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FALLOUT FROM THE COMMISSION’S REPORT

If someone thought that appointing a commission to clarify the issue of the Sabbath traffic on Bar-Ilan Street would contribute to a relief of tension and a mitigation of dissent, he underestimated the Israeli passion for controversy. The commission produced no more than an additional document to argue about. A proposal for reasonable compromise has certainly not emerged from the commission’s findings.

At best, the Tzameret Commission report brought the conflict back to its previous impasse: the proposal to stop vehicular traffic in the street at prayer hours. But a comment made by the chairman of the commission when it had completed its work “ruined the pudding,” creating another bitter dispute—no less acrimonious than the contents of the report itself. His remark? That in a matter of a few years, five-eighths of the residents of Jerusalem will be non-Zionists: Chareidim (devout Jews) and Arabs.

I do not know the criteria by which one determines who is a Zionist and who is not. Is a person who lives in Zion and raises children and grandchildren there less Zionist than a Jew who lives in the Diaspora, loves Zion from afar while paying the concept lip service, yet doesn’t even think of making Zion his permanent residence? What do the Chareidim and the Arabs think of being linked together to share the negative category of non-Zionists? Would one even entertain the notion of classifying human beings by the criteria of whether they are non-vegetarians, or according to their identification as non-socialists?

For the State of Israel to remain a Jewish state, its Jewish majority must be preserved. But the attempt to examine the political orientation of this majority and to issue a “certificate of kashrus” only to those whose Zionism is beyond the shadow of a doubt, entails an invasion of privacy and freedom one would associate with a totalitarian state, not with a country where rights are not limited only to those who subscribe to politically correct views.

THE DIFFERENCES AMONG THE VARIOUS “NON-ZIONISTS”

Dr. Tzameret’s comment encouraged those who reject religion and its practitioners to plan intelligently on how to limit the increase in Jerusalem’s Chareidi population (of course, no one resents the increase of the Arabs). And raises children and grandchildren there less Zionist than a Jew who lives in the Diaspora, loves Zion from afar while paying the concept lip service, yet doesn’t even think of making Zion his permanent residence? What do the Chareidim and the Arabs think of being linked together to share the negative category of non-Zionists? Would one even entertain the notion of classifying human beings by the criteria of whether they are non-vegetarians, or according to their identification as non-socialists?

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Dr. Tzameret’s comment encouraged those who reject religion and its practitioners to plan intelligently on how to limit the increase in Jerusalem’s Chareidi population (of course, no one resents the increase of the Arabs): Perhaps the answer lies in denying them housing, or withholding from them ways to earn a living... or to thwart their flourishing in other ways, so that they will look for alternative housing outside of Jerusalem.

Those who lump the Chareidim and
The Arabs under one negative rubric betray a lack of love for both these communities. Moreover, they reveal something defective in their Ahavas Yisroel—love of fellow Jews, especially in that instinctive sense of solidarity and mutual care, which is the most beautiful expression of Ahavas Yisroel.

An Arab is not a Zionist because Eretz Yisroel for him is only one of many countries that the Islam warriors conquered in their first campaign against “the infidels.” He was not exiled from this country two thousand years ago, as we were, and he has no need to return and rebuild his national existence in it.

By contrast, a Chareidi is not a Zionist because a Zionist, in his eyes, has strayed from the proper Jewish path; also, a Zionist, among other things, does not count non-Zionists among his brothers with whom he is inextricably linked in a covenant of love and a bond of mutual responsibility. The Chareidim and the Arabs? They share nothing in common, and there are a thousand things that divide them. You don’t count apples and pears together, nor can you bunch Jews and Arabs together in one bundle.

CHAREIDIM AND ARABS: A MODEL OF COEXISTENCE FOR CHILONIIM

There are a number of places where devout Jews and tradition-keeping Arabs developed patterns of co-existence and tolerance, which secular Jews might do well to learn from. After all, the issue is one of developing mutual understanding between two elements that are completely alien to each other. One who can hear the Muazzin’s voice as it calls Arabs to prayer and not be bothered by it, will soon discover that his neighbors are ready to hear the shofar’s sound without protesting. He who is prepared to dwell with an Arab group and develop a neighborly relationship with them, will undoubtedly learn how to live in peace with a Jewish neighbor who is non-observant.

Too many people among us are convinced that Jerusalem had originally been a secular city, until the religious came and took control of it, neighborhood after neighborhood and street after street, and forced the secular residents to a rearguard battle and retreat. The possibility that perhaps the process had been in the reverse, and that Jerusalem had been a city of faith and religion, seems so absurd to the Chiloniim—the secularists—that they categorically reject it out of hand. A person does not organize convoys of protesting vehicles on the Sabbath in a Chareidi neighborhood unless he is convinced that it is a neighborhood from which he had been forcibly evicted.

A HISTORY OF DIVERSITY

To comprehend the essence of the battle over the character of Jerusalem, we have to understand that both sides believe that they are defending themselves from being dispossessed, and both want to preserve what each perceives as a pre-existing condition.

They are both in error. What had always existed was the exact opposite—a state of diversity, a mix of lifestyles, and a variety of political and religious outlooks. It is hard to decide which of the two sides is more severely affected with the intolerance syndrome. They will never reach a compromise if they will not come to understand that the honor and the right to be a Jew does not expire.

Chareidim feel obligated to rebuke the transgressors, but they must—and can—understand that rebuke has its limits, and coercion lies beyond those limits.

The Chiloniim, on the other hand, must understand that it was not secularism that preserved the Jewish nation throughout its exile, and that a Rabbi deserves at least as much respect as a Christian or Moslem clergyman, and perhaps even a little more. When both sides will learn to conduct themselves with restraint when encountering brothers who maintain different lifestyles, then Jerusalem will finally be a city of peace with neighborly relationships between Jews and non-Jews, and especially between Chareidim and Chiloniim.

Isn’t it odd—even disturbing—that Jews who are totally convinced that the dispute between Jews and Arabs must be settled by means of compromise, even if it entails giving away land and surrendering rights, are at the same time of the opinion that disagreements between Chareidim and Chiloniim require surgically precise decisions that can be reached by maintaining a non-compromising stance?

If these reasonable negotiators are ready to bypass Ramallah and Jennin for the sake of peace, why aren’t they able to bypass Bar-Ilan Street for the sake of peace?

Where was this insane doctrine born, one that maintains that with Arabs, with whom we maintain a historic ledger written in blood, recording generations of conflict, compromise is acceptable; but with Jews, with whom there are generations of fraternal ties, we cannot make peace on the basis of concession and compromise?

Abridged and translated from Maariv, by Rabbi Moshe Rosenblum.
The truth be told, I was uncertain as to whether I should write this article. The Jewish Observer had forwarded to me numerous letters responding to an article that I had written entitled “Time for Tikkun” that appeared on these pages a year ago. The article appealed for firm takanos (rabbinical ordinances) to deal with all aspects of simchos (public celebrations of private milestones). The article was taken from a speech that I was privileged to deliver at last year’s National Convention of Agudath Israel.

Unlike the standard appeal for restraint, I attempted to place the problem of the lifestyle of our community in broader perspective. I noted the high incidence of tension-related physical and psychological afflictions that had become prevalent in our community. There was an attempt to relate the need for restraint to the phenomenon of large families, limited incomes and impossible demands made by the cost of chinuch. The article discussed the time drain of being constantly on the go from one affair to another, with diminished time for self-development in Torah and attention to one’s spouse and children. And there was discussion of the views of certain educators in our communities who report declining academic performance of students over the past several years.

It is fair to characterize the reaction to my address and the subsequent article as extraordinary. It was clear that the article had struck a responsive chord with many who seemed to identify with the description of our tension-filled harried lives and the impossible financial pressures that rob us of peace of mind and any sense of tranquility.

A sampling from the letters reinforces the observations set forth above. (See sidebars for letters from Abraham Dicker, Rabbi Binyomin Field, and a correspondent who requested that his name be withheld.)

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**Reflections: One Year Later**

“**The Time For Tikkun Has Come. Are We Ready?**”

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**Downsizing Our Lifestyles—Too Hard for the Average Moish**

To the Editor:

There is no question that Dr. Twerski’s plea for downsizing the lavishness of our simchos (Feb ’96) is right on the mark. But, let’s face it, the average Joe (or Moish) is not strong enough to withstand the pressure of the “keep up with the Jones” (Cohens) syndrome.

The crux of the problem actually suggests a solution: If an average baal habayis refuses to order “french service,” or omits sable, etc., at a bris, he is labeled a “cheapskate.” However, if distinguished leaders of our community would agree to curtail extravagant expenditures at their own simchos and would insist that their fellow baalei simcha adhere to reasonable takanos, then the average person could follow suit without embarrassment.

**Abraham Dicker**
Brooklyn, NY

**Time for Controls—Weddings Are Only a Start**

To the Editor:

We suffer from pizur hanefesh (massive distraction) today more than ever before. There is not only a perceptible decline in academic performance with some, but the myriad social ills that afflict the general community are slowly seeping into our own circles—and at younger ages. Added to the stresses of the social calendar are the necessary commitments to the various mosdos.
Why it is Difficult to Respond

The letters and oral comments share in common a profound sense of helplessness and deep-seated frustration that after years of agonizing about the problem, little has been done to ameliorate it.

And that gets me to why I was reluctant to write this article. Frankly, I have little more to say. I have no rejoinder to those whose pain I feel. No turn of a phrase. No witty quip can right their sense of frustration. They are, in my opinion, altogether right. The sad reality is that this problem of lifestyle and takanos is simply not uppermost on the priority list of the community leadership.

Shortly after last year’s Convention, several meetings were held. It quickly became evident that not all constituencies could be pleased. Creating sensible takanos is very difficult. As they say, the devil is in the details. And the their daughters endure years of stress over the fact that they are shut out of a large part of the shidduch market due to their low financial status.

I know a fellow who earns just enough to support his family and learns a couple of hours a night. His daughters are in the young teens. Someone suggested that he quit his learning seder in order to take on a night job so that he will have what to offer when his daughters reach shidduch age. He brought this issue before a renowned talmud chacham (to whom money was never an issue when he married off his children). This scholar was adamantly in saying that the man should not sacrifice his learning for such reasons—and he lamented the fact that the shidduch situation in our community should necessitate asking such a question.

As an aside: Some twenty years ago, the son of a well-known rav became engaged. The boy was considered a “real catch,” and after the engagement, someone asked what the amount of the promised nodin (dowry) was. “Oh, one hundred thousand dollars,” came the reply. “You see,” the rav continued, “my future daughter-in-law is so special, her material needs are so minimal, that over the course of time she will surely save my son a hundred thousand dollars!”

Time has proven him right. His son remained in kollel for many years and they have raised a beautiful family.

It seems to me that this issue of shidduchim is a crisis of sorts that should be addressed.

NAME WITHHELD BY REQUEST

(THE NEED FOR TAKANOS: MORE THAN MONEY AT STAKE)

To the Editor:

I am in perfect agreement with Dr. Twerski’s proposals. However, please note the following:

Dr. Twerski focuses on the financial drain of the t’niyim-vort- wedding-shema berachos extravaganzas, and adds that the costs of a wedding present and babysitter are expenses many guests would be happy to forgo.

There is another issue to consider: TIME. There is nothing more precious than time. Rabbi Aharon Kotler (in Mishnas Reb Aharon) was highly critical of those who use a sefer in a beis midrash without returning it to its proper place; such practices steal the time of those who must later search for the sefer when they need it. It seems to me, and I know that others agree, that the new Orthodox institution of the gala "vort" is one colossal waste of the precious time of scores of people. Why is it necessary to say "Mazel tov" in person, in a formal suit and tie? What is wrong with a simple phone call? In a generation that is so in need of zechuyos (merit), what right do we have to take fathers away from learning with their sons, mothers from their mothering, men from their sedarim (set times for Torah study), and women from their mitzva projects, so that they can wish us Mazel tov?

