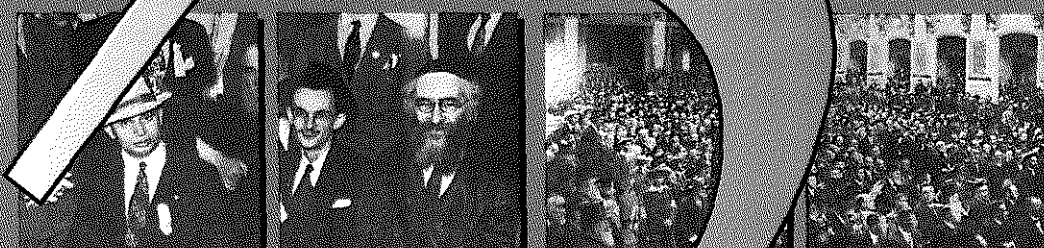
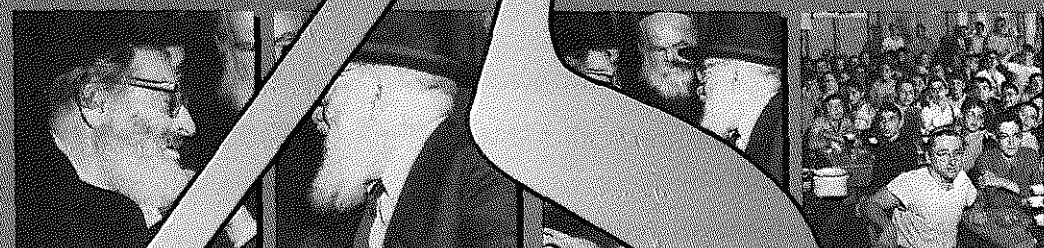
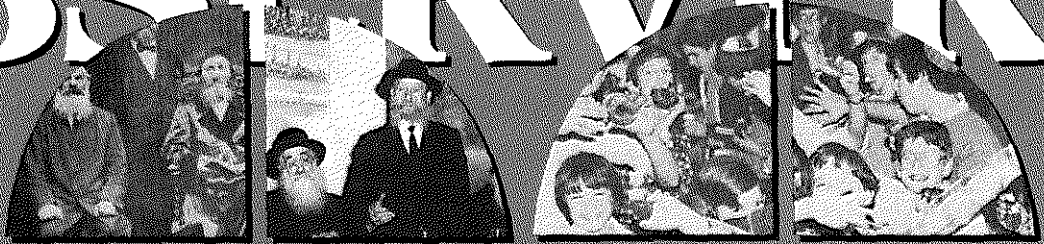


THE Jewish OBSERVER

Sivan 5757 • May 1997
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אגודת ישראל באמריקה

1922-1997

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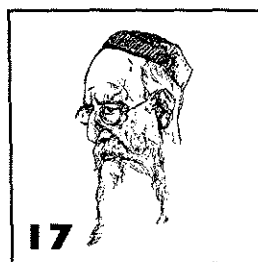
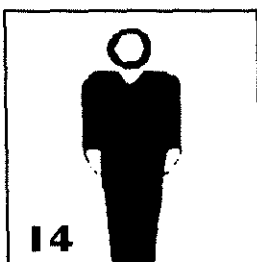
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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

IN TRIBUTE TO HEROIC SERVICE

Seventy-five years is a major milestone.

When an organization reaches its seventy-fifth year as the spokesman of Jewry's primary mission, and the spokesman for the Torah community, it is a time for assessment, reflection, and renewed dedication.

Agudath Israel has served our people well, superlatively well.

It has breathed inspiration and pride into American Orthodoxy.

From its earliest days — when the Agudah consisted of a handful of young families with roots at Sinai, eyes focused on Eastern Europe's Torah life, and hands engaged in building loyal homes in America — Agudath Israel stood for Kiddush Hashem and unwavering fidelity to Toras Hashem.

Then, its voice was tiny and local; today it is resonant and national. But its message is unchanged, and has brought pride and strength to the cause it serves.

We are proud of Agudath Israel and our association with it.

And we pay tribute to its leaders, its staff, and all those who make its work possible.

May Hashem Visborach bless them all with good health, long life, and many more fruitful decades of serving Klal Yisrael.

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1924



1922-1997

תריסר-העשר

1921: Agudath Israel delegation from Europe to America. Left to right: Rabbi Asher Spitzer, Rabbi Dr. Meir Hildesheimer, Rabbi Meir Don Plotzky, Rabbi Joseph Lev, Dr. Nathan Birnbaum, upon their arrival.

1927: Committee of Zeirei Agudath Israel of America. Seated (left to right) Nathan Horowitz, Charles Fogel, Fishel Eichenenthal, Hirschel Berliner; standing (left to right): Joseph Fogel, Abba Gleicher, Joseph Weinrib.



1929



1929: Second Knessia Gedola, in Vienna, including American delegates

1937: American delegation to third Knessia Gedola in Marienbad

1939: Zeirei Agudath Israel Convention standing (left to right)



1937

Agudath Israel of America

75 years of advocacy, representation, and service. A scrapbook of special moments, events and milestones

1927

Oscar Rand, Elimelech Tress, Joe Fogel, Chaplain Hirsh Lenazer; sitting (left to right): Binyamin Hirsch, Dr. Jonas Simon, Chaim Uri Lipshitz, Grand Rabbi Moshe Lipshitz, Isaac Strahl

1942: 616 Bedford Ave., Williamsburgh home of Zeirei Agudath Israel



1942

1946: Marcy Ave., Brooklyn. Zeirei relief packages to starving survivors

1946: Agudath Convention, Belmar, NJ. From left to right: Rabbi Reuven Grozovsky, Dr. Jonas Simon, Moreinu Jacob Rosenheim



1939

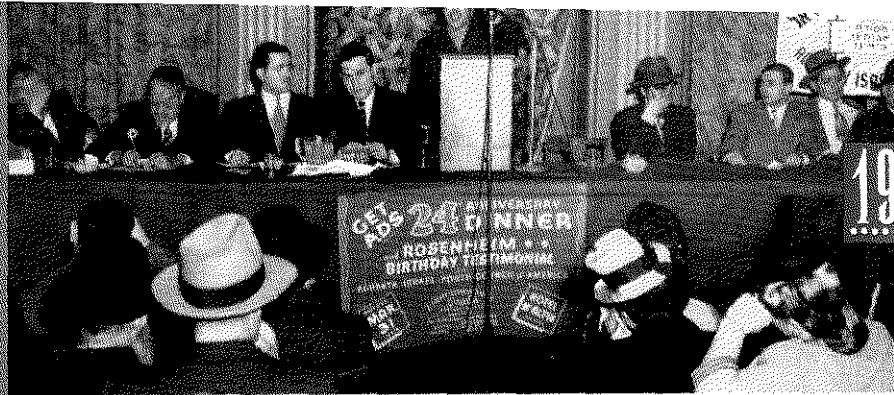
1946



1946

1946: Reb Elimelech (Mike) Tress reporting on conditions in D.P. camps in NY hotel. Dais L-R: Rabbi Herbert Goldstein, Rabbi Moshe Sherer, Rabbi Elias Karp, Rabbi Gedalia Schorr, Herman Treisser, Sol Septimus, Dave Maryles.

1948: Zeirei and Bnos members send food to Jerusalem under siege



1946



1951

1951: The ball field in Camp Agudah — Highmount NY (note head counselor, Rabbi Leibel Isbee (נרל))

1952: Camp Agudah in Highmount NY



1948

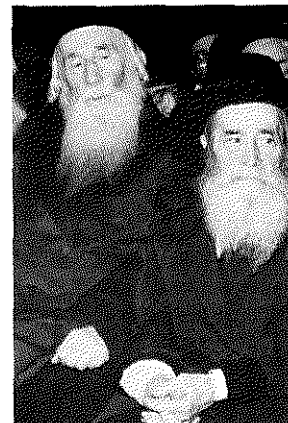


1955

1955: Agudath Israel Convention. L-R: Rabbi Nochum Perlow (Novominsker Rebbe), Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Rabbi Shlomo Friedman (Boyaner Rebbe), Rabbi Eliezer Silver, Rabbi Avrohom Yehoshua Heschel (Kapishnitzer Rebbe), Sadigor Pshemishl Rebbe

1956

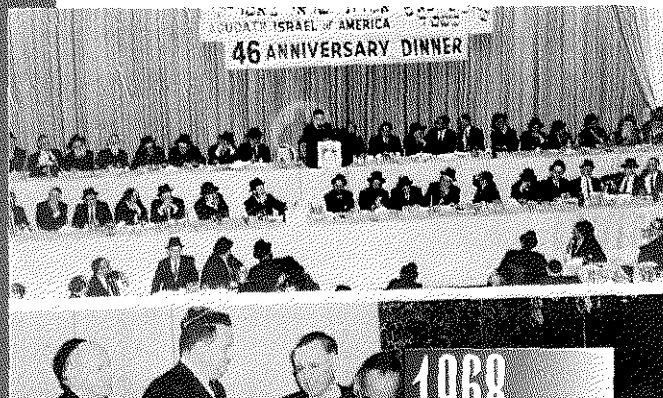
1956: Coming to the aid of refugees from Hungarian Revolution



1965: Rabbi Moshe Sherer receiving award from President Lyndon B. Johnson in the White House for his efforts on behalf of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

1968: Agudath Israel Administration meeting with the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah

1968: 46th Anniversary Dinner of Agudath Israel of America



1968



1952



1968



1965



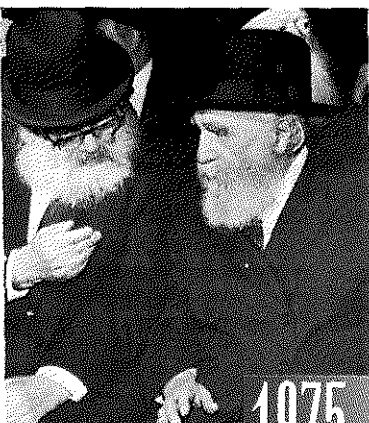
1968



1971



1971



1975



1977



1980

The Jewish Observer, May 1997

1970

1968: Rabbi Yaakov Teitelbaum זצ"ל, man-hig ruchani/ mora d'as-ra of Camp Agudah niftar that year



1970: New York Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller (c.) and Attorney General Louis Lefkowitz (l.) greeted by Rabbi Moshe Sherer on a visit to Agudah headquarters in New York to discuss legislative issues affecting the Jewish community, particularly the problems of Jewish Sabbath observers

1971: Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchok Rudeman at Agudath Israel's annual dinner

1971: Part of the crowd of 15,000 people who attended the Yom HaTe-filla in the Manhattan Center area on behalf of Jews in the Soviet Union

1975: Venerable Torah sages at the seventh Siyum Hashas Manhattan Center. Left to right: Bluzhever Rebbe,

Novominsker Rebbe, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

1977: Prime Minister Menachem Begin meets with Rabbinic leaders of Agudath Israel of America at home of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein

1980: Zeirei JEP outreach — the scene in St. Louis

1981: Yosef Mendelevitch, prisoner of conscience, upon his

release from the Soviet Prison, greeted by Rabbi Moshe Sherer and Rabbi Shneur Kotler זצ"ל at Agudath Israel Dinner



1982

1982: JEP publications



1981

1985: Bluzhover Rebbe at Camp Agudah

1986: Rabbi Shimon Schwab addressing National Pirchei Siyum Mishnayos

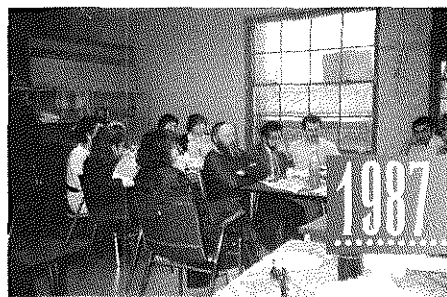
1986: Agudath Israel Torah Center and Kosher Meals Program for Iranian Jewish refugees in Vienna

1987: Chanuka gathering of RISE — outreach to Russian immigrants in USA

1987: Agudah youth bringing joy to seniors

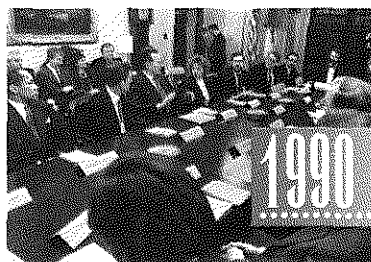
1987: Agudath Israel Boro Park Senior Citizen Center

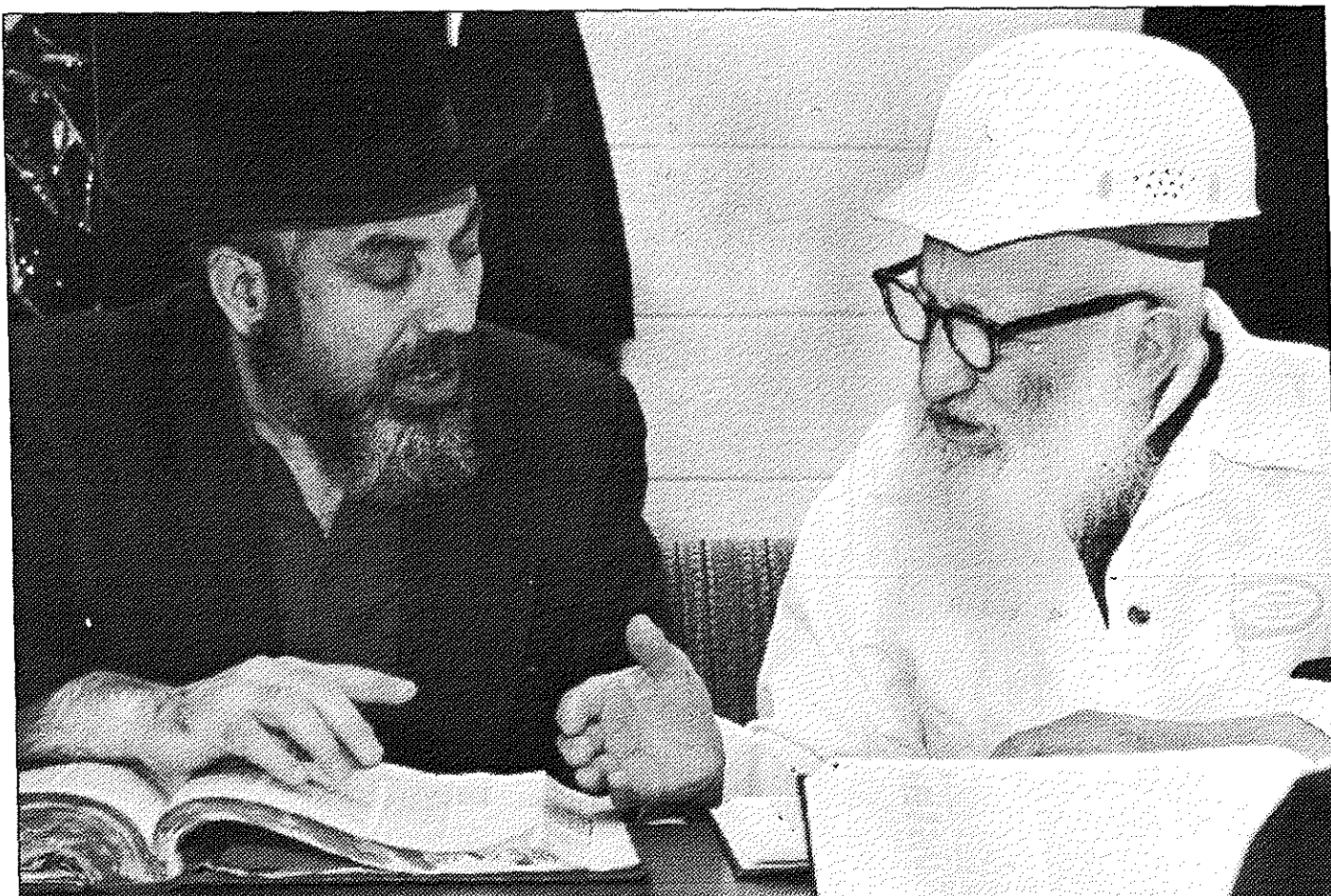
1989: Agudah Boro Park Senior Citizen Center



1990: 9th Siyum Hashas of Daf Yomi in Madison Square Garden

1990: Agudath Israel Washington representative Abba Cohen at White House meeting with President George Bush





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A Layman's Guide to a *Din Torah*

WHY NOT LITIGATE?

Mazel Tov! You are finally going to move into your new home built exactly to your specifications. You contract with Boneh-Yofeh Builders, a reputable Jewish firm. When you are about to move in, you notice that the wiring is not as extensive as you specified. The contractor tells you it is and will not incur the extra expense to rewire. No problem, you assume. Like any good American, you will let the courts decide.

Your daughter's wedding last night was an exhausting effort, but — who can deny it? — well worth it. You now take her wedding dress to the local *Shomer Shabbos* dry cleaner. He tells you he really doesn't like to do these dresses, but since you are a good customer, he will give it his best. Sure enough, when you pick it up, some ornamentation is ruined. You immediately blame him for ruining your expensive investment which you planned to use for your other five daughters. He says he warned you that it was your risk. No problem, you assume. Like any good American, you will let the courts decide.

