

# THE Jewish OBSERVER

Elul 5756 • September 1996  
U.S.A. \$3.50/Foreign \$4.50 • VOL XXIX/NO. 6

לשנה טובה  
תכתבו ותחתמו

## *An Appreciation of the Late Gever Rebbe*

*Also in this issue:*

**PREPARING FOR  
THE NEW YEAR**

*Teshuva—  
Reaching the  
Heavens, One  
Step at a Time*

RABBI  
SENDER STRASSFELD

*How to Cry Out  
to "Tatteb"*

RABBI YERACHMIEL  
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**REFORM "SPIRITUALITY",  
LIBERALISM, AND KIRUV**

*Do We Really  
Have All the  
Answers?*

RABBI LEONARD  
OPPENHEIMER

*"And He Shall  
Turn the Hearts  
of Fathers to the  
Sons,"*

YOSEF BEN SHLOMO  
HAKOHN

■

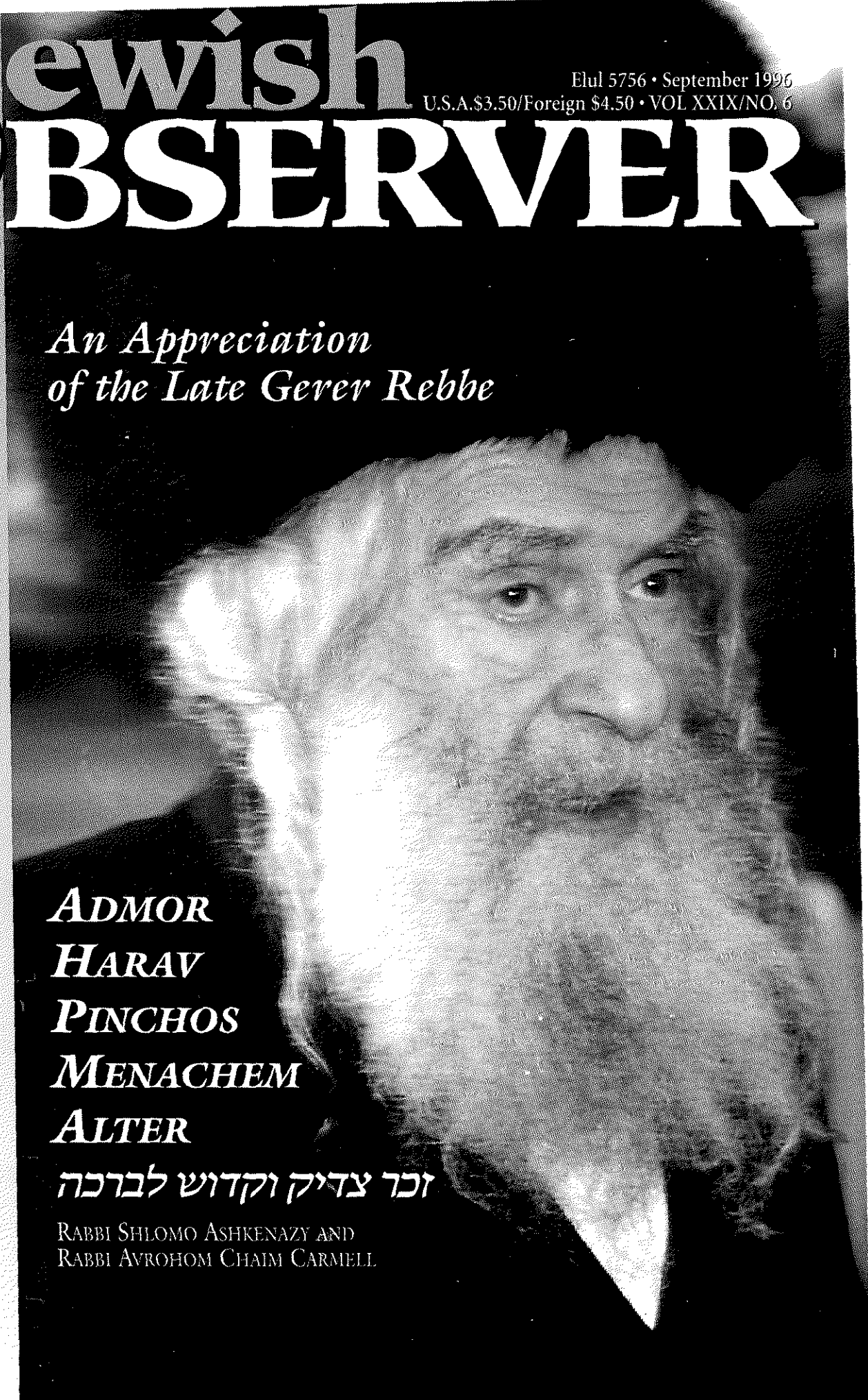
*Of Mars and Men*

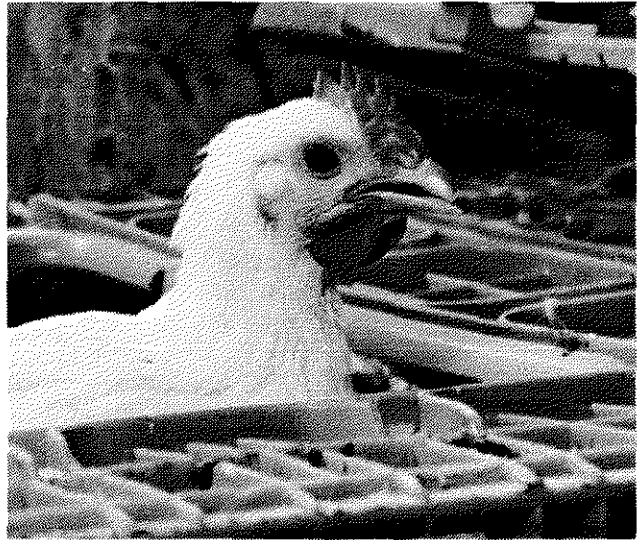
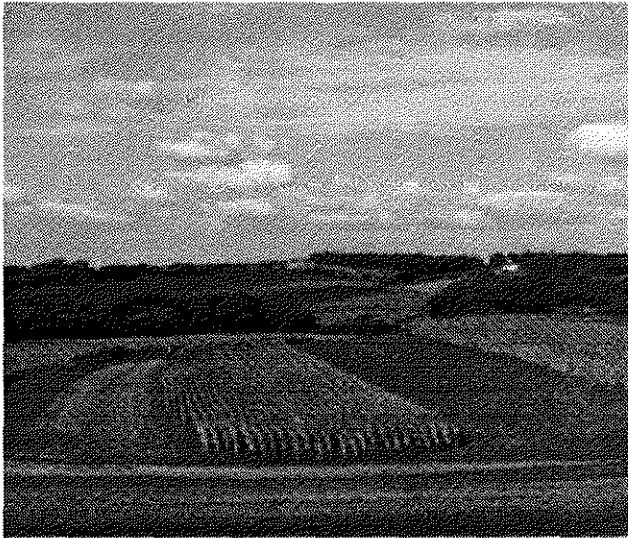
RABBI YECHIEL PERR

**ADMOR  
HARAV  
PINCHOS  
MENACHEM  
ALTER**

**זכר צדיק וקדוש לברכה**

RABBI SHLOMO ASHKENAZY AND  
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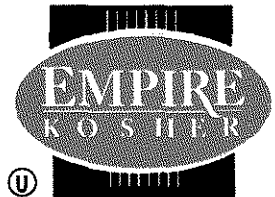
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U.S.A. \$3.50/Foreign \$4.50 • VOL XXIX/NO. 6

**THE JEWISH OBSERVER** (ISSN) 0021-6615 is published monthly except July and August by the Agudath Israel of America, 84 William Street, New York, N.Y. 10038. Second class postage paid in New York, N.Y. Subscription \$24.00 per year; two years, \$44.00; three years, \$60.00. Outside of the United States (US funds drawn on a US bank only) \$12.00 surcharge per year. Single copy \$3.50; foreign \$4.50.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: The Jewish Observer, 84 William Street, N.Y., N.Y. 10038. Tel: 212-797-9000, Fax: 212-269-2843.

Printed in the U.S.A.

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SEPTEMBER 1996  
VOLUME XXIX/NO. 6



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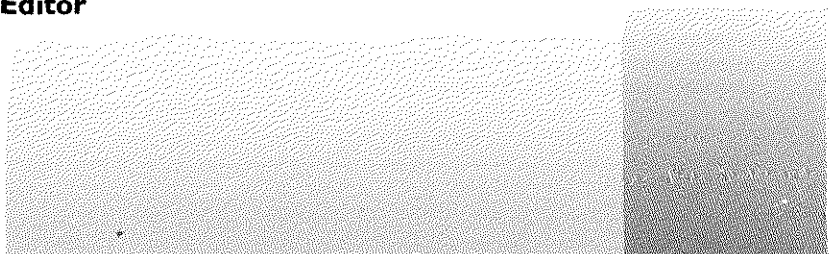
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# Admor Horav Pinchos Menachem Alter

## זכר צדיק וקדוש לברכה

### An Appreciation of the Late Gerer Rebbe



**T**orrential rain poured down in intermittent waves, as if the skies were breaking out repeatedly in uncontrollable sobbing. Bolts of lightning rent the clouds—the very heavens were tearing *kriah*. Peals of ominous

Rabbi Ashkenazy, a *talmid* of Mesivta Torah Vodaath, in Brooklyn, NY, Beth Medrash Govoha, in Lakewood, NJ, and Mir-Jerusalem. He presently heads the Boston *Kollel* in Har Nof, Jerusalem.

Rabbi Carmell, a *talmid* of the Yeshivos of Gateshead (England) and Ponevez, teaches in the Bostoner *Kollel*.

The authors, whose appreciation of the *Lev Simcha*, Rabbi Simcha Bunim Alter זצ"ל, was featured in *JO*, Oct '92, asked to express their inadequacy to the assignment of writing an article such as this: "Like *Lilliputians* at the foot of a towering peak, whose summit is beyond the range of their limited vision, we recognize our inefficacy in capturing the multifaceted greatness of this extraordinary personality. Our prayer is that somehow these words will convey to the reader some indication of his greatness."

thunder rolled across the sky, bewailing the calamity that had befallen *Am Yisroel*.

The forces of destruction had hit at the heart of *Klal Yisroel*—the *tzaddik*. It was so sudden, it left us reeling from the impact of the blow.

An unfinished quote in the *Rebbe's* call to *teshuva* took on a new, frightful meaning — "...once the forces of destruction are let loose, they do not distinguish between the righteous and the wicked...." The statement in the *Gemora* concludes: "Not only that, but it begins with the *tzaddikim!*" Did the *Rebbe* sense that he was to be the atonement for *Klal Yisroel*?

When asked about the preparations for the Purim *tisch*, he replied "Like a *tisch* before Tisha Be'Av."

Who had realized the import of his

words on Purim: that *Shaul Hamelech* had to depart this world for the sake of *Klal Yisroel*. He often pointed out that his own name had the same numerical value as "*Shaul*" and "*Purim*."

For months he had warned of impending danger. In his *tefillos* and *shmuessen* (talks), one could hear urgency and trepidation in his voice, as he called out for Heavenly mercy. His call for *teshuva* apparently unheeded, he



readied himself to go up as a sacrifice to atone for *Bnei Yisroel* and offset the evil decree. A thunderbolt "to straighten out the crookedness of the heart" (*Berachos* 59a).

As his coffin was hurried through the streets of Geula amidst an unseasonable thunderstorm, one verse kept coming to mind, "And Eliyahu ascended in a storm, to Heaven" (*Melachim* II 2,11)<sup>1</sup>

"That which we feared and warned about has come to pass" (see p. 11)

## I. BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

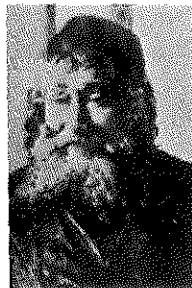
The 21st of Tammuz 5686 (July 3, 1926) was a day of rejoicing for Polish Jewry. A promise had been fulfilled. The Gerer *Rebbe*, Rabbi Avrohom Mordechai Alter (the *Imrei Emes*), had a son born to him at the age of 60. The mother, *Rebbetzin* Feige Mintshe<sup>2</sup>, on agreeing to marry the aging *tzaddik*, had requested that he promise that she would bear him offspring. The child was named Pinchos Menachem, commemorating the *Parsha* of the week and the proximity to the month of Menachem Av. This was also the name of his great-uncle, the *Sifsei Tzaddik* of Piltz.

Although he was by far the youngest son of the *Imrei Emes*, the *Chassidim* sensed that a great future lay in store for him. An inkling of his future greatness was given by the *Imrei Emes* at the *bris*. He discussed the prayer of *Moshe Rabbeinu* that *Am Yisroel* be given a leader that "would lead them out and bring them in" (*Bamidbar* 27,17), explaining this to mean "take them out of their rut and bring them into *kedusha*."

*As a small child at the Pesach Seder, Pinchos Menachem stumbled over his recital of the Ma Nishtana. He burst into tears, crying, "I also want to be able to say it so that they will hear me up to heaven!" His father comforted him saying, "Don't cry, you'll yet be able to speak words that will be heard in heaven."*

1. Pinchos was Eliyahu (*Yalkut Shimoni, Bamidbar* #771).

2. daughter of Rabbi Yaakov Meir Biderman, a son-in-law of the *Sefas Emes*.



The late Rebbe's father, the *Imrei Emes* (r.) and his father-in-law, Rabbi Yaakov Meir Biderman זצ"ל.

### A Regimen of Diligence and Breadth

Although the *Imrei Emes* was burdened by his numerous responsibilities as *Rebbe* and leader of *Agudath Israel*, which involved him in all aspects of European Jewry, he did not forego his role as a father. He appointed special mentors for his son with detailed instructions about the quality of his learning and the breadth of his curriculum. Reb Pinchos Menachem admitted once that he finished *Shas* (the entire Talmud) "at a very young age." The study of *mussar* (ethical teachings), too, was included as specified in a letter of instruction from the *Imrei Emes* listing the *sefarim* to learn. The rest of his life, he never missed a day without including study of *mussar*. When fleeing from Poland he only had a small *Chovas Halevovos*, which he constantly learned.

He was inspired to learn *Zohar* every week even before his Bar Mitzva because his father surprisingly expected him to



The Rebbe as a child accompanying his father.

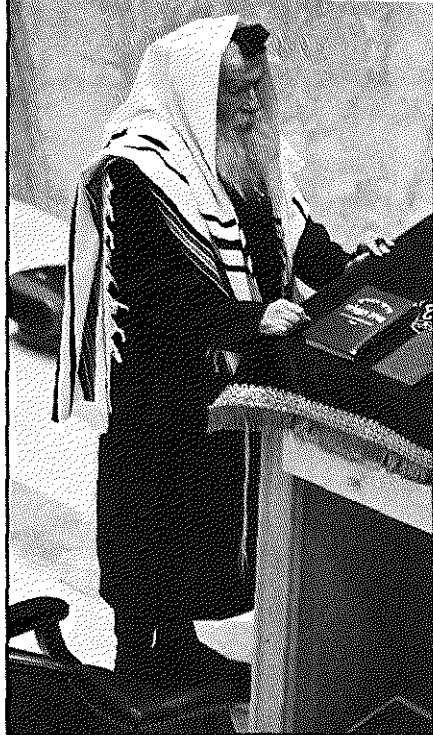
know a quotation from there, remarking, "A Jew has to know everything." The *Imrei Emes* personally tested him and later had daily *shiurim* with him, to ensure that Pinchos Menachem would not rely on his prodigal mind and faultless memory. As a result, his diligence reached extraordinary heights.

While in Nazi-occupied Warsaw, he braved the curfew to keep a study session with a cousin. On the way, he was picked up by an S. S. patrol and thrown into a truck with other Jews. Miraculously, someone noticed him and called out to him to jump out and run.

His Bar Mitzva took place in the summer of 1939, two months before the outbreak of World War II. War survivors recall how the occasion lifted their spirits in those fearful months. Particularly, when the *Imrei Emes* gave the honor of *Birchas Hamazon* to the grandfather, Reb Yaakov Meir Biderman, saying, "I shall *bentch* at the wedding." Throughout the war, when it seemed that the world had come to an end, this statement charged the *Chassidim* with confidence that the *Rebbe* would survive and normal life would be resumed.

On arriving to *Eretz Yisroel* after the miraculous escape of the *Imrei Emes* and his family from occupied Poland, he learned in Ponovez Yeshiva and later in *Yeshivos Chayei Olam* and *Sefas Emes* in Jerusalem. He viewed Reb Simcha Bunim Leizersohn (brother-in-law of Reb Shlomo Zalman Auerbach זצ"ל) as his "*Rebbe*," having had a private *shiur* with him in which he amassed an enormous wealth of knowledge on *Rishonim* and *Acharonim*.

He married Tzipora Alter, granddaughter of his uncle Reb Moshe Betzalel זי"ד, and the frail *Imrei Emes* led the *Birchas Hamazon*, as he had foretold. The couple moved in with his parents, and Reb Pinchos Menachem continued to study with his father whenever the latter's health permitted.



At the time of his marriage, the *Imrei Emes* could say of him, "He is a cemented cistern that does not lose a drop" (*Avos* II: 11).

