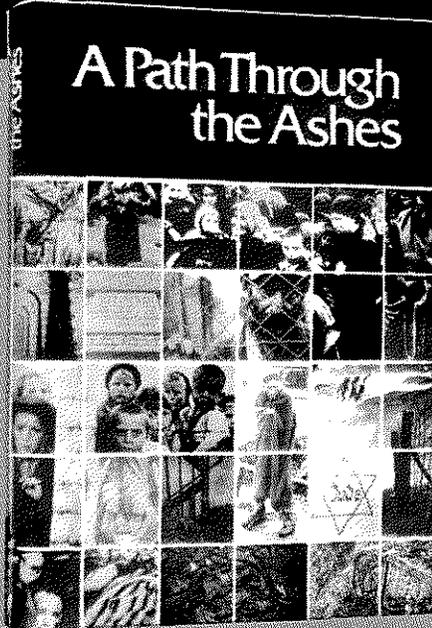
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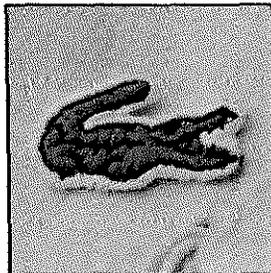
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THE JEWISH OBSERVER

In This Issue...



THE JEWISH OBSERVER (ISSN 0021-6615) is published monthly except July and August, by the Agudath Israel of America, 5 Beekman Street, New York, N.Y. 10038. Second class postage paid at New York, N.Y. Subscription \$15.00 per year; two years, \$27.00; three years, \$36.00. Outside of the United States (US funds only) \$20.00, \$25.00 in So. Africa and Pacific countries. Single copy: \$2.00; foreign: \$2.50. Send address changes to The Jewish Observer, 5 Beekman St., N.Y., N.Y. 10038. Printed in the U.S.A.

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ADAR I, 5746
FEB. 1986 VOL. XIX, NO. 2

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**A
DECADE
OF
CARING.**



VST

American Friends of *Kiryat Sanz Laniado Hospital* will celebrate a decade of unique care and pay tribute to those who have shared in one of Judaism's most fascinating social adventures.

Join leaders of our community on **March 9, 1986, 28 Adar I, 5746** at **5:30 p.m.** at the **New York Hilton** to celebrate the Tenth Anniversary Dinner.

Guest of Honor: **Henry A. Roth**

Man of the Decade Award:
Rabbi Meir Eisemann

Raphael Award for Medicine:
Dr. Bernard Ehrlich

A special commemorative journal will be published on the occasion. An interesting program featuring prominent personalities is being prepared. For journal ad and dinner reservation information, contact **American Friends of Kiryat Sanz Laniado Hospital**, 18 West 45th Street, New York, New York 10036, 212-944-2690.



ל"ד מ"ו

**THANK YOU FOR SHARING
A DECADE OF CARING.**

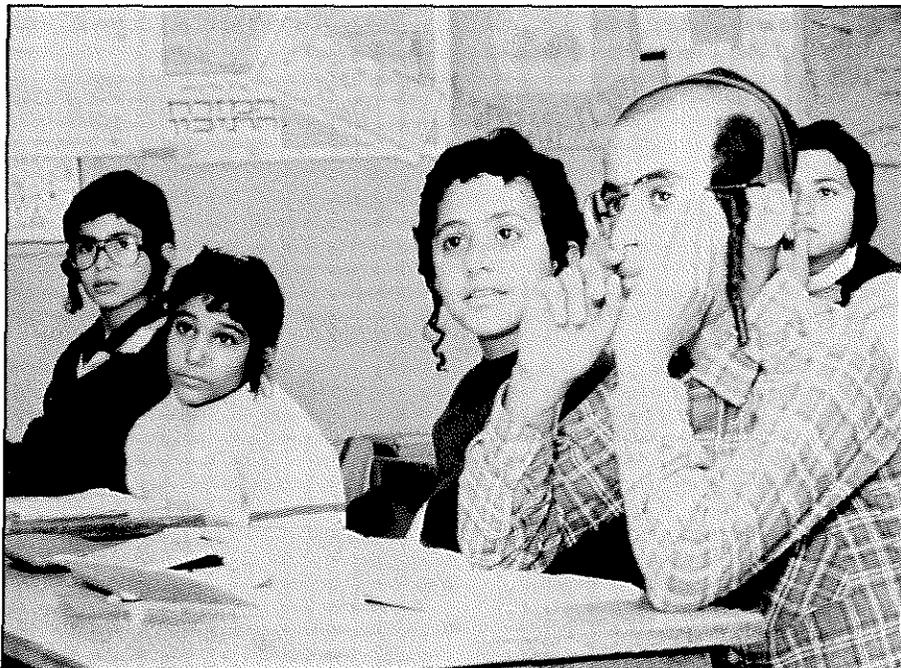


CHILDREN

Are the Very Survival of Klal Yisroel



Rabbi Elazar Shach שליט"א, Rosh HaYeshiva of Ponevezh, in Bnei Brak, made the following remarks at an emergency meeting of the Board of Governors of Chinuch Atzmai, the network of Torah Schools in Israel, which serves 40,000 children. The meeting took place in Jerusalem, with the participation of six prominent American Roshei HaYeshiva who were visiting Israel, in advance of the September/Elul school year, focusing on the devastating budget cuts that the school system was facing because of reduced funding.



(The discussion at the meeting dealt with, among other things, bus service, so essential for transporting children from scattered communities. This service, contracted to Egged, has become more costly, while the government funding has remained constant.)

One administrator reported on his negotiations with Egged: the bus company explained that an 8 a.m. school start coincides with rush hour in Israel. If Chinuch Atzmai schools would begin their day at 8:30, Egged would be willing to cut its fee by 30%.

Until this point, Rabbi Shach was sitting with his head bent forward, as though distracted. At this suggestion, Rabbi Shach interrupted the speaker, and addressed the entire topic.)

Photos in this article show scenes from Chinuch Atzmai schools in Israel.



**The Chofetz Chaim asked:
“A bracha for children?
Where will they learn?
Why have children if they
will not learn Torah?”**

“Do you really believe that we can save the situation by starting school at 8:30 instead of 8 a.m.? I hear your response: end the day at 3:30 instead of 3 p.m. and no time will be lost. How would this strike the Chinuch Atzmai students' neighbors? Everybody is off to school and studying, and these children are still waiting for the bus! And what about the working mothers who must be out of the house and at work by 8 a.m.? Let us not lose our common sense nor our appreciation for the dignity of Torah. *Kavod Hatorah* is surely more important than a saving of \$100,000!

I had the privilege of visiting the Chofetz Chaim on two occasions. Once, when I was still in Kletsk, my uncle, Reb Isser Zalman Meltzer, sent me to the Chofetz Chaim to ask that he pray for a young childless couple that lived in a town near Chortkov—to ask for a *bracha* that they have children. At that time, the *chadortm* in the small communities of Poland were undergoing a severe crisis, and many were closing. The Chofetz Chaim was heartbroken about this situation.

He asked me to sit down, and I told him that Reb Isser Zalman had sent me to ask for a *bracha* for children for this specific couple.

“A *bracha* for children?” he said. “Where will they learn? Why have children if they will not learn Torah? The couple will have children one day. But for what purpose?” That was the thinking of the Chofetz Chaim: the survival of the Jewish people is dependent on its children,

but without Torah schools, where will they learn how to be Jews? Without a place to learn, the *Kiyum of Am Yisroel*, the very existence of Israel, is threatened.

The second time that I visited the Chofetz Chaim was close to 1930. Sarah Schenrler had founded the teachers' seminary for girls in Cracow, and the school's supporters had approached the Chofetz Chaim for a letter of recommendation. There were some groups opposed to the seminary, who questioned: “How can you teach Torah to girls?” On reviewing the project, he exclaimed: “Such a worthwhile undertaking, and I should be without a share in it? Of course I'll write a letter!”

The Chofetz Chaim was over 90, and had accomplished so much in

his lifetime, yet he craved a share in this undertaking! He understood how crucial it was to the survival of the Jewish people: If there is Torah, there is Judaism, and Jewry has a future. Otherwise, why have children?

I want to tell you: I am deeply impressed with a number of young men who are *baalei teshuva* that have come to consult with me. I usually ask them about their background, their families, their schooling and other experiences. Recently, I was visited by a young man who had become a *baal teshuva* just three years ago. I asked him: “Where did you go to school?”

“A secular elementary school,” was his reply.





I asked if he had learned *Gemora* ... he had never heard of *Gemora*.

"Did you learn *Chumash* and *Rashi*?"

"Only some *Chumash*."

"How did your teacher explain זכור את יום השבת לקדשו (remember the Sabbath to keep it holy)?"

He replied, "We were told that the ancients wrote these books and laws for their times, but they are not relevant today." This is what they taught him! And this is how an entire generation is being educated!

Do you know how many children are enrolled in the government schools in Israel? One million children are being taught that way! When we discuss accommodating more children in *Chinuch Atzmai*, we are dealing with the survival of *Klal Yisroel*! If one does not learn Torah, he cannot be a Jew. He knows nothing about *Shabbos*, he knows nothing about *tefillin*, he knows nothing about being a Jew! If there are still Jews in this world, it is only because some people have learned what it means to be a Jew.

I must tell you that, gathered here as we are, the very existence of *Klal Yisroel* depends upon us. We are making decisions that will mold the future of *Klal Yisroel*. If we throw up our hands in defeat, and impose cuts in the budget simply because we are short \$100,000 for this or that item, we are shirking our responsibilities! If we can't meet our obligations, what good are we? We may as well go and throw ourselves

into the sea! Today it is a problem of maintaining transportation, tomorrow it will be a problem of eliminating classes, closing schools, or reducing hours of instruction. If the ship is sinking, do we lighten the load by throwing our *tallis* and *tefillin* overboard?

Yes, we are already carrying a great burden, but we must accept still more responsibility. Are we so morally bankrupt that we must make an issue over such monies? We must extend ourselves and see to it that there are no cutbacks. Tell me what I can do. I will sell my trousers! My coat! I will arrange for loans to be repaid later. We are all here today ... we must pool our efforts to find a way together. Let us not seek stop-gap measures by eliminating a school here, cutting hours there, reducing a program elsewhere. Save \$100,000 this month, and next month there will be another problem. This is an ineffective approach!



As the Chofetz Chaim said: "What do we need children for if we cannot teach them Torah?" The survival of *Klal Yisroel* is dependent upon us.



Every individual child is a matter of *Klal Yisroel*. One child in a public school becomes a Tabori [the mayor of Petach Tikva who has been agitating against Sabbath observance in the commercial strip of his town], and tens of thousands of Jews are *mechalel Shabbos* because of him. Another of today's children will become director in the Ministry of Education. How much damage or how much good will he accomplish? One will build Torah, one will destroy Torah. See for yourselves how many people were saved by a Torah education. We must act with all our strength.

I must confess that I am not a strong man. But ever since I heard the words of the Chofetz Chaim I am driven, for I am still overwhelmed by them: Why have children? Where will they learn? Children are the very survival of *Klal Yisroel*. ■

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To Plummet Earthward or To Soar To The Sky?

Every generation has its own challenges to overcome, its specific tasks to perform. How are we, as members of American Jewish society in 5746/1986, to understand our contemporary situation? Rabbi Yisroel Perkowski שליט"א, Rosh Hayeshiva of Beth HaTalmud in Brooklyn, Rav of the Agudath Israel of 16th Avenue, in Boro Park, points to a particular challenge and suggest a proper response.



Each of the Avos (Patriarchs) distinguished himself by achieving perfection in a specific character trait. In each case, the individual trait demonstrated that the respective patriarch rose above the trends of his time. Thus, Avraham was the epitome of *chessed* (generosity and loving kindness), reflecting the Divine attribute of *chessed* in a time when the people of Sodom and Amora exemplified the most depraved levels of selfishness and hedonism. ... Yitzchok's self-negating devotion to G-d stood in stark contrast to the imperialism

and self-aggrandizement of Avimelech, the King of the Philistines. ... And Yaakov's *emes* (integrity and devotion to truth), representing the Divine attribute of Truth in the earthly setting, was all the more meaningful in the context of his father-in-law Lavan's trickery and deceit. We, too, might gain an insight into our specific mission by taking note of some of the downward trends of our own society.

Never before in history have we experienced such comfort, enjoyed such plenty, possessed such a degree of affluence. This, of course, is a

A "rasha" is not defined by his deeds, but by the direction of his interests.

blessing, to be utilized for helping our fellow Jews come closer to Torah and its teachings, and for enhancing the spirituality of our own lives. Beyond doubt, this is why we have been favored by Providence with such unprecedented wealth: to accomplish more than ever before. If anything, however, our times have been marked by an extraordinary emphasis on materialism, excessive involvement in the luxurious trappings of personal lives, and indulgence in all sorts of pleasures.

On the simple level, if we are caught up in such an emphasis, it can lead to outright *aveiros*—violations of Torah law. But there is another threat implicit in a materialistic way of life that can be even more insidious. Focusing on pleasurable experiences can make our *neshama*—the spiritual aspect of our existence—secondary to our material existence. The dust of the earth, which is the source of our bodies, could become the prime aspect of our personal make-up. Our very *neshama* could then be severed from its heavenly sources and, instead, become attached to the object of its yearning—the material, the sensual.

This concept is stated clearly by Rabbeinu Yonah of Gerundi:

The soul of the *rasha* (the wicked man) is such that all of its yearnings are for bodily pleasures, its drives are directed away from serving G-d, and it becomes alienated from its ethereal source. At the time of the person's death, his soul descends earthward, toward the object of its desires. Its very nature is similar to the dust of the earth—to be drawn downward, not to ascend heavenward. To be sure, the soul will be taken aloft to stand trial, to determine why it traded in its spiritual essence for the grave. After that, however, it will follow its own nature, and go downward, to the earth.

Shaarei Teshuva: II, 18



Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian זצ"ל, a master teacher and exponent of *Mussar* (ethics) of the last generation, commented on the above passage from *Shaarei Teshuva*:

Should someone ask you, 'What is a *rasha*?' the answer, obviously, would be 'a person guilty of transgressions.' Rabbeinu Yonah, however, does not mention the word 'transgression' at all. Instead, he describes the soul of the *rasha* as desiring only physical pleasures. In other words, even a person who observes *mitzvos* and avoids *aveiros*—he *davens* three times a day, as is prescribed; he never eats bread without *netilas yodaytm* (laving his hands) and reciting the proper *bracha*; and so on. All his interests, his actions, the full range of his concerns, however, are totally directed toward fulfilling sensual desires, and these alone provide him with the joy of his life. By contrast, when he approaches a *mitzva* or any activity associated with Divine service, he may fulfill all that is demanded of him, but he is totally lacking enthusiasm or pleasure. He is only doing what he must, as though he were being coerced to do so.

from *Leiv Eliyahu*:
"that You Learn to Fear."

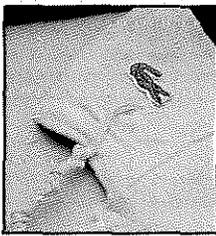
EMULATING AVRAHAM

We are advised in *Avos* (V, 22) to be counted among the disciples of *Avraham Avinu*, which involves possessing "a generous eye, a humble spirit, and an abstinent soul. . . . The disciples of Avraham enjoy this world and inherit the World-to-Come."

Beyond punctilious performance of *mitzvos*, more than avoidance of transgressions, we have an obligation to rise above the *Zeitgeist*. Specifically, instead of drifting along with the trend toward more opulent furnishings and ever more indulgent lifestyles, we must focus on our spiritual needs.

