

# THE Jewish OBSERVER

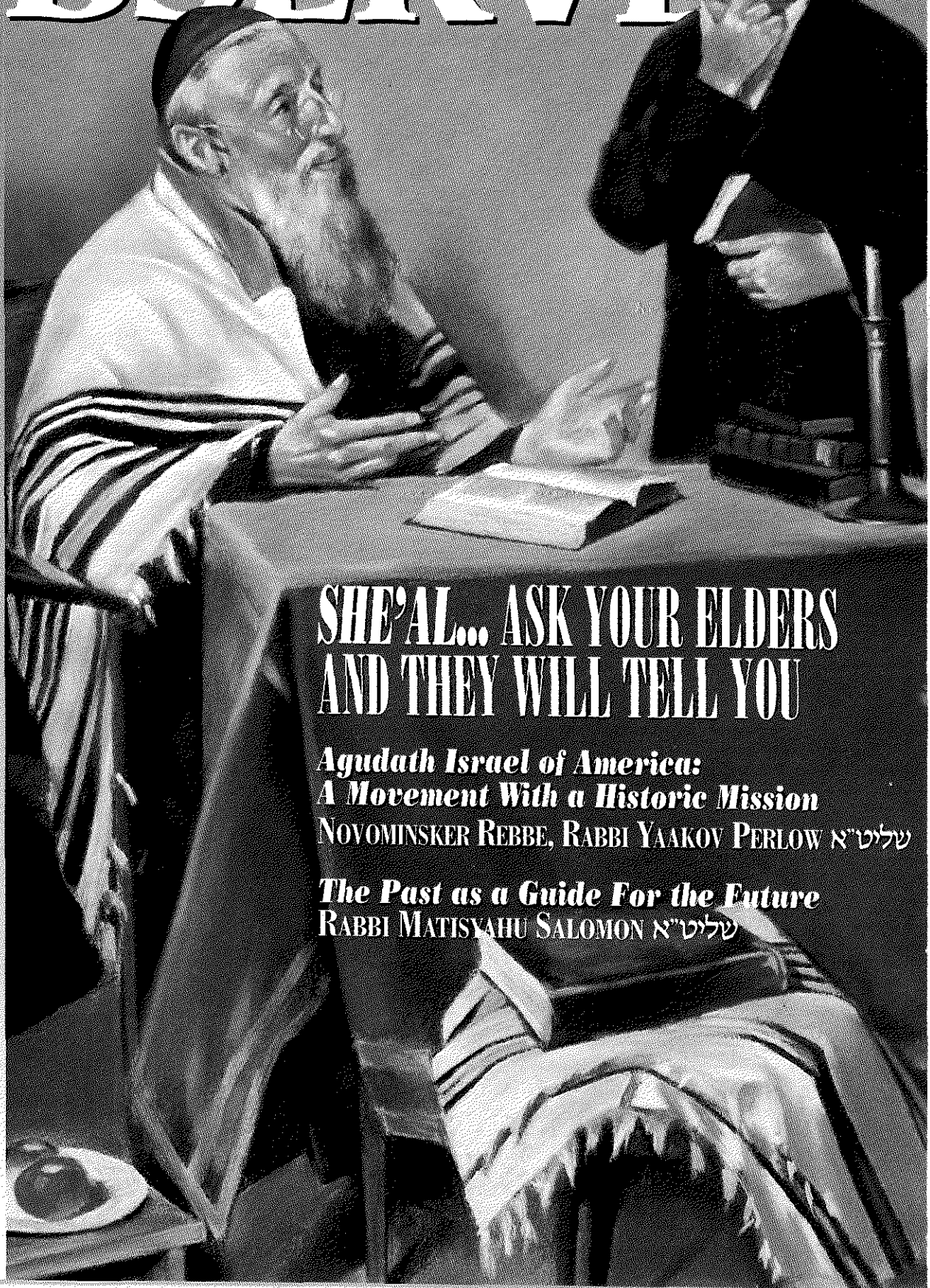
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*Also in this issue:*

*Rebbetzin Tzila Sorotzkin זצ"ל:  
The White Angel of Auschwitz*  
JOSEPH FRIEDENSON

*Bringing Wall Street Wisdom to the Quest for Continuity*  
RABBI AVI SHAFRAN

*All Roads Lead to Rome*  
RABBI YAAKOV ASHER SINCLAIR



## **SHE'AL... ASK YOUR ELDERS AND THEY WILL TELL YOU**

**Agudath Israel of America:  
A Movement With a Historic Mission**  
NOVOMINSKER REBBE, RABBI YAAKOV PERLOW שליט"א

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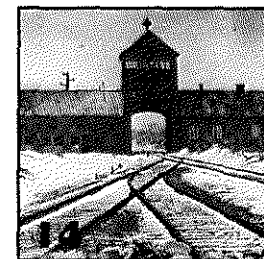
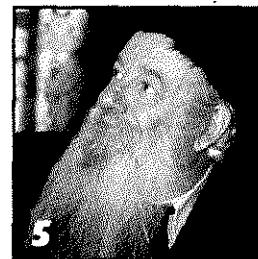
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# AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA: A MOVEMENT WITH A HISTORIC MISSION

*Based on an address by the Novominsker Rebbe, Rabbi Yaakov Perlow שליט"א, at the recent convention of Agudath Israel of America, upon assuming the position of Rosh Agudas Yisroel*

*In his opening remarks, the Rebbe called attention to the fact that the National Convention of Agudath Israel of America was being held in the overwhelming shadow of the painful absence of its late president, Rabbi Moshe Sherer, zichrono livracha. He went on to say:*



*Here stood the leader who was able to unite the different segments of our tzibbur and build them into a powerful force and a sacred movement Y'chvod Shamayim, a figure of history whose accomplishments will remain a landmark for generations to come. Reb Moshe became synonymous with Agudath Israel. As Chazal say, 'He who has given his life for an ideal merits that it is called by*

*"Much has been spoken and written of the loss that has befallen us, and the entire Torah world, with the petira of Rabbi Sherer, zichrono livracha. At this convention, though, we relive the experience and the pain all over again. For here stood our spokesman to the Jewish — and non-Jewish — world. Here he conveyed the message and the spirit of our obligations as a Torah community.*

*his name.' Agudath Israel of America became Reb Moshe Sherer's Agudah.*

*"This is therefore a proper juncture to review and relearn the mission of the movement called Agudath Israel."*

## PROMOTING K'VOD SHAMAYIM AND SERVING THE NEEDS OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE

**A**gudath Israel of America's mission is a tractate of many chapters, a symphony of many melodies. Together, they all convey a single historic purpose: to promote the K'vod Shamayim (honor of Hashem)

and serve the needs of the Jewish People. Agudath Israel is proud to be the sacred vessel where the goals and the problems of Orthodox Jews are addressed. It hopes, too, to reach many — indeed all — Jews and afford them an understanding of how the Torah views the issues of the day.

Agudath Israel stands ready to articulate a Torah outlook on both internal

issues and those that address our relations with others — to respond to detractors, to educate the questioners, to re-enforce the committed, to project Torah spokespersonship that is universally heard and respected.

Although the focus of the American Agudah is primarily on the American Jewish community, we cannot, especially at this time, fail to express our deep feel-

ings of concern for and solidarity with our brethren who dwell in our Holy Land, who live in constant peril under the specter of murder and terrorism.

We take no position on the political and military decisions that are being made. We are deeply pained at the thought of relinquishing even an inch of *Eretz Yisroel* to other nations, murderers of Jews — especially land that has been settled by Jews with such difficulty and dedication. The question of protecting life, however, limiting war and bloodshed, is *the* over-riding concern; precisely where that concern points is very difficult to determine. Ultimately, we have only *Hashem* on Whom to rely, and must entreat Him with our heartfelt prayers: “*Shomer Yisroel*, Guardian of Israel, He Who watches over the remnant of Israel, and will not allow the destruction of Israel, those who call out ‘*Sh’ma Yisroel!*’”

What breaks our heart, however, is that there are tens of thousands of Jews in the Holy Land who do not say and do not know the meaning of saying “*Sh’ma Yisroel.*” We are devastated by the realization that under the guise of a noble ideal — the right of every Jew to return to his homeland — hundreds of thousands of non-Jews have come to settle in the Holy Land. These people were, for the most part, knowingly admitted by secularists who looked the other way, who just did not care. The result is that a sizable segment of the Jewish State’s society is simply not Jewish, and does not care to be Jewish.

I mention this here because I am of the opinion that this is the most serious, the most catastrophic, situation that we face today in *Eretz Yisroel* — worse than anything else. If we are concerned with intermarriage and assimilation in this country, the awesome fact is that in the future these concerns are likely to become part of the Israeli scene, as well. May *Hashem* have mercy!

We must realize that the secular Jewish establishment in this country will sweep this threat under the carpet. They cannot cope with intermarriage in their own backyard, and cannot be expected to be concerned about intermarriage in *Eretz Yisroel*.

■

Although the focus of the American Agudah is primarily on the American Jewish community, we cannot, especially at this time, fail to express our deep feelings of concern for and solidarity with our brethren who dwell in our Holy Land, who live in constant peril under the specter of murder and terrorism.

■

It is thus imperative now, more than ever, to support and strengthen all the heroic efforts that are being made at bringing fellow Jews back to our religious tradition, in *Eretz Yisroel* and elsewhere. The educational work of organizations like Shuvu, Lev L’Achim, the outreach efforts of groups like Arachim, Gateways, Partners in Torah, and others must receive our fullest backing and help. The grand idea of *Am Echad*, conceived by Rabbi Sherer as his last magnificent enterprise, must be continued and expanded.

Agudath Israel in America has played a major role — sometimes in the forefront and sometimes behind the scenes — in the effort to build a Torah society in *Eretz Yisroel*. Indeed, Shuvu was founded at an Agudath Israel convention some eight years ago, as was the highly effective Operation Open Curtain. And the Vaad L’Hatzolas Nidchei Yisroel, whose accomplishments are of historic proportions, was also founded as a project of the World Agudah Orga-

nization. In addition, the newly established Development Fund for Torah Chinuch in Israel has already established five new schools and ten new kindergartens in Israel, and will, with *Hashem*’s help, revitalize and expand the entire Chinuch Atzmai system — and is being nurtured by a lay leadership rooted in the history of Agudath Israel.

We must thank *Hashem* that a new generation of Torah-activists has arisen, disciples of Rabbi Sherer, proud to carry on his legacy, eager to be vessels of Divine service.

We need more Jews to stand up and be counted amongst those who labor on behalf of the Jewish People for the sake of Heaven. There is so much to be done to expand the frontiers of Torah and *K’vod Shamayim*, so much still to accomplish, here and in *Eretz Yisroel*, within Agudath Israel and beyond. Each of us must help where he can, must give of his time and means, in whatever way is meaningful. No one is exempt from sharing the responsibility for the welfare of the Jewish People. This has always been the philosophy and message of Agudath Israel, instilled in us by our teachers. And on this road the Agudah will, with *Hashem*’s help, continue to grow and flourish in the years to come.

Along these lines, it is important for us to recognize that over past years, one of the great indications of *Hashem*’s blessing of our endeavors has been the emergence of a new generation of congregational rabbis and religious leaders in our ranks. We are blessed with impeccable scholars, decisors and disseminators of Torah, who have had an impact on thousands of people in their own communities and in the broader public arena, through their sermons, their classes, their written words, and the personal guidance they have provided to so many. Our expanding Agudath Israel community includes our Yeshiva population, Chasidic groups, Jews of Sephardic extraction, German background, and Americans. And this community possesses a veritable treasury of leaders, teachers, and mentors, who, we anticipate, will assume an even greater role in the continued growth of our society.

A TWO-FOLD MANDATE:  
THE ORCHARD AND THE INN

May I offer the following thought: The Torah tells us that our patriarch Avraham established an "eishel." There are two Talmudic interpretations of the word: one opinion holds it was an orchard that bore many fruits; the other, that it was a hostel, a lodging-place for weary wayfarers. The Maharal understands the "orchard" to refer to wisdom; and the fruits, to the conclusions drawn from that wisdom. "Eishel," according to the Midrash, is meant as an anagram of "she'al," "ask" — inquire regarding the pure meaning of life; search for truth. Learning the truth will lead to correct thinking and proper values.

The second opinion — that what Avraham established was an inn — the Maharal explains, holds that not "delicacies" but "bread and butter" was what our forefather shared with those around him. Rather than teach distilled wisdom, he chose to impart basic guidance in terms of the need to act with propriety, providing them with the day-to-day diet of proper conduct and good deeds.

I would suggest that Agudath Israel was meant by Hashem to serve both as an orchard and an inn; a repository of Torah ideals, and a station to serve the needs of Jews. The invasive secular culture makes it imperative that we have clear statements of Torah values, not only for the estranged who seek to come closer, but for ourselves — a profound understanding of the priorities that families and individuals must maintain as they struggle with the vicissitudes of life.