Your ten-year-old crashes his bicycle into the non-observant lady who lives at the other end of the block. Before you can placate her that it was only an accident, she berates you for allowing your child to ride on the

sidewalk instead of on the street, thereby causing extensive damage to the thousand-dollar fur coat she was carrying. You will be hearing from her lawyer. No problem, you assume. Like any good American, you will let the courts decide.

Then you remember that there is a problem. You've read about it in past issues of *The Jewish Observer*. You've heard it expounded at public addresses. Very likely, you've come across it when learning *Chumash* or *Gemora*. Nonetheless, it is worth repeating: The Torah explicitly prohibits the primary usage of secular courts to adjudicate disputes between Jews.¹

So what can you do? The Torah prescribes its own court system — *beis din*. Each *beis din* consists of several judges qualified by their Torah expertise. The number of sitting judges in *batei din* vary. We will concern ourselves here with a three judge panel, the number normally required for civil cases.

ALLAYING FEARS OF THE UNFAMILIAR

Lest one think that a *beis din* is just an alternative legal system, a *pasuk* in *Tehillim* informs us that Hashem Himself participates in every *beis din* decision². The problem arises from the fact that the intricate structure of the American legal system combined with ignorance about the *beis din* discourages people from going to a *beis din*.

¹ "And these are the laws that you should put before them — before the Jewish courts, and not before the gentile courts" (*Gittin* 88b).

² *Tehillim* 82,1. See *Malbim* and other commentators.

The following lines will hopefully allay the fear of the unknown and familiarize potential litigants with the *beis din* system. These guidelines pertain to the courts in the United States as well as abroad. The *din Torah* legal process is actually quite simple and is accessible to any knowledgeable person.

After all, if the legal system with which I am somewhat familiar is too complicated for me, why do I want to start with a totally unfamiliar system? I can just hire a lawyer who will professionally litigate.

The following lines will hopefully allay the fear of the unknown and familiarize potential litigants with the system. These guidelines pertain to the courts in the United States as well as abroad.

Originating a case or consenting to dispute in a secular court is prohibited. In case of an irreconcilable dispute, the Torah ideally prefers a compromise to a strict ruling. Nevertheless, if a Jew vociferously believes that he (or she — women are equally recognized as plaintiffs or defendants) was wronged, he may recover his loss without undue constraint. The *din Torah* legal process is actually quite simple and is accessible to

Yoseph M. Braunfeld learned in the Kollel of Yeshiva Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and currently is a practicing accountant. The author acknowledges valuable insights provided by the *Dayanim* Chaim Kohn (Monsey and Manhattan) and Yaakov Forscheimer (Lakewood), and Rabbi Moshe Heine-man (Baltimore).

any knowledgeable person.

►What constitutes a *beis din*?

Hashem directed Moshe Rabbeinu to implement a "*semicha*" system beginning with his disciple Yehoshua, whereby those demonstrating their proficiency would be allowed to judge. After this continuous chain was broken subsequent to the destruction of the Second *Beis Hamikdash*, our leaders decreed that anyone properly versed in *halacha* would have limited authority to judge. Throughout our history, cities with a significant Jewish population have organized standing *batei din*. Alternatively, a valid *beis din* may be set up by each of the disputants selecting a judge, and they in turn selecting a third one.

►Where do I find I find a *beis din*?

Many large communities and organizations have a standing *beis din* available to their constituency. Anyone wanting to initiate a proceeding should contact his rabbi or a major organization.

►What kind of dispute can I bring as a *din Torah*?

Since the exile, our judges are not empowered to judge capital or corporal crimes. All civil altercations between two parties, however, are eligible. Most cases involve financial disputes. *Batei din* may also be called upon to mediate character attacks, and the like. The purpose of the *din Torah* is to evaluate how the Torah sizes up the particular quandary for disputants who want to maintain their lives in its spirit.

►Must I represent myself, or may I delegate a lawyer?

The Torah prefers that the parties represent themselves. Nevertheless, when a party may not feel confident that he will present his position properly or when he fears that the case may be significantly complex, some *batei din* allow him to bring along an expert, preferably someone versed in *halacha*, as an advisor (*to'ein*). Some *batei din* actually prefer that a halachically-versed *to'ein* be engaged so as to reduce irrelevant arguments. On the other hand, many *batei din* greatly discourage the use of a *to'ein*, especially one who does so as a professional; they may even total-

■

Batei din realize that there are widely-accepted customs which are assumed by all the people of a community. These customs would retain the status of implicit agreements.

■

ly disallow the use of a *to'ein* if they suspect that he is just trying to twist the case in his client's favor rather than limit himself to presenting relevant arguments.

►Don't we have a rule of "*Dina demalchusa dina* — that we are obligated to comply with the law of the land"?

Dina demalchusa dina means that we are required to adhere to all governmental laws not antithetical to *halacha*. In a conflict between Torah law and secular law, however, we observe only Torah law. Likewise, it does not mean that personal disagreements may be adjudicated in a civil court. The contrary is true. That is not to say that the *dayanim* will not take accepted business practice into consideration. *Batei din* realize that there are widely-accepted customs which are assumed by all the people of a community. These customs would retain the status of implicit agreements.

►How can I be sure that the government authorities will recognize the *beis din*'s judgment?

Beis din has the parties sign a "*shtar berurin* — consent to arbitration." Secular courts will normally treat the *p'sak* of *beis din* as a legal arbitration as long as certain guidelines are not violated. The *beis din* will ensure that maintaining these guidelines does not in itself violate their independent judicial authority.

►How is a *din Torah* initiated?

If the disputants do not come together to the *beis din*, the plaintiff (*tove'a*) will ask the *beis din* to send a summons (*hazmana*) to the defendant (*nitva*). The defendant has the option of requesting a different *beis din*. If, however, he fails to respond, the *beis din* may send two more summonses. If there is still no response, the *beis din* will either issue a *seruv*, which is a public announcement stating that the defendant is not responding to *beis din*'s order to appear, or will allow the plaintiff to pursue his case in a secular court. The secular court would then act as *beis din*'s *shaliach*.

When the *din Torah* does get under way, each party, possibly assisted by a *to'ein*, presents his case to the *beis din*. Women may not generally serve as witnesses, but they may present expertise which the judges will consider. The *beis din* then deliberates privately and issues its judgment.

The *beis din* itself may not be in a position to enforce the *p'sak*, but may direct the plaintiff to enforce it through the secular courts based on the arbitration agreement. It can then be enforced via the normal enforcement channels.

►Who pays the ancillary costs?

The normal practice is to split the *beis din*'s fee. Each party is responsible for his own expenses and lost time. It is therefore advisable to take that into consideration.

►"I want to swear!"

The *Gemora* discusses cases where swearing is required or optional. Nowadays, *beis din* will not allow disputants to swear.

►"Can I bring additional evidence later?"

The general rule is that a disputant may reconvene the *beis din* to clarify or add to a prior claim. He may not change or contradict a prior statement.

►Will the judgment be a guilty/innocent type of ruling?

At the case's outset, the *beis din* will attempt to convince the parties to accept a compromise settlement. If the case turns out to be one not explicitly described in the *Shulchan Aruch*, the judges will then work out a compromise

Many large communities and organizations have a standing *beis din* available to their constituency. Anyone wanting to initiate a proceeding should contact his rabbi or a major organization.

amongst themselves based on the *din*, but allowing for subjective discretion, with extenuating circumstances taken

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into consideration. Of course, this can only be done if the parties agreed originally to grant the *beis din* this latitude. If the *beis din* is requested to judge on a strict *din* basis, then the choice of rulings would be more limited.

►Can a judgment be appealed?

Normally not. The *halacha* recognizes the finality of a *p'sak beis din*. By submitting a dispute to a *beis din*, the parties accept that particular *beis din's* ultimate authority. In line with this logic, unlike secular courts, the judges will likely not express their reasoning, although the parties do have the right to request the reasons for the decision.

►If I receive a summons from a Jewish plaintiff to appear in a civil court, what should I do?

For practical reasons, respond to the summons. You should, however, have a *beis din* send the plaintiff a *hazmana* protesting his submitting the case to civil court. If the plaintiff persists, you may defend yourself in the civil court. The plaintiff would be committing the halachic transgression.

►What if I summon a defendant to *beis din* and he insists on going to civil court?

The *halacha* would allow you to go. This is tantamount to the case where the defendant ignores the summons. The *halacha* recognizes the civil court as a *shaliach* (agent) of *beis din*.

►I (or my adversary) initiated a case in civil court, but we want to do *teshuvah*. Or even if our motives are not altruistic, we want to reinstate the proceeding in *beis din*. Can we?

If the dispute has not concluded, then there is no question that it may be reinitiated in *beis din*. If the secular court had reached a verdict, however, there is a major discussion amongst the responsa whether it may be reinitiated in *beis din*. As a matter of current practice, most *batei din* will not accept such a case.

►I know for sure that the judge in the civil court is a Torah-observant Jew. Can I go to his court?

The Torah places the prohibition on any legal system not under Torah auspices. The background of a particular judge in a secular system is irrelevant.

By the same token, even if one knows that a civil verdict will correspond to a *beis din's* in a particular case, one must go to the *beis din* and not the civil court.

►What if my adversary is a non-observant Jew or a gentile?

The rules are the same. If the non-observant Jew forces you to go to a secular court, you may go, just as if you are forced by an otherwise observant Jew. As long as you take an initiative to submit your case to a *beis din*, you do not transgress the prohibition. If you desire, you may also attempt to convince the gentile to attend a *beis din*, but there is no such requirement, and you may settle the dispute in civil court.

►I have an irreconcilable dispute which both of us want to pursue halachically, but we do not want to go to all the expense and trouble of a *beis din*. Do we have an enforceable alternative?

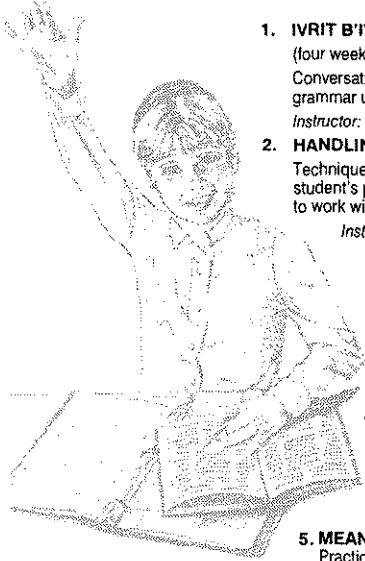
The standard civil *beis din* prescribed by the Torah consists of three judges. Nevertheless, altercating parties may agree to present their case to a single *poseik*. If they agree to the aforementioned *shtar berurin*, *halacha* will accept the finality of the *poseik's* judgment. Likewise, the secular court system will look upon the decision as a mutually binding arbitration.

When Yisro joined up with the Jewish nation, Moshe described the great deluge of questions and cases being posed to him as the people's search for the teaching of Hashem³. That is how we are to approach our conflicts. If we pursue our rights because we feel that we earned our property honestly, according to the laws — and spirit — of the Torah, then we have nothing to fear from a *din Torah*. We should also remember that if we lose the *din Torah*, we should be even more thankful, since we would otherwise have retained property that is not really ours. The Ultimate Judge guarantees that using the *beis din* will elicit the truth. There is no guarantee in regard to a secular court.

³ Shemos 18,15; see Rashi.

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Cheder Lubavitch Hebrew Day School, Skokie, IL

7. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Methods to structure the environment to produce learning.

Instructor: Rabbi Nachum Kaplan, Dean,
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8. TEACHING NAVI

Gain an in-depth understanding of Navi and how to teach it

Instructor: Rabbi Zev Katz, Principal Judaic Dept.,
Yeshiva of Greater Washington-Girls Div.

9. CLASSROOM SURVIVAL

Various methods and approaches that work when faced with difficult discipline problems

Instructor: Rabbi Shmarya Rennett, Rabbi,
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10:15-12:35	1. IVRIT B'IVRIT TEACHERS' SEMINAR 2. HANDLING THE DIFFICULT CHILD 3. BACK TO BASICS 4. PRINCIPALS/ ADMINISTRATORS' SEMINAR	1. IVRIT B'IVRIT TEACHERS' SEMINAR 8. TEACHING NAVI 9. CLASSROOM SURVIVAL	1. IVRIT B'IVRIT TEACHERS' SEMINAR 13. BUILDING SKILLS IN PRIMARY GRADES 14. CLASSROOM PSYCHOLOGY
1:30-3:50	5. MEANINGFUL COMMUNICATION	10. TEACHING IS	15. DISCIPLINE WITH DIGNITY
3:50-4:05	מנחה	מנחה	מנחה
4:05-6:25	6. TEACHING GEMORAH 7. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT	11. DIKDUK MADE SIMPLE 12. HELPING CHILDREN GROW	16. TEACHING THE WHOLE CLASS 17. ACTIVE TEACHING

No sessions on July 22

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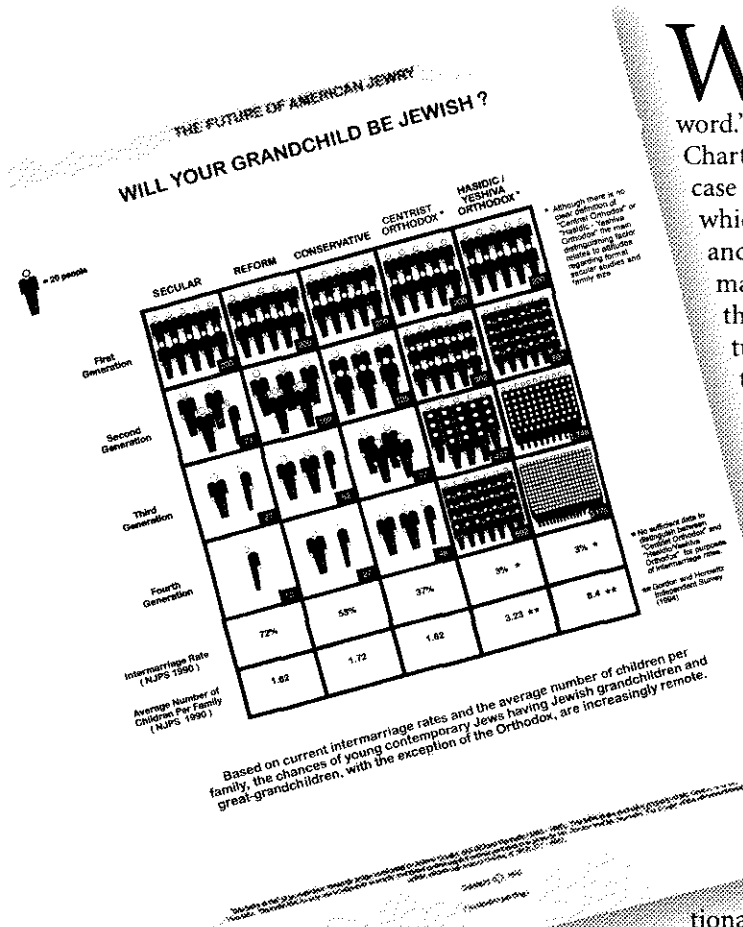
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NUMBERS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS



We all know the old adage, "a picture is worth a thousand words." The "Generational Chart" (see left) is a classic case in point. The chart, which illustrates in clear and graphic terms how many Jews will survive the onslaught of acculturation and assimilation in America over the next three generations, is the central table in our research article entitled "Will Your Grandchild Be Jewish?"¹ The article has already been published in whole or in part in numerous publications²; however, the recent publication of the "Generational Chart" in Alan M.

Dershowitz's new book, *The Vanishing American Jew*, has now captured the attention of a much wider audience.

The only graph or chart in the entire 395 page book is, in fact, the

"Generational Chart." Professor Dershowitz cites the chart to illustrate the demographic trends in America. Of concern, however, are Part II and Part III of Dershowitz's book, which forms the major part of his book, in which the Harvard Law School Professor deals with "Proposed Solutions" and "A Workable Answer" respectively. Professor Dershowitz's proposed solutions and suggestions are, in most instances, antithetical to the findings that we gleamed as a result of our research.

The essence of Professor Dershowitz's argument and proposed solution is summed up in his book as follows:

"In every generation, Jews have redefined themselves to adapt to the ever-changing world. This ability to keep Judaism relevant, to give the past a vote but not a veto, has been a key ingredient in our long and mysterious survival against all odds. In the end, my proposals for a more open Judaism, adaptive to the new realities of Jewish first-class status, acceptance, and marginalization of anti-Semitism, will not save the kind of Judaism that is G-d centered, rule bound, ritual driven, and clannish. That kind of Judaism will be saved by those who believe and practice Halakic (sic) Judaism. They are doing a fine job and need no help from me or others who are not members of the club. The Judaism I am trying to defend and enhance is a Judaism of ideas, of attitudes, of skepticism, of justice, of compassion, of argumentation, and inclusiveness. That kind of Judaism can survive, indeed thrive, in an open and welcoming world into which Jewish ideas can cast a beacon of light. That kind of Judaism does not depend on numbers, or on religious definitions of who is a Jew, or on whether one's mother or father was a Jew. That kind of Judaism depends on the power of Jewish ideas to educate, influence, and repair the world. Every Jew who cares our future must join in building the foundation for this new Judaism..." (pp 334-335).

Chanan (Antony) Gordon is a Sir Abe Bailey Scholar (1988), Fulbright Scholar (1989), and graduate of the Harvard Law School. Mr. Gordon is involved in numerous outreach projects in Los Angeles including being the co-founder of "Partner in Torah" (Los Angeles) as well as the L.A. *Hachnasat Orchim* Committee. He currently works as an Investment Executive at PaineWebber, Inc.

