

THE JEWISH OBSERVER

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VOLUME XVIII, NUMBER 5
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THE ETHIOPIAN ALIYA

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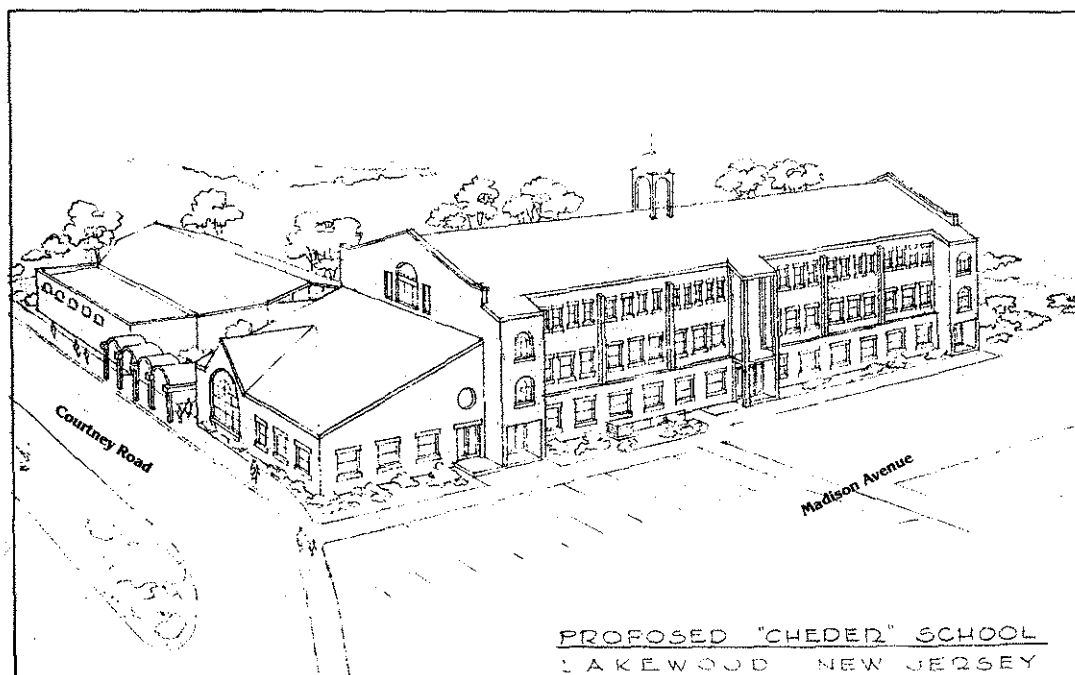
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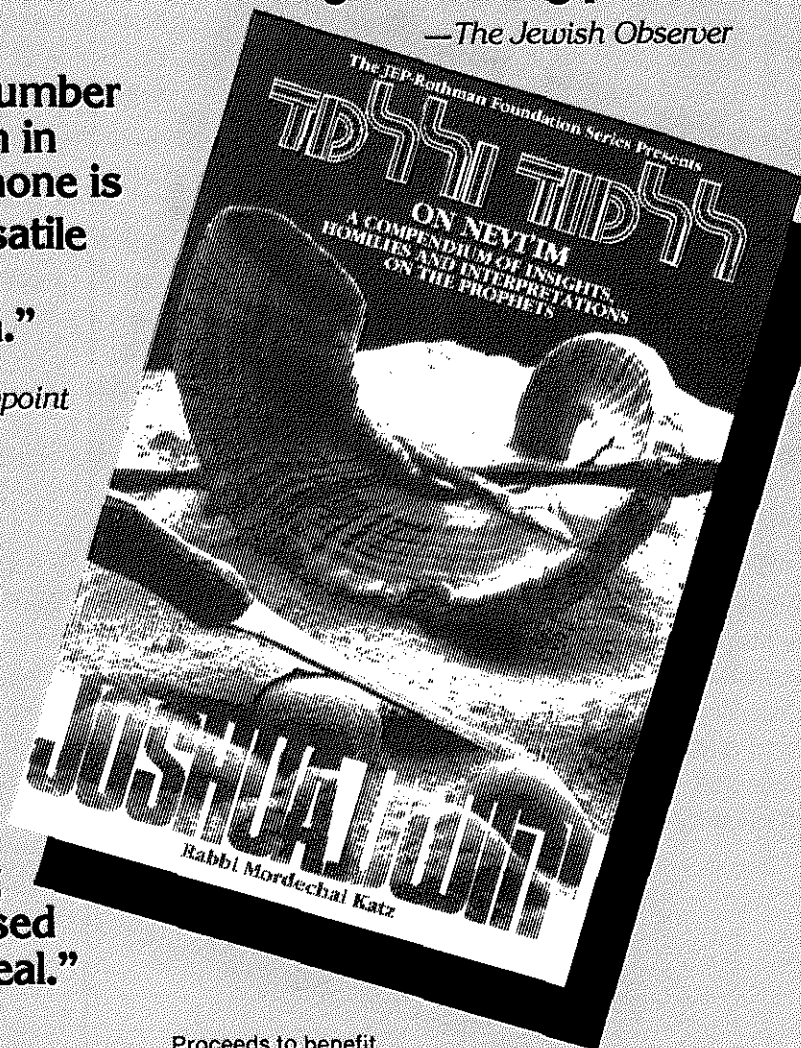
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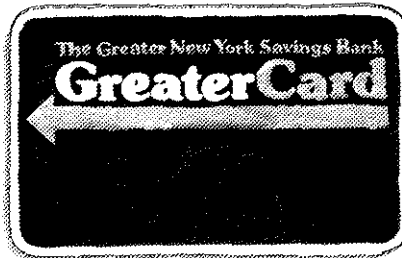
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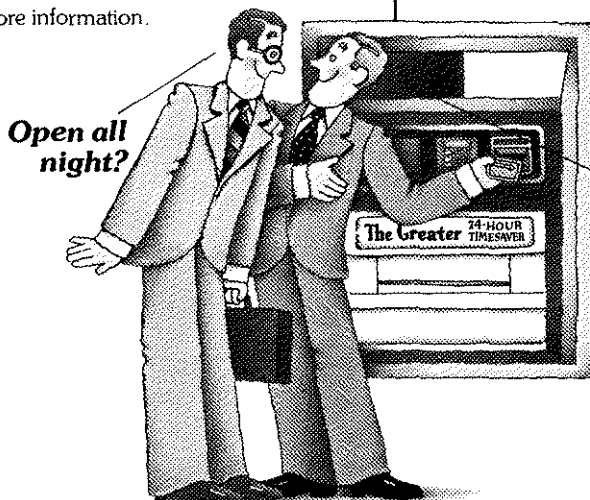
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Nisson Wolpin

THE ETHIOPIAN

To appreciate the full scope of the problems that surround the successful absorption of Israel's 10,000 new olim from Ethiopia, and to better plan to resolve them, much more must be known about these Ethiopian "Jews"—their background, their halachic status, their way of life, and the way they are being dealt with today in Israel. Some of the more fascinating details will be explored in other articles in this issue. This article will focus on the present-day situation—the halachic realities, their implications, how they are being honored and how they are being defied.

* Photo courtesy American Committee for Shaare Zedek Hospital in Jerusalem.

I. Background

Everyone's heart and imagination were captured by the breathtaking *aliya* of some 10,000 Jews from Ethiopia. Heart-rending stories are now being told about how, for generations now, members of this valiant tribe have suffered hardship and discrimination because of their stubborn adherence to their understanding of Biblical Law. According to historical accounts, the "Falasha Jews" numbered over 200,000 souls just over a century ago, with barely 20,000 surviving today, enduring terrible decimation in their population.

One cannot help but be moved by recent accounts of families that have been separated in their long trek from the highlands, where they had lived, to the air strips from which they were being flown to Israel, in this dramatic undertaking dubbed Operation Moses. Not always are these families reunited. Tragically, many people have perished on the way, while others have been stranded as a result of the interruption of this Operation, triggered by the imprudent release of publicity surrounding this *aliya*, last December. We have yet to learn the full drama of their long, tortuous hike from the highlands to the equatorial desert, their trip into Sudan, their surreptitious flights to Israel via Belgium, and their assignment to absorption centers.



*Ethiopian refugees at Shaare Zedek Medical Center in Jerusalem.

ALIYA

The Shock After Landing

The adventures and crises are not over with their arrival in Israel. The cultural shock they are experiencing in entering the 1980's from a backward village existence makes for fascinating stories; however, people do tend to adapt to 20th Century conveniences, and this is not the major crisis they are facing. More difficult is their exposure to the totally non-religious atmosphere of some of the absorption centers. Many of them have never witnessed Sabbath desecration before, and hardly expect to see it in the Holy Land. This constitutes an even greater shock.

The first impulse, then, is to take these valiant refugees to heart, and do all that is possible to help them adjust to their new home; to give tangible expression to our sense of participating in the historical act of bringing to a close millennia of estrangement.

We must realize, though, that these events have been taking place with unusual rapidity, and we just may be overlooking the most important problem of all. As recently as 1979, there were only several hundred Ethiopian Jews in Israel. Beginning clandestinely under Menachem Begin, and reaching a dramatic climax last December, the "Falashan" *aliya* has brought the Ethiopian population in Israel

to a full 10,000 today. While every effort is being made to integrate the Ethiopian Jews into Israel's society, one difficulty stands in the way of this goal: Are they really Jews?

The status of the Ethiopian Jews has been under a cloud of doubt for centuries, for while they have long claimed to be Jews, their practices are not all consistent with Jewish law, in some respects similar to those of some old fundamentalist Christian groups that have also claimed to be this or that one of the Lost Tribes, and not that different from the Karaite tradition, which accepts the Written Law but rejects the Oral Law: What does one make of a people that adheres tenaciously to a religion that it calls "Judaism," and yet never heard of *tefillin*?...that honors the Sabbath by staying in the house of worship most of the day, from sundown Friday through nightfall Saturday, but does not kindle lights on Friday eve, because it views "a fire burning in their dwelling place" a desecration of the Sabbath?

As the adjoining box clarifies, determining the halachic status of these "Jews" must take two sets of problems into account: First, those questions of "personal status" that might affect any Jewish community that has been beset with generations of questionable marriages and invalid divorces. Throughout the thousand years that the rest of world Jewry has known of this isolated tribe, its members have never been aware of the halachic *get* (divorce document), never mind administered one. In other words, if these Ethiopians are Jews, any of their marriages that have ended in divorce were never really dissolved, and subsequent marriages by those "divorced" were actually adulterous, with all subsequent generations *mamzeirim*.

And then, one must deal with the question of "religious identity" — whether the members of the community are all of Jewish descent: to what extent they are a mixture of Jews, converts to Judaism — without benefit of halachically valid conversions, and non-Jews who happen to identify with the community.

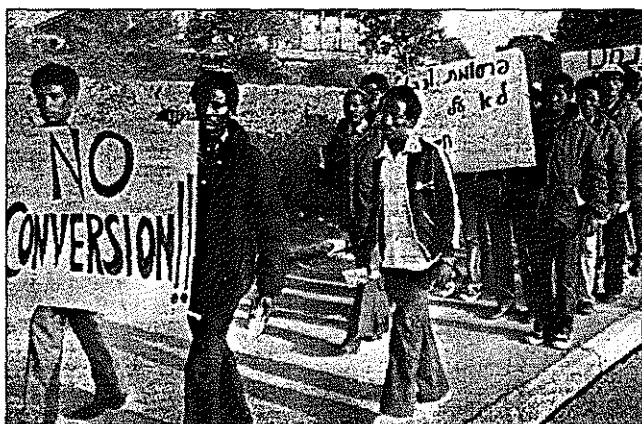
These are very grave problems, but they could be resolved one way or another if they would be dealt with by those who are competent to do so, as is elaborated upon in the special section: full conversion before a competent rabbinical court. But unfortunately, this is not as yet the case.

II. The Israeli Reality...and Its Resolution

Ten thousand Ethiopian would-be Jews are in Israel, anxious to be part of *Klal Yisroel*; they should by all means be led along the guidelines of Torah law, and encouraged to learn as much about Judaism as possible. Unfortunately, the many problems that face them are not being dealt with by a concerted effort. Worse, they are being compounded by the anti-religious tactics of some Israeli officials and apparent provocation by secular media and spokespersons.



The sensitive halachic matters dealing with the requirements of *geirus*, even when they affect public policy (or especially...), should be settled by those with halachic expertise, away from the limelight, but this consideration did not by any means keep this controversy away from the Knesset floor or the media. To the contrary, it was hotly debated in the Knesset, and Shulamit Aloni declared that the rabbinical requirements for the conversion of the Ethiopian Jews were most offensive, especially in view of the fact that "they are more Jewish than we are." As if responding on cue, a group of "Falashas" suddenly appeared with English and Hebrew lettered placards, in a



Ethiopian Jews who were airlifted from the Sudan protesting outside Parliament in Jerusalem.

sophisticated Western-style protest, proclaiming "No Conversions!" before representatives of the press and TV cameras; and sure enough the scene was captured and then transmitted across oceans and continents for the benefit of *New York Times* readers and prime time viewers. And responding to the same cue, secular newspapers decried the "rabbinical intransigence" in view of the "Falashas'" heroism. (See box.) Does suspicion of outside provocateurs in this case indicate paranoia? Not in the

"Many members of the Ethiopian community in Israel are willing to undergo *giyur* (a full conversion), to satisfy the more stringent opinions. A number of Ethiopian youths, however, are forcefully preventing this from taking place, in defiance of their community's leaders and priests, even resorting to violence.

For example, the Chief Rabbinate had arranged for Ethiopian *olim* currently in the Absorption Center in Nazareth to participate in a *tevila* (immersion in a *mikva* for the purpose of conversion). When the bus chartered for this purpose arrived to pick up a large number of passengers, young men wielding clubs blocked their way, beating those who attempted to board the bus for the *mikva*. After six Ethiopians did board, the youths attempted to block the bus bodily, and later with garbage cans. When they did not succeed, they pelted the bus with stones. . . . In spite of threats from antagonistic youths in Ofakim, scores of Ethiopians from that region did carry out their conversion, as intended.

—from a report in MACHNE HACHAREIDI, April 15-20

Editorial in the Jerusalem Post

THURSDAY, MARCH 28, 1985

End to harassment

ARE ETHIOPIAN Jews coming to Israel really Jews?

The question may seem frivolous, even odious. Of course they are Jews, otherwise they would never have been airlifted here under the Law of Return, which applies only to Jews. In the eyes of the Jewish State, at least, there can be no question who or what they are. They are, simply, Jews.

Yet when they do come here, at long last, after a millennia-long separation, they are told, by the Chief Rabbinate, that they are — well, not exactly, as Ethiopia's dictator, Mengistu Haile Mariam, has pronounced them, not Jews, but, well, not quite Jews. There is, so to speak, some doubt about their Jewishness, and this flaw needs correction. At the minimum, through ritual immersion.

opinion of the religious community, whether Israel's Chief Rabbis or commentators in *Hamodia*, Agudath Israel's daily.*

The Difference This Time

One aspect of the official treatment of the Ethiopian *olim*, however, is in stark contrast to the treatment of *olim* in the 40's and 50's, who were sent to anti-religious absorption centers and kibbutzim. The Absorption Ministry today is placing many "Falashas" in religious communities. According to a quotation cited in an article in the *B'nai B'rith Jewish Monthly* (Nov., 85) by Craig S. Karpel "[Volunteers working with Ethiopians in Safed] who were airlifted from Yemen...remember how...so much of the spirituality they'd preserved for millennia was lost...(They) don't want the same thing to happen to Ethiopians."

This same theme is highlighted in a full page advertisement placed by the Mizrahi's Emunah Women for its "Project Joshua" in *The New York Times* as well as other papers across the country. Even though in the past, the Mizrahi did not arduously battle the de-Judaizing of earlier *olim*, this time they are remembering their history:

"In the 1950s and early 60s...Jews from Moslem lands...brought with them a heritage... rich in Torah and a commitment to religious values. But after undergoing a secular social-welfare orientation, many lost their Torah values without ever becoming 'Westernized'....Today we all know that a disproportionate number of Israeli welfare families, broken homes and delinquents come from this immigration. And the fault is not theirs. These people were secularized. They were deprived of the very belief which nurtured them as proud Jews through centuries of torment and discrimination....

"The mistake was made once. It should never be repeated."

Acceptance, With a Vengeance

Somewhere, on some level of consciousness, the Jewish Agency and the Absorption Ministry must be realizing that they would be repeating the mistakes of a generation ago if they do not give the members of this new *aliya* the benefits of a religious environment. Indeed, most children are being enrolled in religious schools. Yet, it seems as though it is being done with a vengeance, and with total disregard of the requirements of being part of a Torah society — to the detriment of the Ethiopian children and the integrity of *Klal Yisroel*.

The Education Ministry has insisted that Ethiopian children be accepted in religious schools without any conditions or qualifications: that is, no conversions. If not, the schools will be barred from receiving any further government funding. While Bnei Akiva schools are accepting Ethiopian children without requiring conversions, in direct opposition to the *psak* of those who require conversion before accepting these children into schools, a Chabad-sponsored dormitory school has refused to do so — and it has been cut off from government funds.

And what about the status of the Ethiopians in general society? The Ministry of the Interior has been issuing Jewish identity papers to all Ethiopians without requiring con-

version — in complete defiance of the established rabbinical policy and the published opinion of almost all living halachic authorities. Oddly enough, this Ministry is headed by the Sephardic Shas Party leader, Rabbi Yitzchak Peretz, who claims to recognize the validity of the mainstream halachic approach of requiring full-fledged *geirus* — acceptance of Torah and *mitzvos*, *mikva*, and *hatofas dam bris*. (Rabbi Peretz has remained silent on this issue, not attributing his Ministry's practice to the more recent ruling of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef.)

An Imperative: Avoiding Tragic Confusion

This mounting confusion is all leading to an extremely tragic denouement: These 10,000 Ethiopian "Jews," as they are today, can be brought into the ranks of *Klal Yisroel* as full-fledged, recognized members, qualified to marry other Jews, as any other *ger tzeddek*. Instead, they and their offspring are being denied this full measure of participation in Jewish life that they had risked life and limb for. They are being mixed indiscriminately into Israeli society so that, on the one hand, Jews and non-Jews will intermarry without realizing it, and on the other, every Ethiopian Jew will be greeted by every other Jew who possesses a modicum of awareness of the problems surrounding their status, with well-founded suspicion: did he/she convert, or didn't he/she? This problem, of course, goes

The Halachic Quandary

The question of the true status of the Ethiopian Jews was first raised formally in several halachic queries to *Radvaz* — Rabbi David ben Zimra — revered Chief Rabbi of Egypt in the 16th Century (author of over 3,000 halachic responsa, who retired to live his last years in Jerusalem, where he died at 110).