It seems to me that many mechutanim whose vorts I have attended are in complete agreement with this. But they “do it for the kids.” Perhaps the time has come for every yeshiva and Bais Yaakov to institute a pre-engagement class to instruct their students concerning the “wrongs” and “rights,” from dating to engagement to wedding to marriage.

Dr. Twerski focused on the emotional stress brought about by unnecessary simcha expenditures. A major area of stress that his article did not address is getting to the point of making a simcha. Too many parents and
details are truly terribly difficult. But in the meantime, the pain and the angst of b'nei Torah is greater yet.

One final letter needs to be cited. The writer is a highly respected member of our community, Nosson Munk:

To the Editor:

After reading Prof. Twerski’s article, I decided to get involved, and find out what it would take to get moving toward the desperately needed tikanos on downsizing simchos in general, and weddings in particular. I spoke to many well-known and respected people, Roshei Yeshiva, Rabbanim, wealthy ba’alei battim, and mechasheim (educators) who over the last twenty years have been working on getting a takanah issued.

Dr. Twerski’s conclusion is that our gedolim would like to enact tikanos, but are keeping silent because “they sense in us a cynicism incompatible with the kind of emunah chachamin necessary for a true allegiance to Torah.”

Furthermore, even if some frum, wealthy individuals do agree on a downsizing formula, it will be insufficient for getting a takanah enacted. A critical mass must demonstrate a readiness to respond before tikanos will be enacted.

The bottom line, then, is that we are therefore doomed to remain without tikanos and must suffer the consequences. This is not cynicism, but the very sad and true reality.

Hashem Ya’azor!

Nosson Munk
Brooklyn, NY

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Purpose in Writing

I
do not fully agree with Reb Nosson. True, we are so beleaguered with problems of survival that this issue has not gotten to the top of the list. But discussing the problem and examining its causes promotes public awareness, and keeps the subject on the agenda, bringing closer the day when ultimately \textit{takanos} will be enacted.

To be more specific: Addressing the issue of overspending and the need for downsizing, in speech as well as in print forums, is bound to make a difference—albeit incrementally—in how we think and how we act. Over a period of time, the overspender is bound to feel some discomfort, and the belt-tightener will bask in a degree of self-righteousness instead of embarrassment.

Addressing the issue of overspending and the need for downsizing, in speech as well as in print forums, is bound to make a difference—albeit incrementally—in how we think and how we act. Over a period of time, the overspender is bound to feel some discomfort, and the belt-tightener will bask in a degree of self-righteousness instead of embarrassment.

All—everyone of these members of \textit{Klal Yisroel}—find themselves echoing the pleas of \textit{Yitzchok Avinu} when his father placed him on the \textit{mizbe'ach} (altar), in preparation to offer him as a sacrifice. According to the \textit{Midrash}, Yitzchok cried out, “Bind my hands and my feet, father, lest I swing out and render myself unsuit-
able for a \textit{Korban}!”

We too plead to our rabbinical leaders:

“Bind our hands, that we do not spend foolishly! Bind our feet lest we go in ridiculous ways, and make our \textit{simchos} unsuitable in your eyes!”

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Music has always been an important part of the Jewish spiritual and cultural heritage. In the words of the Baal Hatanya, it is “the pen of the soul,” which can communicate feelings that are beyond words.1 In the time of the Nevi'im, music was used to induce the prophetic state. According to the Rambam: “The prophets did not experience revelations whenever they so desired. Rather, they attuned their minds [by] sitting in a joyous and positive frame of mind and meditating. For the spirit of prophecy cannot be attained through sadness and indolence, but through joy. Therefore, the disciples of the prophets would avail themselves of the harp, drum, flute and lyre while seeking the spirit of prophecy.”2

Probably the foremost musician-prophet was David Hamelech, known as “the sweet singer of Israel” for having composed the prophetically-inspired Sefer Tehillim.3 The revelations of the Messianic era, too, are bound up with music, as we sing in Shir HaMa’alos before reciting the Birchas Hamazon (Grace After Meals), “Then our mouths will be filled with gladness and our tongues with joyous song.”4

Historically, the focal point of Jewish music was the Beis Hamikdash in Jerusalem. There, in the spiritual heart of the Jewish nation, the Levi'im composed and performed music, which not only added to the atmosphere of sanctity but served as a vehicle for dveykus (cleaving to G-d).6 Thus, it is no coincidence that the synagogue—the mikdash me’at (miniature sanctuary)—has been the focal point of Jewish music throughout our galus until the present day.

Given the close kinship of music and spirituality, one would expect the music heard in today’s shuls and yeshivos to be similar to that heard at our simchos. Oddly enough, they have hardly anything in common. Take, for example, the intensely Jewish neighborhoods of Flatbush and Boro Park. Imagine going to Modzitz or Chaim Berlin, Stolin or Erunas Yisroel on any Shabbos when those present are singing at the tisch or joining hands for a lively rikkud. Then imagine visiting the nearest wedding hall, while the harried waiters are snatching away the barely-touched chicken dinners. At the former, you would hear niggunim full of yearning for the Ribbono Shel Olam. At the latter, you would hear brash, Las Vegas show tunes grafted onto kosher-style lyrics, while the oblivious guests crowd the dance-floor. Why?

THE JEWISH MUSICIAN: STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND

It has been said that music is the “universal language.” As such, it can reach beyond the borders that divide po-

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2. Misnayeh Torah, Hilkhot Yosdei HaTorah 7, 4; also note I Divrei HaYomim 25, 1; Shmuel I 10,5; Rashi, Radak, Metzudas Tzion, et al, on Shmuel II (23,1).
4. Also note Rashi on Shemos (15, 1), citing Sanhedrin91b; Tikkunei Zohar, Tikkan 21, 51b; Likkutei Moharan I:237.
5. Tehillim (126, 2).
regarded with a bit of suspicion. They may have been admired as artists; but, justifiably or not, they had a certain stigma to overcome.

Today's Orthodox society has its own Jewish Music Scene. One popular Jewish magazine features a "Top Ten" of the latest cassettes. Almost every Jewish bookstore sells these tapes—some of them representing the niggunim of various Chassidic groups. Buildings and utility poles in Boro Park and Flatbush are plastered with posters of Orthodox Jewish musical celebrities who perform in concerts with separate seating and kosher refreshments. Probably without exception, these singers are ehrliche Yidden—sincere Jews who pray three times a day and send their children to yeshivos. However, the old negative attitude toward musicians still lingers on. Is this the relic of an out-dated prejudice, or a legitimate response to a problematic aspect of Jewish life?

Today's Orthodox society has its own Jewish Music Scene. For hundreds of years, Jewish musicians performed at both Jewish and non-Jewish events, together with non-Jewish musicians. Sometimes, this prompted good will between people of differing beliefs. However, such encounters often had a deleterious effect on the observance of many Jewish musicians. In modern times, as the Haskalah ("Enlightenment") made deeper inroads into traditional Jewish communities, the new Jewish secularism co-opted the old melodies for the Yiddish Theater and the concert hall. Therefore, in pre-War Eastern Europe, klezmorim were sometimes for better or worse. For hundreds of years, Jewish musicians performed at both Jewish and non-Jewish events, together with non-Jewish musicians. Sometimes, this prompted good will between people of differing beliefs. However, such encounters often had a deleterious effect on the observance of many Jewish musicians. In modern times, as the Haskalah ("Enlightenment") made deeper inroads into traditional Jewish communities, the new Jewish secularism co-opted the old melodies for the Yiddish Theater and the concert hall. Therefore, in pre-War Eastern Europe, klezmorim were regarded with a bit of suspicion. They may have been admired as artists; but, justifiably or not, they had a certain stigma to overcome.

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Perhaps it's a little of both. The contemporary Orthodox Jewish musician is probably as ehrlich as any other professional. The problem that resides with today's Jewish music is the emotional character of the melodies and arrangements in vogue. Somehow, the essen-
The Jewish pop music scene

Once upon a time—and it wasn't a long time ago—several ambitious Orthodox Jewish entrepreneurs and band-leaders, star-struck by the glitz of American show biz, set out to create its Jewish equivalent. I don't think these people pursued their goal with malice aforethought; turned off by the light classical arrangements then in vogue, they probably thought they were doing Jewish music a favor. But, with certain naive enthusiasm, they began to rearrange the old niggunim as if they were meant to be sung by secular pop stars, and, in so doing, subverted both the esthetic and emotional intent of the compositions. The melodies were more or less the same—but the stylistically foreign chords and rhythms transformed the songs entirely. Tragically, these quasi-niggunim, played at deafening volumes, now afflict participants at virtually every simcha in and out of New York.

Another Frankenstein's monster that stalks the chassana halls is the phenomenon of popular rock-and-roll tunes, sutured together with Jewish lyrics, and promoted with a vengeance. This was the next glowing achievement of the Jewish Music Scene's kingpins. But a lot of kids (and a lot of parents) who don't know any better listen to them.

Our troubles don't stop here. Intoxicated by their rock-and-rollish musical brew, the entrepreneurs have even attempted to promote Orthodox Jewish celebrities at non-Jewish venues. The logic is that, since their esthetic has been largely derived from non-Jewish pop music, this vaguely ethnic hodge podge may appeal to the general audience, too. As far as I know, these attempts have been largely unsuccessful. However, on one occasion a prominent Chasidic singer was featured on a widely-publicized video accompanied by a bearded male chorus doing choreographed dance-steps like a "soul" group from Detroit. Clips of strutting, microphone-waving Orthodox Jewish pop stars have also appeared on television in New York and California. Such transparently derivative, tasteless performances are an embarrassment to the frum community and an affront to the beauty of the Jewish musical tradition.

A lesser-known aspect of the Orthodox music business is that many sidemen in both the wedding bands and studio groups are either not frum or not Jewish. Such players have no interest in Jewish music, nor do they have the faintest idea of what people feel (or wish to feel) at a Yiddishe simcha. Frum musicians have often witnessed the disdain of these players, both for the unhip
repertoire and their unhip audiences. To be fair, the physical stamina it takes to play a chaseneh can be daunting, even to a musician with the best of intentions. And the common disregard for whether the musicians are given a chance to eat (or even catch their breath) is not conducive to prompting good will. But, all excuses aside, the music of the Orthodox Jewish world is being significantly influenced by these people.

Typically, the non-frum or non-Jewish side-men at Orthodox weddings are out of work “club-date” musicians forced into the meat market of the big wedding bands. To avoid the grim alternative of a “day job,” they have to churn out hours of constant loud, repetitive music without respite. Therefore, to break up the boredom, these players adapt the melodies to suit their own tastes: jazz-fusion, swing or rock. The result sounds exciting, and the crowd seems to like it—or, at least, part of the crowd. Besides, the musicians find it fun to see religious ladies dance to disco tunes with lewd lyrics, thinking that it’s just “good, clean fun.” And what a joke for a hot saxophone player with hair down to his waist knows the difference.

S

ince the tzaddikim possessed pure hearts and souls, they knew that if a certain melody touched them, it, too, must be holy. The singers and producers who have created the current frum music scene may possess many fine qualities—but I don’t think they are on a lofty enough spiritual level to make this sensitive birur (act of extrication).

THE HEART OF MUSIC

Some readers may view this critique thus far with a question: why is the current Jewish pop music scene any less legitimate than any other form of music we have developed during our galus? Gerer niggunim often sound like Polish marches, Lubavicher niggunim have a Russian flavor, many klezmer tunes sound Roumanian or Bessarabian, Iraqi Jewish wedding songs are similar to Arab melodies, etc. The answer is that what makes music Jewish is not the formal style in which it is played. If such a unique Jewish style ever existed,
it was lost long ago. What makes a Jewish song is the emotion it conveys as a result of its kavana—its original intention. When, for example, certain motifs characteristic of Ukrainian music appear in a Tchernobler niggun, they are part of a larger musical statement which expresses the way a person who composed it felt on a particular occasion: joy at a child's wedding, yearning to recognize these melodies, the certain great Chassidische Rebbe knew what violence, ego, and coarse sensuality sound like. I think most of us know what this music is really about, if only we will admit it to ourselves.