Richard M. Horowitz graduated with an M.B.A. from Pepperdine University. Mr. Horowitz is the President of Management Brokers Insurance Agency, Leviathan Computers and Dial 800 L.P. He is also President of *Aish Hatorah* for North America.

¹ The article was the culmination of almost four years of research of data based primarily on the National Jewish Population Study (1990) and collated by the North American Jewish Data Bank. The authors worked in tandem with Dr. Ariela Keysar, Ph.D., Professor Barry Kosmin and Mr. Jeffrey Scheckner amongst others.

² *Moment* (October, 1996); *Jewish Spectator* (Fall, 1996); *Heritage* (March 14, 1997); *Jewish World* (March 26-April 3, 1997).

CHALLENGING THE DERSHOWITZ SOLUTION

One of the central themes that permeates Dershowitz's book is the notion that by moving further away from what Dershowitz refers to as "Halakic Judaism," and embracing "a more open Judaism," the continuation of American Jews would be assured. These proposals by Dershowitz are not borne out by the data. In fact, in most instances we find the opposite to be true.

It is now clearly apparent from the results of the National Jewish Population Survey 1990 ("NJPS 1990"), that the rate of intermarriage has risen dramatically in the past thirty years, from an average of 9% before 1965 to 52% in 1990. This fact has been recognized by leading academicians from all the major denominations. The NJPS 1990 showed clearly that secular Jews have doubled their intermarriage rate, while Reform and Conservative Jews have tripled theirs. Contrary to Dershowitz's assertions, the data indicates that the move away from "Halakic Judaism" over the years shows a clear trend away from ensuring Jewish continuity:

Secular Jews in the 18 to 39 year age group have an intermarriage rate of 72%, while those over age 39 have an intermarriage rate of 35%. Younger Reform Jews now have an intermarriage rate of 53%, compared to a 16% rate for the older group. Among younger Conservative Jews, the intermarriage rate has increased to 37%, compared to 10% for those Conservative Jews over the age of 39. Only Orthodox Jews have reversed this trend—their intermarriage has fallen from 10% among those over 39 to 3% of the 18-39 group today.

Professor Dershowitz's specific comments about intermarriage are also not supported by the plethora of statistically data that we evaluated. "Jews must adopt a different approach to the increasing reality of intermarriage," he writes. "We must become more welcoming of the non-Jewish spouse. Refusal to permit intermarriage has failed as a deterrent mechanism. We must try another way. If a non-Jew

While 28% of children of intermarriage are being raised as Jews, only 15% of the entire group ultimately marry Jews themselves. Thus, contrary to Dershowitz's hypothesis, it is clear that nearly all of the children of intermarriage are lost to the Jewish people.



wants to marry a Jew and is prepared to have a rabbi participate in the ceremony, a rabbi should be willing to lend his or her Jewish participation to so important an event." (p 322). The NJPS found

that mixed married households contained 770,000 children under 18 years of age. According to the NJPS, only 28% of these children were being raised as Jews; 41% were being raised in another religion; and 31% were being raised with no religion at all. Moreover, while 28% of children of intermarriage are being raised as Jews, only 15% of the entire group ultimately marry Jews themselves. Thus, contrary to Dershowitz's hypothesis, it is clear that nearly all of the children of intermarriage are lost to the Jewish people.

Dershowitz's call to action to embrace a Judaism that would be more "open" and "adaptive" to ensure Jewish continuity is not corroborated by the facts. One need go no further than the fact that the conversion rate amongst Reform Jews exceeded 20% before the adoption by the Reform denomination of the contrary-to-halacha concept of patrilineal descent. Ironically, since this concept was adopted by the Reform denomination, the conversion rates dropped to approximately 10%.

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unaffiliated or less committed Jews, and helping them understand that, notwithstanding Dershowitz's thesis, only a move based on *more* of a commitment to "Halakic Judaism" could in fact ensure the *true continuity* of American Jewry. Consider the following, based on the illustration used in the *Generational Chart*:

If two young Reform Jews were to become affiliated to the Chassidic Orthodox or Yeshiva Orthodox, the two former Reform Jews would have an average of 52 descendants in 3 generations. On the other hand, the 98 young Reform Jews they leave behind will have a total of only 13 Jewish descendants. In other words, the average number of descendants of the two young Reform Jews who became affiliated to the Chassidic Orthodox or Yeshiva Orthodox will be four times as many as the 98 young Jews who remain Reform.

Similarly, two young Conservative Jews who become affiliated to the Chassidic Orthodox or Yeshiva Orthodox will have twice as many Jewish descendants

as the 98 they leave behind. Two young secular Jews who become affiliated to the Chassidic Orthodox/Yeshiva Orthodox denomination will have ten times as many descendants as the 98 secular Jews they leave behind.

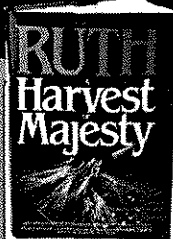
Six young Conservative Jews who become affiliated to the Centrist Orthodox will have as many Jewish descendants as the 94 they leave behind. Four young Reform Jews who become Centrist Orthodox will have as many Jewish descendants as the 96 they leave behind and two young secular Jews who become affiliated to the Centrist Orthodox denomination will have more Jewish descendants than the 98 they leave behind.

In short, if Dershowitz is truly concerned about Jewish continuity, it should be evident that the only change that will result in a statistically significant consequence for American Jews is a horizontal shift along the denominational axiom from the secular, Reform or Conservative Jews to the Centrist or Chassidic Orthodox/Yeshiva Orthodox camp. ■

If two young Reform Jews were to become affiliated to the Chassidic Orthodox or Yeshiva Orthodox, the two former Reform Jews will have an average of 52 descendants in 3 generations. On the other hand, the 98 young Reform Jews they leave behind will have a total of only 13 Jewish descendants.

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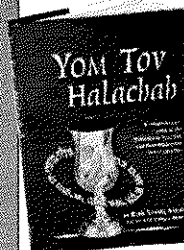
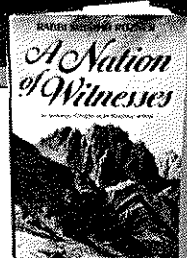
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Der Aufstieg: Dr. Nathan Birnbaum זצ"ל, Ascent and Agudah

Nathan Birnbaum is not a ba'al teshuva. He is like Avraham Avinu in that he came to recognize his Creator on his own.

RABBI AVRAHAM ELIYAHU KAPLAN זצ"ל

We generally define a *ba'al teshuva* either as one who was held captive by a *yeitzer hara* and then overcame it, or as one who was ignorant of Judaism who then came to appreciate its ideals and their relevance. By these definitions, the most famous *baal teshuva* of our century, Dr. Nathan Birnbaum זצ"ל, was never a *baal teshuva* at all! Dr. Birnbaum never succumbed to *yetzarim*. At every step along his way to *emuna*, he sought the truth of *Yahadus*.¹ He shaped the ideology and accomplishments—and experienced the shortcomings and frustrations—of each of the various movements that vied for the soul of our nation. Like *Avraham Avinu*, by process of elimination—and no small measure of Divine Providence—he came to realize the *emes* of Torah-true Judaism.

This past *Pesach* marked his sixtieth *yahrzeit*. This year also marks the eight-

Rabbi Bechhofer is the Rosh Kollel of Yeshivas Beis HaMidrash LaTorah and the Noble Night Kollel in Skokie IL, as well as *Mora D'Asra* of Cong. Bais Tefilla in Chicago. His most recent contribution to these pages was "Dr. Isaac Breuer זצ"ל, History and Destiny," June, '97.

ieth anniversary of a remarkable movement he founded within the Agudah: "*HaOlim*, The Ascenders."

A LIFE OF STRUGGLE AND ASCENT

Nathan Birnbaum was born in 1864, to observant parents from Galicia and Hungary, in Vienna. Although he distanced himself from Orthodoxy, he did not do so to assimilate, but to pursue Jewish national renewal. In 1885, he founded a Jewish nationalistic movement—a movement which he himself named—Zionism. By 1897, he served as chief secretary of the central Zionist office.

Over time, he recognized the Zionist movement as bereft of true Jewish culture. He came to the realization that the struggle for land could not supplant

the struggle for cultural advancement. Dr. Birnbaum broke with the Zionist movement to seek an authentic Jewish modality that would transcend the narrow quest for a homeland. He thought he found it—in Eastern European Jewish culture. He became an ardent Yiddishist. From 1906 until 1911, he published Yiddish periodicals that promoted an autonomous Jewish culture focusing on the Yiddish language.

This second phase of his career brought him into intimate contact with Eastern European Jewry. The vibrancy of both Polish *Chassidus* and Lithuanian *Mussar* made a profound impact upon him. An *erlebenis* (religious experience) while at sea on a ship to America pushed him along, and he came to recognize the *yad Hashem*. Dr. Birnbaum came to see the role of *Am Yisroel* in Creation as a religious destiny. By 1919, Nathan Birnbaum was a fervent Agudist, and the first general secretary of the Agudath Israel World Organization.

Personal, even professional, fulfillment never satisfied him. Like *Avraham Avinu*, his quest was never personal sal-

¹ Related by Dr. J. Wolgemuth זצ"ל, in *Jeschurun*, Berlin, *Iyar-Sivan* 5684. Quoted by Rabbi Tzvi Kaplan (Reb Avraham Elya's son) in *MeMa'ayanei Kedem*, p. 330.

² His first pen name was "*Mattisyahu Acher*," *Mattisyahu* - a loyal son of his nation; *Acher* - but also, a heretic who denied his nation's faith (*ibid.*, p. 319; see also *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol. 4, pp. 1040-1042).

vation or achievement, but the renaissance and growth of the entirety of *Klal Yisroel*. Thus, after returning to Torah and *mitzvos*, Dr. Birnbaum felt compelled to publicize and promote what he had found.

But not to his estranged brethren! To Dr. Birnbaum, the great challenge was to energize Torah true Jewry. His "return" spurred him to new ambitions: Ambitions to rise and uplift his fellow *Ma'aminim* with him, that we might all lead lives that befit scions of a holy nation, of G-d's nation. Already in 1917,

he published works in Yiddish and Hebrew that were challenges to us:

You complain about the traitors to *Toras Hashem* and about our period that produces such traitors. You are angry with these traitors, who have distanced themselves from Torah for the sake of an easy life. But you who cling to the Torah — do you not also seek comfort? Can't their pursuit of affluence be linked to your attitude?

Why are you not angry with yourselves?

Every day you take pride in that

Hashem chose you and gave you His Torah. Didn't he also command you "Be holy unto Me"? How can you take pride in that He chose you, yet not pursue holiness as He has commanded?

It can only be because it is easier for you thus.

Every day you await the moment when *Hashem* in His great mercy and love for you will send you *Moshiach*. Why do you expect a gift, a grant, a favor? Why don't you improve your deeds, to merit *Moshiach's* coming by your own righteousness? Indeed, the only way to merit such a reward is by travelling the road that ascends toward the loftiest level of holiness that man can attain. But this road appears to you too difficult to travel. You seek only that which is easy.

You know the Torah's words well. You also know which road leads to holiness. Why is it that you have not walked along that road?

IN THE PATH OF REB YISROEL SALANTER

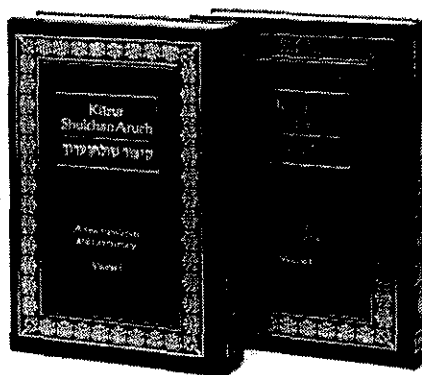
A generation earlier, Rabbi Yisroel Salanter ז"ר had toiled to introduce the idea of ongoing self-critique and development. Dr. Birnbaum undertook a similar task. The main difference in these two approaches, perhaps, lay in that Reb Yisroel focused on individual *avoda*, while Dr. Birnbaum stressed the elevation of society.³ Dr. Birnbaum strove to mobilize *Klal Yisroel's* energies in pursuit of *shleimus* as an *Am Hashem*.

³ "Am Hashem" — a collection of Dr. Birnbaum's essays in Hebrew translation, (Netzach, Bnei Brag, 1977), p. 91. The volume's name is taken from one of his major works in German, *Gottesvolk*, "G-d's Nation." This 1917 essay, "Eis La'asos," is also printed in Rabbi Moshe Prager z"l's "L'Or HaNetzach" (Research Institute of Religious Jewry, New York, 1962), p. 437. "Divrei Ha'Olim" was published the same year.

⁴ The resemblance was not lost on his contemporaries in the Lithuanian Yeshiva world. Many of his writings were translated and published in *HaNe'eman*, the Telzer journal that served as the voice of contemporary *Mussar*. I am grateful to Rabbi Tuvya Lasdun, librarian at the Gottesman Library of Yeshivas Rabbi Yitzchak Elchanan for providing me with copies of Dr. Birnbaum's essays in *HaNe'eman*. It would be a great favor to our generation were someone to reprint the *HaNe'eman* series, which is difficult to obtain.

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It followed that the organization that unified Orthodox Jewry under the banner of Torah true principles should serve as the vehicle for that elevation. This was Dr. Birnbaum's perspective on Agudath Israel. He saw the Agudah as the ideal forum in which to promote constant striving for *his'alus* and *shleimus*. He persistently lobbied the Agudah's leaders and members to join in his great push for mass refinement.⁵

Dr. Birnbaum organized small groups of individuals that would devote themselves even more intensely to the cause of *his'alus*. Known as "*Ha'Olim*," these groups were to be the vanguard of a great movement toward heightened *avodas Hashem*.

Ha'Olim groups were extant from the 1910's until the 1930's. It was with the solidification of the Agudah after the second *Kenessia Gedola* (in 1927), however, that Dr. Birnbaum first mounted a major effort to expand the movement.⁶ [See box.] He publicized a signed call to join his fledgling movement. Most of the signatories were well-known ideologues and activists of the early Agudah. The *Kol Koreh* was printed simultaneously in the newsletter of *Agudas Yisroel* in Germany and in the Telzer *HaNe'eman* (in Hebrew).⁷

A GLIMPSE OF HA'OLIM'S ACTIVITIES

Few records of their activities remain.⁸ But the *Ha'Olim* literature and Dr. Birnbaum's writings

⁵ A fascinating facet of Dr. Birnbaum program was a firm belief that cosmopolitan lifestyles were detrimental to *his'alus*. He believed that the intensity and competitiveness of city life and trade were inimical to the contemplative and deliberate personality that is the Torah's ideal. He was, therefore, very vocal in his advocacy of a return to a rural, agrarian lifestyle. See, for example, *Am Hashem* pp. 106-107.

⁶ *Men of Spirit* (New York, 1964), Rabbi Leo Jung zt"l, Editor, p. 337 (essay by Dr. Solomon A. Birnbaum zt"l on his father, Dr. Nathan Birnbaum).

⁷ The *Kol Koreh* in *HaNe'eman* is accompanied by an editorial essay (likely authored by Rabbi Yosef Shmuelevitz זי"ע, editor of *HaNe'eman*, and a towering figure in his own right), that expresses Eastern European amazement that such a movement might have been conceived in Germany — a country they perceived as bereft of spiritual strivings and *Mussar* inclinations; and also a heartfelt plea to the Lithuanian Yeshiva world to recognize the compelling necessity to join in these efforts.

afford a glimpse of *Ha'Olim*'s program and activities.

Dr. Birnbaum identified three areas in which we must sanctify ourselves: *da'as*, *rachamim* and *tiferes*.

By *da'as* he meant awareness and knowledge of *Hashem*. He did not mean that one should study the evidence of G-d's existence and the like. Dr. Birnbaum meant that we should be intimately acquainted with *Hashem*. This intimacy would be manifest in fervor (*hislahavus*) in *Hashem* and submission (*hachna'a*) before Him. Awareness and

⁸ I am grateful to *The Nathan and Solomon Birnbaum Archives* of Toronto, under the auspices of Dr. Birnbaum's grandchildren, Prof. Eleazar and Mr. David Birnbaum, for providing me with the records and protocols that do exist, including the cover page of an issue of *Der Aufstieg*, a monthly journal published by Dr. Birnbaum in Berlin from 1930-1933, from which the title of this essay and the accompanying illustration are taken. A sad but fascinating sidebar: One of the prominent members of *Ha'Olim* was Daniel Schindler, father of Reform "Rabbi" Alexander Schindler. Another grandson, Mr. Jacob Birnbaum, informed me that the Schindler family's *tallis* has an *atara* upon which are embroidered the words: "*da'as, rachamim, tiferes*."

knowledge that do not lead to fervor and submission are imperfect. Submission before *Hashem* leads one to submit to others that submit to G-d's will as well, but not to those who do not, i.e., evil-doers, scoffers and the haughty.

By *rachamim* he meant that we should cling to *Hashem's middas harachamim* and have mercy upon our fellow beings. Such *rachamim* must be aroused when one perceives either physical or spiritual anguish in another; it must concern itself both with remediation of extant pain and with prevention of potential pain; and it must address communities and individuals equally.