In one case, the *Radvaz* was asked regarding a Kushite woman who was captured with her two sons; she claimed to be a Jewess, from the tribe of Dan, and that her entire village, including her husband, was killed. She was purchased by a Jew, Reuben by name, who subsequently married her and had a son. This child now wants to marry. What was his status?...In response to a subsequent query, the *Radvaz* deals with a Kushite purchased by a Jew as a slave, who claims to be Jewish. What is to be done with this slave/Jew?

In his reponso, the *Radvaz* replies that (1) the Kushites included three communities — Christians, Moslems and Jews who were indeed from Dan. (2) This latter group did not observe the Oral Law and were thus like Karaites; their divorces were thus not administered in accordance with *halacha*, and many of their children (e.g. those born to second marriages after invalid divorces) were *mamzeirim*. (3) Unlike Karaites, they were unaware of Rabbinic Law, and acted out of innocence rather than defiance. Whereas Karaites were defiant in their trespass of Rabbinical interpretation and law, and were not to

be helped when in need, the Kushites (unlike Karaites) should be helped from all types of distress. For this reason, the *Radvaz* informed the poser of the second *she'eilah* (query) that instead of purchasing a slave as he had thought, he has performed the *mitzva* of redeeming a prisoner (an act of *pidyon shevu'im*). Unlike Karaites, who are not ransomed when they are held captive, because of their contempt of Rabbinic authority, Kushites are to be ransomed. (4) In the first of these responsa, the *Radvaz* suggests that their lack of commitment to the divinity of the Oral Law disqualifies them from serving as witnesses. Thus, any first marriage that ended in divorce was never binding in the first place — lacking the requisite *halacha*-abiding witnesses to validate the marriage. Thus, children born later are not *mamzeirim*, for a divorce was never necessary to dissolve the (first) non-existent marriage. In sum, the very weakness of the Kushites' *yichus* is at the same time its saving grace. However, he did not seem certain of this decision, and in the later *teshuva*, the *Radvaz* only says: "I fear that their marriages are marriages while their divorces are not valid."

Twentieth Century Applications

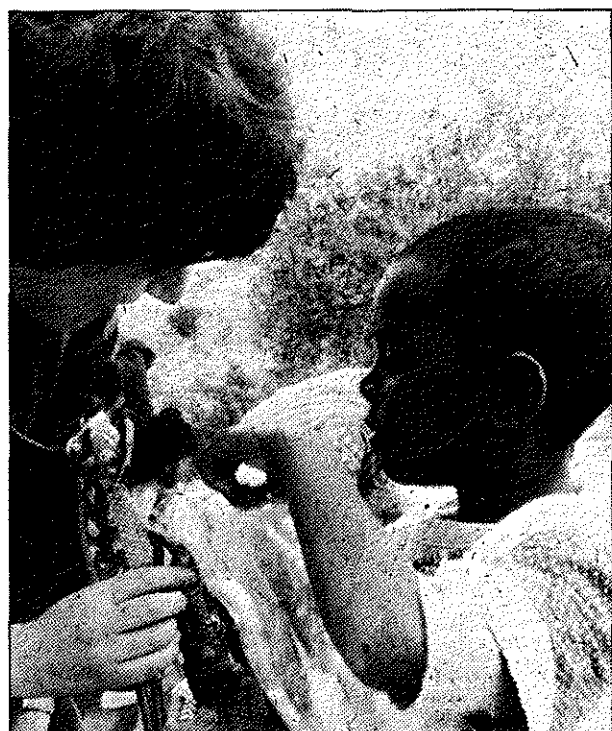
One cannot step directly from the *Radvaz*'s decisions in the 1500's into the 20th Century scene regarding the status of the "Falashas." During the interim, the geographic area was sub-

Continued on page 12



beyond the personal plight of 10,000 individuals, serious as this is. We are dealing with the very grave — and imminent — possibility of the floodgates of intermarriage being opened in Israel, permitting — even fostering — the marriage of Jews with thousands of others who are found by almost all halachic authorities to be in need of conversion, with the official imprimatur of the State, affecting future generations for all time to come.

Party alignments and secular prejudices must be put aside. Operation Moses, Operation Joshua — what have you — can only be meaningful if these take into account the precedent of the first Ethiopian/ Kushite to join the ranks of Jewry: Jethro, father-in-law of Moses, who enraged his neighbors by rejecting their idolatry, made the long and hazardous trek to join the Jews at Sinai, and then — going beyond intellectual conviction and social identification — underwent full conversion to become a *ger tzedek*. The order of the day is for the Jewish Agency and the Israeli ministries to give full meaning to the tremendous expenditure of time, money and human effort that went into the other "Operations," and to launch a comprehensive Operation Jethro. Will they measure up to the challenge? Will Orthodox Jewry live up to this challenge? History will judge us very harshly if we don't. ■



A young newcomer from Ethiopia gets a doll in Jerusalem's Gilo neighborhood.

The Halachic Quandary

Continued from page 11

ject to constant warfare and the frequent taking of captives, with much population exchange. There was never a possibility of bonafide conversions for the constant stream of new members of this "Jewish" community, since there were no qualified rabbinical judges there to validate the conversions, leaving many members of the Kushite community unaffected by the Radvaz's unquestioning acceptance of Ethiopian Jews of his day as "members of the Tribe of Dan." Chances are that a member of today's Ethiopian Jews may be the descendant of non-Jews who lived amongst Jews, identified with them, but never really joined them as members of the same religious community. Thus, the cloud of *mamzeirus* is further befogged by the very real possibility of non-Jewish *yichus*.

At first glance, this may seem to be the compounding of two insurmountable problems — questionable Jewishness and possible *mamzeirus* — but fortunately for the valiant members of this tribe who have chosen to cast their lot amongst the Jewish people, the truth is quite to the contrary: If we can assume that they are not Jews, then the cloud of *mamzeirus* is totally dispelled. Non-Jews do not beget *mamzeirim*. On the other hand, a formal conversion would then be required — *geirus*, which entails acceptance of the Torah's authority and obligation to keep its *mitzvos* before a bonafide rabbinical court, immersion in a *mikva*, and (for males) *hatofas dam bris*.

This indeed was the very requirement for accepting "Falashas" into Jewry spelled out by Israel's Chief Rabbis from Rabbi Avrohom Yitzchok Kook and Rabbi Yitzchok Halevi Herzog, זצ"ל, through today, and until recently the same has been required by virtually all who have been dealing with "Falashas."

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, שליט"א, in response to a query from his grandson last June, wrote that even though the Jewishness of the "Falashas" is questionable, every effort should be made to rescue them from oppression and starvation, as one would do for any of our fellow Jews. *Safeik nefashos lehachmir*. Dealing with life-and-death situations, one must take the stringent course even when there are doubts. The questions regarding their Jewishness do not in any way reduce our obligation to come to their aid. Before they be permitted to marry with other Jews, however, they must undergo a full conversion (as outlined above). Without conversion, they should be settled safely...elsewhere, but not in Israel, where the risk of intermarriage and compromise of the sanctity of *Klal Yisroel* runs very

**hatofas dam bris*—drawing a drop of blood as a means of performing a *bris mila* on a circumcized male.

high. (A copy of Rabbi Feinstein's letter appears on this page.) This same requirement for full conversion was articulated by Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, in a decision rendered eleven years ago. Only recently did he reverse himself, saying that the "Falashas" are full-fledged Jews, and should be accepted as such without any conversion rituals whatsoever.

Israel's current Chief Rabbinate first went on the record as being consistent with the almost-universal call for full conversion, but more recently has dropped the requirement of *hatofas dam bris*, relying somehow on earlier circumcisions performed for the sake of "belonging to Jewry." Three days after Rabbi Yosef's reversal, they publicly stated that they still stand firm on their previously stated requirement of conversion.

Rabbi Moshe Sternbuch, well-known author of *Moadim Uz'manim*, issued a statement on the "Falashas" that pointed out that their religious practices bear more resemblance to those of early Christians than to Jews; that Rabbis Hildesheimer and Guggenheimer, who in the 19th Century generated so much unqualified enthusiasm for extending help to the "Falashas" as full-fledged Jews (see the article, "Beyond the Sambatyon"), did so out of a lack of full knowledge of their status which resulted from the tremendous geographic distance that separated them, which no longer exists and does not affect our ability to assess their status; and that any compromise in the prerequisites of conversion, *mikva*, and *hatofas dam bris*, is unconscionable. He underscored the fact that conversion is actually a marvelous opening to this group that has been yearning for a full expression of Jewishness, and "protecting" them from these rabbinical requirements can only complicate their lives as well as promote confusion for *Klal Yisroel*.

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ב"ר מיינשטיין

למפ"ב נכדו האהוב הרב"ר משה'ל מרדכי קנרלער שליט"א, בברכה שלום וברכה ושלום.

אחרי שנים רבות, נאחז בזה לאשר מה שכתבתי בפני כמה שנים, אודות "הפעלשעס", שירדע מה שכתבתי בשו"ת דרכי"ו חלק שביעי סימן י"ט, שסמך שחזקים כיהודים, אבל לדינא קשה למסור על זה, שלא כדור אם קרוב"ו ידע היטב המציאות אודותם, וגם לא ברור אם עז ומנינו לא נשתנה מצבם, אבל לדוגמא א"כ בלשון עמיתנו רבין אהרן"ו מוכרז שם שד"ר"ו יבס כהם וטעם ספק"ו. יל"ז פתח"ו א"כ בלשון אומר דעתו דא"כ נאמר.

ולבני יתרושם, נחשב לנו כספק, ויש להצרכים בירוח אטיחי קודם שחזרים לבוא בקהל. שכל גם קודם בירוחם יש מצוה להצילם משהו דמסכנה כרין כל יסור, ש"סמך נצחיה נאמר"ו א"כ שטון חסד נודי כהם יחזיקם ביהודים, וגם יש לידע, שאפילו אם לדינא אינם יהודים, ש"ס כחזר שחזרים שום יהודים ומוסרים נכסם על יהודים, מחויבים להצילם.

וחנה כחזרה, אין להביא לאחי א"כ ידברו בירוח, כדי שלא להרבות חשש המכיללות, אבל אם נחזירו כרין, וכמו שסמך עושים, נחשש בכל יהודים, ויש לעזובם ולחוסם בכל דברי חזירה, בין בנספיק ובין ברוחניות. וסאד נצפיה על מה שסמך יש כאלו בא"י שחזרים סלקרם בעניני רוחניות, ונודים ח"ו שיהיו אבדוים מה יהודים, ונראה לי שכן נהגים דם שום שאלו קודם הוא שחזר. דמסם שיש לעקבם, לא רק סד שחזרים גרושים שחזר יהודים, דא"כ לדינא חילוק כמה שחזרים, אלא גם סד שיש כהם חסונה שחזר הם גרים, ונצילם במצוה "ואהבתם את הגר".

ואסוף במקרה שחזר הסב, ובכונה שחזר כל הסנה, נזהר בולנו בקרוב לקיבוץ בליוח ע"י שחזר צוקר.

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Beyond the River Sambatyon

The mists that cover the approach to the African highlands where the Ethiopian Jews lived corresponds to the mists of ambiguity that shroud the beginnings of this community of thousands of years' standing. Yes, Isaiah (11:11-14) did prophesy that "On that day G-d will again extend his hand to possess the remnants of His nation from Ashur, from Egypt, from Patros, and from Kush" — commonly interpreted as referring to Ethiopia.... According to tradition, the Ten Lost Tribes are in exile beyond the River Sambatyon, which was known to fling stones wildly for six days of the week, but rest on the seventh — hence its name. According to Rabbi Akiva, the phenomenon of the stilling of the waters on the Sabbath discontinued "because of our sins" (*Sanhedrin* 65), and indeed, the source waters of the Nile — a churning river, surrounded by deep canyon walls — separates the "Falasha" habitat from all but the most adventurous travellers. But are these truly the remnants of one of the lost Tribes?

Precisely 1,000 years ago, in the year 985, a dark-skinned man who called himself Eldad Hadani ("of Dan") visited the Jewish communities of Babylon (Iraq), Morocco, and Spain and presented himself as Eldad, son of Machli, son of Yechezkiel...son of Chushim, son of Dan, son of Yaakov...a member of the Tribe of Dan. According to his tradition, he said, his ancestors had refused to go along with the secession of Yeravam ben Nevat from Rechavam ben Shlomo's kingdom, and instead chose a self-imposed exile in Egypt, eventually settling in the mountains of Ethiopia (called Cheresheh). Close to 300 years later, when Sancherev conquered the Ten Tribes, the exiles of Naftali, Gad, and Asher allegedly joined this colony of Jews. Eldad's recounting of "the 36 Laws of Kashrus"

corresponded to similar codes of the Karaites, totally ignoring the Oral Law. On the other hand, he reported that his community administered the death penalty in its four variations, including *chenek* (asphyxiation), which is not mentioned in the Written Torah and is only known through the Oral Tradition. Some thought that this indicated a limited awareness — or retention — of the Oral Law, never preserved by transcription. Others dismissed him as an elaborate fraud — as did the Ibn Ezra and other Torah leaders of later times.

"The Emperor of Judah"'s Version

Another explanation of the source of this community was offered by Haile Selassie, late emperor of Ethiopia — called "Lion of Judah," among other grandiose titles — during a visit to Jerusalem in 1935. He claimed that he was 140th in line of direct descent from a supposed union between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Their alleged child, Menalik (*ben-Melech* — "Son of the King"), was born in Ethiopia, but returned to his father's court for his education.

Selassie went on to explain: "As a gift to my grandmother, King Solomon sent servants and merchants from all twelve Tribes. They taught us wisdom and we kept their commands...such as circumcision, dietary laws, the Sabbath, and so on. In the mid 16th Century, Christian missionaries converted us to Christianity, but the Jewish merchants refused, converted a number of men and women to Judaism, and married with them. Their children are black-skinned — the progenitors of today's Falashas. To preserve their way of life, they retreated to the highlands. We, like them, feel close to the Holy City, Jerusalem."

Other Reports, Other Explanations

Other members of the "Falasha" community attributed their source to a group of Jews that sought refuge in Alexandria, Egypt, from Nevuchadnezzar's invading army, which destroyed the first *Beis Hamikdash*. When one of leaders built a replica of the destroyed Temple in Alexandria, another broke away in protest, and led his followers to the African highlands to the south.... Then there is Elephantine Island, near Aswan, which around 525 BCE became a Persian fortress manned by Jewish mercenaries, and it is thought that these soldiers may have escaped to Abyssinia when the Persians lost control of Egypt, and formed the community of Ethiopian Jews.... Yet others say they stem from a contingent of Jews who sailed across the Straits from Yemen during the Second *Beis Hamikdash*, and took refuge in Ethiopia.

Mention of this obscure community is found in the travel records of Binyamin of Tudela, as well as in those of Rabbi Ovadia of Bartenura: "In some of their practices, these people resemble the Karaites, in other ways they resemble us."

The 1864 Proclamation

More recently, the "Falashas" became a *cause celebre* in Europe. News reports reached the Jewish communities of Europe in the early 1860's regarding a massive campaign by English missionaries aimed at converting the "Falashas" to Christianity. In response, Rabbi Ezriel Hildesheimer of Berlin issued a call, published in *Jeshurun* in 1864, to his fellow rabbis to do all possible to save this threatened community. Joined by Rabbi Nossan Adler of London, he pleaded with Rabbi Moshe Chazan of Alexandria to help save the

A search for the origins of the Ethiopian "Jewish" colony

"Falashas." Rabbi Chazan demurred, claiming that they were Karaites, and nothing would be gained by saving them from Christianity.

Together with Rabbi Shlomo Rapaport of Prague and Rabbi Gugenheimer of Cologne (Rabbi S. R. Hirsch's son-in-law), they prevailed upon the Alliance Israelit Universal of Paris to dispatch an accomplished linguist, Joseph Halevi, to make the hazardous journey to the Ethiopian highlands for a fact-finding tour. The trip, made in 1867, found the community threatened by the decision of their king, Theodorus, to cast his lot with the missionaries. In fact, he killed "Falasha" priests and their followers who refused to convert with him.

When Halevi returned to Paris with his alarming report, the Alliance Israelit Universal shrugged off his call for help, with the explanation that their hands were more than full with trying to save their oppressed brethren in Poland and the Ukraine....A copy of a "Falasha" prayerbook and Halevi's published description of their beliefs and practices succeeded in keeping their plight alive in the concerns of European Jewry, but the great geographic distance made practical steps quite impossible.

The Faitlovitch Expeditions

Halevi had a disciple, Dr. Jacques (Yaakov Noach) Faitlovitch, who carried on his mentor's dedication to the Judaic colony of Ethiopia. He made the first of many expeditions to Ethiopia in 1904, when only 23 years old (he was born in 1881 in Lodz, Poland). On his very first trip, which was blessed by Rabbi Zadok Kahn, Chief Rabbi of Paris, and financed by Edmond de Rothschild, he found that what had been a community of 200,000 souls just forty years before had dwindled to 50- to 70,000 people.

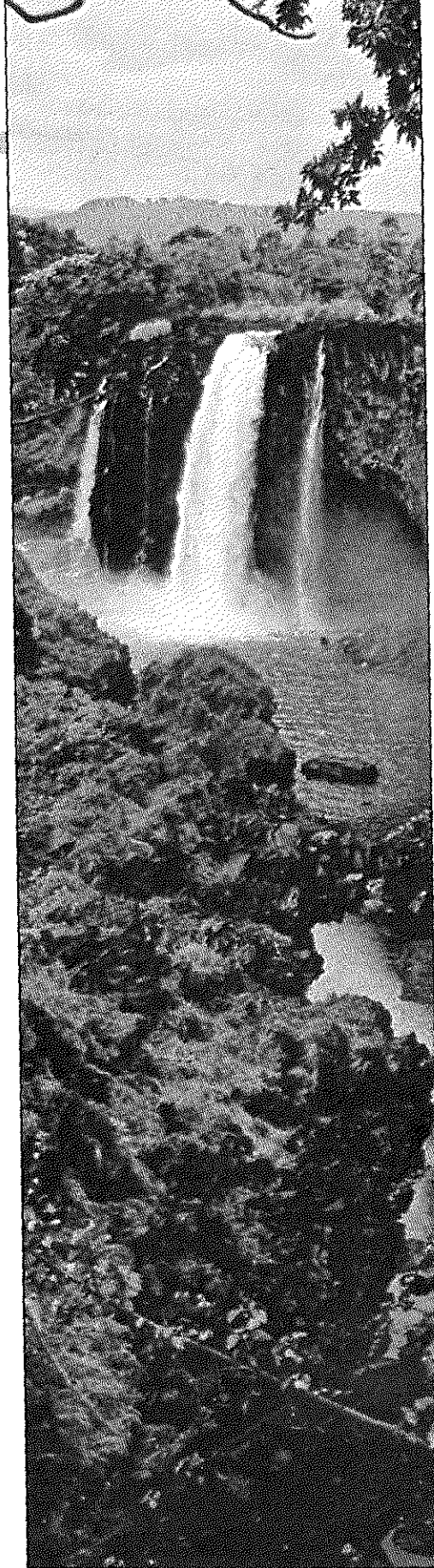


Cover illustration of Dr. Faitlovitch's book on his second visit to Ethiopia.