### Catapulted to Leadership

On Shavuot 5708/1948, while Jerusalem was besieged by the Arab legionaries, the *Imrei Emes* passed away and was buried in the courtyard of the Yeshiva. His oldest surviving son, Reb Yisroel (posthumously to be known as the *Beis Yisroel*), assumed the leadership of the decimated *Gerer Chassidus*. Reb Pinchos Menachem became an ardent *Chassid* of his brother, as he said in a *hesped* (eulogy), "I saw a flaming fire and I submitted to it for 29 years." With characteristic humility, he succeeded to conceal his vast knowledge from others. However, the *Beis Yisroel*, fully aware of his genius, appointed him *Rosh Hayeshiva* of Yeshivas Sefas Emes in 1957. His first *shiur* in the Yeshiva dazzled the listeners with its scope and breadth.

*A Polish Gaon who had survived the holocaust bemoaned to the Beis Yisroel the lack of Torah brilliance he had seen in pre-war Europe. The Beis Yisroel suggested he speak to his youngest brother. Afterwards, he admitted that the clarity and scope of the discussion reminded him of the great Reb Menachem Ziemba זימבא.*

In 1971, the *Beis Yisroel* sent him to address the 50th convention of Agudath Israel in America. Since Rabbi Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל was to introduce him, it was suggested that they meet first so that Reb Moshe could make his acquaintance. The meeting, scheduled for less than an hour, continued on for many more. On emerging, Reb Moshe could not contain his amazement: "I couldn't believe what I was hearing. The entirety of Torah! Reminiscent of the Rogatchover Gaon!"



Addressing the Agudath Israel of America Convention, 1971. To his left, Rabbi Moshe Sherer, and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and Rabbi Gedalya Schorr זצ"ל.

His wealth of knowledge extended to other areas as well. With a swift and analytical grasp, he accumulated information in science, history, medicine, finance, and political issues that would amaze experts in these fields.

*While Rosh Yeshiva, he met with the non-religious father of a chassan in the Yeshiva, who was perturbed by the religious approach to marriage, particularly the custom that the engaged couple not meet again until the wedding. Reb Pinchos Menachem, in impeccable Ivrit, presented a convincing justification for the Chassidic approach. To score his point, he cited the precise page number in a recent work by a renowned psychologist, who acknowledges that excessive contact during the engagement is detrimental to the success of the marriage.*

In 1977, the *Beis Yisroel* passed away, and was succeeded by his brother, the *Lev Simcha*—Reb Simcha Bunim. When accepting this position at almost 80 years of age, he asked Reb Pinchos Menachem to help him lead the *Chassidim*. At the

time, Reb Pinchos Menachem could not understand his intention. It was only eight years later, in 1985, that this request took on meaning. At the height of his campaign to prevent the building of a Mormon University in Jerusalem, Reb Simcha Bunim fell ill, never to recover. As it became increasingly difficult for Reb Simcha Bunim to receive people, the *Chassidim* began to turn to the *Rosh Yeshiva* for advice and guidance. He would cut to the heart of a problem, touching on all aspects of the issue at hand. With great sensitivity to the emotional and social factors that often compound a medical or financial problem, he would help the petitioner cope with these, too.

*A man came to him for financial aid to cover medical expenses incurred by an incurable disease afflicting a member of his family. After giving a generous donation to cover the expenses, he asked him to return after a few days. On his return, the Rebbe told him: "Besides the financial burden, I am sure the family is emotionally shattered by the suffering of their beloved one. Then there is the sense of alienation by society, the feeling that Hashem is picking on you, the worry about the future...." He continued to enumerate every major and minor problem that they were experiencing. The sensitive analysis alone was comforting. But he continued to clarify how so many of the concerns were really unnecessary, not denying the severity of the problem itself. The man left with a wealth of common sense and encouragement that eased his burden in the many trying months that lay ahead of him.*

### In Face of Adversity

In 1987, his third son, Reb Arieh, was killed at the age of 27, in a car accident. He had been the epitome of his father's genius and flawless character. This was a crippling blow, rendering him unable to give his regular *shiurim* due to the ill health he suffered after the bereavement of his son. He made an effort to give short *shiurim*, later published under the title *Toras'cha*



With the Satmar Rav שליט"א (l.) and Reb Chanina Schiff (r.) the late Rebbe's Gabbai

*Shashuoi*—as Dovid Hamelech had said, “If not for the delight of your Torah, I would have perished in my suffering.”

In 1991, a new, unprecedented danger loomed over the *Yishuv* in *Eretz Yisroel*. The despotic, war-hungry Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, facing an international embargo for his invasion of Kuwait, threatened to rain chemical warheads on Israel. The country, which had weathered five wars, found itself panic-stricken as the government distributed gas-masks to every man, woman and child. In a departure from his usual avoidance of public attention, Reb Pinchos Menachem emerged as a calming force, dispensing guidance and fortitude to the Torah community during those fearful weeks.

Speaking at a *siyum* shortly before the deadline of the U. N. ultimatum to Iraq, he stated unequivocally that there was no need to fear. Based on Chassidic sources, he said, “We know for sure that there is no room for fear. No catastrophe will befall *Eretz Yisroel*. On the contrary, we should utilize the arousal of the moment to place greater efforts in our Torah study with true rejoicing, drawing ourselves closer to our Father in Heaven.”

Uncharacteristically, he requested that this address be made public in the *Agudah* daily, *Hamodia*. Three times during those tense weeks, and once after the cease-fire, he published articles in the press setting forth clearly the way a Torah-believing Jew should think and act in face of the potential danger, underscoring the obvious *Hashgacha*. The message gave thousands of Jews confidence while exhorting them to strengthen their commitment to Torah

The *shmuessen* were kaleidoscopic in format, touching on numerous topics and illuminating countless obtruse statements from Chazal in *Shas* and *Midrashim*. However, the two central themes were developing good *middos* and bringing *kedusha* into every aspect of life.

and *mitzvos*.

He himself displayed utter calm, refusing a special gas-mask designed for bearded people. (“Give it to someone else who feels he needs it!”) Nonetheless, those close to him could see how he felt the immense responsibility he had shouldered. He was seen spending many hours praying at his father’s grave, wrapped in deep thought.

#### Assuming His Place at the Helm

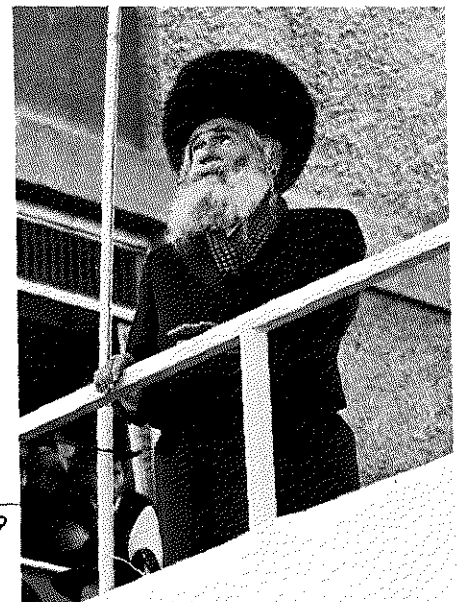
On 7 Tammuz 5752, Reb Simcha Bunim passed away. The choice of successor was either his son Rabbi Yaakov Arieh (the present Gerer Rebbe שליט"א) or Rabbi Pinchos Menachem. Each attempted to convince the other to accept, until a decision, which received immediate acceptance by all of the *Chassidim*, was reached: Reb Pinchos Menachem would take over the leadership. He made it clear, however, that he saw himself as only a stopgap between Reb Simcha Bunim and his son, Reb Yaakov Arieh.

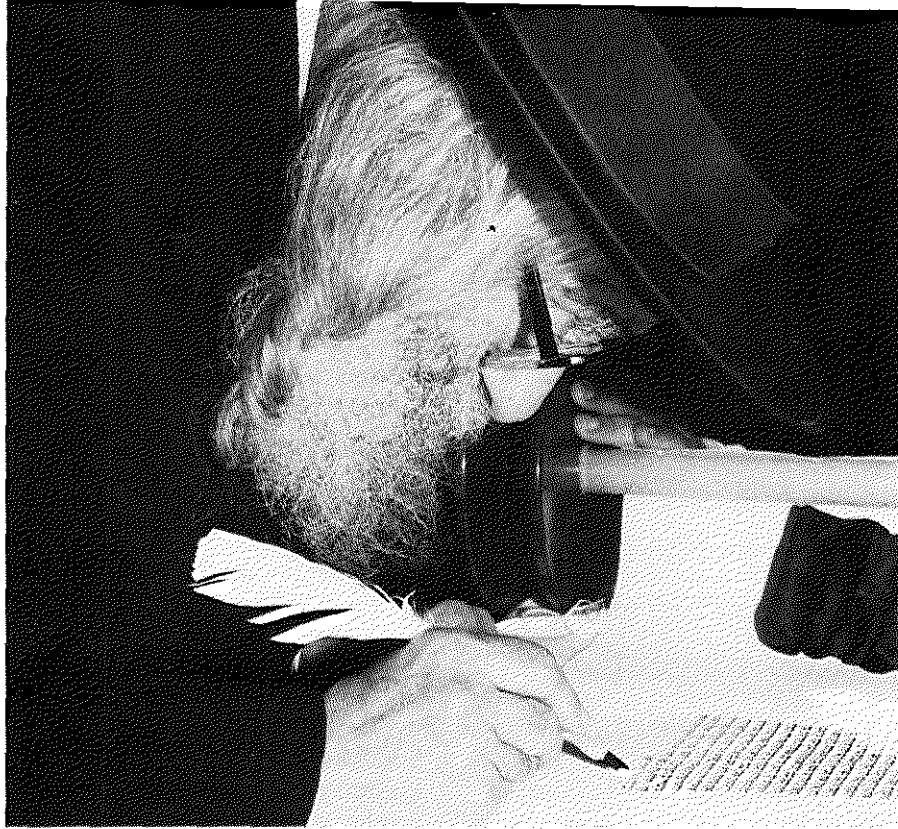
He compared his position to that of

Reb Henoch of Alexander who led the *Chassidim* for almost four years between the *Chiddushei Harim* and the *Sefas Emes*. On the first *Shabbos* after the *shiva*, to the surprise and delight of the *Chassidim*, instead of leaving the *Beis Midrash* after *Shacharis*<sup>3</sup>, he turned his *shtender* to face the congregation and gave a talk on the *Parsha*. He focused on a thought his father had said at his Bar Mitzva, which had been on the same *Shabbos*. In it he explained *Moshe Rabbeinu*’s prayer: “Let Hashem appoint a man over the congregation..... and they should not be like a flock without a shepherd” (*Bamidbar* 27,17). Two points were highlighted—firstly, the leader should be able to extricate the people from negative positions into a position of *kedusha* (holiness). Secondly, the leader should be able to connect the people to their true Shepherd, as King David said: “Hashem is my Shepherd” (*Tehillim* 23,1). This theme describes his main mission—to cleanse Jewish hearts (“*Yiddische Hertz*”), elevating them and bring them closer to Hashem. He continued this practice of delivering *derashos* until he began holding the traditional *tisch*.

At the *tisch*, he exerted himself to give *shmuessen* in a loud voice, audible to all. The *shmuessen* were kaleidoscopic in format, touching on numerous topics and illuminating countless obtruse statements from Chazal in *Shas* and *Midrashim*. However, the two central

3. The custom in Gur is to have a one hour-break for Torah study before *Kriyas HaTorah*.





themes were developing good *middos* and bringing *kedusha* into every aspect of life. Invariably, he mentioned the latter topic at every weekly Friday night *tisch*. He said on more than one occasion that his main task was to bring *kedusha* into the lives of the *bachurim* and *Yungeleit*.

The concept of *ayin tova* (generous eye) became a password, representing his constant demand for consideration and generosity. In this spirit, he set forth guidelines to ensure that everyone would get an equal opportunity to have a favorable spot during *davening* and the *tisch*. Anyone coming into Ger could sense new dimensions of Torah breadth and depth, combined with heightened sensitivity in interpersonal relations.

#### *Leading in Communal Affairs*

Besides serving as *Rebbe* and mentor of Gerer *Chassidim*, he carried the burden of being a major leader of *Klal Yisroel*. He made a point of being in direct contact with all *Gedolim* from the full spectrum of the Torah world. Prior to becoming *Rebbe*, he was the chairman of Agudath Israel of Eretz Yisroel and was instrumental in bringing unity to the party. As Gerer

*Rebbe*, he presided over the *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah* (Council of Torah Sages) together with the Vizhnitzer *Rebbe שליט"א*. In all areas—political, health, financial, personal, and educational—*Rabbonim*, politicians and simple Jews solicited his opinion. He not only gave answers, but like a kind father, also elaborately explained his position. He also took matters to heart and immersed himself into trying to find solutions.

When the Intifada in Israel escalated and the Leftist government started its precarious peace negotiations, the *Rebbe's* compassionate heart grieved. The death of every Jew caused him great anguish, and his clear, analytical grasp of the political scene, left him with no illusions about the prospects of permanent peace with Arab terrorists turned "peacemakers." A cloud of concern and unrest settled up on him. He spoke of the many sleepless nights he spent grappling with the danger-fraught decisions that were being taken.

*A group of Rabbonim asked him to accompany them to the late Prime Minister Rabin to discuss the peace process. In declining, he said, "I have been in contact many times with the people involved in the negotiations. On one*

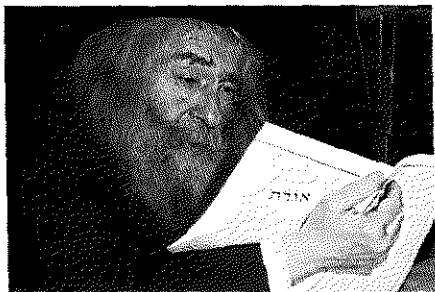
*occasion, I spent over an hour in a phone conversation with Rabin discussing the issue. He is fully aware of my opinion."*

In his *shmuessen*, he spoke increasingly about the urgent need to intensify our Torah and *mitzvos* to arouse the mercies of Heaven. He would raise his voice in a heart-rending pitch when mentioning the word "*Ra-cha-mim*." The message was blatantly clear—there is serious danger looming on the horizon. The terrorist attacks gave him no rest. He would mention the *Chazal*, "If you are holy, you are mine; and if not, you are in the hands of Nevuchadnetzar and his cohorts. There is nothing in between!"

The spate of murderous bombings before Purim tore at his heart. In a desperate attempt to arouse *Klal Yisroel* to *teshuva*, he penned his last impassioned letter on the eve of Taanis Esther (see inset on following page). Later that night, he felt the letter had concluded on too sharp a note, and added the blessing, "*Hashem* will not cast off His nation, nor will He forsake his heritage." [It has been noted that the *Gemora* in *Berachos* suggests this verse as a blessing to be used when taking leave.] Upon returning from the prayer rally on Taanis Esther afternoon, he was informed of the bomb in Dizengof Square. When he heard of the child victims, he cried out: "I can't bear this any longer!" On Purim, he entered his *tisch* after the meal had been served, stating that the smell of the food disturbed him. He spoke *Divrei Torah* almost the entire time, cutting short the singing, and distributing almost no *shirayim* (except to an orphan). He spoke about the self-sacrifice of *Shaul Hamelech*, who went to battle knowing it would cost him his life. He spoke of *David Hamelech*, who, in the seventy years of his life, had completed all that was expected of him.

After the *tisch*, he said to his son-in-law that he felt he had overexerted himself, but Purim is a time for *mesiras nefesh*. When he arrived home, he said to the *Rebbetzin* the verse, "And Moshe went up to *Hashem*" (*Shemos* 19,3), explaining that sometimes *tzaddikim*

have achieved all that they can for *Am Yisroel* in this world, and feel that they can do more for them in Heaven. To her cry that there was so much more for him to do, he replied, "You know I don't say things without reason." He wished her "Shalom" and retired to his room. After studying the first 8-10 *dafim* of *Pesachim* (as a marker in the *Gemora Pesachim*, he left the *kvittel* of a son who had apologized for not taking personal leave from him for lack of time and



Besides being a last message to the generation, his final letter is also a self-portrait, a true last will and testament. All the outstanding features of his multi-faceted personality and *Avodas Hashem* are touched upon.

unwillingness to disturb) he changed his normal resting position. The next morning he was found lifeless with a smile on his face. His *neshama* had escaped to Heaven; his mission on earth completed.

He left us with the letter, written three days before he departed from us. In it, he set forth all that he had tried to convey in his lifetime. Besides being a last message to the generation, it is also a self-portrait, a true

last will and testament. All the outstanding features of his multi-faceted personality and *Avodas Hashem* are touched upon. It is the unique legacy of a *Gaon* and *Tzaddik*, who saw so clearly the spiritual maladies of our generation. With a heart bursting with pain and compassion for the suffering of *Am Yisroel*, he made a last attempt to arouse us to amend our ways, and merit a full redemption.

**"Let us abandon all our calculations and grievances"**

It would appear that with these words the *Rebbe* is giving us both ideological and practical directives in response to the question that was nagging at every believing Jew in the wake of the latest spate of murderous bombing attacks: *What does Hashem want from us?* Unfortunately, there is a tendency, in particular when relating to the

## The Letter

W.G.H. Sunday, 12 Adar, 5756

Nation of *Hashem*, take strength and we shall gird ourselves. It is a time of crisis for Jacob. That which we feared and warned about, has come to pass.

Let us abandon all the calculations and grievances amongst us. *Chazal* say: "Once the forces of destruction are released, no differentiation is made between the righteous and the wicked, etc." (*Bava Kama* 60a)

"All Jews are responsible for each other." Let us uproot from our midst any animosity we may harbor against our fellow Jews. Let us augment our feelings of kindness and good will. Let us enhance our Torah study, ways of pleasantness and fear of *Hashem*. Let us endeavor to fulfill the verse, "When you go out to war against your enemies, you shall take heed from anything evil. Lest there be seen in your midst any shameful thing and He will turn away from you." Let us all cry out to the Rock of Israel, Blessed be He, who liberates us from our enemies, G-d our Savior.