\textit{L'Ma'aseh—An Agenda for Change}

Now that Jewish pop music has become mainstream, what are we supposed to do? A number of Chassidic communities have already diagnosed this musical malaise and responded by forbidding their youths to listen to offensive tapes. They have made various \textit{takanos} (rules of conduct) concerning their own \textit{chasenehs}—primarily for financial reasons—including the restriction of musical accompaniment to electronic “one-man bands.” The musicians who provide this service are usually respected members of the Chassidic world, familiar with the repertoire and empathetic with their listeners. Some are surprisingly skillful players, despite the fact that they are largely self-taught.

The “one-man band” solution undoubtedly has certain advantages. Realistically, however, I do not think this is a solution with much of a future—nor is it one I would readily embrace. A synthesizer can make a lot of interesting sounds and rhythms, and with the right amplifier, it can make them loud enough to make even the most jaded listener wince. But electronically-simulated sounds and rhythms do not equal a symphony—or an intimate, acoustic ensemble, either. Electronic music is often like laminated wood-paneling: a poor substitute for the real thing. As stated above, “Music is the pen of the soul.”

Where is the soul in a computerized rhythm section? Or, for that matter, in any of the pseudo-instruments produced by a synthesizer, however adept the player?

\textbf{IN PRACTICAL TERMS}

In practical terms, it is almost impossible to take a global position on the current Jewish music tapes and concerts; some are objectionable, some are not. (Despite my personal dislike for most of the Jewish pop music, I am not condemning everything on the market.) Certain things are a matter of taste—and there are reasons why we like what we like, but they are not always so easy to delineate. What really needs to be done is some soul-searching, especially by the trend-setters. If a new esthetic, rooted in tradition and truly expressive of the Jewish heart, is destined to flower, it will not find mediocre rock-and-roll the most fertile soil in which to put down its roots. The obvious place to look for inspiration is the Eastern European Jewish instrumental tradition, much of which has been preserved on record. This tradition developed hand-in-hand with the \textit{niggunim} we still sing today. But even American folk and acoustic music have more in common with our vocal tradition, at least at the emotional level, as several popular performers have demonstrated.

As for the wedding bands, the present situation must change. For starters, band-leaders should be told to avoid rock songs that masquerade as \textit{niggunim}, and turn down the volume. The more traditional groups should be hired, and the rest will eventually change their repertoire, as well. Again, the real issue here is not so much the specific style in which the music is played as it is the feelings that it expresses. If the arrangers, singers, and musicians will only learn to respect the emotional intent of the melodies they play, the wedding scene is bound to greatly improve.

In the meantime, while awaiting the New Wave of Jewish music, aficionados still have Vizhnitz, Bobov and Ger.

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The One-Minute Manager was a New York Times national bestseller with millions of copies sold. It purported to present a system whereby any manager in any business could vastly improve the performance of those he managed with a few simple, pointed techniques that on the average took no more than one minute to implement. The book became such a success that it produced spin-offs: The One-Minute Salesman, The One-Minute Father, The One-Minute Teacher, etc. All in all, there have been now over 10 million “One-Minute” books sold!

Only in America.

The truth is that, unlike fast food, instant lottery, and presidential promises, there really is substance to the “one-minute” approach. Based on the 20/80 rule in business, which states that 20 percent of a company’s salespeople produce 80 percent of its sales revenues, the operant dynamic is quality. Often taking even one minute just to think about what we are doing or what to tell another person produces more than the hours we spend doing a task or speaking to others without thinking. It sounds logical enough and many people have apparently benefited from these books. The question is: Is it a Jewish idea? More to the point: Is the title of this article misleading? In kiruv, is there really such a thing as a “one-minute” approach? Isn’t kiruv—bringing an estranged Jew “close” to Torah and mitzvos—a long, arduous process for the individual(s) doing the kiruv?

ONE-MINUTE KIRUV...AS IT WAS

As strange as it sounds, the “one-minute” approach can be a Jewish idea, one that applies to kiruv as well as parenting, education, and everything else we do. The source is a very famous Chazal (discussion by rabbis of the Talmud).

A non-Jew approached Shammai. "Convert me on the condition that you teach me the entire Torah while I stand on one foot," he said. Shammai pushed him away with the rod that was in his hand.

The gentile came before Hillel. "Convert me." Hillel said, "That which is hateful to you, do not do to others." That is the entire Torah. The rest is commentary. [Now] go and learn." (Shabbos 31a)

How long can a person stand on one foot? One minute? Two minutes? After a while, it gets uncomfortable. Shammai and Hillel, then, were debating the value of the one-minute approach. Shammai saw no advantage to it. If the gentile was not ready to undergo the hard work of turning himself into a Jew, there was no reason to lead him on. So he pushed him away. Hillel, on the other hand, drew him close. He felt he could accomplish something of far-reaching effects, while not underselling Torah, even in one-minute's time.

The same passage (Shabbos 31a) tells us the stories of two other potential converts approaching Shammai and Hillel. Taken all together, I believe that these three stories correspond to the teaching in Avos (4:28) that “Kina (jealousy), ta'ava (pleasure seeking), and kavod (egotism or ga'ava) drive a person from this world.” Analyzing each story will not only offer insight into how Hillel employed the one-minute technique to draw three types of typically estranged people “close” to the ways of Torah, but will also give us basic insight into human nature (others’ and our own).

The Ben Yehoyada points out that, in reality, Shammai and Hillel acted as a team. Together they fulfilled the exhortation to "push away with the left hand while drawing close with the right." Apparently, according to the Ben Yehoyada, had the gentile received only Hillel’s “drawing close with the right hand” approach, he would not have become a true Jew in the end. According to this, then, even Shammai was utilizing a one-minute approach. He was performing something similar to what the "One-Minute” books call a “one-minute reprimand.”

Yaakov Astor is a published author whose articles have appeared in these pages—most recently, “The Singles Crisis” (April ’96).
As strange as it sounds, the "one-minute" approach can be a Jewish idea, one that applies to kiruv as well as parenting, education, and everything else we do. The source is a very famous Chazal.

THE BAAL TA'AVA
THE PLEASURE SEEKER

To Hillel, the essence of life itself was "V'ahavta l'rayacha kamocha — Love your neighbor as yourself." He translated that love into the very practical and easy-to-do dictum: "That which is hateful to you, do not do to others." Just as you would not want to be shunned by another, so should you not shun others who seek you out, even if they have ulterior motives or are off-base in one way or another.

It does not take great analytic powers to determine how the gentile who wanted Hillel to teach him the entire Torah on one foot was off base. He was not exactly a "hinin" personality type—an Avraham Avinu saying: "Here I am"—ready and willing to answer G-d's call on a moment's notice, no matter what or how long the effort involved. He wanted it all done in less than a minute.

A sound-system technology hit the market not long ago that made everything before it seem obsolete. No need to strain yourself with that remote-control CD-changer any longer. Now all one has to do is tell the stereo what he wants. Say "Track five," and the CD switches to five; say "louder" and the volume increases; say "off" and the system turns off. Remote control is neanderthal. It requires too much work. Your finger may get strained flicking the buttons as you lean back in your padded lounge chair.

Only in America

From the condition the gentile made (to hear everything while standing on one foot), we can discern that he was the typically lazy person. Laziness, generally, is a function of ta'ava, "desire" or pleasure seeking. The body's pleasure is to be slothful, to "take it easy." It does not want to work too hard. It does not want to hear a long shmuess or concentrate too hard. This gentile did not want to study or learn. He wanted to be fed facts, preferably in an amusing way, in the shortest amount of time possible.

OK, Hillel said. I will give you what you want, an answer to life, the universe, and everything while standing on one foot: Love (which, behavioristically speaking, translates into not doing hateful things to others) is the secret behind everything in the Torah. That...
was a concept the gentile could relate to. Hillel was able to show him the proverbial forest amidst the trees.

That is an important point to understand. Often a lazy person is lazy because he has no real meaning in his life; he has no goal other than fulfilling his own drive for pleasure. If you have no goal, then everything you do is a burden. A donkey does not understand what it does, either. So, too, an outsider looking at the avoda, the Divine service of a Jew, without knowing why or what for sees Judaism as nothing but drudgery. However, show him the larger picture—a meaning, a goal, a purpose—and the same drudgery becomes pleasure.

The gentile could relate to loving your neighbor as yourself. Indeed, once convinced that this was the simple, basic truth of Torah life, Hillel was able to tell him: “[Now] go and learn.” He was able to convince him to undertake the very thing he did not want to do: the hard work of learning!

A pleasure seeker (baal t’avah) only understands the pleasure of the moment. If you can broaden his perspective and show him the pleasure of eternity, then he is more likely to work to overcome his nature. He is more likely to make that effort, and make it willingly.

KAVOD/FEELING SUPERIOR

In another case mentioned in the same passage, a gentile approached Shammai and wanted him to teach him only the Written Torah because, he admitted, he believed only in it, not the Oral Torah. This gentile is the typical egocentric person. As the Vilna Gaon writes, kavod is in essence the same as ga’ava,3 egocentricity: the need to dom-

3See Ewen Shilema 2:1 and the note above.

iner or feel haughty. (The desire for honor or kavod is rooted in the need to feel superior.) This egocentric person was his own man. Nobody was going to tell him how to read a book, or how to interpret the Torah.

Shammai abruptly brushed him away. When the gentile came before Hillel, however, the sage offered to teach him the first few letters in the Alef-Beis, a normal way for a gentile interested in becoming a Jew to begin. After the lesson was over Hillel told him to absorb what he had learned and to come back for another lesson the next day. The next day arrived, the gentile returned, and Hillel taught him the same letters, but with different names and sounds.

“Are you playing games with me?” the gentile said.

“No,” Hillel responded. “But if you need a teacher of consistency and reliability for something as elementary as

A TRAGEDY OF EPIC PROPORTIONS

A local frum family is devastated by the death of their father and husband.

The story is tragic beyond comprehension. A young mother of eight, herself sick with leukemia and trying valiantly to overcome the disease, is left an orphan by the sudden passing of her 43 year old husband from a massive heart attack.

THROUGH THEIR TEARS, THE אמאים אלמנה ARE ASKING MANY QUESTIONS, AND WE MUST PROVIDE THE ANSWERS:

- How will they pay their medical and insurance needs?
- Who will cover tuition, living expenses, old debts, and future simchos?
- An eight-year old girl asks, “Who will teach me to say the brachos on Chanukah?
- A 12-year-old boy wonders: “Who will say הホーム at my Bar Mitzvah?”

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The Jewish Observer, January 1997
the Alef-Beis, then how can you expect to understand the entire Torah without such a teacher?”

In less than one minute, Hillel taught him perhaps the first lesson of Torah Judaism: the absolute necessity of Mesora, of an oral tradition.

Yet, the information Hillel conveyed was only part of the work. At least as vital was the way he conveyed it. Hillel sensed the man’s thirst for ego fulfillment. Had he argued with him and conveyed even the most flawless proofs supporting the necessity for Mesora, he probably would have failed. He would never have gotten around the man’s ego. It might have sounded nice and made a good book, but it would not have done the job. Hillel taught the man in such a way that he was able to conclude on his own that one needed to depend on others even for the understanding of the Mesora.

Interestingly, unlike with the other two, Hillel converted this gentile before even seemingly addressing his character flaw. He intuited that this gentile’s path to becoming truly Torah observant was not the same as the previous two. Perhaps we can explain the reason by suggesting that jealousy at its root is the lack of a sense of self-worth. It is selflessness not based on humility, which is the recognition of the greatness of Hashem. It is rather a selflessness born from weakness, from the inability to recognize one’s intrinsic worth. Hillel himself was famous for saying, “If I will not be me (If there is no essential ‘ani’ to me), who will be me?” A person who feels he has no intrinsic worth (who has no “ani”) will probably seek relativistic worth, i.e., he will feel good about himself only when he compares himself to others who are equal to or less than him. And that is exactly what jealousy is: comparing oneself to another.