Faitlovitch continued to travel to Ethiopia over the next few decades, and is credited with bringing the "Falashas" their very first Torah scroll, as well as an introduction to its teachings. His work in Ethiopia was interrupted by Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia in 1934. With the outbreak of World War II, Dr. Faitlovitch settled in Israel. He returned to Ethiopia immediately after the war, intending to open a Jewish school, but did not succeed. The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 stirred a longing for the Promised Land among the Ethiopians. Thinking that the Temple was due to be rebuilt at any moment, they wrote to their mentor for help, but Faitlovitch rightly feared their assimilation into Israel's irreligious society and their consequent loss of faith, and wrote them to wait until the situation had changed.

In 1958, Dr. Faitlovitch did bring a small group to study in Israel and was on hand to welcome twenty-one young Ethiopians in Amharic when they arrived at a Mizrachi school in Ranana. Until the late 70's, however, contact between Israel and the "Jews" of Ethiopia was quite limited.

N.W.





Where Falasha Is a Naughty Word

*An in-depth examination of the life style
and religious practices of Israel's newest olim.*

"You're not supposed to say that!" exclaimed a friend, an American immigrant at the Mevasseret Absorption Center near Jerusalem, where a large group of Ethiopian refugees just arrived. I had made the mistake of asking about the *Falashas*.

While just about all rabbis have questions about the Jewishness of these newcomers, there was never even a shadow of a doubt as far as the Ethiopian Christians were concerned. The word *falasha** is an insult, the Amharic** equivalent of "kike," which is applied to those Ethiopians who are identified as Jews. The Judaic Ethiopians refer to themselves as *Beta Esrael*, which means just what it sounds like.

Jews or not, the Ethiopians have certainly shared many a typical Jewish experience during their 2,500 history—the whole panoply of antisemitic persecution. Time and time again this small African tribe suffered book burnings, pogroms, massacres, forced conversions and marranism. One Christian king, who reigned from 1434 to 1468, gave himself the title "Exterminator of the Jews."

Are names the Ethiopians' only claim to membership in the People Of Israel?

No. There is more.

In the mountains of Abyssinia (a province of Ethiopia) there are numerous river gorges like that of the Blue Nile, which tosses rocks like the legendary *Sambatyon*. *Sambatyon* sounds related to *Shabbat*, and indeed the Ethiopians' word for Shabbat is *Sanbat*. Their religious language is called Ge'ez, of Semitic origin, and contains an easily recognizable vocabulary. For example:

querban—sacrifice

mizvat—charity

safur—shofar

Gahannom

tazkar—memorial

aba—older man

kokab—star

gezrat—circumcision (root גרר)

Fassiq—Pesah

Nisan, Ab, Tomos (Tamuz)

Names of Hashem *Orit*—Torah (Aram.: *Oraita*)

Legal—But Without Oral Law

Oritawi means to Ethiopians what the words *Torah-true* do to English speakers. It is a good description of these deeply religious people, who are very stringent in what they know of Judaism. Although many of their practices may resemble those of the Essenes, the Karaites or the Qumran community, it must be remembered that the reason is different: the latter groups rejected the Oral Torah, or parts of it, whereas the Ethiopians simply never had the advantage of seeing it in writing, and much of what they may have known could have been forgotten over the millennia.

Indeed, when Jewish visitors reached their villages, not so long ago, and told them of the full range of Judaism, the Ethiopians were interested and eager to learn.

Since they did not have the *Mishna* and *Gemora* to guide them in their daily life, the Ethiopians based their observance solely on written works—*Tanach* and a number of Apocryphal books such as the Books of Jubilees, Enoch, Tobit, Judith, Barukh, Ben Sira I and II, and Maccabees. There were religious debates in the thatched huts of Abyssinia, and in 1954 a visitor sat in on one which concerned repair work to the synagogue during the intermediate days of Pesach.

*Israelis now call them simply "Ethiopians," and I shall do the same in this article.

**The official language of Ethiopia.

Mrs. Nahmoud, a frequent contributor to THE JEWISH OBSERVER as well as other publications, resides in Jerusalem.

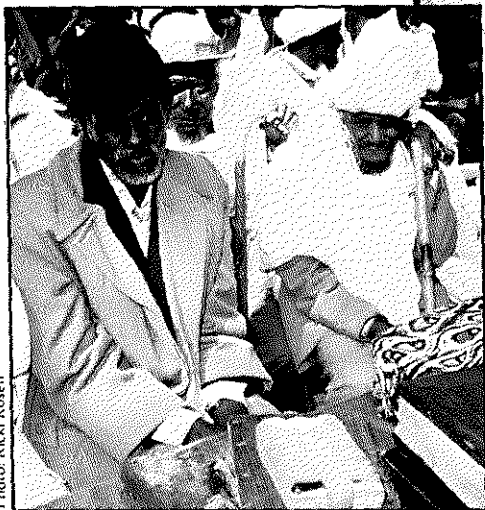
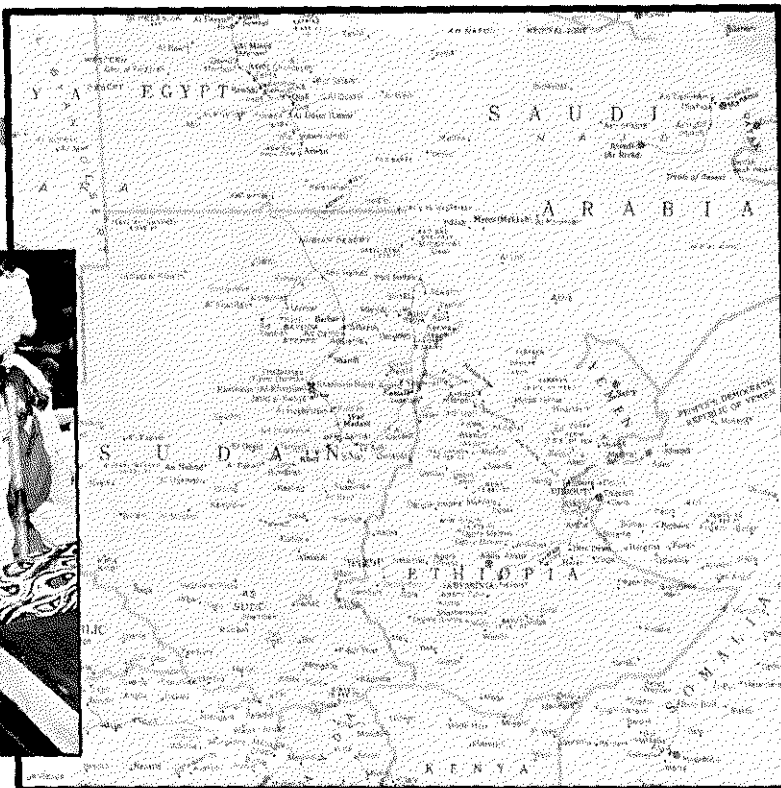


Photo: Ricki Rosen



The Ethiopians wrote a book called *Te'ezaza Sanbat*, or *Hilkhot Shabbat*. Taken from the Book of Jubilees, the precepts it contains were very rigorously observed. Drawing water, going beyond the limits of the village, or even stepping over a brook are among the prohibitions. Not only was it forbidden to light a fire on *Shabbat*, even a fire that had been lit on Friday was strictly *assur*, in keeping with the literal interpretation of the verse: "No fires shall burn . . . on the *Shabbat*" (*Shemos* 35,3). Householders extinguished all fires on Friday, and, naturally, they did not light *Shabbat* candles for this reason—like the Sadducees of 2,000 years ago and the more recent Karaites. My friend at the Absorption Center described the Ethiopians' shock the first time they were served hot food on *Shabbat*.

Sanbat salem (*Shabbat shalom*) is more than a greeting; it is also a reminder that quarreling is forbidden on *Shabbat*. *Shabbat* activities in the Ethiopian villages consisted of prayer, with a break for a communal meal. Singing and dancing were customary on holidays, but not on *Shabbat*. However, there is a poetic chant glorifying the Sabbath Queen that was recited on Friday evening. Work ceased on Friday at midday, when everyone in the village went to immerse themselves in the river while wearing their *Shabbat* clothes.

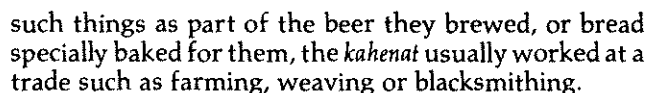
Fresh Like the Water

The Ethiopian Christians always claimed they could smell a '*falasha*'—he smells like fresh water, they said. This statement might not be an exaggeration, for the Judaic Ethiopians were very meticulous about ritual cleanliness; their villages were purposely built near a river so that they would have a "*mikveh*" at hand. Their

rituals of purification were based on many of the rules mentioned in Leviticus—and here we can see some resemblance to the Qumran and Essene practices. Contact with a corpse made one unclean for a full week, a period of quarantine that ended with clothes washing and an immersion at the final sunset before returning home. Other unclean-making acts were circumcision (for the circumciser); touching a grave; touching a dead animal or an unclean person. Touching a Christian caused a week's uncleanness, too, and it is interesting to note that the Ethiopians who lived in mixed communities were considered unclean by their coreligionists in the villages and were not allowed in the synagogues.

The words "*rabbi*," "*rav*" and "*hakham*" do not appear in the Ethiopian lexicon; their spiritual leaders were called *kahenat* (sing.: *kahen*). In every region the *kahenat* elected a high priest from their midst, who was then empowered to ordain. The priesthood was not hereditary, but it did have stringent requirements as to background, character and study. The candidate's family was investigated and, if there were a case of adultery or a physical defect even several generations back, the man was disqualified, as was a divorcee. (A *kahen* was not permitted to divorce.)

Candidates for the priesthood studied the Ge'ez language and the liturgy, and then became apprenticed to an older *kahen*. One of their tasks was to translate portions from the *Humash* from Ge'ez into the local language (usually Amharic) for the congregation during *Shabbat* services. In addition to offering sacrifices and officiating at the synagogue, priests sat as judges, said blessings at *gezrat* (circumcisions) and funerals, and performed most of the functions of rabbis in other parts of the world. Although the villagers brought the priests



Sacrifices were part of the Ethiopian religious life until only very recently. They brought sin offerings and sacrifices for certain holidays, as well as a paschal lamb. When foreign Jews began to penetrate the Abyssinian highlands, however, and they became aware that sacrifices are not being brought elsewhere, debates started up among their priests as to whether sacrifices were something to be relegated exclusively to the Temple at Jerusalem—which was to be built soon, they believed. Finally the custom of sacrifices fell into disuse as some of the older *kahenat* died and, it was held, the proper procedures had been forgotten.

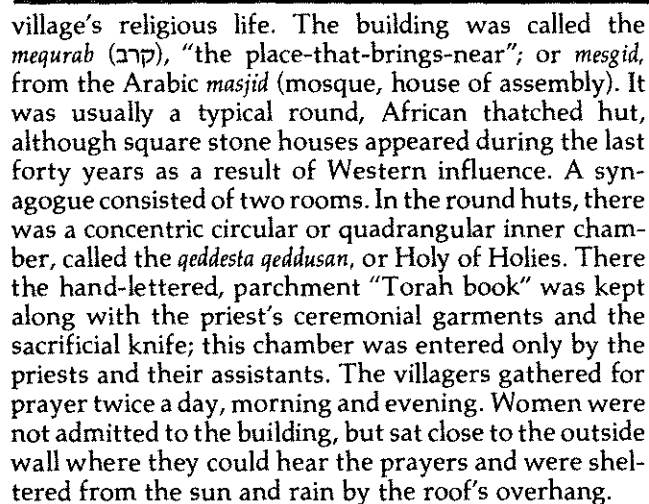
Sacrifices were offered on a stone altar which stood on the northern side of the synagogue courtyard, but it was the synagogue itself that was the center of the

The Ethiopian "Jewish" calendar is different from that officially and generally recognized in Ethiopia. The "Jewish" calendar consists of twelve months of twenty-nine and thirty days, alternating; every fourth year is a thirteen-month leap year. The year begins with Nisan.

Rosh Hashana is called *Berhan Saraga*, "The Light Has Appeared." It falls on the date of the new moon closest to September 11. A book called *Gadla Abraham* (the life and deeds of Abraham) was recited on the New Year, and formerly an animal was sacrificed. A trumpet was blown in ancient times, too, but the custom somehow disappeared.

The tenth of Tishri is the first of *Astasreyo*, "The Pardon," corresponding to Yom Kippur. After the final prayer at sundown, grain for birds was scattered on the roofs and the ground to show that man, the stronger, should feed the weaker. This gesture was a sort of *misva-prayer*, entreating Hashem's generosity for man in the new year.

Part of a prayer written in Ge'ez



Ethiopians said frequent blessings. In addition to the usual occasions, such as before and after meals, they also said "*Tatabarak Egziabher Amlak Esrael* (Blessed is the Owner of the World, the G-d King of Israel)" over a newborn baby—a miracle in their eyes—and upon meeting a foreign Jew, which was a rare and wondrous occurrence in an Ethiopian village.

Succot was a minor festival called *Bala Matsalat*. No booths were built, nor was there a *lulav* and *etrog*. Large tropical leaves were spread on the floors of homes and synagogue, however, and it is thought that *succot* were not constructed because the people felt they were already living in such shelters.

Pesah was celebrated for seven days, the first and the last days being the most holy, when no work or travel was permitted. Highlight of the restricted diet was an unleavened bread called *qita*. Milk that looked creamy was excluded, since cream was considered to be fermentation; therefore milk had to be drunk or used the day the cow was milked.

The destruction of the Temple was mourned by a fast day in Ab, and there were *two* fasts of Esther—but no Purim.

Circumcisions were celebrated on the eighth day *after* birth (day number nine) when the priest recited the *Tazkara Abraham*, a legend about Abraham Avinu. Funerals were simple. The deceased was wrapped and tied in a white cloth. The *kahen* read *Mota Muse* at the cemetery. This is a work which somewhat resembles the old Sephardic *Petirat Moshe*. *Mota Muse* had a special significance for the Ethiopians, since it recalls the time Miriam

spoke against Moshe Rabbeinu because of his Kushite wife.

The families of the deceased observed seven days of mourning, during which all work was forbidden. The last day was a *tazkar*, and on the first anniversary of the death the priest said special prayers in the synagogue, while the family slaughtered a bull or a sheep for the neighbors in memory of the departed.

Food Restrictions

Ethiopians were punctilious in the observance of agricultural laws. Their adherence to the Torah requirement of permitting their oxen to eat as they plowed or threshed in the field was in contrast to the Christian practice of muzzling the animals.

Kashrut was observed in a primitive manner, without *halachic* refinements, or the "fences" we have. The Ethiopians were careful about clean and unclean animals, and they slaughtered with a specially sharpened knife.

Not only was blood forbidden, so was raw meat. The Ethiopians would not cook a goat in its mother's milk, literally following the Biblical injunction, but they would add cow's milk to a stew of goat meat, since a cow could never have been the mother of a goat. They did have their own "fences," though: not only would they avoid eating what they considered *neveila*, but any kosher animal that had been merely bitten by another animal was declared *treif*.

Wine—all wine—was off limits because of the possibility of drinking Christian sacramental wine. When Jews from the outside began visiting, some of them brought "kosher wine from Jerusalem" and, when the visitor was trusted, the priests permitted the wine. Some old timers, however, still hesitated.

Similarities and differences between the religious practices of the Judaic Ethiopians and Jews the world over may—or may not—be indicators of their true Jewishness. But they offer us a glimpse into an ancient community, and may even be helpful in leading these people into a full Jewish life בסייד. ■

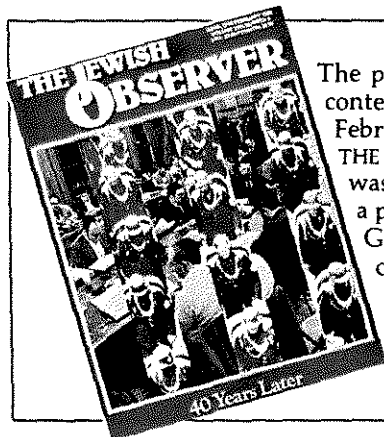
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Council of Torah Sages Declares: No Rabbinic Dialogue with Conservatives

The Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah (Council of Torah Sages) of Agudath Israel of America issued a forceful statement during the last week of March declaring its "strong protest and categorical opposition" to any Orthodox rabbinic dialogue with the Conservative movement. The proclamation was made in reaction to the recent unprecedented appearance of the president of an Orthodox rabbinic group, the Rabbinical Council of America, before the national convention of the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly of America, arranged with the understanding that the president of the Conservative group would be invited to reciprocate with an address at the Orthodox body's convention the following month.

Text of the Statement

Recent events—which have seen the president of an Orthodox rabbinic body address the national convention of the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly of America, as part of an exchange arrangement whereby the president of the Conservative group will speak at the Orthodox organization's convention next month—call upon us to declare our strong protest and categorical opposition to any such dialogue.

Our hands and hearts are extended to Jews everywhere, no matter what their professed beliefs, and we welcome any opportunity to convey to sincere individuals the Torah heritage which binds us to one another. Before us, however, is a totally different situation: The exchange of convention pulpits, which ipso facto bestows the perception of religious legitimacy on a "Judaism" that denies the Divine Revelation of the Written and Oral Torah at Sinai; a Judaism fashioned by man and therefore alterable to accommodate

man's foibles and comforts; a Judaism that has undermined the sanctity of Jewish peoplehood; a Judaism that professes loyalty to Halachah but in practice has turned Halachah into a shambles bearing no resemblance to authoritative Jewish law and that sanctions numerous blatant violations of Torah law.

The classic tenets of Judaism are not negotiable nor are they subject matter for dialogues with those who are purveying to an unwary public a "Judaism" that tears down fundamentals of our ancient heritage—all in the name of Halachah. Those among the Orthodox who still have illusions of persuading the Conservative leadership to alter their movement's views on specific matters of Halachah, seem to ignore that the Conservative interpretation of a non-Divinely-given Halachah is absolutely irreconcilable with the authentic Torah view. The steady drift of the Conservative group towards the Reform movement is further evidenced by the Conservative convention's putting up for a vote the irreparably devastating proposal of defining Jewishness by patrilineal descent.

Instead of convincing the Conservative rabbinic leaders to reverse their beliefs and behaviors on major religious issues, which is the stated purpose of this Orthodox group's entering into such a dialogue, the overwhelming result of this approach is the creation of a public impression that the Orthodox and Conservative groups represent merely alternative outlooks on Judaism with negotiable differences on specific localized issues. The grave consequence of such an exchange of convention speeches by the respective

presidents of an Orthodox rabbis' group and the Conservative rabbis' group, serves to give credence to the prevailing fallacy of "three wings of Judaism" as a legitimate religious concept. This serious step is clearly an outgrowth of the continued defiance by certain Orthodox groups of the legal ruling of the Torah Sages of our past and present generation against membership in such "three wing" religious organizations as the Synagogue Council of America.