Those who are fasting tomorrow, and those who are not fasting too, let us all call out, wherever we find ourselves, with prayer in this "time of assembly for all," the 13th of Adar. May the Divine attributes of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that are written in this week's *Parsha*, "Compassionate and Gracious, Slow to anger and Abundant in Kindness etc." come to our rescue, as it is written: "Do good, *Hashem*, to those who are good, and upright in their hearts."

We are confident that we will experience the fulfillment of the verse: "For *Hashem* will not cast off this nation nor will He forsake His heritage," and He will indeed save us.

Pinchos Menachem Alter

## II. AN APPRECIATION

In *Pirkei Avos*, the advice of many *Tanna'im* is introduced by the words, "*Hu haya omer*—he used to say." These are the statements that personified the life aspirations of these giants—"What he was, he said." In this vein, we shall base this appreciation of the *Rebbe* זצ"ל on his last public statement, in which he included all those values that were so dear to his heart.

Israeli scene, to point an accusing finger at the anti-religious behavior of our estranged brethren—*chillul Shabbos*, desecration of graves, breaches in the wall of *kashrus*, etc. The *Rebbe* was telling us that first of all, even if this is true, we are still in danger: "The forces of destruction do not discriminate between the righteous and the wicked." Secondly, we have to realize that ultimately it is our responsibility: "All Jews are accountable for each other." Fur-

thermore, Reb Yisroel Salanter said, "When the yeshiva *bachur* in Aishishuk forgets a *Mincha*, a student in Paris desecrates the *Shabbos*." Who knows if our faults do not loom much larger than those of our ignorant fellow Jews, deprived of their heritage by forces beyond their control?

This sense of accountability sheds some light on the source of the *Rebbe's* self-effacing humility.

*The Rebbe once overheard someone refer to a nonreligious public figure as a "Shvache Yid" (barely Jewish). He turned to a young bachur present and said, "Look at me! I am the son of the Imrei Emes, grandson of the Sefas Emes and the Chiddushei Harim, and yet, despite my conduct, I am still considered a Jew. How can anyone be considered a 'Shvache Yid'!"*

Humility was a trait he worked on from an early age. The inside covers of many of his books were inscribed with a list of points enumerated by the *Chovas Halevavos* as conducive to humility. In his younger years, he would often act in a manner that brought mirth to those around him. When asked why he did this, he replied that when he arrived in *Eretz Yisroel* during the war, he adopted a "hobby" of causing himself ridicule, to offset the excessive honor he had received in Poland as the youngest child of the *Imrei Emes*. It was this genuine humility that qualified the *Rebbe* to turn to the *Chareidi* camp with a call to..."abandon all our... grievances."

Second only to the *Rebbe's* anguish for the tragedies of the bomb attacks was his deep pain over the discord within the Torah camp. The idea that the precious and hard-won unity that he had masterminded before he became *Rebbe*, in 1992, would be shattered gave him no peace. He was prepared to make any concession necessary in order to maintain unity. He cast aside time-hallowed "prerogatives" and positions in a clear statement that Agudath Israel stands for unity.

*The Rebbe once related how he succeeded in overcoming a personal affront, from a unique angle: Someone had grievously offended him on a pub-*

*lic issue. "I was very hurt and I was sure I'd acted on the purest of motives. On Erev Rosh Hashana, while reviewing my conduct in the past year, I reconsidered this episode. I said to myself, Hakadosh Baruch Hu no doubt wishes to bestow good fortune on that person in the coming year. Yet with my complaints, however justified they may be, I'm going to deny Hashem that pleasure. How dare I!" All bad feelings I had towards that person dissipated.*

**"Let us uproot any animosity to fellow Jews..."**

*Just a week had gone by since the passing of the Lev Simcha. Thousands of Gerer Chassidim from all over the country and beyond converged on Yerushalayim to visit the kever of the late Rebbe and enter for the first time to receive a beracha from his successor. One young man waiting in line was obviously very ill at ease. His thoughts kept turning back to an episode ten years previously when as a student in the Yeshiva he had led a rebellion against the Rosh Yeshiva who was now the Rebbe. He had resolved that he could not present himself before his new Rebbe without asking forgiveness for the brazen behavior of his youth. His turn came; the Rebbe's warm compassionate eyes met his as he made his faltering confession, concerned how it would be taken. The Rebbe's response became the catch-word of the day: "I did not accept the leadership before I was convinced that I would love every one of my Chassidim as if he were my own child!"*

Even children felt the all-encompassing warmth and concern he had for every one of them.

*A child in Bnei Brak woke up to find a note from his parents who had rushed off to hospital with his grandfather. Afraid to be alone and concerned for his grandfather, the child remembered that whenever his father had a problem he would call the Rebbe in Yerushalayim. Without further ado he located the number and put through the call. The Rebbe abetted the boy's fears*



With the Bostoner Rebbe שליט"א

*and assured him that his grandfather would recover. Only after telling him a short story and being assured that he would return to his bed, did the Rebbe conclude the conversation.*

\* \* \*

*On one of his daily walks, he passed a not very Jewish-looking individual with long, unkempt hair, muttering to himself incoherently. The Rebbe commented that with the increase of non-Jews entering Israel, one can't be sure if such a person is Jewish at all. After a few moments of thought, he added, "Every Jew is a gem. Since we are instructed to view everyone favorably, it is probable that in such a case, judging favorably would require us to assume he is Jewish."*

*Towards the end of the walk they came across the same character. This time, he came towards them with a hand outstretched for alms, mumbling verses from Tehillim. The Rebbe's face lit up as he gave him a generous handful of coins.*

**"...and augment our feelings of good will"**

Shortly after Reb Pinchos Menachem became *Rebbe*, he was visited by the *Gabai* of the late Amshinover *Rebbe*, Reb Meir'le מיר'ל, of Bayit Vegan. He came to reveal an episode that had remained a secret with him for the past 20 years.

*Reb Simcha Bunim once visited Reb Meir'le during the lifetime of the Beis Yisroel. When the Gabai announced that the Gerer Rebbe's brother had arrived, Reb Meir'le strangely*

4. Likewise, all his life he took a daily walk, in keeping with instructions he received from his mother in his youth.

remarked, "Not his brother, the Gerer Rebbe himself."

After Reb Simcha Bunim left, Reb Meir'le added, "I'm sure you know that the Imrei Emes, in his first will (written before the war), appointed his brother Reb Moshe Betzalel as his successor, although he had sons that were quite capable of filling this position, as is the usual custom. However, he understood that the Chassidim would prefer to be led by another son of the Sefas Emes. As reward for that generosity, he will yet merit that his three surviving sons will inherit his greatness." With the appointment of Reb Pinchos Menachem as Rebbe, this prediction had been realized.

The Rebbe, who always strove to emulate his illustrious father, excelled in his trait of generosity and succeeded to imprint this attitude upon his Chassidim. He said that the plague of cancer is a physical representation of the spiritual and psychological malady of encroaching onto other people's good fortune with an envious eye. When a confidant attempted to criticize someone for improper behavior, he took him to the *mezuzah* of his room and with him repeated three times, "Yidden zeinen gut—Jews are good!"

With his spirit of good will, the Rebbe would recall favors done to himself or his family countless years before, and express his indebtedness.

During a *tisch*, he honored a certain talmid chacham by sending him *shirayim*. He later explained that earlier that day, he had reminded himself of a novel interpretation he had heard from that person as a student in the Yeshiva 35 years previously. This was his way of showing his gratitude.

\*\*\*

An eye specialist came to receive the Rebbe's blessing before departing to the USA as the sole delegate for Israel at a conference of ophthalmologists. The Rebbe asked him to include the following message in the name of a "great Rabbi in Israel": "As doctors involved in improving human eyesight, it is incumbent on us, too, to have a gener-

More than his money and his heart, of which he gave so generously, the Rebbe gave of his time. That priceless commodity, which he cherished so much for Torah study, was his greatest sacrifice to help another Jew.

ous view towards our fellow human beings—in particular, not to withhold results of our research in order to reap greater personal gain."

On his return, the doctor reported with awe how prophetic the Rebbe's words had been. The lecture immediately following his was by a European doctor about whom it was rumored that he had discovered a complete cure for a particular condition, which he refused to disclose. He began his address by confessing that he was guilty of the conduct referred to by the Rabbi in Israel. However, the inspiring message had influenced him to change his attitude and he was now ready to reveal the results of his research.

"And kindness..."

The Rebbe utilized every opportunity for active *chesed* and charity. On countless occasions, people were caught by surprise when, besides his words of advice and blessing, he added a cheque of hundreds or even thousands of Shekel to alleviate their financial burden. He would refer to similar experiences in his own personal life, in a disarming manner that made one feel one was con-

versing with a friend rather than petitioning a great Rebbe. These tales of woe that were his daily fare weighed heavily on his heart, often causing him sleepless nights.

A man beset by numerous sorrows and misfortunes commented on leaving the Rebbe's room that he felt as though stones had been removed from his heart. When this comment was repeated to the Rebbe, his rejoinder was, "Yes, but what do you think I did with them? I took them onto my own heart!"

More than his money and his heart, of which he gave so generously, the Rebbe gave of his time. That priceless commodity, which he cherished so much for Torah study, was his greatest sacrifice to help another Jew. Close to one hundred people would wait in line to see him every day, yet he never hurried anyone. He would make conversation—analyzing the problem from various angles, or sharing a Torah thought as a word of encouragement—before giving his advice or blessing.

As Rosh Yeshiva, the students noticed that one of the familiar alms-collectors of Jerusalem came to visit Reb Pinchos Menachem every Erev Rosh Chodesh. He would leave after about 15-20 minutes with a very satisfied look on his face. To the more curious ones, he revealed that, as a self-styled authority on world affairs, he had been asked by the Rosh Yeshiva to keep him apprised of current events in return for a handsome remuneration. When he appeared the month after the Rebbe assumed leadership, the students tried to dissuade him from bothering the Rebbe. To their surprise, he claimed to have received a special message to come as usual. After a few minutes, he came out saying that the Rebbe had told him that he now had alternative sources of information and it was no longer necessary for him to bother. He was instructed, however, to continue coming to receive his monthly remuneration.

"Let us enhance our Torah study..."

When the Chiddushei Harim found-

ed Gerer *Chassidus*, he made Torah study its central theme. This has remained the hallmark of Ger to this day. Rabbi Pinchos Menachem was the first *Rebbe* since the *Chiddushei Harim* to have served as a *Rosh Yeshiva* prior to becoming *Rebbe*. Thus while his predecessors had often concealed their greatness in Torah, Rabbi Pinchos Menachem was a recognized Torah giant.

Out of his great love for Torah, he never refused a request to speak at Torah-gatherings whenever he felt that he could support another Torah venture. Above all, his love for Torah expressed itself in intense *hasmada*. His greatest delight was to be left alone with his *sefarim* for hours at a time. When returning home after many hours of receiving people, he often barely had the strength to climb the stairs. As soon as he entered his house, however, he would rush into his study with renewed vigor and immediately immerse himself in his learning with enthusiasm.

His *shmuessen* were studied with novel interpretation of quotes from both *Talmudim*, *Midrashim* and *Zohar*, interspersed with references to major classics of *Rishonim* and the early *Chassidic* masters. The more learned of the *Chassidim* would prepare themselves for the *tisch* by reviewing major works on the *Parsha*, to ensure they would fully grasp the *Rebbe's* words.

#### **"And ways of pleasantness..."**

Whoever met the *Rebbe* was inspired by the pleasantness of the encounter. Someone who came in to see him for the first time would be asked, "Which language do you prefer? Yiddish? Ivrit?" In some instances he offered English, too.

*A student in one of the yeshivos had made an outstanding achievement in his studies. His mentors reported this to the Rebbe, mentioning that they intended honoring him publicly to encourage others to do likewise. At first he endorsed the idea, but on verifying that a cousin studied in the same yeshiva, he vetoed the plan. "What value is there to extra Torah gained at the expense of another Jew's discomfort?"*

He himself would go to great lengths to ensure that he did not hurt anyone's feelings.

*While on a trip to the States, he was invited by an acquaintance to pay a visit to his home. His aides suggested that the visit was inappropriate for a person of his position. To avoid arguing, he made his way there at night, walking alone through a dangerous section of New York, in the biting cold.*

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*While visiting the newly-built Gurneighborhood in Beit Shemesh, the Rebbe inquired about the availability of telephones. Upon hearing that the phone company had so far installed only a few public telephones, the Rebbe was greatly disturbed. He demanded that private phones be immediately installed; otherwise, he would have to delay the settling of this neighborhood. He explained that while the men spend their day amongst their friends in the Kollel, the young women are left at home. Without the possibility of phone-contact with friends and family, they will feel cut off and lonely. The directors of the project prevailed on the phone company to lay the necessary lines, and the settling of the neighborhood continued.*

#### **"And fear of Heaven"**

*The Rebbe would rise from his seat for elderly people—even his own Chassidim. To their objections, he would reply: "My father used to say that rising before the elderly brings Yiras Shamayim. Do you object to me increasing my Yiras Shamayim?"<sup>5</sup>*

The tremor of fear could be discerned in his voice when he said a *beracha* or *tefilla*. His fervor in doing *mitzvos* was electrifying. When the *sefer Torah* was taken out or he was called up for an *aliya* he would literally run to honor the Torah. When he was called out to be a *sandek* (at a *bris*) or when a beggar came

by soliciting, he rushed to do the *mitzva*. Again and again throughout the *davenuing*, he could be seen checking to make sure his *tefillin* were in the right spot, or cherishly kissing them.

When offering advice, he would see beyond the problem itself, taking into account the effect a particular course of action might have on the character of those involved.

*Someone in public office had made serious misuse of his influence for personal gain. A group of askonim (activists) came to the Rebbe for his consent to reprimand this person in public as a deterrent for himself and others in the future. The Rebbe did not agree. Sometime later he explained that his main objection was because every person has within him bad middos—destructive forces that he has learnt to control through a lifetime of self-refinement. To act in the way they suggested would re-awaken these destructive tendencies within themselves, and might bring them to act beyond their original intentions. Despite the absolute justification of their decision, he could not agree that they take a course of action that entailed the risk that a lifetime's work of middos-improvement would be undone.*

**"Lest there be seen in your midst any shameful thing."**

The *Lev Simcha* and the *Rebbe* often quoted how the *Chofetz Chaim* cried out against immodesty at the *Knessia Gedolah* in Vienna, saying: "How does a Jewish heart not burst from fear of the threat 'Lest there be seen in your midst any shameful thing and He will turn away from you?'" To combat this threat, they followed in the footsteps of the *Beis Yisroel*, who raised a generation of Jewish homes that ascribed to the highest standards of *kedusha* and *tahara*—sanctity and purity.

He could sense from afar a potential breach in *tzeniut*, and took action to ensure it was rectified.

*At a Sheva Berachos the Rebbe attended, a son of the host stood directly in front of the Rebbe, constantly*

5. As the verse concludes: "Rise before the elderly... and you shall fear your G-d" (*Vayikra* 19,32).

snapping photos. After inquiring whether there were girls in this family, the Rebbe requested that their tzenuis be researched. His concern was that since the boy's behavior evidenced a complete lack of shame in the family, in the case of the girls it might express itself in immodesty of dress.

In the Western world, obscene advertising is one of those sickly signs of a decadent culture to which we have grown accustomed. In Yerushalayim, the City of *Kedusha*, there are still those who do not accept this situation. After many years of fruitless attempts to stop this scourge, an ingenious plan was devised that brought the heads of the three largest advertising companies running to negotiate an agreement: All the *Kashrus* councils in *Eretz Yisroel* were approached to sign a unified declaration that no *hechsher* would be given to any company that contracted any advertising firm that issued offensive advertisements. The Rebbe was intimately involved in this campaign, and from behind the scenes guided the negotiations. He exhorted them to persevere in their endeavors, saying, "In the World-to-Come we will be shown friends, and Jews in general, who fell prey to these enticements. If we don't do something to prevent this from happening, we will be responsible for the *chillul Hashem*."

To remove evil temptations from the path of the Torah Jew, special "kosher" flights were arranged, on which movies are not shown. When a bachur asked if he could take a different flight at a savings of \$100, the Rebbe wrote him a check for that amount, saying, "Ika darka achrina—there is an alternative way" (see *Babba Basra* 57b).

\*\*\*

The Rebbe met with some non-religious professors, one of whom commented about a recent uproar by the Chareidi community over the participation of a women's choir in a ceremony at the Kosel. He maintained that it was primitive to be so affected by such matters in our modern age. He, for example, has been exposed to worse impres-



sions without any ill effect. The derisive tone of the stinging question was defused by the reply given with a warm smile, "The honorable professor is no doubt aware that the Bedouin walks the desert barefoot, quite oblivious to the stones and thorns under his feet. The European, however, is disturbed by the smallest piece of gravel in his shoe. I'm sure we all agree that the European is more civilized than the Bedouin."

Impressed with the astute response, the professor related it to his students.

#### "Let us cry out to the Rock of Israel"

The Rebbe would often say that, like his namesake, the *Sifsei Tzaddik* of Piltz, his only means of helping Jews was through the power of *tefilla*. He would often be seen at the graveside of his father, beseeching on behalf of people who had come to him for help. And the *tefillas* were heard. Dangerously ill patients recovered, to the amazement of the doctors. Childless couples were blessed with children.