And that is perhaps why Hillel converted him on the spot. The root of this non-Jew’s character flaw was that he envied King David’s achievements.

Jealousy, then, is the opposite of ga’ava. Ga’ava is an inflated or misplaced sense of self while jealousy is a missing sense of self. The cure for ga’ava is seeing that there is more to the world than you. The cure for kina is recognizing that bishirvill ni’iru ha’olam, “For my sake the universe was created.”

KINA/ENVY

The third case involved a non-Jew who wanted to convert on the condition of being made the Kohein Gadol. However, the only thing he knew then about the Kohein Gadol was that he wore majestic clothes, the bigdei kehuna. We see, therefore, that he did not want the position in order to lord over others (as the baal ga’ava ladden with desires for kaved would). He merely desired nice clothes; indeed, the nicest clothes. If he could wear such clothes, he would never be envious of anyone—they would be envious of him. Thus, he was essentially driven by kina, jealousy, the need to possess the best of what others have . . . merely because others possess it; to keep up with the Joneses (or the Weisbergs), if you will.

Naturally, when this potential convert, obviously motivated by base desires, approached Shammai, the sage pushed him away with his stick again. Hillel, however, converted the gentile then and there. (Below we will attempt to explain why.) Later, Hillel guided the convert to the verse that said that a “stranger” could never become even a simple Kohein. Curious to know who the word “stranger” included, Hillel told the gentile that it even applied to King David. On his own, the convert then drew the conclusion that if King David could not be Kohein Gadol, his dream to be a Kohein Gadol was impossible. He was not heartbroken, though, because if even one as great as King David could never become Kohein Gadol then he had nothing to feel envious about. He was in good company.

Thus, he painlessly converted him on the spot. The root of this non-Jew’s character flaw was that he could never become even a Kohein Gadol, included, Hillel told the convert of an oral tradition.
simply lacked self-worth. So Hillel gave it to him—he made him a Jew. Once he was a Jew, a member of the people chosen by Hashem to bring light to the world, he possessed the tool necessary to eventually overcome his lack of selfworth. He possessed intrinsic identity. He possessed a Jewish soul.

The bottom line is that Hillel once more showed that kiruv can be a one-minute affair. One minute, indeed, is sometimes all that is needed to change another’s life and ultimately bring that person closer to the ways of Torah.

ONE-MINUTE KIRUV... IN TODAY’S SCENE

Not long ago, I asked Rabbi Meir Shuster the secret of his success. As you probably know, Rabbi Shuster is that very quiet, unassuming man in the black suit, tie, and hat, who has successfully approached tens of thousands of Jews at the Kosel and all around Jerusalem, asking them if they would like a class to attend, or a place to stay, or a family to eat with on Shabbos. Rabbi Shuster told me what I already knew, what we already knew: The main thing is that one has to care about the other.

That was Hillel’s success. Time and again he tuned into the need of the person standing before him and used what can be called an “other-centered” approach. He did not discount the potential convert’s personality. He quickly surmised it and gave each of them a path to come to the truth on his own. Torah has an answer for everyone. However, not everyone is satisfied with the same answer. We have the responsibility to find out which answer will satisfy the need of the other and supply that answer in a way that is sensitive to that person’s needs. If you understand that, then you may be able to move mountains in minutes. If you do not, then you may never budge them an inch, no matter how long you try and do not, then you may never budge them an inch, no matter how long you try and

The applications of one-minute kiruv extend far beyond the bringing close of assimilated strangers, and refers to much more than the fundamentals taught in an outreach professional’s workshop. It is a powerful and useful tool for fulfilling nothing less than the “Great Principle of the Torah: Love your neighbor as yourself.” It reflects the essence of the Torah ideal of chessed, the empowering of another soul to exploit its greatest gift: bechira, choice.

And G-d knows we need more of it. A baal(as) teshuvah, even long after outwardly and even inwardly committing to Torah, has special needs more of us have to be sensitive to. And, of course, the always-observant need kiruv, too. A friend or acquaintance at work, observant or non-observant, whom you have been dealing with routinely may benefit from you changing your routine and taking a minute to think how you can fulfill their need, physical or spiritual, and then acting upon that thought.

Perhaps more than any others, your own children and students are in need of your undivided attention, and hopefully you can give them more than just the one-minute variety. On the other hand, a good minute or two of quality listening and caring usually goes a lot further than hours of merely occupying the same space together.

One-minute kiruv (I like better to think of it as one-minute v’ahavta I’rei’acha kamocha, “love your neighbor as yourself”) may be efficient, but it is not necessarily easy. It may only take a minute—but it takes a minute. It requires real time to turn your focus away from your daily preoccupations. It does not produce if you do not take that quality minute. But you will find that when you do take the short minute to really tune into others (sometimes that other can be yourself!), you improve the quality of life, theirs and yours, immeasurably. That one minute is a great investment. Why not take a minute right now and start thinking about where to invest it?
Clermont, Florida. Hardly a bastion of Torah, and even the few Reform Jews who lived in the greater environs didn’t bother to establish an edifice to enshrine their devotions.

None of this troubled Eric and Melanie Brenner. Their Judaism was officially terminated and formaldehyde-drenched with their confirmation ceremonies over three decades earlier. In sunny Clermont they were able to raise the ideal American family, be gainfully employed, and live a life free of any religious encumbrances.

In such an environment were Cliff and Dave Brenner raised.

Eric and Melanie never would have believed that one of their sons might one day become religious. If some clairvoyant or pundit had suggested such a notion, they probably would have responded by asking, “Which religion?”

There were neither the environmental factors, nor the educational inputs, nor the emotional motivators that would place Judaism on the multiple choice list. Yet, somehow, it made it.

Dave had finished his freshman year of college, and for an original “experience,” decided to be one of the countless thousands to bike around the world (and then write a book about it).

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Everything was on track until he got to Turkey. Such excursions, as a rule, followed an itinerary mapped by impulse and charted by whim. Fellow bikers conducted along the route impromptu symposia on where to go and what to avoid. Hey, the world was round, and eventually you get back to where you started. Especially if you had Dad’s credit card. It wasn’t as if Dave or his cronies had a schedule to keep, a clock to punch, or a deadline to meet.

Turkey was the crossroads. Ahead lay Asia; above the CIS; below Africa. Heading south virtually precluded ever catching the sites of Novokuznetsk, Krasnoyarsk, Lesobiirk, and other Siberian highlights, rumored to be a “must” in the winter. Continuing straight meant forgoing the deserts of Oman and Pakistan, an absolute requisite in the summer. Going north all but eliminated cycling through the peaceful countryside of Sudan and Rwanda. And without a little insurrection, war and starving refugees, the experience would lack that “write-home” quality these young adventurers so desperately craved.

What to do? Perhaps it was just the luck of the draw, the biker’s sense of direction, or G-d’s own irony at work,
but Dave decided to head south-by-southeast. For a foray through Israel and Jordan.

Israel was quite a change from Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey. The roads were actually lit, the telephones actually worked, and the bathrooms were often sanitary. Wherever he went there were tourists.

In Israel, however, the attractions were not grand palaces, imposing forts, lush gardens and glassy lakes, but unadorned religious sites. There was no end to them; they were everywhere. For a person whose entire familiarity with religion was limited to Easter bunny chocolates, sudden exposure to the world's spiritual center was overwhelming. It just about blew all his circuit breakers. It was out of sight, far out, and definitely cool.

He peddled to Nazareth and Hebron, Bethlehem and Tiberias, Haifa and Jerusalem. The Armenian Patriarchate and the Via Dolorosa, the Church of the Redeemer and the Temple Mount, the Garden Tomb and the Al Aksa Mosque—and of course the Kotel.

Actually, the Kotel as a tourist attraction did not have all that much to offer: just stones, a broad plaza, a strange collection of birds nesting in sparse foliage—but undoubtedly a great photo op. What it lacked in the way of pews, altars and elaborate carpets, however, was made up for by the decidedly disparate assemblage. Everyone and sundry was there, including a man who saw to it that Jewish youth walked away from the Kotel with more than just a snapshot.

No, Dave had never heard of a yeshiva or the Torah, but he was Jewish, in a biological kind of way.

"Attend a class?" Why not? Hey, that's what this whole bike experience was about—tasting, trying and learning. He had agreed to far, far more bizarre things during the course of his trip.

The class was intriguing, and was like nothing he had ever experienced before! So Dave stayed on for a few classes; he even stayed for the weekend. He even postponed seeing Petra.

Dave enjoyed yeshiva and found
meaning in Judaism. Proof was that he never did make it to Malaysia or Indonesia, Burundi or Togo. But he did make it to rudimentary Hebrew, Jewish philosophy and Mishna.

Dave devoted five months to studying his religion before concluding that it was time to heed his parents' requests, warnings and return to the real world of Clermont, Florida.

David's teachers had tried to convince him that it was premature for him to leave yeshiva. He had not yet developed the firm foundation necessary to withstand the temptations of America or the fortitude to combat a hostile home environment.

But Dave Brenner's innermost cranial niches were impervious to reasoning. After twenty-one weeks of rudimentary Jewish instruction, he returned—this time by air—to Clermont.

Dave's enthusiasm for Judaism was met by his parents' staunch opposition, he challenged them that they didn't even know what they were protesting, but that too was grounds for an argument—augmented by the young man's newfound religious passion.

Had the Brenners only lived in the Miami area, the yeshiva would surely have assigned a back-up team to support and assist. But Eric and Melanie, not entirely by chance, had chosen a home nowhere near a Jewish populace. Clermont was singularly isolated and insulated from the perils of Jewish incursion.

The Brenners-senior did not take kindly to their son's eccentricity and classified Jewish practice into three categories: absurd, bad and intolerable.

"Attend a class?" Why not? Hey, that's what this whole bike experience was about—tasting, trying and learning. He had agreed to far, far more bizarre things during the course of his trip. The class was intriguing, and was like nothing he had ever experienced before! So Dave stayed on for a few classes; he even stayed for the weekend. He even postponed seeing Petra.

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The Jewish Observer, January 1997
Dave couldn't figure out why a religion that had no meaning to them had so much meaning to him. They launched an inquisition against the absurd and the bad (prayer and Kashrus), and regarding the intolerable (shmiras Shabbos)—it was an all-out crusade. His parents actually forbade him to observe Shabbos; and it wasn't as if he had an option of spending weekends with other Shomer Shabbos families in the area.

David's teachers were right: despite all his good intentions and sincerity, he was unprepared for the onslaught that awaited him at home. He was harassed from morning to night and pressured to abandon a "lifestyle of antiquated nonsense." His only defense was to wait for a Divine signal—somehow, some way—that would assure him he was following the right course.

One Friday night, as Dave pitifully attempted to observe a Shabbos meal amid the tempestuous storm of vocal detractors, he finally caved in. Not in their presence—for he wished to deny them that satisfaction. But he came to the realization that in the absence of a signal, Shabbos observance was simply not worth the hardship.

Late Friday night, Dave treated his tormented brain to a little leisure. He sat down in the family room easy chair and flicked on the TV. It had been a long time since he had seen The David Letterman Show, and the late-night TV personality was always entertaining and witty.

Letterman's first guest was a well-known journalist who had just returned from an extended stint in Jerusalem. Letterman welcomed the man and posed what appeared to be an unrehearsed question: "What was the most remarkable thing you noticed about Israeli life?"

The reporter thought for but a moment. "Well, tonight, Friday night, is a holiday in Israel. And although not all Israelis observe the Sabbath, there is..."
nonetheless a certain tranquil—almost palpable—sense of the Sabbath being a day of rest. Over the course of the Sabbath, whomever you meet—even perfect strangers—greet you by wishing you ‘Shabbat Shalom,’ which means ‘Sabbath peace.’