On the individual level, we should aspire for growth in Torah knowledge, and increase our hours of study. On the communal scale, we must see that every youngster has a yeshiva that meets his needs; that every town, every neighborhood where Jews live be provided with a Torah school; that there be more adult classes and more *Kollelim* to serve Jewish communities across the expanse of this country. If this be our concern, if our thoughts and plans and activities are directed along such a course, then—as Rabbeinu Yonah says—our *neshamos* will by their very nature soar upward, rather than plummet earthward in keeping with the pull of our times. Thus can we convert the challenges of our generation into the opportunity of our generation, for the general betterment of our people and appreciable enhancement of our personal lives. ■

The above essay is based on an address delivered at the 63th National Convention of Agudath Israel of America, transcribed by Rabbi Yehudah Oelbaum, *menahel* of Mesivta Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch in New York City.



WHEN THE CALL WAS ISSUED

Personal Reactions to an Extraordinary Event:

A Gathering for Introspection for the Entire Community, Convened for Women on the Tenth of Teves

Hadassah Becker

THEY CALLED AND WE CAME

We left our children, our busy households, our harried Sunday schedules, and assembled to hear words of inspiration and *mussar*. Seeking guidance and direction, we came to hear two rabbinical leaders speak: Rabbi Avrohom Pam, Rosh HaYeshiva of Mesivta Torah Vodaath, and Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, Novominsker Rebbe.

We came, in part, because we were heartbroken by a series of tragic illnesses that had befallen some of the best and most promising members of our community. A group of concerned women, who had seen their friends and relatives touched by tragedy, decided that it was time to act. They turned to our *Rabbonim* to ask: מה זאת עשה? לוי אלוקים? What is being demanded of us? How do we respond? And that's how this gathering came to be.

There was no large group or major organization behind this assembly. Nobody came because of any particular affiliations. A handful of dedicated and determined women called out, and the women of our community responded overwhelmingly.

Not hundreds, but thousands—over 4,000 by some estimates—of women cared enough to come. Young and old, mothers as well as grandmothers came, along with many teenagers from the local Bais Yaakovs. Most of us were from Boro Park and Flatbush, but there were women who came from other boroughs and a number of outlying cities as well. At 12:45 there were throngs of women attempting to enter the "Sephardishe Shul" where the gathering was convened, but it was already packed. The overflow was directed to the nearby Bais Yaakov Elementary School where loudspeakers had been set up in the main auditorium. Soon that too was jammed to capacity, and a second auditorium was opened to accommodate the massive crowd. Despite the fact that they were fasting, many women stood for the entire three hours.

"WE TURN TO THEM FOR OUR ANSWERS"

That so many people had come together for a spiritual purpose was in itself an inspiration. It was a public acknowledgement of our belief in *hashgacha*, the calamities we suffer are messages directed to us from Above, and our decisions to change ourselves can

Mrs. Becker teaches in a Bais Yaakov High School in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn.



4,000 women came to hear how to improve their lives and thereby raise the spiritual level of the community. They came to hear, to listen, to effect changes.

make the difference. It was also a demonstration of *emunas chachamim*—that when seeking answers we turn to our rabbinical leaders.

We were not coming merely to listen, but to hear their words and to accept them. People were thirsty for explanations, for guidance, leaning forward in their seats, hanging on to every word: In the front row I noticed an older woman earnestly taking notes. At my shoulder sat the young mother of one of my students, also taking notes. Behind me was a former student of mine, pen and notebook in hand. And, of course, tape recorders were everywhere in evidence.

My younger sister sat in the Bais Yaakov auditorium, where they were not privileged to see the speakers. A thousand women sat, faced only by a huge loudspeaker. At one point, the loudspeaker failed for a moment. "There was an audible sigh of disappointment," a friend told me. "People wanted to hear every word."

"When Rav Pam called us *nashim tzidkanyos* (righteous women)," she added, "I felt our potential to be *nashim tzidkanyos* awakened, aroused. When he called us *mevakshos Hashem* (seekers of spiritual guidance), who among us did not feel an increased desire to hear the word of *Hashem*? It was a feeling that we took with us after the gathering was over."

"I feel uncomfortable giving *mussar* (reproof)," said the Novominsker Rebbe, "but this is such a unique opportunity, such a rare occasion."

"I am very moved," began Rabbi Pam, "by the size of this audience which has come to hear *divrei hisorerus* (an inspirational message) and suggestions for improvements in their society, in their homes and in their hearts." He later told someone that he felt literally choked up as he entered the *shul* and saw the size of the crowd.

A TIME FOR "CHESSED" . . . PLUS

Rabbi Pam quoted from the Chofetz Chaim's *Sefer Ahavas Chesed* that at a time when the *midas hadin* (unbending judgment) prevails in the world, we must increase the amount of *tzeddaka* and *chesed*.

(*Tzeddaka and chessed?* my friend admitted thinking. *But that's our strong point! Why start with that?*)

"We do give a lot of *tzeddaka*," continued Rabbi Pam, "but it is not enough. We must give as much as we possibly can."

(*Sometimes my little son comes home from school with a bag of popcorn, my friend commented, and I ask him to share it with his brother and sister. He takes out one piece of popcorn, divides it in half, and gives it away. An extreme example, but when we give *tzeddaka* and we do *chesed*, the proportions might be all wrong.*)

Rabbi Pam quoted the Vilna Gaon's injunction to his wife that she separate no less than a fifth of their meager income and allocate it for *tzeddaka*. He read the words of the Chofetz Chaim in *Ahavas Chesed*, that when one is aware of poverty, it is not enough to give *maaser*—a tenth of one's earnings. One must then give up to a fifth of his income to *tzeddaka*. Under certain circumstances one must give even more.

The same theme was articulated by the Novominsker Rebbe:

Unlike previous times when people had to face tribulations—poverty, pogroms—to remain *erliche Yidden*, most of us face very few *nisyonos* (challenges). *Yiddishkett* is presented to us on a silver platter. We have lost the capacity of being able to confront difficult conditions, difficult spiritual conditions. . . . Perhaps *Hashem* wants us to rise one or two rungs higher, in the quality of our personal commitment to *mitzvos* and *maasim tovim* (good deeds). . . .

We must stop doing business as usual and feeling self-satisfied.

Permit me to say that *tzeddaka* and *chesed* at times come easily . . . they make us feel virtuous. And (perhaps it's too sharp a remark, so please pardon me) it pampers our ego, too.

At a time like this we must think very hard about the changes we want to bring about in ourselves that are not so easy to accept, that are not so easy to practice. ♣

A FOCUS FOR OUR GENEROSITY

Rabbi Pam spoke extensively about the many Jewish children who are totally ignorant of their heritage: Children enrolled in public schools must be taken out and given a Jewish education.

There are yeshivos that would be willing to take them. They have lists of children who have applied for admission and are still enrolled in public school. Some of them are even under the influence of missionaries. For what reason? For lack of money.

Where do we find the money? I think that we already have sources at our disposal: if we would cut down on some of the expenses in the general lifestyle, and particularly if we would cut down on the expenses of our *simchos*, we would save many thousands of dollars that could be put to wonderful use.

When we celebrate a *bar mitzva*, our *simcha* is for the elevation of a Jewish boy to a full-fledged *oved Hashem*—servant of G-d. How beautiful it would be if we made a simpler celebration, cut down on the expenses and used that money to bring other Jewish boys to Torah, causing them to be *ovdei Hashem*.

Chasunos. We do so many things as a *segula*—an omen for *hatzlacha*, for *bracha* (success and blessings). We are particular on which day we schedule the wedding—we want it to be in the beginning of the month as a good omen. The skylight is open as a good sign. We are anxious to have *Hashem* bestow his blessings upon the bride and groom. But wouldn't it be the greatest *segula*, the greatest *siman bracha*—to take a good, good portion of the wedding expenses and use it for the *chinuch*, the education of Jewish children . . . or to be *mesame'ach* a poor bride and groom, or an orphan, and help them celebrate their wedding? *אם אתה משמח את שלי אני משמח את שלך*—You bring joy to Mine, and I'll bring joy to yours. There are many people who would welcome such innovations, the problem is that nobody wants to be the first.

We must reach out to the thousands and thousands of children who are starving for a bit of *Yiddishkeit*. If permitted to continue the way they are without our ever reaching them, then we will eventually be battling against them; they will be in the Reform movement or they will be anonymous assimilation statistics. . . . A beautiful wedding is one that takes this problem into consideration and makes solving it part of the *simcha*.

There is an incident described in Talmud Yerushalmi (in *Shekalim*)—I have some hesitation in quoting it, but I also hesitate omitting it:

Rabbi Oshiya, Rabba, and Rav Chana bar Chanina were passing a magnificent *shul* building in Lud. Rabbi Oshiya commented: "How many lives were lost because of this building? Weren't there *talmidei chachamim*, weren't there *bnai Torah*, weren't there *Yiddishe kinder* that this money could have been used for?"

If this is said about a *shul*, how much more so does this judgment apply to a private dwelling! Or to the building of a *bayis ne'eman beYisroel*—establishing a new Jewish family. Thousands of children are being lost while we indulge in excesses. We can imbue our *simchos* with

kedusha (holiness) if we but bear in mind the thousands of children of our community as well as those of *Eretz Yisroel*, where there is a struggle for the character of *Klal Yisroel*. And the only solution is *chinuch*. Will we have a generation that's destined to establish Torah, or a generation that will be dedicated to uproot Torah? ♣

BEYOND SUNDAY: A LASTING IMPACT

At the *kinus* itself there was an awareness that one afternoon of *hisorrerus* (inspiration) was not the goal. The Novominsker Rebbe stressed emphatically that "some concrete action should result."

The Novominsker Rebbe added that if we are seeking to avoid illness and plague, if we desire to live long, healthy lives, we need not seek arcane *segulos* (charms). "The first place to consult is no further than our *Tehillim*, as the Chofetz Chaim pointed out in his *seforim* and in his very way of life. *David Hamelech* said clearly, Who wants life, who loves days of seeing good? Guard your tongue from evil, your life from deceit (*Tehillim* 34:14). We all desire life. Let us honor the passage in accordance with its simple, literal meaning."

He suggested that everyone present make a *kabbala*—accept the obligation—to totally refrain from speaking *lashon hora* for a three hour period every day. "If we back up our inner desire for self-improvement with a *kabbala*—and a *kabbala* has almost the force of a *neder* (a vow)—that means that this is serious business."

After the *kinus* a group of friends decided that they would choose the same set of hours to abstain from *lashon hora*. They decided upon the hectic hours of seven to ten in the evening. One member of the group hesitated.

"It's such a hard time of the day, and three hours is too long, I don't think I can do it."

"Think about it," urged her friend.

The next day she called back. "I decided to keep those hours. It's true that those hours will be the most difficult, but those hours will have the greatest impact on the whole family. Maybe after a while it won't be that hard."

Others got together and split up the day between themselves so that all the hours will be covered. The entire student body of the school in which I teach agreed to accept the same three-hour period. That way they can reinforce one another in their commitment.

One person commented: "Until now I always felt awkward when *lashon hora* came up. It was hard to find a comfortable way of curtailing the conversation without preaching or offending. Now it's easy. All I have to do is wink and say, Sorry, not now. It's my three hours!"

A TREND TOWARD MODERATION

"Our phones have not stopped ringing," said one of the women who organized this gathering. "But they are not only calling to express gratitude or to tell us how moved they were. They are asking, *What's going to be next? Where do we take it from here?*"



Did you ever listen to the stories of the *shalichim* collecting for the poor in Eretz Yisrael? Could you then have the arrogance to be extravagant with the monies you've been blessed with?

"People want change," her co-worker added. "We've been talking to many people and we see it more and more. People are beginning to realize that there is something wrong with the imbalances in our lifestyle. I am convinced that the turnout at this gathering attests to that."

These two women have been active for some time, seeking to promote moderation in *simchas*. "We are meeting with *rabbonim*, and they will soon be meeting among themselves to discuss ways of dealing with this issue. We are also trying to get grassroots support for this idea. We are speaking to many people, trying to enlist their backing. Several prominent members of our community, planning weddings for their children, have decided to eliminate not only a Viennese table but the Smorgasbord as well. We hope others will follow suit."

Said the Novominsker Rebbe:

"The *Noda BeYehuda* (Rabbi Yechezkiel Landau, framed 18th Century rabbinical leader) in his day instituted rulings regarding how many people are to participate in each kind of *simcha*. This is nothing new; in the *Vaad Arba Aratzos* they dealt with it. And in recent times, before the *Churban* (of World War II) there were rulings in various communities, and in our own times as well. If this is a tangible result from this *kinus*, it would be a *Kiddush Hashem*."

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

A friend of mine expressed concern that we not forget about the *ayin tov*—the gracious, forgiving eye—that Rabbi Pam spoke about. "It is so easy to point a finger and say, 'THEY made such a lavish wedding,' 'THEY have such an ostentatious home.' It would be so unfortunate if this led people to judge other people and regard them with a *tzorus ayin*—an unforgiving attitude."

The idea of *leviv tov* (a good heart) was extensively discussed by Rabbi Pam, who suggested that women set aside a few moments a day to learn the *Sefer Ahavas Chessed*. (As of this writing, the *sefer* is sold out in most Brooklyn *seforim* stores!) If one absorbs the content and

spirit of this *sefer* he will regard people differently. An *ohev chessed* is sensitive to the needs of others rather than to their shortcomings. Rabbi Pam added:

"When we have *ahavas chessed*, we have no problem with *lashon hora*. During the sixty years that I was with her, I never heard *lashon hora* from my mother *ר"ע*. Was it an extra-heroic effort for her to restrain herself? Not at all! It took no effort whatsoever—because she had *ahavas chessed*. She had a *leviv tov*. It hurt her, it pained her, to hear anything bad about another person."

(When I heard those words, said a friend, I wondered, what will my children be able to say about me?)

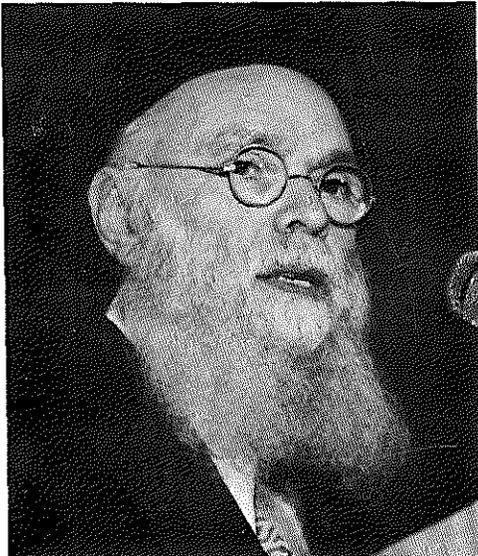
Many women commented on Rabbi Pam's discussion of speech within family relationships and his description of the home as a place where insulting and hurtful talk is not permitted.

HOME IS WHERE IT BEGINS

The quality of *chinuch* in the home was an issue that Rabbi Perlow discussed from many angles. He cited the importance of serving as proper role models as well as the need to inculcate our children with *derech eretz*.

Do we realize the opportunities that exist in our homes for *chinuch*? Do we realize that so much more can be done with our children by spending time with them, by talking to them, by listening to them, by having *Melave Malka* with them? Why shouldn't fathers and mothers and children get together and discuss *devarim shebikedusha* (spiritual discussions) together, and hear a *ma'aseh* (a story of old) and be told a *mashal* (parable)? It requires input, it requires effort, it requires a certain degree of preparation, but just look at the rewards! We are judged as parents not by what our children bring home from school, but what they bring to school.