By *tiferes* he meant that we must consciously borrow a part of the ultimate glory that is *Hashem's* and adorn ourselves with it. The stress here is on "borrow" — as opposed to "acquire." We must see ourselves as a part of the glory that is the Creation, not as independent sources of splendor. The danger of the latter attitude is haughtiness and self-

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Kol-Koreh/Public Proclamation (free translation)

"And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a sacred nation." G-d commanded Israel to sanctify itself and raise up that sanctity as an example and a banner. This is the task of the Jewish nation. It has not yet completed this task. It is still distant from the pathway that leads to this sanctity. It is still far from true awareness and service of *Hashem*; far from compassion and extra care in matters *bein adam l'chaveiro*; far from arranging itself in a modest way amid the world's grandeur, a way that would reflect the majesty of G-d Himself. Even worse, a part of the level that the nation had already achieved has eroded. Our *bein adam laMakom* is frigid and has become flippant; our *bein adam l'chaveiro* has become artificial or political. Our lives are either patterned after foreign, empty ideals, or bereft of all esthetics and order, not sacred unto *Hashem*.

Will this decline continue? Is it permissible to gaze with equanimity on this destruction? Has the time not come to turn the evil back? Hasn't the moment arrived for *Am Yisroel* to strive for that ascent for which it was chosen? Who [but us] is responsible for fortifying themselves and calling out to *Yisroel*: Become more than you presently are! Be *more than true* to *Hashem* and His Torah. Take on the mighty responsibility for the life force of the Jewish nation!

One thing gives us hope, the fact that *Charedim* have recently organized themselves and become productive. Through these efforts they have gained much in distinction, in confidence and in the quest to act. This gives us hope, that soon they will come to realize their capacity for the greatest task of all.

To fulfill this hope, the undersigned committee has decided to found

The Society of Olim

Based on the ideas expressed by Dr. Nathan Birnbaum in his book, "In the Work of Promise."

This society, as part of the framework of *Agudas Yisroel*, will not be a political party or entity aspiring to rally masses under its flag. It will not compete with independent Orthodox organizations. On the contrary — it yearns to be an army of pioneers upon which others can rely.

The purpose of the society is: To promote the idea that *Agudas Yisroel* must create the necessary conditions to refine the entire Jewish nation.... Then, under the leadership of the *Rabbonim* of the *Mo'etzes Gedolei HaTorah*, the nation will be enhanced. It will become a true *Knesses Yisroel*, one that embraces the entire nation of an Israel that is *chared l'dvar Hashem* with strong and tight-knit bonds, as opposed to the state of anarchy that currently reigns.

Before all else, however, the society must ensure that it itself will be an example and role model. Not just in a return to agriculture (in that it will found a model colony now, and, subsequently, various colonies, in *Eretz Yisroel* and other lands). Primarily, rather, by proving that courage of spirit and self education will have enabled the society to achieve significant ascent despite the current less-than-ideal situation. The society is obliged to build groups of those who yearn for sanctity within the body of *Am Yisroel*.

To attain its goal the society will use special techniques and regulations whose fundamentals have already been formulated, but whose details must still be resolved. With no shred of politics, the society will educate all those who accompany it:

- To the capacity to withstand the modern rebellions against both *emuna* in *Hashem* and *Mesora* and against the laws of *tzenius* and *kavod chachamim*.

- To strengthen *emuna* and diligent Torah study.

- To imbue their hearts with true love and awareness of *Hashem*.

- To habituate themselves to the *midda* of *rachamim*: empathy, assistance and good will in matters *bein adam l'chaveiro*.

- To arouse themselves to thoughts of *Kiddush Hashem* and to pattern their public lives in a splendid and majestic authentic Jewish manner.

Anyone who yearns to see *Yisroel* ascend to its proper level as a *nation of destiny and example*, and knows that he has the capacity to toil with his entire personality for the benefit of this purpose, should come and identify himself to us!

We must mention an individual that to our sorrow has already passed from among us: Rabbi Avrohom Eliyahu Kaplan ז"ל was among those who began to gather under the idea of "*Ha'Olim*." He signed this *Kol Koreh* some years ago. Were he still alive, he certainly would have had his name signed on the *Kol Koreh* as it is now being issued. He surely would have participated and helped us now in our work.

We will eagerly provide more information to anyone corresponding to the address of:

Samuel Ostersetzer, Duisburg (Germany) Charlottenstrasse 62.

From Poland and throughout Eastern Europe, to the address of:

Advocate Dr. Ben-Zion Fessler, Kolomea (Poland) Sobieckiego 8.

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Rabbi Dr. Elie Munk, Ansbach/Mordechai Knobelsch, Dortmund/Samuel Ostersetzer, Duisburg/Lawyer Isaac Rosenheim, Frankfurt/Dr. Gershon Schnerb, Frankfurt/Dr. Solomon Birnbaum, Hamburg/Wolf S. Jacobson, Hamburg/Moshe Elzas, Kassel/David Ullmann, Kassel/Dr. Ben-Zion Fessler, Kolomea/Henry van Leeuwen, Rotterdam/ Rabbi Tuvia Horowitz, Rzeszow/Binyomin Mintz, Tel Aviv/Dr. Leo Deutschlander, Vienna/Alfred Stroh, Vienna/Yehuda Leib Orlean, Warsaw

centeredness. *Kedushas hatiferes* requires us to identify, define and pursue a Torah esthetic — in our dress, our abodes, our art and our music — one that reflects the values of an *Am Segula*.⁹

This was not abstract idealism. Dr. Birnbaum created a detailed plan for ascent in holiness. A 1927 address to the Agudah's Central Committee captures the essence of the *Ha'Olim's* program:¹⁰

HA'OLIM'S PROGRAM, AS PER DR. BIRNBAUM:

“It is the greatest demand placed by Judaism itself on the Jewish people: ‘And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a sacred nation.’ If *Chareidim* seek to be true activists, then they must consider how they will fulfill this lofty demand that Judaism makes. They must place this demand at the center of their activism.

I know that many — and not necessarily the most base among us — respond to such demands with a smile on their lips. They perceive this as exaggerated *temimus*, as a naivete that refuses to recognize the nature of humanity and its inescapable frailties. In truth, even I am far from believing that all human beings possess an equal capacity and ambition for a life of *Mussar*....

What I think, what I hope to achieve, what I demand from *Chareidi* activists who recall G-d's ancient charge to the Jewish people, is a *society* that attains a lofty character, so that each member of the society ascends discernibly, whether to a great or small degree, even if that individual does not end as *the* outstanding *ba'al middos*....

How can the ideal of sanctity and character refinement become the new driving force within *Am Yisroel*? It seems to me, without doubt, that this ideal can only serve as a driving force if we can find suitable individuals to accept upon themselves to enunciate and declare this ideal in all its breadth and depth. They must do so incessantly,

⁹ The definitions here are taken from *Am Hashem* p. 109.

¹⁰ Reprinted in *L'Or HaNetzach*, p. 439.

DER



EINE JUDISCHE MONATSSCHRIFT
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UND DAS SAGST DU DEN NEUBERUFENEN WAS GUT IST UND DICH HENZIG UND DIE
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DAS DEN HILFEN DES JAHRES, DAS DICH HENZIG, UND IN LEBEN
GALT NEIGEL, END ES STROMEN ZU IM ALLE VOLKE. JAHRE II. 2

without slavishness, with the full weight of the idea. Furthermore, there must arise a small force of pioneers in self-sanctification to serve as an example and role model for *Am Yisroel*....

[Organized Orthodoxy] is obliged to come together and create societal tools that will teach: 1. How to deepen our awareness of *Hashem* out of love for Him [*da'as*]. 2. How to dedicate ourselves to love our fellow human beings [*rachamim*]. 3. How to pursue modesty [*hatznei'a leches*] as a manifestation of the glory of our *Hashem* [*tiferes*]....

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“We must admit that cold intellectualism has penetrated our relationship with Hashem. Following through with that metaphor, *Ha'Olim* cannot remain at ease with this frigidity. They must toil until within their societies, within each of their groupings and within each of their members there arise divine *hislahavus* and inner spiritual feeling.

To achieve *aliya* in *Da'as Hashem*, I envision [the following ideas]:

1. Torah study in a more profound manner: Every “*Oleh*” is required to expand and deepen his knowledge of Torah and *Chachmas Yisroel*. Before all else, if he does not possess basic knowledge, he must acquire it upon entering the society. The society must constant-

ly supervise its members to ensure that they are fulfilling this obligation. It must provide the opportunity to learn and grow through *shiurim* that it will conduct within its circle. The society shall campaign among its members, their children and their students to convince them to embark upon a term of study in a yeshiva or under a renowned *talmid chacham* for one to three years.¹¹

2. Festive gatherings of *Chareidim*, for spiritual purposes (such as the introduction of the Eastern European *Shalosh Seudos*, etc.).

3. Special instruction in the history and development of *hislahavus* and *dveykus* in Israel and its practice.

4. Great emphasis must be placed upon a stipulation that every *Oleh* refrain from any excesses or immodesty in speech, clothing, deed and from any competitive sport or gambling.

5. The development of a pure esthetic that will free the architecture of our *shuls* and the nature of our music from the influence of other religions....

To achieve *aliya* in *bein adam l'chaveiro*, I propose:

1. Instruction in the issues of *bein adam l'chaveiro* and guidance in expanded practical applications. Both modern and classic texts should be employed, with a particular stress on current situations, to develop a greater sense of belonging to Orthodox society as a whole.

2. The obligation of every *Oleh* to engage in *cheshbon hanefesh* at least once a week, to ascertain if, and to what extent, he has fulfilled *mitzvos* and refrained from *aveiros* according to the instruction and guidance provided to him.

3. An outright ban on certain material pursuits.

4. Substantive and apolitical common counsel to resolve Jewish societal problems in the spirit of Torah and *Mesora*.

Even if the manner in which we display the public image of our lives does not currently convey our glory as the Chosen Nation, even if we are uncertain how to properly become the glory [*pe'er*] of the world, *Ha'Olim* cannot allow the status quo to continue. They must attempt to rectify as much as possible.

To achieve *aliya* in the manners of creating public lives, I would project:

1. Instruction in issues concerning glory [*tiferes*] and its correlation to religion and *mussar*¹²... [and] practical guidance in the application of these principles to the creation of appropriate public lives.

2. The development of an independent Jewish social structure following Judaism and *mussar*.

3. The development of arts, especially architecture, music and poetry, rooted in the spirit of true Jewish *Mesora*, and the establishment of competitions in these areas.

4. The previously mentioned (in the section on *da'as Hashem*) ban on excesses.

As a means of ascent in all three afore

¹¹ We must be aware of the German Orthodox milieu, in which *yiras Shamayim* and *shemiras hamitzvos* were very strong, but Torah knowledge, scholarship and religious fervor were relatively weak. Advanced yeshiva study (except for those who aspired to the rabbinate) was unheard of.

¹² Dr. Birnbaum references here a work by Reb Yaakov Rosenheim z”l on Aesthetics and Judaism.

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mentioned areas I would consider:

Involvement in the education of young men and young women according to the demands of *Ha'Olim* — an involvement that will become especially substantial when it will be possible to arrange such education among large groups of *Ha'Olim* or in their respective communities....

There is no room to doubt the importance of *Ha'Olim* to the entirety of *Agudas Yisroel*.... Through their *avoda* in the ideals of *mussar* and *middos* (a labor unto itself), they can be a special force for the Agudah, if only the Agudah realizes how to take advantage of this opportunity. For although the Agudah's strengths are mostly organizational and political, it cannot derive its life force from those strengths.... It must focus on those inherent strengths of *Yahadus* itself, its eternal ideas and ancient yearnings as well. In the final analysis, strength of will is contingent on those ideas and yearnings....

Please do not allow your hearts to persuade you that all there is here is the foundation of yet another redundant

new society. That which we will found here is a *Kiddush Hashem* that will unite the driving forces of *Chassidus*, of the *Mussar* Movement, of the Talmudic Masters and of the ambition for loftier *Derech Eretz*.... This will be a *Kiddush Hashem* to an extent never before attempted. A *Kiddush Hashem* that will be the first step toward the blossoming of the ancient Torah, a debt that we owe *Hashem* in return for the *chesed* He has granted us in choosing our nation. It is the first step toward fulfilling the task, for which *Hashem* has chosen us. »

POSTSCRIPT

Unfortunately for us all, Hitler's rise to power put an end to the activities of those groups of *Ha'Olim* that had begun to form in various places. The unsettled conditions that prevailed in Europe doomed this attempt to create a nucleus of enthusiastic young Jews dedicated to the spiritual regeneration of their people.¹³

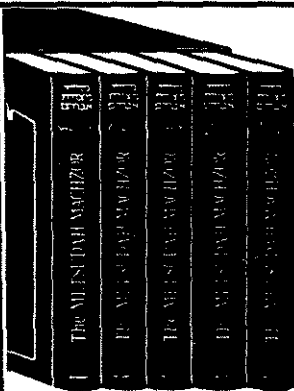
¹³ *Men of Spirit*, ibid.

Forseeing the danger posed by Hitler *yemach shemo v'zichro*, Dr. Birnbaum fled Berlin (where he had lived since 1911) with his family in 1933. He moved promptly to The Hague in Holland. He continued there to publish yet another periodical, "*Der Rufe*." The upheavals, however, took their toll. Dr. Birnbaum's death in 1937, along with the Holocaust, decimated the *Ha'Olim* movement.

We certainly have not done Dr. Nathan Birnbaum or "*Ha'Olim*" justice. What we have attempted here, rather, is to place upon the table of Judaism an array of essential ideas. The challenge that Dr. Birnbaum placed before the Agudah's central committee seventy years ago is still relevant. The Holocaust led to compelling "distractions": the rebuilding of Orthodoxy and the Yeshiva world; the solidification of our socio-economic and political foundations; the popularization of large scale Torah study projects.

But isn't it now time for determined, structured ascent? ■

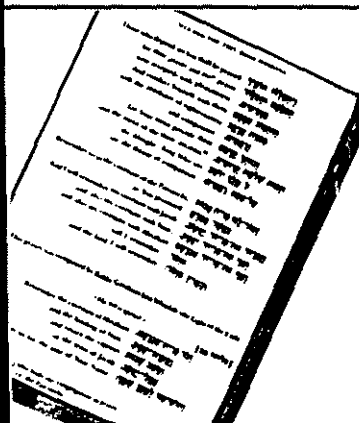
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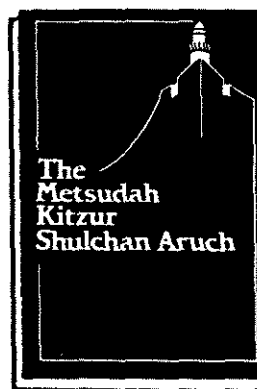
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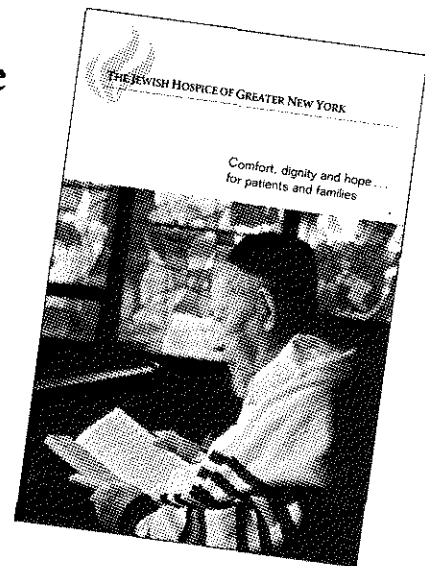
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A Neglected Chessed: Comforting the Bereaved Who Are Not Aveilim

“Where are they sitting?” and “Till when is the *shiva*?” are almost reflexive questions asked in response to a *besurah ra’ah*. Although the task is far less enjoyable than the *chessed* of being *m’sameach chosson v’kallah*, most people today recognize the great benefit to *aveilim* of performing the *mitzva* of *nichum aveilim*.

While there still may be room for improvement in the manner in which we perform this vital *mitzva* (See: “The Psychodynamics of Grief and Mourning: A Layman’s Guide to Making a *Shiva* Visit,” *JO*, Jan. ’85), most people would agree that *nichum aveilim* today does not belong in the disregarded category of a *meis mitzva* (i.e. a *mitzva* that has become abandoned).

When we hear of someone sitting *shiva*, we know just what to do, what is expected of us and how we can help. *Chazal* have provided us with clear guidelines for just how to demonstrate our support to those who have been struck by *aveilus*.

But what about the bereaved who are not required to sit *shiva*? Are their emotional needs any less pressing? How can we reach out and comfort those grief stricken individuals in our midst who do not have the halachic status of *aveilim*? This article will attempt to address these questions.

During any crisis in life, the support

Dr. Meir Wikler, a psychotherapist and family counselor in private practice, lives in Brooklyn, New York. He is a frequent contributor to these pages, most recently with “Children Are What They See,” in Dec.’96.

A noted mental health professional offers some practical advice on comforting the bereaved who are not required to sit shiva.

we receive from family and friends goes a long way towards helping us weather the storm. While this is true for all of life’s stresses, there are three particular circumstances of bereavement which are so often overlooked that we need to be reminded of them.

1. Miscarriages

The prescribed rituals of *shiva* are conducted only when the *niftar* was at least 30 days old, or, if younger, was definitely born after a full nine months. (See, *Yoreh Deah*, Section 3, Chapter 340:30 and 374:8.) When a fetus is not carried to full term, therefore, the parents do not have the halachic status of *aveilim*.

But the parents may be just as grief stricken at the loss of an 8 month old fetus as they would be if the child had been born. And the loss of a fetus can be just as devastating to parents, whether or not they have other children.