His daily prayer was a lesson in "the service of the heart." Before *Shemoneh Esrei* he would straighten his hat, tighten his *gartel* and position his *peyos*, in fulfillment of the verse, "Prepare yourself before your G-d, Yisroel" (cf. *Orach Chaim* ch. 91). His facial expression kept changing as he immersed himself in the various parts of the *tefilla*. At particular points, he would raise both his hands to heaven, a gesture mentioned in *sefarim* as one that brings down bless-

ings for the world. When saying "Amen Yehei Sh'mei Rabba," he would clench his fists or hold onto something, as his whole body shook with fervor. These outward expressions during *tefilla* were uncharacteristic of Gur, which subscribes to the Kotzker approach of "keeping the fire within." The Rebbe once indicated, however, that he felt that the new generation would benefit from seeing that there is depth to true *tefilla*. He even arranged a special place for the children to stand during the *davening*: "Perhaps they will learn to *daven* better."

The children noticed that if they raised their eyes to look at the Rebbe during *Shemoneh Esrei*, he would suddenly pick up his *Siddur* and begin to *daven* from it. They would get the message and revert their eyes back to their *davening*.

#### "Do good, Hashem, to those who are good"

His demand for perfection was often repeated in his *shmuessen*. "One wrong thought, and one can lose everything." "Teshuva has to be absolutely sincere, no self-deception."

He personified the *Gemora* in *Yoma* (39b) that he repeatedly quoted: "40 years before the destruction of the Temple, the doors of the sanctuary began to open by themselves, until Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai shouted at them"—to which He would add the interpretation of the *Sefas Emes*: "He shouted at the hearts of *Klal Yisroel* [to arouse them to *teshuva*]."

A chassid came from America to spend *Yamim Noraim* in *Yerushalayim*. When he entered the Rebbe's room, the Rebbe mentioned that he had to do *teshuva* on his past sins. Shaken and bewildered, he turned to one of his past *mashgichim* for advice. After a great deal of soul-searching, he eventually recalled an incident that had occurred 35 years previously.

These rigorous demands would appear to be incongruent with his overflowing kindness, but it was obvious to all that it was "gevura she-bechessed"—sternness emanating from

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kindness. In his selfless compassion, he felt obliged to make us strive for perfection. But he always concluded in the same breath: "Any small effort is highly valued in Heaven." "One time refraining from sin is of immeasurable value." As mentioned, he amended this letter, too, to conclude on a more positive note.

Let us endeavor to apply these lessons and draw inspiration from this ways. As his *Rebbetzin* said at a women's rally held shortly after his passing, "The *Rebbe* gave up his life for our sake. Let us at least take his message to heart and affect some change in ourselves to ensure that his sacrifice not be in vain." זכותו יגן עלינו ■

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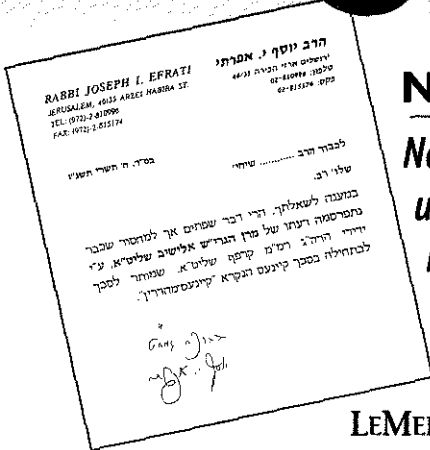
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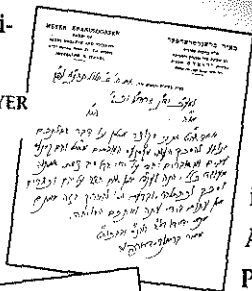
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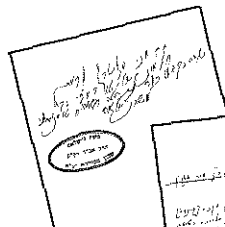


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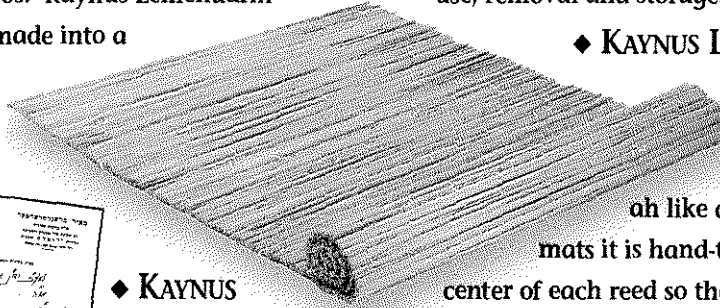
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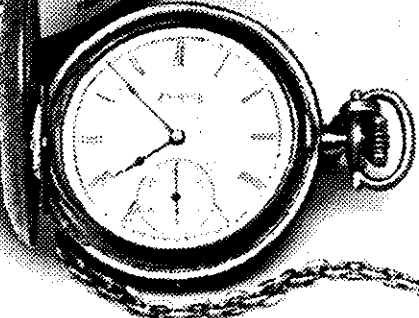
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# Teshuva:

## Reaching the Heavens, One Step at a Time

### THE FIRST STEP IN THE PROCESS

**H**ow wonderful were the feelings of the *Yamim Noraim* (Days of Awe) of our early years! Filled with the idealism of youth, blissfully unaware of how unrealistic our goals were, our hearts soared with the thought of leaving behind our *aveiros* (sins) forever. Even then, there was perhaps somewhere deep inside of us a whispering voice of doubt. But whispers can be ignored.

With each passing year, with each repetition of the *Al Cheit* confessional, the inner voice grew louder and more insistent. *This time we really will change!* The voice persisted in reminding us that we said the same thing, with just as much sincerity and conviction last year, and the year before that, and the year before that... for as long as we

Rabbi Strassfeld, a *musmach* of Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim in Forest Hills, is a *rebbe* in the Yeshiva Ketana of Manhattan.

could remember. Unless we are totally out of touch with reality, we are no longer capable of maintaining such self-deception.

What then are we to do? Should we just give up on *teshuva*? After all, one of the essential ingredients of *teshuva* is *azivas hacheit*, totally freeing ourselves of the transgression, a goal which experience has taught us we are extremely unlikely to achieve.

Perhaps we need to recognize that for most of us, *teshuva* is not the work of a few days or weeks, but a life-long process. Reb Yisroel Salanter says that one who accepts upon himself to learn *mussar* on a regular basis has joined the ranks of "*osei teshuva*, those involved in the process of doing *teshuva*," even before he has actually opened a *mussar sefer*. The first step, then, is to break through our inertia and *begin* improving ourselves. This is the challenge; to stop talking and start doing.

### TRIPPING ON A STRAND OF HAIR, LEAPING OVER MOUNTAIN PEAKS

**R**abbi Eliyahu Dessler ז"ר quotes the *Gemora* in *Succa* (52a), that *Pasid lavo*—in the ultimate future—*Hashem* will show the evil inclination to the *tzaddikim* and the *resha'im*—the righteous and the evil-doers. To the *resha'im* it will appear like a strand of hair. They will cry and wonder, "How is it that we were unable to overcome so slight an obstacle?"

How are we to understand this? Certainly, the evil inclination is a formidable foe. Even the greatest *tzaddikim* could not defeat this mighty adversary without divine assistance; as *Chazal* tell us: "*Ilulei Hakadosh Baruch Hu ozro eino yachol lo*—Without G-d's assistance, one could not resist him." Moreover, the very same *Gemora* tells us that to the righteous, the evil inclination will appear as a tall, almost insurmountable mountain. Why then do the *resha'im* see him as

weak and insignificant?

Is this "strand of hair" just an optical illusion designed to torture the *resha'im*? Surely, this would be a grotesque violation of *emes* in the *olam haemes*, a world of pure, uncompromised truth.

Rabbi Dessler explains that the question the *resha'im* must answer is, "Why did you remain where you were? What kept you from starting to work on yourself? How difficult would it have been for

you to take those first steps to self-improvement? Not hard at all. Had you taken the first steps, encouraged by your success, you would certainly take one more step, then another, then another... Who knows how far up the ladder of spiritual attainment you might have travelled, had you but taken that first simple step!"

How hard would it be for us to study Torah five more minutes, or to say one *beracha* with *kavana* (concentration), each and every day? Could we not

With each passing year, with each repetition of the *Al Cheit* confessional, the inner voice grew louder and more insistent.

*This time we really will change!*

restrain ourselves, once a week, from saying something we shouldn't? We can do it without much effort. Shall we allow a "strand of hair" to stand in our way?

Even were we never to progress beyond that initial step, how much we would accomplish! Think about it; 5 minutes a day, 354 days a year, for 30 years, would amount to 53,100 minutes or 885 hours. One *beracha* a day over the same time period would total 10,620 *berachos*. One less *lashon hara* (slander) a week would add up to 1,560 less *issurim* (prohibitions), each which may involve several *laavin* (negative commands), not to mention an *asei* (positive command) honored here and there. Consider this in the light of the well-known statement of the *Chofetz Chaim* זצ"ל, that it would be worth all the effort of writing the *Shmiras Halashon*, his classic *sefer* on the topic of guarding one's tongue, to stop one person from speaking *lashon hara* once.

Moreover, there is every expectation that this will only be the start. This would certainly fit the category of "*Mitzva goreres mitzva*"—one *mitzva* brings another in its wake. Instead of the discouragement of looking back on another year that began with such good intentions, yet concluded without measurable progress, we will have something concrete to show for our efforts. This sense of accomplishment, this taste of success, will likely motivate us to take another step, to meet another challenge.

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This realistic focus on incremental growth so confounds our evil inclination that he may well resort to an unconventional tactic to counteract it. Donning his *bekeshe* or *kapotte* (he has quite a wardrobe), he will attempt to belittle our accomplishments. "Five extra minutes," he will snort. "Five hours will not suffice to fulfill your obligation. One *beracha* a day;

■ ■ ■ The voice persisted in reminding us that we said the same thing, with just as much sincerity and conviction last year, and the year before that, and the year before that... for as long as we could remember.

and ninety-nine times a day you mention the name of *Hashem* without sparing it a thought?" He will spur us on to undertake what we cannot, over the long term, maintain.

This counterattack should not surprise us. As *Chazal* (the rabbis of the Talmud) tell us, the evil inclination is an *ish milchama umelumad b'armimus*: He is a master of psychological warfare. He will allow us the short-term gain of

profound *hisorerus* and inspiration to deny us the long-term benefits of real growth. He knows that in all likelihood, we will not be able to maintain this level of *tzidkus*. Inevitably, we start to backslide, and a feeling of failure overtakes us. We are disappointed in ourselves for not living up to our aspirations. Our self-esteem has been diminished. We have been cunningly manipulated to undertake more than we are realistically capable of achieving. Our subsequent lack of success serves to reinforce the illusion that we cannot change.

This is why we say in our *tefillos*: "*Vehaser sattan milfaneinu ume'achareinu*," remove the *sattan* from before us and behind us. We can readily understand why the *sattan* would be in front of us, impeding our efforts to move forward, closer to *Hashem*. But why would the *sattan* position himself in back of us? My *Rosh Yeshiva*, Rabbi Henschel Leibowitz שליט"א, explains that at times the *sattan* is behind us, propelling us towards *Hashem*. His strategy is to push us forward so swiftly that we are sure to stumble. Then he gloats over our downfall. He then tells us that we cannot achieve our goal, that we will never be able to. He gleefully points to the latest evidence of our weakness. *You wanted so passionately to change, you tried so hard to improve! Yet, there you lie, defeated once more.*

PRUDENCE THROUGH PATIENCE AND PERSISTENCE

It would seem prudent, then, that we proceed slowly. Let our first goals be modest, perhaps accomplishing somewhat less than we are capable of. Let us carefully avoid the pitfall of try-

ing to do too much, too soon. Once we break through our inertia and prove to ourselves that we can reach and sustain the goals we set for ourselves, we are on our way. What is vital, is not the speed at which we travel, but that we keep moving in the right direction. It's a ladder we must climb to reach the heavens, not a super-highway. Getting to the top requires careful, deliberate movement.

The qualities needed to succeed are patience and persistence. We need to keep track of how we are doing. We must recognize that we will have bad days and go through an occasional slump. If we are meeting our goals a good percentage of the time, we should be encouraged by our progress, while striving to improve on it. If we are not doing as well, we probably need to adjust our objectives to a more attainable level. When we find that we are meeting or surpassing our expectations for an extended period of time, we can then begin considering what steps we might take next.

This does not mean to suggest that we should in any way lower our ultimate goal. This must remain nothing less than *sheleimus*, spiritual perfection, the pursuit of which is the very purpose of our creation. Yet, every great journey must begin with one small step in the right direction.

It's wonderful that we get emotional when saying *Al Cheit*. It's inspiring when we talk about doing *teshuva*. Yet, as *Shlomo Hamelech* teaches us, "*B'rov devarim lo yechdal peshah*": We do not stop doing *aveiros* by talking endlessly about what we ought to do. No amount of talk can equal even a little action. We cannot do it all immediately, but we can begin right now.... There is so much to do. ■

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# How to Cry Out to "Tatteh"

## Learning From Our Disciples

At six and a half feet, he was the tallest person in the *Beis Midrash* by at least four inches. His voice suited his height: deep, resonant and with just a hint of a gravelly edge. His eyes were blue, not an ocean blue, but like a fiery blue-white diamond. His rugged face was framed by a trimmed greying-at-the-edges beard. Yet, for all his intimidating countenance, he radiated kindness and sensitivity.

When I first noticed him Thursday afternoon, I had come into the out-of-town yeshiva directly from the airport to catch a *Mincha* before making my way to the suburban, wooded retreat which was rented for the weekend by local sponsors of the Discovery Seminar. He fit in so well with the younger *bachurim* that I assumed he was "*nebech, an eltere bachur*."

To the casual observer, he could pass for a senior student, perhaps a *sho'el umayshiv* (consultant to the students), but closer examination revealed that his suit jacket was really a sport coat and a tad too light grey to qualify. He was a *baal habayis* (layman), I finally decided, who spent more than a fair amount of his time learning at the yeshiva.

The Discovery Seminar, fascinating as it is, is designed to attract and introduce Jews with limited or non-existent religious education to the compelling evidence of the existence of *Hashem* and to His authorship of Torah. It is *not* intended to attract *baalebattim* who spend more than a fair

Yerachmiel Milstein is the executive vice president of American Friends of Sanz Medical Center/Lanido Hospital. His "Optimist's View on *Kiruv*" was featured in *JO*, Dec.'92.

■

"How can I be of help?" I asked with more patience than I really possessed at that moment. "I just thought, uh, that I'd call you, uh, to, um, let you know how terrific the Seminar was and," clearing his throat, he continued, "what it meant to me personally."

■

amount of their time at a yeshiva. Imagine my surprise, then, when I found myself standing next to this very same gentleman at *Erev Shabbos Mincha* at the Seminar.

"*Sholom Aleichem, Gut Shabbos*," I volunteered after *Maariv*.

"*Shabbat Shalom*. I'm Gabe—Gavriel, actually," he responded warmly while pumping my hand with gusto.

That "*Shabbat Shalom*" gave him away. Okay, so he was a *baal teshuva*, perhaps coming back to Discovery for a recharge. "You've been to Discovery before," I asked, smug in my foreknowledge of the affirmative reply.

"No, I've never been to Discovery before, but I heard such great things about it," he said with genuine excitement.

I didn't notice Gavriel much the rest of the seminar. Oh, he was there alright, but didn't come by to ask any questions or anything like that.

Sunday night found me in my hotel room, exhausted from the teaching, the questions and the emotional discussions which invariably take place between the sessions. I was packing my bags in preparation for the drive to the airport and the return flight to New York, when the telephone rang. "It's Gavriel," said the voice on the other side. "I'm so glad I caught you, rabbi."

"Too shy to ask questions during the seminar," I thought. "How can I be of help?" I asked with more patience than I really possessed at that moment. "I just thought, uh, that I'd call you, uh, to, um, let you know how terrific the Seminar was and," clearing his throat, he continued, "what it meant to me personally."

Recalling stories I'd heard about the creative techniques used by rural police to discourage out-of-town drivers from speeding in their jurisdictions, I found myself thinking of my flight's too-close-for-comfort departure time and, simultaneously, for ways to politely terminate the conversation. However, I thought I had detected something in Gavriel's voice that suggested that the conversation was about to take on a dramatic urgency, so I allowed him to continue.

"You see, I'm a *baal teshuva* who, until four years ago, was married to a woman who wasn't interested in Judaism. We divorced and now I find

myself the single father of five children, four of whom have made the leap with me. My oldest, a daughter, is 17 and not only was she against religion, but she was the dark spot in my otherwise new found spiritual enlightenment. When I would get back to the office every day after my mid-day *seder* in yeshiva, I'd be energized and feeling absolutely fortunate that I had found my way to Torah. Then, she would call and say something nasty about my being 'born again.' It spoiled it a lot for me. She gradually became cold and distant,

whereas once we were pretty much inseparable, and on more than one occasion accused me outright of breaking up the family and 'ruining her life.' She was very good at making me feel guilty about my *Avodas Hashem*."

I now had about 55 minutes left to make the plane and it would take 20 just to reach the airport. "Ah hah," I said feigning endless patience.

"It's not like I didn't try. I talked to her lovingly about monotheism and G-0d's lovingkindness. I asked her to study Torah with me. I bought her hun-

dreds of dollars worth of Anglo-Judaic books. I even took her to football games, skiing, to rock-concerts and on picnics just to create the opportunity for more conversation."

"Yes," I said, stretching the "e" to an unprecedented length, in the sing-song manner of a doctor whose body is stuck in the office with a hypochondriac, but whose mind is already chained to the links on his favorite green. I hoped the irritation didn't show.