Perhaps the most important idea is that a *Yid* is to live only as a *Yid* and not as a cultural *goy*. This challenges us so much in our personal lives, in our homes, our families, in our human relations that one cannot over emphasize this.



She never spoke lashon hora—not because of self-control, but because of her love for others.

Living as a *Yid* doesn't only mean observance of Torah and *mitzvos*, it means living our own way of life—how we live, how we think, how we dress—not to adapt to the customs and lifestyle of the non-Jew. It's very insidious.

He stressed the characteristic of *nefesh shefeila* (abstinent soul) that is ascribed to the disciples of Avraham Avinu, as opposed to the greed of Bilaam, who revealed himself in his words "Let Balak give me his house full of silver and gold." A soul that has modest desires. This means striving for modesty, restraint as opposed to extravagance—not showing off our affluence in the way we dress the way we live and rejoice.

"Walk humbly with your G-d"—doesn't only mean doing *mitzvos* in secret. Sometimes one has to do a *mitzva* openly to set an example. "Walking humbly" means having about oneself a feeling of not displaying whatever one owns, whatever one does, whatever one wears.

One's home, one's clothing should have a sense of refinement ... even men's fashions have gotten out of hand. ... When people come knocking on your door for *hachnosas kalla* (to help a poor bride), did you ever sit down and listen to their stories? And we have the arrogance to be extravagant with that which we own!

We expect to be delivered from this *galus* to *Yerushalayim Ir Hakodesh*, and we are not going to be taking it all with us.

He also spoke strongly about the importance of removing foreign influences such as television from the Jewish home. (*I prided myself on totally restricting my children from watching television, said a neighbor the day after the gathering. But after yesterday I thought, "If I don't want them to watch it, why do I have it in the house?"*)

"It was a pleasure to drive through Boro Park on Monday," quipped one lady. She was referring to the Novominsker's citing double-parking as an example of lapses in our sensitivity to our fellow man. He had spoken about the little things that we do "not with malice, but with a certain degree of insensitivity," and called for a higher standard of *derech erez*.

LONG RANGE PLANS

A teacher who discussed the gathering with her high school students expressed surprise at how well they had absorbed its message, quoting specific points, discussing details.

A phone call from St. Louis pleaded: "Send me a tape.* I would like to organize an evening of *chizuk*." ... Other gatherings were held—in Lakewood as well as in Los Angeles. ... Groups were formed in the Flatbush and Bensonhurst sections of Brooklyn to implement some of the ideas of the *kinus*. And a series of lectures is scheduled in Boro Park as a result of the *kinus*.

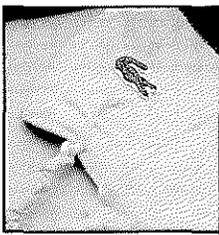
One group contacted Rabbi Pam for advice on how to proceed. He advised them to make a written *kabbala* to limit the size and expense of *simchos*, to study the halachic sections of *Ahavas Chessed*, and to undertake to sponsor a specific item in a school such as R'tzad, Be'er Hagolah, or one of the schools of Chinuch Atzmai or Tashbar. He mentioned the possibility of sponsoring one year's salary of a teacher.

People have begun to study *Ahavas Chessed* in earnest. A husband and wife of my acquaintance spend several moments learning it each night. Two women of my acquaintance are studying it together by phone, from 6:50 to 7:00 each morning. The mother of a large family gathers her children, even the young ones, and tells them a daily *halacha* from the *sefer*.

Several schools have already instituted the study of *Ahavas Chessed*, and others are discussing various projects that would implement some of the specific suggestions made. (The Novominsker Rebbe had pointed out how the Chofetz Chaim was of a stature of earlier generations, but was planted in his time to guide *Klal Yisroel*. Apparently, this is as true today as it was fifty, a hundred years ago. His works were the most quoted all afternoon.)

The *kinus* has stimulated much thought and discussion. "It has set off a huge ripple effect in thought and action," said one of its organizers. Let us hope that the ripple has just begun. ■

*Tapes are available. Call (718) 435-5793/6974 or write: Kinus Tapes/4514-15 Av/Brooklyn, N.Y. 11219.



The 400th Blow

The old man taught Reb Yechiel to open his eyes to the lessons of the letter "Tof"—and then start all over again.

At the Manhattan side approach to the George Washington Bridge, there's a corner where bearded Orthodox Jews stand and wait for a ride to their homes in the Monsey area of New York State some thirty miles away. They don't know who their driver will be until he pulls up. And I—the driver—knew less about the elderly, saintly-looking man I picked up on that corner. I'm glad I did, because otherwise, I would never have heard his story.

* * *

"Reb" Yechiel was an *am ha'aretz*, by its most simple meaning. Not that he didn't have time to learn. He just never bothered. He got his respect anyway because Reb Yechiel was very wealthy.

Yechiel had earned his title "Reb" soon after arriving in town. They made an appeal that *Shabbos*, and

Rabbi Reisman, a member of the Kollel of Mesivta Torah Vodaath in Brooklyn, wrote several articles that were featured in JO, most recently "The Old Man Counted to Nine" (Oct. '85).

Yechiel carefully planned to "AH!" the crowd with a tremendous pledge to the local Yeshiva. A few generous "*Mi Shebetrach's*" later and Yechiel was "Reb Yechiel."

On Yom Kippur, the *Rav* was always honored with *Shlishi*, the choice *aliya* to the Torah, while Reb Yechiel got *Shishi*, the number two spot. No one EVER outbid Reb Yechiel. While everyone paid their yearly hundred dollars for their *shul* seats, Reb Yechiel gave the *Gabbai* \$400, and of course, he was placed on the *Mizrach Vant*, the Eastern Wall, next to the *Rav*. Reb Yechiel had the nicest house, the best car, and certainly, the most money in town. He never had reason to be in awe of anyone. That is, until the Old Man moved into town. . . .

Nobody really knew where he had come from. Oh, there were rumors—some said he was a freed Soviet refusenik who wanted to live out his years quietly. Others claimed that he was a Euro-

pean professor-turned *baal teshuva*, or a *Lamed-Vovnik*, a hidden saint. All they knew for certain was that the Old Man was always cheerful. And very wise.

The people in town might never have really known him if not for the *Chumash shiur*. Between *Mincha* and *Ma'ariv*, the more learned members of the *shul* would study *Gemora* on their own. It was the others, the less accomplished, that the Old Man gathered. "Let's learn *Chumash* together; between us we'll manage to understand something."

Naturally, the Old Man did most of the talking. And soon even the more learned members of town gravitated toward him. And, often, the Old Man told a story of a shepherd.

"Day after day, year after year, he walked the fields with his sheep. Oh, he put on *tefillin* and kept the *Shabbos*, but he was incapable of learning the most simple *pasuk* in *Chumash*. And by the age of 40 he felt it was much too late to start.

"Until, one day, he sat down by a brook, and his life changed. He ob-

“You are skeptical about the power of the unforgiving eye,” said the Old Man, “because you do not understand. Someday, when you really want to understand, perhaps you will.”

served how dripping water had pierced a hole through a stone. ‘If only I pound away, continuously,’ he told himself, ‘the Torah too can penetrate my heart.’ And it did.

“The shepherd’s name was Akiva, and many years later, he became the greatest of the *Tannaim*.”

And the Old Man would explain—“Wisdom and knowledge are two different things. Undoubtedly, many people had observed that very stone, and thousands like it. But they didn’t see what Rabbi Akiva saw. Rabbi Akiva—though ignorant—was wise. His eyes saw what others failed to see. Knowledge rests in the brain, but wisdom shines from the eyes.”

It was his eyes—Reb Yechiel decided. The Old Man’s powers lay in his eyes. Somehow, the Old Man saw things differently. Others looked, but he penetrated. Others saw, but he understood. Generations earlier, he might have joined Akiva, the Shepherd, at the spring... and he, too, would have understood.

Many great men aspired to reach the level of *Pardes*—the garden of *HaShem*’s secrets—where are hidden the luscious fruits of pure knowledge. But only four were privileged to enter during their lifetime. And of the four, only Rabbi Akiva was great enough to grow from the experience.

And, on his own level—Reb Yechiel would soon discover—the Old Man knew some secrets, too.

For the first time since he came to town, Reb Yechiel felt awkward. During the question period after the *shiur*, his friends would ask all kinds of questions—about Torah, *halacha*, or life in general. But, try as he might, Reb Yechiel never had a question. And for the first time since he came to town, Reb Yechiel actually felt like an *am ha’aretz*.

Reb Yechiel strained to remember. Sometime, long ago he had asked his

Cheder Rebbe a question that he could not answer.

“The last letter of the *Aleph Bais*, the *Tof*, has a numerical value—*gematriya*—of 400. Wouldn’t it be more appropriate,” Reb Yechiel asked, “to end with a rounded number, such as 100 or 1,000 or even 10,000?”

The Old Man sat back and paused, choosing his words carefully.

“To answer your question properly, one would have to delve deeply into



areas that are best left to those more capable than we. But—in a more simple sense, the *Tof*, the power of 400, symbolizes a very potent force. Four hundred is the numerical equivalent of *Ayin Ra*¹—the evil eye. *Ayin Ra*, as explained by those who understand such things, is an all-consuming power. Eisav, Bilaam, Nevuchadnetzer, and even Satan himself are said to take their destructive powers from this mysterious force.

“The Talmud relates that Rav once spoke to the souls of the dead, and was told—‘of every hundred people who are buried, ninety nine die of *Ayin Ra*, and only one of natural causes.’

“The *Aleph Bais* ends with the *Tof*, as if to warn that after the *Ayin Ra*, nothing more can come. To re-

main outside of this influence, we must attach ourselves to another *Tof*—the Torah, which saves and protects. The word which occurs most often in the Torah, ‘es², has a numerical value of 401, to symbolize its superiority over *Ayin Ra*.”

The answer did not really satisfy Reb Yechiel. Somehow, numerology, spirits, and evil eyes seemed far removed from 20th century America. And, why attach such significance to a number?

The Old Man saw this. “You’re skeptical because you do not understand. Some day, when you really want to understand, perhaps you will.” The Old Man’s eyes seemed sure that the day would come.

In ensuing days, the topic of *Ayin Ra* seemed to come up often in the Old Man’s *shiur*. And, more often than not, it had some connection to the number four hundred. Sometimes, it seemed to Reb Yechiel that the Old Man was speaking to him. Maybe it was his imagination.

“Efron, too, had an evil eye. His generous offer to Avraham was part of a scheme to get an exorbitant price for the *MeOras Hamachpella*, the cave where Avraham buried Sarah. And, *Rashi* tells us, that for this reason, the Torah spells his name with the letter *Vov* missing.

“Efron³ without a *Vov*,” the Old Man explained, “has a numerical value of 400.

“And the price paid for the *Meoras Hamachpella* was precisely 400 dinars.”

The year was 1980 and Reb Yechiel’s *parnasa* was in precious metals. As the price of gold soared towards \$1,000 an ounce, he invested heavily in the metal. Then, almost overnight, his inventory was devalued by 50%. Reb Yechiel always relied on his business sense and he felt sure that gold and silver prices would rebound. Stubbornly, he held

The clearest vantage point from which to view life is from the hospital bed.

on to his stock, only to see its value continue to fall.

And still, the Old Man spoke of *Ayin Ra*...

It was Parshas *VaYishlach* "Yaakov was blessed with the power of the voice—*Kol Yaakov*, while Eisav was given the power of the eye. *Yedei Eisav*⁴ has the numerical value of 400, symbolizing his mastery of using the *Ayin Ra* to destroy.

"When Eisav threatened to do battle with Yaakov, Yaakov sent him gifts. Rashi explains that he did this 'to satisfy the eyes' of Eisav. With what power did Eisav come to wage war with Yaakov?"—Reb Yechiel looked down at the *Chumash* before him—"With 400 men."

Reb Yechiel's business, and the industry in general, continued to decline. Reb Yechiel's income still was more than adequate for most households. But, his standard of living was higher than most, and, soon, Reb Yechiel felt it prudent to make some downward adjustments. There were people in town, Reb Yechiel knew, who were always jealous of his wealth. It hurt to see those feelings placated.

The Old Man quoted *Rabbeinu B'chat*: "The greatest act of kindness ever to occur was the giving of the Torah at Sinai and the elevation of *Klal Yisroel* as the Chosen People. Subsequently, the Jews would become susceptible to the *Ayin Ra*, and to shield them from this *HaShem* decreed that they would first work and suffer in a land that is not theirs for 400 years. Again, the number 400. And, here too, the words '*Eretz lo lahem*'⁵—a land that is not theirs—has the numerical value of 400."

Reb Yechiel could restrain his doubts no longer. "You keep on speaking of *Ayin Ra*, something totally inexplicable. We live in a civilized, technological society; are we supposed to believe in old wives' tales like *Ayin Ra*?"

The Old Man betrayed no surprise or condemnation for Rev Yechiel's



outburst of "heresy." "There were *Gaonim* and *Rishonim* who did not feel bound to believe in *sheidim* and other spirits. But *Ayin Ra* is different. Reference is made to it in *Chumash*, when Yaakov gave Yoseif the blessing of '*alei ayin*'—invulnerability from *Ayin Ra*. The *Shulchan Aruch* mentions *Ayin Ra* in regard to various practical *halachos*, because *Ayin Ra* falls into the realm of the natural, not the supernatural. As to its explainability," the Old Man smiled, "I will explain it to you, Reb Yechiel. But now, it's time for *Ma'ariv*."

As his business fortunes drifted, Reb Yechiel became desperate for new customers. And when one such customer called from Miami, he flew down to meet him.

It was a set up. Reb Yechiel had barely left the airport when two goons approached him. Months earlier, Reb Yechiel would have quickly handed over his goods, but now he hesitated. His delay cost him a bullet in the chest.

"The clearest vantage point from which to view life," the Old Man had once said, "is from the hospital bed." As he was carried to the emergency room, Reb Yechiel understood what he had meant. His business problems were far from his mind. And, as he slipped into unconsciousness, the

light bulbs above him seemed to take on the shining shape of the Old Man's eye. ...

Reb Eliezer was once arrested and prosecuted in the Roman courts. Upon returning home, he took account of anything he had ever done, seeking a sin that had been responsible for this punishment, so that he would be able to repent. Try as he would, he could find nothing.

His chavertim came to console him, but he would not be comforted. Finally, his talmid Rabbi Akiva asked to say a few words. "Perhaps you once spoke to an apikores—a heretic—and enjoyed his words. For that reason, the heretics instigated against you in the Roman courts. That would be fair punishment."

Rabbi Akiva was right. Rabbi Eliezer recalled speaking to an apikores many years earlier, and enjoying a witty comment he had made.

Rabbi Akiva saw what other great men couldn't see. The Byways of Heavenly Justice were open before his shining eyes. And he could know something about Rabbi Eliezer that Rabbi Eliezer himself did not recall.

Mortals that we are, we should never attempt to keep an accounting of *HaShem*'s actions. Bad things happen to good people; if not, man would lose his valuable power of *bechira*—free will. Yet there are some very special people with very clear eyes who can see through the curtains of nature, to view the Heavenly Byways. And on certain very rare occasions, for reasons known to Him, G-d parts the curtain and an ordinary person can receive some very valuable information.

Reb Yechiel was depressed. It had been a very rough year, and now, he was holed up in a hospital far from home, recuperating from a collapsed lung. The long lay-off would not bode well for his business.