The agonizing disappointment and crushing loss may even be compounded by excessive and unreasonable feelings of guilt. At times, parents also experience a sense of shame for being so different from their neighbors, friends and relatives who enjoy the much-too-taken-for-

granted happiness of normal births.

What do you say to a woman who has just suffered a miscarriage? What should you not say? How do you comfort her husband?

If you are like most, you probably say and do nothing for fear of hurting the bereaved parents even more. While such a *sheiv v’al ta’aseh* (passive) policy prevents you from committing any faux pas, it also leaves the grief stricken parents feeling abandoned and alone.

The best thing you can do is acknowledge their loss. Tell the parents that you heard about it so they won’t have to guess whether or not you know. Then take your cues from them. If they want to talk, they will. If they would rather try to forget about it, they’ll change the subject. Follow their lead.

If you can, offer some concrete assistance. “Can I take any of the little ones off your hands for a couple of hours?” “Do you need anything at the grocery store? I wouldn’t mind adding a few items to my order for you.”

Of course, you should avoid moralizing and don’t attempt to cheer up the parents. That just gives them the message that they’re not supposed to feel sad, or that they’re expected not to feel pain.

If they raise theological questions you can respond. But don’t begin with the “positive” side of their loss unless they turn to you for that kind of *chizuk* or unless you are uniquely qualified to provide it. (See: “A Mission Fulfilled,” by Rabbi Moshe Wolfson with Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, *JO*, Summer ’95, pp. 8 - 10.)

2. The Days and Weeks After Shiva

Ask anyone who has ever sat *shiva* what was the most difficult time. Chances are nine out of ten will answer, "the day" or "the week after *shiva* was the hardest."

For close to seven days the *aveilim* are never left alone. All of their practical needs are taken care of by others. They do not even prepare food for themselves. And they do not leave the *beis aveil* in most cases, except for *Shabbos*.

For the week of *shiva*, family and friends rally around the is giving them the moral support they so desperately need to help them cope with the crisis of their bereavement. Their days are structured with the *minyanim* and visits of those who come to offer comfort.

But the day after *shiva*, all of this support is withdrawn. And some *aveilim* experience an emotional free fall which leaves them feeling alone and overwhelmed. Many people have confided to me shortly after getting up from *shiva*

that what they feared most during their first week of bereavement was how on earth they would ever manage returning to their regular jobs, classes and daily routines.

Going back to yeshiva or back to work is an enormous challenge which should never be faced alone. A brief visit or even a phone call to "touch base" with someone who has just gotten up from *shiva* can go a long way towards easing the burden of that most difficult transition from the secure cocoon of *shiva* to the threatening challenges of everyday life.

If it is a *chessed* to make a *shiva* visit, is it any less of a *chessed* to pick up the phone the following week and ask the *aveil* how it's going? Believe me, those few calls that do come in the week after *shiva* are often appreciated far more than the hundreds of visits the week before. This is not meant to suggest that one should rather call the week after *shiva* instead of making a *shiva* visit. But one should try, whenever possible, to do both.

3. The Loss of Extended Family Members

The *Shulchan Aruch* requires sitting *shiva* only for the seven immediate family members: father, mother, sister, brother, son, daughter, and spouse. The emotional bond between other relatives, however, may be just as close, if not closer.

Someone may feel closer to a grandparent, cousin, step parent, or in-law (father, mother, brother, sister, son or daughter) than they do to more immediate family members. Nevertheless, when one of these relatives is *niftar* there is no formalized recognition of the loss. (See, *Yoreh Deah*, Section 3, Chapter 374:7.)

The bereaved individual has no structured opportunity to vent his or her feelings of grief. He or she will attend the *levaya*, of course, as well as the *k'vurah* and/or *shiva*. But the focus of attention is, as it should be, on the *aveilim*. Nevertheless, that may leave this person with bottled up emotions to deal with alone.

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This does not mean that people who come to make a *shiva* visit should ignore the *aveilim* and turn their attention to the bereaved cousins or grandchildren. But it does mean that it would also be an act of *chessed* to acknowledge that a bereaved sister-in-law or father-in-law has just suffered a major loss.

Not too long ago, a young man, let's call him Levi, lost his father-in-law, Mr. Wein. In the last few years of Mr. Wein's life, Levi was single-handedly responsible for coordinating the increasingly complicated medical care Mr. Wein required. In fact, Levi took a more active role in contacting doctors and shepherding Mr. Wein to his medical appointments than Mr. Wein's children.

Levi was eager to accept these additional responsibilities for his father-in-law because of the deep respect and love which had built up over the years since Levi had married into the Wein family. Coming from an irreligious home, Levi looked for and received much spiritual and practical guidance from Mr. Wein.

Now he was gone. Levi visited the house of mourning as much to comfort his in-laws and wife as to find some comfort for himself. As he sat in the *beis aveil* listening to the outpouring of sympathy for his in-laws, he couldn't help wishing that at least some of it be directed at him. Two weeks later, during his annual check-up, Levi broke into uncontrollable sobbing when his doctor said, "I heard you lost your father-in-law recently. How are you doing, now?"

You are not supposed to make a *shiva* visit to anyone who is not an *aveil*. But if you meet or speak with someone who just lost his grandfather or daughter-in-law, it is as

much a *chessed* to address their feelings as it is to comfort someone who is sitting *shiva*. In fact, since so many people ignore the emotional needs of bereaved extended family members, your words of support and comfort may be even more appreciated.

You don't need to be a *talmid chacham* or a mental health professional to know what to say. Just acknowledge the loss and then take your cues from them. If they want to talk, they will, now that you've given them the chance. If they don't want to vent any feelings,

they'll simply change the subject, which they have every right to do. But because you brought up the subject of their loss, you have performed an act of *chessed* which takes so little time and yet fulfills the Biblical command of *V'ahavta l'rey-acha kamocha* (Vayikra 19,18).

In this age of "emergency *chessed* parties" and multi-million dollar, international *chessed* organizations, it is important to remember that a great *chessed* can sometimes be performed simply by asking, "I heard of your loss. How are you doing?" ■

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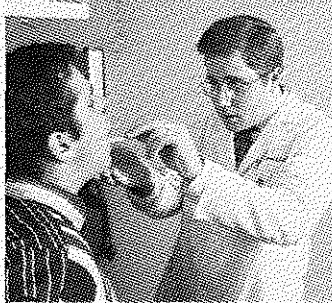
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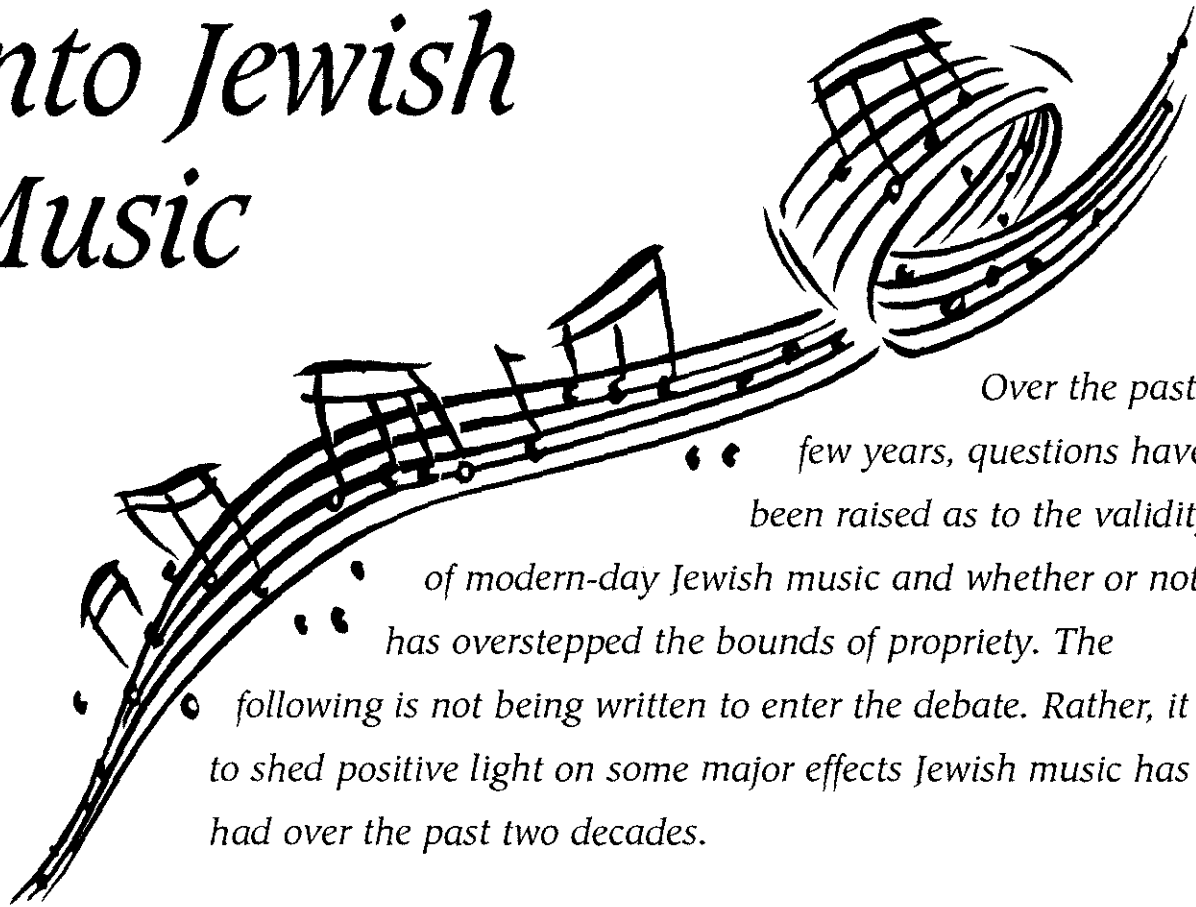
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Putting The "Music" Into Jewish Music



Over the past few years, questions have been raised as to the validity of modern-day Jewish music and whether or not it has overstepped the bounds of propriety. The following is not being written to enter the debate. Rather, it is to shed positive light on some major effects Jewish music has had over the past two decades.

What can bring a beaming smile to the face of a chronically ill child, when nothing his devoted parents can do for him seems to be mitigating his heartbreaking situation?

What are the first words out of a HASC¹ child's mouth as he steps off his "school" bus into the arms of his family after a summer away from home?

What could possibly enliven a "Shabbaton" in a place as remote from major Jewish population centers as Omaha, Nebraska?

And what is it that can attract the

non-religious to their roots and lead them to become *baalei teshuva*?

Two words can answer these questions. Jewish Music. And with good reason. Over the years, Jewish music has become a pipeline between Jews and their souls, effectively bridging a gap that was otherwise filled by various and sundry secular pursuits that bore no beneficial results. The obvious positive effects of Jewish music cannot be negated nor denied by even its most ardent critics. Allow me to delve a bit into the specifics.

FOR THE CHRONICALLY ILL: JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED

One invaluable contribution Jewish music has made to chronically ill children and adults

everywhere is a project called "Simchas Chava." Born in 1988, under the auspices of Agudath Israel in conjunction

NOTICE

The following is the text of article VI of the Beth Medrash Govoha, Lakewood, N.J. by-laws, which are currently in full force and effect, and are carried out in practice.

ARTICLE VI

Beth Medrash Govoha shall maintain a nondiscriminatory admissions policy and shall at all times be in compliance with applicable federal, state and local regulations in regard to admissions, accommodations, educational opportunity, student aid policies and employment.

Qualified men of the Jewish faith are admitted to Beth Medrash Govoha and are uniformly accorded all rights, privileges and benefits, without regard to race, color, national or ethnic origin.

Beth Medrash Govoha shall maintain a policy of Equal Opportunity in Employment.

¹ Hebrew Academy for Special Children

Dovid N. Golding, the Ding half of Suki & Ding Productions, is responsible for the proliferation of "Uncle Moishy and the Mitzvah Men" tapes, as well as a host of other musical recordings and concerts worldwide. The author acknowledges the efforts of Mrs. C. Sruelwitz for her contribution to this article.

with Suki & Ding Productions, it was named in memory of Mrs. Chava Golding, a truly loving woman who had devoted her life to *Bikur Cholim*. Simchas Chava spreads cheer through music amongst the seriously ill and handicapped.

Imagine, if you will, the look on the face of the Bar Mitzva boy, stricken with a severe form of multiple sclerosis, too sick to deal with the strain an ordinary Bar Mitzva can place on a child, when suddenly, at the celebration of this milestone event, the band strikes up an intro, and his biggest hero, Mordechai Ben

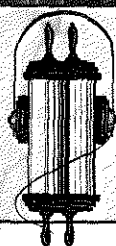
David, walks into the room and starts singing to him!

Picture, too, the tired lines of exhaustion disappearing from the face of a mother in Milwaukee when Uncle Moishy, a well-loved Jewish children's entertainer, dances into the hospital room with his guitar and coaxes a real smile out of her sick child. And this was a boy who had refused to acknowledge the presence of his friends and family for weeks. Uncle Moishy even managed to get the little boy to sing along.

Consider Avraham Fried taking a flight to the National Institute of Health

in Bethesda, Maryland, for the express purpose of singing his songs to a nine-year-old boy on a respirator. The doctors had all but given up hope for the sick little boy and then, out of the blue, in walks Avraham Fried and a keyboard player. They hit a chord and begin singing to the tiny figure huddled in white blankets, machines of all kinds surrounding his motionless form. Doctors and nurses stop in their tracks. "Look! He hears you!" one of the physicians practically shouts. "Come! Everyone! He's smiling! He's clapping!"

The doctors and nurses gathered



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around the bed that day unshamedly cried.²

About two years ago, Dedi visited a hospitalized teenage girl who was stricken with cancer. After he had finished singing, he told the young girl, "Don't worry, you'll be okay. Be'ezer Hashem, I'm going to sing at your wedding, too." The girl smiled wanly, knowing how improbable the thought of her getting married was. Shortly before this past Pesach, Dedi, smiling broadly, walked into the Sands Ballroom and kept his promise. He sang at her wedding.

Simchas Chava has also sent hundreds of Jewish tapes and videos to hospitals in all corners of the globe; organizations such as Chai Lifeline, Rofeh, Zichron Shlomo, Caring and Sharing, and the Bobover and Satmar Bikur Cholim groups know that they can call upon these resources at any given time to provide musical therapy for the ill.

THE HANDICAPPED: SPECIAL TREATMENT FOR SPECIAL CHILDREN

In the Jewish world, HASC has become a household name for their tireless efforts geared to children with handicaps. All year long, including the summer months³, HASC relies on Jewish music to sustain its children both mentally and physically. Ask a HASC child how his summer was. I did.

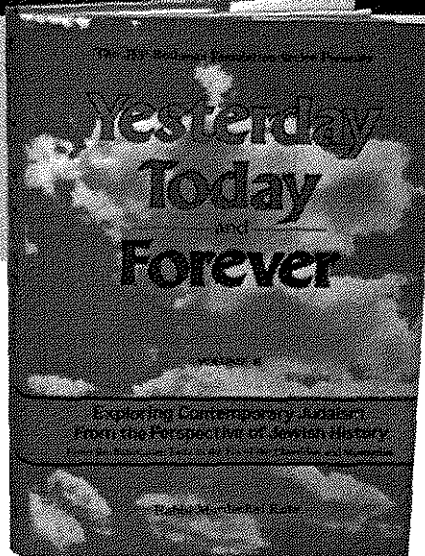
"Mordechai ben David came to our camp! I sang on stage with Mordechai ben David! Me!" The look on his face said more than his words did.

Organizations such as Mishkan, P'tach, Chush, and others too numerous to mention, look forward to appearances by Jewish singers and entertainers as a break from the every-day grind and as an uplifting experience to all ages and stages of handicap.

² Other popular Jewish musicians such as Yerachmiel Begun, Mendy Wald, Yisroel Williger, Yediel Werdyger, the Piamentas, Sandy Shmueli, Abish Brodt, Country Yossi, Rivie Schwebel, Dov Levine, Ali Scharf, Avraham Rosenblum, Yoel Sharabi and Rochel Miller have donated graciously of their time and energy to bring smiles to the faces of sick children.

³ Their summer program, which allows these children to be away from home for a few weeks, provides their parents with a much-needed respite.

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Imagine a beautiful little girl born mentally retarded and who, to her parents' dismay, hasn't shown the slightest reaction to the world around her in her two short years of life. Then one day, sitting on her father's lap, oblivious and quiet at an Uncle Moishy performance,

her eyes suddenly sparkle and she brings her tiny hands together to clap softly. It might have only lasted a few seconds and maybe only her father witnessed this miracle, but no price tag can be placed on the tears of joy a simple song about mitzvos evoked that day.

OUTREACH: A MUSICAL SHABBOS

What would a Shabbaton be without Jewish music? Organizations like NCSY, JEP, Aish Hatorah, Chabad, and many more have long banked on the uniting effects of Jewish music of every kind to join teenagers the world over and bring people closer to Hashem. Rabbis Yerachmiel Milstein and Yaakov Salomon, who lead Discovery programs across the U.S., have given testimony to the potent force music has provided to their efforts in *Kiruv Rechokim*, penetrating even the most hardened hearts,⁴ ranging from Russian immigrants to budding Yankee *baalei teshuva*.

Jewish music has gone where no one had gone before, giving Jewish teenagers an alternative to non-Jewish music. So when the Beatles were trying to mark their territory with our children, Pirchei

⁴ Singers and entertainers like Rabbi Shmuel Brazil, Abie Rotenberg, Shelly Lang, Zale Newman and Yossi Lieber are just a few musical talents who have left their permanent mark on the souls of searching Jews everywhere.