Letterman smiled at the articulate reply and focused his eyes upon his guest. As if on cue, the guest addressed his host with, “Shabbat Shalom, Dave!” and David Letterman returned the salutation.

David Brenner tightly gripped the arms of the easy chair. Was this a signal, or what? Throughout the show each new guest was welcomed with “Shabbat Shalom.”

There were three cameramen covering the show. To streamline editing and ensure smoother transitions, the cameramen communicated with each other through headphones to assign who would cover which angle—although their routines were well-rehearsed.

They always opened with a wide angle shot cutting to a closeup of the star. The show ended the same way in reverse: a tight shot on one of the stars opened to a wide shot of all the guests, closing on a pan of the exuberant audience “spontaneously” responding to the APPLAUSE sign lighting up with cinematic urgency.

Tonight was different. The lead cameraman gestured that he wanted to digress from the standard procedure. Beginning dead center he dollied right up the middle, zooming in the lens so that for the final ten seconds of the show, the close-up was not of David Letterman, or the audience, but of the celebrity’s mouth.

And what were those famous, six-digit-salary lips saying? They were closing the show with the words that had captured the evening: “Shabbat Shalom, Dave!”

The entire screen—one quarter-of-a-million pixels, twenty-four-bit color, a fraction of a millimeter dot pitch—personally wished Dave Brenner Shabbat Shalom.

He sat there transfixed. He didn’t hear the applause or the credits. He didn’t hear his mother shouting something, or the cats howling outside. All he heard was “Shabbat Shalom, Dave!” repeating over and over and over again in a mantra-like cadence in his head.

David Brenner had received the signal he had longed for. Three days later he was headed back to Israel—he did not want the transmission to fade... ever.
Our eight-year-old daughter recently spent one week in Children's Hospital, five days of which she was confined to the intensive care unit. Although she was blessed with a rapid recovery, the week was emotionally draining, physically and spiritually challenging. Unplanned obstacles, those beyond the normal routine, are stressful and trying—sometimes the most painful but often the most rewarding. Reflection afterward is important in order to focus the mixed emotions, accept and incorporate the lessons.

The Risks of Confidence

What started as the common cold or flu, and most of the time would have disappeared in a week or ten days, this time developed into something worse. We take for granted modern medicine and the luxury of antibiotics. There are risks that come with such confidence. Occasionally, we are reminded of the blessing of good health and the importance of G-d's role as the Rofeh Cholim—Healer of the sick. Indeed, it was not that long ago when flu season was dreaded and epidemics were frequent. Perhaps we are more unsettled by tragedies and difficulties and less prepared to withstand the challenges than previous generations because generally we do not have it as hard.

Whether it is health issues, antisemitism, or poverty, we become complacent, expecting a tranquil, prosperous life, only to be shaken out of our slumber when the expected does not occur. In the past, a person expected less and was more appreciative of what he or she had. Today we expect more, and are disappointed more often. We lack the appreciation and joy that one should feel at living in such times. Times when there is freedom to live as Jews being denied very few of the opportunities that all Americans have. Times when children are expected to survive pregnancy, be born healthy and live to be zakeinim (elderly). Like the Jews of the desert born after the manna was an actuality, we forget that there is no entitlement. Occasionally we are reminded of the reality and that we have much to be thankful for.

Home Immediately, Or With Parents at Her Side

Our daughter expressed her desire to go home immediately and, if unable to do so, that we not leave her side. Otherwise, she reacted most positively to the entire ordeal. A combination of maturity, trust, security and naivete. But even the slightest discomfort to one's child is too much for her parents. Did she comprehend the severity of the situation? I hope not. Her actions and words constantly
reminded us how much we mean to her. I hope we properly conveyed how much she means to us.

Standing in the intensive care unit, one perceives G-d’s presence. There is an uninterrupted line of open communication. To pray; to praise. I count my blessings as I pass each bed. One feels G-d’s tears as He shares the experience. If G-d accompanies man into exile, how could he not accompany the patients in a pediatric intensive care unit? Innocent, with the angel of death. Kids who just the other day were playing ball, laughing with friends, taking their first steps or saying their first words suddenly lie motionless where every second is a gift. Each case defies explanation. Diseases they did not ask for. Drunk drivers they did not want to meet. Somehow their parents and family assume top importance.

We received support, strength and love from family and friends, which I hope will instruct us in becoming better parents and friends and, thus, better people. One is likewise moved by the dedicated professionals. Professionals rising to the occasion. Most important, the enormous example set by the patients themselves. Where do they get the strength and courage to battle the odds? And for those conscious, how do they maintain their optimism and the ability to interact with others? No one and family are asked to confront life’s greatest difficulties and to face man’s greatest questions. And they prevail.

Insufferably Alone or Strongly Connected

The tragedy is insufferable when one is alone. Connection to others is critical. There is vertical connection over time from creation to redemption, all part of a master plan. If all is connected, there must also be horizontal connection over space between people and in community. To be alone is to be abandoned. Every visitor, every phone call, every card makes a difference—non-intrusive, just being there. It has impact for the moment and forever.

We noticed and appreciated. Some people have a way of keeping other human beings’ feelings and problems on their own mind. To put it simply, they are people who truly care. They don’t preach it, discuss it or learn about it. They just do it. It is often those who are most busy, yet find the time for a visit, a phone call or a note. Even merely a kind word when they see you on the street. Me, my life, my thoughts are important to you. I matter. One cannot underestimate how important those feelings are. Calls from friends, relatives and even Roshei Yesli-vya from near and far. As Rabbi Aharon Kotler said, “You can’t be involved with Klal Yisroel if you are not involved with the individual.” Busy with communal concerns, national issues and their own personal responsibilities, yet time for one more person and his needs.

A Break For Home

I go home. To kiss and hug the other children. For a brief moment, one stops worrying about neatness, and a not-so-perfect report card, a forgotten homework assignment. That perspective doesn’t last long, but every now and then we need to reevaluate our priorities, appreciate life for its opportunities, and cherish the truly important things like health and love. There will be time later to scream about the magic marker left in the dirty laundry.

One learns so much about the character, depth and precious nature of one’s children at times like this. “I can’t sleep because I miss my sister.” “The only Chanuka present I want is for her to come home.” The hug and smile between patient and sibling when they see each other cannot be captured—except in our hearts. As parents, we comfort and reassure the children, whose fears and concerns cannot be ignored. They naturally and unknowingly reassure and comfort us, as well.

When our daughter first returned home, her brothers and sister were overly sensitive—sharing and caring. It was, however, but a few hours before the special treatment ceased and they were back to their usual selves. Isn’t that the way it’s meant to be?

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The Jewish Observer, January 1997
At the hospital, the mutual vulnerability of the patients’ families gives rise to a bonding. Personal stories normally withheld are shared among each other. We are reminded that everyone has their own package of difficult experiences, some

Every now and then we need to reevaluate our priorities, appreciate life for its opportunities, and cherish the truly important things like health and love. There will be time later to scream about the magic marker left in the dirty laundry.

having passed, others ongoing. Even those seem to have passed always remain with us. Memory can be a blessing or a curse. But without it, our life has no meaning. Our past defines us and connects us. We are often unaware of what other are contending with, that there is likely a good explanation for their seemingly inexcusable behavior. They are preoccupied with matters they wish not to reveal; matters that consume their complete attention.

And yes, despite the lack of time for each other, the bond between husband and wife grows. It is G-d’s way of picking up the difference. The emotional intensity draws you together. But equally significant is the love that comes from watching a spouse as she exhibits love that only a mother can display for a child. The pain is shared as if the umbilical cord were still attached. Decisions are made that may not be the most rational or in the best interest of the entire family. But they are made out of love and from a bond that need not be explained or justified. It takes time to accept those maternal decisions and maturity to appreciate them. In the end, these decisions reflect the unique nature of the family unit, the mother’s central role, and why family is the most critical unit for the survival of Judaism and all of civilization.
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Confessions of a Gemach ‘nik

IN THE WAYS OF AVRAHAM

The word Gemach is an acronym for gemillas chessed, meaning acts of loving kindness or charity. Thousands of Gemachim exist round the globe, wherever Jewish communities may be found. There are Gemachim that lend out basic necessities like food, baby supplies, various appliances for a short period of time, or basic services through volunteer work like baby sitting, advice giving, repair work etc. You have various catering Gemachs (dishes for a simcha, chick peas for a short order shalom zachor), baby pacifier Gemachs, shidduchem, psychological and rabbinical Gemachs... I recently heard about a Gemach in Yerushalayim for those who have problems falling asleep; they provide music tapes and various electronic devices for suffering insomniacs. Baruch Hashem; there is no shortage of Gemachim.

The Baal Shem Tov Hakadosh remarked that the reason we say “Magen Avraham” in the Amida, and not Magen Yitzchak or Yaakov, is because our prior merit nowadays is that of chessed. Our Torah and holiness do not even approach the level of previous generations; but chessed is chessed. When one is in need and another fulfills that need, then chessed is performed. It does not matter what level of devotion it was enacted. We therefore say “Magen Avraham,” for it is he who stood for chessed above other traits; we ask Hashem for salvation in his merit and in the merit of our own acts of loving kindness.

OPENING MOTIVATIONS

One opens up a Gemach for any one of a variety of reasons. At times, it is decided that a Gemach would be a fitting way to perpetuate the name of a deceased relative. The service would then be named after the deceased with the word “Zichron,” “Ner,” or “In memory of,” preceding it. A Zichron Shmuel tape library, for example, a Zichron Chana baby crib-lending service, a Ner David lecture service, and so on.

Sometimes a community may be in dire need of some service and a kind, dedicated member will see to it that it is provided. And there are times when one feels a desire or spiritual need to do acts of kindness on a steady basis; a Gemach is then born and carried to the masses. I fit into this third category of Gemach ‘niks.

Opening up a Gemach has at least three prerequisites: a. the finances to back it. b. the dedication it takes to keep it running, and c. publicizing the service to any number of people who could benefit from it. I had a bit of a problem. I am a dairy farmer on Moshav Yesodot—a small, 90-family, successful Moshav dedicated very strongly to Torah values; by no means the typical place to open up a Gemach, especially a new one. So criteria c. was rather lame. As far as a. is concerned, I’d have to wait until I win a lottery. All I had was b. to work with—the stamina, desire and dedication to properly run a Gemach.

I prayed for ideas and Hashem answered. One day I concentrated on my telephone; here I am, in farm country in the Holy Land, away from the rest of the civilized world, but only a telephone call away from anyone on the globe. Hidden away in the office was an old answering machine gathering dust. Then it hit me: Combine the two for “Telegemach—the Information Gemach.” The idea is simple and inexpensive, but the results are priceless.

People call in about everything under the sun, from employment needs to shidduchem. Lost-and-found to advice. Gemachim to volunteering. Needers, givers, buyers, sellers, apartments, furniture, trips, etc., etc. I leave the answering machine on from eleven p.m. to seven a.m. (as per public announcements and advertisements), and during the day I listen to the tape, jot down crucial information, and make whatever connections I could. It works. Occasionally I get a tough one, like the guy who called up to
sell a full set of scuba diving gear (he's throwing in the weights). Any buyer? I also look through magazines and newspapers for interesting job opportunities, items for sale, and so on to help my callers.

THE DOMESTIC HURDLE

First, of course, I had to convince my wife: "No, Leah, they won't call during the forbidden hours. After all, it's written to call only between 11 p.m. and 7 a.m. The ole answering machine will do all the work."... But call they did.

"Leah, it won't cost us. Besides I'll take expenses off ma'aser." At first the telephone bills were a concern, till I got used to asking people to call me back. About $30 a month is quite reasonable, considering all the people who receive so much help through the connections that are made.

"Leah, it doesn't mean we'll be under the spotlight. This is a very modest Gemach, really," So, how many people are reading this article? Look, if people don't know about the Gemach, how can I make proper connections? This is an information service. The more people see or hear about the Gemach, the more they develop a clear understanding of its potential.