Then the Old Man walked in. Reb Yechiel was astounded. The Old Man

had travelled to Miami to visit him! The two sat and talked. And Reb Yechiel released his pent-up frustrations. He told the Old Man of his difficulties ... and he could see in the Old Man's eyes that he understood. He understood very well.

"Reb Yechiel, I travelled here because this is a *shas hakosher*, a rare opportunity. Yesterday was too early and tomorrow may be too late, but today I think you'll understand. I want to teach you something about *Ayin Ra*.

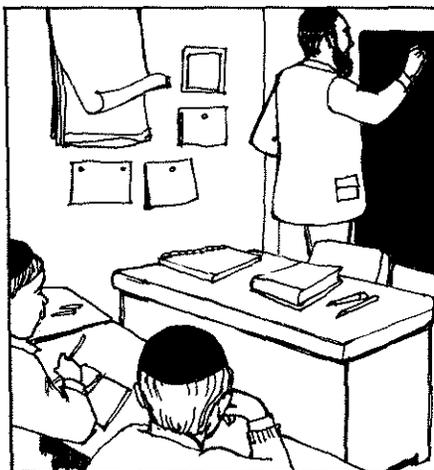
"Man's feelings—his emotions of joy and grief, of love and hate—can have tremendous effects in the physical world. While *HaShem* does not reward us for *mitzvos* in this world, He does reward man for the joy and love with which a *mitzva* is performed. In this manner, emotions have constructive power.

"But they can be destructive too. Jealousy and hate are powers of destruction, more lethal than bombs and bullets. When one is fortunate enough to be blessed with unusual wealth, he is in danger. By flaunting his wealth, he causes jealousy, anguish and hurt. These feelings, although wrong, are very natural, and the man who flaunts his wealth should have avoided causing them. The effects of these feelings are, in its most simple sense, what we refer to as *Ayin Ra*. One must pay in one way or another for causing pain to others. And then, when people don't find someone's good fortune acceptable, they provoke Heavenly justice to question if the person is truly deserving of his wealth, or whatever. The net result is usually harmful to the person involved.

"When brothers lose a father, the *bechor* (eldest son) receives a double portion of the inheritance. This is coming to him—it is the *halacha*, and it shouldn't cause jealousy among brothers. However, when one is NOT a *bechor*, and his father bequeaths him a double portion, hurt and jealousy are a very normal consequence. Of all the brothers, Yaakov blessed only Yoseif with *alei ayin*. By giving Yoseif a double portion, Yaakov was—in a sense—putting him in danger, which the *bracha* alleviated.

"There are two ways for a man to avoid *Ayin Ra*. One is to hide his

wealth. "The *Ain Ra* has no effect on things hidden from the eye," says the Talmud. The other is to study Torah. Because when righteous people are rewarded by *HaShem*, He—like Yaakov—protects them from any potential harm His gifts may cause.



"And you, Reb Yechiel"—the Old Man spoke with a stony seriousness—"are in desperate need of both these cures. For years you've abused a wealth you hardly deserved, and now—the eyes all around are beginning to demand satisfaction."

The Old Man opened a small brown *sefer* he had brought along—the *Derech HaShem**. He read to Reb Yechiel: "To straighten the crookedness symbolized by the letter *Tof*—this is all that is required of man."

Reb Yechiel wasn't exactly sure what the words meant; but the message hit home. To fight the *Tof*, he'd have to begin from *Aleph*.

We arrived in Monsey just as my guest concluded his tale. As I pulled up to the address he had given me, I introduced myself to him. "And you must be a *mechanech*—a teacher," I remarked. "*Mechanchim* always have such interesting stories."

"Yes," he answered, "I'm an *Alef-Bais rebbe*. Until a few years ago, though, I was a businessman. The name is Steinmetz—Yechiel Steinmetz."

He winked, and before I could say a word, he was off.

*by R'Moshe Chaim Luzzato, better known as author of *Mesilas YeShirim*. The above quote appears in *Derech Etz Chaim* (pg. 135 of the popular edition) in greater length.

As I drove on, I reviewed the amazing story—and the various *gematriyos*—I had just heard. And I smiled as I realized that the *gematriya** of "Rabbi Akiva" is 401. ■

*The proper Hebrew spelling of "Akiva" is with a 'Heh' at the end, making the *Im Hakollel gematriya*, 401. (*Hakdomo to Ohr Zarua*).

THE NUMERICAL EQUIVALENTS:

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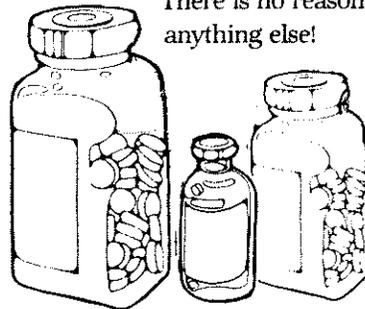
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עופר מלר משיב:
אור לבנים - לא חושך להורים

The Sad, Sad Triumph of OPHER MAHLER

In the past twenty years, something new has been added to the annals of religious Jewish folklore—the *ba'al teshuva* story. Typically, it begins with a young man or woman living a life which is as estranged from Jewish tradition as one can possibly imagine: visiting a guru high atop a mountain in Tibet, or reaching the heights of cinematic stardom in Hollywood or Tel Aviv, or perhaps careening to the top of the economic heap as a brilliant Wall Street analyst. Comes the obligatory trip to Israel (or, if you're Israeli, the three years of army service), the epiphany, when one faces the emptiness of one's life, and the discovery of the yeshiva, of *Shabbos*, of Torah. Shortly thereafter, comfortably esconced in a small apartment in Matersdorf/Arzei HaBira/Monsey, with spouse and children, the aliya from secularism ends. And they live happily ever after.

Though many of us recognize that the personal journey of each and every Jew who returns to his G-d and the Torah is not quite as simple as all that, there is a tendency to facile treatment. In our joy at the return of

Mrs. Zakon, translator of Artscroll's English-language *Tzena U'rena*, and author of several novels on Jewish themes for teenagers, wrote "The Teacher is the Lesson" about Sarah Schenirer for the April '85 *Jewish Observer*.

large numbers of Jews to Judaism, we often find a feeling of self-righteous smugness with ourselves and our cause. We are right, they are wrong; we are victorious, they are defeated; we are to be praised, they, censured.

But before we break out the *l'chaims*, before we begin the celebrations, let us take a look at one particular family, one particular *ba'al teshuva*. We shall see that our joy, while appropriate, ought to be muted. Perhaps the happy ending is not quite what we should expect.

Let us examine, then, the sad, sad triumph of Opher Mahler.

THE PARENTS AND THEIR SON

My first look at the inner workings of the embattled Mahler family came through a cover story in the weekend magazine of Israel's largest newspaper, *Ma'ariv*. Written by Professor Dan Mahler, it was a tale of an aggrieved father, a put-upon mother, an ungrateful child.

The facts in themselves were not unusual. Dan Mahler was a professor in Ben Gurion University in Be'er Sheva. His wife, Sophia, also had a doctorate. Their eldest son, Opher,

had been a bright and talented boy, interested in theater, in drawing, in science and geology. The Holocaust, particularly, had always fascinated him. In politics, he leaned towards the nationalist Techiya camp.

Like many, indeed most, Israelis, the family's secular roots did not go very deep. Their stock was Chasidic, but of their traditions and faith, only the slightest hint, the faintest memory, remained.

Opher's life followed the well marked course of a middle-class secular Israeli. He went to school, graduated, and joined the ranks of the army. At the end of his service, his parents expected him to attend university, hopefully marry, and make them proud of him.

It was not to be. Stung by the taunts of an Egyptian in Eilat, who ridiculed his claim that Israel's justification for existence was to be found in the Bible—"Do you live by the Bible? What connection do you have with your Bible?"—Opher began to seek his Jewish roots. At the beginning of army service, he told his parents that he was going to a presentation by a group called "Na'aseh Ve'Nishma," an organization dedicated to rekindling the flame of Torah in Jews. Slowly, inexorably, Opher rediscovered what his par-

ents had lost—and Opher changed. First, a knitted *kipa*, followed by a black one; *tzitzis*, *payos*, black suit. University was rejected; Opher was sitting and learning Talmud.

Were the Mahlers pleased that their son had found a lifestyle which brought him boundless satisfaction? Did they breathe a sigh of relief that their son had rejected the drug culture, was not living with an Arab girl, had chosen ideals over materialism?

Not exactly.

To hear it from Dan Mahler, their son has chosen a lifestyle which has placed an impenetrable barrier between him and his family. He can no longer speak to his son, for they have nothing in common to speak of. His son withholds his two young children from loving grandparents, insults his mother, incites his brothers and sisters. The long-suffering parents held their peace but, finally, it all welled up inside of them, and they were forced to take their story to the public: the mother, in the leftist magazine *Koteret Reishit*, the father in his story in *Ma'ariv*.

Mahler, Sr.: My son has discovered 612 mitzvos; he never heard of #613—honoring his parents.

SOME DISTURBING INCONSISTENCIES

An objective look at the Mahler story, though, discovers some disturbing inconsistencies. Mahler begins his diatribe with the accusation that his son, in rediscovering 612 commandments, had ignored the 613th: the commandment of honoring one's parents. But he himself admits that his son "desires to avoid open quarrel . . . telephones sometimes to ask how I am, remembers my birthday and brings me a gift, and tells me that he loves me. . . ." The picture of the recalcitrant and obstinate child grows dimmer, becomes fuzzy: Is it because the only sin which the father can discover, the ultimate crime, was his son's choice of a life which does not seem suitable to him? Strange, for someone so liberal, for someone whose canon and code of ethics is based on a belief in "live and let alive." But this, to Mahler's way of thinking, is not life. . . .

Mahler speaks of a home replete with books, with music, with good conversation. In his child's home, he cries, there is nothing. It is a heartbreaking scene, but again, there's that disturbing inconsistency: Can it be that a man who spends practically every waking hour poring over *seforim* has not one book in his home? Is it possible that a Jew who lingers for hours over *Shabbos zemitros* has totally rejected music?

Ah, but those are not Mahler's books. That is not Mahler's kind of music.

The breach widens. The man whom the father publicly terms a *ben sorer u'moreh* (the archetypical rebellious son—see *Devarim* 21, 18-21) opens his home to his parents. But the parents cannot come, for their only free time is on *Shabbat*.



To visit their children and grandchildren, they would have to come before *Shabbat* and stay all day. And there is nothing for him to do there, complains the Professor. "I do not go to the synagogue, that is not my way of life." The loving father cannot be expected to sacrifice one day of soccer to be with his grandchildren.

Professor Mahler does not deign to speak of his son's teachers as rabbis; they are, in his estimation, missionaries. His son has not freely chosen his new life; he has been brainwashed. Mahler says that he would have accepted his son's choice, had he done it after much thought and reading, but this is not the case. The choice, rather, was made almost overnight.

Strange, because at the same time Mahler maps out his son's course, finding several distinct stages of religious development (overnight? Without thought?). He admits that the first clear interest in religion was sparked at the beginning of his son's Army stint, while his final decision as to lifestyle was not reached until over three years later.

Yes, there are inconsistencies, untruths, exaggerations a-plenty in the Senior Mahler's invective. The objective reader should reject much of what he has to say out of hand, merely on the basis of rational consideration.

Unfortunately, it didn't happen.

THE MEDIA AND THE BITTERNESS

The Mahler story struck an incredibly responsive chord throughout Israel. People talked about it, wrote about it, ar-

**זהירות!
ה"חזרה בתשובה"
אורבת לפתח ביתכם!**

כולנו עדים לחידים העצומים הרועמים כיום בארץ כתוצאה מתגובותיהם של נפגעי ח"ה, החזרה בתשובה, וביחוד לאחר פרסום זעקת הכאב של פרופ' דן מלר (המערבני, 18.10.85).

מארת המכתבים ואלפי הטלפונים שהתקבלו הם רק אות ראשון לכך, שעניינים רבים נפקחות לראות נכוחה את השקפה הזדון וההרס שב"החזרה בתשובה".

אנו, ארגון נפגעי החזרה בתשובה מצלצלים שוב ושוב בפעמוני האזהרה: **יהודים העילו! העיירה בווערת!**

אם לא תהיו ערים לבערה, יאם לא תשייעו לשכניכם — מחר הפגע האש בבתיכם שלכם היום נפגענו אנו — מחר עלולים להפגע אתם, ילדיכם ונכדיכם.

תודתנו על אלפי מילות העידוד והחיזוק אולם מלים לא תספקנה: הביעו השהת פותכם באופן פעיל: בכל בעיה, משאלה או רצון לפעול — פנו מיד ל"אגודת נפגעי החזרה בתשובה" — ת.ד. 10431 תל-אביב 61-131, ויחד נפעל לבלמת נוע ה"החזרה בתשובה", ויחד נגבר עליו.

**ד"ר צופיה ופרופ' דן מלר
וכל חברי אגודת
"נפגעי החזרה בתשובה"**

Declaration of war against ba'alet teshuva, printed in Israeli papers.

gued about it. It became something of a media event, with the son's story and response being printed in *Erev Shabbat*, a religious weekly, and, later, in *Ma'ariv's* weekend magazine. Secular and religious newspapers carried the story. There were editorials, mass meetings, letters to the editor. The furor wouldn't die.

It is in this astonishing response that the first sad fact displays itself: Large numbers, enormously large numbers of Israelis feel threatened, alarmed, and upset by the religious awakening of their youth. Despite the clear inconsistencies; despite the obvious rejection of the liberal values which the Drs. Mahler themselves purport to espouse, values that include the acceptance of alternative lifestyles; despite the monstrous assertion that Mahler would have "preferred to see his son a drug addict, for there is a cure for drugs and none for religion"—despite all of these things, Jewish parents wrote in support of Dan Mahler, in bitter disapproval of his wayward son.

Mahler had titled his article: "We Have Lost A Son." What a frightening thing, that in the land of Israel, where so many men and women learned the true meaning of grief as they lost their sons to four wars, only a few voices, the vast majority of them religious, were heard decrying a father who had "lost his son" through his own grim choice!

A NATIONAL DIMENSION

Were the conflicts between parents and child confined to one troubled family in Be'er Sheva the story would be a sad one, but would lack the dimensions of a national tragedy. Unfortunately, it is not confined to Be'er Sheva. While many, perhaps most, parents welcome, or at the very least, tolerate their children's new religious lifestyle, large numbers do feel threatened. With the support of the Mahlers and other ultra-leftists, a society has been formed for these parents, a society which has dedicated itself to fighting the "missionaries" that "threaten our children."

And so, along with the celebration of the new movement of return, along with the joy, there are tears to be shed. There are tears for the Mahlers

Said the Egyptian soldier: "You claim that the Land is yours because of the Bible.—Do you live by the Bible?"

and their many counterparts—they, too, are Jewish children; lost, hating, but always Jewish—tears for the many Israelis who, if not so steeped in Jewish self-hatred as to disown their children, still feel a kinship with Dan Mahler and his preference for drugs over Torah.

Our joy in our new-found returnees cannot be complete, not while there is so much to be done. There are so many misunderstandings to explain, so much hatred to overcome. The full celebration must wait; the happy ending is not yet upon us.

This, then, is the sad, sad dimension of the personal triumph of Opher Mahler.

Have the secular Israelis strayed so far from their own religion that they have come to this? For every

Jew who comes back, is there one who turns his back, who rejects, who hates with every fiber of his being?