This kind of collegial acknowledgment implied by the president of an Orthodox rabbis' body formally addressing the organization of Conservative rabbis, compounded by a reciprocal convention visitation understanding, provides the precise dialogue platform that the Conservative leaders have sought in their quest to gain legitimacy for their movement in the U.S.A. and Israel. Orthodox rabbis who misguidedly play into their hands do a great disservice to Torah Judaism.

We urgently call upon the leaders of this Orthodox rabbinic group not to further this false notion by permitting the Conservative rabbinic leader to address their forthcoming convention. We call upon our fellow Orthodox Jews to concentrate all our efforts on strengthening the pillars of Torah Judaism and spreading the light of Torah among the masses of Jews searching for truth and for their spiritual roots.

MOETZES GEDOLEI HATORAH OF AMERICA

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, Rabbi Moshe Horowitz (Bostoner Rebbe), Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, Rabbi Avrohom Pam, Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman, Rabbi Israel Spira (Bluzhover Rebbe), Rabbi Elya Svei (in alphabetical order).



Miriam Zakon

The Teacher is the Lesson

Sarah Schenirer: Her Lessons and Her Legacy, Fifty Years After Her Passing

This Legend Lived

The medium is the message. Marshall McLuhan's aphorism has become something of a byword for any discussion of effective communication. How something is said or presented—the medium—is inseparable from what is said—the message.

If this rule is true in the world of television, McLuhan's area of expertise and interest, it is perhaps even more important in the world of education. Education is possibly the purest form of communication, the communication of the more's, beliefs, ideals, and knowledge of one generation to the next, of the wiser to the less knowledgeable, of those closer to Sinaitic revelation to those one step further removed. If "the medium is the message" then "the teacher is the lesson." That *Rebbe* who stood next to the blackboard taught us as much by his gestures as by his lectures; we remember *Morah's* smile or frown more than we do her stencils. Truly, the lessons of our teachers' lives and behavior are unforgettable ones.

If you are reading this, and you are a Torah-observant

American woman of a Torah-observant background, the chances are great that your most unforgettable teacher was a woman whom you have never met. If you are reading this, and you are a man who is a *ben Torah*, the chances are great that your wife supported you in *kollel*, urged you to attend a *shiur*, or encouraged you to find a *chavrusa* partly because of the influence of a woman whom you, and she, never met. And if you are one of the growing numbers of *chozrei biteshuva*, the newly observant, chances are great that many of your teachers, many of your mentors, many of those who helped you find your way, owe an enormous debt to a woman whom they, and you, never met.

The woman is Sarah Schenirer, ע"ה. The debt owed her by women, by men, by children, by all of *Klal Yisroel*, is an enormous one. She was our teacher. And if "the teacher is the lesson," we would do well to study her life,* and the lessons that can be learned from this extraordinary woman.

The story, familiar to almost all graduates of Bais Yaakov schools, has an almost legendary quality about it. It begins, always, with the compelling image of the seamstress toiling with her needlework in her Polish

Mrs. Zakon served as translator for the recently published English-language *Tzena U'rena*, and is author of several novels for Jewish teenagers.

*The reader is referred to Joseph Friedenson's biography of Sarah Schenirer in JO, Feb. '64, and Chaim Shapiro's "The Flame Called Sarah Schenirer," in JO, Dec. 74.

city, watching with anxious eyes as the rift grows between Jewish mother and daughter, as girls untutored in the splendors of Jewish thought and learning seek escape in secular philosophy. The scene shifts to a small school that the visionary seamstress has begun. The idea takes hold, captures the imagination, and suddenly a dream becomes a movement, an idea turns into an ideology. Bais Yaakov has been born!

Like many legends, we begin to take it for granted, to accept what is told without examining its implications. The mythical quality of the story makes it difficult to grasp, to understand. But in the case of this particular legend there is one difference. You see, this legend is true, this legend lived. And therefore this legend—no, this living, breathing woman—has much to teach us. This teacher, truly, is the lesson.

Lessons In Change and Revolution

It has been said, by those who have little understanding and less love for Torah-true Judaism, that we are an obstinate and unyielding lot, a group that makes no concession to reality, that remains conservative and inflexible in the face of new circumstances. The lesson of one woman's life proves this to be no more than a canard, a false accusation.

Frau Schenirer changed her world. She found a Poland that was offering an endless supply of tantalizing ideologies to girls ignorant of the riches of their own heritage. These "isms"—secularism, socialism, nationalism, communism—posed a potent threat to the very core of Jewish life, the home.

When Sarah Schenirer, pious and devout woman that she was, sensed the need for a change in the world of Torah education, she followed the path trodden by many Torah-true "revolutionaries" before her. She consulted *da'as Torah*, sages steeped in Jewish learning and wisdom. *Da'as Torah*, in this case, was the Belzer Rebbe, then staying in Marienbend. At her request, her brother, a Belzer *chassid* dubious of her plans of opening a school for girls, sent a note to the Rebbe outlining her dream. The Rebbe wished her success, and she was ready to begin her remarkable venture. Later, encouragement by the venerable Chofetz Chaim and other great men gave her additional confidence to enlarge the scope of her work.

Yes, when times demand change, Torah-true Jews are not afraid to answer the call. We do so not by abandoning our beliefs and our laws, but, conversely, by studying them even more deeply, searching within our Torah for the answers which we know are there, seeking out our "living *Sifrei Torah*" for their guidance and advice. Change there may be, but the goal—a life of Torah study, *mitzva* observance, and doing G-d's will—is eternal.

With the fervor of a revolutionary and the piety of an *aishes chayil*, a woman of valor, Sarah Schenirer gave generations of girls and women the means to fight the false allure of endless "isms." At the same time she gave us a meaningful lesson in how an authentic Jew effects change.

Lessons In Tznius And Simplicity

Pashtus—simplicity—is a quality that, more than any other, has been attributed to Sarah Schenirer. One of Sarah Schenirer's students in the seminary in Cracow, now a respected educator in her own right, remembers with fondness her first lesson with Frau Schenirer. At the time that this student first met her, Sarah Schenirer's reputation had reached far past the borders of her own native city, and the newly-arrived girl expected a lesson full of deep insight and learning. What she got, instead, was a simple review of the laws of *neigel vasser*, washing the hands in the morning.

How disappointed all the girls were!—she remembers with a smile. Now, over fifty years later, she realizes the great depth of that simple lesson, and all the lessons which followed.

Simplicity was the motif of her lessons, of her life. Not the innocence of naivete, this, but the true simplicity of one who knows her goals, who trusts in her G-d. She was much like her namesake, Sarah, in this respect, as Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch (whose work had a great influence on Frau Schenirer) points out: "Sarah took the beauty of childhood with her into her womanhood, and the innocence of the twenty year old girl with her into the grave. How far . . . does this point of view of our rabbis contrast with that of our days! (Our *Rabbanim*) look for beauty, not in the twenty year old, but in the child, and innocence not in the child, but in mature adolescence . . . only the girl matured to womanhood . . . can crown (her) head with the wreath of innocence." (Rabbi Hirsch, commentary on Genesis 23:1)

This trait of simplicity was certainly not indicative of ignorance or a lack of depth. No simple-minded pietist, she, the woman with the blazing eyes whose most beloved *sefer* was Hirsch's *Nineteen Letters* (read, naturally, in its original German). Hers was a total, complete singleness of purpose, her life absolutely dedicated *l'shem Shomayim*, for the sake of Heaven. If she lacked complexity, it was only the complexity of life that man creates for himself by doubts, by errors. The world—if one is totally and completely dedicated to G-d's service, and His service alone—can really be quite a simple place. Sarah Schenirer tapped into this simplicity, trod the path that G-d had laid so clearly before her. There were no detours, no false turns. This, then, was her simplicity, a simplicity so profound it is difficult for most of us—still searching for that one clear road—to comprehend.

Her students recall a time when she picked up stones pitched at her by those antagonistic to her, turned to her students and told them that the stones would be of help for building a new school building. In these days of public relations and "hype" running rampant, one might praise her instincts as a showman. It certainly makes for good copy. But one would be wrong. She did not see the incident as an opportunity for a *bon mot*, a memorable line. Those stones were merely stones that would help her build, help her to further what G-d desired of her; and if He had chosen to have them cast at her in such a manner, *gam zu l'tova*, this, too, was for the best.

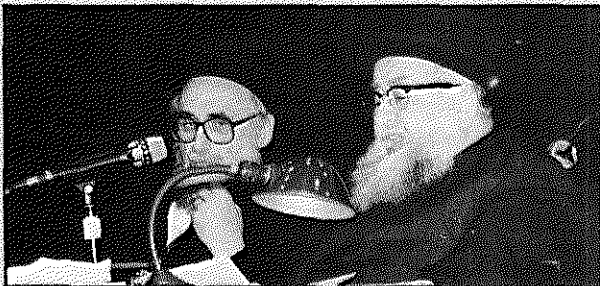
Her *pashtus* was enhanced by her *tznius*, her modesty. When the cornerstone for a new and commodious building for the Bais Yaakov Seminary in Cracow was laid, Frau Schenirer, the visionary who could take credit for having begun the entire movement, sat with her students in the audience, allowing others to take the stage. The *tznius* of that moment, the modesty of that woman,

resounds to this very day with a clear, clarion sound! What a lesson this life was!

Lessons In Dedication, Lessons In Love

I recently had the privilege of spending a few pleasant hours with a group of Sarah Schenirer's former students. A notable group it was, a room full of our generation's top educators, women who were pioneers in the world of Torah education for American girls, women whose dedication and selflessness have set examples for hundreds of their students.

What struck me most about the group was the change that came over all of them as we began to discuss their beloved teacher. Somber eyes, which had viewed the destruction of European Jewry, began to sparkle; stern features, which had set many a student quaking, softened visibly. The stories gushed forth; the smiles grew more wistful. Suddenly I found myself in the presence of children, children whose enthusiasm and



Rabbi Schwab, with Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller (l), speaking at the gathering, which was coordinated by Bnos Agudath Israel in conjunction with a committee of principals of Beth Jacob schools.

Yaakov's Interior Strength

Rabbi Shimon Schwab

Chazal tell us that in times of old, when somebody did an extraordinary *mitzva*, the *Novi*—the Prophet—was commanded to write it down and it was preserved for us in the *Tanach*. But later when there are no more *Neviim* to record history, *Eliyahu Hanavi* writes it down and *Hashem Yisborach* Himself signs it. My heart tells me that *Eliyahu Hanavi* has written down the epic story of this *Isha Gedola*—this great woman—and that *Eliyahu Hanavi* will probably write down the names of thousands of Bais Yaakov students, Bais Yaakov-educated Jewish women, wives and mothers of Bnei Torah, who are the blossoms and fruits of the tree which Sarah Schenirer planted. All of the *Kollelim* today—in America, in England, in Europe, in *Eretz Yisroel*—are possible because of the Bais Yaakov education, because of the seed planted by her.

The word *bayis* means "house." And Bais Yaakov is the house of Yaakov, the Jewish house, which is a domain of a Jewish woman. "*Bayis*—house, this refers

to the woman." But *bayis* also means "the inside"—as in "*mibayis umibachutz tetzapenah* you shall coat it inside and out" . . . and Bais Yaakov means the inside of Yaakov. Think for a moment about a beautiful *Kiddush* cup, a *becher* made of sterling silver. The outside is shiny, glitters, is artistically embellished and attractive to the eye—but this is only the outside. The inside holds the wine. Without the ability of the inside to hold the wine, the outside is a mere shell, without meaning: no wine, no *Kiddush*, no *bracha*. The outside of *Klal Yisroel* is the men; the inside, the *bayis*, is the Jewish women, *Bais Yaakov*. There is no inside without an outside; there is no outside without an inside. True, the eyes of the world rest on the outside, its most prominent feature. As far as the wine is concerned, however, the inside is what matters. It is the *ikar*.

The outside and the inside have different functions. So have men and women. They look different. And the inside and outside of the *Kiddush* cup have even slightly different measurements. You cannot hold on to the wine without the outside, but the wine would never be there in the first place without the inside . . . because both are one. Both belong together. Bais Yaakov is the *pnimiyus*—the interior beautify of *Klal Yisroel*.

We have two *mitzvos* that deal with lights: kindling *Shabbos* lights and kindling *Chanuka* lights. These *mitzvos* are commanded to both men and women alike; yet when it comes to *Shabbos* lights, which illuminate the inside—the key to *Shalom Bayis*—men delegate the *mitzva* to the women. When it comes to *Chanuka* lights, which are meant to shine outward, into the street, to convey *pirsuma nisah*, publicizing the miracle, the women delegate their *mitzva* to the men. Both *pnimiyus* and *chitzoniyus*—inward experience and outward expression—the Torah addresses both, together.

energy cannot be contained, children speaking of a truly beloved mother or friend. The unquenchable brightness of a child's eyes was there, illuminating the faces of each of these righteous women.

What could it have been, I mused afterwards, that could have such an astounding effect over half a century later? What quality of Sarah Schenirer's could evoke such openly expressed emotion, could tear through the mists of forgetfulness and make her seem so alive to those who had known her and loved her?

Although the full answer still eludes me, I suspect that the key word here is love, an *ahavas Yisroel* that was rare, astonishing both in its depth and breadth. Her love for the *Klal*, for all Jewry, is evidenced by her dedication to its welfare, but this love was sharpened and made all the greater by her love for each and every individual. The tales are endless: Sarah Schenirer toiling over her correspondence each night, not allowing one letter to go unanswered; Sarah Schenirer dancing with her stu-

dents, her face aglow; Sarah Schenirer's burning eyes, which silently demanded the best of each and every student, and silently assured the student that, yes, the best could be achieved.

Just as she looked at Polish Jewry, saw the potential within its womanhood, and brought it out to full flower, so she looked at each girl and saw, not an unlearned child, but a Jewess with the potential of immeasurable accomplishment. It was this love for the individual that enabled her to take the university-trained German Jewess, the scholarly girl of Lithuania, and the Chassidic Polish student, and mesh them together, meld their talents and strengths into one great, united whole.

The two qualities needed to teach, Sarah Schenirer told one of her students, were love for the Jewish child and *mesiras nefesh*, the dedicated sacrifice of oneself for the Jewish people.

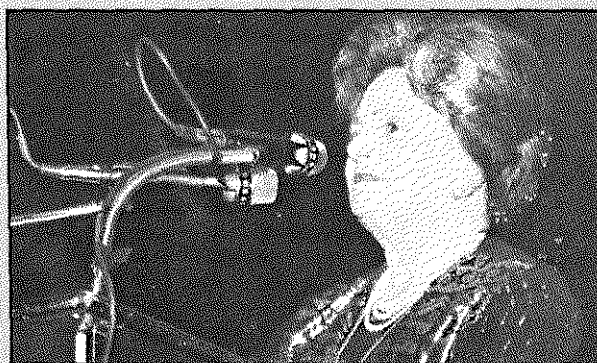
Her life teaches us this lesson even more clearly than her words. Fifty years after her *petira*, her lesson lives on.

"Speaking Out Of Her Eyes"

Rebbitzin Dr. J. Grunfeld

I don't know why they called me over from England. You have such wonderful speakers. . . . There is only one thing perhaps. I am the only one, alas, who worked side by side with Sarah Schenirer. I am the link. I was already grown up then. My beloved and respected pupils—the Rebbitzens who teach in your seminaries and high schools—they were 15 or 16 at the time, when I was already a teacher. So I am the only one who worked with Sarah Schenirer together. I had the *zchiya* to be with her morning, noon and night, Yom Tov, Purim, *Shabbos*, Yom Kippur. . . . I heard her, I listened to her. And I felt—how can I describe it—her *neshama* speaking out of her eyes. She was not tall; a small woman. She was not very significant looking. She was dressed in a very modest way. But her eyes were alive, darting, speaking.

This past week somebody told me that she was a pupil in Vienna when Sarah Schenirer was in her last stage of illness, and she saw her being carried to the train to take her back to Cracow, because the professors in Vienna found that they could not help her in any way anymore in her fatal last illness. The girls in the school in Vienna were told to go to the station: *Sarah Schenirer is being carried on a stretcher onto the train. She will be taken home to Cracow. Only Hashem Yisborach can make a Nes to save her.* The girls went to the station and saw Sarah Schenirer being carried on a stretcher. She was so white; she was so ill. But her eyes were dancing. Her eyes were shining. And she gave a smile to the girls and she tried to give a greeting. . . . Not long after that she passed away.



Rebbetzin Grunfeld

Anyone who wants to know the meaning of "*Zochreinu lechayim*, remember us for life," should come here. She is no more—and she is alive. She carries on and you are her *talmidos*. And her *Kaddish* is the light that comes from your presence here. . . .

Let me finish with one cheerful story. A Bais Yaakov girl organized a Chanuka party in the town hall of one of the Polish villages. She had a rehearsal two days before. Afterwards the manager of the hall came to her, "Well Miss Singer, are you satisfied?"—he was a Jewish fellow, not *frum*.

She said, "Thank you. I am quite satisfied. Thank you for your help."

He said, "I wish you a successful evening," and stretched his hand out.

She said, "Sorry, I don't want to offend you, but we don't shake hands with gentlemen."

"What! In the 20th century? You must be the only one!"

She replied, "In the 20th century I may be the only one, but in the 21st century there will be many, many more."

... Her Legacy



Rebbetzin Kaplan

Graduation in Cracow

Rebbitzin W. Kaplan

It was not at all like a graduation today. Nobody was invited—just the staff and ourselves. The program consisted of a couple of speeches. We ate together, and then spontaneously began to dance with Sarah Schenirer, and we danced all night, literally... and the *niggun* we sang over and over was the same: "*Vetaheir Libeinu le'avdecha be'emes*... Purify our hearts to serve you, truly." This was not a planned program. Nobody said we should dance this long or sing this song. But it sang of itself, with Sarah Schenirer in the middle.

This was the *ruach* that dominated in Cracow. We felt the gravity of the great moment when we had to leave Sarah Schenirer and at this time we had a *tefila* to Hashem: "May we be *zoche* to be *mechanchos* to the children of Poland, and later of our own children. Give us the *zechus* to have the right *derech*, and give us the opportunity to find the *nekudah* of each Jewish heart." This was Cracow: A preparation for a life of *tahara*.



Dramatic testimony to the continuing vitality of Sarah Schenirer's legacy took place on Sunday, the 24th day of Adar, 5745. It is a long trip from an obscure street in Cracow to the Felt Forum in Madison Square Garden, New York City, but the Bais Yaakov movement somehow managed to span the distance, and span it gracefully.

I came to the memorial marking the 50th *Yahrzeit* of Sarah Schenirer determined to make an objective report, to observe, as a good reporter should, in a detached and unemotional mood.

I looked around, at the masses of chattering, laughing girls filing in. Add a head covering, a slight thickening of chin and waist, a line or two—they are me. I saw their mothers, their eyes resting proudly upon the students. Add a few more lines, a few more children, a few more years—they are what I will be. I saw my teachers, felt, almost as a reflex, that familiar feeling of nervousness mingled with respect. They, too, are a part of me.