Now that my wife is convinced, more or less, it is time to advertise. At this point, not only is Telegemach being publicized all over Eretz Yisroel via posters, mailings, the newspapers and radio, the Gemach is be'ezzer Hashem going world-wide, as well.

A ONE-YEAR'S LEGACY OF BENEFITS

Although the Gemach is hardly a year old it already boasts a host of heart-warming incidents.

- A fellow in the Tel Aviv area called up to donate several beds. I put him in touch with a family that had recently escaped from Iran with nothing to their name. He decided to bring the beds over himself, when he arrived in their Bnei Brak apartment, he found them sleeping on sheets spread out on the floor. He was so delighted to ease their misery that he called to thank me for enabling him to do a tremendous chessed.

- A widow in Haifa with two sick daughters called about a number of items she needed. I was able to help her by making several connections: a bank clerk had called to donate a large sum to some needy family, a woman had called to give away a washing machine, etc. This woman called back, her voice quivering with emotion, to tell me that she had thought that she had no one to turn to on this world, no friends or family—but now I am her family.

There are unfortunately a large number of people walking around, right under our noses, with no one to turn to, with difficulties they are too afraid or embarrassed to talk to anyone about. Many of these people turn to Telegemach because of its anonymous nature. Some call and refuse to give a name or address, and I accept them warmly. I only need their telephone number to get back to them with help. A number of people have called up with marital and psychological problems. At times, I have had to do a little research to get them to the right address. Of course, because the Gemach itself puts me in touch with so many interesting and kind-hearted people, research is never too difficult, no matter what the issue. I try not to get too emotionally involved with the people who call, to insure that the Gemach runs smoothly without interfering too much with my personal life or my efforts to help as many people as I can, as quickly as possible.

Calls come in continually from people who want to get involved in doing chessed. A writer in Tel Aviv, for example, called for a chance to do volunteer work on Fridays. I put him in touch with a widower in his area who was left alone with a number of children, one of them retarded. He had asked for volunteers to take care of the retarded child to allow him to rest and work. Two people living in the same area were able to fulfill each other’s need, but had had no idea of the other’s existence.

In this enterprise, information can be more valuable than money.

Companies—entire industries—deal with information. There is no reason why information should not be used in the framework of chessed as well. Vital information exists on a wide scale. The more this data can be condensed into one repository, accessible by all, the more people can be helped by it.

Chazal say that the world, with its many innovations—both natural and man-made—was all created for the sake of Klal Yisroel. We can see this so clearly, for example, in the area of computer technology, currently being utilized for Torah-study and dissemination in a highly sophisticated manner. Now in Eretz Yisroel, utilizing modern advertising techniques, employing the media, and relying on the telephone, Telegemach is putting chessed on the technological mitzva map, as well.

Imagine a network of Telegemach branches set up throughout the world, whereby all cities with Jewish populations will be interconnected. Whether it be medical assistance, business opportunities, a shidduch, or another heart-to-talk—whatever the problem area—the Jew in need will have an address to turn to.
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To the Editor:

In his article "Do We Really Have All the Answers?" (Sept. '96), Rabbi Oppenheimer offers his answer to the question of why the spiritually starving masses of American Jewry are not "banging down the doors of the Orthodox." I do not feel that Orthodox people are repelling sincere searchers for spirituality by lack of personal respect for anyone less committed than they are, or "looking down their noses" at them. These might be excuses, conscious or not, to blame the frum for why they don't want to be frum. There are some very simple factors that have a much greater bearing on the gap between the frum community and our fellow Jews who are "yearning... for reattachment to the Divine."

The Discomfort Factor

Viewing frumkeit through contemporary American values, the Orthodox choice is an unacceptable solution to the problem of assimilation. Having lots of children, driving older model cars, paying fat tuition bills, few, if any, real vacations, eating only in kosher restaurants, etc., is not glamorous and is just not appealing to the vast majority of American cultured adults. Of course, restrictions are not the sum-total of Orthodox life, but that is what is most obvious from the outside looking in.

This problem is further accentuated when the spiritual search is an outgrowth of the American ideal of total personal comfort. The person whose motivation is that he is uncomfortable with spiritual emptiness would have to have this discomfort outweigh all the discomforts and inconveniences of keeping Torah and mitzvos. The pleasure of being frum would have to be so much greater than the pleasures he'd be giving up. The fact that one cannot have the best of both worlds is a bitter pill for the American psyche to swallow.

The Imperfect Role Model

Much of the Western world has absorbed the Christian concept of spirituality where the truly spiritual person is portrayed as benignly content, smiling, never in a bad mood and generally not bothered by material concerns. The world of Orthodox Judaism doesn't give this impression. Many people leading a Torah lifestyle today are harried, pressured, usually carrying more than their share of the load. Baruch Hashem, we have Torah guidelines with which to refine our middos while attempting to juggle our daily affairs. Our striving for perfection can be indiscernible to an outsider, so long as we are yet imperfect. A frum Jew displaying his imperfection in a public setting might just have revealed the Torah-improved version of his struggling self. Given his nature, his behavior would be much worse were he not Torah observant! Isn't that spiritual?
Opting for Orthodoxy—A Humbling Choice

In order for a person to truly investigate Orthodox Judaism, he would have to place himself in a very humbling position. He will be very obviously ignorant. Also, believing or agreeing is insufficient in Yiddishkeit. One has to perform! In contrast, take, for example, the average Yuppie professional: he is established and in control. He has accomplished much in his field. Put him in a shul for a weekday Mincha and he’s lost. He won’t know whether to sit or stand. The service is incomprehensible. (It may as well be Chinese.) It is easy to understand why he wouldn’t be motivated enough to put in the effort and the self-deprecation required to literally “start from the Aleph Beis.” Human nature, being as it is, would have him rather back off, offering explanations of how Orthodox Jews are “cold” or “lacking in spirituality.”

In conclusion, if we think we have the answers, it’s because we do! We have the Torah. But it doesn’t come in a sugar-coated, easy-to-administer package. Under the circumstances, it’s amazing how many Americans do become true Shomrei Torah.

Mrs. F. Jane Menchel
Baltimore

The author responds:

Mrs. Menchel had made some fine observations regarding why the non-Orthodox spiritual seekers are not “banging down our doors.” She is certainly correct that there are many reasons that make an Orthodox lifestyle seem remote and unappealing to cultured, sophisticated, secular American Jews. I still maintain, however, that a primary reason that there is such an unbridgeable gap between our less observant brethren and ourselves is the judgmental superiority that many of us exude towards them.

Furthermore, I feel that this attitude problem accentuates the very factors that she points to, which might otherwise be more readily bridged. She cites, as her first factor, the “comfort and pleasure” issue, whereby our lifestyle—with its additional expenses, greater restrictions, and lesser pleasure opportunities—is forbidding to the outsider.

Renunciation of Exotica to Become Orthodox

While this is certainly a large barrier for many people, it is not one that the true “spiritual seeker” will find impassable. Many of these people, after all, have lost their appetite for the exotic vacations, fancy restaurants, glamorous homes, late-model cars, and other “must-have” items that our society and the media tell us are so important. They are looking for something more substantial, compelling and authentic with which to find a meaningful life, and are often willing to forgo some of the above for a chance to be in touch with what they sense is their inner essence. When, however, they discover that many frum Jews do not grasp the sincerity of their search, or that they are not given adequate respect for many of their achievements and moral victories, since they do not measure up to our halachic standards, they may choose to continue their search elsewhere.

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This unfortunately also occurs when such people come amongst us, and see the vulgar materialism that too many of us are caught up with. It is particularly repugnant to newcomers to Orthodoxy to observe that many of us are so absorbed in foolish one-upmanship in our spending on smachot, in decorating our homes, and yes, late-model cars and exotic vacations. It looks incredibly bizarre to them to see the money, care and concern lavished by some on the latest Borsalino hat, dress, or other fashion statement, impeccable "tznisus" credentials (sic) notwithstanding.

In a wonderful shiur by Rabbi Shloime Twerski of Denver, he discussed various lessons that all of us FFB (Frum From Birth) folk should take from the baalei teshuva among us. In pointing to this phenomenon, he cried out to us to learn from these wonderful people who, more often than not, have turned their backs on an easier material life to embrace a Torah lifestyle.

He greatly lamented the people that are turned away from joining us because they often see amongst us the very values from which they are trying to escape, albeit with a frum veneer.

**Lack of Serenity: An Attractive "Earthiness"**

As to Mrs. Menchel's second comment, that our "spirituality" often is not the calm serenity that they might be expecting, I have generally found that people are in fact attracted to our "earthiness," the way that our spirituality is practiced in the "real world" of day-to-day life. While we certainly have our share of true baalei middos tovos and mussar personalities who would appeal to those looking for the more meditative, reserved spiritual model, there are many who are excited by the notion of regular, imperfect people who are seeking to live in accordance with a Divine morality. Nevertheless, if we are to be effective in communicating the beauty of our lifestyle, if we are to truly achieve a degree of keduscha and heightened sensitivity in our lives, we cannot let the "harried, pressured" difficulties of our lifestyle overwhelm us. We need to take some time out, at least in our tefilos, on Shabbos, and at with our families, to focus on the spiritual and the sacred.

**The Importance of ResONating With Acceptance**

Regarding Mrs. Menchel's final point, it is achingly true that this dread of seeming incompetent is responsible for keeping many people away. She captured well the fear that keeps many adults outside, even when willing to drop off their children at the synagogue.

Nevertheless, the more that we let our brethren know that we don't look down at them; that we understand that because we had the great privilege of having a good Jewish education, we have an obligation to help them, and not, G-d forbid, to feel superior to them; that we welcome them in our midst, and will make every effort to help them along and applaud their growth with love, patience, and understanding; to that degree will we be successful in reaching out to them. In that same shiur, Rabbi Twerski pointed out that the main reason that, lehavdil, the cults are successful is because they grant the newcomer instant acceptance. "We are thrilled that you are here, we welcome you, we're here to help you." If we could have more of that attitude in our shuvis, if our communities would truly be places that the newcomer would feel warmth, acceptance, and yes, spirituality, we would be much further along in our goal of helping our brethren to come under the wings of the Shechina.

**RABBI LEONARD OPPENHEIMER**

Portland, OR

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To the Editor:

Let's be frank: are Orthodox Jews really committed to bringing secular and liberal Jews closer to G-d, or are we con-
tent to see Torah Judaism remain a club for current members only? That's the question implicitly asked by Avi Shafran in his important article, "Pluralism Must Matter" (Dec. '96).

Rabbi Shafran argues eloquently, as always, that The Jewish Observer should continue to confront and criticize heterodox ideologies calling themselves "Judaism"—and never mind those readers who would prefer to see the journal stick to strictly inter-Orthodox matters. He is correct, of course: our fellow Jews deserve whatever help and guidance we can give and they will accept. As he points out, the Observer is read outside of frum circles, by Reform and Conservative Jews.

Rabbi Shafran doesn't note, however, that the Observer's non-Orthodox readers—and I doubt there are many—are leaders and functionaries in the heterodox movements, not laymen; in other words, people who depend on the heterodoxies for a parnassa, whose minds are closed by their need to earn a livelihood. You occasionally meet a Reform leader with an open mind, but not often. (When I wrote an article in National Review a few years ago that criticized Reform, I got a call from a rabbi at a prominent Reform temple who confessed that for a long time he had felt, if he were independently wealthy and could quit his job, he would move to Israel and live as an Orthodox Jew.)

We should, therefore, be going after the rank-and-file, many of whom are spiritually hungry to the point of starvation. A few kiruv organizations have tried to do that, with very modest results—"modest," given that what they are trying to interest Jews in is not just some human product. If presented correctly, Torah should be able almost to sell itself. The problem with Chabad, "Turn Friday Night into Shabbos," and other worthy but unsubtle kiruv efforts is that for most part they present Yiddishkeit as an experience, a lifestyle. That's fine. But the Jews are a people inclined to listen to their intellects even more than to their hearts. To convey Torah to our secularized brethren, the Jews whose minds can be changed, we need to engage in a battle of ideas.