And what of the purveyors of that hatred, the media, who grab at the chance to humiliate their Jewishness? In his introduction to Mahler's article, Editor Tzvi Lavi writes of his own personal feelings of sorrow and empathy for the *av shakul*, the father who lost his son, and for the thousands of parents who have remained in "their own silent hell" while their children enjoy their new-found spiritual heaven. He speaks of the "cruel laws" of fanaticism, which "know no compromise, and father, mother, and the old world be damned."

Anyone who has had any kind of contact with a *ba'al teshuva* knows just what an ugly distortion of reality these words are. And yet they flow from the pen of a journalist, one of a breed that prides itself on objectivity! Dr. Mahler's poison pen article appeared without any response from Opher; "equal time" is not something that secularists believe in, it seems. Only after the furor grew too great to ignore; only after the religious press took up Opher's cause and printed his version of the truth; only weeks later, did *Ma'ariv* finally see fit to grant Opher Mahler space for a reply. ■

Opher Mahler today with his son.



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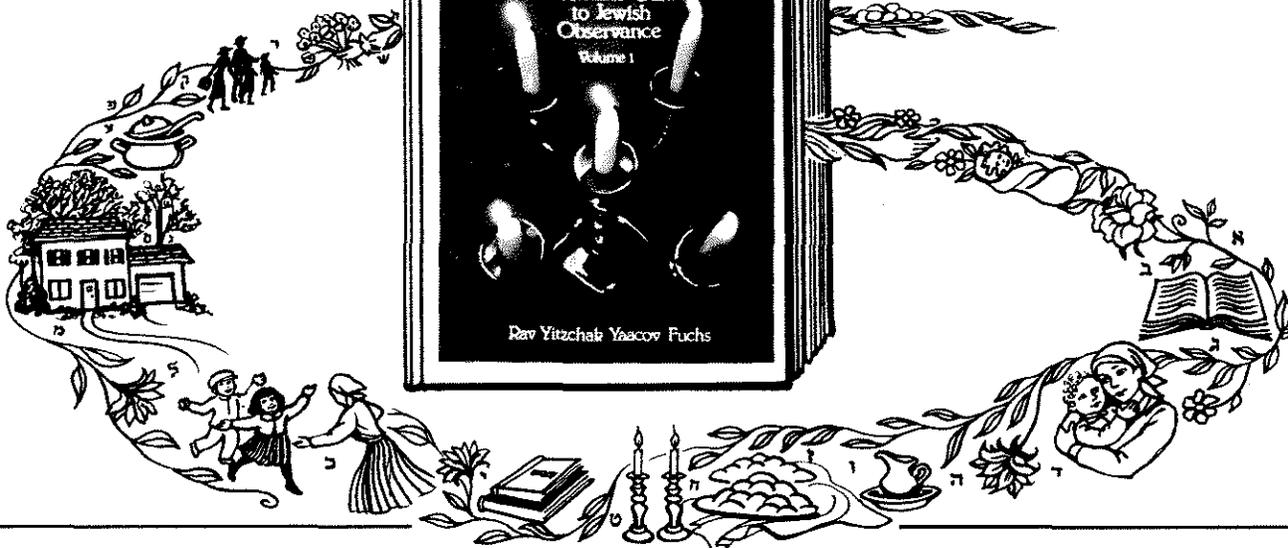
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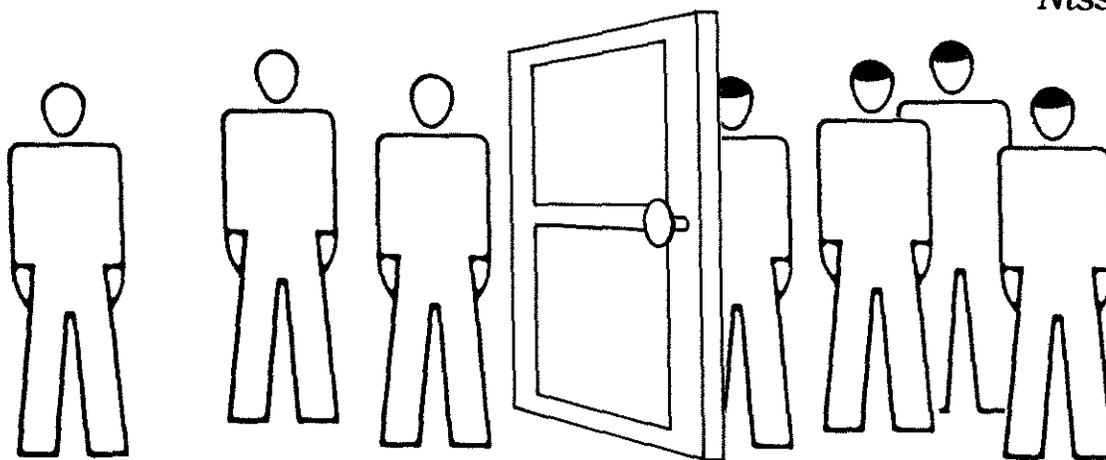
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Second Looks at the Jewish Scene

Nisson Wolpin



“SELEKTZIA” AFTER THE FACT

In Search of Gentler Metaphors

A MISGUIDED LOAN

Events and figures from history are convenient in helping us understand contemporary problems, even if only as a point of reference—“a national tragedy surpassed only by the destruction of the Second Temple” ... “joy unequalled since the *Simchas Bets Hasho’etva*” ... “not since the pogroms of Chmielnitzki” ... “clarity of thinking rivalled only by that of Rabbi Akiva Eiger” ... “a veritable Haman!”

The systematic murder of Six Million Jews by Nazi Germany during World War II so stands out as an atrocity without parallel in history, that it became necessary to create an entire lexicon of terms to describe the events surrounding it: genocide, Holocaust, *Selektzia*, *Kapo*, *Musselman*, *Zyklon B.* ... These words are double-edged swords and as a result one should think twice about borrowing them to describe other events, for fear either of trivializing the horrors they originally were meant to describe, or of inflating the crimes and sufferings of other epochs. (Remember how upset we all were—liberals and conservatives—when the Blacks complained of Genocide in Bedford-Stuyvesant, or Holocaust in Watts?)

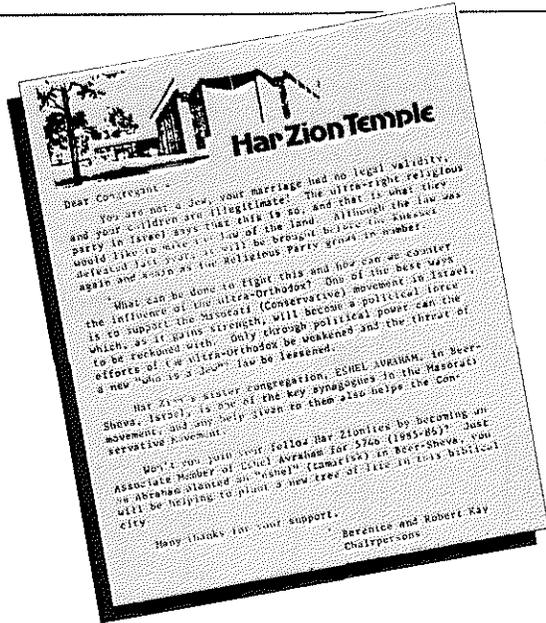
It is thus deeply disconcerting to read the statement of Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, head of the Reform Union of American Hebrew Congregations, depicting Orthodox Jewry’s rejection of the Reform open-door policy to intermarried non-Jews as Jews. Says Schindler:

“Today, only one generation after Auschwitz, and only one month after the tragedy of the Achille Lauro, Orthodox zealots persist in their efforts to establish their own kind of selecting process, not in Poland, but before the gates of Jerusalem, not to sort the strong from the weak, but Jew from Jew.”

quoted in the *N.Y. Times*, Nov. 13, '85

The infamous Mengele sorted Jew from Jew, dispatching this one to a swift death, that one to a slower, living death. So much for the original *Selektzia*.

As for Orthodoxy’s insistence that Jewry be protected from an influx of non-Jews being granted recognition by Reform’s latest non-restrictive policies—we are not alone in this. Every religious group has its standards for admission, no less we Jews, whose guidelines are from Sinai. Granted, our ranks are hemorrhaging through assimilation, intermarriage and just plain evaporation—notably from the liberal flank, where identification is anchored by neither memory nor commitment to Judaism. Granted, the Reform movement is doing its best to keep the ranks full by stretching the definition of Jewishness to include children of mixed marriages even when the mother is a non-Jew, as long as the child is “brought up as a Jew”; as well as non-Jews who “convert” without accepting Torah and *mitzvos*, as long as they “identify with the Jewish people” (whatever that means). These people lack the basic conditions for joining Jewry—they were not born Jewish and they did not undergo full conversion—and Torah law does not accept them as Jews.



Recognizing criteria for membership and abiding by these rules does not make one guilty of "Selektzia."

FROM MADISON AVENUE'S DUST BIN

Why does the Reform leadership persist in making such a dishonest and unsavory comparison? There is an old rule in public relations whereby any claim, no matter how preposterous, is ultimately believed if it is repeated often enough. Madison Avenue has risen above such deliberate disinformation, but the Reform Movement seems to still be in the snake-oil-that'll-remove-your-warts-and-make-your-roses-bloom era. Say it again, and incredulity goes with the wind: People will believe that the Orthodox are reading Conservative and Reform Jews out of Jewry, all protests to the contrary notwithstanding. (Of course Reform and Conservative Jews are Jews. It is the Reform and Conservative "rabbis" that are not rabbis, and their converts that are not *geirim*.)

As for the motive behind the Reform leadership's assault on Orthodoxy, it is obviously out of a sense of desperation born from witnessing the Orthodox upsurge of the last twenty years, highlighted by the two bulkheads of this growth—the yeshiva movement and the *baal teshuva* phenomenon—that the Reform leadership has resorted to a cheap hucksterism, hawking a phony product with a sophistication all its own. (Insiders admit quite openly that the deviationists have resorted to ordaining women, against historical and halachic precedent, because their seminaries have failed to attract quality candidates.)

In addition to the *Selektzia* label tacked on to Orthodox policies, some additional unflattering—and totally fallacious—labels have been dusted off for Orthodoxy. "Ultra-Orthodox": the prefix "ultra" is defined as "going beyond the ordinary; excessive; extreme" (*Random House Dictionary*). Whenever the Torah community is conspicuous by achievement, pronouncement, or simply in numbers, it is perceived as a threat, and must be

When the sheep slip out of the fold, conventional wisdom would call for locking the gate, not extending the parameters of the pasture. But this point has been made *ad infinitum* in these pages. More germane is Schindler's outrageous accusation that Orthodoxy is guilty of *Selektzia*.*

(Parenthetically, a number of advocates of a Jewish unity totally void of halachic guidelines, including some Orthodox rabbis such as Irving Greenberg, have described denominational differences between types of Jews as "irrelevant and even obscene," since Hitler did not discriminate between Hassidim, Orthodox and Reform Jews, consigning them all to the gas chambers. It's worth noting that we are defined by Torah at best, by ourselves at worst, but never by our enemies. Moreover, the tragic *Selektzia* at the gates of Auschwitz affected avowed Christians whose entire reason for internment was a single Jewish paternal ancestor, and whose identity was so patently non-Jewish that even Alexander Schindler would not consider them Jews. Recognizing criteria for membership and abiding by these rules does not make someone guilty of "*Selektzia*.")

*Harold Schulweis, Reconstructionist rabbi of Encino, California, favors the term "Apartheid" to describe Orthodox practice of defining Jewishness. (See *Moment*, Dec. '85.)

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discredited with an "ultra" tag, as in the Jan. 7, 1986 Zionist International News Service item (which follows the discrediting tactic of the Reform Movement)

"JERUSALEM'S ULTRA-ORTHODOX POPULATION REACHED 27 PERCENT JERUSALEM (ZINS)—The rapidly growing ultra-Orthodox population in Jerusalem is now 27 percent of the city's Jewish population, or some 85,000 persons, according to a study of the Jerusalem Institute for Israel's Studies."

Kippah Sruga or goldcolored *Kaftan*, it's all the same. As long as they don't go to the movies on *Shabbos*, or have large families, they're "ultra."

TWO MORE FOR "ACHDUS"

Another two choice epithets for Torah Jews are "Fundamentalists" and "Triumphalism"—reducing Orthodoxy's commitment and growth to the two dimensions of America's more simplistic religious movements. True, Orthodox Jews do live by the letter of the law, but *not* by the literal meaning of the texts. Not content with Falwelling the yeshivos and Chassidim, the Reformers do one better and equate the Torah leaders with—we'll allow them to speak for themselves. . . . The following quotation is from a public notice that appeared in the November 7, '85 edition of the *Australian Jewish*

**Say something preposterous once,
and people will laugh. Say it
again . . . and again, and
incredulity goes with the wind.**

Times, placed by the ARZI Community Forum (ARZI is the Reform Zionist organization):

"FROM THE AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI TO THE SATMARER REBBE — RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM — TWIN THREATS TO THE MIDDLE EAST."

So, in one statement the Reform leadership claims that its aspirations for Jewish unity are being torn asunder by ultra-Orthodox extremism. At the same time, it issues other statements that find us guilty of *Selektzia*, *Apartment*, and *Khomeini-ism*! Yet it can succeed in both attempts—even influencing Reform supporters of Torah and the building of Zion to withhold contributions from Orthodox institutions (see attached)—as part of its adept handling of a cheap Snake Oil pitch. Admittedly, an unpleasant metaphor. But unfortunately, too apt. ■

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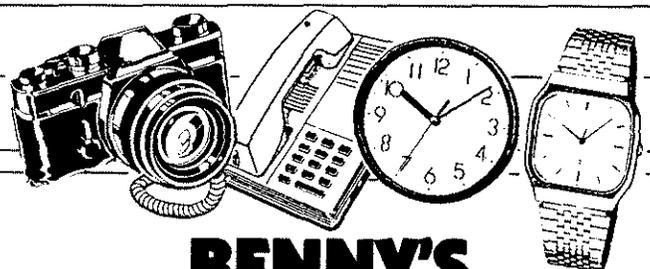
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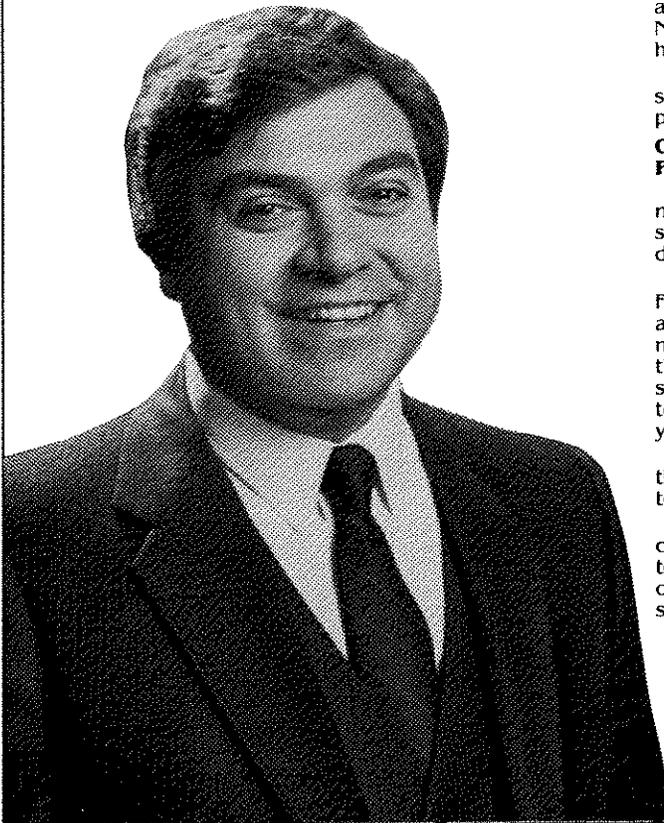
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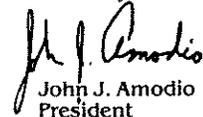
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CHALLENGER: A TRAGIC REMINDER

Oh L-rd, how mighty is Your Name throughout the earth. . . . When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have set in place. . . . What is the frail human that You should remember him?