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records happened. And after that, the JEP records appeared, bringing their own distinctive style of English-language lyrics to the Jewish public.

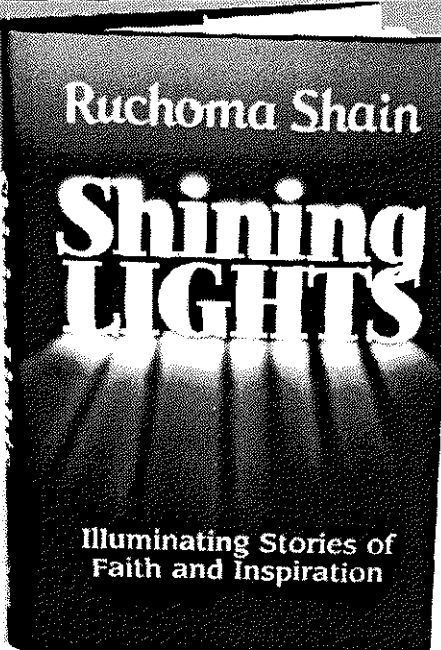
One specific incident stands out boldly in Kiruv history that attests to music's power: In 1990, Stanley Felsinger, the owner of Camp Monroe, a non-religious camp for teens, became observant. Not satisfied with his personal achievement, Stanley decided that Camp Monroe should also become religious. That may have seemed beyond the realm of possibility, but the odds didn't stop him.

First, he started serving only Kosher food. Then he put a stop to public Chillul Shabbos. But the job he had ahead of him, getting the children to actually be aware of and accept their precious Jewish heritage, seemed insurmountable. At loss for a proper course of action, he approached Rabbi Aaron Schechter שליט"א, Rosh Hayeshiva of Mesivta Rabbi Chaim Berlin, and explained his predicament. Rabbi Schechter suggested that he get the camp to experience a real Shabbos in all its glory.

How does one tackle so great an assignment? Stanley devised a simple plan: From the first night of camp on, he made it his business to show his teens a videotape of MBD singing "Just One Shabbos..." taken at a concert. He showed it over and over again. Soon, everyone knew the song, word for word. When he caught sight of the children singing it on their own, he knew he was succeeding.

Towards the end of that summer, MBD found out about Camp Monroe and Stanley's undertaking. He decided to surprise them with a visit. It was a visit no one at Camp that day will ever forget: the delighted screams from the teenagers and staff alike, the dancing, and most of all, the singing. And when Mordechai ben David sang "Just One Shabbos" with the entire Camp Monroe accompanying him, Stanley Felsinger cried.

True stories that speak to the heart...



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A TRUE SIMCHA, INDEED

Aaron Zutler, a well-known musician, relates an incident that happened to him not long ago. A talented musician, he constantly receives calls for his services in cases where money is a problem. Whenever possible, Aaron takes the jobs.

One day, Rabbi Mutty Katz from JEP⁵ called him in desperation, explaining that a Russian girl who had no money

⁵ Zeirei Agudath Israel's outreach effort: Jewish Education Program.

was getting married that day. With no music at her wedding, it would be a lackluster event. Could he please do it? Aaron had one small problem. He had promised to drive his wife to a Chinese Auction and did not like going back on his word. Making a quick decision, he apologized profusely to his wife for not being able to take her, sent her to the Chinese Auction by taxi, and played for the young Russian bride. A few hours later, he received a call from his wife, breathless with excitement. "You're not going to believe this, Aaron. We won the grand prize worth \$2,500!"

There's a fascinating story about a very wealthy man in Israel who was stricken with cancer. Baruch Hashem he was cured after a short regimen of therapy, and he invited Dedi to sing for his seudas hoda'a. Dedi agreed and sang from ten in the evening until four in the morning. Non-stop. At 4 a.m., the grateful man took out his check book and said, "So, Dedi, what do I owe you for tonight?"

"A million five," said Dedi, looking him straight in the eye.

"You're kidding!" said the man, incredulously.

"Nope," replied Dedi. "I'm as serious as I'll ever be."

"A MILLION FIVE??"

"Yup. A million five. You see, I'm trying to build a cancer center for children here."

The man smiled. Then he took out his pen and wrote the check. Today, in Petach Tikvah, there's a new cancer center for children.⁷

JEWISH MUSIC: A CELEBRATION THAT LASTS A LIFETIME

What would a wedding be like without the *chassan's* Rosh Yeshiva dancing with him to joyous music? A father and son dancing at a Bar Mitzva? *Baalei teshuva* rejoicing with song at a Purim *chagiga*? The sick and handicapped celebrating life with music and laughter?

Each instance, a beautiful picture to be cherished.

To millions of Jews the world over, music is the lubrication that keeps their souls running, it's the sun peeking out of a hole in the clouds. One thing we're all certain of: The Golus will end. But Jewish music won't. ■

⁶ Aaron is only one of many musicians who have dedicated selflessly of their time and talent. Eitan Kantor, Yochi Briskman, Yisroel Lamm, Steve Levine, Yitzy Braun and Shabsi Parnes are just a few of the talented musicians out to help a brother in need.

⁷ Needless to say, this is only one of the many ways Jewish musicians, singers and actual songs have been used to raise badly needed funds for important causes. There aren't many organizations who can claim Jewish musicians had nothing to do with their success, whether from singing at concerts to actually digging into their own pockets.

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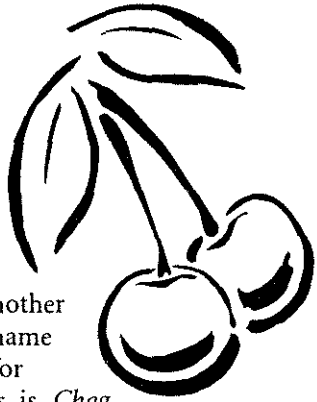
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Another name for

Shavuot is *Chag Habikkurim*, a reference to the *mitzva* of bringing *Bikkurim* (the first of each of the Seven Species of produce to ripen) to the *Beis Hamikdash*. Since these fruits could be brought starting from Shavuot, the *Yom Tov* was also called *Chag Habikkurim*.

As the *Mishna* writes, "How are *Bikkurim* separated? A man would go down into his field and see [the first] fig that ripened, [the first] cluster of grapes that ripened, [or] pomegranate that ripened; he would tie a string [around the fruit] and say, 'Behold, these are *Bikkurim*'" (*Bikkurim* 3:1).

These first fruits were then brought to the *Beis Hamikdash* in special baskets and formally presented to the *Kohanim* with much *simcha* and celebration.

B'avonoseinu harabbim — due to our many sins — we no longer have the opportunity to perform this beautiful *mitzva*. All we can do today is yearn for the rebuilding of the *Beis Hamikdash* and try to imagine what it would feel like to present the *Kohein* with our first fruits.

"Aaron, what are you carrying in that briefcase? It looks like it must weigh half a ton."

"Oh, hi, Meir. Have you got a minute? I can't wait to show you what I've got here."

Aaron reaches into his oversized briefcase and pulls out a newly-bound, intimidating textbook. "Here," he says, thrusting the volume into Meir's hands. "Take a look. It's my only copy. I just got it today from the publisher. What do you think?"

Eliyahu Mayer is a New York-based writer. His "What Counts During *Sefira*" appeared in the May '96 J.O.

First Fruits

Shavuot Musings

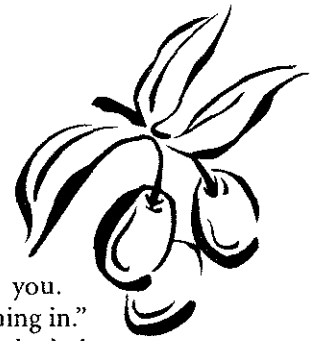
"Pretty impressive. This must have taken a tremendous amount of work to put together."

"That's over six years and hundreds of hours of work you're holding there. You have no idea how many revisions I had to make. I can't believe it's finally in print. Uh, go easy with the pages. This is my first copy. I'll get more in a few weeks; but right now that's my only one."

"Leibie, this is quite a place you've got here. How's business?"

"*Baruch Hashem*, I can't complain. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing really. I just wanted to drop by and wish you *hatzlacha* on your new store."



"That's very thoughtful of you. Thanks for coming in."

"By the way, what's that dollar bill doing there taped to the wall behind the cash register?"

"Oh, that. That's the first dollar I made the day I took over this business. You wouldn't expect me to put *that* dollar in the bank, would you? It's too special for me to deposit."

"Mommy, how come all of our baby pictures are fuzzy? Why aren't they clearer like the more recent ones we have?"

"*Tzaddik'le*, we didn't have such a good camera in those days. Today we

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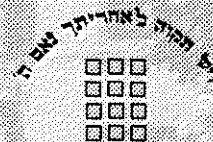
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have a much better one. And...uh, did you wipe your hands before you started looking at those pictures?"

"Oh, sure. But how come you're always so worried that someone's going to mess up these pictures?"

"*Tzaddik*'le, these are the first pictures I have of you and your brothers and sisters. If anything ever happened to them, I could never replace them."

"Malka, isn't she a beauty?"

"Oh, gorgeous."

"I picked it today, so you could cut it up for the salad for *Shabbos*. The first tomato of the season from our garden. I'm so excited."

"For a salad, you really need tomatoes that are a bit firmer. Otherwise the salad gets too watery. Uh,...I'm not sure this one would be good for the salad."

"You know, you're right. It wouldn't get enough attention in all that lettuce

and stuff. It would get lost. Why not use it to put a slice on everyone's plate of chopped liver? That way we can all savor the unadulterated flavor of our first tomato this summer."

Now suppose we had to bring the first copy of our latest book, the first dollar we earned at our new store, the first photos of our children, or even the first tomato from our backyard garden, to present to the *Kohein* in the *Beis Hamikdash*. Would we be able to part with these prized possessions so easily? Probably not.

Was it any easier for the Jewish farmer to part with his first fruits during the time of the *Beis Hamikdash*? He had to plow his field (without a tractor) in the fall, pray for rain in the winter, and then guard his delicate crops from a host of predators in the spring. Was he any less excited to see the very first ripening of the fruits of his labor?

But when he came into the *Beis Hamikdash* and recited the *Vidui Ma'aser*, which reminded him that *everything* he has he owes to the kindness of *Hashem*, perhaps it made it a little easier. For then he was reminded of his indebtedness to *Hashem* for *all* of his good fortune, and that his donation of *Bikkurim* was but a relatively small token of the gratitude he should feel towards *Hashem*.

Although we do not have the *Beis Hamikdash* today, we can nevertheless take advantage of the opportunity of *Shavuot* to reflect upon the lesson of *Bikkurim*.

Don't we also owe everything we have to *Hashem*? Shouldn't we also dedicate the "first fruits" of our time and energy to Torah and *mitzvos*? Shouldn't we devote the *first* hours of the day to Torah, the *first* opportunity during a lunch break to *Tehillim*, or the *first* chunk of free time to *chessed*... rather than leaving them for last?

If we do dedicate our first efforts to *Shamayim*, then hopefully next year, we will be *zocheh* to bring *Bikkurim* to the *Beis Hamikdash*, in Yerushalayim. ■

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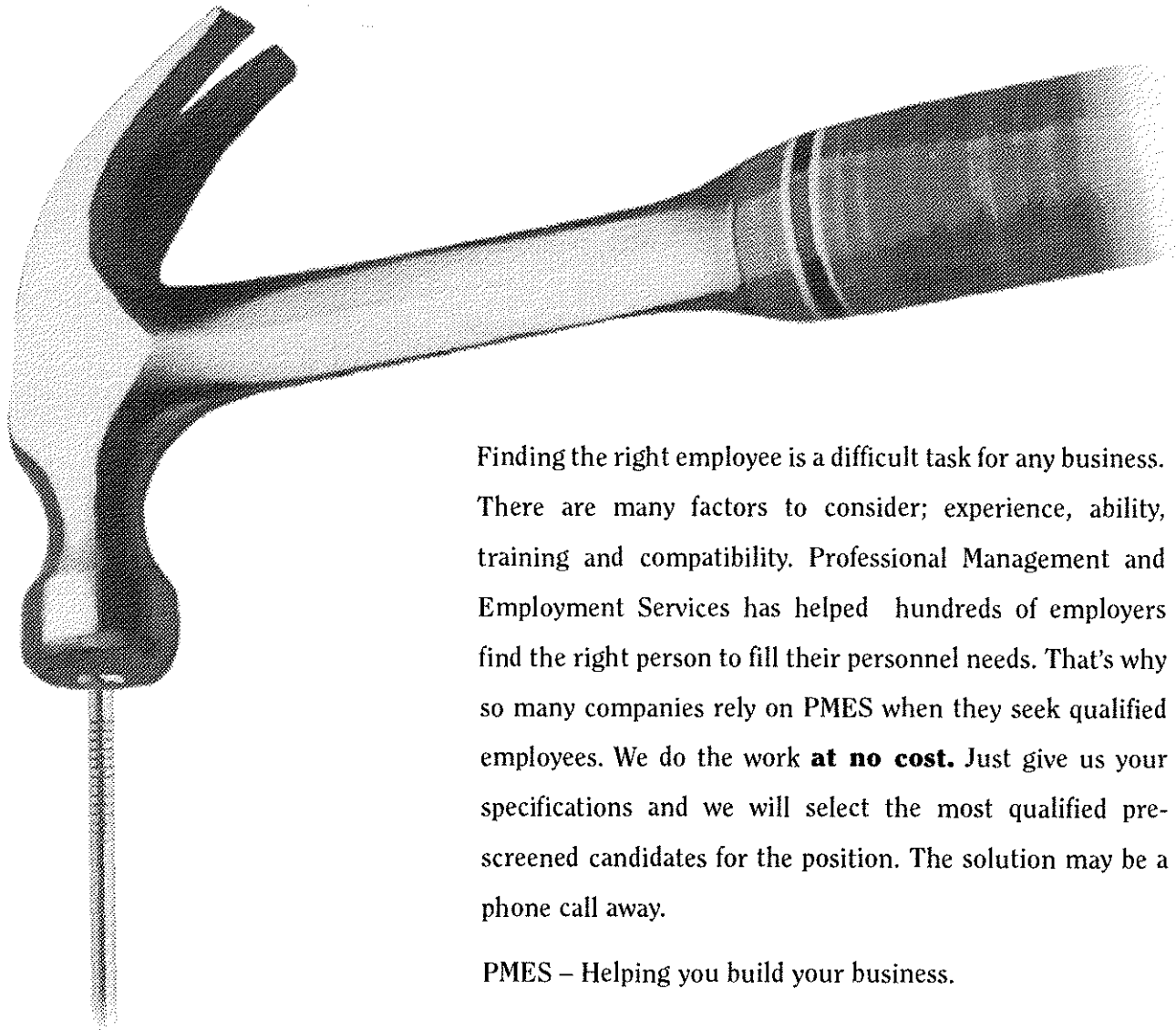


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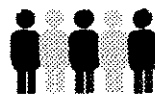
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Lehavdil

Does a *baal teshuva* ever cross the great divide that separates him or her from those who had the good fortune to be born to observant parents?

Facing Judgment, Criticism, and Irritation

We were walking along a quiet suburban street one *Shabbos* afternoon when the topic of *shidduchim* came up. I began to extol the virtues of a close friend of my husband, asking if perhaps the *Rebbetzin* knew of a suitable Bais Yaakov graduate. The *Rebbetzin* turned to me, and, without realizing the pain she caused, said instinctively, "But he's a *baal teshuva*."

I recoiled from the implications of her words — yes, *baruch Hashem* we have seen the light, it's wonderful to have new energy flowing into the community, but to have you marrying our daughters (or our sons) is beyond the pale. All my reasoning — he was not conceived in *tahara*, he has internalized too many outside influences, etc. — did not dull the pain of such collective rejection.

An earlier memory — saying goodbye to a teacher before leaving for *chutz laAretz*. I run up the stairs towards her, carrying my first pregnancy with excitement, confidence and joy. I'm wearing a flowing dress, chosen more for comfort than style, and matching scarf ensemble. As she turns to face me, I see her expression register judgment, criticism, and irritation. The first words out of her mouth pry apart the chasm I have been so desperate to keep closed, "You look so *baal teshuvish*." To which I feebly reply, "But I am."

She proceeded to admonish me that my child would be the only one in his school to have such a strange looking mommy. I would have to start dressing like the mature woman I was. My need

for creative self-expression would have to find more conservative outlets. Much ashamed, I thought to myself, "My child is still in utero, with at least five more years before s/he enters the system." Because I was so eager to please I did not give voice to my conflict. I did not ask to be given time to grow in my observance, gradually taking on more of the "uniform," integrating it slowly into my personality. In my rush to embrace Orthodoxy, I had taken on too many things too quickly. Enveloped in the serenity of my last trimester, what I wanted more than anything was some "time-out" to become myself again. Her concern for me had a rough edge, and all I could think, after our farewells had been said, was how glad I was to be escaping the claustrophobic conformity she demanded of me.