That can't be accomplished from behind the walls of Orthodox institutions, in publications like The Jewish Observer, Tradition or Jewish Action, which provide a venue for Orthodox Jews to talk among ourselves, in our language, about our own often parochial concerns. The intellectual battle has to be carried into the field, and we seem unwilling to do it. That there exists not a single Orthodox magazine or newspaper that speaks to observant and non-observant Jews alike, in which Torah confronts the world in the language of the world, is a shame, maybe even a scandal.

There is a tremendous kiddush Hashem waiting to be done, but no place to do it.

DAVID KLINGHOFFER
New York City
(The writer is literary editor of The National Review.)
To the Editor:

I was touched by Rabbi Shafran's article "Pluralism Must Matter," and felt validated as well. I suspect that it's as he suggests, that some frum people might focus on the vibrancy of their own community, perhaps to the almost complete expense of concern and feelings of achrayis (responsibility) for the Jewish community in is entirety.

In the past year, Christian and other proselytizing organizations have recognized the weakness of the general secular Jewish community, openly declared "its time," and have moved in for its destruction. The bulk of American Jewry is in the process of becoming a non-entity with barely a whimper, and never a scream.

Perhaps we are too comfortable and desensitized from drastically reductions earlier this century to really care, except for those who come to us.

When predators of the Jewish community have more numbers, more energy, and more commitment to swaying people ignorant of their own faith, and a culture and status quo squarely behind them, we have a serious problem. It is ironic that apathy and acceptance of this situation subsists equally, and perhaps even more, in the modern Orthodox communities. Institutions such as Yeshiva University, my alma mater, receive most of their private funding from secular Jews, have a university, work in the professional world, yet concentrate most of their public energies on their own definition. One would suspect that if nothing else moves you, at least the inevitable loss of your socio-economic base should. This fact is not lost on our competitors.

How many Jews for J ads have you seen in The New York Times, Newsweek, and now even the subway? How many messages in storefronts and on TV equating Chanuka and Xmas? There is no shortage of examples and glorifications of "successful" intermarriages. Even if you intend your silence to be interpreted as disapproval, who can hear it?

We could at least mocheh (object), in a public, intelligent, and sophisticated manner. If we wait for our brethren to come to us to hear the Orthodox perspective, few will, as the frequency of our competitors is much greater. The most persuasive argument is useless without the person's attention. If the volume is turned up, more people will hear. The more who bear, the more will be willing to listen. We need an additional approach, one of intellectual debate and confrontation, to just kiruv alone.

DAVID J. KELSEY
New York City

To the Editor:

Enclosed please find a check to cover three subscriptions to be sent to the below addresses. I know it is probably extra trouble, but because these subscriptions are for my variously assimilated family members, could you please start with the issue from this December as soon as possible? It's everything we've been arguing over for years, but you say it a lot better than I do.

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"JEWS WITH TORAH": SAYING IT FOR US

To the Editor:

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To the Editor:

Regarding the Dec. '96 JO articles on American Jews Without Torah: a request and a thank you.

1) Rabbi Shafran writes: "... and subtly slide into the trap of regarding non-halachic Jewish movements as, for some Jews, better than nothing." I agree with Rabbi Shafran's statement, but I have found people who disagree. Among their arguments: "At least, he'll have a better chance of marrying a Jewish girl hence have Jewish kids who will maybe eventually see the emptiness-falsehood and find the truth. But if he opts for nothing—he's lost." Could Rabbi Shafran please write his supporting arguments for his statement.

2) Thank you for your on-going coverage of this painful topic. I have an older married brother with three children who are Conservative-affiliated and receiving Conservative 'educations.' I feel the pain personally for my brother and his family. The on-going coverage allows me not to forget "and move on to our own concerns" but instead, to intensify my tefillos on their and others' behalves, and to intensify my efforts at self-improvement, so as to be a proper attractant and example of Torah-true Judaism.

NAME WITHHELD BY REQUEST

The author responds:

There may well be Jews who were kept in touch with their Jewish roots, perhaps even married other Jews, as a result of their association with one or another of the heterodox movements. But if, instead, the only options American Jews had were the wide range of Orthodox congregations or total divorce from the identifiable Jewish community, would less-than-fully-observant (or even totally non-observant but Jewishly-conscious) Jews choose the latter? The Jewish neshama does not so casually self-destruct.

In any event, just as personal tragedies, challila, may bring inheritances and more meaningful blessings still—like deeper appreciation for those gone and closer bonds with fellow survivors—so may communal ones seem to bear gifts. That does not, though, make them any less tragic.

Our place can only be to care desperately and speak truthfully. We may, and should, hope that our fellow Jews who have been misled by non-halachic movements will come to recognize their spiritual heritage and return to it, but it would be patently unwise to let that hope devolve into an assertion of some inherent "value" to the counterfeit and dangerous.

A.S.

THE QUATROMINI PRINCIPLE & COMBATING MISSIONARIES

To the Editor:

I am well acquainted with the outstanding work of Rabbi Eli Gewirtz (quoted in Nov. '96, JO "The Quatromini Principle") in the field of kiruv. The value of his Partners in Torah program—one-on-one learning in a relaxed, social situation for those unfamiliar with their Jewish heritage—cannot not be overestimated. With all due respect, however, I must take the issue with Rabbi Gewirtz's's comment that "Many well-intentioned people miss the mark in trying to combat the influence of [Christian] missionaries."

There are about half a dozen (certainly not many) full-time "counter-missionaries" in the United States. The Task Force on Missionaries and Cults, directed by Dr. Philip Abramowitz of Brooklyn, and "Jews For Judaism," directed by Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz of Los Angeles, are the most effective organizations working against Christian missionary ploys. All believe, as Rabbi Gewirtz does, that the best inoculation against the missionaries is substantive Jewish education.

Sometimes, however, the disease hits before the inoculation has been administered. Over the past 30 years, 25,000 Jews, most of whom had little or no real Jewish education, have become practicing Christians. Their resistance to kiruv and Torah's truth proves nearly impenetrable; the pintele Yid has been buried deeper than that of the average secular Jew; they are convinced that they are living, lehavid, lives of truth and meaning. Some can be reached, however, as the Task Force and Jews for Judaism deprogrammers/kiruv-experts know. It takes knowledge of the issues and training to succeed.

The Goals of Counter-Missionaries

Counter-missionary organizations have two goals: to educate vulnerable Jews, and to deprogram individuals when it is possible. Education consists of (1) exposing so-called "Hebrew-Christianity," a.k.a. "Messianic Judaism," a.k.a. Christianity, for what it is; and (2) to steer Jews to Jewish learning—for example, to Aish HaTorah, Ohr Somayach or Partners in Torah. This past summer, the Task Force on Missionaries and Cults and Jews For Judaism went public, countering one missionary group's...
offensive annual summer “witnessing” campaign. The goal of that campaign is to convince Jews that without the belief in J—s as, lehavdil eleph havdolos, G-d and "mashiach," Judaism is incomplete and fraudulent. The Jews of New York City were affronted all summer by prominent billboards and MTA signs heralding, "BE MORE JEWISH. BELIEVE IN J—S." The Task Force and Jews for Judaism, using media coverage and distributing Jewish literature in English and Russian, warned American and Russian Jews that missionary groups, posing as Jewish were out in force to convert them through deception. (Russian Jews, by the way, denied Jewish education in the former USSR for three generations, are particularly susceptible to the claims that missionaries make about “the True Judaism.”)

“Messianic Judaism” is a movement funded by Christian Fundamentalists in the United States, to the tune of well over $100 million a year. A revolting meld of Christian belief and Jewish ritual, its methodology is to blur the absolute distinctions between the two religions, and to create a “Jewish style” atmosphere in which unlearned Jews will feel at home, yet will be practicing Christianity. Missionary methods include:
1. offering free “Jewish holiday” and weekly “Shabbat” events—all focused on J—s;
2. incorporating in their Christian worship the use of yarmulkes, talisim, Sifrei Torah, menoras, Shabbos licht, mikva’os, niggunim, and thoroughly Hebraized terminology (e.g. “immersion in mikva” for “baptism”);
3. posing as Jews, infiltrating even the top levels of Jewish organizations (e.g. YM-YWHAs, community day schools, Hadassahs, and places where Jews worship);
4. tending to the Jewish ill, the lonely, the elderly in nursing homes, and to the Jewish handicapped;
5. adopting Jewish orphans;
6. seducing Jewish immigrants with “friendship”;
7. adulterating Tanach, ascribing to it false translations and meanings to “prove” their points;
8. working towards acceptance, projecting an appearance of legitimacy within the pluralistic Jewish world, as the “fifth arm” of Judaism.

Fundamentalist Christians mean business and will stop at nothing to claim a precious Jewish soul.

Widespread Torah-true education is certainly the key. Unfortunately, the phones of the Task Force on Missionaries and Cults and Jews for Judaism ring with the cries of families whose Jewish children might have been saved had they at least known that “Hebrew-Christianity” is a lie. Counter-missionaries are there for them, and for any Jew who would otherwise fall.

Incidentally, Joey Quatromini would probably agree on the importance of counter-missionary work. He recently purchased Jews for Judaism’s 12-tape series entitled “The Counter-Missionary Survival Kit” and had them sent to him at Yeshiva Aish HaTorah in Jerusalem, where now, Baruch Hashem, he learns.

ANDREA SOMMERSTEIN
Passaic, N.J.

Up until the past decade or so, the Holocaust had been co-opted by secularist Jews. This was true not only in terms of creating and controlling Holocaust centers, celebrations and newspapers, but also in authoring the vast majority of memoirs, Yizkor books and histories. This has often resulted in the distortion of facts as well as in the perspective in which the Holocaust should be viewed. For example, the glorification of the non-Jewish emphasis on physical resistance, in contrast to the “walking like sheep to the slaughter” syndrome, is evident from the sub-title of Yad Vashem, “The Holocaust Martyrdom and Heroes Remembrance Authority.” Moreover, one often had great difficulty in locating material on the experiences of Orthodox Jews, whether as victims or as rescuers, let alone a really Jewish weltanschauung regarding their experiences. It weren’t for the strenuous efforts by Professor Yaafa Eliach, for example, to put a real Jewish face on her own exhibit it on the stettel, the visitor to the Washington D.C. Holocaust Museum would get the impression that only secular Jews were martyred. In reality, the ratio of Orthodox within the six million Jewish victims has been estimated to lie between a third to a half.

In recent years, the Orthodox have finally discovered the Holocaust. They have begun to realize that observant Jews also had noteworthy experiences, especially involving spiritual resistance and rescue efforts. Faith at the Brink, a highly intelligent memoir by an Orthodox Jew whose youth was robbed by the Holocaust, is a prime example of such a book. More than merely focusing on his experiences in the camps or the war years, this work provides the reader with the broader experience of a Torah-true Jew before, during and after the war.

As a scion of a prominent German-Jewish family, including Rabbi Marcus Lehmann, the author of numerous books of Jewish historical fiction and the publisher of the Israelit, the influential Orthodox newspaper, our author was always aware of his lineage and family traditions. Moreover, among the interesting facets of this work is the fact that he was related to many other prominent Orthodox families, such as the Prins, the Sassoons, the Feuchtwangers and the Frankfurt a.M. Levi’s. This relationship was to come in good stead during the difficult postwar years when they provided warm support for our orphaned author and his two sisters.

Among the lesser-known aspects of the Holocaust described here is the author’s experience in Westerbork, the Dutch detention camp, which served as a prelude to Auschwitz and other concentration camps. The author’s family was sent to the sector of Bergen Belsen reserved for those held for possible exchange. This meant that conditions were somewhat better than those in the main camp; for example, youngsters ten years and under sometimes received a real luxury—half a glass of milk. In fact, this sector housed a group that was exchanged for Germans in Eretz Yisroel. In addition, it soon became the home for the seventeen hundred passengers of the so-called “Kastner Train” that arrived from Budapest in July, 1944. This train included, among others, the Satmar Rav and Rabbi Yoan­son Steif, who were eventually released to Switzerland half a year later.