The men in the Chareidi world may have studied in yeshivos; all our women, in Beis Yaakovs. But maintaining a religious standard requires constant reevaluation. *Are the norms of our daily behavior living up to the ideals we absorbed in earlier years? Is the society, from without, not making inroads in our lifestyle, in our fear of Heaven, in our general conduct? Contemporary society is so steeped in immorality, from the top down. How do we protect ourselves and*



Front Row (L.to R.): Rabbi Yitzchok Feigelstock, Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Levin, Rabbi Aaron Schechter, Rabbi Elya Svei, Rabbi Yaakov Perlow (Novominsker Rebbe), Rabbi Simcha Bunim Ehrenfeld (Matesdorfer Rov); Second row: Rabbi Moshe Silberberg, R' Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, Rabbi Shlomo Gertzulin, Rabbi Shmuel Bloom, R' Reuvain Dessler, Rabbi Avrohom Nisan Perl, Rabbi Ephraim Wachsmann, שליט"א

*our children from these dangers? Are there television sets in the home? Are we allowing our children open access to VCRs or the Internet? These matters constitute mortal dangers for a Jewish soul — make no mistake about it! If you view it as such, you will do something about it. And if you don't, I'm sorry to say, your dedication to Torah ideals needs a great deal of improvement. Are the standards of holiness and modesty sufficiently maintained within the home and without? Is the Torah's value system sufficiently protected from erosion by the standards of the world around us?*

What, you may ask, has this to do with Agudath Israel? The answer is "everything." Because those who affiliate with Agudath Israel have chosen to receive guidance and inspiration from the sages of our time, and from gatherings where the word of Hashem is constantly heard and leaves a deep impact; where people learn devotion to the community's needs and to feel responsible for the entire Jewish People; where they learn dedication to Torah-study, and love for fellow Jews and the importance of helping one another.

This, I suggest, is the "orchard" of fruit that Agudath Israel provides for all who have the wisdom — yes, and the good sense — to join its ranks. It is an orchard of wondrous fruit for scholars and laymen alike, and it aspires to widen its scope of attention to make the word of Hashem more accessible to all segments of contemporary Jewish society.

But Agudath Israel is also an inn, one that hopes to serve the needs of as many as it can reach. It is, and will increasingly ever be, sensitive to the needs of Torah institutions, as well as to the problems of Jewish families, be it in the realm of

*parnassa* (sustenance), *shidduchim*, or the raising of children.

Undeniably, there is much pain in our midst. Aside from the plagues of illness and broken families, the awesome situation of unmarried singles is a particularly stressful problem in our community. We must all — each and every one of us — try to help in this area. There are no easy answers. But serious thought, and serious caring about each other's needs, is crucial today to the lives of so very many.

The army of Jews represented in Agudath Israel, its generals and its troops, raised in *Toras Chessed* and committed to caring for others, is particularly sensitive and attuned to the need to bring about, with Hashem's help, some improvement in this, among so many other matters that require our attention.

NEW TIMES, GREATER NEEDS

The orchard and inn of Avraham Avinu had one purpose: to enhance *K'vod Shamayim*. This, of course, is also the mission of Agudath Israel. It is not a new mission; it is the mandate of every Jew. In modern times, though, a much greater public force has become necessary than in previous times. This was the innovation of the great sages who founded Agudath Israel: to bring the force of a unified Jewish movement, governed by Torah principles, to all phases of Jewish life. We in America, even more than in the "old country," have come to recognize the potential and efficacy of a vibrant, strong public force that results from the interaction of G-d-fearing Jews. We must retain that wonderful spirit of *achdus* (unity) and cooperation that was felt

during the recent visit of the Gerer *Rebbe* and Rabbi Aaron Leib Steinman. That visit was uplifting and inspirational, a ray of *Kiddush Shem Shamayim*. It brought out the best in us; our deepest desires to promote *K'vod Shamayim* and to attend to the needs of our people. *Baruch Hashem*, this spirit of cooperation has borne beautiful fruits in *Eretz Yisroel* and is already bringing about stronger, more unified, commitment to all the affairs at hand. This force must now be strengthened.

Agudath Israel needs fresh blood,

new members, new activists. There is so much that must still be done for *k'vod Shamayim*. There are new heights to be scaled; new frontiers to be reached. True, "there is nothing new under the sun" (*Koheles*), but our Torah, the Sages tell us, is "above the sun," beyond all natural limitations, and there are, no doubt, new things to accomplish for Torah, through Torah. We must, though, approach them together, as a unified, empowered public force.

Finally, the members of the *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah* have placed on my

humble shoulders a very demanding task; it is something I did not seek, did not wish, and personally did not need. But the compelling situation that we in Agudath Israel are facing compelled me also to accede to the wishes of the *Moetzes*. I have deep gratitude to my fellow members for their trust, to the administration of Agudath Israel and to all my good friends who have showered me with their blessings.

May it be *Hashem's* will that His presence rest on the work of our hands. ■



# The Past as a Guide For the Future

Based on an Address by **Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon שליט"א**,  
Mashgiach of Bais Medrash Govoha (Lakewood, NJ), at the recent  
National Convention of Agudath Israel of America

The theme of this discussion is "An Eye to the Past; a Vision For the Future." Indeed, the Torah tells us that we can learn from experience: "*Zechor yemos olam binu shenos dor va'dor* — Remember the days of old, comprehend the years of the generations" (*Devarim* 32, 7). By examining history, we can learn valuable lessons — we discover what happened in the past when people sinned, and what occurred when people acted as *Hashem Yisborach* had expected of them. We then learn not to repeat the mistakes that others may have made, and we come to understand the ways of *Hashem*.

But the Torah attaches a condition: "*She'al avicha veyagedcha zekeinecha vey-*

*omru lach* — Ask your father, he will relate it to you; your elders, and they will explain it to you" (*ibid*) Do not trust yourself to interpret history. You must hear the explanations of the older generations — *zekeinecha, talmidei chachamim...* sometimes even *nevi'im*. *Rashi* comments that even though we may know all the facts, we do not know what lies behind them. We still lack the correct interpretation of what actually took place.

## A PRECEDENT OF NOT ASKING

An example: The Torah tells us that Cham, the father of Canaan, who was the least of Noach's three sons,

prevented him from having more children. He made a calculation based on historical precedent. Kayin and Hevel were two sons of *Adam HaRishon*. The world was apparently not big enough for the two of them to co-exist, so Kayin killed Hevel. Noach already has three children; can we allow him to have a fourth? On this basis Cham took action.

Let us analyze this insight: Cham was the first person to formulate the problem of "population explosion," having seen that two people cannot co-exist on this planet, concluding that with more people, an explosion will be triggered. World wars will erupt, and normal life will come to an end. So he devised a preventive measure.

Cham built his statistical projection on history. And the Chams of our generation have nothing more to base their statistics on than did the original Cham.

Consulting our elders, however, informs us that the *Ribbono Shel Olam* created the world, and the *Ribbono Shel Olam* gave us *mitzvos*, one of which is the Divine command "Be fruitful and multiply." Every child, possessing a unique *neshama*, represents a fulfillment of this *mitzva*. Every child is a share in eternity. Viewing the prospect of bringing children into the world from the perspective of *Daas Torah*, who would be the fool to deny *zechusim* for himself and for *Klal Yisroel*?

Kayin had recognized his error, and was afraid that others would repeat it. Thus, when he did *teshuva* for having murdered his own brother, he spent the rest of his life building a city — hardly a necessity for the sparse population of that time. Yet, he did so to assure that future generations would be alerted: He wanted people to know that the reason he had killed his brother was because of a lack of *chinuch* (education) — he was not trained to understand the limitless bounty of the Creator's resources. So he called the city *Chanoch*, to proclaim: "Educate yourself to co-exist." That was the *Daas Torah* of the time that Cham had ignored.

If Cham would have only asked Noah: Are my considerations correct? Are my calculations right? "She'al — ask!" Then he would not have made his tragic error!

#### A MASTER IN FULFILLING "SHE'AL"

Perhaps the primary lesson that we can learn from Rabbi Moshe Sherer זצ"ל is how to fulfill "She'al — Ask

your father and he will tell you...." During the last ten years of his life, the *Rosh Yeshiva*, Rabbi Aaron Kotler זצ"ל was in constant touch with Rabbi Sherer, day in day out, sometimes several times a day, guiding him in responsible Torah leadership, responding to Rabbi Sherer's presentations of "She'al — Ask!"

This is a model for the rest of us: If you truly want to do what is correct, if you want your actions to be constructive and not destructive, if you want to build *Klal Yisroel* and not *ḥḥ* destroy *Klal Yisroel* — then *She'al*, ask. Indeed, Agudath Israel provides us with opportunities to ask.

Teach your children *Kavod HaTorah*. Teach your children to ask, and to respect the answers of *talmidei chachamim*. Demonstrate your own respect in the presence of your children — particularly of *Rebbei'im*, of teachers, of *Mosdos HaTorah* (Torah institutions). Do not destroy the influence that can only come from respect.

There should be lines of people outside the doors of every *Rosh Yeshiva*, every *Admor*, every *Gadol B'Torah*, and every *talmid chacham*. There are so many issues today about which we are confused. And from them we can hear *Daas Torah*. But only if we fulfill *She'al*, the Divine command to ask.

*How should we lead our lives? What standard of living should we maintain? Should we be the ones to decide? Which parnassa (livelihood) is honest? Which have questionable activities within them? Which is recommended by Gedolei Yisroel, and which is not?*

Our generation is blessed with *zekeinim* (sages), waiting to be asked, to solve problems and clear away confusion.

An immediate example of a current

concern is this new technological advantage, the Internet, which has so many problems inherent to it. Do people ask if they truly need it? Do they inquire how to use it with proper safeguards... where to place it? Why are people not asking?

Many of us have *chinuch* problems with young children — *Yiddishe neshamos*, who are unfortunately labeled dropouts in early stages of life. If only they would have asked beforehand, and not have been so confident that what they are doing is right....

The theme being addressed, "An Eye to the Past; A Vision for the Future," may have many layers of meaning, but the obvious message is that there is no vision for the future if we do not keep our eyes on the past, because *Klal Yisroel's* ideology is based on the past. Interpreters of the past are our *zekeinim*. We can not understand history without our *zekeinim*, nor can we understand the problems confronting us without our *zekeinim*.

Our task is to fulfill "She'al — Ask!"...the *She'al* in which Reb Moshe Sherer was the master, and which was the touchstone of his remarkable success. ■

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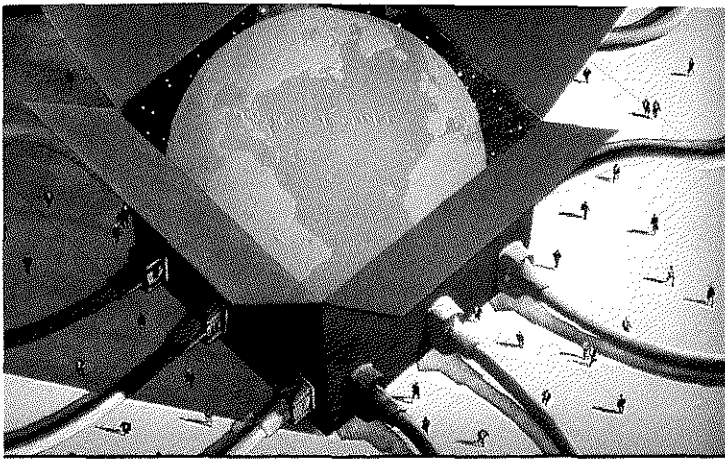
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# ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME

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Increasingly, the word “communication” has come to mean electronic contact as opposed to a flesh-and-blood meeting.

One of the prerequisites of rulership is communication. The Romans built quick straight roads because they needed to know and dominate what was hap-

Rabbi Sinclair, originally from London, is a *maggid shiur* in Yeshiva Ohr Somayach in Jerusalem.

pening in the far corners of their empire. Size is a function of the ability to conquer space. We talk of the world getting smaller even though it’s still some 24,000 miles around. The “size” of the world is in direct proportion to our ability to span the globe, both physically and electronically. Even though the Roman Empire occupied little more than Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, in comparative terms it was probably the largest empire that ever existed, because the world was a very large place in those days.

## MEDIA: ROADS TO DOMINATION

Just as the Romans used the roads to rule, so do the inheritors of their empire use the electronic media.

Imperial domination, however, can take the form of more than brute force and tax collection. Most of the wars in history have been either about trade or

religion. And religious wars are about the imposition of a certain *weltanschauung* — a cosmology. “We see the world this way, and if you want to stay in this world, you’d better see it that way, too.” The sword is often the ultimate theological argument.

The imposition of the religion of the imperial power is an expression of its cultural domination. In our era, the cultural domination of the heirs of the Roman Empire is the Coca-Cola sign hanging beside the Inca Trail on the way to Macchu Picchu; it’s the Golden Arches in the shadow of the Taj Mahal.

The brilliance of American consumerism is that it bonds into a cohesive whole a country of numerous time zones, vastly different geography and weather, culture and religion. Whether you come from Biloxie or Topeka, Encino or Nantucket, however far you are from home, you can always look out your car window and feel right at home looking at the same icons you left behind: Best Western; Burger King; Holiday Inn; K-Mart. The same familiar landscape — the landscape of Empire. Television performs the same function: it binds the nation together. Wherever you are, you’re in the same transcontinental parochial meeting house.