"Nothing worked. In fact, I was alienating her. She told me so herself. She said she was thinking about moving to another state."

("Nu," I thought, "get to the point.")

"Then, *Hashem* sent me a flier in the mail."

"Excuse me?"

"I received a letter which had been mass mailed here in town to all the synagogue members and which described an upcoming seminar that it claimed would make me proud to be a Jew. I thought maybe my daughter could use a little pride."

"Gavriel, I've got to make a plane in 45 minutes...."

"Great, I'd hoped I could repay you by giving you a *besura tova* just before you got on the plane. This way when you get back to your kids it'll still be fresh in your mind," he said, rushing his words now. "Anyway, I brought my daughter to Discovery. I told her we'd have plenty of time over the course of the weekend to talk things over in the quiet of the retreat. Well, we didn't talk about a thing the entire weekend. There was just no time. She was so impressed after attending the first session that she insisted when there was a choice of workshops to go to, that we split up so I could fill her in on what she missed at the other session."

I sat down and realized that since I was probably going to miss the plane anyway, I might as well get comfortable.

"We drove home from the seminar in separate cars and I felt a genuine *hakoras hatov*; glad that she'd had a good experience. I felt that I had helped give her an

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opportunity to at least make an informed decision when it came to *Yiddishkeit*. And, maybe with the passage of time she would come to see me and my choices in a new light."

I extended my legs to the point where I could comfortably rest them on the hotel room's coffee table.

"Well rabbi, to make a long story short (I actually had thought we were quite a long way past that), when I got home just now the phone rang. It was my daughter. She just kept crying, 'Oh Daddy, oh Daddy. Please take me back. Please let me into your life. I didn't know. Please let me be Jewish.' I told her it was okay; that I loved her; that it was our way not to bear a grudge. I told her I was delighted that she liked the seminar. She took a deep breath and

composed herself. In a still shaky voice she said, 'Daddy, I want you to erase everything I did in the past years and to love me again as your child.' Rabbi, I guess you realize that I will be indebted to you for a long, long time. I just thought I could give you a little gift to bring home to your own family by telling you all this before you left."

Gavriel was crying himself as he finished and said good-bye. I in turn was so moved by his story that by the time I'd collected myself sufficiently to grab my bags and leave, it was just minutes before take off.

If you've never missed a flight before, you may not know that in order for the airlines to allow you to use the ticket for a subsequent flight, you're supposed to present yourself at the airport within a reasonable time after departure. So, I dutifully drove out to the airport and, no longer rushing, walked over to the ticket counter where to my surprise the agent said, "I can still get you on that flight to JFK if you rush. They were held

at the gate because a child, travelling alone, became frantic for her father. It was the weirdest thing, you'd think she would have cried for her mother."

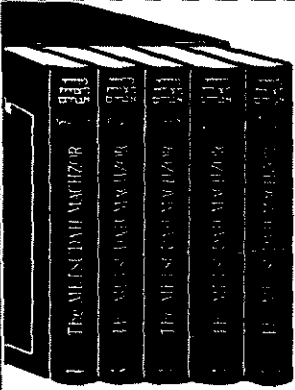
Both, the irony of her statement and the fact that I was made living proof, yet again, of the dictum, "An agent in the act of performing a *mitzva* will suffer no harm," proved to be more than enough food for thought for the duration of the flight. As it happened, it was the only kosher food available on that flight.

Rosh Hashana took place a scant fortnight after the seminar. I found myself thinking of Gavriel and shedding tears easily at every *Shemoneh Esrei*. In my mind, his daughter's words kept up a repetitive echo: "Oy Tattah, Oy Tattah...please take me back....I want you to erase everything I did in the past years and to love me again as your child....I didn't know...Oy Tattah in Himmel...!"

Funny, I always thought I taught at these seminars for the benefit of the participants. ■



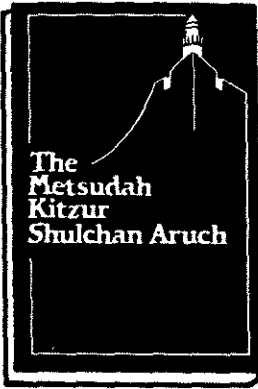
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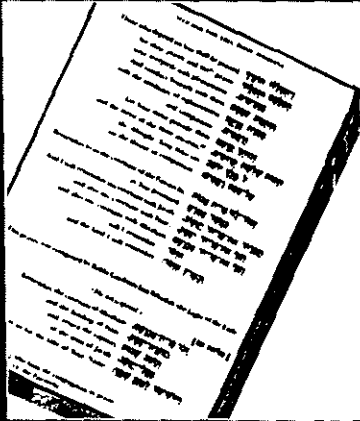
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# DO WE REALLY HAVE ALL THE ANSWERS?



A  
letter to the editor  
from **Rabbi Leonard  
Oppenheimer**, Rav of an Orthodox con-  
gregation of spiritually upward-mobile  
Jews in Portland, Oregon

## To the Editor:

I appreciated your story, "Surprising Settings, Yearning Souls," in the January 1996 issue, in which you discussed the new spiritual stirrings amongst our non-Orthodox brethren. You accurately captured much of the exasperation that many Orthodox Jews feel when looking at the attempts of our brethren to relate to Torah Judaism in ways that seem so alien and devoid of real substance. It was also heartening to share your observation that, despite the peculiar actions we sometimes see, there may be an underlying yearning of Jewish *neshamos* for re-attachment with the Divine.

Here in Portland, Oregon, I often come into contact with such Jews. And while it is encouraging to see your interest in this subject, I do not feel that your article dealt adequately with two vital issues. In the experience of my wife and myself, these issues are crucial for us in the Torah world to grapple with, if we

are going to fully bridge the gap between us and our brothers and sisters.

## How do we talk to our fellow Jews?

First, I did not sense in your article, and often do not sense in my conversations with other *frum Yidden*, a sufficient appreciation for the genuine realization amongst our non-Orthodox brethren of the bankruptcy of what has masqueraded in the past for Judaism. There is an enormous disillusionment with the old Conservative and Reform ideas, on the one hand, and a yearning on the part of many Jewish souls for

spiritual nourishment on the other hand. I am often amazed to see how little credence is given to the substance of what is passed as Judaism in the non-Orthodox temples, *le-mineihem*, by their lay members. All of the various movements, to one degree or another, are actively trying to infuse their services, rituals, and religious rites with "feeling," "spirituality," "teachings," and "meaning." The Reform and Conservative temples are desperately attempting to redefine themselves, knowing that they are becoming increasingly irrelevant to their own constituents.

But the pathetic attempts that we see, often so empty, meaningless and hypocritical, would be humorous if not for the question, "Why are they not banging down the doors of the Orthodox? Why, if there is such a drive to find the authentic, do they not come and try to learn from us?"

To be fair, there are many reasons for which we are not responsible, such as the influence of the media, canards propa-

gated by radical feminism, and the poison that has been uttered by generations of non-Orthodox clergy. But one reason, which I am afraid to say we are very much responsible for, is that they sense our haughty moral superiority, as we look down our noses at them with disdain, ridicule and smugness.

We need to stop saying things like "we look with desperation for some kind of indication that others share our concern.... To us the goals are clear and so are the steps." Sure, we have a wonderful *mesorah* and know that this alone will assure continuity. Of course, we are certain that only a Torah lifestyle will be successful in combatting assimilation and intermarriage. But we are mistaken if we think that it is only we who are concerned with the problems ravaging the Jewish community. They are as frightened and terrified about the future of Jewish children as are we, perhaps more so! After all, it is primarily their children who are being lost.

We need to think again before criticizing their attempts to resolve these problems as indicative of a lack of sin-

Do we not recognize that those few thousand ba'alei teshuva are at most one percent of our non-Orthodox brethren? Should we not hesitate before announcing that we have all the answers as to how to reach these people?

cerity, simply because we disagree with the methods chosen. We might wish that the money that THEY raise, that is now going to a Reform Kollel, Solomon Schechter schools, seminars for working with the intermarried *et al*, would go instead to our *Mosdos HaTorah*. But can we not see that virtually all of these are in fact sincere, albeit mistaken, attempts to strengthen Judaism? That virtually all of the young students at the Reform Kollel and the non-Orthodox seminaries have chosen this path because they passionately want to strengthen Judaism, as much as we feel that their career is headed for terrible tragedy? Is it not possible that for them, a trip to Israel for intermarried couples is an attempt to offer some taste of authentic Judaism to the many who are going to consider themselves Jewish, whether we deplore it or not? That the offering of kosher food at a UAHC convention is a wonderful development, regardless of the choices of some delegates to eat elsewhere?

Do we not understand that ridicule of their attempts to strengthen Judaism

does no good for anyone, and in fact potentially causes great harm? (I must add that this article was relatively tame in its sarcasm, as compared with many articles that pour out of various Orthodox publications.)

And are we really confident that we have good answers, that we know precisely "the goals and the steps," to combat the enormous problems of intermarriage, assimilation, apathy, ignorance, and misinformation? Sure, we are rightfully proud of the wonderful accomplishments of those of us who have been involved in *Kiruv Rechokim*. But do we not recognize that those few thousand *ba'alei teshuva* are at most one percent of our non-Orthodox brethren? Should we not hesitate before announcing that we have all the answers as to how to reach these people?

*Spirituality—Do we really have it?*

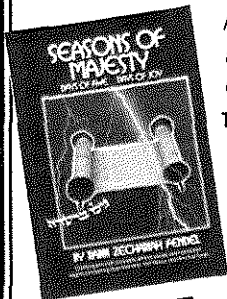
The second point I want to make relates to our own sense of spirituality. Certainly, the author is

correct in pointing to "our dedication to Torah, our personal excitement in *mitzva* performance" as indicia of the beauty and pride of the Torah world today. But in terms of what is usually thought of as the "spiritual," I have grave doubts about the accuracy, in general terms, of declaring "We possess an enviable, incredible spirituality, and our fellow Jews out there recognize it."

I think I am not alone in having been drawn to the field of *Kiruv Rechokim* precisely because I had trouble recognizing spirituality in the yeshiva world as I experienced it. I certainly saw abundant love of Torah learning, great care taken in *mitzva* observance, and considerable effort to pray well. Wonderful *chessed* projects abound; children are involved in a warm and loving world of Torah; and there is a pride and "bren" for things Jewish that is not remotely approached elsewhere. But yet, the wonder and beauty of experiencing *Shabbos* through the eyes of a newcomer; the delving into those parts of the Torah that made not just the what,

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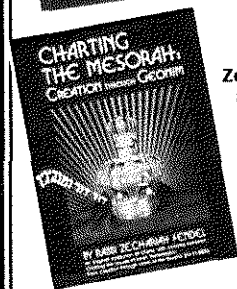


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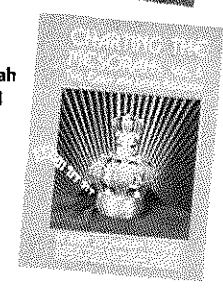
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when and how, but the why of *mitzva* observance come alive; the examination not just of the obligations of our souls, but of their essence; the attempts to see how the lessons of Torah and *mitzvos* can directly illuminate our day-to-day lives—not being satisfied to leave much of it as a purely abstract intellectual exercise—these “spiritual” activities are not emphasized by many of us.

When one hears the term “spirituality,” one generally understands it to refer to a person who experiences a great and deep sense of feeling for the sacred, and for religious acts laden with great purpose and meaning. A spiritual person is usually understood to be one who strives for inner peace resulting from a profound understanding that the belief system and set of actions that he or she subscribes to are in fact greatly moving and meaningful. It is a person who is not satisfied with doing things by rote or ritual, but constantly seeks to infuse those actions with deeply personal meaning.

*Love and appreciation—yes; but does it fit?*

While I find a great appreciation and love for Torah in most of my *frum* brothers and sisters, I find little evidence of effort to delve into the implication of *mitzvos* for one’s personal growth, to look for what this or that *mitzva* means to the self, above and beyond the vital fact that it is, first and foremost, the unquestioned will of our Creator.

Now the path of *emuna p’shuta*, or “simple faith,” much hallowed by many of our venerable sages and *Rebbeim*, might rightly be associated with a *derech* of great *tzidkus* and *kedusha* (righteousness and holiness). One need not necessarily be involved with philosophical or spiritual inquiry to have a great deal of Torah, *yira* (awe), and *kedusha* in one’s life. I am merely observing that what is generally referred to as “spirituality” usually means a *derech* in which people seek to instill in their actions, life, and thoughts a deep sense of the inspiring, the moving, and the sacred; and often this is not what is emphasized in parts of our communities.

There are people who, although they grew up within the Orthodox world and generally observe the dos and don’ts, and follow the Torah’s rituals, find very little personal connection with the Torah and the Almighty.

When our brethren come to us and ask us to show them our view of their heritage, they really do want to “try it on,” and see if it is meaningful and inspiring to them. Much of what they often hear, however, is decidedly unsatisfying to the spiritual seeker. While there may (hopefully) be a warmth and friendliness in an Orthodox home, and there may be obvious excitement at leading a *frum* life, there is often little that can be communicated in a way that an outsider can appreciate.

Oftentimes there is enough to encourage further interest—a well-known saying is that “For the price of a *kugel* you can be *mekarev* another Jew.” It is almost always an inspiring, eye-opening experience for the outsider to encounter the family togetherness and serenity of a typical *Shabbos* table. But equally often, that interest will not grow if the person does not sense that we, ourselves, find Judaism to be a genuinely moving and spiritual discipline, which we understand and feel deeply.

*Can we come to your house?*

It is a sad commentary that there are so few homes to which a *kiruv* professional can send new people out of the fear that the hosts might (1) not suf-

ficiently respect the persons and the thoughts and feelings that they harbor about Judaism, much as we might disagree with them, and (2) not be equipped to discuss the questions that the Jew from “out there” might raise. Questions which simply seek to probe how we feel about *mitzvos*, the role of the Jew in human society, the severe restrictions that *halacha* seems to place on us, the “strange observances” and technical minutiae with which we seem to be so obsessed. Sad, indeed, if in fact most of those questions are about the very bases and fundamentals of our faith.

It must also be noted that this problem is not limited to those who come from outside the Orthodox community. One of the most painful realities of



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Orthodox life is the fact that there are people who, although they grew up within the Orthodox world and generally observe the dos and don'ts, and follow the Torah's rituals, find very little personal connection with the Torah and the Almighty.

Again, many factors may cause these phenomena, many of which are specific to the unfortunate experiences of the individual. But for all too many, they have simply never been exposed to the "spiritual" side of Judaism. They never learned what inner beauty, grace and meaning are hidden within the rituals that they have experienced in a sterile manner. They have no idea what great personal fulfillment can be had in understanding the sweetness of Torah, beyond intellectual stimulation.

I know of many people, including myself, who experienced a renewed sense of awe at the grandeur of Torah thought when discovering that not only is such inquiry permitted, but that with proper guidance, it is deeply sat-

isfying. One could discuss these issues in terms of their implications for the curriculum of our schools and other *mosdos*; I leave that to those far wiser than myself. And for those who feel no need to delve into these and other parts of the Torah, certainly they have great authority to rely on. The question of the propriety of delving into the *ikrei emuna* (fundamentals of faith) and *ta'amei hamitzvos* (benefits of *mitzva* observance) is one that has been debated by our sages for a very long time.

But I can tell you that for the most part, the spiritual aspects of our lives that Jews "out there" are potentially attracted to, are those that will help them in feeling that their lives and Jewishness will be palpably more meaningful. And for most of them, at least initially, it does not mean just intense study and *dikduk b'mitzva*, important as they are. It means that they are attracted to a deep sense that Judaism has the potential for infusing their lives with meaning, with actions that are both authentic and

deeply moving, and with a sense of acceptance, love, and tolerance for those who have not had the good fortune to know as much as others.

#### The main threat — "Reform Hasidism"

At the recent AJOP (Association of Jewish Outreach Professionals) convention, Rabbi Ephraim Buchwald, one of today's foremost *kiruv* workers, noted that our main challenge today comes not from Reform or Conservative theologies. It comes from the Jewish Renewal/Pnai Or movement, who call themselves "Reform Hasidim" (sick) (sic), and are offering their people this sense of deep meaning, without the obligations of *halacha*.

They come with many novel, and often heretical, thoughts about Torah subjects. But the adherents to Jewish Renewal are genuinely trying to bring Judaism into their life in a way that is deeply moving and inspiring to them. To us, the things that are said in these groups are strange at best, and a perversion of Torah at worst. But these groups are touching Jewish *neshamos*, because they are focusing on the food that these *neshamos* are starving for—a sense of the meaningful and spiritual in Judaism.

It is this deep sense of spirituality that is out there in the form of a "Hunger, not for bread, nor for water, rather to hear (understand) the word of *Hashem*." Perhaps it would not be too bold for me to suggest that these *neshamos* are not yet ready for "*lachma shel Torah*" (the bread of Torah), meaning the basic world of halachic learning and observance. They first need to deeply "hear" the word of *Hashem*, to sense that *Hashem* is speaking to them in a way that they can relate to as being meaningful.

Only when they cross this threshold, will they be able to eat and drink the *Yesodos HaTorah*. May we be *zocheh* to enhance our own spirituality and share it with others.

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# “And He Shall Turn the Hearts of the Fathers to the Sons”

## STUMBLING ALONG THE PATH

Walking along Kelm's main road, which had been paved by the King's prisoners sentenced to slave labor, Rabbi Simcha Zissel, a leading *Mussar* figure of 19th century Eastern Europe, would think of their suffering. "How can people walk calmly through this place," he wondered, "where people suffered so much and invested their blood and sweat?"