Tragically, the author and his two sisters were shunted to a worse part of the camp as a result of a little-known heroic episode that involved his father and other Jews who made up the “Diamond Group.” These were diamond cutters and polishers who were greatly prized by the Germans who lacked this expertise, so crucial for their war effort. The Germans wanted to set up a diamond industry in Bergen Belsen, offering these Jews “normal” accommodations and good food for their cooperation. After some discussions, the group, led by Lehmann’s father and fully aware of the dire consequences, decided not to cooperate with the Germans, thereby denying their valuable skills to the production of deadly new weapons to be used against the Allies.

The author dramatically describes the painful, final farewell with his parents, who stand out as an extraordinary couple. Their total dedication to Yiddishkeit under the harshest circumstances stood him in good stead, when he had to endure his own difficult tests in this arena as the sole boy to remain fully dedicated to his religious principles.

Throughout the book, the author manifests his strong Jewish feelings and perspectives, as well as his obvious hatred for the German monsters who destroyed the Jewish world in general and his own little world in particular. An index would have been most helpful to the reader. Interesting, but at times irrelevant appendices, conclude an overall fascinating picture of a saga of faith amidst tragedy. This book is highly recommended for readers of all ages.
EMES AND_FRAGMENTED TRUTH: PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

To the Editor:
The Tishrei issue of The Jewish Observer (Oct. '96) featured an article, “The Whole Truth and the Fragmented Truth,” based on what the author calls a “well known” Midrash, which he quotes as follows:

When Hashem sought to create man, He consulted with His ministering angels. Emes said: “Al yivra sheku-lo shekarim—Let Man not be created, for he is compromised completely of lies.” What did Hashem do? He took emes and cast it down to earth, where it shattered into thousands of fragments. When the frightened angels cried out, “Why did You ill-treat Your most valuable jewel?” Hashem mollified them by assuring them that “Emes ma’eretz tiszmach—Truth will spring forward from the earth.” (Tehillim 85, 12). All the fragments of emes will be gathered by the people, and in the Messianic future will unite and will make emes whole again.”

The author then asks, “What sort of emes is this that can be shattered into thousands of pieces? Chazal teach us that Hashem’s seal is emes. Is it possible to speak of Hashem’s seal shattering into a thousand pieces?” He then proceeds to resolve these difficulties by advancing the novel interpretation that “there would appear to be two Truths—the authentic one, which is Hashem’s seal, and the other, fragmentary emes!”

His intriguing theory is that “the authentic, true, whole emes (which is Hashem’s seal) is that the universe is an integrated whole. The fragmentary emes...that was cast down to the earth...represents our perception of the universe [which is that] the universe is fragmentary, incomplete.”

All of this is intellectually stimulating, but, I am afraid, is in itself a fragmented emes.

The source for this Midrash is given in the footnotes: Bereishis Rabba 8.5. (It is also quoted in Yalkut Shimoni, Tehillim, Remez 838, on Chapter 85).

And, indeed, the Midrash does begin as quoted. The exact wording of the Midrash is as follows:

To the Editor:

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No where is there any mention of the emes being shattered into thousands of fragments and no where does it mention those fragments being gathered by the people and being united in the Messianic future. There is simply no such source!

Moreover, it is quite obvious from all the meforshim that the emes that was cast down to earth was the emes. Rash[i] followed by the Matnas Kehuna, learn that the Hashem’s seal is a chozam [chozam shel Hakadosh Baruch Hu emes]—Hashem’s seal.

Other Meforshim (Ye’efi T’or, RD’L) learn that the “jewel” was the Torah, which was given to man on earth. Nei-
ther the seal nor the Torah remained in Heaven.—And nothing was shattered. Hashem threw his seal down to earth and desired that emes me'etzat tztzach, the truth should come forth from the earth.

The Ketzos Haschoshen, in his introduction, quotes the Midrash and explains it with the principle elucidated in Drashos Haran (Drush 7). Hashem desired that the final decision of Torah be given to chachmet hador—the Torah scholars of each generation. Even if their decision does not concur with the absolute truth of Hashem, it is His will that K'hal Yisroel follow the truth as understood by the chachomim. This is the authentic emes. That is why we do not consult a navi (prophet) for a decision in Torah law. Rabbi Yehoshua disregarded the bas kol—the heavenly voice that proclaimed that the halacha was according to Rabbi Eliezer because lo b'Shamayim hi—the Torah is no longer in Heaven—but has been given to man, and in the Torah it says acharei horabbim lehatos—the halacha is decided by the majority. Not only is the practical halacha on earth decided by man, but Hashem himself in His heavenly yeshiva defers to the truth as seen by the chachomim.

When Hashem had a dispute with the Mesivta D'Rakia—the heavenly yeshiva—as to the halacha of safek im ba'as kadma lesear lavan—Hashem said tamar, the Mesivta D'Rakia said tamei—it was decided to bring Rabbi Bar Nachmani to decide, for he had achieved the greatest level of human potential in mastery of Negaim, and what was required was human intellect to decide the din Torah. Emes is decided according to the highest level of human intellect—and that is Hashem's will!

There are other understandings of this Midrash (see above mentioned commentaries), but they all agree that what was sent into this world was the authentic, definitive emes, and this was Hashem's will in creation. The whole poetic idea of an angel of emes who, as described in the article, was a nay-sayer, and an obstructionist because he was a "fragmentary thinker" and was therefore shattered, is, to say the least, an antilogy. If he was whole before he was shattered, why was he a nay-sayer? And if he was "the paradigm of the fragmented thinker," why did he deserve to be the angel of truth, and why will he be any better when he is put back together?

One may certainly agree with the author's main idea that human beings have an incomplete perception of the Universe. But that has nothing to do with the Midrash—and the idea of a fragmented emes is simply not emes.

RABBI CHAIM DOV KELLER
Chicago

KIDDUSH HASHEM-PLUS
IN THE MARKETPLACE

To the Editor:
I suggest one addition to Yosi Heber's excellent list of rules of thumb for behavior in the secular workplace (JO, Nov. '96): whenever possible recommend qualified shomrei mitzvos (observant Jews) for job openings in your firm.

Heber writes of the kiddush Hashem that results when a colleague remarks, "If only I were as consistent with my diet as you are with your religion, I would've lost thirty pounds by now." Well, substitute "you and your friends" for "you" in that quote, and the kiddush Hashem becomes that much greater. And, of course, you also perform the chessed of helping a fellow Jew earn a living.

I write from experience as a recipient of such chessed. Twice over the years, I have gotten a job mainly because a frum friend recommended me.

EDDIE STEINBERG
Teaneck, NJ

AUTHOR'S CLARIFICATION

In "Looking For Your Face in the Picture," which appeared in the Second Looks section of JO (Nov. '96), a JTA article was cited that had described a Kollel wife in Lakewood, NJ, as being forced by poverty to work as a driver for a car service, in spite of her advanced pregnancy. An informal survey of the thousand or so Lakewood Kollel families yielded no such person, the article said. It added that, in response to a query regarding the existence of this woman, the author of the JTA report had "replied that the subject was a 'composite.'"

The JTA author relates that the

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The entire extended family had left their homes for the family _simcha_, which was scheduled to take place at a location outside of the city. Parents and grandparents, brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews—all converged, ready to celebrate. All, that is, except one particular uncle—a congregation rabbi in Brooklyn. The rabbi stayed home, alone.

Apologies were accepted, with a bit of puzzlement: The rabbi had the _bar mitzva_ of a congregant, which he couldn’t miss. (Yet he _could_ miss the family _simcha_?) This was different. The local _bar mitzva_ boy’s father had just passed away quite suddenly. His ailing mother and brothers and sisters would be there, but Tatty wouldn’t. Could the Rav also absent himself? (A reasonable explanation, touching circumstances. But weren’t there others to officiate?)

Then, after _Shabbos_, the rabbi reported to the family how, at the _Kiddush_, the youngster dug out some hand-scribbled notes that he had tucked away in the hall. He took a deep breath, cleared his throat and read:

_Dear Tatty,_

_This past Shabbos was my bar mitzva as you most probably know. As I lained I kept on thinking: Tatty isn’t here. But Tatty is here._

_This past Shabbos was probably the hardest Shabbos in my life. Being _bar mitzva_ without my father. Before I lained I told you that this is for you. Whether in body or in soul, I know you were there. All I ask of you is to be proud of me and my brothers._

_Mommy told me on the way to the _kiddush_, Shoshana kept on saying: “I want Tatty to be here, I want Tatty to be here.” Oh, how you were! I remember the morning that you were niftar, the last words (as much as we know) were, _YITZCHOK GET UP!_ I wake up every morning, and I think of these words every so often. Now I take it as a _mussar_. “Yitzchok get up!”, as if you were telling me something more than that, that those words are telling me, as they tell everyone: WAKE UP!

_Are we willing to live our life the way it should be, or the way we want it to be? I think your death was a warning to the world, as your last words GET UP were said, and you gave your final words of _mussar_, and then you were niftar._

_Please help us change our lives, Tatty, please._

_As I am finishing off my letter to you, I would like to thank you once more. And do the world one more favor: in the merit of your _tefilos_ and our _tefilos_, you should help speed up the _geula shleima_ bimheira. Omein._

_I love you Tatty._

_The Rabbi shared the text of the boy’s speech with the rest of his family. They read it. And they understood._

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**SECOND LOOKS**

_The Shabbos the Rabbi Stayed Home_

The entire extended family had left their homes for the family _simcha_, which was scheduled to take place at a location outside of the city.

Parents and grandparents, brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews—all converged, ready to celebrate. All, that is, except one particular uncle—a congregational rabbi in Brooklyn. The rabbi stayed home, alone.

Apologies were accepted, with a bit of puzzlement: The rabbi had the _bar mitzva_ of a congregant, which he couldn’t miss. (Yet he _could_ miss the family _simcha_?) This was different. The local _bar mitzva_ boy’s father had just passed away quite suddenly. His ailing mother and his brothers and sisters would be there, but Tatty wouldn’t. Could the Rav also absent himself? (A reasonable explanation, touching circumstances. But weren’t there others to officiate?)

Then, after _Shabbos_, the rabbi reported to the family how, at the _Kiddush_, the youngster dug out some hand-scribbled notes that he had tucked away in the hall. He took a deep breath, cleared his throat and read:

_Dear Tatty,_

_This past Shabbos was my bar mitzva as you most probably know. As I lained I kept on thinking: Tatty isn’t here. But Tatty is here._

_This past Shabbos was probably the hardest Shabbos in my life. Being _bar mitzva_ without my father. Before I lained I told you that this is for you. Whether in body or in soul, I know you were there. All I ask of you is to be proud of me and my brothers._

_Mommy told me on the way to the _kiddush_, Shoshana kept on saying: “I want Tatty to be here, I want Tatty to be here.” Oh, how you were! I remember the morning that you were niftar, the last words (as much as we know) were, _YITZCHOK GET UP!_ I wake up every morning, and I think of these words every so often. Now I take it as a _mussar_. “Yitzchok get up!”, as if you were telling me something more than that, that those words are telling me, as they tell everyone: WAKE UP!

_Are we willing to live our life the way it should be, or the way we want it to be? I think your death was a warning to the world, as your last words GET UP were said, and you gave your final words of _mussar_, and then you were niftar._

_Please help us change our lives, Tatty, please._

_As I am finishing off my letter to you, I would like to thank you once more. And do the world one more favor: in the merit of your _tefilos_ and our _tefilos_, you should help speed up the _geula shleima_ bimheira. Omein._

_I love you Tatty._

_The Rabbi shared the text of the boy’s speech with the rest of his family. They read it. And they understood._

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