## TORAH THROUGH MEDIA

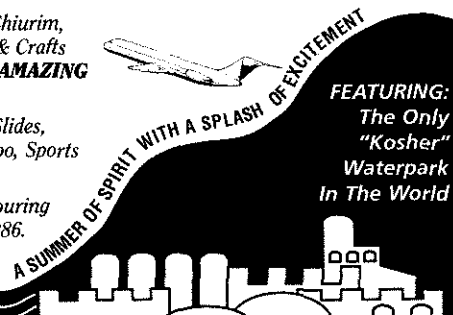
Broadcast television is such a powerful tool, and it’s so much a part of our cultural language, that people frequently suggest it as a means of spreading Torah values. There is an idea that we can reach many of our brothers and sisters who have become estranged from Judaism by making TV documen-

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taries for broadcast television shout the Torah and the Torah way of life. Another idea is that those who have had conspicuous success in the secular world, whether in the arts, business or science, should make their stories into TV docudramas. (One can well imagine the sort of title which would emerge, such as "From Wall Street to the Western Wall.")

It seems to me that such projects are doomed from their very inception. Have you ever seen Orthodox Jews look anything other than weird on the media? Why is that? Why is it that only Muslims look exotic and picturesque against all those Lawrence-of-Arabia sand dunes! Why does Kodachrome love every African or Indian cult, whereas the People of the Book are singularly non-photogenic? Why do they seem parochial and rather shabby when exposed to the glare of the TV's gaze?

Our Sages teach that the Jewish People will experience four exiles. These exiles are hinted to in the very opening lines of the Torah: "*And the Land was formless (Babylon) and void (Persia/Medea) and darkness (Greece) on the face of the deep (Rome).*" Since the Torah is the blueprint of the world, something written at the very beginning of the blueprint indicates that these exiles are a fundamental process in history of the world.

#### WHO WRITES OUR SONGS?

The first of these four kingdoms took the kingship from the Jewish people. Each empire has successively grabbed the mantle of power from its predecessor. Ultimately the fourth empire, the empire of Esav/Rome and its current heirs, will return kingship to the Jewish People. Until that time however, the fourth kingdom has the power of the kingship and all its trappings. It writes the songs of the world, for music is a scion of kingship: King David, the prototype of all kings, is called the "sweet singer of Israel." But the lyre of David breathes the songs of majesty no more.

When the Jewish People went into this last exile, the exile of Rome, the

Temple songs of the *Levi'im* were silenced. The Romans took that music and made it serve a new master. It resurfaced hundreds of years later as the Gregorian chants of the church.

If music and religion are but two aspects of imperial cultural domination, television is the ultimate form of this thrill: Television is the dream factory which allows the ruling power to foist its world-view on its vassal states. It places the minds of its subjects in the cultural iron mask. Wherever you can

put up a satellite antenna and beam down a *Big Mac*, there the empire rules.

The Romans built the best roads in the world. But if they were alive today, they would be producing *Seinfeld*. Television is an instrument of kingship, and the kingship is not ours at the moment. This is not just a physical reality, it's a mystical reality. It means that when we attempt, as the Jewish People, to take hold of the reins of kingship, be that music or television, we must inevitably look ridiculous and fail.

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MIRRORED KINGDOMS

The Kingdom of Heaven is mirrored in the Kingdom of Earth. The Jewish People are in their darkest exile and the Divine Presence is in that exile with us. This is an exile of such totality that most of us don't even realize that we are in exile. We have almost totally accepted upon ourselves the yoke of the empire, its icons and its ideas. We are glued to their visions. We wear their clothes. We think their thoughts.

Every day, when we recite the *Shema*, we proclaim *Hashem* as King over the world. We crown Him in absentia, for there is little that we can see that bespeaks His majesty. He is in exile, doubly hidden in a world where materialism and selfishness are the twin rulers.

We long for the day when this fourth kingdom will have run its course and the kingship will return to the Jewish People. For on that day, *Hashem* will be One and His Name One, and the people who proclaim twice daily His Oneness will be seen in their splendor, risen from the sack cloth of ages.

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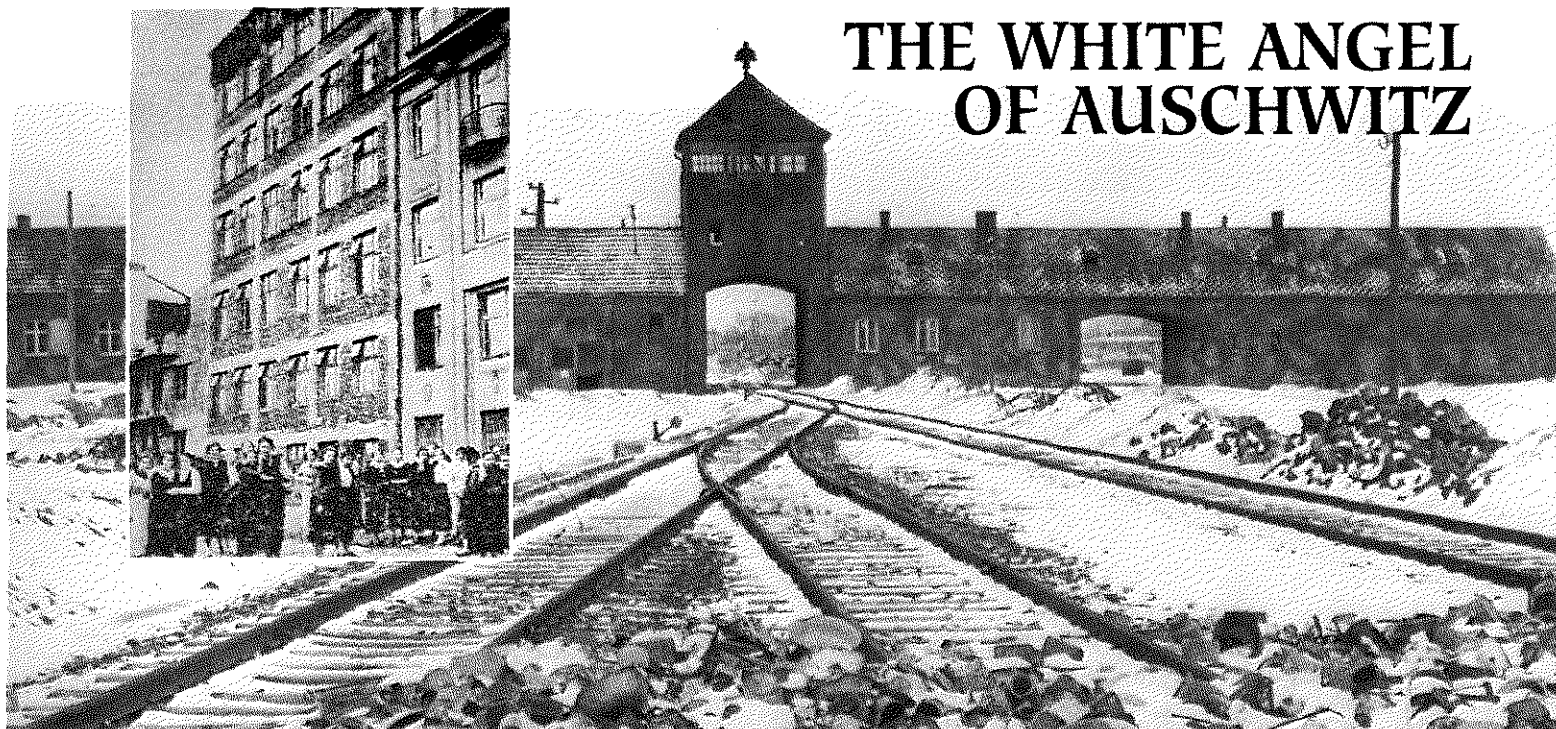
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# Rebbetzin Tzila Sorotzkin ע"ה

## THE WHITE ANGEL OF AUSCHWITZ



In box: Bais Yaakov Seminary in pre-war Cracow

And untold others were heartbroken by the news from Yerushalayim of the *petira* of Rebbetzin Tzila Sorotzkin (formerly Orlean), ז"ל, noted *mechaneches* of Bais Yaakov Seminary in Cracow, a protégé of Sarah Schenirer, נ"ע, illustrious wife of Rabbi Elchonon Sorotzkin, זצ"ל, the oldest son of the famous Lutzker *Rav*, Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin, זצ"ל, and, above all else, as I remember her, the famous heroine (known as the "White Angel") of Auschwitz.

What is legendary about the *Rebbetzin* is the scope of her accomplishments in the *Gehinnom* known as Auschwitz-Birkenau. Much of it I witnessed per-

Mr. Friedenson is the founding editor of *Dos Yiddische Vort*, Agudath Israel of America's Yiddish-language monthly journal of thought and opinion.

Sorah Shapiro, who lives in Brooklyn, is a frequent contributor to these pages, most recently with "Shavuos in Ger" (May '98). She writes for numerous newspapers and magazines, and lectures on religious and general topics.

sonally; the rest I heard from my wife, from the *Rebbetzin's* Bais Yaakov students, and from her fellow inmates in Auschwitz, a chapter in heroic history that warrants an entire volume.

### FIRST ENCOUNTER IN BIRKENAU

I shall never forget my first encounter with the *Rebbetzin* (then Mrs. Tzila Orlean) in the women's infirmary in Birkenau. It was a *Shabbos* afternoon, and I and some other Auschwitz slave laborers were paving the road near the infirmary. A *heimisher Yid* approached me and said that he had heard that inside the infirmary, there's an inmate named Orlean, who could be the daughter or sister of Reb Yehuda Leib

<sup>1</sup>Rabbi Orlean, a prolific writer, was the educational director of the Bais Yaakov Seminary, and — along with Sarah Schenirer — the spiritual pillar of the Bais Yaakov movement. She had been married to his brother, who had perished before the events recounted here.

Orlean<sup>1</sup>, and we should seek her out.

To me his words seemed a godsend. Contacting an Orlean was a stratagem that could lead to uncovering the whereabouts of my wife, whom the Nazis separated from me on our arrival in Auschwitz. (In fact, finding my spouse was my primary purpose for requesting that the barrack supervisor assign me to work in this area.)

I began checking one infirmary barrack after another. Everyone knew the name Orlean, but no one knew where she could be found. Gathering courage, I marched into the hospital's main office. I no sooner crossed the threshold when a tall, stately woman blocked my path, shouting "Raus! Was suchen sie hier?" (Get out! What are you looking for here?)

"I'm looking for Mrs. Orlean," I answered meekly.

On hearing the name Orlean, she mellowed into contrition. "You'd better go back to work," she said with some

deference. "You're not allowed to be here. Just tell me where you work. I'll find her and send her to your group."

About half an hour later, a young lady strode over to us and said, "My name is Orlean. Is someone looking for me?"

"Yes," I answered. "I am. My name is Friedenson."

"Friedenson!" she exclaimed. "From Lodz? There's a Friedenson here, and I didn't know about it? How can it be?"

"Yes," I answered. "I'm the son of Reb Eliezer Gershon Friedenson. You should know me. You were at our house for a Bais Yaakov conference in Lodz. It was about eight or nine years ago."

"Of course I remember your house. And also your mother and two young boys. Are you one of those boys?"

"Yes," I said, "but I'm not a young boy anymore. I'm already married. I was brought here with my wife."

"Have you seen her?" she asked.

"How can I see her? I'm not allowed to leave this base. I don't know if there was a *selektion* of the women when we arrived, or where she might be now. All I know is that the women who were brought from Starochovitz are in Block 25."

"Block 25?" she paused to reflect. There was a time when Block 25 had been the last stop before the gas chambers. "I know the block supervisor. She's a shrew! But wait, I have an idea!"

Turning on her heels, she disappeared. Two minutes later, she returned, flaunting a piece of paper. "I accomplished something," she proclaimed proudly. "I told the head secretary that I must escort someone from Block 25 to the infirmary. Here's the pass. If your wife is in Block 25, I will bring her here."

It didn't take long, and *Rebbetzin* Tzila, presenting the pass, brought my wife to the infirmary for "treatment." When I saw Mrs. Tzila the next day I asked her if she hadn't perhaps jeopardized her job...and maybe even her life...to obtain my wife under false pretenses. I shall never forget her answer: "Here in the camp we are constantly being beaten and punished for no sin. Should I then be afraid of being penalized for doing a *mitzva*?"

For that favor — and, needless to say, for all the others — for proving to me that my wife was still alive, I have remained grateful all my life. During the next six months, *Rebbetzin* Tzila provided my wife with clothing, medical care and moral support. She brought her into the fold of Bais Yaakov students who worked under her supervision at the infirmary.

But this is not the main focus of my essay. What I want to stress is how the *Rebbetzin* also cared for complete strangers, people with whom she had no connection.

#### PROMOTING PIKUACH NEFESH

After she had helped me find my wife, she asked if I would be returning the next day. I said I didn't know; it depended on the barrack *kapo*.

"Try to come," she said. "Tomorrow is Sunday, and the Germans won't be here. There'll be lots of food, enough for

you and whomever you wish to bring. You could use a nourishing soup."

It was predestined that my *kapo* sent me back there the next day. As *Rebbetzin* Tzila had recommended, I brought a guest, a *Chassidisher* young man, who had come from Lodz only a few days earlier and whose piety had made a strong impression on me. All skin and bones, he struck me as a deserving candidate for some nourishing food.

*Rebbetzin* Tzila was waiting at the barrack door. Lunchtime she brought us two brimming bowls of boiling, freshly-made soup. I'm not ashamed to say that I was carried away with joy by the mere sight of the hearty broth, but my friend was beside himself with anguish. "Do you see what's swimming around in this soup?" he asked apprehensively. "It's *treife* meat! I'm not going to eat this! It's not for me! I overcame the temptation in the ghetto until now, and I'm still living...."