Objectivity? Detachment? Another place, another time, perhaps. This was a gathering uniquely Bais Yaakov, and I was a part of it, raised and nurtured and influenced by it. I belonged. There was no place here for staying apart, for a mere observer.

Abandoning the role of impartial observer, I sat back and prepared to learn, to enjoy, to remember, to feel.

The gathering, one sensed, was a tremendous affirmation of life. A few years ago I attended the World Gathering of Holocaust Survivors in Yerushalayim. That, too, was an affirmation, a joyous and tearful announcement that the Jewish people had survived, that we could not be destroyed by latter-day Amalekites. But this was something more. Yes, we affirmed, we have survived physical destruction, have risen out of the ashes to bear new generations, but we have done even more! Our heritage, our learning, our Torah, has survived, survived and flourished. We are Jews whom our martyred grandparents and great-grandparents would have been proud of, we have carried on and treasured their legacy to us.

Within this vital affirmation of life, one motif spun round and round, unmistakable: Sarah Schenirer. Sarah Schenirer and her dream. Sarah Schenirer and Bais Yaakov. Inseparable, unforgettable.

It began, as all Jewish events ought, with prayer. *Tehillim* was recited for two of the foremost *gedolim* of our time. The words of *Tehillim* flowed easily on the tongues of five thousand women and girls. Bais Yaakov has done its job well.

And then, the speeches. There were six of them, each inspiring, each illuminating in its own unique way.

As I listened to the words of Torah, I began to realize that we were not alone, we five thousand women in this large auditorium. In any Torah gathering the Jews are

accompanied by their past, and by the hopes of their future.

We were treated to a magnificent Torah insight by Rabbi Shimon Schwab—a message and a theme that Sarah Schenirer had equipped us to absorb [See box].

We were taken back to our distant past, to our sages of old, by the words of Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller. Rabbi Keller spoke of the accomplishment of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Gamla, *Kohein Gadol* in the time of the second Temple, who was credited with having saved Torah learning among the people of Israel . . . and of Sarah Schenirer. [See the article that follows.]

Our books are the bridges we have with the distant past; the older generations are the living links with more recent years. Two who knew Sarah Schenirer spoke, sharing their memories of this unforgettable woman. There were few in the audience who were not moved by the reminiscences of Rebbetzin W. Kaplan, as she spoke of the graduation ceremonies in the Cracow Seminary. [See box] Who did not see before her the picture of Sarah Schenirer, sitting on a chair surrounded by dancing students, all singing "*Vitaher libenu*—singing, singing, and singing more, until the sun slipped over the horizon and a new day dawned. And how moving were the words of Sarah Schenirer's colleague, Rebbetzin Dr. Judith Grunfeld* of London, as she described Frau Schenirer's dark eyes, still burning with an inner fire, even as she was borne by stretcher back to Cracow, where soon her *neschama* was to take leave of this world. [See box]

If many of the speeches evoked a feeling for our living past, it was the conclusion of the memorial that bound us to our future. Young girls from eight Bais Yaakov schools, the next generation of mothers in Israel, raised their voices in Yiddish, in Hebrew, in English. Sarah Schenirer would have been proud.

A Final Note

I read, the next day, of another gathering that had taken place in the New York area that Sunday. A concert of a popular rock group had been held in the Nassau Coliseum. Ten thousand had turned out for tickets, and the wait became a slugfest. Mounted police quelled the mini-riot, but not before three people were arrested and several wounded.

I thought of our five thousand Jewesses, calmly and politely making their way into the Forum. I thought of the police who stood by the entrance, bored, with nothing to do but give directions to a passing stranger or two.

Bais Yaakov has done its job well.

The lessons of Sarah Schenirer are still being learned.

*Dr. Grunfeld's biographic appreciation of Sarah Schenirer has been published separately by Bnos Agudath Israel.

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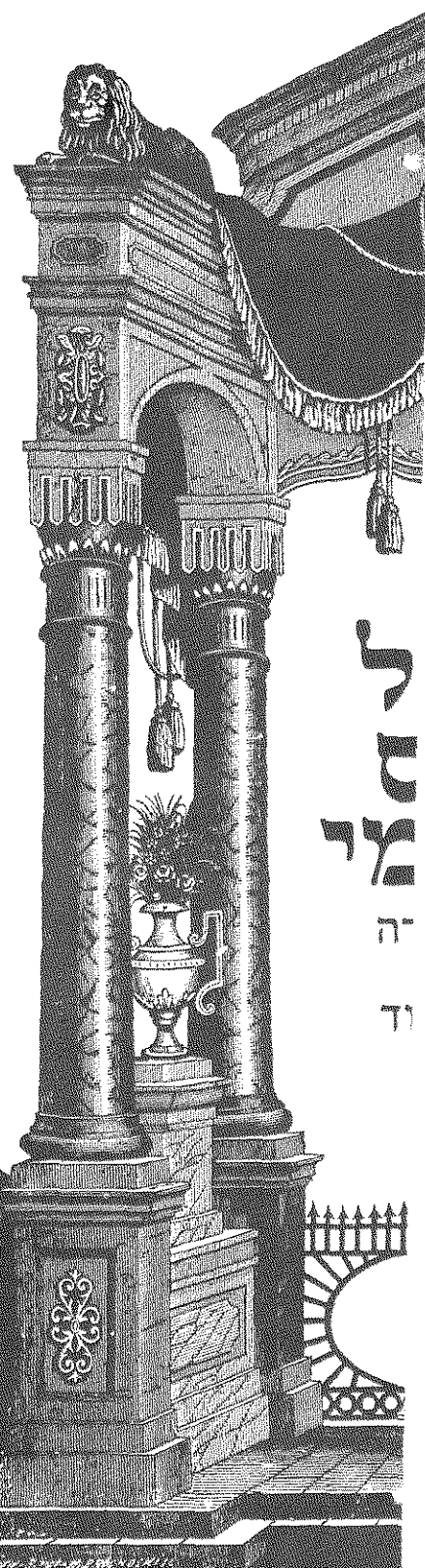
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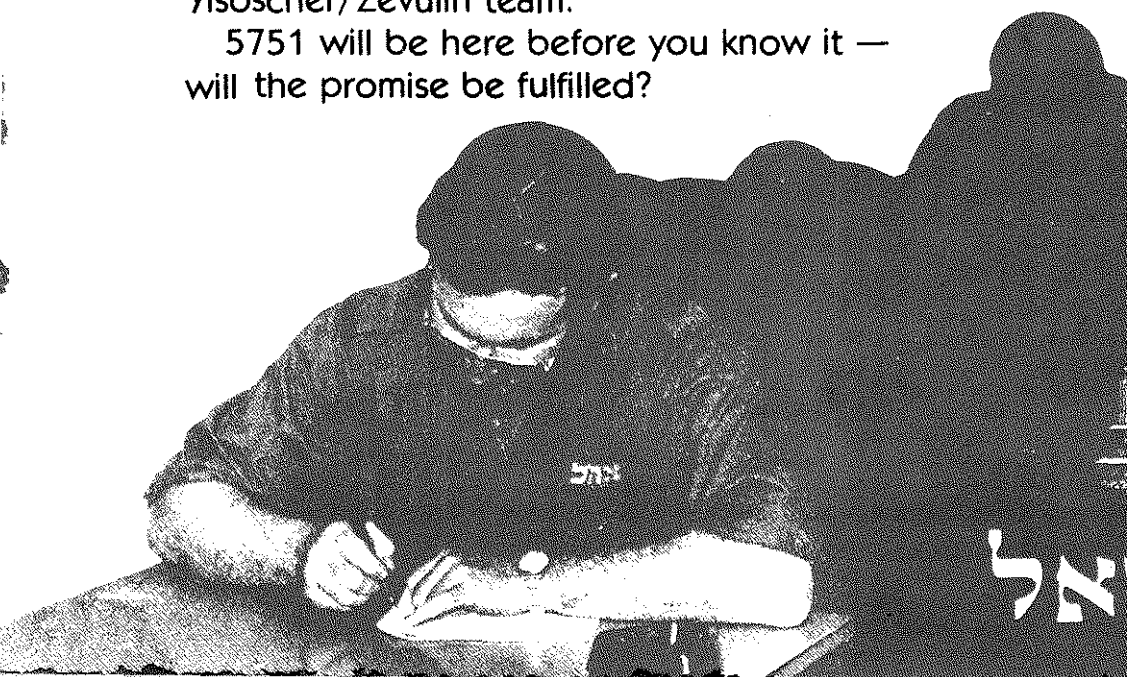
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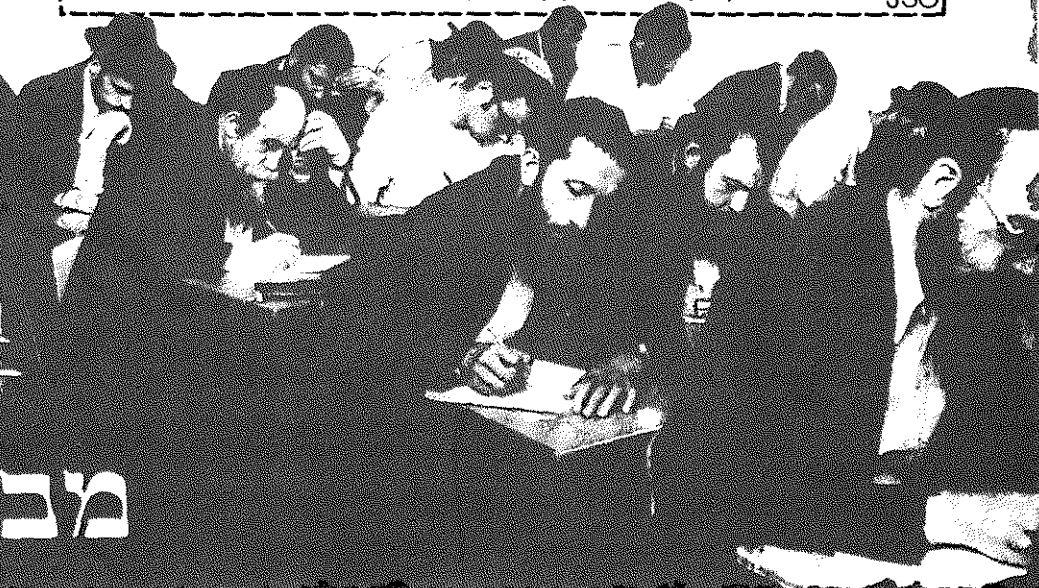
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Were It Not For Her . . .

An appreciation of Sarah Schenirer, ע"ה, on the occasion of her 50th yahrzeit.

I. After Years—An Historic Perspective

One cannot judge the significance of an individual in his lifetime or put a movement into its proper historic perspective during its initial stages. Historians, even *Chachamim*, can only evaluate a person, an event or a movement after years, perhaps eras have gone by.

The *Gemora* (*Babba Basra* 21a) tells us:

אמר ר' יהודה אמר רב ברם זכור אותו האיש לטוב
ויהושע בן גמלא שמו שאלמלא הוא נשתכחה תורה מישראל

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: Remember this man for good, Yehoshua ben Gamla was his name; were it not for him, Torah would have been forgotten from Israel. For at first whoever had a father, that father would learn Torah with him; whoever did not have a father, (or obviously someone whose father was incapable of teaching him) would not learn Torah.

The *Gemora* then describes earlier attempts at solving this problem . . . until Yehoshua ben Gamla decreed that teachers should be appointed for children in all parts of the country and that children be brought in to learn at the age of six or seven. This, according to Rav, saved Torah for Klal Yisroel.

When did Rav live and when did Yehoshua ben Gamla live?

Yehoshua ben Gamla was a *Kohein Gadol* during the reign of King Yanai, towards the end of the Second Temple*, which was destroyed in the Year 3828. Rav was a disciple of Rabbeinu HaKodosh—Reb Yehuda Hanassi—the compiler of the *Mishna*, the last of the *Tannaim* and the first of the *Amoraim*. This was approximately 150 years after the destruction of the Temple. And yet Rav was the first to define the historic role that Yehoshua ben Gamla played in the spiritual revival of the Jewish people.

There is an amazing insight to be gained in this. All of those schools set up by Yehoshua ben Gamla in every

city in the country were destroyed at the time of the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*. The schools were destroyed, the teachers and pupils were slaughtered, but the *takana* of Yehoshua ben Gamla—the revolutionary system that he introduced—remained. There were survivors who had learned Torah in those schools, and after the *churban*, they reinstituted the system and there ensued a glorious period of Torah scholarship, culminating in the compilation of the *Mishna*—all in a relatively short period after the destruction. Rav understood that this phenomenal growth was the result of the *takana* of Yehoshua ben Gamla, and he put the stamp of his Torah authority on that evaluation, stating definitively: "Were it not for him Torah would have been forgotten from Israel."

From One Room to a Movement

We now stand 50 years since the passing of Sarah Schenirer and 68 years since she started her first one-room Bais Yaakov school with 25 pupils. She was one of very few people privileged to see the fulfillment of a dream in their own lifetime. When she passed away in 1935, that school of 25 girls, founded in 1917, had developed into a powerful movement with over 32,000 students in a network of close to 300 schools, in just about every city and town in Poland, as well as in Lithuania, Hungary and Rumania.

Obviously she did not accomplish all of this single-handedly. In a memoir published in the *Bais Yaakov Journal* in Adar, 5692 (1932), she writes that when the local Agudas Yisroel was founded in Cracow in 1919, leaders of the organization came to her and offered to assume the financial responsibility for her school. She accepted the offer after consulting with the Bobover Rebbe, Rabbi Ben Zion Halberstam זצ"ל, who gave his approval. . . . In 1924, the Central Executive Committee (*Central-Rat*) of the World Agudah movement met in Cracow. After visiting the school, the delegates decided to include the Bais Yaakov in the activities of the Keren HaTorah, the fund-raising arm of the World Aguda for

*See *Tosefos* on the above-quoted *Gemora* (*Babba Basra* 21a: *Zachor*).

Rabbi Keller, Rosh HaYeshiva of Telshe-Chicago, based this essay on his address at the gathering marking the 50th Yahrzeit of Sarah Schenirer that took place in New York's Madison Square Garden last March.

What would Sarah Schenirer say if she would walk into some of our homes today? In many, she would shed tears of joy for the shelves laden with seforim. In others, she might be shocked at what shares space on the shelves with those Hebrew books.

the upbuilding and maintenance of Torah institutions, which was headed by Dr. Shmuel (Leo) Deutschlander.

From then on, Dr. Deutschlander threw himself completely into the work of organizing, expanding and raising financial support for the burgeoning Bais Yaakov movement. This was in addition to the pedagogical genius that he contributed to the Bais Yaakov Seminaries in Cracow and Vienna. Without this organization and support, the movement could never have attained the dimension of success that it did.

Beyond question, however, the inspiration and the personality of Sara Schenirer and the Divine help that she merited were the decisive factors in the miraculous growth of Bais Yaakov. She was not only the founder, the teacher, the leader, the mother of her *talmidos* whom she called "*Kinder*"; she was the message. It was her qualities of soul, her *emunah* and *bitachon*—her unflagging faith and trust in the A-lmighty, her love for Torah, her *Yiras Shomayim*, her enthusiasm, her simplicity and her single-minded devotion to the ideal of Bais Yaakov that inspired her *talmidos*. She was the living example of everything she sought to impart to her students.

Enough Time to Make a Judgment

Now—fifty years after her passing, and almost seventy years from the beginning of her dream—we can perhaps begin to make an attempt to evaluate her significance in the history of *Klal Yisroel*. Aside from the obvious parallel between the educational reforms of Yehoshua ben Gamla and Sarah Schenirer, there is another striking similarity between the two. Just as the world of Yehoshua ben Gamla and all he had built up was destroyed with the *churban Beis Hamikdash*, so too was the world of Sara Schenirer, all of her beloved schools, and the vast majority of her precious *talmidos* destroyed in the awesome *churban* of European Jewry. And just as that *takana* of Yehoshua ben Gamla made it possible to reconstruct the world of Torah after the *Churban*, so was it with the *takana* of Sara Schenirer's Bais Yaakov.

Our sages tell us that G-d creates the cure before the injury (*Megilla* 13b). Had Yehoshua Ben Gamla not made that *takana* before the *churban*, there would have been no way to pick up the shattered pieces of the Torah world after the *churban*. His was the *zechus* to be the messenger of Divine Providence that Torah not be forgotten. So too in our time, just before the greatest cataclysm that befell the Jewish people since the Destruction of the Second Temple, there had to be a

Divinely-inspired revolution which would turn the tide and fulfill the Divine promise:

וְהָיָה כִּי תִמְצָאן אוֹתוֹ רַעוּת רַבּוֹת וְצָרוֹת וְעֵנָה הַשִּׁירָה הַזֹּאת לִפְנֵינוּ לֵאמֹר
כִּי לֹא תִשְׁכַּח מִפִּי זִרְעוֹ. (דברים לא, כא)

"And it will come to pass when evils and troubles will come upon them, this song will testify before them . . . for it shall not be forgotten from the mouths of their seed. . . ." (*Devarim* 31, 21). At the time when the greatest destruction befalls the Jewish People, the Torah will bear witness to the indestructibility of that People, because precisely at that time there will be a Divinely-inspired development to insure that Torah will not be forgotten. The Torah does not say, "It will not be forgotten from the mouths of their sons," but from all their children.

From the phenomenal success Sarah Schenirer realized, one can see that she was indeed the Divine instrument for this historic fulfillment, insuring the future of Torah—and not only the future of Torah among girls and women. . . . If you walk into the Beis Midrash in Lakewood or Telz, or Mir, or in hundreds of other Yeshivos and Kollelim in this country and in *Eretz Yisroel*, you will see thousands of young men—Kollel scholars dedicating their lives to Torah. Without wives who share their dedication and are willing to forego many of life's comforts to enable their husbands to learn Torah, these Kollelim could not exist. These heroic young women are the products of Torah revolution begun by Sarah Schenirer.

Now, forty years after the *Churban*, when we have witnessed the miraculous rebirth of Bais Yaakov here, in *Eretz Yisroel*, and in England and Europe through the inspired efforts of a handful of Sarah Schenirer's *talmidos* . . . now, when we see how this made possible the glorious renaissance of the Torah world, I believe that we can say, "Remember that woman for good—her name was Sarah Schenirer—for were it not for her, Torah would have been forgotten from Israel."

II. Beyond a "Hesped"

The gathering marking her *Yahrzeit* was unequivocally an historic occasion, and we cannot permit it to go by with just a *hesped*. Let us not fall into the trap of making Sarah Schenirer some untouchable saint whose memory we revere. We must understand not only what she meant for her generation, but what her significance and her message is for our and future generations.

The name she chose for her life's work was not just an

apt borrowing from the interpretation of the Sages on the verse introducing the Torah to the Jewish people on Mt. Sinai:

... כה תאמר לבית יעקב "So shall you speak to the House of Jacob" ... (Shemos 19, 3)—these are the women. "... and say to the sons of Israel"—these are the men. (See Rashi *ibid*)

The name *Bais Yaakov*—literally, the House of Yaakov—was a statement of the basic purpose of the movement, the rededication and resanctification of the Jewish home.