Functioning in a Stratified Culture

This division into *baal teshuva* "Us" versus Observant from Birth "Them" is even more manifest in the Land of Israel. This is a culture founded upon stratification, and the religious realm is no exception. My husband and I had always dreamed of making *aliya*, expecting naively to be welcomed into the unity of *Klal Yisroel*. Because everything here is filtered through such an exacting prism, the component parts are all the more divided into their categories of knitted *kippa*, *streimel*, *peyos*, *sheitels*, snoods, working, learning, *Chareidi*, *Mizrachi*. We had expected these divisions — we were not, however, prepared for the unqualified segregation of the wanna-be from the always-were. To be a *baal teshuva* in this society is to wear our parents' apostasy

on our sleeve for all to see. Our contribution to Torah, and our demands for spiritual excellence in *chinuch* and business — none of this can erase the *p'gam* (defect) from our *neshamos*. The fact that we still have connections, whether familial, commercial, or creative, with the world of *tuma* is proof of our unworthiness to be accepted into the inner sanctum of the Really Frum.

We don't mind being the Zevulun to your Yissachar, as long as this relationship is one of mutual respect. Instead, our medical, legal, and financial knowledge, though useful, brand us as somewhat suspect. Our families, our homes, our ideals, are constantly scrutinized for evidence of *treifus*, impurity and inability to *really* leave behind our decadent past. The psychology textbooks on our bookshelves, the swathe of computer-printouts in our bathroom — these are signs of our incipient descent into the netherworld of immorality and idol-worship. Can we *really* be observant if we make use of the secular wisdom? Shouldn't the Torah be the font to which we turn in the times of doubt? And what of the *bittul To'ah* involved in such dubious undertakings as staying abreast of the current developments in quantum physics? Is it really so important to know what Muslim fundamentalist are up to in Algeria? Surely seeking all this information can't be for the sole purpose of *kiruv*.

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Mrs. Minsk lives in a *Chareidi* community in Harei Yehuda. This is her first appearance in these pages

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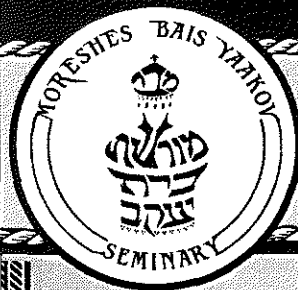
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It could be argued that we need access to the secular world to aid us in our occupations. Nevertheless, even if we were to render our professional services solely to our own community, our neighbors may still prevent their children from entering our homes. True, our associations with the non-*frum* world *may* have deleterious effects on our offspring. But it may also enhance other aspects of their *chinuch*, which appear to need strengthening in the wider *Chareidi* community: *Ahavas Yisroel* towards secular Jews (I mean, Bubby and Zaidy are still good people, they just don't yet observe all of Hashem's commandments); judging other people favorably; a desire to be *mekarev* those who are far from the Path.

Moreover, living with parents who are constantly striving to measure up to people like the Chofetz Chaim, Rav Elchonon Wasserman, Rav Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל, is a greater gift than just adorning the walls of our living room with these self-same *gedolim*. Teaching them that these people are capable of changing their *middos*, that *teshuvah* is possible, this is our *mesora* that we are bequeathing to them. Both sides have so much to offer.

Could we not meet half way? I will continue to respect your tenacity in preserving the Tradition. Could you, in turn, please appreciate and respect my integrity and courage? And in this way, may we bring *achdus* and *chesed* into the realm of the possible. ■



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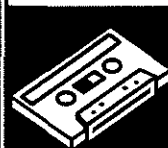
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Toras Emes: A True Siyum?

Of Menus and Curricula

Summer camps serve as an extension of our *chinuch* efforts. We select a camp for our children based on the caliber of its staff, its reputation and *ruach*. There is one practice engaged in by even the finest Torah-oriented camps, however, that is a carry-over from the past which deserves revisitation and reevaluation.

Every year, during the Nine Days culminating with *Tisha B'Av*, I receive the same report from my daughters: A rabbi comes into the dining hall, mumbles some words into the microphone which nobody understands, and they all sit down to a *fleishig* dinner like any other. At home, my wife works hard to balance *milchig/pareve* menus so that we properly observe the words of the *Rema* to abstain from meat during these days.

I have been affiliated in various capacities with many camps, and my *talmidim* attend many others; the reports from the field are the same. Our camps, which boast of their learning programs and adherence to rules of *tze-nius*, are cutting corners and compromising our children's *chinuch* nonetheless with these so-called *siyumim*! In some situations the children will tell you: "The director tells some kids to make a quick *siyum* or he does it himself because it's easier for the cook to make *fleishig*." As a kitchen staffer, I recall being told to ask the *cook* which days he wants us to "make the *siyum*!" This past summer, the second trip of a major girls' camp commenced in the week of *Tisha B'Av*. The girls were welcomed with a *fleishig* meal, despite the stringency of the actual week of the *ta'anis*. The girls were told that the decision was made on the grounds of "nutrition." (Was that

The author of the above article, a senior *mechanech* in the New York City area, requested that his name be withheld

of any concern when the same camp served franks and french fries.)

How the Situation Arose

Originally, this practice was sanctioned by America's leading *gedolim*. Based on conversations with people who were involved in the early days of American *frum* camping, I have pieced together the history.

Under the guidance of such great *mechanechim* (Torah educators) as the late Reb Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz זצ"ל, many children of the 1940's and 1950's were literally taken from the streets and placed in *yeshivos*. This nurtured their *Yiddishkeit* for ten months of the year. Faced with the potential threat of losing them back to the streets over the long, hot summers, the original Camp Mesivta, Camp Yeshiva, Camp Agudah and others were founded to host these youths in a positive summer environment. Girls' camps were quick to follow. A generation was saved.

Besides being starved spiritually, many of these young people came from homes that were unable to provide much in the way of physical nourishment. Poverty was still common among the new immigrants; often the *yeshiva's* lunch was the child's main meal.

In those days, very few options were available to maintain a non-meat menu for a week. The multiple, prepared, frozen delights that line our store's freezers did not exist. Some cheese, bread, potatoes, plain noodles and, on rare occasion, high-priced fish were the only choices. If the Kosher *yeshiva* camp could not provide a varied menu and keep these children happy and excited about camp, in short order they would likely become discontented and return to where they came from... a loss to the Jewish community.

In conjunction with other *gedolim* of

that time, including Rabbi Aharon Kotler and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל, a decision was made to rely on the *Rema* in *Orach Chaim* 551:10, who permitted the eating of meat at a *siyum* during the Nine Days. Besides granting the children the balanced menu which they so sorely needed along with a pleasing camp experience — also sorely needed — the opportunity to emphasize the greatness of Torah learning was utilized.

A careful study of the *Shulchan Aruch* and its commentaries (see *Mishna Berura*, *ibid*) clearly indicates that this

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is not the ideal course of action. Like a *bris*, if the *siyum* just so happens to fall out during these days, the actual celebrants and those normally invited may partake of meat and wine. It's almost uncanny that we don't hear of too many camp-wide *siyumim* outside of the Nine Days, nor do we hear of Bais Yaakovs celebrating the completion of *Mesechtos* at any other time of the year.

In the Light of Current Reality...

On many occasions, I have heard Rabbi Shimon Schwab זצ"ל declare this practice as "scandalous" when children of his *Kehilla* would tell him of it. There was a time when a specific situation arose, and the *Gedolim* of that generation addressed it. Nowadays, *Baruch Hashem*, the reality has changed. Malnutrition and lack of available variety of foods are no longer issues. Virtually nobody will go "off the *derech*" for lack of meat. Yet, we content ourselves to satisfy our own convenience in a manner less than ideal. Can we still justify this practice in light of current reality?

Every camp is staffed with talented head counselors and activity directors. Their gifts can be utilized to develop creative ways to serve a week of *milchigs*: sandwich nights, plan-a-menu contests, supper bars, etc. If there are to be *siyumim*, be sure to schedule some during *Tamuz* and after *Tisha B'Av*, as well (and invite the cook too!).

If we are to raise a *dor muchshar*, an upright generation, ready to serve *Hashem* in the best possible fashion, we must be careful to start with the basics: *Chosmo shel Hakadosh Baruch Hu emes* — the signet of *Hashem* is Truth! ■

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A New Jewish School Network in Israel

Israel at a Turning Point

The country of Israel is at a turning point. The older generation, who at least had fond memories of observant grandparents, is being replaced by a youth that is showing the long-term impact of a secularist ideology. Drug use among teens has skyrocketed. "There has been a dramatic increase in drug use among youth. It's not a phenomenon any more, it's an epidemic!" (Chairman of the National Parents' Association — Dec. 26, '95 *Jerusalem Post* archives). Cults and teen violence are on the rise. One in six boys brings some kind of weapon to school. Tens of thousands of young Israeli adults are reported to gather on the beaches of India for drug trading and use. A very large percentage of secular teachers polled said that they would rather have not been born Jewish. The worst of decadent secularism has infected the Israeli populace.

Parents are scared. Officials recognize the problem, but do not know how to respond. There appears to be no solution in sight.

On the other hand, *kiruv* (outreach) is blossoming. More and more Israelis express a desire to return to a life of full observance. Rabbi Uri Zohar speaks at public lectures sponsored by Lev L'Achim to crowds of 200-1000 people, often several times a week. Ten to 20%

Rabbi Winston, who lives in the Neve Yaakov section of Jerusalem, is a free-lance writer.

fill out response forms asking for help in making serious commitments to *mitzva* observance. *Kollel Avreichim* go door-to-door asking non-observant families if "they would like to learn Torah together." Surprisingly, given the anti-religious portrayal of the classic Israeli, very few doors are closed in their faces. In fact, *mitzva* observance is often discussed within the first few weekly meetings and genuine progress is made, including keeping of *Shabbos*, *Kashrus*, *taharas hamishpacha* and the willingness to send their children to Torah schools.

Meeting the Growing Demand

The high rate of success in outreach has placed great strains on the existing *kiruv* organizations. They are hard-pressed to find the resources to meet the demand. One of the most glaring difficulties is the lack of schools for children from secular homes.

This is due to the great success rate of Chinuch Atzmai — almost all of their students are now religious and many *Chareidi*. Though Chinuch Atzmai schools do take children from non-observant backgrounds, existing parents often object to accepting non-observant children, as they do not want their children to be influenced by the secular youths. *SHUVU* has done excellent work in providing Torah schools for Russians. But what about the rest of the Israeli children?

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they have attended one of the famous Arachim seminars. They have decided to start keeping *mitzvos* and want to send their children to a Torah school. Yet, to their dismay, no one is willing to accept them, as their level of observance is not yet on the level of the families already enrolled in the local Torah school. "We are willing to change our lives so much — but they still won't accept us!" Having no choice, they leave their children in the public school system.

As one volunteer with Lev L'Achim

described it: "I was working with a nice family. She was Ashkenazi. He was Sephardi. We were making slow, but steady progress. They had agreed to start keeping the laws of *taharas hamishpacha*. One of their children was also interested in attending a Torah school. But to my horror, I found that there were no Torah schools on my city that take children from non-observant homes!"

Was this city some distant, isolated place? No. It was in Yerushalayim. Imagine: A Jewish child could not receive a proper Torah education in, of

all places, *Yerushalayim Ir Hakodesh!*

Who is at fault?

Are the hard-pressed *kiruv* organizations to blame? Is a successful Chinuch Atzmai at fault — for succeeding too well? Clearly we must open Torah schools throughout *Eretz Yisroel* in any place that needs them.

The Growing Deficit

It is estimated that over fifty communities in Israel require a boys' and girls' Torah school. The schools must be attractive, have a high academic level, and help children and their parents to discover the wealth of Torah Judaism.

With a mandate from Rabbi Yosef Shalom Eliyashiv שליט"א, joined by Rabbi Michael Yehuda Lefkowitz, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Steinman, Rabbi Shmuel Auerbach, Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Sheinberg שליט"א, and a North American Rabbinic Board (in formation) consisting of the Bostoner Rebbe, Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky (*Rosh HaYeshiva*, Philadelphia) and Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg (*Rosh HaYeshiva* Ner Israel, Baltimore) שליט"א, the New Jewish School Network in Israel has been formed. Its purpose is to ensure that (בס"ד) every Jewish child in Israel be able to receive a proper Torah education. An ambitious goal, but would we permit ourselves to strive for anything less?

These schools will not only be places where children can begin to taste the sweetness of Torah, but also serve as educational centers for the whole community. Special lectures, seminars, programs and classes for parents will help bring the life-giving force of Torah to cities throughout Israel.

What does the future hold for Israel? Will it continue a decline into decadent materialism and even become anti-religious? Or will the embers of *kedusha* hidden in the hearts of our Israeli brethren be given a chance to burst forth into a magnificent flame? It seems the *Hashgacha* has put this historic decision into our hands. ■

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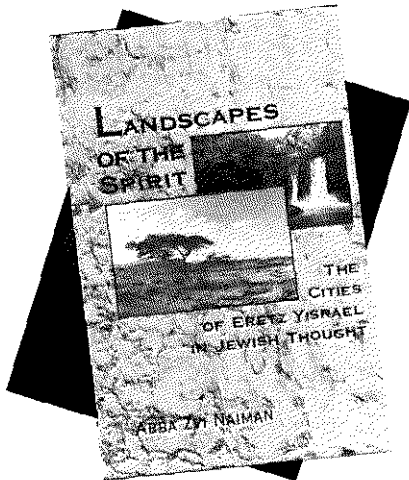


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BOOKS IN REVIEW



Landscape of the Spirit: The Cities of Eretz Yisroel in Jewish Thought, by Rabbi Abba Zvi Naiman (Targum/Feldheim, Jerusalem/Nanuet, NY, 1996, 177 pages, \$15.95)

Rabbi Abba Zvi Naiman is a gifted *talmid chacham*, a graduate of Yeshiva Ner Israel in Baltimore and Yeshivas Mir in Yerushalayim, and currently an author and editor of the Schottenstein Edition of the Talmud, published by Mesorah/ArtScroll. But of greater interest to us in these pages, he is a disciple in the field of *machshava* (Jewish thought) of Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg, Rabbi Moshe Shapiro and Rabbi Nachum Lansky *shlita*. Through their tutelage, Rabbi Naiman has gained a mastery of the fundamental concepts of philosophy and a methodology for explicating the *Aggadic* passages of Talmud and Midrash. By dint of his own exertions he has acquired broad knowledge of the works of such diverse thinkers as Maharal, Ramchal, the Vilna Gaon, R' Tzaddok HaKohen, Sfas Emes, Shem MiShmuel, et al. The fruits of such a substantial investment include Rabbi Naiman's highly acclaimed *Edrei Tzon*

on the Torah and Holidays (in Hebrew), and *Mafte'ach leSifrei Rav Tzaddok HaKohen zt"l*, a comprehensive index to the works of R' Tzaddok (also in Hebrew). And now, for the English-speaking and lay audience, he has produced *Landscapes of the Spirit*.

The concept behind this *sefer* is as timely and delightful as it is novel. Drawn from the teachings of the Arizal and Maharal and from writings of the great Sefardic Kabbalist R' Avraham Azulia, it states that just as *Eretz Yisroel* is — among all countries — uniquely

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From their letters of approbation...

It will certainly be helpful to those who study Torah, specifically those learning Daf Yomi.

Rav Chaim Pinchas Sheinberg
שליט"א, Rosh Yeshiva of Torah-
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I have studied the manuscript and found the translation to be enlightening, clear, and true to the original. The notes are illuminating and will surely help those learning this masseches.

Rav Zelik Epstein שליט"א, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva
Sha'ar HaTorah

I reviewed the translation and explanation... and was most amazed by it. בס"ד, it can be most helpful to those learning this difficult masseches, one whose topics are unfamiliar even to those versed in Torah.

Rav Avigdor Nebenzahl שליט"א, Rav of the Old City of Jerusalem, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivat HaKotel, and Talmid and Chavrusa of Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach זצ"ל for over thirty years

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suiting for a life of holiness and spirituality, so has each city in Eretz Yisroel a distinctive character, which promotes a specific type of spirituality. Thus, Yericho performs a different function than does Yerushalayim or Chevron. One city affects a certain connection between Hashem and His people, while other cities create different bonds.

Landscapes thus takes us on a fascinating tour of the Holy Land. We are taught why Yericho is the "lock" of Eretz Yisroel, Shechem is the city of "individuality," Yaffo is the "gateway" to Yerushalayim, and Betar is the city of "pride."

In all, twenty-five areas are visited and examined, revealing their spiritual essences in the light of major events that had transpired there. Permit me to give but one example: Ashkelon was the home of Dama ben Nesina, a Roman official who forfeited a huge financial windfall rather than disturb his father's sleep (see *Kiddushin* 31a). In another incident (*ibid.*), Dama suffered his distraught mother's insults in silence rather than shame her in public. To Rabbi Naiman's mind, the fact that the *Gemora* chose a gentile from Ashkelon as the paradigm of one who truly honors his parents patently requires explanation.

The author cites *Maharal*, who writes that the *mitzva* of honoring parents is exceedingly logical. As the people who bring us into this world, raise

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us, care for all our needs, and teach us proper values and good sense, parents deserve our complete respect. Even someone who denies *Hashem* and Divine reward and punishment will accept this precept. In fact, such a person will find it particularly easy to honor his parents, since he lives only for this world, wherein his parents have given him all that he has. Hence, it is not surprising that someone like Dama ben Nesina, who was devoted to this world and eschewed the higher realms of existence, would honor his parents to the utmost. [Interestingly, for performing this *mitzva* he was rewarded with a red heifer (a *para aduma*), which is required for a *mitzva* that defies logic.] Maharal concludes that it is indeed not happenstance that Dama ben Nesina lived in Ashkelon, for that city's name is rooted in the word *shikul*, which means *taking* or *accepting*. That is, Ashkelon and its inhabitants accept the dictates of logic, of which parental honor is one. Perhaps a trip to Ashkelon, the city of "Logic" will inspire us Jews to observe that *mitzva* as unstintingly as did Dama ben Nesina.