SPARKS OF MUSSAR,

BY RABBI CHAIM EPHRAIM ZAITCHIK

In some ways, this story reflects the education that I received from my father, Mr. Seymour (Shlomo) Oboler, a progressive social activist who grew up in America during the depression years, and who devoted his life to causes on behalf of the poor and the underprivileged. My father זצ"ל, together with my mother רב"ל, helped to develop within me the ability to empathize with the suffering of all human beings, wherever they may be.

My father was not exposed to the Torah world of a Reb Simcha Zissel Ziv. Although he had a vague awareness that his sensitivity and idealism had roots in Jewish tradition, he had no awareness that they could be expressed and ele-

Yosef Ben Shlomo Hakohen is a Torah educator and writer who lives in Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem. He is the author of *The Universal Jew: Letters to a Progressive Father From his Orthodox Son*, published by Feldheim. His father, Seymour Oboler, lives in Far Rockaway, NY, where he is a member of several community organizations. This article is dedicated to the memory of Rabbi Gershon Weinreb זצ"ל, a *talmid* of Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner זצ"ל, and a high school *Rebbe* of the author.

*The author grew up in a liberal, progressive home, and his father was active in various causes on behalf of the poor and the underprivileged. In this article, he describes his father's Jewish journey, and he explores the relevance of this journey to kiruv work today among Jews with universalistic and humanistic concerns.*

vated through a life committed to Torah and *mitzvos*. As my father once told me:

*I did not have a traditional upbringing, but something drew me to my neighborhood synagogue in Flatbush. These religious feelings began when I was a young boy, and continued until a few years after my bar mitzva. I was very much into davening, and I even put on tefillin. But at age eighteen, I decided to give up these practices, for I could not find a teacher who could explain to me the purpose of these and other observances. Nor could I find a rabbi who could relate all these traditions to the issues facing my generation—the poverty of the depression, the struggle against religious and racial bigotry, and, most important, our*

*yearning for a better and more just society. So I looked elsewhere for answers.*

Yet, something in my father's soul prompted him to attempt to find the G-d of his forefathers. This yearning exemplifies an observation by Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman זצ"ל during his visit to America in the late 1930's:

Everyone told me that America is not fit for Torah. But that is not true. On my travels, I have seen many pure Yiddishe kinder, temimus'dike kinder (Jewish children, pure children). In some respects they are purer than the children in Europe. All that is needed is someone to teach them Torah. If people undertake to spread Torah, they will accept it.

THEY CALLED HIM MIKE,

BY YONASON ROSENBLUM, P. 126.

## THE MISSING STEPS TO TORAH JUDAISM

My father did not have someone to teach him Torah. Nor did he ever meet the leader of Zeirei Agudath Israel, Reb Elemelech "Mike" Tress, who could have introduced him to Torah sages such as Reb Elchonon Wasserman. Reb Elchonon would relate the Torah to the issues of the day at his Friday night talks at the Zeirei headquarters in Williamsburg:

"Fregt a kasha—ask a question," he would tell them, and they would pepper him with questions about everything that was bothering them.... He would quote various verses and explain their relevance to current events.

IBID. P. 127

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Through Mike Tress and Zeirei, my father would have also had the privilege of meeting Reb Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz and attending the weekly class on *Tehillim*, which he taught at the Zeirei headquarters. These classes were based on the commentary of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, and through Hirsch's commentary, my father would have discovered the universal Jewish vision he was searching for:

True, this dispersed nation is devoid of power and brilliance and therefore is overshadowed by the other nations which are endowed with plainly obvious might and strength. But it is not such tangibles, in whose possession the nations take such pride and whose lack causes Israel such humiliation among men, that G-d views as the building bricks for the fulfillment of His purposes on earth. The treasures which the Jewish people must cherish are the moral and spiritual values, which it must cultivate and demonstrate throughout its exile. There is one treasure above all, and Jerusalem and Zion will rise again for its sake so that it may be made a living reality, and that is the Torah. It is the Law, whose sole trustee Israel is and ever shall remain, the Law through which the Word of G-d, through voluntary recognition and homage, should come to rule and shape all the affairs of humanity on the basis of truth, justice and morality.

COMMENTARY TO PSALMS 147,1

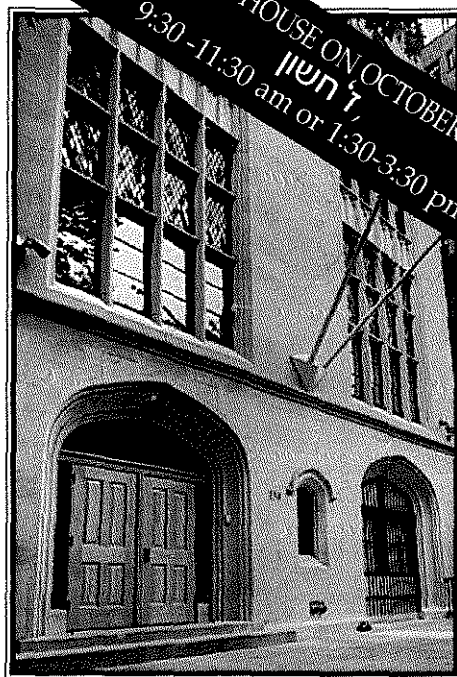
In his own way, my father felt the pain of our exile, and that is another rea-



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son why my father would have benefited from meeting Mike Tress. In his youth, my father began to feel a strong bond with his people, and he often told me of his anger and pain over the reports of the growing danger to the Jews of Europe. Had my father been introduced to Zeirei Agudath Israel, he would have found—among many benefits—other idealistic young Jews like himself who were fighting for their people under the banner of Torah. Instead, he and thousands of other young Jews were attracted to various American leftist movements that took a public stand against anti-Semitism and were organizing anti-Fascist meetings and rallies.

#### THE "ZEIREI" FACTOR IN MY ROAD TO TORAH

Mike Tress eventually did influence my father, however, through a protégé of his—Rabbi Gavriel Beer—an activist in Agudath Israel of America, who became the rabbi of our neighborhood synagogue in Rockaway Beach, NY. My mother—who grew up in a home that was somewhat traditional—had enrolled me and my sister, Devorah דבורה, in the synagogue's Hebrew school, which is how Rabbi Beer got to know my family. He respected my parents' idealism, and admired their *chessed*—especially their concern for the elderly Jews of our neighborhood. He and his wife became close to my parents, and persuaded my parents to allow me to attend the Hebrew Institute of Long Island (HILI), in Far Rockaway.

At first, my father was afraid that an Orthodox school might cause me to be prejudiced towards Gentiles. He noticed, however, that Rabbi Beer had a warm relationship with his Gentile neighbors, and that he carefully avoided stereotyping any racial or ethnic groups. He also told my father that a Torah education develops a respect for human dignity, and since Rabbi Beer was a living example of this ideal, my father allowed him to guide my Jewish education. Therefore at age 10, I began my studies at HILI.

#### THE JEWISH ELEMENT IN A LIBERAL'S CREDO

As I continued my Torah studies, I became aware of how, in a subtle way, my father had instilled in me the idea that Jews had a special role among the nations. He loved to tell me how he and other social activists went to Peekskill for the concert of the great Black singer, Paul Robeson; how the white racist mob surrounded the town, and threw stones at the buses coming from New York City. And, with great

pride, he described how the activists courageously formed a human ring around the concert area to protect Robeson.

Once, he added: "Jeffrey, the people who came up to defend Paul Robeson—members of various unions, veteran groups, and political organizations—most of them were Jewish. We Jews have a special responsibility to fight for justice in this world. Because we suffered, we feel the pain of other people. Therefore, we have to be in the forefront of the struggle."

### Dear Yad Eliezer,

*So much is spent  
to make a memorable affair,  
The photographer, the band,  
the makeup... and the hair.  
Sheva Brachos outfits,  
a bracelet and a setting,  
without a diamond ring  
can there be a wedding?  
The list is endless...  
cufflinks and a tie  
The budgets overdrawn,  
and there's so much still to buy.  
You've given us opportunity  
to really comprehend -  
the value of \$1000  
and how much we overspend!!  
There's great pleasure in knowing  
another couple will dance too.  
Your work is tremendous  
How can we thank you?*

*Sincerely,  
Mimi and Dovid*



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I was seven years old at the time. Until then, he spoke mainly about equality between all races and creeds. Suddenly I was told for the first time that a Jew has a special responsibility to the world.

**REACHING OUT TO IDEALISTIC YOUTH**

**T**oday, I am a Torah educator involved with spiritually-searching Jews of all ages, and I have encountered sensitive, young Jews of the 90's generation who also feel that Jews have some kind of responsibility for the

world. True, American society has become increasingly materialistic and hedonistic, and this trend has unfortunately affected many Jews. But if we would investigate all of the current social causes and projects in the United States that seek to develop a more just and compassionate society, we would find that Jews are still involved in these causes in disproportionate numbers. And in my outreach work, I discovered that not all of these idealistic Jews have a liberal political orientation. A growing minority are of conservative political

bent. They too have a universalistic outlook and sense of social responsibility, even though they may differ with the liberals as to the best means to achieve a more just and compassionate society.

Although the majority of these Jews have only a vague sense of Jewish identity, they tend to associate this identity with an altruistic purpose. How do we understand this remarkable sense of idealism?

My *Rebbe*, Rabbi Aharon Feldman, finds the answer in a well-known statement of our sages:

This (Jewish) nation has three signs: they are compassionate, they have a sense of shame, and they do acts of kindness.

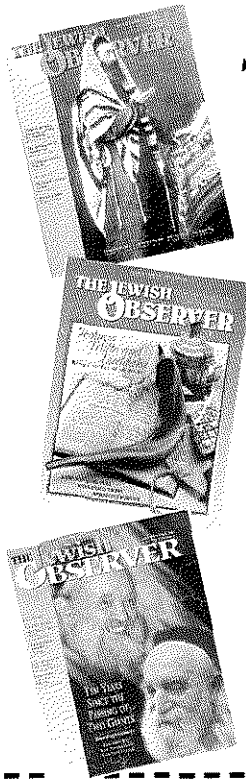
YEVAMOS 79A

In his book *The Juggler and the King*—an elaboration of the Vilna Gaon's interpretations of various *Aggados*—Rabbi Feldman describes how these three characteristics are a spiritual inheritance that we received from our forefathers, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov. He notes that even non-observant Jews have these traits—at least to a greater degree than do members of other nations.

No matter how little learned a Jew may be, no matter how estranged he is from his heritage, something within him relentlessly pushes him to strive for ideals of the spirit. All over the world, wherever there is a struggle for a cause of justice and kindness, Jews—observant or not—are at its forefront.

Of course, the ideals being fought for are not necessarily Jewish ones, but the very fact that Jews seek such causes indicates their natural spiritual thirst. Thirst does not insure that one will end up drinking water; one might be driven instead to attempt to quench his thirst with saltwater, which will increase it. Similarly, to satisfy his longings, a Jew might take up ideals which are ultimately unfulfilling. But in any case, in the final analysis, a Jew is a spiritually thirsty person, and this is so because of the intrinsic nature of the Jewish seed. (p. 187)

Our forefathers were known for



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their *rachamim*—compassion; and we, their children, are therefore known as *rachmanim bnei rachmanim*. Compassion is a most beautiful trait, yet it was my father who first taught me that it can be dangerous when applied to the wrong people. As a soldier in the American army during World War II, my father was stationed near a liberated concentration camp. That shocking and traumatic experience became one of the stories he would tell me when I was a young boy; he once added: "That evil nation which murdered millions of our people should not have been given the opportunity to rise again as a state. In this way, the allies would have demonstrated to the entire world that there can be no compassion for a nation that commits genocide. Instead, the allies decided to rebuild this nation and its economy. As a result, a message was conveyed that political and financial concerns take priority over concern for human life."

#### THE LIMITS OF A JEW'S ACTIVISM

**A**lthough my father was an active supporter of civil rights for Black Americans, he would not tolerate any expression of anti-Semitism in the Black community. He was aware that the Black Muslims preached hatred against Jews, and he told our Black neighbors that they have a moral responsibility to speak out against those who preach hatred. He then dropped his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement.

The above recollections challenge the stereotypical view that some Orthodox Jews have of liberal Jews. They believe that Jews with universalistic humanistic concerns are, for the most part, "self-hating Jews who fight for every people but their own." This causes them to feel disdain and resentment towards them. *Jews like my father sense that resentment, and it reinforces their stereotyped view that most Orthodox Jews feel disdain towards Jews who are not Orthodox. Both stereotypes do not accurately reflect reality.*

Yes, some Jews are classical examples of the "self-hating Jew who fights for

every cause, but his own." Most of these Jews do not identify in any way with the Jewish people. There is a greater number of American Jews, however, who consider themselves to be "liberal," "progressive" and/or "universalistic," who do not fit into that category. They *do* identify in some way with the Jewish people, and they are concerned with Jewish issues such as the survival of the State of Israel, the rise of anti-Semitism, and even the threat of assimilation. In fact, a growing number of these Jews are making attempts to explore their Jewish spiritual

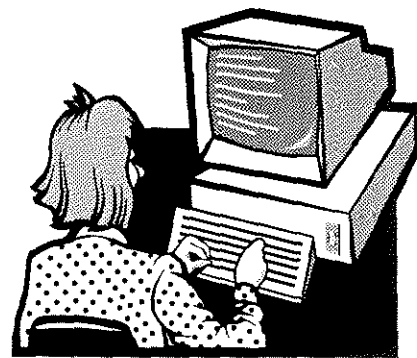
roots, but most of them lack direction from Torah-committed teachers.

Without the guidance of Torah, they often develop non-Torah priorities; for example, their compassionate nature can lead them to support "lifestyle" movements that conflict with Torah values. The Torah community may need to take public stands against some of their positions, but we need to remember that *they* are not the "enemy," *chas v'shalom*; ignorance of Torah is the enemy. As Reb Elchonon Wasserman commented during his visit to America: "I have seen

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many *temimus'dike kinder*.... All that is needed is someone to teach them Torah."

#### LIBERALISM AS AN ENTRY TO A TORAH LIFE

During my senior year in high school, my *Rebbe*, Rabbi Gershon Weinreb ז"ר, became friendly with my parents, and expressed great respect for their altruism. He saw in their compassion for all life an expression of the greatness of the *Yiddishe neshama*. He gave me a copy of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch's *The Nineteen Letters*, and said: "Now that I know your family background, I feel that it is important for your development as a *ben Torah* that you read this book. I also feel that it will help you to communicate your beliefs and values to idealistic Jews like your parents."

He was right; Rav Hirsch's teachings eventually did have a profound effect on me, my family and my friends. For example, we were inspired by his message:

Yisroel has no other task than to

acknowledge as its G-d the One Who calls and educates *all* human beings to His service, and to make Him known as such, through its destiny and way of life!

LETTER FIFTEEN

Thus, if we attempt to teach Torah to these sensitive Jews, it must include not only its vision for *Klal Yisroel*, but also its vision for all humanity. And if we want them to cry out "*Shema Yisroel*," then we should not only emphasize the beginning of the *Shema*, which refers to *Klal Yisroel's* unique relationship to *Hashem*, but also the conclusion of the first *pasuk*—*Hashem Echod*, which according to *Rashi*, refers to the Messianic Age when all nations will unite to serve *Hashem*, as it is written: "On that day *Hashem* will be One and His Name One" (*Zecharya* 14,9).

These Jews are the children of Avraham, our father, who proclaimed to all that *Hashem* is "G-d of the world" (*Bereishis* 21,33), and they sense within their *neshamos* a yearning for the unity and the perfection of all humanity. If we

can help them realize that through the Torah we are destined to become "a kingdom of *Kohanim* and a holy nation" (*Shemos* 19,6), which will serve as an ethical and spiritual model for all peoples—"a light to nations" (*Yeshayahu* 42,6)—then, *b'ezras Hashem*, they will be inspired to devote their creative talents and energies to Torah and to *Klal Yisroel*—the people of Torah.

It was this realization that helped my father to once again put on *tefillin* each day, to *daven* to the G-d of his forefathers. And it was this realization that inspired me to begin to reach out to Jews of all ages who share my father's passionate yearning for a united and just world.

#### THE AGENDA FOR FURTHER GROWTH

It is vital that these sensitive and searching Jews be given the opportunity to meet *Roshei Yeshivos* who can relate the teachings of the Torah to the issues of the day, just as the young men of *Zeirei* heard Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman relate the Torah to the issues of his day.

They also need to meet Torah educators who can explore with them the Torah's universal vision, just as Reb Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz explored with his students that vision, as expressed in the writings of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch.

And they need to meet idealistic Torah Jews like Reb Elemelech Tress—Jews who will *respect* them, as well as love them, and who will help them to return to their true spiritual roots. Through the rediscovery of these roots, we and they will finally be reunited.

Let us therefore call out to them the words of the *Naivi*:

Listen to Me, pursuers of justice, seekers of G-d.

Look to the stone from which you were hewn, to the quarry from which you were dug.

Look to Avraham your father and to Sarah who bore you.

YESHAYAHU 51, 1-2

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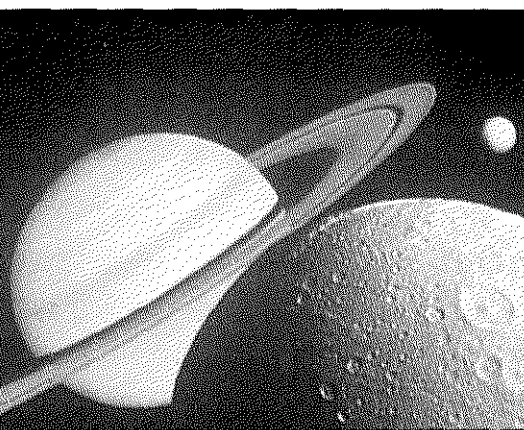
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# Of Mars and Men



At the end of the first week of August, NASA scientists released the startling news that they have detected evidence of microscopic life on a meteorite assumed to have come from Mars. This news was made public before definitive electron microscopic studies had been made. It came at a time when Congress is cutting billions from government spending. Therefore, many have questioned the scientific objectivity of these studies.