In one of her letters, she explained why the A-lmighty addressed the women at Sinai before the men: because the Jewish mother would educate the next generation—on her lap, the children will become imbued with a love for Torah and fear of Heaven; thus, they insure the spiritual survival of the Jewish people. But even more, the description of Jewish women as *Bais Yaakov* conveys an idea—not that "a woman's place is in the home," but that the woman *is* the home.

The Torah tells us of the *Kohein Gadol* on Yom Kippur וכפר בעדו ובעד ביתו (Vayikra 16, 6): "He shall atone for himself and for his house"—his house—that is his wife (*Mishna Yoma* 1, 1). Without a wife, the *Kohein Gadol* had no home and was unfit for the Yom Kippur service.

The Impetus for Action

Sarah Schenirer was first moved to begin her work of bringing Torah to Jewish girls because of the break-up of the Jewish home. Wherever she turned, she saw young girls, bored and uninspired, completely lacking in understanding and appreciation of the beauty of Torah, becoming estranged from their devout mothers and fathers. She felt that she must impart to them the inspiration that she herself felt, which would lead them to understand that the ideal of the Jewish woman was to be the Jewish home.

A Home For The Shechina

The Jewish home is not as simple as all that. The Jewish home is the sanctuary where the *Shechina* rests. When our Father Yitzchak took Rivka as a wife, the Torahs tell us: ויבאה האהלה שרה אמו (בראשית כ"ד, 67) And Yitzchak brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah—(*Bereishis* 24, 67). The *Baal Haturim* points out that the word *אהלה* is used in *Tanach* eight times, which is an allusion to the eight places where the Divine Presence rested: The *Mishkan*, Gilgal, Shiloh, Nov, Gibeon, the First *Beis Hamikdash*, the Second *Beis Hamikdash*, and the *Beis Hamikdash* of the future—may it be built speedily in our days! These were the communal sanctuaries of the Jewish people where the *Shechina* rested—but the foundation of them all was *אהלה שרה אמו* the tent of Sarah,

that tent which had a ה' from the Divine name before it and another ה' after it. The tents of the *Avos* and *Imahos* were the resting place of the Divine Presence.

The *Ramban*, in his introduction to *Shemos* tells us that the redemption from Egypt was not complete until the Jewish People had come to Sinai, and built the *Mishkan*.

ושב הקב"ה והשרה שכנתו ביניהם אז שבו אל מעלת אבותם שחיה סוד אלוך עלי אהליהם

"And the Holy One once again caused His *Shechina* to rest among them. Then they had returned to the exalted state of their fathers upon whose tents rested the Divine Presence."

The *Mishkan* on a national collective scale was nothing more than a return to the glory of the individual homes of the patriarchs, which is hinted at in the word *אהלה שרה אמו*—the Tent of his mother Sarah.*

This was the ideal of the Jewish home that our latter day Sarah dreamed to revitalize. Indeed, her *talmidos* also called her "Our Mother Sarah."

III. Different Battles, Same War

It was Sarah Schenirer's overriding concern to raise generations of Jewish daughters who, with their love of Torah, could withstand the blandishments of modern culture and find their fulfillment in serving Hashem by establishing homes where the *Shechina* could dwell.

The challenges that our generation must face are not the same that Sarah Schenirer faced, but then again they are really not that different.

In an article in the *Bais Yaakov Journal* (#43), following the second convention of *Bnos Agudas Yisroel*—whose spiritual leader Sara Schenirer was—she wrote of the amazement of irreligious journalists that there are "young girls today who speak not about the cinema and

*The Matriarchs were so imbued with this ideal of establishing a home for the Divine Presence, that their lives had no meaning if this mission were not fulfilled.

ותאמר רבקה אל יצחק קצתי בחיי מכני בנות חת אם לקח יעקב אשה מבנות חת כאלה מבנות הארץ למה לי חיים. (בראשית כ"ד, 68)

And Rivka said to Yitzchok: "My life is unbearable because of the daughters of Chais (Eisav's wives); if Yaakov takes a wife from the daughters of Chais like these ... of what purpose is my life?" (*Bereishis* 27, 46) The *Baal Haturim* says the letter ק from the word קצתי is small because she saw that the *Beis Hamikdash* whose height was one hundred cubits (the numerical value of ק) would be destroyed.

Rivka's life had meaning only if the wives of her sons would contribute to the building of the Sanctuary—not its destruction, as did the wives of Eisav. For it was the descendants of Eisav who finally destroyed the Second Temple. Rivka, in her prophetic vision, saw that this would be the result of the type of home the wives of Eisav would establish. For the *Shechina* cannot dwell in the *Beis Hamikdash* of the Jewish people if there is no room for it in their individual tents.

the theater, and not about fashions and luxuries, but about how to organize in the battle against the emptiness of modern life."

"The delegates," she continues, "spoke about Torah, *Avoda* and *Gemillus Chassadim*. How great was my joy to have lived to see the children of my spiritual aspirations with such seriousness of purpose, imbued with so much enthusiasm!"

It is no longer necessary to fight for acceptance of the idea that girls should study Torah. That battle was fought and won by Sarah Schenirer, with the encouragement of the Chofetz Chaim and other *Gedolei Yisroel* of that time.

We no longer have to worry about the lure of the Polish theater and the Polish novel. But is there really a basic difference between the theater of our day and the theater of Pre-War Poland, between the Polish novel and the American novel? The battleground may have changed, but the enemy is the same—only much more sophisticated. For the enemy has learned how to invade our homes and coexist—or what is perhaps worse, *synthesize*—with Torah learning.

A "Visit" From Sarah

What would Sarah Schenirer have to say if she would walk into some of our homes today?

In many she would *shep nachas*—she would shed tears of joy that her spiritual heiresses had set up homes of Torah, *Avoda* and *Gemillus Chassadim*, where the *Shechina* could find its place.

In others, she would walk into the living room and would surely rejoice to see book shelves heavy with *Shas*, *Mishnayos*, *Tanach*, *Mussar Seferim*, English books and periodicals of Torah thought. But she would see other types of literature, as well. She might pick up one of those books or periodicals, leaf through it and turn pale. She might drop it in revulsion and exclaim: *מיטאר דאס נישט האלטן אין האנד אפילו* "You're not even allowed to hold this in your hand."

She might notice a piece of furniture she had never seen in Cracow—a cabinet-like box with a glass screen in front. She would ask one of the girls of the house, "What's this?"

The girl might answer, a bit uncomfortably, "Oh, that. . . . That's a new thing which provides us with news and educational programs and a bit of entertainment."

And Sarah Schenirer would say, "Nu, let's have a look," and the girl might hesitate a bit. At Sarah Schenirer's urging she would turn it on and the two of them would sit down to watch an hour of prime time T.V. Most probably Sarah Schenirer would not make it to the end of the hour. . . .

We could go on with this little fancy. But is it really necessary?

We no longer have to worry as Sarah Schenirer did of the theater and the movies. *Who of our Bais Yaakov girls would think of going to today's movies? But what have we done? We have brought the theater and the movies and the whole non-Jewish value system into our living rooms.*

Over thirty years ago a husband and wife came before my Rebbe, the late Telshe Roshe Yeshiva, Reb Eliyahu Meir Bloch זצ"ל. The woman had a complaint. It seems that the husband had inherited a Sefer Torah and had set it up in a small Aron Kodesh, which he had made for it in their living room. Ever since the Torah had been brought into the house, the couple had suffered one misfortune after another. "How can we have a Sefer Torah in our home," the woman cried to the Rosh Yeshiva, "when we have a television in the same room?"

"You're right," said Reb Elya Meir. "So what do you suggest?"

He was shocked by her answer: "Let him take the Sefer Torah out of the house!"

When the Rosh Yeshiva told this over to us, he was beside himself: "See what we have come to? There is no longer room in a Jewish home for a Sefer Torah! Instead of taking out the T.V., the woman came to a Rav to ask that the Sefer Torah be taken out!"

If the woman is the home, then it is her personality, her priorities, her set of values that will permeate the home. It is she, in most cases, who will make the decisions that will determine whether her home is one into which a *Sefer Torah* can be brought, one in which the *Shechina* can find a resting place.

The On-Going Revolution

Sarah Schenirer began a revolution. It was not a violent revolution. Hers was a quiet revolution of *tznius*, which changed the course of history. Today that revolution has to take the form of *palace coup* in which our proud Jewish daughters reassert the supremacy of the King of Kings and His Torah in their own homes.

They must begin thinking in terms of priorities and values. They must ask themselves:

What is important to me as a person? Is it the latest fashion being worn on the avenue, the latest wig style, which would better fit a movie starlet than an Isha Kasheira? Or is it my personal understanding of what it means to be a Jewish woman, a Jewish wife and mother?

What is important in my home? Is it the furniture and the decor, or is it the atmosphere of Kedusha, which will allow my husband and children to learn Torah, and will make a place for the King? What formulates my outlook on life, my hashkafa, and that of my children? Is it Tanach and the words of the Chachamim? Or is it the moral and cultural pollution which seeps out from even the commercials and ads of the media?

Are business and professional careers means of making a livelihood, as they should be, or have they become goals in life?

If Sarah Schenirer had to give us a message today, I believe it would be the same message she gave her *talmidos* in her lifetime. She would quote the same *p'sukim* which were always on her tongue:

Serve Hashem with simcha. Sadness, despondency, despair—these have no place in the ranks of our vibrant, dynamic, young girls and women. Joy and gladness? For sure! But let the *simcha* be in serving Hashem, not in the fleeting fancies which the modern world calls good times.

The Torah of Hashem is perfect, it restores the soul. Let us realize that all we seek can be found in Torah. The sophistication and self-styled intellectualism of the college campus and of secular literature are very attractive. But they can never approach the perfection of Torah—and they can never affect the inner person—they can never restore the *nefesh*—the soul of man or woman. At this historic occasion of 50 years since the passing of that immortal woman who began it all, let us rededicate ourselves to that sublime ideal of Bais Yaakov and go in the light of Hashem! ■

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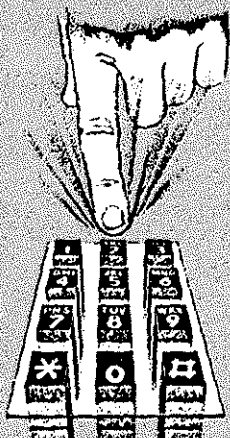
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An Overwhelming View

One of the last paragraphs of the history of Sarah Schenirer's Seminary in Cracow, Poland

I sit here (in the Felt Forum), overwhelmed, and I remember —

It was the end of the terrible World War II. We had been deported to Russia from Poland during the war. Now at the end of war, there was a citizens' exchange and we found ourselves back in Poland, in the city of Cracow....I was six-and-a-half years old at the time.

We entered a beautiful white building around four stories high. It had a large dining hall and many individual rooms. I did not understand the meaning then, but I remember the whispers and the sighs: "This was Sarah Schenirer's Seminary."

There were less than a handful of mothers or fathers with their children. (I was there with both my parents, ישיחי.) As for the rest, there were around two hundred orphan girls.

Sarah, perhaps they were the daughters of your daughters....

I would see them and ask myself, "How could a little girl without a mommy smile?" And then I caught them when they turned away...those eyes, those "sad, sad eyes," — there are no other words for the look in those eyes.

One day, my mother made conversation with one such girl — she must have been ten years old. I was standing there when the young girl said, "I am here because I know I am Jewish. I know I am Jewish because before my mother left me, she said with tears, 'Do not forget that you have a Jewish heart'...." *That mother, Sarah, might have been one of your Bais Yaakov girls.*

I sit here overwhelmed and I remember — Looking out of the window from that beautiful white building, a serene beauty unfolded before me. It seemed to me that right in front of this white house was a beautiful lake with a cluster of stars beyond it. I asked my mother, "Why is there such a tight bunch of stars across the lake?" — for the first time in my life, I beheld the sight of a town lit up by electricity. Until the next dawn, it was all a wonder. But not the next night: darkness brought bullets, fright, terror and lights-out to this beautiful white house. The Polish devils weren't satisfied. They still wanted to bring about "The Final Solution." I couldn't understand then why anyone would want to destroy these precious two hundred innocent orphan girls, and this beautiful house.

Only years later, as a Bais Yaakov student and teacher, did I learn of the horror and Kiddush Hashem that your beautiful white building had witnessed, the leap to eternity by thirty-five young girls who jumped from the roof (the same roof that sheltered us) in order not to be defiled by the approaching German soldiers, *yimach sh'mam*.

While I sit here, in Madison Square Garden, with five thousand other Bais Yaakov *talmidos* (only a symbol of the many thousands of Bais Yaakov *talmidos* round the world, *ken tirbenah*) — I am overwhelmed....

Thanks to you, Sarah Imeina, we can listen to and understand a speech with a *d'var Torah*. Thanks to you, we can teach a *d'var Torah*. Thanks to you, we can try to live a life of Torah. And thanks to you, thousands of our daughters are being given the same

opportunities. You have indeed saved Klal Yisroel.

But I am overwhelmed: for my memory is dipped in the past, and overflows with tears — for those orphan girls, for your daughters and their children, for your white house, symbol of hope and future.

I sit here overwhelmed, and desperately try to pull together one single image from the unbearable tragedy of the past, the fulfillment of the present, and the hope of the future.

A glistening jewel emerges...let me share it with my sisters.

*I see
Tears glistening from Sarah Schenirer,
Tears of fulfillment,
Thousands of daughters under one roof,
under one banner.
Thousands, wishing to live a Torah life.*

*I see
Tears of sorrow,
Thousands of Bais Yaakov daughters
In Tachrichim, glowing in the light of Kiddush Hashem.*

*I see
Sarah standing with Rachel Imeinu,
Crying for the past,
Crying for the future.
Rachel weeps for her children
And Sarah weeps for her daughters.
Oh, mothers of Israel,
Cry for your children
To be spared the trials of Gog and Magog,
Wail, for we had more than enough!
Cry, mothers, cry,
For the speedy Techiyas Hameisim
Of all your children
Crying with you.* ■

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א.מ.ת.

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Second Looks at the Jewish Scene



Science, Pseudoscience, and Rocky Raccoon

Bernard Fryshman

Any Wednesday in August. My refrigerator is down to a container of yogurt, a few hard boiled eggs that are by now a month old (happy birthday!) and various other perishables (very).

Along with the virtual absence of food, my house is characterized by an almost total lack of reading matter. Except of course, the just-arrived copy of "Whisker's Summer Weekly Reader."

Ever the caring father, I perused it (in a particularly desperate moment)—but only because I want to be sure that Shaindel is not exposed to the wrong kind of Billy B. Frog story.

I never got to Billy B. Frog, because on page 3, I was delighted to read that "raccoons dunk their food in water." Even more interesting was the fact that there are several theories explaining this observation. Some scientists believe raccoons do this to imitate the way they capture fish and other sea life; other scientists believe that raccoons wet their food to make it easier to chew and swallow. (Raccoons have no saliva.) Shaindel will be fascinated.

But there is a lesson to be learned here that is far more important than the one about raccoons. It is a lesson about scientists. Scientists "suggest

Dr. Fryshman, a physicist, has informed us that he is prepared to write the definitive treatment of creationism vs. evolution just as soon as he has an "uninterrupted couple of months."

several theories"; some propose the "fish" explanation, other scientists support the "saliva." Good Science. Because scientists are not certain. They hypothesize, they test, they question, and they do not issue "absolute truths." Even though raccoons are readily available (any bungalow colony that produces garbage of acceptable quality is issued its own raccoon, for example), modern science is unable to determine the answers to an observation as simple as "why do raccoons dunk their food?"

Now compare this to the work of those scientists whose subject matter died 50 million years ago. (Or is it 50 billion? Numbers above 5745 confuse me.) Starting with a bone fragment sometimes no bigger than a thumb, scientists attribute facts regarding size, color, shape, behavior, longevity... to the entity to which the bone presumably belonged. These scientists state facts with a definiteness and authority that drowns out any questions. They extrapolate backwards in time by a factor of a million or so, and end up with *New York Times* feature stories on their "discoveries."

I do not intend at this time to open up the entire "Creationism" vs. Evolution matter, except to point out that the challenges of the creationists successfully exposed certain claims of evolutionists, and led to

some revolutionary changes in evolutionary thought.

Shaindel may never study science. But if she does, I expect her teachers will point out that there are scientists who study the real world, and whose statements are careful and precise. I also hope that she will be told to ignore the pretentious claims of those who study an era that may never have existed, and whose conclusions are not subject to verification or test. But most important, I trust her teachers will reinforce the lesson Shaindel learned from birth: for absolute truth there is only our Torah. ■

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“ . . . ”
with and without comment:

Don't Shoot Until You See the Whites of Their Lies (or, Media: Where You Never Have to Say "I'm Sorry")

I.

The following is a direct quotation of excerpts from an editorial that appeared in the March 28 issue of the Jerusalem Post.

When two television crew members of the Columbia Broadcasting System from Beirut were killed by Israeli tankfire during a search operation in South Lebanon, the CBS moguls in New York knew precisely, and right away, what had happened. And without even checking with the IDF.

They knew that it had not been simply a tragic mishap in which two of their employees found themselves on the wrong side in warlike confrontation among Shi'ite gunmen engaged in terrorism against Israeli soldiers. And they knew that it had not been a case in which Israeli soldiers, sensitive to the dangers lurking at every corner in South Lebanon, were doing what seemed natural in the circumstances — firing in the direction of the terrorists.

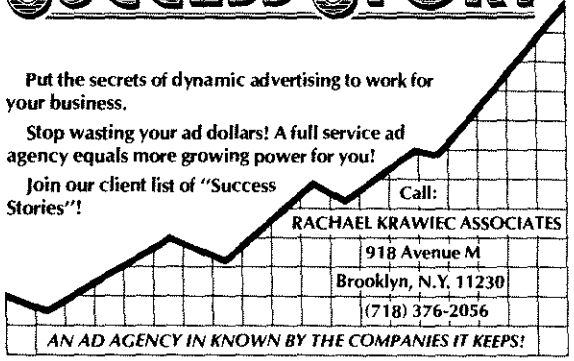
So, CBS News President Edward Joyce shot off an angry message to

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Premier Shimon Peres, calling for an "immediate and energetic" probe into what he described as only the latest — though "the most wanton and tragic" — instance "of attacks by the Israeli military against innocent journalists in Lebanon."

The mind still boggles at the arrogance. Mr. Joyce had settled upon a convenient scapegoat to pin the blame for his company's independent decision, not cleared with the IDF, to dispatch two of his employees into a raging battle zone to obtain pictures.

CBS's Mr. Joyce turned his earlier charge sheet into a final verdict: The killings had been "entirely unprovoked." All that was now needed was the facts to buttress the Verdict. Later, News Vice President Ernest

Leiser emerged convinced that "the killings were not deliberate and might simply have been a tragic error."

This was not a full retraction.