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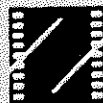
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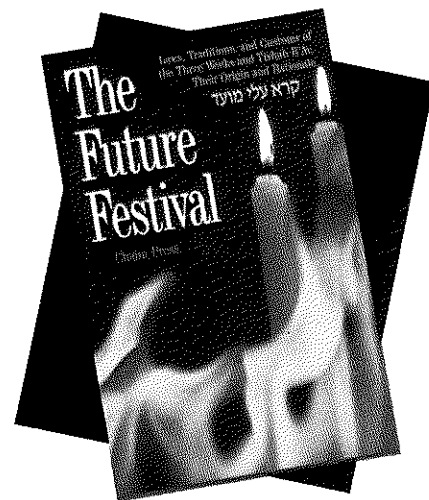
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The Future Festival: Laws Tradition and Customs of the Three Weeks, by Rabbi Chaim Press (Targum/Feldheim, Jerusalem/Nanuet, NY, 178 pages, \$16.95)

Once again Rabbi Chaim Press has done an important service for the Orthodox community, this time producing a well-organized, extensively researched and eminently readable presentation of the laws and

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customs, and their historical bases and philosophical underpinnings, of the *Bein HaMeitzarim* period (the Three Weeks). In addition, he has provided excerpts and their explanations from *Megillas Eich* and the *Kinno*s. Issues dealt with herein include the Holocaust, exile and redemption, and the rules of Jerusalem and *Eretz Yisroel* in our lives. Rabbi Press very much makes the point — via halachic dicta as well as aggadic material — that while Tisha B'Av is the most sorrowful and desolate day in the Jewish calendar, it is also called a *mo'ed*; and it is the inevitability of redemption suggested by such designation that allows the reader to come away from this book uplifted as well as edified.

The Future Festival is filled with fascinating insights, culled from the classic sources (Talmud, Midrash, Rabbinic and Chassidic literature) and contemporary ones as well (prominent *roshei yeshiva* and *rabbanim* such as the Novominsker *Rebbe*, Rabbi Moshe Shapiro and Rabbi Shlomo Brevda). We are taught, for instance, that Noach sent the dove from the ark on the seventeenth day of Tammuz (according to one opinion). The Midrash explains that the dove symbolizes Israel: Just as the dove "found no resting place for the sole of her foot," so Israel in exile will find no resting place. But just as the dove "returned to him in the ark," so Israel will be redeemed and return from exile to their land.

In explanation of the prohibition against consuming meat and wine during the Nine Days (in addition to the dictum: "There is no rejoicing without meat or wine"), the following thought is adduced: Consuming these items at this time is inappropriate, for they call to mind the daily animal sacrifices and wine libations that ceased with the destruction of the Temple.

And one final nugget: Regarding the prohibition against wearing shoes on Tisha B'Av, a contemporary scholar

Rabbi Kasnett is a senior editor of the *ArtScroll Shas*, and is the author of three books of essays on Torah thought: *A Future and a Hope*, *Ancient Mountains* and *Timeless Hills and Kayin and Hevel*.

notes that shoes allow a person to walk wherever he wishes. Devoid of shoes, however, one is dependent on existing, well-paved roads. His world becomes limited, his esteem diminished, and he loses his sense of personal freedom. Going about unshod on Tisha B'Av,

then, is an intimation of our desolation in a world without a *Mikdash*.

This *sefer* provides an excellent preparation for the Three-Weeks period. May our scrupulous, informed and heartfelt observance of its laws and customs hasten the long-awaited redemption. ■

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL, THOUGH NOT IN THE SAME SCHOOL

To the Editor:

I read Rabbi Aisenstark's article, "Fire Drill," in the Adar/March '97 issue. It is

obvious from the article, and from those who know him personally, that he speaks with true *ahavas Yisroel*. He is genuinely interested in constructive activism and many of his points are accurate (he does not need my *haskama*).

However, I would like to share some experience that I had in the last 20 years in *chinuch* on both sides of the fence — the very *yeshivish* and the more "modern."

I once heard from Rabbi Moshe Soloveichik זצ"ל, that, in the *Hagadda*, we say "*Keneged arba'a banim dibra Torah*" — The Torah addresses every type of a son in terms of how to edu-

cate him. Even the *rasha* needs a *chinuch*, hopefully to bring him back to Torah. But each of the four sons needs a different answer.

I can proudly say that I have many *talmidim* who are currently in Lakewood and Brisk. And I can also say (maybe not so proudly) that I have many *talmidim* in full university programs — wearing a *kippa sruga*. The common thread that binds them: I love each of them and I am very close to all of them.

This, however, did not happen in one institution. Over the years I have been a *mechanech* in different *mosdos HaTorah* (institutions).

In many of our *mosdos*, there was no necessity to speak about *chalav Yisroel* (positive), attending college and TV (negative). In other *mosdos*, I felt that I should not speak about *chalav Yisroel* or college and TV. (We did have a campaign on these issues during *Asseres Yemei Teshuva*, though.) In one *mosad*, I encouraged the boys to finish a *mesechta* with a specific *chavrusa* after *Maariv* (10:00 pm). In the other, I spoke about wearing your cap and *tzitzis* when you play ball in the gym.

Here we discussed the Brisker *derêch halimud* vs. the Ponevezzer approach. And there we discussed the importance of going to yeshiva and college at night vs. full-time university, or the pitfalls of social mixing with girls. Can you do both in one classroom?

On the other hand, I fully agree that in the very *heimishe mosdos*, we should teach tolerance and understanding of others; at the same time, we make certain not to compromise *k'chut hasa'ara*, not even in a matter that makes a hair's breadth of a difference.

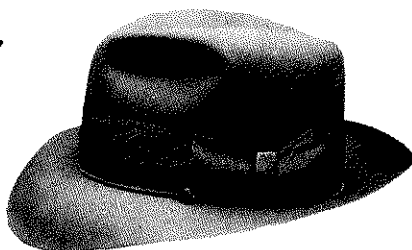
I would like to close my remarks with a quote from Reb Yaakov זצ"ל that I heard on a tape. He underscored the importance of teaching children the differences between requirements of *halacha*, *minhagim*, and discretionary *chumros*. And that one should never look down at someone who doesn't keep or understand one's personal *chumros* and *minhagim*.

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Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan, *Rosh Yeshiva*

Rabbi Yehoshua Gutman, *Menahel*

AUTHOR'S RESPONSE:

I fully concur with the letter writer; schools can specialize and target students of specific levels of ability and degrees of *frumkeit*. At the same time, however, all children should be guided to learn to respect differences and understand one another. The "chalav Yisroel kid" should not consider the "staam chalav youngster" a *sheiget*, nor should the latter view the former as a fanatic.

RABBI SHNEUR AISENSTARK

RESPONSIBILITY OF "PLASTIC FRAMES" FATHER TO SPEAK UP

To the Editor:

Your inspiring article entitled "Plastic Frames" was brought to my attention by a *chaver* who said over the phone, "You must read this article and then call me back."

By the time I found my copy of *The Jewish Observer* (after asking my children and wife, "Who had it last?" a few times), I was curious. The article hit home and did make me call back. Plus, I insisted my wife read it A.S.A.P. and I took it to make copies and share it with X.Y.Z. etc.

The issue of *ono'as devarim* (hurting others with words) is a very serious concern and it should matter to all of us. "Rav Yochanon teaches us in the name of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai: hurting people with words is worse than hurting them monetarily..." (*Bava Metzia* 58b).

If three boys in a yeshiva were involved in stealing lunches, watches and money from their classmates, I'm sure the writer of the article would take a stand and work with the *menahel* of the yeshiva, the *rebbe'im* and parents to deal with the situation. Why does this issue not warrant the choice of "fighting the battle" to change the tone of a yeshiva? Why conclude a meaningful message of self-improvement, caring and sensitivity with "deciding to sidestep" an issue of vast importance?

Rabbi A. Miller *shlita* writes that the word "*ono'as*" *devarim* is derived from

"*onain*" (an *aveil* on the first day of his mourning period) [*A Kingdom of Kohanim* p. 307]. "There are words that are as the piercings of a sword" (*Mishlei* 12,18).

There was an incident that transpired in the 1840's when a poor shoemaker came upon great wealth. With his new status, he celebrated his daughter's wedding in style, to the chagrin of some of the wealthy townspeople. At the *chupa*, a wealthy individual approached the bride's father and inquired: "My shoe is torn, how much

would it cost to have it repaired?"

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter was horrified when he heard of this incident and he remarked: "The great leaders of the previous generation, who are now rejoicing in Gan Eden, are being taken to task for this incident. They are held accountable for not educating their generation to the point that this episode should not have occurred." (*Me'oros Hagedolim* 163)

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HELPING FILL THE "EMPTY PIT"

To the Editor:

The article "A Pit Full of Emptiness," which I recently contributed to *The Jewish Observer* (March '97), came from the heart, and evidently resonated with many of our readers. It was, for me, a humbling experience to witness the outpouring of love and concern which it elicited. If people had only sent a check, that would have been nothing out of the ordinary, but most people went far beyond that. I have a huge pile of notes on my desk which I can't bring myself to throw out and which, in as many ways as there are notes, testifies to the depth and breadth of Jewish caring. *Es iz gut tzu sein a Yid!*

(RABBI) MOSHE EISEMANN
Baltimore

CORRECTION ON CREDENTIALS OF "ORTHODOX FEMINISM" SPEAKER

To the Editor:

Your recent article on "Orthodoxy and Feminism" (April '97) misidentified Rabbi Saul Berman on page 10. Rabbi Berman is a tenured associate professor at Stern College for Women. He is *not* and never has been dean of the school.

In addition, it goes without saying that individual faculty members such as Rabbi Berman speak for themselves and not for Stern College or Yeshiva University.

DAVID ROSEN,
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
YESHIVA UNIVERSITY
New York City

AUTHOR'S RESPONSE:

(Akiva Davidsen's article, "From Station to Station" (Feb. '97), recounted how he succeeded in disengaging himself from his habit of listening to the radio to achieve a sense of quiet — both within and outside of himself. A letter critical of Davidsen's sealing himself off from the potential benefits that ride the radio airwaves, written by Wolf Karfiol, was published in the April '97 JO (p. 57) without including a response from the

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A turning point. Israeli youth are becoming increasingly involved with cults, drugs and violence in the schools. Parents are scared, but don't know what to do. On the other hand, more and more Israelis are returning to a life of mitzvah observance.

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author. Mr. Davidsen's comment follows:)

Mr. Karfiol sounds like a sensitive and caring individual with an abundance of *Ahavas Yisroel*. Indeed, one should seek out every possible avenue to be *mekadesh shem Shamayim*. His argument, however, about missing out on the opportunities to do *chessed* by not listening to the radio, falls short.

Of course, radio broadcasts can occasionally be vehicles for positive experiences. Even television, dare I say, could have some redeeming value to it. Would that justify watching television on the slim chance that some beneficial image will happen to stroll past my gaze?

Would you recommend that we frequent some of the seedier Manhattan night haunts, in search of "kiruv opportunities"? I think not.

Perhaps if the *hamoan am* (broad masses) were on the level of Yosef Hatzaddik, we too could transform a prison sentence into a giant seminar for personal growth. But let's be realistic. Most of us should be seeking ways to filter out the bombardment of drivel, indecency and distraction from our daily existence. Yes. That might mean foregoing the occasional "chessed opportunity." Well worth it, I submit. There are an infinite number of non-radio oppor-

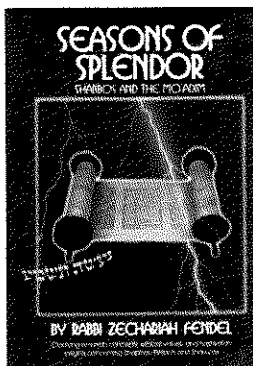
tunities for us to direct our best intention.

Besides, the main point of my article was not the cleansing benefits of avoiding the radio toxins, *per se*. But rather, using radio abstinence as a device to shatter through the mighty clutches of *hergel* (oblivious regularity). It is this habitual behavior that is the true toxin that infiltrates every fragment of our conduct and becomes a menacing impediment to our ultimate goal: becoming closer to Hashem.

AKIVA DAVIDSEN

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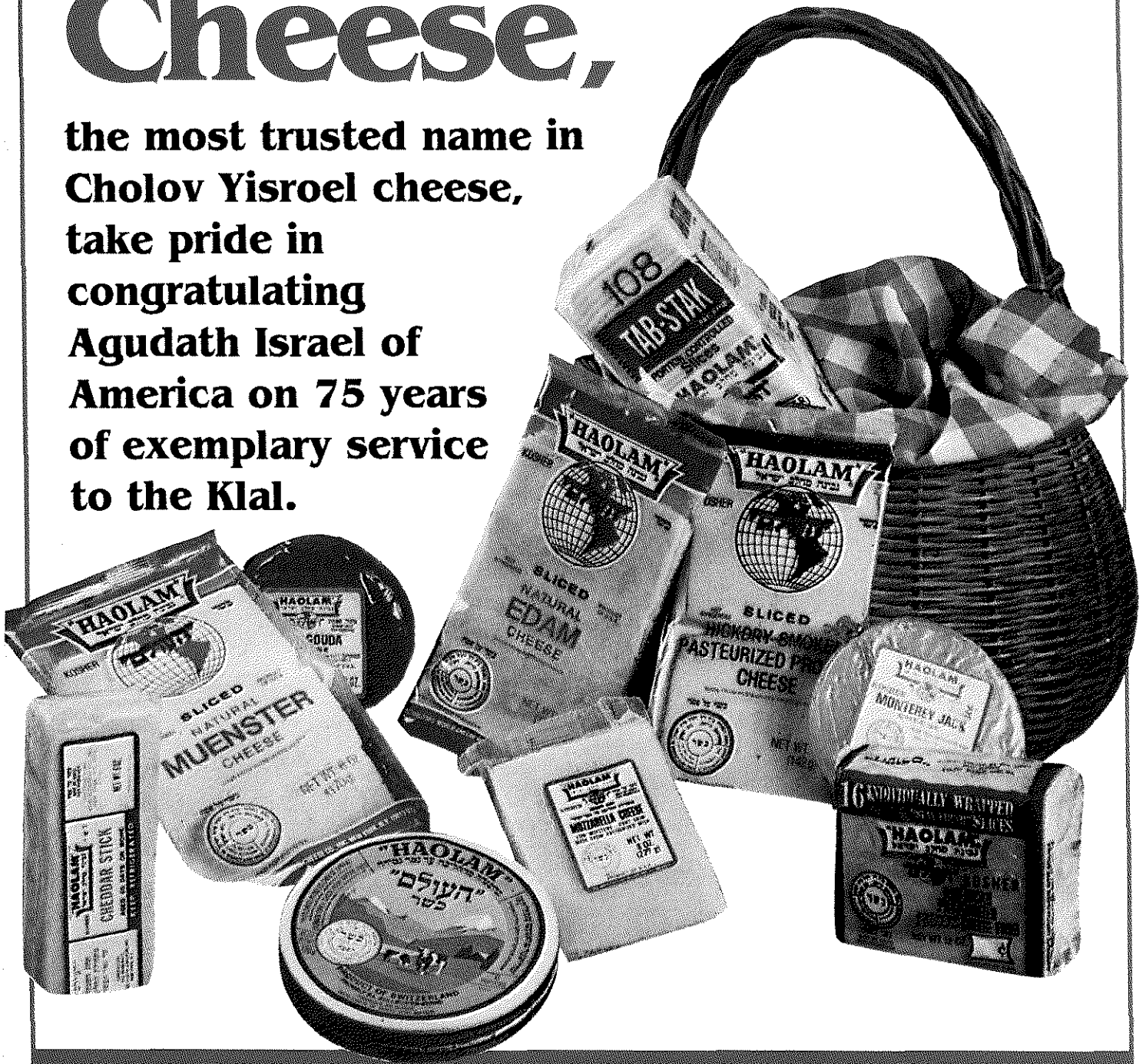
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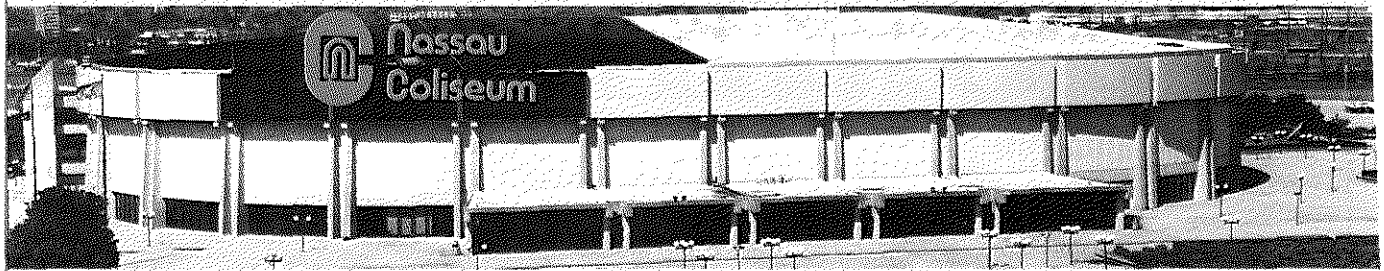
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