His words brought *Rebbetzin* Tzila to tears. "You don't want to eat?" she cried.

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"Have you forgotten where you are? You're in Auschwitz, in the concentration camp, and this soup can keep you alive. You're not allowed to say you won't eat. It's *pikuach nefesh*, and the Torah says 'u'vocharto ba'chaim — choose life.'

Eat, eat! You must eat! It's a *mitzva* to eat! A number of *tzaddikim* here said so. There are many religious Jews here who never ate in anyone's house, but here in the camp they eat everything.... It's a *mitzva* to eat! Over there [pointing to a

neighboring barrack near the fence] is the Novominsker *Rebbe* from Warsaw. On your way out, stop in to see him. He'll tell you whether or not it's a *mitzva* to eat!"

I can't recall everything *Rebbetzin* Tzila said in her long *drasha* about *pikuach nefesh*, but I do remember how delighted she was when my friend took spoon in hand and dug in. She waited until he finished, then handed him a piece of bread, saying, "I had this for you when I saw you, but I withheld it. I knew if I gave it to you, you wouldn't eat the soup. Now that I've convinced you to eat the soup, take this also, and may it be to your good health! Remember, in Auschwitz you can't afford to be overly righteous!"

#### INHUMANE CONDITIONS, THE HUMAN TOUCH

Twice again I was privileged to cross paths with *Rebbetzin* Tzila in Auschwitz. On both occasions, she helped several of us through serious difficulties. Shortly after that, I lost my work assignment in the women's camps, and I lost contact with both her and my wife, until after the war.

After the liberation, when I was reunited with my wife, I heard from her and from others who were close with her for many months in Auschwitz numerous accounts of her magnanimous deeds — how from her infirmary barrack she organized a legion of Bais Yaakov girls to care for the weak and sick, and to fortify their own faith with lighting *Shabbos* and Chanuka candles, *davening* whenever possible, and so on.

A virtual spiritual beacon of Bais Yaakov, *Rebbetzin* Tzila felt a sacred responsibility to nurture the "children of Sarah Schenirer." She thirsted to take newly-arrived Bais Yaakov students under her wing, to set their hearts to rest, and, primarily, to assure they remain steadfast in their ancestral faith. To keep their moral fiber intact, to retain their *mentschlichkeit*, not to become *farlagert* (tainted by the camp), as she was wont to say, presented a formidable task,

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as the appallingly squalid conditions tended to harden the hearts and pollute the speech. Sapped by starvation and frightened by the licking tongues of the crematoria, an inmate usually developed a savage self-centeredness which brought him to see and think only of himself (consistent with a statement of Chazal, that impoverishment "*ma'avir es ha'adam al daato v'al daas kono*" — causes a person to violate his own will and the will of his Creator). Multiply that by famine, filth, foul odor, affliction, flogging, constant fear for one's life, and the proximity of the gas chambers.

Rebbetzin Sorotzkin, however, never cringed before the challenge. She proclaimed that precisely there, in that hellish abyss, one must strive to intensify one's refinement, sensitivity and Jewishness. Under her guidance, the girls developed into models of virtue and modesty, smoothing the path of the suffering throughout those grueling years. In fact, many of the women and girls in the various camps had completed their "active duty" and graduated her "basic training" in Auschwitz. They served time with her in Birkenau, where they were infused with her spirited and unflinching heroism. Later, when they were sent from Birkenau to Stutthof, Mauthausen, Bergen-Belsen and other women's camps, they went armed with the weaponry of her influence.

It is only partially true that Rebbetzin Sorotzkin accomplished so much because of her special status. Providence had so divined that she come to Auschwitz from Slovakia when she attempted to escape from Cracow in 1941. Auschwitz was not yet an extermination camp, but somewhat of a "respectable" concentration camp. With her advanced education and mastery of languages, she was engaged first as a nurse in the women's infirmary and then as secretary in the main office.

She saw this promotion as a calling to "*lemichya shelochani*" (sent by the Creator to provide for others), as she rededicated herself to her imperiled brothers and sisters. For hundreds, she was the embodiment of a "*malach moshia*."

I described earlier how she implored

the Chassidic young man to consume the unkosher soup. How astonished I was later to learn that she herself ate no *treif* during the entire length of her stay. One could rationalize that in the infirmary there was no dearth of food, and she could easily bypass the *treif*. But the truth was that even those who had food in Auschwitz always went hungry. Her determination to avoid *treif* was a formidable challenge requiring superhuman strength. An even greater feat, perhaps, was not expecting others to do the same.

## THE BREADTH OF HER INFLUENCE

Rebbetzin Sorotzkin's humanitarianism was not limited to singular or sporadic favors. Her work, as my wife has always told me, embodied a secret, coordinated and all-encompassing *chessed* mechanism that functioned as a lifeline to her grieving kinsmen.

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students in strategic positions: in the kitchen, bread and clothing commissaries, and barrack management—as well as in “nursing.” These placements served a dual purpose, to lighten the burdens of daily life for her assistants as well as for those they assisted. She taught the girls not to exploit their position for their own self-aggrandizement but to aspire to loftier ideals: to give of themselves and their resources...shoes and warm garments for those who had to work outdoors in the bitter frost...bread and soup for the

weak...caring doctors for the sick.... To run this “organization” required herculean strength, which her assistants soon discovered she more than adequately possessed.

There is no question but that her boundless reach, extending indirectly even to the men, of which I was only one, is attributable to the high level of respect she earned at the top echelons of administration, particularly the infirmary’s female Jewish and non-Jewish doctors.

That she could enlist the personnel

to pursue an agenda unrelated to her work assignments, was in itself a marvel, especially since the officials were obviously not her compatriots. She lived in a world unto herself, where she *davened* and did *mitzvos* as at home, never compromising her ideals. Even the most refined of the female doctors were not “her type.” One could never imagine her commingling with them...yet they somehow responded to her every request.

I can offer but one explanation, and that is the *pasuk*, “*Vera’u kol amei ha’aretz ki Sheim Hashem nikra alecha v’yaru mimeka* — that the nations will see that the Name of the Creator is called upon you, and they will be awestruck by you.” It was no doubt her erudition and wisdom that not only impressed but enchanted the high-ranking women. But I am even more certain that it was her *yiras Shamayim*, modesty, majesty, and innately spiritual mien that inspired her beholders to yield to her drive to give shelter to the shattered.

Not only were the camp inmates touched, but also the Nazis. Once, mustering courage at a *selektion* in the infirmary (*selektions* there were frequent), she approached a Nazi and successfully convinced him to reduce his quota of girls and women. When later asked how she summoned the nerve, she explained that something in his face reflected a bit of *menschlichkeit*. Since unlike the others, he didn’t shout, threaten, beat anyone or evoke fear, she simply appealed to his conscience by saying: “You know what will happen to the girls you are taking. You probably consider them unproductive and therefore worthless, but you are making a mistake. They are not as sick as they look. There’s hope for all of them.” With that she won her case, and he discontinued the *selektion*. (I heard this remarkable story from Ms. Ita Moshkovitz from Boro Park, who worked with her for a few years in Birkenau.)

There’s another possibility as to why *Rebbetzin* Sorotzkin won so much respect from the doctors. When she was yet a nurse, prior to being appointed sec-

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retary, when the hospital was still a place for helping and curing the sick, the doctors and barrack officials gazed in wonder at her selfless devotion to the ill. That served as a forerunner to her being promoted to an administrative position. As secretary, she found even more favor with the powers-that-be for extending her hand to the sick. (This account also warrants credibility, as the following narration from my wife will demonstrate.)

*A few days before the liberation by the Soviets, a report spread that the Nazis had fled. They were no more to be seen in the watchtowers, barracks, mess hall or other places where they would make their daily appearance.*

*Stunned by the news, the frantic inmates scurried to the commissaries and food and clothing lockers to still their hunger for food and other necessities.*

*What did the Rebbetzin do at that moment? Since it occurred to her that when the mothers went to avail themselves of "bizas Auschwitz," (the spoils of Auschwitz) they must have left their offspring unattended, she enlisted a few helpers and rushed to the children's barrack. There they found the young ones alone and frightened, eyes transfixed with shock and grief, dirty and disheveled, an offensive stench from their clothes, wailing for their mothers. Rebbetzin Tzila and her crew rolled up their sleeves and plunged into washing, de-licing, disentangling and grooming every last child until the wee hours of the morning.<sup>2</sup>*

#### A BELATED TRIBUTE

A number of years ago, on a visit to the home of Rabbi Elchonon and Rebbetzin Tzila Sorotzkin in Yerushalyim, I nonchalantly mentioned

<sup>2</sup> It's a fact that in death-permeated Auschwitz, where thousands of children were gassed daily, there was a children's barrack with dozens of mothers and children, most of whom were obviously Jewish. Within a time frame of two years, the Nazis had so brutally murdered more than one and half million children, many from that very camp. Why did the Nazis find it expedient to maintain a children's barrack, yet for Jewish children? No one really knows.

to the Rav that I would like to write about the Rebbetzin's *maasim tovim* and *niflaos* — her wondrous good deeds — but he discouraged me, saying, "Don't think it's because I'm such a 'borei'ach min hakavod' (flee from honor). I myself would take pleasure in having everyone know what a *tzaddeikes* my Rebbetzin is, but I know it would displease her. With all her good deeds, she feels remorse. She is still crying over the

friends and students she lost. She feels she did very little. To write about her would only generate new suffering and pain. It's best not to."

But now that Rebbetzin Tzila and Reb Elchonon, ז"ל, are in *Gan Eden*, I can be *mekayem* the *mitzva* of "l'farseim osei mitzva — to publicize those who do mitzvos." Likewise, I hope to give others an opportunity to do the same.

May her memory be a blessing. ■

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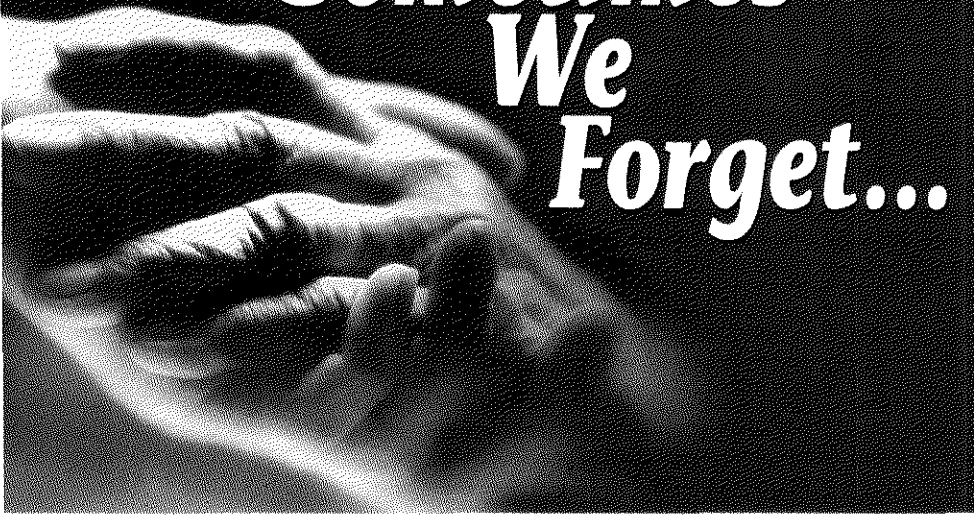
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# Sometimes We Forget...



Sometimes we forget how much power we have. Sometimes we ignore the incredible ability we as humans have to literally give others life — with the easiest and simplest gestures. As religious Jews, that responsibility is even more significant. The following is a true story that taught me this important lesson, which I should have learned from Chazal.

### It Began With "Good Afternoon"...

It was about a year ago, in Cincinnati. I was walking down the street, when a man approached me. I recognized him as the man who lived across the

Rabbi Lipman is a *Rebbi* in the Yeshiva of Greater Washington in Silver Spring, MD.

street from the new home my family had recently moved to. When I wished him, "Good afternoon," he responded. "Where in the Torah does it state that you must wear a hat and jacket?"

For someone to begin a conversation with a stranger using that question, he must have more on his mind than hats and jackets. I introduced myself and he told me his name was Julian Rubin. Sure enough, over the course of the conversation, he revealed to me that he had rejected his Jewish faith completely, and we began to debate the issues. My "outreach radar" was in full gear, and I took the time to speak to Mr. Rubin on a regular basis.

Almost daily we would talk. More often than not, the conversation would

revolve around religion, and debates would develop on concepts such as, "Must there be a Creator?" and, "What is the purpose of life?" We also found the time for lighter issues and general joking around, but my focus was on the religious issues. I righteously justified the time I was spending with Mr. Rubin as outreach — trying to teach a lost Jewish soul about his glorious heritage.

Aside from our conversations, Mr. Rubin took great pleasure and pride in watching my 15-month-old son, Shlomo Menachem, grow up. He loved to take note of Shlomo's new achievements, such as walking and talking. He asked us questions about how my wife and I were going to raise Shlomo, and added his own advice as well. He enjoyed simply watching Shlomo run up and down the sidewalk.

One great moment in our relationship came when the *Kollel* only had nine people for *Mincha*, and I looked outside to see Mr. Rubin, the self-proclaimed fervent agnostic, walking by the building. The look on his face when I described our situation was priceless. The man had not walked into a "Jewish building" in 25 years. He walked towards the *Kollel* door and said emphatically, "I'm doing this because I like you, and for no other reason."