I have my own reservations about their objectivity, because, for some reason whose logic escapes me, the existence of microscopic life on Mars is supposed to prove that the world was not created. I happen to know that one scientist had a deep need to prove that the world was not created, and this makes me suspect that all of these efforts are so motivated. The one scientist was Joshua Lederberg.

Joshua Lederberg is—or was (I don't know if he is still alive)—a major scientist. A Nobel Laureate, no less. I first heard of him when I was a *talmid* at the Yeshiva of Philadelphia.

I was the tenth *talmid* to arrive, around Chanukah time, at the newly-opened Yeshiva of Philadelphia. The *Roshei Yeshiva* were Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetsky, שליט"א, and at that time, Rabbi Dov Schwartzman, שליט"א. The Yeshiva was located in an old Jewish section known as Strawberry Mansion, and its arrival in town had creat-

Rabbi Perr is *Rosh Hayeshiva* of Yeshiva Derech Ayson of Far Rockaway, NY.

ed something of a stir.

One day, a small group of bright twelve-year-olds started coming to the yeshiva for some extra learning with one of the older *bachurim*. This went on for a while until that *bachur* decided not to continue. Somehow, I ended up teaching this group for an hour or two a week.

I soon came to realize that this group had a special problem. One of the youngsters—Lederberg, by name (I don't remember his first name)—was always asking me (I should say challenging me) with conflicts between science and religion. I had grown up among marginally religious Jews in my father's *shul* and was no stranger to these issues, and I tried to answer these challenges as best I could. One time Lederberg said to me, "My dream is to some day create life in a test tube."

I understood, of course, what he was implying. "You'll never do it," I responded. "I guarantee you'll never do it! And neither will anyone else!"

Lederberg retreated in the face of my vehemence. Perhaps the skirmish in front of the others had been won. I couldn't know. But I knew for sure that Lederberg's heart, sadly, had not been won.

Not long after, a visitor appeared in our little *Beis Medrash* at 3003 Berks Street, an old, but very erect gentleman, dressed in an ancient Homburg, and fading black cutaway with striped pants, an outfit that had been the trademark of certain rabbinical functionaries of a long bygone era. This gentlemen stopped to ask a *bachur* a question, and then headed in my direc-

tion. "Shalom Aleichem," he said to me in an especially deep voice. "My name is Rabbi Lederberg."

Rabbi Lederberg grasped my hand with a warmth that contrasted with the dryness of his own elderly hand, and in a manner no less old fashioned and courtly than his outfit, asked my permission to speak to me in *Ivrit*. Then, haltingly, searching for the proper words in his self-taught, self-practiced Hebrew, he explained the purpose of his visit.

With what dreams he had come to America, he did not tell me. But not much was needed to explain his present reality. An old rabbi, in one of the small *shuls* of a dying community. No honor. Very little income. And nothing very exciting to look forward to in the future.

But all this was not his problem. His problem was his wife. She was locked in a passionate battle with him for the souls of his children. She had pushed the older one, Joshua — "You have heard of him?"; I had not—she had pushed Joshua, who is today a "great professor," to excel in secular studies. In science. She made of him what he is today, an important scientist. He paused. "An *apikorus!*" he said with deep bitterness. The tears welled up in his eyes and then began to course down his parchment-like cheeks. He will never forget, he told me, with his voice catching, that morning when Joshua, not yet fifteen, refused forevermore to put on his *tefillin*. And Joshua was now doing everything possible to get his younger brother to follow in his footsteps. Then, with an anguish too great to be conveyed in his laboriously acquired Hebrew, he switched to his native Yiddish, and said, "*Ich bet eich. Ihr lerent doch mit ehm. Ratavit mir dem kint!* I beg of you. You learn with him. Save the child for me!"

I was overwhelmed. "I will try," was all I could say.

I came in contact with Rabbi Lederberg only one more time after that. It was at a *Melava Malka* fund-raiser for the Yeshiva held next door in the Yeshiva dining room, at 3001 Berks. The little room was populated by our *minyán* of *talmidim*, clustered at one

end, and a smallish crowd of *ba'alei batim* at the other. Suddenly a certain *ba'al habayis* called to us from amidst the group at the other end of the room. It seems that someone in that group had just made a substantial pledge to the Yeshiva. "Sing, *bachurim*—sing!" the *ba'al habayis* called out to us ecstatically. We *talmidim* were totally surprised, and responded to his happy calls with a total silence. In that silence Rabbi Lederberg's deep voice was heard throughout the room as he commented in Yiddish, "These *bachurim* don't sing for money!"

The school year ended, the youngsters stopped coming to learn, and I regret to say, I fell out of contact with the Lederberg boy. I don't know what became of him. But as the *Hashgacha* willed it, I happened to come across references to his older brother two times afterwards.

The first time was when I happened to see a headline that he had won a Nobel Prize. The second time was some thirty years ago when the results of the unmanned exploration of Mars reported that there were no signs of life on Mars. The August 8, 1965, edition of *The Times* carried this news, and also carried a long article under the caption: "Nobel Laureate Feels Mars May Support Life Despite Mariner Photos." In it, Dr. Joshua Lederberg hurries to convince the public that mankind should not give up hope of finding some form of life on Mars. There may be scattered oases that can support life, he says. These explorations, he assures us, focus on questions "which continue to have the deepest scientific and philosophical interest. Paramount among these is whether life, in any form, has evolved independently of the terrestrial system and man."

That the existence of microscopic life on Mars is of deep philosophical interest to mankind is something about which I personally have my doubts. That it was deeply significant to the world-renown Nobel Laureate who still had to prove that he was right in his fights with his old father about putting on *tefillin*, of this I am convinced.

There is a madness that has seized hold of the intellectuals of our time, a madness to pry open all the doors of existence and see what is inside. A madness to prove that only

emptiness exists behind these doors, after all. Yes, an emptiness very much like that which they feel deep within their own souls. ■

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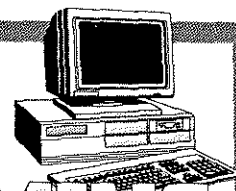
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# "Bechira: How Free is Free Will"—Revisited

## Two Letters and Responses

### FREE WILL—REDUCED IN CASES OF COMPULSION?

To The Editor:

Dr. Sorotzkin's article, "How Free is Free Will," (April '96) would seem to minimize a person's responsibility for his actions. As such, the article relates directly to one of the thirteen principles of Jewish faith, the principle of reward and punishment, and thus, bears response.

1) On page 19, Dr. Sorotzkin quotes Rabbi Wolbe as the source for the illustration regarding the gang member who

may be considered "compelled" to rob a bank. As a point of fact, that illustration belongs to Rabbi Dessler (*Michtav Me'Eliyahu* p. 114), whom Rabbi Wolbe is merely quoting verbatim. Further, the word "compelled" in this context is Dr. Sorotzkin's own creation and is not found either in Rabbi Dessler's or Rabbi Wolbe's original Hebrew. Quite to the contrary, Rabbi Wolbe (see above A.S.II p. 41) is clear in his rejection of the secular tendency to use psychic determinism to excuse unacceptable behavior. He stresses that each person is responsible to

refrain from sinful action, and is accountable to be judged for those actions, a point which Dr. Sorotzkin, though using Rabbi Wolbe, fails to follow through on.

2) Again, Dr. Sorotzkin writes: "Rabbi Dessler makes it clear that a person can only be held responsible for behavior over which he has free will." Perhaps Rabbi Dessler's writings can be subjectively interpreted in such a manner. However, many years ago I put this



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very question in writing to Rabbi Wolbe: "Does Rabbi Dessler's thesis on free will suggest in any way that one is not responsible for his those sins that are above his point of free will?"

Rabbi Wolbe's answer (copy of the original enclosed): "It is not logical that man can exempt himself from Divine retribution with the claim that his sins were above his point of free will. And it seems to me that this was not what Rabbi Dessler ל"י intended."

Clearly, Dr. Sorotzkin's interpretation of Rabbi Dessler does not coincide with Rabbi Wolbe's. Thus, it does not follow logically to use Rabbi Wolbe to strengthen this interpretation. I believe a clarification is in order.

3) Again, Dr. Sorotzkin deduces from a *Gemora* in *Succa* that the daughter of one of the members of Bilgah "could not have behaved" [dishonorably] if not for the deficiencies in *chinuch* provided by her father. A study of the *Gemora* taught me only that the father set the example, but not, as the author implies, that he predetermined her free will.

4) Dr. Sorotzkin writes, "common experience shows there is often a 'will' and yet no 'way'." Here I feel absolutely "compelled" to respond. "Will" and "way" are the essential ingredients of partnership between man and *Hashem*. See *Alei Shur* I, p. 120-122, where willpower is developed as perhaps the most powerful tool in self-improvement, whose use opens virtually unlimited pathways of Divine assistance. Whoever complains that there is no "way" for him, writes R' Wolbe, is actually blaming *Hashem* for the person's own lack of will. Willpower is a cornerstone of faith, for it works with *Hashem* to find ways to succeed, to change, to improve, restoring to the person his free will on the deepest level. Dr. Sorotzkin's statement would seem to minimize both the strength of willpower within man, and the Divine commitment to forge a way to help man succeed.

5) Dr. Sorotzkin writes: "A person's psychological past defines his point of free will." A careful study of Rabbi Dessler's colorful description of the bat-

tlefront of free will (*Michtav Me'Eliyahu* I p. 113) may show that psychological past is only half of the point of free will. The ingredient of inherent strength within the person (coupled again with Divine assistance at every step) is the counterforce that completes a real picture of free will. And this exists very powerfully in the present!

6) *Mesillas Yesharim* (ch 2) writes that the evil inclination is very powerful and without *Hashem's* help, man cannot overcome him. I would suggest to Dr.

Sorotzkin a modified approach to therapy that is perhaps not so client-centered: to have both therapist and client humbly integrate Divine assistance into the effort towards self-improvement and free will. This, I am certain, would open tremendous pathways of success and honorable self-realization in the life of the sincere person who really "wants" so much to change, but cannot seem to find the "way."

(RABBI) NAFTOLI BASSMAN  
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**The author responds:**

Among the various reactions I have received to the publication of my article on *Bechira*.

Most gratifying was from two people who told me that the article prompted them to find more effective ways of overcoming serious *aveiros*, which they had found almost impossible to overcome. As much as I enjoy the positive feedback, I am also thankful for the critical comments that have prompted me to further explore and

clarify this complex issue.

I am especially grateful to Rabbi Naftoli Bassman for his critical comments and for sharing a letter he received long ago from Rabbi Wolbe, in which he states "it is not logical that man can exempt himself from Divine retribution with the claim that his sins were above his *nekudas habechira*, and it seems to me that this was not what Rabbi Dessler ז"ר intended."

I was indeed very perplexed by this letter, since Rabbi Dessler's comments on this topic (Vol. 1, pp. 111-116) seem

to clearly indicate that indeed one is not responsible for behavior which is above his level of *bechira*.

During a recent visit to Israel, I met with Rabbi Wolbe to clarify this issue. He had not looked over the *Michtav MeEliyahu* on this topic recently, so he could not give me a definite answer, but he did agree to discuss the issue.

He indicated that while a person is never exempt from a *mitzva* (even a *tinok shenishba*), it is possible that a person is exempt from punishment if an *aveira* is above his level of *bechira* for reasons beyond his control. Rabbi Wolbe referred me to an incident described in his *Sefer*, of a father who, because of misguided *frumkeit*, never let his child play. This child eventually rebelled and became non-*frum*. Rabbi Wolbe said that clearly it is the father who will be punished for this rather than the son.

Of course, only *Hashem* knows if, in fact, a particular act for a particular person was above his level of *bechira*, and if so, if he was or was not responsible for that act.

Regarding his letter to Rabbi Bassman, he did not recall the specific question he was replying to or the context of the response. I suggested that perhaps he meant to say that one cannot totally exempt himself from punishment by claiming that all his *aveiros* were above his level of *bechira*. There is

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always some positive action (even if only on a relative scale) or inhibition of negative action (even if only a partial inhibition) which is within a person's *nekedas habechira*.

Rabbi Wolbe agreed that that may be a possible explanation but that he would need to examine the issue further.

Rabbi Wolbe also pointed out that in his own writing he has mostly focused on *bechira* as a part of a person's *avoda*, rather than on the "philosophical" issues involved. He felt that people assumed they were involved in the *avoda* of *bechira* simply because they were behaving in one manner as opposed to another. In fact, *bechira* requires deliberate thought, focus and action. Rabbi Wolbe also pointed out that I did not accurately convey his intentions in my quote from the *Alei Shur* (Vol. I, p.156), where he states that in *chinuch* one has to relate to every person "as if has no *bechira*." What he meant by this is that a person should not put himself or others in a *nisayon* because we should not rely on *bechira*.

Rabbi Bassman objects to my use of the word "compelled" in describing a person's inability to refrain from doing an *aveira* above his *nekudas habechira*. Rabbi Wolbe did not find the word objectionable.

#### NOT A MATTER OF SOCIETAL NORMS

Rabbi Bassman challenges my thesis by pointing out that Rabbi Wolbe (*Alei Shur*, Vol. 2, p. 41) strongly rejects the secular tendency to excuse unacceptable behaviors because of "psychological" reasons.

In fact, my article was not relating to the norms of our society, which certainly should not be lowered to accommodate people with emotional (or other) difficulties. I was referring to helping individuals overcome specific difficulties. Rabbi Wolbe agreed that when dealing with practical problems of this nature it may, in fact, be necessary to use the approach I suggested in my article.

Rabbi Bassman feels that the *Gemora* regarding the *Mishmar* of *Bilgah*, "only indicates that the father set a neg-

ative example for his daughter, but not that he predetermined her free will." In fact I made it abundantly clear in my article that life circumstances do not predetermine behavior. It only limits the range of choices at any particular time. The *Gemora* does not indicate that we have evidence that the father set a poor example for his daughter; rather we assume that he must have done so. This indicates a modification of the daughter's *bechira*. Otherwise, why can't we say that the father behaved in an exemplary fashion and nonetheless the

daughter chose to behave dishonorably?


#### AN ABUNDANCE OF WILL, NO WAY

Rabbi Bassman questions my statement that "common experience shows that there is often a 'will' and yet no 'way'." He quotes from Rabbi Wolbe (*Alei Shur* Vol.1, pg 121), regarding the importance of will power. "What a person truly desires, he achieves in his lifetime."

However, Rabbi Wolbe is talking about will at its deepest level. In our

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conversation, Rabbi Wolbe showed me the Vilna Gaon's commentary on *Mishlei* 16,2, where he states that "All of a person's ways are drawn after his primary desire." This, Rabbi Wolbe explained, refers to the person's "subconscious wishes." The "will" I was referring to is the superficial will. As Rabbi Wolbe himself states in the above quote in *Alei Shur*: "Momentary inspiration and a fleeting stimulation do not necessarily express *ratzon* (desire)."

It seems that a person's capacity to truly "will" something becomes progressively reduced as we become more distant from Sinai. For example the *Shulchan Aruch* rules: "One who prays should concentrate on the meaning of all the *berachos* (of the *Shemona Esrei*) ... and if he does not do so in 'Avos' (the first *beracha*), he should start over." The R'MA adds: "Nowadays one doesn't repeat [the *beracha*] for lack of concentration, for most likely one will fail to concentrate in the repetition, as well,"

(*Orach Chaim* 101). The R'MA doesn't say that if the person really had the *ratzon*, he would be able to have *kavana!*

Rabbi Bassman questions my statement that "a person's psychological past defines his point of free will." He asserts that "the ingredient of inherent strength within the person.... is the counterforce that completes the real picture of free will." I certainly agree with this, since if there was no will to do what is right, there would not be an issue of *bechira* at any level. I assume this "will to do what's right" in speaking of the person's "psychological past."

Rabbi Bassman suggests a "modified approach to therapy... to have both therapist and client humbly integrate Divine assistance into the effort towards self-improvement and free will." Clearly this is true regarding any endeavor (e.g. a teacher, *Rebbi*, doctor, therapist). Recently, a *Gadol* suggested to a colleague of mine that he say a brief *tefilla*

for *siyata diShmaya* (Divine assistance) before each session. However, he did not suggest saying this *tefilla* with the patient (just as the *Rambam's Physician's Prayer* was not intended to be said with the patient).

DR. BEN SOROTZKIN

#### QUERY ON POINT OF BECHIRA

To the Editor:

I found Dr. Sorotzkin's article on *bechira* (free choice) most fascinating. One key question: How is one to identify his or her *nekudas habechira*?

DANIEL LEWENSTEIN  
Bayit Vegan, Jerusalem

#### The author responds:

The first step is recognizing that one's *bechira* is limited in scope. Then one needs to develop a sensitivity to one's own feelings. When the person fails in his attempt to do a *mitzva*, for example, he needs to evaluate the reasons for his failure. Was he totally off the mark? Was he attempting something way beyond his *nekudas habechira*? Or was he close, and perhaps with a little more preparation and/or effort, he may be more likely to succeed next time.