As matters stand, CBS owes an apology to Israel. And making it would benefit CBS more than Israel. (end of quote)

Bottom line: Apologies demanded from *The Jerusalem Post* and company.

II.

The Israel office of the American Jewish Committee publishes a weekly review of Israeli press comments on specific topics. Its March 17 edition featured a story called "The Skin Test."

We quote excerpts:

A new controversy in Israel has added to the already strained relations between Israel's secular society and the Orthodox religious establishment.

In an editorial entitled "Cause for Shame," the *Jerusalem Post* noted that Hadassah Hospital at Ein Kerem in Jerusalem had to import skin from Holland to save the lives of two Israeli soldiers who had been badly burned in the suicide car-bomb explosion near Metulla. Hadassah "did not have a 'skin bank' of its own until a year ago, when some Orthodox circles raised the objection that the bank was being maintained in violation of the 1980 Pathology Law," the *Post* pointed out. "...because halacha forbids the taking of organs...such as skin for any purpose except pikuah nefesh."*

The *Post* editorial charges that having to import skin graft material from Holland is an "absurdity" and a "moral and social outrage," which is "only the latest illustration of the creeping annexation of modern Israel to the realm of halacha, and halacha as interpreted by medievalist exegetes."

The editorial in *Al Hamishmar* (March 14), published by the opposition Mapam Party, states that religious oriented legislation, such as the Pathology Law which, interfering with the treatment of wounded Israeli soldiers, is a sign of the spread of "Khomeinism" and the return of the "Dark Ages" in Israel.

With regard to the wounded soldiers, *Al Hamishmar* argues that the Pathology Law "has harmed and harms, among others, the wounded who urgently need the transplant of organs, just as it has ruined all Israeli medicine. Because of this crazy law, that has no place in a normal country, it is impossible to provide the very ur-

*According to an article in *The Long Island Jewish World* by Marvin Schick, the skin bank in Hadassah Hospital was closed for financial reasons, not because of religious pressure.

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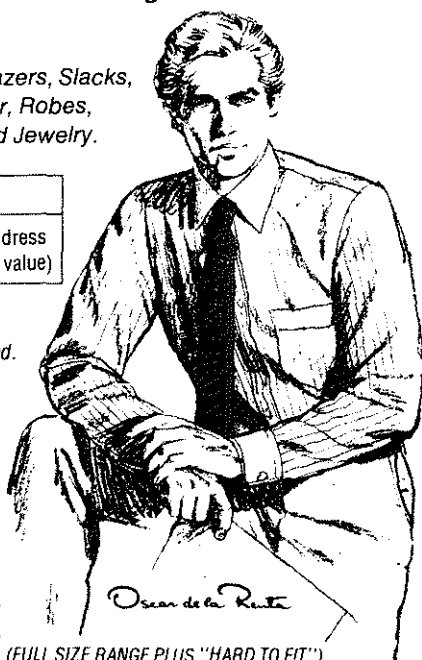
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gent medical assistance to the soldiers who suffered burns in the explosion of the car bomb in Metulla.

On March 15, *Ha'aretz* joined the major newspapers of the previous day in denouncing the Pathology Law and calling for its revision.

On the day that the *Ha'aretz* editorial was published, that newspaper and others, including the *Jerusalem Post*, referred to Health Ministry officials who denied that there had ever been a shortage of skin for grafts. The *Post* quoted the ministry's director general, Dan Michael, who said that the ministry had not been consulted about a lack of skin to treat victims of the car bomb attack near Metulla.

The *Post* also reported that the Chief Rabbinate had issued a public statement confirming that skin may be taken from bodies without the permission of the families in "times of disaster."

Apparently, there had been no lack of skin for grafts at major hospitals in Israel when tragedy struck near Metulla.
(end of quote)

Period. End of story. No further editorials on the issue. ■

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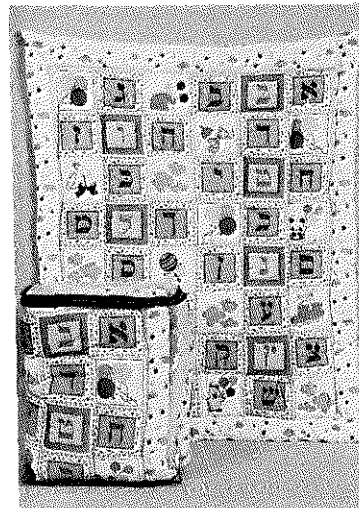
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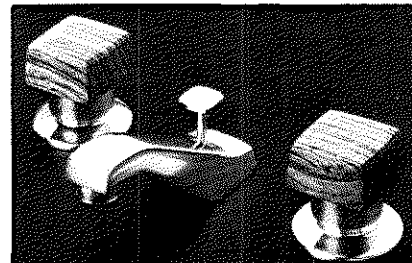
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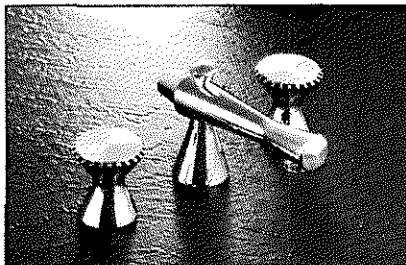
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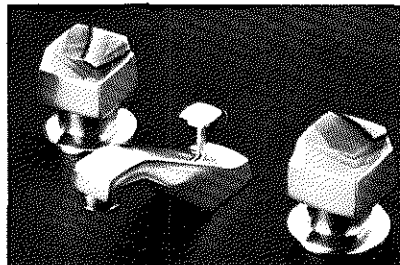
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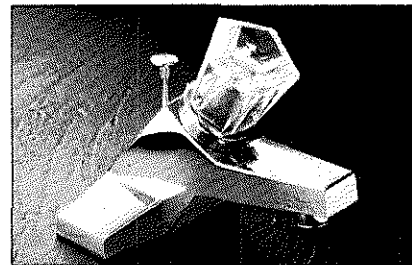
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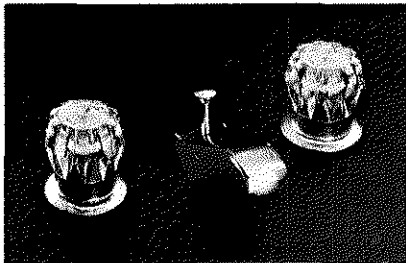
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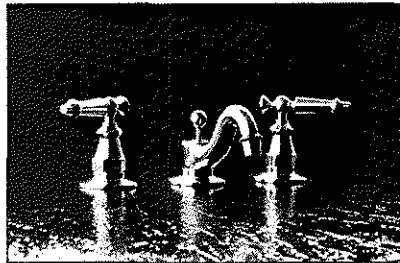
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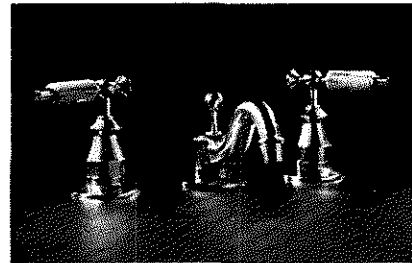
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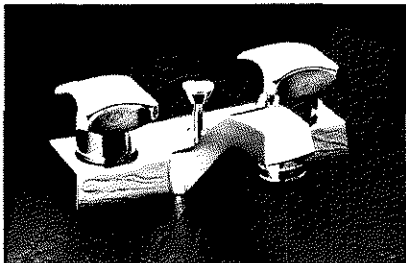
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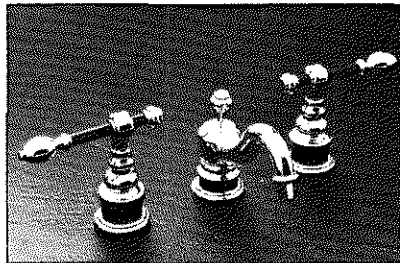
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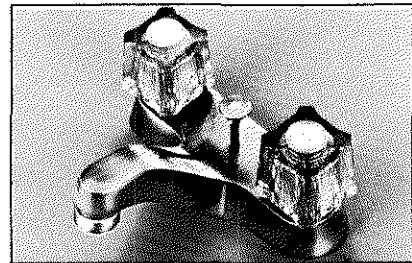
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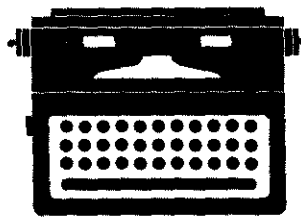


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Letters to the Editor

Need We Seek the Bird's Nest?

To the Editor:

While my wife questioned the common sense of Rabbi Finkelman's article "Taking Flight with A Mitzva" (JO, Nov. 84), I have some halachic remarks to make.

Rambam (Hilchos Brachos 11:2) distinguishes between two categories of mitzvos, one which we are obligated to fulfill in any case and the other one which we do not have to look for; as examples of the latter, he cites *mezuza* and *ma'ako* (a fence on the roof). This group of commandments we only have to do, if we happen to have a house or an inhabited roof-top, but we do not have to seek them.

To which category does *Shilu'ach HaKein* belong?

In Chulin 139 b, the Gemora states that there is no command to look for a bird's nest. I need only fulfill the mitzva if I have happened to see one.

But even after I have come across a bird's nest, there is not yet a clear, positive decision amongst the Poskim, if I am obligated to send away the mother bird if I do not intend to take the little ones.

The Responsa Chavas Yair #67 (as quoted by Pis'chei Teshuva, Yore Deah #292) is asked if the mitzva applies only if he wants to take the little birds or even if he has no intention to take them. I would like to refer also to the RAN in Chulin 140b.

It is not understandable to me—why Rabbi Finkelman has assigned "*Shilu'ach HaKein*" to the first category, when it belongs to the second.

RABBI TOVIYA LASDUN
New York City

The Author Responds:

No Obligation, But Meritorious

There is no question that *Shiluach HaKein* is not obligatory upon one who has not chanced upon a nest, as Rabbi Lasdun correctly cites (Chulin 139b). He is also correct in saying that the question as to whether or not one who has chanced upon a nest is obligated to perform the mitzva; even if he does not desire the children, is a subject of debate among the poskim. (In this context, it should be noted that Sh'eilus U'Teshuvos Nishal L'Dovid cites *Mesechtes Derech Eretz Zuta* [Perek HaShalom] which seems to indicate clearly that the mitzva is obligatory [when chanced upon]. Rabbeinu Yeruchom (#23), Levush (Yoreh De'ah 292:35:1) and Sheilos U'Teshuvos Beis Ephraim (Yoreh De'ah, Responsa 66) are also of this opinion.) All agree that in order to fulfill the mitzva one must take the children.

Nowhere in my article was there any indication contrary to what has been stated thus far. The article did imply, quite strongly, that though we are not obligated to seek out a nest to perform this mitzva, it is certainly meritorious for one to do so. In truth, the *ma'aseh rav* mentioned in the article, that the late Satmar Rav ז"ל fulfilled the mitzva twice after being directed to nests by Rabbi Shwarz, should be sufficient to back this up.

However, I would like to elaborate further:

Sefer Shulchan Gevoha (Yoreh De'ah 292:8, cited in *Kan Tzipor*) writes:

"And although the Gemora (Chulin 139b) states that one is not obligated to search the mountains and hills to find (a nest) and fulfill the mitzva of *Shiluach HaKein*... (nevertheless) the holy *rav* (a reference to the Arizal), at the outset of *Sefer Shaar HaMitzvos* and *Sefer Eitz Chaim*, states that this (the Torah's not making it obligatory to search for a nest) is only so that one who has not pursued (the mitzva) will not incur punishment for this; however, the *neshama* has not attained *shleimus* (perfection) with-

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out having fulfilled all 248 positive commandments ... and therefore one must pursue the mitzva of *Shiluach HaKein* ...

"And so the pious and men of deed here in Jerusalem do, pursuing (the mitzva) in mountains, hills and villages in the darkness of night, endangering themselves in order to fulfill the mitzva of *Shiluach HaKein*."

Kabbalistic Value

The importance which the *mekubolim* attach to this mitzva is based on *Tekunei Zohar* (Tikun 6, pg. 23a; also cited in *Kan Tzipor*), which the article alludes to, and which states as follows:

"When Jews fulfill the mitzva of *Shiluach HaKein* wherein the mother bird is driven away and the children cry as they are taken, an angel appointed over the birds seeks merit for his birds and says to *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, 'Is it not written 'His mercies are upon all His works'? Why have You decreed upon this bird that it be driven from its nest?'

"Each ministering angel seeks merit for his birds, and what does *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* do? He gathers all His legions and says, 'Each ministering angel seeks merit for his birds, and there is none among you who will seek merit for My children and for the *Shechina* which is in exile, while Her nest, which is Jerusalem, lies in ruins, and Her children are in exile under the hands of the hard masters of the nations of the world? Is there no one who seeks merit and compassion for them?'

"At that moment, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* (*kav'yochol*) cries out and declares that He will save *Klal Yisroel* for His sake and for the glory of His name. Through this, Divine compassion is aroused for the *Shechina* and for her children who are in exile."

It is interesting to note that while the *Chasam Sofer* (*Orach Chaim*, 100) is of the opinion that the mitzva is not obligatory when one does not desire the children, he is quoted by his student in *Sefer HaMikneh* as saying that this only applies in the Temple era when the merit of the mitzva is not

crucial; during exile, he says, one cannot allow the mitzva to go unfulfilled.

When One Does Not Want the Children

A question has also been raised regarding the opinion that when one does not desire the children, there is no obligation—does this preclude the performance of *Shiluach HaKein* simply for the mitzva's sake? To this, the *Megilas Sefer* to *S'mag* (*Laven* ch. 150; cited in *Kan Tzipor*) writes,

"If one does not desire them (the children), then let him arouse a desire within himself to take the children, in order that he fulfill the mitzva of *Shiluach HaKein*. Certainly he will receive good reward and longevity for having fulfilled it."

The "Common Sense" of a Mitzva

The outset of Rabbi Lasdun's letter refers to a questioning of the "common sense" of the article. I can only assume that he is referring to the seemingly cruel act of sending mother birds away from their nests, without a sincere desire for the children. To this I say the following:

Why do we not consider it cruel to send a mother bird away when we do desire her children, or to slaughter an animal when we desire its meat? The answer of course is that G-d has permitted us to benefit from creation so that we, in turn, can serve the master of it all. If this is one purpose, then our act is not deemed cruel. Can the sending away of a bird for the purpose of a mitzva be any worse than this? (See *Chasam Sofer*, cited above, where this argument is mentioned.)

The sending away of a bird for no apparent reason is certainly an act of cruelty. But when done for the purpose of mitzvas *Shiluach HaKein*, which arouses the Divine Attribute of Mercy for all of *Klal Yisroel* and ultimately benefits all of creation, including the mother bird and her children, it is truly an act of kindness.

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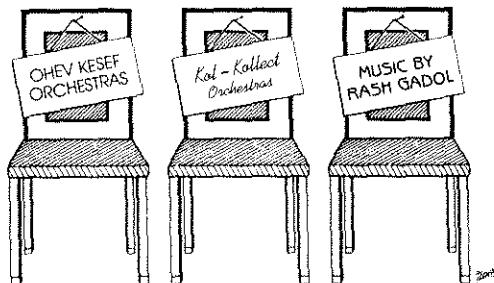
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NEWS FROM AGUDATH ISRAEL

YOUTH

1400 YOUNGSTERS GATHER FOR 22nd PIRCHEI AGUDATH ISRAEL NATIONAL SIYUM MISHNAYOS

Over 1400 boys, varying in age from 8 to 14, from Eastern United States and Canada gathered on Saturday night, March 16, for the twenty-second annual *Siyum Mishnayos* celebration of Pirchei Agudath Israel, the boys' division of Agudath Israel of America. Honoring youngsters who have mastered significant sections of *Mishna* with translation and by heart, it is the largest assembly of Jewish youth where the admission ticket is the knowledge of Torah—*Mishnayos* recited from memory.

Receiving top awards at the *siyum*, held at Yeshiva Toras Emes Kamenitz in Brooklyn, were fourteen boys who each memorized

over 1,000 *Mishnayos* over the past year, as well as eight youngsters who, in honor of their Bar Mitzvah, completed studying the text of all 4,190 *Mishnayos* in *Shas*. Each honoree was awarded with a twenty-volume set of Talmud.



Winner Aryeh Leib Stern, shown with Rabbi Silbermintz (l.), Rabbi Oelbaum, and Rabbi Keller (r.).



Runners-up Hillel Pfeiffer (r.) and Zev Wolf Hirschfeld.

According to Rabbi Joshua Silbermintz, director of Pirchei Agudath Israel, children participating in the nationwide *Mishnayos B'al Peh* contests are tested by educators and Pirchei Agudah youth leaders in their home communities. Those advancing to the highest numbers of *Mishnayos* memorized must pass a final examination by an eminent Torah scholar. This year's finalists were personally examined by Rabbi Moshe Stern, Debreciner Rav, with Rabbi Naftali Basch, Menahel of Mesivta Toras Emes-Kamenitz.

The impact of the *Mishnayos* contests over the years can also be measured in terms of broadening the ambition of a generation of budding Talmudic scholars. Rabbi Silbermintz related the story of a 21-year old student at a major yeshiva who has just completed the study of the entire Babylonian Talmud, a remarkable and awesome achievement. The young man told his parents recently that it all started out when he learned 63 *Mishnayos* for Pirchei Agudath Israel contests in the Midwest, and then went on to several hundred, and then a few thousand, and saw that he "could really do it."



Caleb Stern, 6½

The *Siyum Mishnayos* was addressed by Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller, Rosh Yeshiva of Telshe-Chicago. The *hadran* was delivered by 10-year old Yehuda Aryeh Leib Stern of New York, the top awardee, and the *haschala* was recited by Hillel Yosef Pfeiffer and Zev Wolf Hirschfeld, of Montreal.

Coleiv Yehoshua Stern, a 6½-year old who memorized most of *Sefer Moed*, also participated in the program. Rabbi Shimon Zweig, chairman of the national advisory board of Pirchei Agudath Israel, presented honorary plaques at the event to Menachem Kofman, Menachem Kramer, and Eliezer Parness in recognition of their efforts on behalf of the organization. Chairman of the evening was Rabbi Yehuda Oelbaum, Menahel of Mesivta R.S.R. Hirsch.

Some 600 of the boys also took part in a *Shabbos* interbranch conclave sponsored in conjunction with the *siyum*, where they joined together for *tefillah*, *Oneg Shabbos*, and *diorei Torah*. Addressing the youngsters at the "mini-convention" were: Rabbi Eliezer Horowitz (Rav, Agudath Israel of Boro Park-14th Ave.), Rabbi Leibush Langer (Mirrer Yeshiva), Rabbi Eliyahu Steger (Chairman, National Hasmodoh Contests), Rabbi Silbermintz, Dr. Mosy Biberfeld (Manhig Ruchni, Pirchei Agudath Israel-14th Ave.), Rabbi Mordechai Katz (Director, JEP), Rabbi Boruch Saks (Rav, Zeirei Agudath Israel-14th Ave.), Rabbi Yaakov Brull (Chofetz Chaim-Baltimore), and Rabbi Yaakov Feiner (Tiferes Elimelech).