A few months ago, Mr. Rubin turned seventy, and he began to speak about death. He frequently mentioned how he was no longer as physically fit and strong as he was in earlier days. I tried to cheer him up, and also took advantage of the opportunity to inspire him further regarding religion. We had deep conversations regarding what happens after death. I told him how doing *mitzvos* and learning Torah make a difference in the ultimate reward we receive. After a few weeks of dealing with this issue, Mr. Rubin shocked me by making me promise that after his death, I would see to it that someone says *Kaddish* for him.

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He explained that while he did not live his life as a practicing Jew, he wanted to "cover all of his bases."

...And Ended With "Farewell"

My family moved from Cincinnati to Silver Spring on Thursday, August 6th. While the movers cleared our belongings from our home on the day before, Mr. Rubin spent the afternoon in my living room, essentially telling me his life story. He told me about the army days in Korea, life as a young and successful lawyer, and why he never married. Perhaps more significantly, he told me why he rejected his religion completely in his early teens. The next day, Mr. Rubin reiterated his desire that someone should say *Kaddish* for him. I told him that I would stay in touch, and we bid each other farewell.

While we were unpacking in our new home in Silver Spring, I received a phone call from a neighbor in Cincinnati. Mr. Rubin was no longer alive. I was shocked. Just two days after we moved, he was dead. But he wasn't just dead. He committed suicide.

I do not suggest that Mr. Rubin killed himself because I moved. That would be ludicrous. He was clearly dealing with immense depression and the possibility of suicide before we even met. I strongly feel, however, that he would not have done this terrible act with my family living across the street. I am con-

vinced that without my "righteously motivated" friendship, he would have taken his own life sooner. This has taught me a very powerful lesson. *Chazal* capture this lesson with one simple statement: *Rav* Yochanan ben Zakai would say "Hello" to everyone he passed, even the gentile in the marketplace. Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky, *ב"ר* did the same to the nuns who lived near his home in Monsey, as is well known. No ulterior "righteous motive" is necessary to acknowledge another human being's existence and possibly even befriend them. The very act of giving someone friendship is the most righteous act of all. We don't realize how much friendship means to someone else. There are sad, lonely, and depressed individuals out there who hide this component of their lives very well (as did Mr. Rubin), who might literally stay alive because of the friendly "Good morning" they receive from their neighbor, or a cheerful, "How are you?" which shows them that someone cares.

Just Picking Up Some Books

While writing these words, a true story I heard just a few years ago comes to mind. A teenager was walking home from school one day, when he saw a boy trip and drop all of his books, two sweaters, a baseball bat, a glove, and a tape recorder. He helped the boy pick up his scattered belongings

and helped him carry the load home. He learned the boy's name, and all the things he enjoyed in life. As the conversation continued, he learned that the boy was having trouble in many areas of his life. The afternoon passed with small talk and some laughs, and then they parted ways.

Many years went by and the two talked occasionally. One day, the boy who had dropped his belongings approached the boy who helped him and asked, "Did you ever wonder why I was carrying all of those belongings with me that day? You see, I had cleaned out my locker so as not to leave a mess for others to clean. I had taken some of my mother's sleeping pills and was going home to commit suicide. After we spent that time together talking and laughing, however, it hit me that had I killed myself, I would have missed out on that good time and others that might follow. So, when you picked up my books that day, you did a lot more. You saved my life."

There are cities where *frum* Jews passing each other in the street rarely acknowledge each other, never mind "outsiders." Let all of us think about the lesson taught by *Rav* Yochanan ben Zakai, as well as these stories. Beginning with basics, such as saying, "Good morning," and at the very least, "Good *Shabbos*," we can graduate to the simplest of friendships. Oftentimes, as in Mr. Rubin's case, this can be the difference between life and death. ■

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Lifting only his eyes, his slouched body motionless in his chair, his sleeveless arms limp atop the armrests, the computer salesman held me in an adversarial gaze.

"Yeah," he breathed.

"I need a laptop," I said, fearful that computer shopping in Downtown Manhattan would prove the most annoying buying experience that I or my wife would suffer during our spring vacation in America.

He lifted his languid face to look at me squarely, and my fear suddenly turned visceral. I stared at his slicked-backed, ebony hair, olive skin and fair, unblinking eyes, terribly unsure of both myself and my need for a laptop.

"What ya lookin' for?" he asked, standing and walking away from his chair with a slight bounce in his step.

"I'm not sure," I confessed. "I don't know much about computers and only use them for word processing."

Unmoved by my candor, he made an offer. "I'll give ya a COMPAQ for twelve hundred," he drawled, his street accent so heavy that I had to pause to process the words.

"Does that come with a CD ROM?" I asked.

He shrugged, as if relenting. "For another ninety I'll throw one in."

"I don't know," I sighed.

"Rabbi," he said impatiently, sliding his fingers into the front pockets of his jeans, "What da ya wanna do? Ya wanna buy, or bounce?"

I glanced nervously at the floor, incredulous that I had just been threatened. I imagined a black Lincoln pulling up along the sidewalk and my body being stuffed into the trunk. "Well, I, I guess," I stammered, "I guess I want to buy."

"Tell ya what," he snapped, returning quickly to his chair. "I'll give ya the COMPAQ with CD ROM for a thousand."

I hesitated.

He stared up at me with wild eyes and an odd grin. "If I gave'em to ya for nine hundred," he nearly shouted, his head bobbing forward and back, "then would ya buy'em?!"

"Yes. I would," I said, ready to lie face down on the floor.

He led me to a sales counter at the rear of the store, where he produced a carton bearing the COMPAQ logo. He broke the seal, placed what looked like a tiny, gray briefcase atop the glass counter, and gently opened it.

I liked the computer's design and typed a few words. The keyboard felt solid.

"Ya know," he said, watching me, "I could get ya a more

# Masked Jew



advanced model for a hundred fifty more."

"No," I said, not looking up. "This one is fine."

Suddenly, he stopped speaking and barked across the store, "Hey! *Ani amarti l'cha, lo l'kachat et zeh!*"

I froze and felt lightheaded, as though the room had warped. I looked up at him.

"Are you from Israel?" I asked, staggering.

"Of course," he said matter-of-factly as he repackaged my computer.

I laughed, barely capable of considering that the store might be full of Israelis. "I live in Israel," I said.

"Yeah?" he asked. "Where?"

"Yerushalayim," I said. "Where are you from?"

"Tel Aviv."

I found myself looking at his face with interest and pleasure. He seemed no longer a stranger. The harshness in his voice had fallen. His mask had lifted, and he spoke to me as though from within me, from a common, familial place.

"How long have you been away?" I

wanted to know.

"Two years," he said and shrugged. "But maybe I'll make it back this summer." Wistfully, he added, "I hope!"

He ordered a clerk to bag my package in heavy plastic and looked at me, his eyes wide and lips pursed in an attitude of regret. "This was a vacation," he said, "that turned out to be permanent."

I watched him move from behind the counter and past me, toward the front door.

"It's a different world here, isn't it?" I called after him.

He turned his head without breaking his springy, street-wise step and smiled. "It's a different world!" he called back.

I clung to the image of his cool, challenging gait and knowing smile, of his perfected role within a definitively foreign world. It evoked both laughter and sorrow. Masks can be valuable survival tools, and if one best manipulates his environment through a menacing persona, so be it!

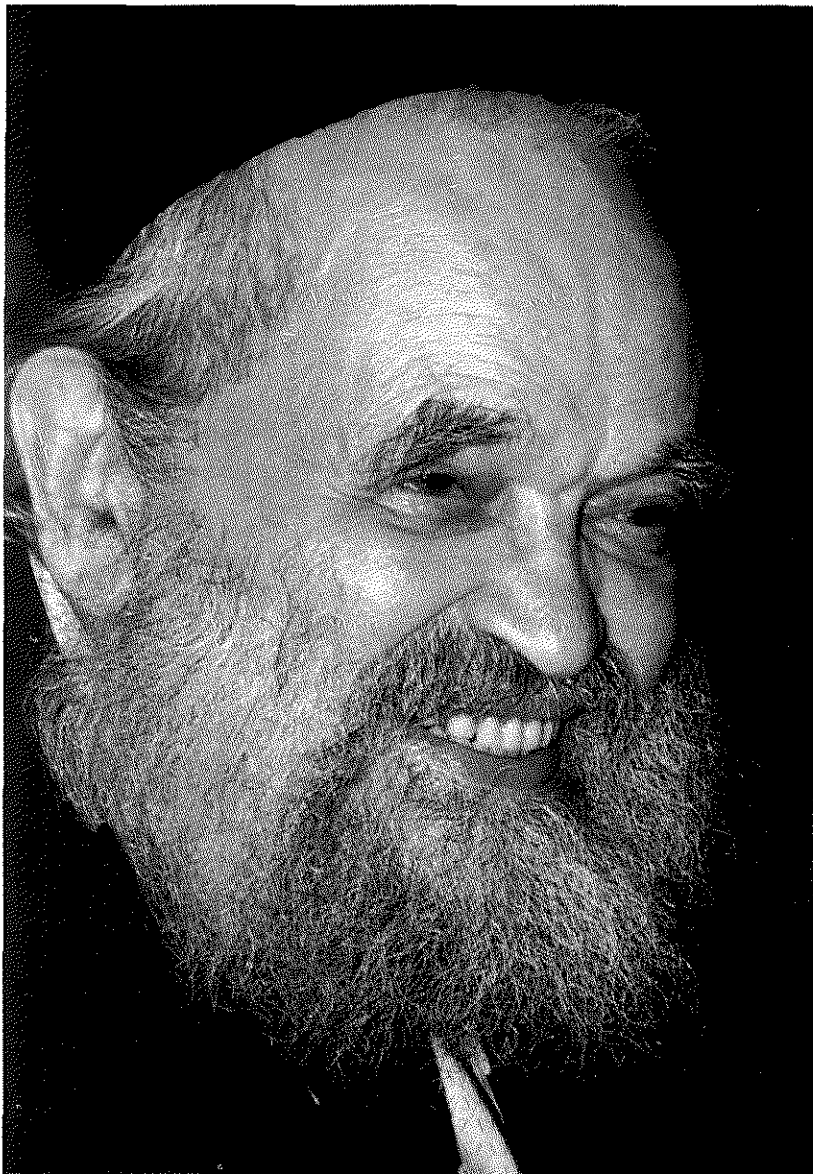
Tragically, however, one often lives only to survive, forgetting to step from the masquerade to nurture self. Then "vacations" become "permanent."

He was a Jew far from home, both physically and spiritually, and he knew it.

As I walked in the late afternoon sun, thinking of the nice things that I would write with my computer and wondering if I could make it Uptown in time for *Mincha*, the image of his mask faded from my mind, and my solitary life resumed. The encounter became a disbelieving shake of the head, a wonder-filled chuckle in the heart, an experience gleaned and tucked away to be shared with my wife and friends, and I felt enriched.

I hope, however, that on Purim, when Jews enter a masquerade and let go their separate bodies to nurture the single Jewish self that not only undid Haman and Achashverosh but that stood at Har Sinai, I shall reach beyond my enriched, solitary life and don a mask grooved with tears for a masked Jew. ■

Pnuel Peri studies in a *Kollel* in Jerusalem. His essay, "No Free Agents," appeared in *JO*, Oct. '96.



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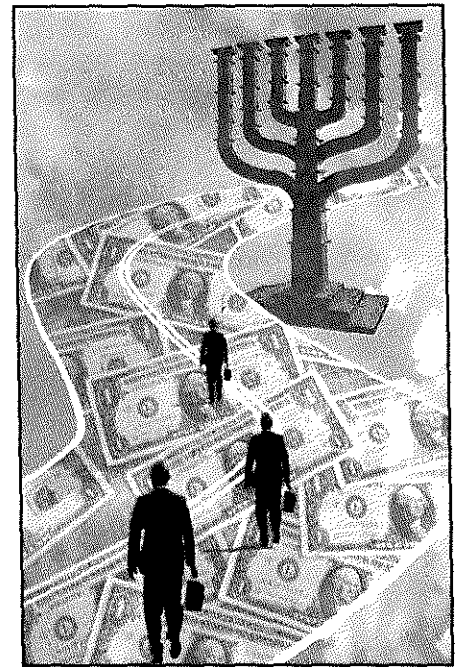
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# Bringing Wall Street Wisdom To the Quest for Continuity



An ambitious program to send any willing Jew in the world between the ages of 15 and 26 to Israel for ten days was recently placed before the public eye. The “Birthright Israel” plan, intended to help fuel Jewish identity and continuity, is impressive, to be sure. And expensive; it is expected to cost \$300 million over five years, a sum that will be initially financed by the Israeli government, a group of North American Jewish philanthropists and the Council of Jewish Federations.

Only a truly hardened cynic could dismiss so well-intentioned an effort out of hand, yet the gnawing sound you hear is the suspicion that free tours of Israel may prove less effective than expected, or even, *chas v’shalom*, counterproductive.

Many are the tales, to be sure, of confused or uncommitted Jews who came to discover their roots and their lives’ direction in the Holy Land, whose very atmosphere, *Chazal* teach us, is a catalyst to wisdom. But there is also much in Israel, especially these days, that could conceivably have a less than salubrious effect on unguided Jewish souls.