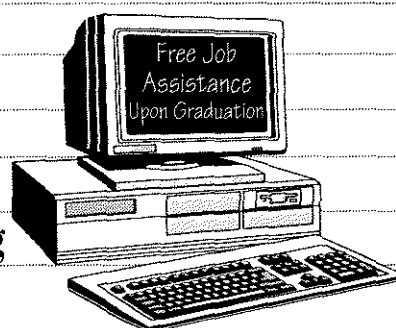
Likewise, with one's children, one needs to help them develop a sensitivity to better understand their feelings and actions, so that they learn to focus their efforts in that area (*nekudas habechira*) where they are most likely to succeed.

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# BOOKS IN REVIEW



**Torah Powerhouse**, by Rabbi Aharon Pollak (Feldheim Publishers, Nanuet, NY 1996, \$13.95)

A story is told about Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach זצ"ל, the Rav of Luebeck. He had five sons, all of whom were famous *Rabbonim* during our century. Someone approached one of his sons and asked him what it was that his parents did that was so special, that their children were *zocheh* to reach their level.

The son explained that Reb Shlomo had high expectations and he would punish them when these would not be met. For example, he expected them all to be on time at *minyan* in the morning. Were they not there, Reb Shlomo would not permit them jelly on their bread at breakfast... but then, the father put none on his own, either.

The principles by which our *Gedolim* have successfully raised generation after generation of children filled with *yiras Shamayim* and *ahavas Yisroel* have been lost to most but a select few. Rabbi Aharon Pollak, *mechanech* par excellence, has made accessible to all of us guidelines and advice based on *Chazal*.

Rabbi Pollak is a *talmid* of Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach זצ"ל, Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, זצ"ל, and Rabbi Shmuel Vosner, שליט"א. For 35 years, he has been *mechanech* children, first as

Dr. Aberback B.Sc. D.D.S. lives in Toronto.

a *melamed* in London, then as *Rosh Yeshiva* in Johannesburg, and then as *menahel* in Manchester. Making extensive use of quotes and stories from *Chazal*, Rabbi Pollak opens our eyes regarding how to train our children in *middos*, how to pass on proper attitudes to them, and—especially important in our times—how to inculcate *emuna* in our children (and in ourselves).

The Chofetz Chaim in the last page of his *Sefer Chochmas Hada'as* tells us that "Just as it is a *mitzva* to have fixed times for learning *Torah*, fixed times for *krias Shema*, *tefilla b'tzibbur*, and all other *mitzvos*... so is it a *mitzva*, and indeed, an absolute *chiyuv* (obligation), for parents, both mother and father, to set aside time to discuss and formulate policies on the *chinuch* of their children. This will ensure that they are brought up in the ways of our ancestors and *rebbeim*."

Our schedules are all full, but the most important thing in our lives is our children—our chain to the future. Woe

unto any of us should our children give us problems; then, unfortunately, we *have* to find the time to solve the problem. How much easier it would be to prevent them in the first place!

*Torah Powerhouse* is chock full of insights into *Torah* parenting. Unencumbered with theories of modern psychology, Rabbi Pollak presents child-rearing to the reader through the *Torah* lens, the *Torah* perspective. How do the parents treat each other and their parents? What is the relationship of the parents to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*? How to create a happy home? How to use mealtime for *middos*-training? The *Shabbos* table and story telling—how and what kind? Jealousy, *Emes*, *Emuna*... the *Torah* has a view on it all, and as parents, we must know the *Torah* view.

As a parent actively involved with *chinuch* since my oldest child entered school 17 years ago, I regret that *Torah Powerhouse* has only now made its debut. As a founder of Project D.E.R.E.C.H. (an organization devoted

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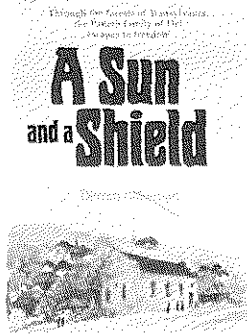
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to strengthening the observance of *hilchos Kovod* and *Yiras Horim, Morim, U'zekainim* and *Derech Eretz*), I am excited to suggest to parents this wonderful new guide.



*A Sun and a Shield*, by Devora Glicksman (Feldheim Publishers, Nanuet, NY (\$21.95 h.c., \$17.95 p.b.))

A full half century separates us from the events of the Holocaust, events so obscene in their horror as to defy belief. Indeed, with the passing of time, deniers of history proliferate, and it is our duty to bear testimony to the depravity that was Naziism, lest these deniers gain credibility by exer-

cising the same "big lie" theory that worked so effectively for Adolf Hitler *שׂוּמְרֵי*. Our children will probably be the last generation to know actual Holocaust survivors, and in keeping with the Torah's command "*Zechor yemos olam... Remember days of yore*" (*Devarim* 32,7), it is vital that we record the stories of their faith, their heroism, and the *Hashgacha* that enabled their survival, so that our grandchildren will not forget. This obligation has been admirably fulfilled in *A Sun and a Shield*, by Devora Glicksman, which chronicles the survival of the Illeander Rav, Rabbi Yosef Paneth, and his family who fled the Nazi occupation of Hungary and managed, miraculously, to live to tell the story. And what a story it is....

The Paneth family lived in the city of Illeand, a small town that was nestled in the heart of Transylvania, where they led the sort of life that from a Torah perspective can only be described as idyllic. The author of this book, who spent five years meticulously researching her subject matter, has managed, with her keen eye for detail, to recreate their world for those of us who were not fortunate enough to experience it. One savors the sights, sounds, and scents of this world, admiring the courage and erudition of the Illeander Rav, basking in the generous hospitality of the Illeander *Rebbetzin*, and smiling at the

exploits of their delightful children, until the future is cruelly wrenched from their grasp by the advance of the German army into Hungary.

The Paneth family was only too familiar with the Nazis and their *modus operandi*. Brandele Paneth, daughter of the Illeander Rav, had been trapped in Poland at the beginning of the war, managing to escape after four long and arduous years, thanks to her fervent *tefillos* and a considerable amount of money passing hands. She returned to her parents a changed and frightened young woman. When the Jews of Illeand were banished from their homes to a ghetto that consisted of makeshift bunkers in the woods, Brandele warned her parents of what would follow, calling upon her experiences in Nazi-occupied Poland. Her recollections had the flavor of the imaginings of a raving child except to those who, like Rabbi Yosef Paneth, were gifted with great foresight, or those who, like us, have the benefit of hindsight.

Hindsight, they say, is twenty-twenty; other times, it is distorted by hazy interpretation of events. All too often self-proclaimed experts will accuse the victims of Nazi violence of cowardice, short-sightedness, or other unflattering traits. *Why did the Jews not run away? Why did they not fight back?* This book gives lie to their accusations by painting a vivid picture not only of the perils of attempted escape, but also of the confusion and disbelief that was pervasive.


Once the German army occupied a country, as the story of the Paneths demonstrates, escape was all but impossible. Only through the intervention of smugglers, profiteers, and other unsavory characters might an individual attempt to cross borders to relative safety. The Paneth family was fortunate enough to obtain resources to bribe a variety of smugglers and profiteers, but each step was fraught with danger, not only of capture by the German army, but

Pessie Novick is principal of Ora Academy, Rochester's new high school for young Jewish women. This is her first appearance in these pages.

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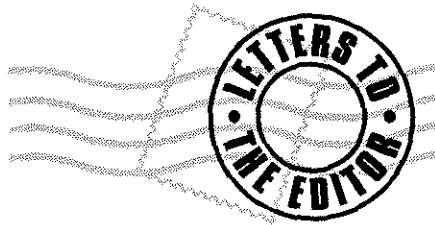
also of betrayal by any of the individuals in whom they had placed their trust.

As to those who ignored the Illean-der Rav's exhortations to flee, one must consider not only the danger posed by attempted escape, but also the fact that the war was not going well for Germany. Surely, the Jews of Hungary thought, it made more sense to export people to work camps as the Nazis had claimed than to death camps. Surely the reports of mass executions were greatly exaggerated. Surely logic would prevail, even in a world gone mad, and logic seemed to dictate that if one obeyed German orders, one would survive albeit under great duress. Thus was lost a city, a country, an entire way of life.

All too often, "Holocaust books" make for depressing reading, dwelling as many of them do on atrocities and on the sheer number of individuals who were lost. *A Sun and a Shield*, however, does otherwise. The events narrated in this book depict every emotion, great sadness to be sure, but also great joy and delight. Devora Glicksman depicts, in her portrait of the Paneth family, lives that were filled with beauty and meaning — individuals whose faith in the *Ribbono shel Olam* kept them strong despite adversity, and enabled them not only to survive but to triumph.

This book has the power to motivate the reader to emulate the bravery of the Paneth family. The reader is certain to return to this book a second and third time, not only to review the history that is presented, but also to drink deeply from its wells of inspiration. ■

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MISPLACED CARS — A MATTER OF  
 PIKUACH NEFESH

To the Editor:

As a resident of an area where parking is at a premium, I appreciated Eliyahu Mayer's thoughts ("What Counts During *Sefirah*," May '96). Ours is a community which justifiably prides itself on its *chesed* and *tzeddaka*. How unfortunate it is that we sometimes lose sight of the need for consideration for others in our everyday lives. I am writing this letter to treat an issue not dealt with in Mr. Mayer's essay.

I am a Hatzalah volunteer, and my car is clearly marked as an emergency vehicle. Despite this, people often illegally block my car—whether in my driveway, on the street, or in a parking lot. I have had several instances in the past weeks where my ability to respond to emergencies was hampered by such thoughtlessness. The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 328:2) tells us that delaying the treatment of a sick person in a possibly life-threatening situation is tantamount to murder, even if the delay was in order to clarify Sabbath laws that pertain to the patient's treatment. Is the convenience of close parking *really that important?*

Moreover, how often do drivers not yield to emergency vehicles? How often

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do drivers at the wheel of their double-parked cars just sit staidly as we try to fit a car or ambulance past them? Whatever justification these people use to assuage their conscience, the fact is that response time is often critical—and while most people do pull over as quickly and as best they can, others try to race us to the corner or through the intersection.

It isn't only the drivers. Whenever pedestrians try to "beat the clock" when they see emergency vehicles coming, or women forget that their carriages extend several feet into the street, or children are not cautioned to keep their heads and hands in the car despite the approaching siren, additional lives are at risk.

A point to ponder for those at an emergency scene is "*Ve'ahavta ... Love your neighbor as yourself.*" If I were a patient, I would certainly be happier if neighbors and friends would stay away as I were being carried into the ambulance. Wouldn't you? Don't our friends and neighbors deserve the same basic courtesy? If you can help the patient or the family, do so without making an

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issue of it. In regard to the family, you might consider waiting for the patient to leave the hospital, or asking a Hatzalah member if the family needs assistance. Otherwise just stay away.



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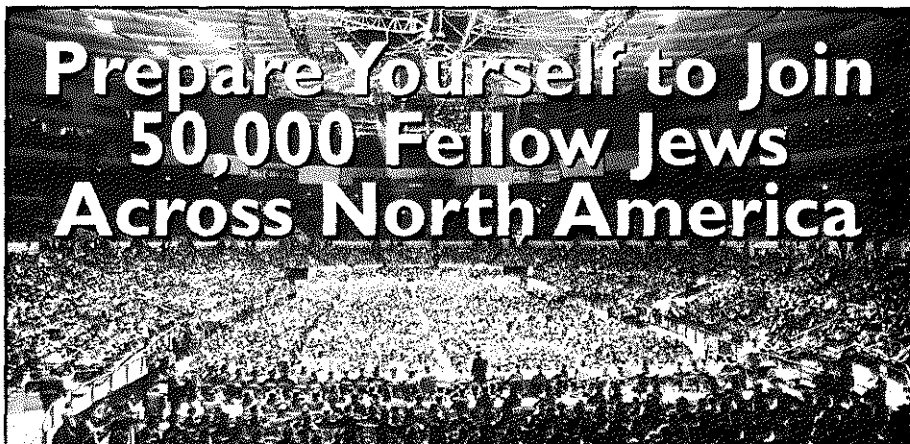
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stantly tries to do their best, and then some? But we are often so caught up in our own lives that we forget how we impact on others.

Giving thought to how we can be sensitive to others—and how our actions affect others—can go a very long way.

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כתיבה וחתימה טובה

לאבי מורי ר' יהודה שוחט שליט"א ולאמי מודתי רעכיל שוחט עמו"ש מאת משה ליב וטשאורנא שוחט

L'Shana Tovah to all

**Peter Benefeld**

לשנה טובה לכלל ישראל

מרא פוגרט

**The Shmuel Oelbaums**

wish friends and relatives

שנה טובה ומתוקה

לשנה טובה תכתבו ותחתמו

To our relatives and friends

**Rabbi & Mrs. Labish Becker and Family**

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to our family and  
to all of Klal Yisroel

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כתיבה וחתימה טובה

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To all our relatives and friends

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To our dear family and friends  
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with good health and happiness.

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and family**

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Milwaukee and Israel

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לאמי היקדה ובעלה הי"ו, לכל אנ"ש,  
לכל קרובינו וידידינו באשר הם שם  
ברכת כתיבה וחתימה טובה ושנה מאושרת  
אלימלך ניימאן ומשפחתו

לשנה טובה תכתבו ותחתמו  
שנת גאולה וישועה  
הצלחה, וכל טוב

**Mr. & Mrs. Abish Brodt  
and family**

To Rabbi Hillel Mandel  
Best wishes for a good &  
sweet New Year for you and  
all of Klal Yisroel

With deep appreciation,  
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Happy, Healthy, and  
Prosperous New Year

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and Family**

L'Shana Tova and Shalom  
for Klal Yisroel

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to

Rabbi Moshe Sherer  
and his distinguished staff  
to friends of Agudath Israel  
and to all of Klal Yisroel

**Mr. & Mrs. Yaakov Rieder  
and family**

לשנה טובה תכתבו ותחתמו

to all relatives and friends

**Dr. & Mrs. Sheldon Zinn**

Phoenix, Arizona

L'Shana Tova  
to all our people

**Sara & Miriam Perez**

כתיבה וחתימה טובה

To all our relatives and friends

**Moishe & Feige Friederwitzer of Staten Island**

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Menachem Otniel, & Menucha Sarah Fendel**

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ירושלים עיר הקודש

L'shana Tova  
to all

**Mrs. David Lenovitz & Moshe**

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to all our relatives and friends

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לשנה הבאה בירושלים הבנויה

Wishing all of Klal Yisroel a  
happy and healthy New Year

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We wish all our friends, relatives,  
and Jews everywhere

כתיבה וחתימה טובה

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We extend to all of Klal Yisroel  
our sincerest wishes for a  
כתיבה וחתימה טובה

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לשנה טובה תכתבו ותחתמו

**Mr. & Mrs.  
Isaac Kirzner**

Best wishes to all my friends,  
relatives and Klal Israel for  
a Happy, Healthy and  
Prosperous New Year.

**Dorothy Liebman**

May the blessings of good health,  
peace, and happiness fill your home  
at this new year and always.

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 a year of peace and  
 good health  
**Mrs. Belle Young**  
**& Family**

ב"ה  
 כתיבה וחתימה טובה  
 to our family and friends  
 (גאונץ כלל ישראל)  
**Feivel & Helen Muller**

לשנה טובה  
**Tracy & Larry**  
**Loigman**  
**Joshua & Daniel**

**Rabbi Dr. & Mrs. Yosef**  
**Rosenshein & Family**  
 wish all of Israel  
 L'shana Tova

לשנה טובה  
 to our dear father  
**"Totty" (Zev) Freundlich**  
 Love, your clan

L'shana Tova from  
**Mr. & Mrs. Gil**  
**Wiedermann**  
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Best Wishes for a  
 שנה טובה  
**David & Jordana**  
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לשנה טובה  
**Rabbi H. M. Felder**  
**& Family**

Mazal Tov to Am Yisroel  
 on Jerusalem's 3,000th  
 Anniversary  
**Henry Kreisel**

לשנה טובה  
**Michael and Alison**  
**Sage**

May you all be written and  
 sealed for a good year.  
**The Weinbergs**  
**of Dayton, Ohio**

לשנה טובה  
**Mr. and Mrs.**  
**Norman Parnass**  
**and Family**

Shana Tova!  
**Avi & Devorah**  
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שנת שלום עם הבנה הדדית  
**Rabbi Shmuel**  
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**Salel Family**

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**Hirth and Family**  
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 כתיבה וחתימה טובה

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כתיבה וחתימה טובה למורנו הרב אלימלך בלוטה שליט"א  
 מגיד שיעור דף היומי לחברים מקשיבים בבנין אגודת ישראל  
 המרכזית באמריקה. תהא השנה הזאת שנת גאולה וישועה,  
 שנת הרמות קרן התורה לו ולכל העוזרים לו ומשתתפים  
 בשיעור ולכל מרביצי וחובבי תורה. ונוכה כלנו לסיים מחזור  
 העשידי הזו של לימוד דף היומי בשנה זו בירושלים עיר  
 הקודש יחד עם משיח צדקנו.

אחד מן החבורה

Jan

לכל ידידינו בכל אתר ואתר  
 כתיבה וחתימה טובה  
 לאלתר לחיים בתוך ספרן של צדיקים  
 מאחלים

דוב בעריש זאלטי  
 ורעיתו ומשפחתו

משה זאלטי  
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 Shana Tova to

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מאת אברהם קנריק  
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"L'Shana Tova"

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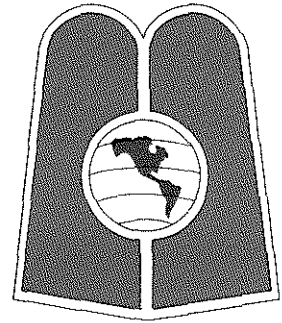
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 Steve & Arlene Greenberg

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 בכל מקומות שהם

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