Chairmen of the entire event were Sruly David and Menachem Yosef Nathan. Avigdor Schick chaired the Housing and Shabbos committee, and Eli David and Menachem Kramer were chairmen of the *Siyum Journal*, with Ephraim Nierenberg, Chaim Richmond and Yitzchok Krasne as co-chairmen. Honorary chairman of the event was Gershon Nathan.

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DATELINE ... LOS ANGELES

CALIFORNIA AGUDATH ISRAEL CONFERENCE SETS LEGISLATIVE GOALS

LOS ANGELES—"Agudath Israel has significantly contributed towards making America a stronger and better place to live," according to U.S. Senator Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.). He paid this compliment to the 63-year old national Orthodox Jewish organization at the Second Annual Legislative Conference of the Commission on Legislation and Civic Action of Agudath Israel of California last Sunday at the Beverly Plaza Hotel. Addressing an overflow crowd of 150 public officials and a broad spectrum of Jewish community leaders, Dodd asserted that Protecting Freedom of Religious Choice—the Conference theme—has been a vital ingredient in America's success: "It is not America which has kept religion, but religious freedom which has kept our nation great."

The Conference was called to mark the first year of the California Agudath Israel Commission's activity, and to introduce its 1985 legislative agenda. A booklet extensively outlining the current national and California public policy priorities of Agudath Israel was distributed at the Conference, and will be mailed to every State legislator.

Sharing the podium with Senator Dodd was Rabbi Moshe Sherer, President of Agudath Israel of America. He congratulated the California branch of Agudath Israel for their first year's efforts culminating with the breakthrough Autopsy Law of 1984, which protects the religious rights of observant Jews in the State to protest post-mortem procedures. The next step must be, according to Rabbi Sherer, guaranteeing the freedom of religious choice in education, by advocating legislation that would maximize governmental assistance to non-public school parents and students. "Why must it be," questioned Rabbi Sherer, "that textbooks and transportation are freely made available to Yeshiva day-school students throughout the country, except in the State of California?" Rabbi Sherer was introduced by Mr. Sol Kest, well-known for his Jewish community involvement, a Presidium-member of Agudath Israel of California.

After attorney Moshe Zyskind, a conference chairman, greeted the rabbinical leaders and public officials attending the Conference, Dr. Irving Lebovics, co-chairman of the Commission on Legislation and Civic Action of Agudath Israel of California, and a Presidium-member, presented the group's 1985

California agenda, calling for legislation to protect Sabbath-observing employees and students, and to support the further prosecutions of those perpetrating Kosher consumer fraud. Bills protecting the observant Jewish community in these areas have already been introduced in Sacramento, at the request of Agudath Israel.

The Sunday morning program was highlighted by the presentation of awards to two public officials with long records of strong support for the Jewish community, State Senators David Roberti, President-Pro-tem of the Senate, and Hershel Rosenthal. They were both instrumental in the passage of last year's Autopsy Law, and have initiated the efforts for this year's bills, as well, along with Assemblyman Tom Hayden. The awards were presented by the other chairmen of the Conference, Mr. Stanley Diller, a Presidium member of the California Agudah, and Mr. Joseph Kornwasser, both noted Orthodox businessmen and community leaders.

Two members of the Agudath Israel Legislative Commission were also honored for their distinguished community service: Rabbi

Meyer May of Yeshiva University of Los Angeles, and prominent attorney Bernard Wiesel.

Closing the Conference, Rabbi Chaim Schnur, Director of Agudath Israel of California, hailed the members of the Agudah Commission on Legislation and Civic Action, and their Co-chairmen, Stanley Treitel and Dr. Irving Lebovics, for their fruitful efforts in forging an effective coalition to help promote the continued growth of Torah Judaism in California. "The Commission," Rabbi Schnur concluded, "has articulated and demonstrated the profound ideology of Agudath Israel, that the Torah outlook and approach can be applied to every facet of contemporary Jewish life." The Presidium of the California chapter of Agudath Israel was also represented by Rabbi Jacob Friedman, chairman, and Mr. Yaakov Goldenberg.

On the morning after the legislative conference, a delegation of Los Angeles Agudah leaders accompanied Rabbi Sherer in a visit to Mayor Tom Bradley at City Hall, to acquaint him with the new legislative goals of Agudath Israel.

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DATELINE ... VIENNA

VIENNA KOSHER KITCHEN FOR REFUGEES SPONSORED BY AGUDATH ISRAEL

VIENNA, AUSTRIA—The kosher kitchen opened here in mid-January by the Agudath Israel World Organization to provide the main daily meal for 120 young Jewish refugees has performed a valuable service, according to an evaluation just completed. The kosher kitchen is funded by the Agudath Israel organizations of the United States, Switzerland, Belgium and England and a local

committee of volunteer Orthodox laypersons.

An important activity of the kosher kitchen facility is its educational aspect, conducted by a husband-and-wife team of well-known Sefardic Torah educators. These educators were brought to Vienna by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to help provide Jewish cultural studies for refugees who are awaiting resettlement in the western world, which can take many months. The youngsters remain after the afternoon meal for several hours of Torah study.

The New York office of the Agudath Israel World Organization, working together with the Ner Israel Yeshiva of Baltimore, of which Rabbi Naftoli Neuberger is the executive vice

president, have overall charge of the kosher kitchen project. In order to intensify and strengthen the amount of Torah study provided the young refugees, a couple from the Ner Israel Kotel of Baltimore, Rabbi and Mrs. Shmuel Khoshkheraman came for Vienna in mid March on an extended educational mission.

For Pesach, the kitchen facility was expanded to provide the refugee population with all their food needs for each day because of the special Passover requirements. The two *Sedarim* for all the Jewish refugees here were funded by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

DATELINE ... HOUSING

SBCO APPOINTS KRAWIECZ EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR


The Board of the Southern Brooklyn Community Organization (SBCO), a division of Agudath Israel of America, announced that Louis Krawiecz, formerly an officer with The Greater New York Savings Bank, has been appointed Executive Director of the Southern Brooklyn Community Organization, it was announced by SBCO Board Chairman Henry Hirsch. Rabbi Jacob Lonner, heretofore the agency's Assistant Director, has been elevated to the position of Administrative Director.

Mr. Hirsch said that Mr. Krawiecz comes to SBCO with a vast reservoir of knowledge in financial management and extensive experience in administration, as well as a strong personal commitment to the Jewish community.

Mr. Louis Glueck, President of SBCO added, "As an officer in the bank, Mr. Krawiecz had to deal with various types of people with different backgrounds and needs, and he did so in a sensitive and compassionate manner. He also displayed a deep concern for the viability of the Brooklyn community, a quality which is of great importance in his new position."

Mr. Krawiecz's appointment came as a result of the decision of SBCO's founding Executive Director, Rabbi Shmuel Lefkowitz, to enter the private sector after having served as Executive Director of SBCO since its inception in 1977. Lefkowitz will be joining the Prime Resources Group, Inc., a varied real estate firm.

Rabbi Lonner's promotion was based on his vast experience, his extensive and selfless involvement in community affairs and his proven skills in neighborhood stabilization.



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YESHIVOS

AGUDATH ISRAEL TO COMBAT CUTS IN SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAMS

In reaction to provisions in President Reagan's recommended budget for fiscal year 1986, the Agudath Israel Commission on Legislation and Civic Action announced that it would mount a "vigorous effort" to combat elements of the proposal that could dramatically reduce federal assistance for yeshivos. Most adversely affected by the Administration's newly submitted plan is the National School Lunch Program, which provides funding and food commodities to both public and non-public schools, enabling them to serve hot meals to students at no cost or at reduced prices.

As explained in a special detailed bulletin on this subject released by Agudath Israel, the Lunch Program is one of many selected programs targeted for deep cuts by the Administration in its desire to freeze overall domestic spending in 1986 at FY 1985 levels. Considerable reductions in child nutrition programs were already introduced four years ago, although a number of the budget-slashing recommendations at the time were soundly defeated as a result of a substantial public information effort in which Agudath Israel took an active role. Attorneys for Agudath Israel said that intensive activity is being undertaken as well with regard to the current proposals, to advise Congressmen and Administration officials of the concerns of the Orthodox Jewish community as the budget process progresses.

According to Shmuel Prager, Esq., General Counsel of the Agudath Israel Commission on Legislation and Civic Action, the newly suggested cuts would specifically eliminate federal cash and commodity reimbursement for students of family income above 185% of the poverty level (i.e. above \$18,870 for a family of four). In turn, yeshivos with a high proportion of students in this category may be forced to drop out from the Lunch Program entirely, thus effectively wiping out subsidies even for still eligible lower-income students.

Other aspects of the Administration's plan call for a one-year freeze on annual cost-of-living adjustments in federal reimbursements for meal programs, and the termination of U.S. Department of Agriculture administration of Summer Food and Child Care Food Programs in states such as New York, which do not administer the programs themselves.

The budget-impact advisory issued by Agudath Israel also details the projected effect of the proposed federal budget on assistance provided by the U.S. Departments

of Education and Energy. The bulletin is one of a series of information briefs addressed to needs of yeshivos and day schools throughout the country published regularly by the Commission on Legislation of Agudath Israel, keeping them advised of developments in government policy that affect their institutions.

PESACH REPORT

CHIZUK HOSTS PRE-PESACH AUDIO-VISUAL SEMINAR

A specially prepared audio-visual presentation treating the multifarious aspects of the Passover holiday was featured at the annual pre-Pesach seminars sponsored in

Brooklyn by Chizuk, the adult outreach and education agency of the Agudath Israel. This year's sessions, open to the public, was held Wednesday evening, March 27, and Monday, April 1, at the Harry and Jane Fischel Center in Flatbush, the drop-in facility for Jewish information founded by Chizuk.

According to Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser, director, the seminars are geared to adults from a variety of Jewish backgrounds, and included talks by a panel of rabbis and educators on such topics as kashering the household; permissible foods, cosmetics, and medicines; conducting the *Seder*; and the underlying themes of the holiday. A question-and-answer period followed each session, and provisions were made for participants to sell their *chometz* at the seminars.

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CHESED

9000 ELDERLY REACHED ON PURIM BY AGUDAH'S PROJECT STAY

A massive, broad-scale effort to reach out to thousands of isolated elderly Jewish citizens, ailing nursing home patients, and the chronically-ill hospitalized throughout the New York metropolitan area was organized by Project STAY—Bnos Agudath Israel Bikur Cholim during the recent Purim holiday season. Over 9000 senior citizens received personal greetings, *shalach manos* packages, and a dose of infectious Purim spirit brought to them by 1500 high school and women's seminary students recruited from Torah

educational institutions by the Agudath Israel volunteer-coordinating agency.

Included in the outreach campaign sponsored by Project STAY were several community celebrations which gathered handicapped shut-ins—through special transportation arrangements—together with groups of more active seniors for programs of skits, music, and merriment conducted by the young volunteers.

At one such event, held in Queens, kindergarten students from the North Shore Hebrew Academy, a local yeshiva, joined with the STAY force to entertain seniors at a home for the aged. Girls from Be'er Hagolah Institute, a Torah school for students from behind the Iron Curtain, also conducted activities specially oriented to members of the Russian immigrant community. A program for chronically ill children at Sloan Kettering Institute in Manhattan, enhanced by the appearance of the well known "Uncle Moishy," was also hosted by STAY. In all, seventy-five hospitals and nursing homes were visited.

According to **Roni Cohen**, Associate Director of Project STAY, this year's Purim program touched the lives of more individuals than ever before in the annual project. Said Miss Cohen, "From Long Island to Staten Island, and from Brownsville to the Bronx, Jews who would otherwise hardly know it's Purim were able to feel part of the total Jewish community."

Typical of the beneficiaries of the program were Mr. and Mrs. Schwartz (not their real name), an immigrant couple living in Brooklyn. Mr. Schwartz suffers from Alzheimer's Disease, and Mrs. Schwartz has had a difficult time coping with her husband's affliction, with no children or broader family support system to fall back on. Project STAY volunteers who recently made the couple's acquaintance, had begun to help them in obtaining health aid, homemaker services, and other assistance. It was the personal attention, though, highlighted by Purim visits and lavish *shalach manos* that, in the words of Mrs. Schwartz, "made us feel that we were just like family."

In discussing the Purim outreach campaign, **Mrs. Nechama Wise**, citywide coordinator of Bnos Agudath Israel Bikur Cholim, emphasized the importance of the volunteers' enthusiasm as crucial to the project. "It was their selfless work," she said, "that was ultimately responsible for the success of the program."

Among the planners of the area-wide project were **Miss Zeva Adler**, case worker involved in senior citizen programs, **Miss Rochel Leah Pomerantz** of the Tele-Pal Homebound Program, **Miss Chani Schechter**, who organized the Queens activities, and **Miss Sarah Zabari**, homebound coordinator of Bnos Agudath Israel Bikur Cholim. The overall director of Project STAY is **Rabbi Yisroel Verschleiser**.

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DATELINE... HARTFORD

JEWISH GROUPS CLASH AT LEGISLATIVE HEARINGS ON CONNECTICUT "AGUNAH BILL"

HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT—Representatives of Agudath Israel of America and the American Jewish Congress engaged in a sharp debate on March 4 during hearings before the Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut Legislature on a proposed bill designed to alleviate the plight of *agunos*—women whose marriages have for all intents and purposes been terminated, but whose husbands refuse to grant them a *get* so that they will be free to remarry under Jewish law.

The bill, introduced by Connecticut State Representative **Adele Kusnitz**, would establish a procedure whereby any party to a civil divorce proceeding who alleges that the other party is imposing a "barrier to remarriage" (defined specifically to include any barrier imposed under religious law) can petition the court to refer the matter to an impartial conciliator. If the conciliator proves unable to resolve the dispute among the parties, the court would be empowered to withhold a final judgment of civil divorce until the barrier to remarriage has been removed.

The proposed legislation is similar, though not identical, to a New York statute drafted at the behest of Agudath Israel of America and signed into law by Governor **Mario Cuomo** during the summer of 1983. Agudath Israel and the National Jewish Commission on Law and Public Affairs (COLPA) worked together with Representative Kusnitz and several local Rabbis in formulating the language of the Connecticut bill.

At the hearing, **David Zwiebel, Esq.**, Director of Agudath Israel of America's Office of Government Affairs, described the bill as a "carefully crafted piece of legislation [which] addresses the social problem engendered by parties who seek to change the rules in the middle of the game, who seek to obtain the benefits of a judgment of nullity or dissolution of marriage when, in fact, they refuse to take the steps necessary to free their spouses to remarry. The problem is one that is legitimately of interest to a secular government."

Taking issue with the Agudath Israel attorney's characterization of the bill as "plainly constitutional," **Marc D. Stern**, Assistant Director of the American Jewish Congress' Commission on Law and Social Action, argued that the bill ran afoul of the First Amendment's prohibition against the estab-

lishment of religion. Although he conceded that the purposes of the bill were noble, Mr. Stern contended that its enactment would constitute the achievement of a short-term benefit at the expense of a greater long-term harm—involving the secular state in matters of religious practice.

The views of the American Jewish Congress were echoed by representatives of the Connecticut chapters of the National Council of Jewish Women and the National Organization of Women. Mr. Zwiebel, on behalf of Agudath Israel, took these organizations to task for being "out of touch with their own constituencies. . . . It borders on callousness for these women's organizations to invoke an absolutist view of the First Amendment—a view that has been thoroughly discredited by the U.S. Supreme Court—to the detriment of the very persons whose interests they purport to represent."

A delegation of Orthodox and Conservative Rabbis from across the State of Connecticut appeared at the hearings to support the bill. The Judiciary Committee heard testimony from **Rabbi Jeffrey Feinstein** (Congregation Shaarei Torah, Bridgeport) and **Rabbi Israel Stein** (Congregation Rodeph Shalom, Bridgeport), each of whom spoke of the tragic plight of the *aguna* and urged the Legislature to enact the bill as a means of providing such women some relief from their unfortunate predicaments. In addition, **Dennis Rapps, Esq.**, Executive Director of COLPA, submitted a written statement urging the bill's passage.

The Judiciary Committee took no vote on the bill at the hearing. According to Representative Kusnitz, the matter will likely be referred to a special subcommittee considering several modifications to Connecticut's law of divorce.



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JEP RELEASES NEW SERIES ON THE PROPHETS

The first volume of an innovative series of works on *Nach* (the Prophets and Hagiographa) was released in March by JEP, the Jewish Education Program of Agudath Israel of America, in conjunction with the Rothman Foundation. The first installment of the six-part LILMODE ULELAMADE set, on the Book of Joshua, is authored by Rabbi Mordechai Katz, Director of JEP, and an experienced leader in the field of informal Torah

education and outreach to untutored masses of Jewish children.

According to Rabbi Yosef C. Golding, executive director of JEP, the study of *Nach* has been for various reasons neglected by many in the Jewish community, and the result has been "an unfortunate lack of understanding of the message of the Prophets as interpreted by our Torah tradition." The *Lilmode Ulelamade* series, following the same design as JEP's widely acclaimed books on *Chumash*, Jewish law and philosophy, was conceived to "fill the need for a work that would appeal to readers of all ages and backgrounds, in projecting the Torah outlook in

an English work through story, anecdote and parable, juxtaposed with the interpretations and insights of the classic rabbinic commentaries."

The volumes includes a synopsis of each prophetic section under review, followed by a compendium of interpretative remarks, in addition to supplementary visual aids. The books are intended for the use of beginners as well as more advanced students, and in particular for youth leaders and individuals involved in outreach work.

Publication of the second sefer of the new series, on the Book of Judges, is nearing completion, and copies will reach marketing outlets later this year. Volumes on the Later Prophets and the Kesuvim are currently in the production stage, and are being planned for release over the space of the next several years.

The previous JEP seforim have been translated into French, Spanish, Russian, and the Scandinavian languages, and have been cast in Braille and recorded on cassettes for the blind. The volumes are used in schools and youth programs throughout the U.S., parts of Canada, South Africa, Australia, Western Europe and Denmark.

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Over 80 youth directors from across the New York metropolitan area and New Jersey gathered March 2 in Brooklyn for the seventh annual Leaders Melave Malka of Pirchei Agudath Israel of America, bringing together the young men who advise the individual chapters of the Agudath Israel boys' movement.

Rabbi Joshua Silbermintz, national director of Pirchei Agudath Israel, on the expansion of the movement's activities, including the formation of 25 new chapters in the last two years and the broadening of participation in the organization's Torah-learning contests.

The gathering also heard from Dovid Retter, who spoke of the spirit of responsibility for the *k'lal* (Jewish community) as a hallmark of the Agudath Israel philosophy.

Chairman of the Melave Malka was Chaim Richmond, and Eli David and Yosef Nathan served as co-chairmen.

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CNB President, John J. Amodio looks on as Arthur Stuart (left) receives award from Rabbi Benjamin Wulliger (right) and Rabbi Hershel Wieder of the Masdos Sans Klausenburg.

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