The plan, after all, will be offering, according to *The New York Times*, “kibbutz trips, archeological trips, hiking treks, ecological journeys and historical trips” — fare that could just as easily disillusion young visitors as inspire them. The kibbutz movement has hardly been a successful engine of Jewish (or even kibbutz) continuity; hiking trails in Israel may not always compete favorably with the Appalachian Trail — and what is an “eco-

Rabbi Avi Shafran, director of Public Affairs of Agudath Israel of America, is a frequent contributor to these pages.

logical journey,” anyway? Historical tours might indeed raise some consciousnesses, but that would largely depend on what elements of Jewish history would be presented, and from what perspective.

## THE JEWISH STATE AS THE JEWISH FAITH

Michael H. Steinhardt, the successful Wall Street money manager who, along with Seagram Company chairman Charles R. Bronfman, is initiating the program, feels that association with Israel is the ultimate goal. “Israel has frankly... for much of my life,” he told *The Times*, “been a substitute for [Jewish] theology.”

Leaving entirely aside the question of why anyone would deem the Jewish religious heritage in need of a substitute, there can be little doubt that, for better or worse, the Jewish State is clearly less inspiring today to many Jews than it was during the heady days of the 1960s.

Those, for instance, who found it relatively easy to discern forces of good and of evil when a host of Arab nations ruthlessly threatened Israel more than three decades ago are less likely to perceive the persistence of that threat today. Things like Yassir Arafat’s astonishing ability to preach coexistence and peace to some audiences (even as he preaches entirely diametric ideals to others) and the press’s incessant portrayal of Israel as intransigent, and worse, make it even harder to see things as they once were so clearly perceived by so many, like the younger Mr. Steinhardt.

Even many of those who may once

have reveled in the romantic “my might and the strength of my hand” notion of temporal Jewish assertion of power and right to the Jewish land have become disillusioned of late with the rude intrusion of geopolitical realities on the Zionist dream. Israel’s leaders, once effectively worshipped in this camp, are often perceived as the Jewish enemy. These days, to recast a famous expression, it is hard to be a secular Zionist.

## LOW ASPIRATIONS

An unintentionally depressing comparison, as it happens, was employed by Mr. Steinhardt himself, in an interview with a reporter for *The Forward*. He expressed his hope, the weekly reported, that the program will achieve success and establish a tradition even “perhaps analogous to [the] bar mitzva.”

The comparison bears reflection. In popular American culture, the bar mitzva celebration has sadly but undeniably come to be associated not with the commencement of commitment but with its smothering. What once heralded (and for some, still heralds) a life of intense Jewish identity has devolved, in so much of the Jewish community, into a celebration of teen-agerhood, a vehicle for parental excess, a showcase for disk-jockeys and

movie themes. It would be superfluous (not to mention depressing) to detail here the "state of the contemporary American bar mitzva," but the picture, most of us know, is not a pretty one.

Thus, ironically, should the "Birthright Israel" plan live up to the hope for it Mr. Steinhardt expressed (though did not likely intend), it will not only fail to solidify Jewish continuity, but become just another means for Jews to embrace materialism and what passes for popular culture in modern times.

#### BELABORING THE OBVIOUS

"Birthright Israel" is a good, if imperfect, idea, and its originators deserve credit for putting forth *any* plan — not to mention the considerable funds they have pledged — to intensify Jewish identity and commitment. Were the program amended, though, to maximize the Jewish impact of the gift it offers Diaspora Jews — were it, say, to provide them ten days (or even two of the ten) in an Israeli yeshiva catering to students from overseas, or in an adult beginner's program sponsored by an outreach institute — it might well be a truly giant step in the right direction. Certainly no objective observer would deny that Torah-study is an integral part of the contemporary Israeli scene.

Might there even, though, be shorter and surer roads, even in the Diaspora, to

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The more years of Jewish education — and the more traditional the curriculum — the stronger the resultant bond with the Jewish people and faith.

the goal of connecting Jews to other Jews and to Judaism? Like, for instance, the road Jews traveled for the nearly 2000 years during which visiting or settling in *Eretz Yisroel* was hardly an option. The very same road, as it happens, that still remains the most effective means of ensuring Jewish identity, praxis and life: a true, traditional Jewish education for every precious Jewish child.

Every study of Jewish continuity, after all, has identified Jewish education as the most potent predictor of future Jewish identity and Jewish living; the more years of Jewish education — and the more traditional the curriculum — the stronger the resultant bond with the Jewish people and faith.

So many Jewish day schools and yeshivos are suffering economically, and so many Jewish parents are unable to afford them. For lack of nothing more than dollars, priceless Jewish souls — from a wide assortment of Jewish backgrounds — are being denied the opportunity to learn to read Hebrew, to study Torah, to hear what *Shabbos* is like.

Some, of course, will agree and yet propose that anything calling itself a Jewish school — even if it teaches ideas and ideals diametric to Jewish tradition — should be enlisted in the fight for Jewish continuity. When a disease is the target, though, a responsible and capable doctor will employ only the most potent and proven medication. If Jewish ennui and assimilation are the enemies, the weapon of choice can only be Torah, unadulterated and clear, as taught through the ages.

There can be little doubt that scholarships to help present Jewish children with their spiritual heritage could deeply, relatively quickly and radically

change the demographic landscape of the Jewish world.

Does it not seem self-evident that, if the will is there to empower Jewish continuity, the way — or, at very least, a major way — is the Jewish school?

#### PUTTING GOALS ABOVE POLITICS

Some, of course, might wax cynical at the thought of concentrating communal Jewish efforts on institutions that, all said and done, are overwhelmingly Orthodox. Coming from Orthodox quarters, to be sure, the notion would certainly seem self-serving at best.

But all truly open-minded Jews, whatever their denominational affiliations, realize that a traditional Jewish education — one that regards Judaism as it has been regarded for three millennia — is, simply stated, the most potent insurer of Jewish continuity. If Jewish knowledge and observance are good, it must be admitted that more of each is surely better.

And the undeniable, happy reality is that, for decades, day schools have been resolutely, sensitively and successfully servicing children from a variety of Jewish backgrounds.

Some of those children may have since come to identify themselves as Orthodox, others not. But all were equipped with the opportunity and knowledge to make Jewish choices — and all graduated more likely to remain conscious and dedicated parts of the Jewish people (not to mention more likely to visit or live in Israel).

#### ADMITTED CHUTZPA

Still, it is probably audacious for the Orthodox community to suggest to people like Mr. Steinhardt and Mr. Bronfman how best to maximize investments of funds; they are, after all, proven successes in the worlds of high finance and business.

Their very success in their fields, though, might well afford us hope that, when re-evaluating their plan, the dedicated philanthropists will be keenly aware of the fact that here, as in every important endeavor, the wisest investments are those placed in proven stocks. ■

**BOOKS  
IN  
REVIEW**

**Torah Patterns — The Magnificent Unity Of Jewish Life And Thought,** Rabbi Moshe Shlomo Emanuel, Targum/Feldheim, \$23.95

Few things can compare with the sublime joy of a child rushing home to tell a parent a Torah concept learned in school. The excitement stems from the glimmering of understanding of the beauty and structure of Torah, the awe of realizing that "everything fits." A wise parent or *mechanech* nurtures the joy by teaching the child even more about the wisdom and all encompassing nature of Torah. Unfortunately, as the child becomes an adult and begins to think he knows all there is to know, he loses that childlike sense of wonder.

Rabbi Moshe Shlomo Emanuel, a prominent *mechanech* and principal of the Menorah Grammar School of London, has previously authored the seminal work, *Tefilla and the Inside Story*, and now presents another unique gift to *Klal Yisroel* with this new *sefer*, *Torah Patterns. The Magnificent Unity of Jewish Life and Thought* helps bring back the wonderful sense of awe over the greatness of Hashem's creation.

Rabbi Emanuel begins by describing the symmetry of concepts throughout the Torah, then demonstrating that everything is predicated on *sefer* (order). This *sefer* is evident in the very words we use to describe our most spiritual possessions and pursuits, from those in the *Siddur* we pray from to the *sedra* we read from the Torah each week; in the *Seder* we arrange on Pesach, and the *sefer* that *bnei yeshiva* attend each morning and evening. Indeed, Rabbi Emanuel teaches us that *sefer* is the very essence of freedom.

He writes:

This emphasis on order and pattern reflects a basic concept in Jewish thought: to be a truly free person means to have a set order in one's life. Contemporary thought would have us believe the exact opposite: that the right to follow a random pattern and choose one's own set of val-

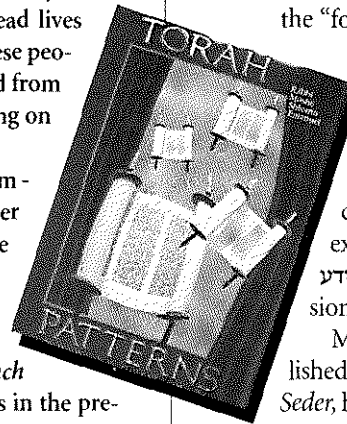
ues is what constitutes true freedom. However, this is a fallacious idea. Those who live a random life do not attain true fulfillment and joy. They live only for the Present and do not lead lives that have Purpose. For these people, the Present is divorced from the Past and has no bearing on the Future.

This key to true freedom - compliance with a set order - means, specifically for the Jew, following the pattern established by the Torah and determined by our rabbis. The *Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim* instructs us in the prescribed order that is necessary for us to follow in our daily, weekly, and yearly lives. The orderly pattern that is implicit within Judaism progresses in a preordained and set sequence. Our every action relates to that special *sefer*. This order was initiated before creation and constitutes the blueprint of the universe. It extends through the length of our history and is part and parcel of our daily lives as Jews, permeating every aspect of our existence.

*Torah Patterns* analyzes the patterns of Torah through the prism of the Pesach *Seder* and its four sections: *Kaddish*, *Maggid*, *Shulchan Aruch* and *Hallel*, and seeks a profound understanding of history from the creation of the world until the advent of

*Moshiach*. All life is seen in terms of its four components: purpose, past, present and future. Rabbi Emanuel carefully demonstrates the relationship of these concepts to the "four cups" of the *Seder*, the Four Sons, the Four Matriarchs, the four-letter Name of Hashem, and a host of other "fours" in the *Seder*. His exposition culminates in a wonderful explanation of the *וידברנו* and *וידע* *אחד מי ידע* sung at the conclusion of the *Seder*.

Moreover, the pattern established through understanding the *Seder*, he explains, can offer insight into many other aspects of Torah thought and life, including the *mitzvos* of Succos, those of Purim, and the four rivers of Gan Eden, to mention just a few. Through the use of diagrams and an easy-to-read format, what could have been a very formidable and forbidding book is clear and readable. This *sefer* is both a window into the infinite wisdom of the Torah and a lesson in *emunah*. May we indeed be *zocheh*, as Rabbi Emanuel says in his final paragraph, "to experience and uncover the depth of the patterns manifest within Torah more and more, even beyond the scope of the limited illustration of the unity of Torah provided by this book, thereby achieving greater and greater heights of freedom!" ■



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Rabbi Becker is Associate Executive Director and Director of Special Projects of Agudath Israel of America.

**The Committed Life**, by *Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis*, Cliff Street Books (HarperCollins), NY, \$24.

In the over thirty years since *Rebbetzin* Esther Jungreis began her *Hinei-ni* outreach organization, she has become a major influence on thousands of people who flock to her for guidance and teaching. How welcome that she not only talks the talk, but writes it, too.

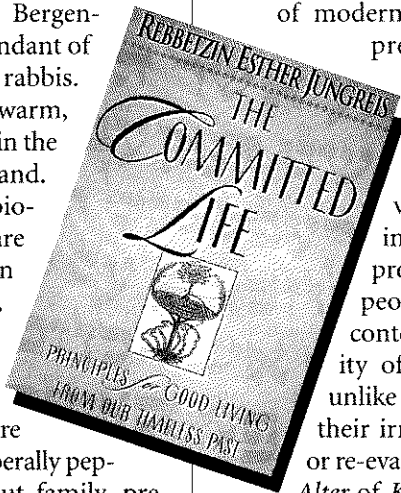
The *Rebbetzin* is a Bergen-Belsen survivor, a descendant of many generations of rabbis. Her late husband was a warm, kind and sensitive rabbi in the Five Towns of Long Island. These are not merely biographical details, they are prominent ingredients in her lectures, writings, and one-on-one encounters with people seeking her guidance. Her essays, which are based on her talks, are liberally peppered with stories about family, pre-Holocaust Hungary, the ghettos and camps, and the outgoing goodness of her late father and husband.

In her eighteen chapters, she discusses many topics that strike a chord with any

Rabbi Nosson Scherman is a member of the Editorial Board of *The Jewish Observer* and is Co-General Editor of Mesorah/Artscroll Publications

## BOOKS IN REVIEW

sincere Jew, such as, "Inviting G-d Into Your Life," "Faith," "Hope," "Compassion," "Gaining Control Over Yourself," "Committing to Marriage," and "Creating a Family." Due to the hectic pace of modern life and the blessed



prevalence of *mitzva* observance in many towns and neighborhoods, many areas of *mitzva* observance have become institutionalized. A by-product of this is that people tend not to give contemplation to the quality of their religious lives, unlike people who must fight their irreligious environment or re-evaluate themselves. As the *Alter of Kelm* used to say, most of us learned the narratives of *Chumash* when we were children and continue to think of Yaakov and Eisav in juvenile terms, without subtlety and maturity. *Rebbetzin* Jungreis tries to make us think about ourselves and our responsibilities with subtlety and maturity — a painful but important process.