Tehillim VIII, 2, 4-5

America and much of the rest of the world were on the launching pad, as it were, with the seven brave astronauts on the fateful Tuesday morning when the Challenger space shuttle prepared for its flight. And the shock of its tragic explosion seventy-four seconds after its spectacular lift-off hit with all the more impact on the rest of us, here on earth. Along with the overwhelming sense of personal loss, there was a tightening of a certain tension that pervades all of men's explorations of the further reaches of our universe.

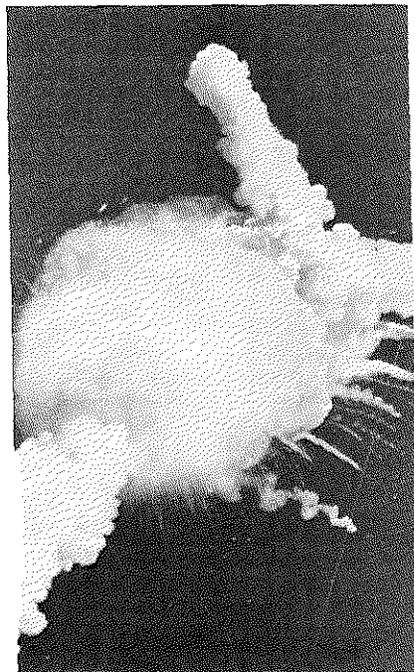
What is the nature of this tension? On the one hand, Voyager 2 (for instance) continually opens our eyes to the ever-splendrous wonders of creation, inspiring puny man with an overwhelming sense of humility. On the other hand, it reminds us how man has succeeded in dispatching his probing eyes across the cosmos and is capable of viewing visions transmitted by signals, describing a view that was not even guessed at a generation ago. Greatness and humility, each growing with every quantum leap forward in technology and science. And now, the sudden setback.

In truth, however, man's self-image as conqueror of the universe is obviously illusory from the first contemplation of leaving the supportive environment of earth. The space suits, the controlled atmosphere of the space vehicle, the elaborate technological appurtenances that surround his journey

beyond earth, all testify to man's vulnerability. Moreover, the totally unanticipated explosion of Challenger only served to further dramatize man's fragility. Indeed, the technicians will pore over every frame of film of the crucial two minutes to try to find the tell-tale spark or loose bolt that caused the tragic mishap. And they must.

Yet, whatever the apparent cause, the thread that runs through it all testifies to man's total dependency on the grace of the Creator, which transcends any measure of man's ability to anticipate needs, hazards, and problems, and to accommodate them. This dependency, however, exists not only when he is beyond Earth's gravitational pull, but even when his feet are planted firmly on terra firma itself; here, too, man needs G-d's grace and providence to protect him and sustain him. Need we refer to the awesome earthquakes of Mexico City and the terrifying mudslides of Colombia to underscore the point? Not really.

Man does not move without risking all sorts of hazards to life and limb. And even the conventional day-to-day functions of life and limb, unto themselves, are miracles. Of course, illness or personal mishap of one sort or another will provoke a search for natural causes—too much cholesterol in the diet?—too much stress in business, or at home?—a faulty brake shoe in the car? One always seeks natural causes for whatever occurs. And one should, so as to correct things on the natural level, but we must not stop there. Every reli-



gious Jew expresses his gratitude to G-d three times daily for

נסך שבכל יום עמנו ועל נפלאותיך

וטובותיך שבכל עת ערב ובקר וצהרים . . .

"For Your miracles that are with us every day, and for Your wonders and favors in every season, evening, morning, and afternoon. . . ." (Modim)

To whatever extent man succeeds in maintaining his own survival—even under optimum conditions—this self-sufficiency is illusory, for man is simply not in control of his life situation. As David Hamelech said, when he sang G-d's praises:

לעושה נפלאות גדולות לבדו, כי לעולם חסדו

"To Him who performs wonders **alone**, for His kindness endures forever." He paid homage to G-d's unique role as the one wonder worker, forever. Man does experience a sense of involvement in his own survival, but in truth it is G-d **alone** who is constantly performing the miracle of life for us.

The shocking termination of Challenger's flight brought us all down to earth again, but no less dependent upon His grace here on earth than in the further reaches of space. Along with "How magnificent is Your handiwork. Oh L-rd" is our constant praise to "Him who performs wonders alone, for His kindness endures forever."

“ . . . ”
with and without comment:



Ethiopians demonstrating at the Western Wall.

Who's Agitating For the Ethiopians?

Among the many adjustments the new *olim* from Ethiopia must undergo in adapting to life in Israel is the Chief Rabbinate's requirement that they undergo conversion to Judaism (at least immersion in a *mikva* and formal acceptance of Torah and *mitzvos* for membership in the Jewish people) so as to qualify for acceptance as Jews.

In truth, this is not only a compromise (foregoing *hatofas dam bris* for males), it successfully circumvents the problem of possible *mamzeirus* that clouds their status. (See JO, April 1985). Mounting pressure and public demonstration against the stance of the Rabbinate has succeeded in directing media and public sentiment for the acceptance of the Ethiopian *olim* as full-

fledged Jews without any conditions whatsoever. The Chief Rabbinate finally agreed to withhold judgment on all Ethiopians until marriage, when every such case would be considered on its own merits by the officiating rabbi. At first, this did not satisfy agitating Ethiopians who carried on a widely publicized demonstration of several weeks' duration in the park opposite the Knesset building in Jerusalem. Eventually, they did disband their demonstration, under the impression that their demands had been met. The Chief Rabbis, however, claimed otherwise (see P.S. in JO, November 1985).

We are quite familiar with the role of some of the left wing Knesset members in poisoning the atmosphere against the rule of Torah law. But what about the Ethiopian agitators? Who are they? Well-meaning Ethiopians who, considering themselves heirs to a long-standing Jewish heritage, are deeply pained by the requirement that they undergo conversion? Or are they agents provocateurs, not at all interested in honoring *halacha*, as the basis of all Jewish life?

The following excerpts from an article in *Maariv*, Israel's popular Labor-backed daily, points to the latter. (The translation is from *Counterpoint*, a supplement to the *Bnai Brith Messenger* weekly of Jan. 3, 1986.)

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The Ethiopian absorption centers are being ruled with an iron fist by an extremist committee of young militants, who don't hesitate to use violence to keep their people in line. They are the new leadership, vying for the power in the community that had in Ethiopia been reserved for the Kessim, the spiritual leaders of the people.

They are not a democratically chosen voice of the people, and according to many who work in the absorption of the community, their methods are similar to the Marxist regime which educated them. At the top of the pyramid is the central committee, governed by Adiso Musala, the Akala family, and Moshe Rachamim. They work together with a small group of spiritual leaders, including Kess (Priest) Ayelin, the spiritual leader of the revolt against the Chief Rabbinate. In the Rabbinate they say his motives are not pure, he is not versed in laws of Kashrut and ritual slaughter, and continues to perform marriages for 12-year old girls, which is against the law of the state.

Each absorption center has its

own local committee. At fixed times during the day they stand by the public telephones and receive the day's orders. They pass these instructions on to the new immigrants who are torn between their trust in the Israeli staff and their own representatives, whose fearful hands loom over them.

When the signal is given, they go out to demonstrate. Many of them don't know what the demonstration is all about. When, and if, they have the nerve to talk to an outsider, they say, "They don't want us here, because we're black. The rabbis don't like our color and therefore they claim we're not Jews. We kept all the commandments under wretched conditions and we're no less Jews than anyone else. Why do they doubt our lineage, and not that of other immigrants?"

A conversation as basic as this was virtually impossible during the strike against the Chief Rabbinate earlier this year. Even now in the absorptions centers, conversations with outsiders are held clandestinely, in a dark doorway or corner. You feel the person you're

speaking with has been threatened and is afraid.

Aliyah Department Head Haim Ahron blames the Absorption Ministry for supporting the committee leadership during the strike against the Rabbinate, thus giving it *de facto* official recognition. MK Miriam Ta'asa-Glaser, head of the Knesset Aliyah Committee, shares this view.

Tamar Eshel, head of the National Council for Ethiopian Jews and former Labor MK, says that all the political private interests have only caused damage. She feels that special-interest groups such as the Conservative and Reform movements have taken a ride on this opportunity to attack the authority of the Chief Rabbinate.

In the absorption centers, the tension is still high. The immigrants for the most part don't understand what they are fighting for, but the gravest danger lies in the stories they are fed, which are laced with racism and discrimination, which does not exist for the most part on the outside.

AVINOAM BAR YOSEF, *Ma'ariv*

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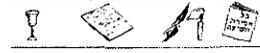
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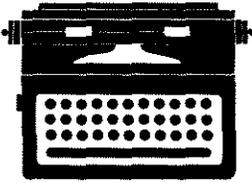
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Letters to the Editor

CRACOW

Outburst at Bar Mitzvah



Rabbi Nachman Elbaum watches as Eric Strom reads from the Torah during his Bar Mitzvah in Cracow.

CRACOW REPORT: SINS OF OMISSION

To the Editor:

Your review ("Second Looks at the Jewish Scene," November *Jewish Observer*, pp. 40-41) of my article on the Cracow *bar mitzva* does not meet the standard of *midvar sheker ttrchak* (Shemos 23, 7) which instructs that even to justify a true ruling, or to communicate a truth, one must not misrepresent the arguments on the other side. (See *Shavuos* 30b and following.) By selective quoting, you imply that I 'forgave' the Reform Jews and faulted Elbaum without any understanding of the Orthodox position. Clearly, such one-sidedness would delegitimize me in the minds of your readers.

The real thrust of the article was not to assign any blame at all—although I remain convinced that "the shame of such a spectacle on the front page of the *New York Times*" was, plain and simple, a *chillul HaShem*. The point of the article is, "the extent to which the Orthodox and the rest of the Jewish commun-

ity now live in two worlds, which lack both an elementary basis of common speech and some mechanism of reconciling conflicting visions of reality."

My article tried to explain both sides to each other. The group who sent the *bar mitzva* to Cracow were individual Jews (not the Federation itself, as you report); most of them were Reform Jews, but they were not looking for a woman rabbi, and not until there was a month to go did they realize the objection that would be raised to sending a woman rabbi to Cracow. It may sound amazing to readers of *The Jewish Observer* that people were not sensitive to this, but that is exactly the point of my article—that this generation of Reform Jews is not "guilty non-observant Orthodox."

At the same time, I explained to the rest of the community the objections of the Orthodox. "The great synagogue of the RMA... was to have a bar mitzva led by a non-Orthodox woman rabbi. Rabbi Moses Isserles is the great Orthodox *poseik* decisor of Polish Jewish history... co-author of the *Shulchan Aruch*..." I described the Orthodox response as, "a travesty... a sense of desecration... outrage at this aggressive incursion by Jews, lacking in learning and observance, into a synagogue which had followed Orthodox practice for centuries."

Some Channel of Contact Could Have Been Worked Out

My main comment was that, even at the last moment—were there some channels of contact—some arrangement could have been worked out to avoid a *chillul HaShem*. Either, pri-

vately, letting the shift of location serve as a solution to avoid public controversy, or, for the sake of peace Eric Strom's rabbi withdraw. (I specifically listed both possibilities.)

You also omit my comment that (as of the writing of the column) not a single leading Orthodox rabbi had disowned "Elbaum's... confrontational intervention"; nor did any leading non-Orthodox rabbi or leader express understanding, regret at the "slight to current halachic practice and Orthodox sensibilities." "As a result, a ceremony that should have brought pure joy and uplift to all of world Jewry has been besmirched and another wedge driven between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews."

You twice state in your column that I did no research other than to read the newspapers and take the reports at face value. In fact, I spoke to the Federation first, and then to the principals who had organized the entire matter. To this day, no Orthodox organization has stepped forward and taken responsibility for inviting Nachman Elbaum to come to Cracow, so I could not check with any such sponsor. It is true that I did not check with Rabbi Elbaum, but I have worked with him in other contexts and I believe that I know him and his approaches well. No one should have gone and confronted the Cracow Bar Mitzva. But, in any event, not Rabbi Elbaum but someone capable of respectfully and eloquently explaining the claims of tradition, should have been there. Even in your version, Rabbi Elbaum's words only sound as if they confirm the stereotypes of Orthodox male chauvinism. You claim that "He was dispatched to Cracow by rabbinical leaders in America"—unless those leaders step forward and take responsibility for their actions (not that I blame them for trying to not be linked to so embarrassing a situation), I cannot assess this claim.

No Mechanism to Avoid A Split in Jewry

Above all, you do not respond seriously to the main concern of my column. There is a mechanism for Israel to deal with Arab nations which are at war with it and sworn

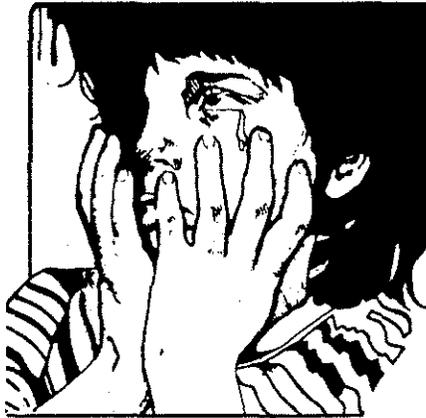
כל המציל נפש אחת מישראל כאילו
קיים עולם מלא

A child is born in Israel to esteemed parents. Her father is a great Talmud Chochom. She is the granddaughter of Gedoeli Yisroel of Yerushalayim. But instead of rejoicing upon her birth, her parents shed many tears. Instead of happiness, there is sadness—for the child is born with a severe problem.

AN EYE IS MISSING ל"ע

Doctors are promising to help medically. However, the costs are tremendous. The financial burden is great!

Dear Friends—Let us help this child have a normal future. please! Open your hearts and give generously. Together, let us help this little girl fill the void in her missing eye! Take part in this great Mitzvah and you shall be rewarded by Hashem for your good deed. Let us help ease the pain of this poor little child and enlighten the hearts of her parents. May you be blessed with good health, prosperity and lots of joy.



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EDITORIAL RESPONSE:

Rabbi Greenberg argues that all the participants in the Cracow bar mitzva were well-meaning, uninformed Jews, and only a lack of channels of communication brought about the "chillul Hashem" that resulted from the media's unfavorable portrayal of the event.

Rabbi Greenberg is apparently unaware that Ms. Korzenick, Eric Strom's "rabbi," made it very clear in an interview on public television that she went to Poland to show the world that America has come of age: the country has women ordained as rabbis. She chose to ignore the pleas of Mrs. Jakubowicz (the Cracow lady who started it all by asking for a Bar Mitzva, last July) that she take into account that "women rabbis are unknown to us" and that she touch base with the Bobover Rebbe. Her role in the family celebration was not meant simply as an innocent social gesture. It was an ideological statement as well, and as such it was totally intolerable, especially in Cracow. For the record, the family was spoken to and Orthodox objections were explained to them, but for reasons of their own they stuck with their original plans to have Ms. Korzenick officiate.