She combines popular expositions of *hashkafa* and faith with personal anecdotes, *Aggada*, and Chassidic lore. While *Rebbetzin* Jungreis is uncompromising in her adherence to and insistence upon complete fidelity to the *Shulchan Aruch*, she expresses herself positively and endearingly. When she admonishes individuals who seek her guidance on a personal level, she does it as a concerned and loving friend. For that alone, this book is valuable. Most of us either shrink from saying anything unpleasant, or do it in such a cross and judgmental way that we alienate, rather than help. Among its other virtues, the *Rebbetzin's* book is a primer in how to carry out the commandment to chastise constructively, without causing a destructive backlash.

As one reads this book, one develops an appreciation of the author as a friend, who is sharing herself with the reader. We read of the traumatic time when her daughter, at the start of her first pregnancy, was diagnosed as having a malignancy that required dangerous and immediate surgery. The reader shares the family's anxiety — indeed, terror — and then is uplifted by a display of faith in the efficacy of prayer and confidence in *Hashem*, culminating in the astounding climax of wrong diagnosis and the birth of a normal, healthy baby, *Baruch Hashem*. We join the *Rebbetzin* on a shopping trip to Thirteenth Avenue in Boro Park, and, with her, watch a woman seeking alms on the avenue and then, when she gets up and leaves her station, drops some coins into the cup of another collector... reminding us how even a needy Jew feels the need of others.

### Learning From the Rabbis

We learn the secret of her husband's success, which, we suspect, is her secret, as well. A not-especially-Orthodox family that became close to him told the *Rebbetzin* how it came about: They had lost their only child in an automobile accident. Rabbi Jungreis, a neighbor who had never even met the mourners, paid a *shiva* call. He walked over to the griev-

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# Us and Them

## A Review Article

Among its other virtues, the Rebbetzin's book is a primer in how to carry out the commandment to chastise constructively, without causing a destructive backlash.

ing father, embraced him, and broke into tears. The parents were deeply moved that someone they knew only by sight could share their tragedy so personally. He stopped being a stranger, and became someone they loved and respected. With all the fashionable talk about *kiruv* and *teshuva*, can there be a better way to demonstrate the beauty of Torah than through such tangible *ahavas Yisroel*?

Rebbetzin Jungreis refers frequently to her father. Even when he was elderly and unwell, he never left home without his notebook of people who needed a *shidduch*; he insisted that everyone has a duty to help everyone else. His Yiddish was never a barrier in his relationships with English-speaking, and even non-Orthodox people; the heart transcended the tongue.

The book is built around a chronicle of inspiring forays into *kiruv* that ended with success. Certainly, there must have been many failures as well, but the book is an exemplar of the old adage that a spoonful of sugar is more effective than a gallon of vinegar.

Committed Life can be read as a primer in how to interact with other Jews. It can be read as a series of essays in how to deal with real-life problems. It can be read for guidance in how to respond to untutored or antagonistic Jews. But among its many virtues, it can be read for the sheer enjoyment of good writing; a book to read and recommend.

**Compassion for Humanity in the Jewish Tradition**, by David Sears, Jason Aronson, 1998, \$35.00

Beginning our days with gratitude to *Hashem* for having "chosen us from all the nations" and winding them down by acknowledging how He "guards His nation *Yisroel* forever," we can sometimes forget that there is a spark of the Divine in every human being, that even that a non-Jew can be, in the *Gemora's* words, "like the *Kohein Gadol* who enters the *Kodesh Hakadashim*."

We may know that *Klal Yisroel* has a mission to be "a light to the nations," and that history's culmination involves all of humanity's recognition of *Hashem's* dominion and His Torah's truth, but we may not think about it often enough.

Realities, too, have a way of intruding. A world that sometimes seems to brim with Islamic terrorists, neo-Nazis and other evils of assorted colors and stripes hardly inspires universalist euphoria in Jewish hearts. In the words of David Sears, author of the recently published *Compassion for Humanity in the Jewish Tradition*, "Who considers the virtues of universalism when the Cosacks are kicking down the door?"

And, in truth of course, our focus is indeed *supposed* to be trained, as much as possible, firmly on our own religious responsibilities. The Torah asks us neither to missionize to non-Jews nor to regard them in the filial way we do our fellow Jews. Our influence on the larger world derives, in the end, from the

Rabbi Bookspan lives in Metropolitan New York. This is his first review in these pages.

very force of our *separateness* from it, from our example as a distinct people, a point Reb David<sup>1</sup>, a Breslaver *Chassid* well-known to *Jewish Observer* readers, certainly makes as well.

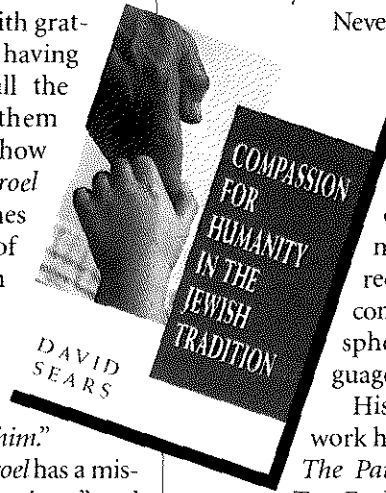
Nevertheless, to ignore the holy potential of the rest of the earth's inhabitants is, in the end, to miss part of the truth of our *Mesora*. Which makes Mr. Sears' most recent offering a welcome contribution to the sphere of English-language Torah literature.

His new book, like the work he published last year, *The Path of the Baal Shem Tov: Early Chassidic Teachings and Customs*, is largely a collection of diverse sources, in this case including the *Gemora* and Midrash, *Rishonim*, *Acharonim* and contemporary Torah-scholars, "rationalist" and "mystical", Chassidic and otherwise.

What they all have in common, though, is a focus on the Jewish mandate to have regard and concern for all human beings.

Included is material familiar to many who attended *yeshivos* or seminaries, as well as material that readers may encounter for the very first time. There are even some truly startling quotes (like the *Sefer HaBris's* opinion that "*rei'acha*" — neighbor — in "*v'ahavta Prei'acha kamocho*" — love your neighbor as yourself — encompasses non-Jews as well as Jews). Also presented in the work are three original and interesting essays by the author.

<sup>1</sup> Author of "Who Took the 'Jewish' Out of Jewish Music?" (Jan. '97), and "Chanuka and the Paradox of Jewish Unity" (Dec. '98).



**A Torah Directed Humanism**

One's first reaction to a book presenting the case for what might be called "Torah-humanism" could easily be wariness. "Universalism," after all, has been at the root of many a sectarian Jewish movement, from ancient times through contemporary ones, reason enough for Jews who recognize the Torah's truth to harbor a healthy degree of insularity.

But just as *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* did not destroy the sun and stars when heathens chose to worship them, neither may we abandon, *chas v'shalom*, the deep concern for all human beings inherent

Compassion for Humanity in the Jewish Tradition is well-researched, well-organized, and imminently readable... a worthy addition to any Jewish library.

in the Torah, just because it has been misunderstood, misrepresented and misused by some.

The attitude we have for certain beliefs, moreover, may not necessarily be extended to our attitude toward their

believers. Many aspects of Christian or Islamic theology may be anathema to Jews, but they need not reflect negatively on non-Jews who affirm them.

That said, this may not be the book a "doctor of the soul" would prescribe for most American Jews; having embraced universalism to a dangerous, indeed mortal, fault, the non-Orthodox Jewish world needs a stronger dose of Jewish particularism: the principle that *Hashem* "did not make us like the nations of the earth," that He "separated *Yisroel* from the *amim*." On the other hand, though, perhaps by seeing that universalism has a distinct place in Jewish tradition, non-Orthodox Jews might become more open to the rest of the Torah's teachings.

In any event, the volume will likely prove a useful one for those of us who have well absorbed the lesson of *Aleinu* and *Havdala*. Because some of us who recognize what being a Jew really means run the distinct risk of occasionally overlooking the fact that all humans, in the end, reflect a *tzelleim Elokim*.

If there is any basis for critique of Reb David's book, it would focus on what might be perceived as its lack of balance. This reviewer, for one, would have preferred that both sides of the universalism/particularism issue be provided "equal time."

He does, to be sure, acknowledge — repeatedly and occasionally at length — the distinctiveness of *Klal Yisroel*. But there are important aspects of that separateness — reflected in prohibitions like *lo sechaneim*, or *stam yeinam* — whose consideration is a necessary counterweight to the formidable amount of material cited.

But to fault Mr. Sears' offering for that lack is really to complain that it is not a different book than it is. The author did not aim and does not claim to offer us an exhaustive survey of the relationship between Jew and Gentile, but rather a source-book about the Jew's responsibilities to humankind — and in that goal he has admirably succeeded.

*Compassion for Humanity in the Jewish Tradition* is well-researched, well-organized, and imminently readable. It will be a worthy addition to any Jewish library. ■

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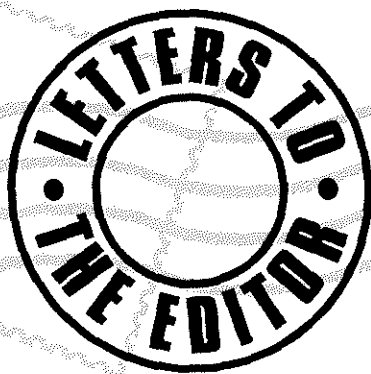
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**FOCUSING ON THE SOURCE OF  
TEENAGERS AT RISK**

To the Editor:

While paging through the October issue of *The Jewish Observer*, my eyes were caught by an enlarged bold-print sentence that read: "The consensus of professional and lay activists working with at-risk teenagers and dropouts has been that the overwhelming majority of their clients come from broken homes, orphaned homes, dysfunctional homes, or unhappy homes."

After studying the message carefully, I realized that this statement could possibly be interpreted in a much more extreme way than it was intended, as if to say the following:

"There are two types of families. One: orphaned, divorced, dysfunctional, and unhappy. And two: the rest of us. Ninety percent of our dropout children come from the first type. And we of the 'normal' families, need to be careful not to become like the other kind of parents."

Upon realizing the hurtful, albeit unintentional impact this statement could have upon a parent struggling with a dropout child, I felt simultaneously mortified and infuriated. I felt a tremendous sense of responsibility to stand up and support the many caring and competent parents who have enough pain in their lives without feeling compartmentalized in an overwhelming majority of dysfunction. I felt a need to rise up and say: Dropout children is an epidemic in our midst, גר, and it strikes in the best of homes!

As parents, we need to unite and reach out to one another. There are not two

classes of parents. We are all human beings who struggle, who try our best. We all experience every day a sense of helplessness and of utter dependence upon *Hashem* in the raising of our children. We know that it is only with *Hashem's* help that any of our children do not drop out. And we also know that all too often the homes that children do drop out of are kind, caring, disciplining, balanced homes. Let us give strength to those parents who try so hard, and who even though they think they have failed, really have succeeded! Let us help them lift their heads and say, "I tried so hard. It is not I who has failed."

As human beings we try together, we cry together, we stumble together. For some reason, *Hashem* keeps so many of us on the straight path. And for some reason, even in the best of homes, some drift painfully away. Together, and humbly, let us be alongside one another to support each other through the trying times and the painful losses. And together, let us hope and pray for a joy that defies unhappiness, a strength that defies dysfunction, and a miracle that brings back all the lost children, as well as ourselves, to a place close to *Hashem*.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my thoughts and feelings.

(RABBI) NAFTOLI BASSMAN  
*Lakewood, NJ*

*The author responds:*

I was truly anguished by Rabbi Bassman's letter, because the furthest thing from my mind was to add to the pain of others. I certainly did not intend to write condescendingly or cynically. I also specifically wrote about the pressure

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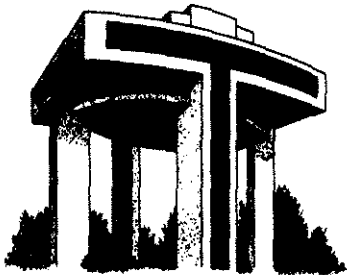
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exerted by the outside world (which includes the pressure exerted by the drop-out population, as well) to account for the tragedy of children of stable homes that are dropping out. Outside of the inadvertent pain that may have resulted from my words, I still maintain that my position is correct as expressed.

I have spoken to psychologists and professionals who work for major national organizations, those who work in a local level, as well as *Rabbei'im*, and yes, *baalei battim* who work with the dropout population. They all share the same view: most of these kids are a product of troubled homes.

Any time we discuss or write about a problem such as this, or about the older singles, childless couples, domestic violence etc., someone might be reminded of his or her problem and feel hurt. But if we are to suggest real solutions, which might avoid future problems, and solve some current ones, we have a responsibility to write as honestly as circumstances permit.

RABBI AARON BRAFMAN

### EXPANDING THE LIST FOR THE REBBI'S CONFESSION

To the Editor:

"A *Rebbi's* Confession" (*JO*, Nov. '98) is a compelling tale. There are numerous lessons from the *Rebbi's* experience, from which we all stand to gain. Chief amongst them, of course, is the need not to judge a person before knowing the full circumstances behind his/her actions.