If Rabbi Greenberg means to imply that he would have been an effective "channel of contact," why didn't he get into the act *before* "Monday morning"? Did he require an invitation from Agudath Israel, or Bobov, or the Rabbinical Council of America, to present the Orthodox point of view to the celebrants? Anyone who feels strongly enough about the topic to syndicate his written dismay over its unfortunate resolution should not have hesitated *before* the fact to speak to the principals and attempt to dissuade them from bringing Reform Judaism to Poland. If he did his homework, as he claims, how did he fail to discover Mrs. Jakubowicz's letter of August 4 to Ms. Korzenick in which she asked her to clear her participation in the event with the Bobover Rebbe?

As for Rabbi Elbaum's role, he went to Poland at the request of the leaders of the Committee for Polish Jewry, headed by Rabbi Shlomo Halberstam (Bobover Rebbe): Rabbi Moshe Steinberg, last Rav of Cracow,

to its destruction in order to avoid incidents that can escalate into full-scale war. There is a mechanism for President Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev, the heads of two nations locked in a life-and-death struggle of peace against dictatorship, to talk and to prevent catastrophe, if possible. There is no mechanism to avoid a fundamental split of the Jewish people which is fast approaching. After all, this sad incident is not even near the stature of the truly divisive issues of *mamzerut* or patrilineal descent or delegitimation of mar-

riages. You owe it to your readers to engage in serious discussion as to what all of us can do—not just what the others can do—to avoid fundamental schisms that will weaken the Jewish people. My sad conclusion was, "The prospect of splitting apart on a much more serious issue grows steadily grimmer." I eagerly seek your response and suggestions on this matter.

RABBI IRVING GREENBERG
President
National Jewish Center
for Learning and Leadership



In his opening comments, Davidson, of Temple Beth El, said, "All of us are deeply concerned about the divisiveness in the Jewish community."

He cited the case of the Connecticut youth who last year went to Cracow, Poland for his bar mitzvah, accompanied by his rabbi, a Reconstructionist woman. When she arrived, she found that an Orthodox rabbi had stepped in to bar mitzvah the young man and that when she at-

tempted to speak to him during the service "her tallit was ripped from her shoulders because he (the rabbi) felt she should not be allowed to speak," he said.

Different Viewpoints

Davidson also asserted that the Lubavitch Hasidim "were trying to control Jewish life" by pressing the "who is a Jew" issue in Israel. And he said that a noted Orthodox rabbi, Moshe Feinstein, said "no" when asked if a Conservative rabbi might

Rabbi Greenberg's inflammatory headline gave rise to the fiction that "her tallis was ripped from her shoulder"—as per clipping from Long Island Jewish World (Jan. 17, 1986).

currently head of the *Bets Din* of the Rabbinical Council of America; Dr. Isaac Lewin, a councilman in pre-War Poland, currently chairman of the American section of the World Agudah Organization; and Rabbi Chaskel Besser, a native of Cracow and a Presidium member of Agudath Israel of America. All of these men have a long history of concern for and activity on behalf of Polish Jewry, and are not strangers to the Jews of Cracow. They apparently did have confidence in Rabbi Elbaum and "the way he operates."

(A correspondent pointed out that Rabbi Elbaum took the *tallis* from Ms. Korzenick's hand, not from the hand of the man who offered it to her. Be it so, the inflammatory headline on Rabbi Greenberg's nationally circulated article, "On Saturday, the Rabbi Pulled Off Her Tallis," is still simply untrue and hardly promotes the *achdus* that Rabbi Greenberg professes to represent.)

Why No Dialogue

Yes, it is painful to realize that while Israel talks to Arab nations, and America talks to Russian leaders, some Orthodox rabbis find it impossible to sit down and "work

things out" with Conservative and Reform rabbis. But neither does Israel (nor would America) sit down with countries that do not recognize her right to exist, and are actually out to undermine her fragile existence. And undermine the existence of authentic Judaism is exactly what the Conservative, Reform and Reconstructionist leadership has been doing for the past 150 years. One wonders: Can any Jewish spokesman or leader who accepts Saadia Gaon's definition of Jewry—"We are only a people by virtue of our Torah"—negotiate on equal terms with "rabbis" who deny the divinity of Torah—in effect denying the Jewish people its national existence?

When these "rabbis" operate under a concept of national welfare based on political or social criteria, and they are on a collision course with Orthodox leaders who differ in this concept of "What's good for the Jews"—one built on a foundation of Torah and *daas Torah*—would the so-called liberals even consider a Torah approach at the expense of their own strongly-held convictions?

Can a Jew whose understanding of Judaism consists of the *Rambam's* Thirteen Articles of Faith—the *Ani Maamin's*—have common

religious discourse, deliberation and decision with a Jew that denies the *Ani Maamin's*, and even promotes their abandonment?

And then consider the innocent bystander who is being presented with a religious Jewish *achdus* that cuts across denominational lines; why shouldn't he assume that differences between Orthodoxy and other groups are merely of style and not of substance?—and that there is a commonality amongst the respective clergy that overrides Sinaitic guidelines?

Such blurring of distinctions may indeed promote unity, but it would be a tragic unity, tied together not by the vital Jewish cords of Torah and *emunah*, but one held together by a redefinition of Judaism void of the basics of our faith. Such unity does not perpetuate Jewry, it erodes Jewry.

A "Judaism" That Ignores History and Halacha

Originally, I did not see the need to deal with the section of Rabbi Greenberg's article that discusses unity. The JO discussion was a review of the events in Cracow, not a review of Rabbi Greenberg's article, and it struck me that his call for unity neither added to nor detracted from the examination of what had taken place in Cracow. On second thought, however, the pitch for a non-Torah *achdus* that Rabbi Greenberg underscores in his letter—as indeed he did in his article—only makes it too clear that it is this very kind of *achdus* that would tolerate the travesty of a Reconstructionist lady rabbi officiating in the Cracow of the RMA, destroying that which was built up in Cracow by Sara Schenirer . . . an "I'm OK, You're OK" kind of Judaism that ignores history and *halacha*: history as lived in Cracow, *halacha* as promulgated in Cracow. As long as Sinaitic guidelines for Judaism are ignored, and those who preach their abandonment are accorded dignity, violations of tradition such as a "Rabbi" Korzenick preaching in Cracow will take place. And no recourse will be left but to rely on people like Rabbi Elbaum to preserve the honor of Cracow and its traditions.

NISSON WOLPIN

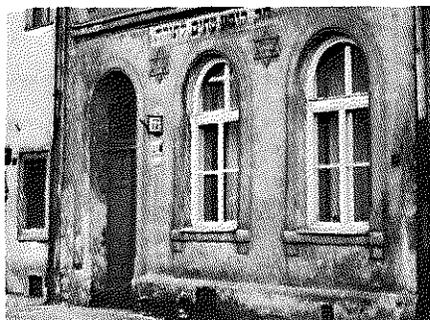


CRACOW: THE FALSIFICATION

To the Editor:

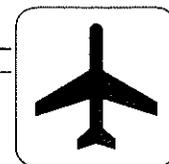
It was with considerable interest that I read the article entitled "Cracow: Who Owns its Memories?" (J.O., Kisleb 5746). My late father came from that city and indeed a number of my close relatives remained there until they perished in the Holocaust.

That the Reformers and their like should want to falsify history should come as no surprise to anyone. The only way to fight falsification is to ensure that we all practice the dic-



tum engraved on a building around the corner of the Cracow Alte Shul. It reads as follows—"Ch'K' Kovayah Itim L'Torah"—set aside time for Torah study.

C. GOLDBAUM, ESQ.
Edgware, Middlesex
England



KEEPING SHMIRAS SHABBOS ON THE GROUND AS IN THE AIR

To the Editor:

Your second Looks "The Mom and Pop Deli in the Sky" (May '85) was long overdue to us earthlings. Widespread confusion in the marketplace has made it difficult for the Orthodox Jewish consumer to keep both feet on the ground. Your suggestion that people continue to support stores or airline caterers that are *Shomer Shabbos* is basic to those of us who have heard a *maaseh* or two from *der alter Heim*, but probably requires extra mention for those of us who are completely captured by mass market glatt production.

The "Concerned Group for the Glatt Kosher Consumers" feels that *Kashrus* standards can fly as well if only we remember that being aloft does not really detach us from our responsibilities of being on earth. To be safe, we need to be assured that the food we consume is prepared by companies where the *owner* is *Shomer Shabbos*, Torah and *mitzvos*, not only the supervising rabbi. If we have learned anything from recurring scandals, it is that we cannot rely on *hashgacha* labels alone. If we really want to eat Kosher we need to know more about the backgrounds of the owners of restaurants, caterers, or airline caterers before we eat. It is in your best interest to call the *Kashrus* organizations as well as the airlines to let them know not only of the importance of the certification, but that Orthodox *ownership* of a company is of equal importance.

We cleared the air on *Shabbos* of El Al flights. Now let's fly the flag of *Shemiras Shabbos*, Torah, and *Mitzvos* in the Glatt Kosher industry. Let us make sure that just as we have a choice of stores in Boro Park, that we can also make that choice regarding the Kosher food we eat in the air. Thank you J.O. for keeping Torah standards aloft.

Y. KRIEGER
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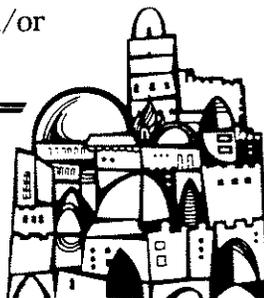
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SEEKS A SOURCE

To the Editor:

I have been searching unsuccessfully for a source for quite some time, and none of the *talmidei chachamim* I have consulted have been able to help. So I would like to pose my query to your readers with the hope that perhaps their collective *bekiyus* will meet the challenge of my query.

The *Magen Avraham (Orach Chayim 124:11)* cites this from the *Shaloh*,

[Regarding] those [children] who run back and forth in play when they come to shul, it would be better if [the parents] do not bring them.

The *Be'er Hettev (124:13)* quotes this *Magen Avraham* and *Shaloh* without any deletions or revisions. The *Mishna Berurah (124:28)*, however, adds the following.

... It would be better if [the parents] do not bring them because habitual patterns (or improper conduct in shul) can become ingrained. In addition, they disturb the congregation from their prayers.

Although I have searched through many *Achronim*, I have been unable to find a single *bar plugtah* (dissenting opinion) which disputes the ruling of the *Shaloh*, the *Magen Avraham* and the *Mishna Berurah*. Nevertheless, as is apparent from almost every shul I have attended, the *Rav* and congregation must know of a halachic source on which they base their non-compliance with the words quoted above.

Therefore, I would be most grateful if anyone could cite that source for me. I'm sure there is one; but I just cannot find it.

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DAF YOMI: SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

To the Editor:

I would just like to set the record straight in regards to Daf Yomi. It appears that Daf Yomi has been catching on like wild fire as of late due to the various programs that have been taking root throughout

the country, such as Dial-A-Daf, Torah Tapes, etc.

I have heard some criticism about what has been happening. One comment was that everyone is learning Daf Yomi and no one is learning Torah. This, of course, is exaggerated, but I feel that people might be getting the wrong impression due to the fact that there is more quantity than quality. However, I have noticed in the past twenty years a tremendous difference between the post-yeshiva student of then and now. In the old days, it was: squeeze in as much *Gemora* as you can for a couple of years and then it was straight to 47th Street. That total scope covered just a few *blatt* in a relatively few *Gemoras*.

Today, there must be tens of thou-

sands of people involved in Daf Yomi. I have observed a bungalow colony where there is at least fifteen people learning Daf Yomi. Twenty years ago if you looked around in a bungalow colony it was difficult to see more than a handful of people just opening any *sefer* on a regular basis.

I feel that we really have to look at this phenomenon with the right frame of mind.

ALBERT SUTTON
Brooklyn, N.Y.



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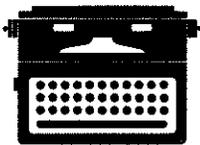


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THE FRANKFURT KEHILLA WHEN S.R. HIRSH ARRIVED

To the Editor:

In the preface to the article about Abraham Geiger (JO, Jan. '86), you said regarding Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch: "When the time came for him to restore the glory of the ancient Kehilla of Frankfurt, only eleven families joined him in his endeavors."

This statement obviously is based on a chronological error. As a native Frankfurter, I feel it incumbent upon me to send you a correction:

The accurate course of events was as follows: In the year 1849, eleven members decided to secede from the Reform-dominated community in Frankfurt and to form a new Kehilla. Those eleven men, were the founders

of the new Kehilla, called *Israelitische Religions-Gesellschaft*. With the help of G-d, the Kehilla grew rapidly and by mid 1851, the membership had risen to about one hundred. It was only then that the leaders, after a membership meeting, offered the position as their spiritual leader to Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, who readily accepted.

When Rabbi Hirsch arrived in Frankfurt that same year, he found already a flourishing congregation of some one hundred members, and not just eleven members. This historically documented fact can be found in the following books: *Die Gruendung der Israelitischen Religionsgesellschaft zu Frankfurt am Main*, published in 1896 by Emanuel Schwarzschild, the son of one of the co-founders of the Kehilla and its one-time president, *The History of Orthodox Jewry in Germany*, by Hermann Schwab, a native born authority on Jewish History in Frankfurt; and *900 Jahre Muttergemeinde in Israel, Frankfurt A.M.*, by Paul Arnsberg, a well-known local historian. I myself, as a youngster, having been acquainted with some

of the sons of the first-generation members, heard them recount that same authoritative description of events time and again.

The reason a number of authors made that inaccurate statement about eleven members only, when Rabbi Hirsch arrived, is simply because the first one of those so-called historians started with it, out of ignorance or misunderstanding, and then the following writers, one after the other, copied what they found printed without checking its accuracy. As far as I could ascertain, the first one to invent the story about the eleven members, whom Rabbi Hirsch, *nebbach*, found at his arrival, was Ahron Marcus in his book *Der Chassidismus*, (1901). After him came J.D. Eisenstein in his *Otzar Yisroel* (1907), who repeated the same mistake. And finally along came a new crop of writers and lecturers, all of whom took for granted what they found printed, and thus perpetuated a regrettable error regarding the sequence of events at a crucial time in Orthodox Jewish History.

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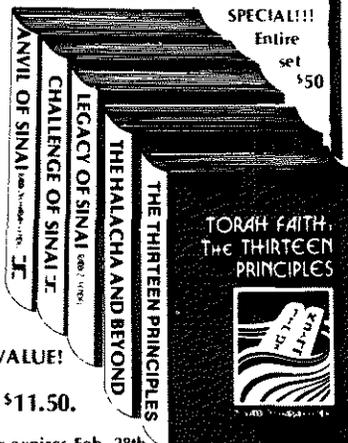
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THE BURIAL IMPERATIVE

To the Editor:

Your article directed at the proper procedures for burial in-the-ground (not above ground) in your recent issue (Jan '86) prompted me to research the matter.

מורנו ורבנו Rav Moshe Feinstein, (*Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 3:143*) says that it is an obvious obligation to publicize the prohibition against leaving any deceased Jew in a mausoleum. In the Rosh Hayeshiva's discussion, he lists three transgressions in this matter.

1) It is a positive Torah obligation for burial to be in the ground (*Sanhedrin 46b*). The *Shulchan Aruch (Yoreh Deah 362:1)* even explains that it is preferable for burial to be directly in the ground even without a coffin.

2) By delaying to place the deceased in the ground, one transgresses a daily prohibition against postponing a burial.

3) In addition, until the flesh of the deceased decays, the *Niftar* is denied atonement and he does not rest from judgments. It is therefore a terrible act of wickedness towards the deceased to prolong his suffering by refraining from an in-ground burial and especially for an extended period of time. . . .

For this crime against the deceased, repentance would require one to ask forgiveness of the deceased, but that may not come so easily—the deceased may claim: What excuse do you have for causing me such harm, without even any personal gain to yourself?

It would also be a disgrace to have someone buried in a cemetery that contains a mausoleum, for it is a place where the dead are disgraced and caused extreme suffering. . . .

An observant Jew may still feel uncomfortable by the points of the high-pressure ad but our Torah sources indicate that the truth is the exact opposite. As the coffin is lowered into the ground, the deceased is being comforted in the best possible way. That is the loving tribute to a dear one to enable them to rest in peace and to merit "to repose in the grave with the proper contentment, pleasure, gladness and peace . . . and to be bound in the bond of (eternal) life" (Prayer for Deceased).

(RABBI) MOSHE GOLDBERGER
Staten Island, N.Y.

(The writer is author of a number of booklets dealing with halachic and inspirational themes.)

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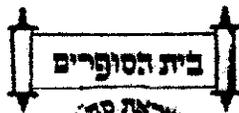
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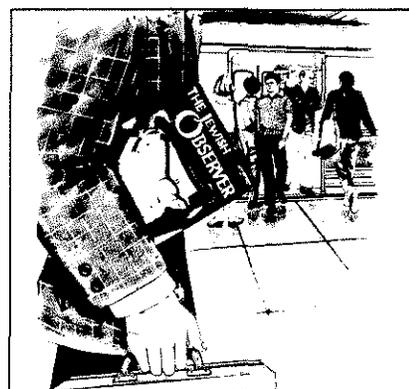
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NEWS FROM AGUDATH ISRAEL



Eliahu Essas Freed From Soviet Union: Jubilation, relief, and profound joy poured forth on the part of Jews the world over Tuesday, January 21, as the famed Soviet Jewish refusenik and *ba'al teshuva* Eliahu Essas arrived in Vienna with his family after 13 years of waiting for permission to leave the Soviet Union.

The 40 year old *baal teshuva* activist, his wife and three children then departed for Israel on Wednesday, accompanied by Mordechai Neustadt, chairman of Vaad L'Hatzolas Nidchei Yisroel, the rescue and rehabilitation arm of the Agudath Israel World Organization who was among those on hand to greet the family upon their arrival here in Vienna. Neustadt is assisting the Essas family in settling in Jerusalem and integrating with the local religious community.

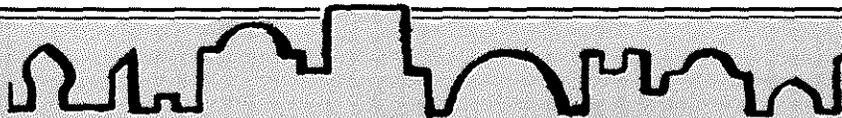
According to Neustadt, Essas' release seems to have come about as a result of the recent warming of U.S.-Soviet rela-

tions. He said that Eliahu Essas's name was prominent on the list of Soviet Jews mentioned by Agudath Israel as well other national and international Jewish groups in their appeal to American statesmen to press the case of Soviet refuseniks with the U.S.S.R. government.

Essas, whose courageous and almost single-handed tutelage and leadership of the *ba'al teshuva* community in Russia has made him something of a legend in his own lifetime, represents to many, through his own personal history, a symbol of the powerful tide of spiritual awakening that has drawn increasing numbers of Jews in the Soviet Union to renewed discovery and practice of Judaism over the last 15 years.

When Essas arrived in Lod on his way to Jerusalem, he was welcomed by thousands of yeshiva students, Russian immigrants, and men, women and children from across Israel singing and dancing in his honor.

At a special news conference at the airport Essas described his exit from the Soviet Union as his own, personal *yetzias Mitzraim*—similar to the Biblical Exodus. Thanking all those who helped him along the way toward that moment, he singled out the World Jewish Congress and the Agudath Israel World Organization for their efforts on his behalf.



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Pirchei Agudath Israel 5-in-1 Event Cites Torah Contest Winners: Over 1000 citations and awards for outstanding attainment in extra-curricular Torah pursuits were presented to children from the middle-Atlantic states by Pirchei Agudath Israel of America, the national Torah youth movement.

At a festive ceremony in Brooklyn, complemented by a similar event held earlier in Baltimore, hundreds of youngsters were in attendance as certificates and prizes were awarded to winners in four of Pirchei Agudath Israel's famed series of nationally sponsored Torah contests, while the organization's coveted "Outstanding Mechanech" award was bestowed upon Rabbi Avrohom Respler, a devoted Rebbe of 28 years in Torah education.

The contests included the 24th semi-annual *Hasmodoh* contest; the 6th an-

nual *Mishnayos Bifnim* contest; the *Kedushas Shabbos* contest, wherein children spend the long hours of summer Friday afternoons and Shabbosos—as well as the *Shovuos Yom Tov*—involved in Torah study; and the *Shnaytm Mikroh V'Echod Targum* contest, initiated to encourage a broad grasp of Chumash and fulfillment of the *din* of reviewing the Torah portion and commentary each week.

Press Fight for State Recognition of Jewish Special Ed Needs: Despite opposition by the New York State Department of Education, the Jewish Center for Special Education (known as "Chush") will continue its long-standing fight for recognition of the special needs of Orthodox Jewish learning disabled children, it was reported at a recent meeting of Agudath Israel of America's Commission on Spe-

cial Education, Developmental Disabilities and Foster Care.

In reporting on the controversy, Dr. Gerald David, Chairman of the Agudath Israel Commission, explained that Chush has been servicing learning disabled and emotionally handicapped children of the Orthodox community since 1976.

Under New York State law, locally based Committees on the Handicapped are charged with designing "appropriate educational programs and placement" to meet "the need of the individual (handicapped) child." If no public school can meet that individualized need, the law authorizes the local Board of Education to contract for the child's education with private schools that have been approved for that purpose by the State Department of Education. But Chush's efforts to obtain such State approval have thus far proven unavailing.

Agudath Israel of America, through its President Rabbi Moshe Sherer and its General Counsel Shmuel Prager, has taken up Chush's cause with high ranking Department of Education officials.

Dr. Gerald David and Dr. Bernard Fryshman have also met with New York State assemblyman Dan Feldman to discuss possible legislative approaches to the problem. High level contacts with members of the New York State Board of Regents have been made to plead Chush's cause. In addition, the prestigious law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton and Garrison has agreed, on a *pro bono* basis, to evaluate the various options open to Chush at this stage and represent the school in its battle to gain Department approval.

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Call for Effective Orthodox Input in School Board Elections: A call for extensive participation by New York's Orthodox Jewish community in the upcoming citywide School Board election campaign was issued this week by the Commission on Legislation and Civic Action of Agudath Israel of America.

The nominations process for the May, 1986 elections began in January, it was noted in a communication to community leaders by Mordechai Avigdor, Esq., recently appointed Associate General Counsel for Agudath Israel and executive director of the Commission. Petition forms for nominations became available to the public on January 14th, with the first day for gathering of signatures being Monday, January 20th.

Int'l Agudah Conference Maps Plans to Seek Out Holocaust Orphans Raised as Non Jews: Lugano, Switzerland—Orthodox Jewish leaders from 10 countries, gathered here for an intensive 4-day conference of the International Executive of the Agudath Israel World Organization, concluded their deliberations here Wednesday, January 8, with a wide-ranging series of resolutions on matters affecting Jews in Israel and throughout the globe, including a resolve to expand the efforts of Agudath Israel's Commission on Rescue and Rehabilitation for Jews in Poland and throughout Eastern Europe who were reared as Christians in the wake of the upheavals of the Holocaust. The conference also passed major resolutions towards countering escalating attacks on Orthodoxy by Conservative and Reform leadership, strengthening Torah life in Israel, and supporting the worldwide *baalei teshuva* movement.

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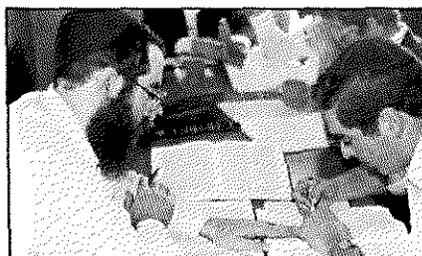
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DATELINE . . . ISRAEL

33 New Chinuch Atzmai Schools During Past 10 Years/Emergency Campaign Launched in Israel to Save Network. Rabbinic and lay leaders from communities throughout Israel, at an emergency conference in Bnei Brak, early December, were told of the extensive growth of the Chinuch Atzmai-Torah School System as well as the urgent need for massive support to prevent its collapse. During the past 10 years, a total of 33 new schools were opened: 11 in the

Jerusalem area, 5 in the Negev, 6 in the Gallil, and 11 in the Tel-Aviv-Central Region.

The conference was also informed of the following evidences of growth:

- Kindergartens—up 77 to a total of 257 in 6 years; total children enrolled in them—up 2,530 to a total of 7,140.
- Children enrolled in grades 1-8 of government-recognized elementary schools—up 7,579 to a total of 29,766—a 34.2% increase in 12 years.
- This year's net increase in enrollment: 1,912 students.
- An emergency campaign was launched at the conference aimed at supporting the Network's special programs—such

as additional hours of Torah education and transportation to bring children over long distances to the schools. This is especially vital in the face of drastic budget cuts by the government.

Chizuk—Filling a Learning Gap in the Heart of Boro Park: "It's not so easy to come to a *shTur* like this," said Irv, a middle-aged man who holds a position in civil service. "I'm embarrassed to admit publicly that I need a *shTur* in Mishnayos that works at my pace, on a more basic level."

Stories such as Irv's are typical among the members of the *chevra*, which meets each Tuesday night at the Novominsker Bais Medrash on 47th Street in Brooklyn, led by Dr. Meir Wikler. Founded by Chizuk, an Agudath Israel agency that promotes popular learning among Jews of all backgrounds, the group has coalesced into a colorful, intimate community of participants, which includes professionals, businessmen, students, singles, heads of families, *baalei teshuva*, born-and-bred Orthodox, young adults and old.

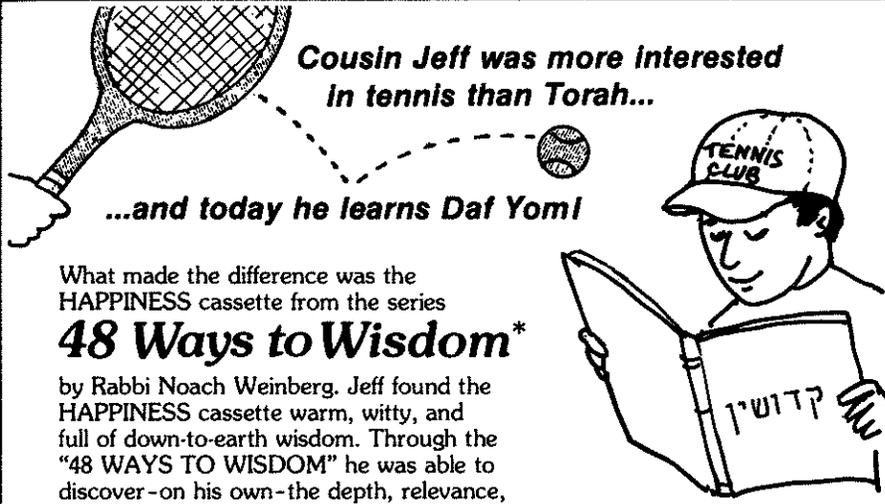
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* Perkei Avot 6:6

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Shir HaShirim Rabbah, Parsha 5

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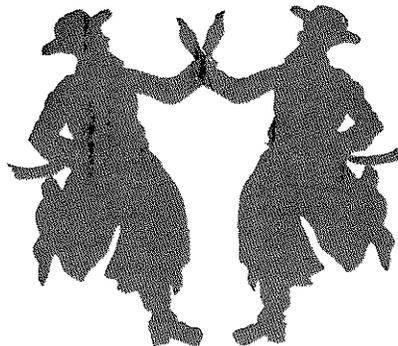
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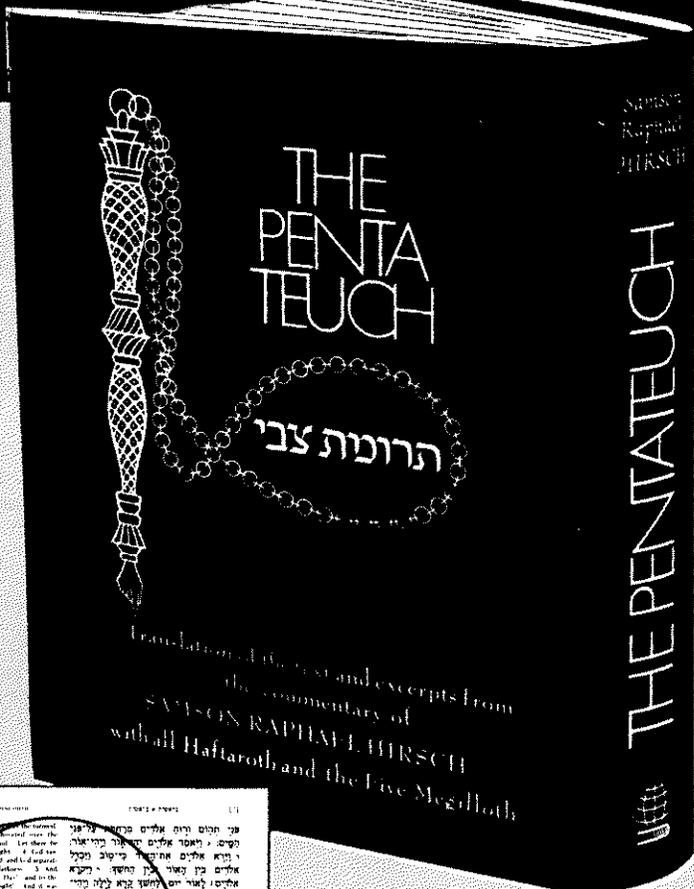
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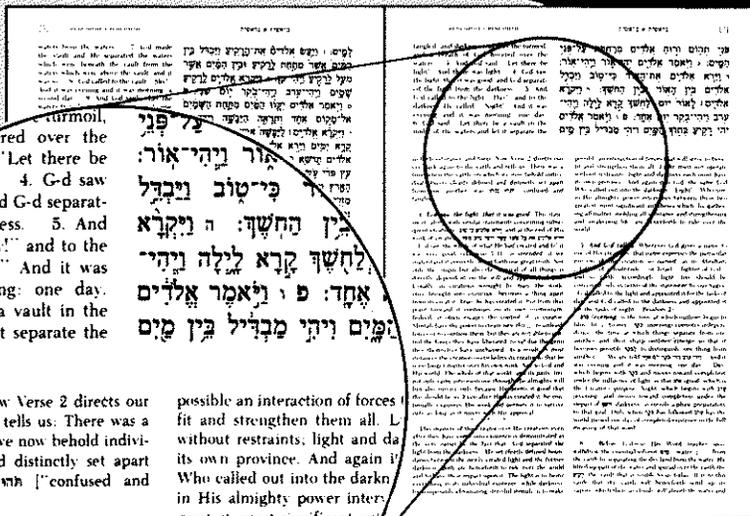
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