There was a lesson, however, which the *Rebbi*, even in his confession, seemed to overlook. When the *Rebbi* greets his former student, Avraham, he is taken aback by what mistakenly appeared to be a suede *yarmulka*, which, as the *Rebbi* recounts, was more an ideological statement than a fashion statement. This leads the *Rebbi* to his admitted fit of rage. Only later does he learn that Avraham's traditional *yarmulka* appeared that way because it was run over by several cars.

The *Rebbi* confesses to a number of misdeeds over the years, which he has now come to regret. He now under-

stands that there was an explanation for the "suede" *yarmulka*. However, being guilty of a deep sense of contempt — *sinas chinam* — for someone with a different type of *yarmulka*, or ideology, was not on his list of remorse.

The fact that the *Rebbi* exhibited such disdain is bad enough. That it never occurs to him, even in his tragically inspired moments of reflection, that this attitude demands correction compounds the problem. This omission exposes a terrible behavioral flaw that permeates too much of our society.

Should the *Rebbi* read these lines, I hope that he will realize that there is one more important lesson he could still learn. May he do us all a favor and spread a bit of *ahavas chinam* (unsolicited love)...even to those in suede *yarmulkas*.

RABBI YOEL SCHONFELD  
Flushing, NY

### "A REBBI'S CONFESSION" — MORE LOSS THAN GAIN

To the Editor:

With much *siyatta dishmaya*, the world of *chinuch* has been elevated by leaps and bounds to its current level in its professionalism, devotion, and sensitivity to the many individual needs of our children. As a parent and an experience *Rebbi*, I can testify that the sensitivity, support and respect we must show our *Rebbis* has to be our first priority. Before an article or a statement is put on the public forum, it must be scrutinized with extreme caution not to offend or undermine this authority and respect which our *rebbe'im* are struggling to hold on to.

The underlying message that flows through the article is grossly degrading to the esteem in which a *mechanech* must be held. Maintaining strong support towards the *mechanchim* of our children is the only medium through which a *Rebbi/teacher* can have any effect on our children.

Being sensitive and caring is a basic prerequisite and of utmost importance for every *mechanech* and every *mentch*, as was skillfully written and reinforced

in the article. Being sensitive and caring about the possible repercussions of such an article is of even greater importance... ויצא שכרו בהפסדו — the loss outweighed the gain.

A MOST CONCERNED REBBI  
Lakewood, NJ

### QUESTIONS JO ON MEDIUM FOR REBBI'S CONFESSION

To the Editor:

The article, "A Rebbi's Confession," left me wondering as to what the point of the article was. It seems that it was a message to *Rebbe'im* and a call for introspection.

I question the use of so public a vehicle as the *JO* for presenting so sensitive an issue. There is no question that a *Rebbi* or *mechanech* is obligated to be *mefashfesh b'maasav* (examine one's actions) to insure that he is transmitting Torah and *Yiras Shamayim al taharas hakodesh*. There is no question that *lomdei Torah* and parents of *tinokos shel beis Rabban* (school children) must choose their teachers carefully. But once a person has fulfilled the requirement of "*asei lecha Rav* (establish a *Rav* for yourself)," he is obligated to follow the *halacha* of "*afilu al yamin shehu smol* (even if he tells you that "right" is "left")."

The article plants a seed of mistrust in a generation that is already groping for clearly defined leadership. The public nature of the article casts a shadow on a group of people who on the whole are the *shluchim* of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* to insure us that the next generation will have the *mesora* in hand. As a *Menahel* of a large *Yeshiva Ketana* in Chicago, I can honestly say that while "*eiyn tzadik ba'aretz asher yaaseh tov v'lo yechta* (there is no such thing as a pure *tzadik* without sin)," *Rebbe'im* on the

whole indeed reflect, "*im yihiyeh Rab-bach k'malach Hashem.*" They are *mechavein l'shem Shamayim*, *ehrllich*, and deeply committed to their mission.

We live in a *dor yasom*, as Dr. Wikler's article in the same *JO* issue points out. Many of our homes are ones in which both parents work in a world that demands career-minded employees. Parents have little time or presence of mind for the full time task of child rearing. A *Rebbi* is called upon to act as father, mother, and *Rebbi*. Not only does a *Rebbi* not receive the support and respect of the community, but he is under the constant bombardment of evaluation and criticism by the public. This is true for *Rabbanim* and *Roshei Yeshiva* as well.

It is not necessary for the *JO* to print a letter indicating the possible faults of a *Rebbi*. These issues are well discussed in *shuls*, *Shabbos* tables, and the "*Yiddishe*" market places of America. What *Rebbe'im*, *Rabbanim*, and *Gedolei Yisroel* do need is the respect and reverence necessary to effectively do their job.

RABBI ZEV MEISELS  
MENAHEL, JOAN DACHS BAIS YAAKOV -  
YESHIVAS TIFERES TZVI  
Chicago

### THE REBBI'S CONFESSION — INSTRUCTIVE TO ALL READERS

To the Editor:

I want to commend *The Jewish Observer* for its courage in printing the amazing story, "A Rebbi's Confession," in the *Cheshvan* issue.

Such a story is sure to touch a raw nerve. Why? Because we are all pulled in two directions by our *yeitzer hara* and *yeitzer hatov*. Will we act like the other nations and blame our "troubles" on



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external factors, or will we — if we experience adversity, G-d forbid — make a *din v'cheshbon* as a Jew is taught to do, searching our own actions for the clue as to why such things are happening to us?

We learn from our *avos hakedoshim* (patriarchs) that the latter course is the Jewish way. One could cite countless instances, but what comes to mind is the famous scene from *Parshas Mikeitz* in which the brothers return to the house of Yoseif in *Mitzrayim* after the goblet is found in Binyamin's sack. Yehuda says to Yoseif, "G-d has uncovered the sin of your servants."

Would anyone but a *Yid* have been able to say that the brothers' troubles were caused by their own sin? They knew the goblet had been planted. But they also remembered their own actions

years in the past, actions which they could not justify.

It took courage to print "A *Rebbi's* Confession" because — tragically — we Jews are affected by the sicknesses of the *Galus* in which we live. All around us we are aware of people who react to adversity by marching on picket lines, screaming to the press or resorting to violence. The *goyishe velt, lehavdil*, blames everybody but themselves when something "goes wrong."

I have heard that some yeshiva educators have criticized the *Observer* article because it allegedly casts a negative light on *Rebbe'im*, as if to say, "If my child is not learning — or even if my child is not a *mensch* — it must be the *Rebbi's* fault."

Nobody is perfect, obviously, but my experience has shown that usually, when there is a problem in the classroom, the fault can be traced to the home. Parents must be so careful to train their children in *derech erez*.

This article shows dramatically that if something goes wrong in the classroom — or anywhere in life — parents and children must make a *din v'cheshbon* on their own actions, not the *Rebbi's* actions. After all, the *Rebbi* who wrote the article was not blaming anyone but himself for what happened. Let parents *at the very least* do the same.

May the anonymous *Rebbi* be blessed for his courage in helping all of us learn the correct *derech*. May the editors of *The Jewish Observer* be blessed for their courage in allowing *Am Yisroel* to be made aware of this great contemporary example of how a *Yid* should react to adversity.

YISROEL NEUBERGER  
Lawrence, NY

MESSAGE OF THE UNSIGNED CHECK:  
SAYING "AMEIN" PROPERLY

To the Editor:

Your "Amein" article (Dec. '98) caught my interest during Chanuka, the *Yom Tov* that is geared to *chizuk* in *emuna* and *Hashgacha Prattis*. The connection between the "Amein" response timing and the unsigned, returned

check strikes me as a profound message to the meaning of the word "Amein."

The *Gemora* (*Shabbos* 119b) explains "what is meant by the term "Amein": "Kel Melech Ne'eman" — the three letters of the Hebrew word *Amein* stand for three separate words. As *Rashi* explains, we are testifying that *Hashem*, who is our Creator, is

- 1) The source of all power,
- 2) The King, and
- 3) The most reliable force extant.

*Tosafos* (*ibid*) says that this is what one should be thinking when saying the word "Amein."

Thus, when the *Gemora* (*Berachos* 53b) teaches that those who respond with "Amein" are greater than those who said the *beracha*, we can learn that it is because the "Amein" completes the message, certifying the blessing with this "signature," declaring that *Hashem* is most reliable.

[The blessing itself also proclaims *Hashem* as the source of all power and the King of the universe, but the third part, "ne'eman," is conveyed by the additional emphasis of the word, "Amein."]

An unsigned check can serve as a metaphor for a blessing without an appropriate "Amein" closure — as if it lacks a "signature."

This also explains why the *Gemora* (*Berachos* 47a) also links one's longevity to the way one responds with "Amein": "He who extends his *Amein* a little bit will merit to have his days and years extended." (*Tosafos*) When we testify wholeheartedly to our loyalty to *Hashem* the Creator and source of life, we earn more life.

When someone utters a blessings to G-d, he is thereby making a proposal that all who hear it should concur by responding with firm consent and commitment.

May we all focus on saying "Amein" properly, and thus earn the blessing alluded to by: "One who responds with *Amein* with all of his concentration [*Rashi*] and with a loud voice [*Tosafos*] will have the gates of *Gan Eden* opened for him" (*Shabbos* 119b).

(RABBI) MOSHE GOLDBERGER  
Staten Island, New York

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PS = PostScript

SL = Second Looks

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## Rabbinical Group Scores "Confidentiality" Lawsuit Decision

In the wake of a recent New York State Supreme Court Justice's summary judgment against — and harsh words for — a Long Island Orthodox rabbi in a much-publicized "breach of confidentiality" case, the Conference of Synagogue Rabbonim of Agudath Israel of America has labeled the ruling "both troubling and dangerous."

The case involves a woman who, experiencing marital problems, revealed certain sensitive information regarding her religious observance to two local Orthodox rabbis. The rabbis, in turn, upon determining that the circumstances justified a halachic exception to the general rule of Jewish law prohibiting the disclosure of confidences, shared some of that information with her husband, his lawyer and a court considering the woman's fitness to be a custodial parent. She subsequently initiated a civil suit against the rabbis, charging them with breaching their duty of confidentiality and seeking millions of dollars in compensatory and punitive damages.

On November 18, 1989, the Queens County division of the New York State Supreme Court (in New York, the "Supreme Court" is the lowest level within the state judiciary) ruled that one of the rabbis had indeed violated state law protecting the confidentiality of conversations with clergymen. (The court reserved judgment regarding the second rabbi's liability, pending a trial to determine whether the woman had waived her confi-

dentiality privilege with respect to her statements to that rabbi.)

In its decision, the court wrote that the rabbis' conduct "so transcends the bounds of decency as to be regarded as both intolerable and atrocious." Rejecting the rabbis' assertion that their conduct was halachically mandated, the court concluded that there was no religious basis for their disclosure of the confidential information. What the defendants did, the judge added, "under the guise of religious necessity, conviction or the protection of the Torah, is not only wrong, it is outrageous." The Agudath Israel rabbinic group, which consists of congregational rabbis from dozens of cities across the country, issued two statements today. The first, written in Hebrew and addressed to the Torah community, reiterates the Jewish religious prohibition against utilizing non-Jewish court systems instead of Jewish religious courts, and condemns the attack on *talmidei chachamim* and the quest to use the court system to "punish" them for exercising their halachic judgment.

The second statement issued by the Conference, written in English and intended for the general public, addresses the specifics of the court's ruling and its broader implications:

"Jewish law takes an unequivocally stringent view regarding the disclosure of confidences; as a general rule, revealing confidential information is strictly

prohibited. But halacha also recognizes that there are certain exceptional circumstances that justify — even demand — the disclosure of such information.

"It is thus with a profound sense of concern that we take note of the recent New York State court ruling imposing civil liability on respected Orthodox rabbis who, in the exercise of their halachic judgment, conveyed certain sensitive but vital information about a woman's religiously improper conduct to her husband and to a court considering her fitness to serve as a custodial parent. We find this ruling both troubling and dangerous.

"We find it troubling because the court overstepped its secular judicial function by offering its view of the halachic propriety of what the rabbis had done, going so far as to flatly pronounce the rabbis' religious justification of their disclosures 'wrong' and 'outrageous'. We believe that it was inappropriate for the judge in the case — unlearned in the complexities of Jewish law surrounding this issue, and bound by constitutional limitations on a secular court's involvement in religious doctrine and practice — to evaluate the religious validity of the rabbis' actions.

"In addition, as synagogue rabbis we see great danger in this ruling, because the specter of civil liability may well discourage rabbis from getting involved in sensitive personal matters involving their congregants or other members of the community. To tell rabbis that they risk civil liability if they follow the dictates of halacha in the extraordinary situation when they conclude that Jewish law mandates disclosure of confidential information is to undermine an essential component of the rabbinical function.

"We express our solidarity with the respected rabbis involved in this case, and urge an expeditious reversal of this unfortunate court ruling."

(Signed) Rabbi Dovid Kviat, Chairman of the Conference of Synagogue Rabbonim of Agudath Israel

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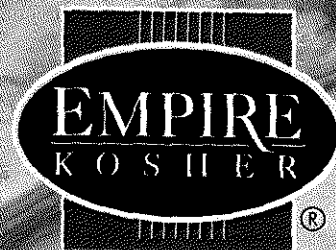
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