

# THE Jewish OBSERVER

Teves 5758 • January 1998  
U.S.A. \$3.50/Foreign \$4.50 • VOL XXXI/NO. 1

*Also in this issue:*

*An Appreciation of  
Rabbi Yehudah  
Naftali Mandel-  
baum זצ"ל*

YONASON  
ROSENBLUM

*The Perversion  
of Truth*

RABBI JOSEPH  
ELIAS

*Protest  
Pays*

ELIYAHU  
MAYER

## AM ECHAD: PRESERVING ONE JEWISH NATION



*A Call To Men of Integrity* Rabbi Moshe Sheref

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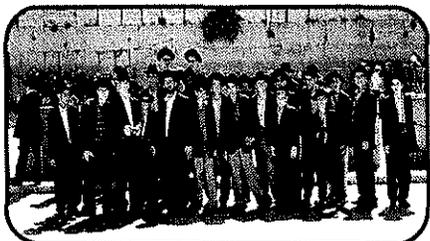
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<b>5 DAY TOUR TO THE NORTH</b>						
July 13 ח תמוז Atilit, British Detention Camp Hike Mt. Carmel along יגור Visit Druze Village Caesarea	July 14 ט תמוז Acon, Rosh Hanikra & Stalactite Cave Bar-B-Que & "Maizes & Music" with R' Amnon Buaron	July 15 י תמוז Wars, Waters & Volcanoes in the Golan. Hike יזיתן & Meshushim Pools Speed Boating in Kinneret	July 16 יא תמוז Good Fence, Metulla Hiking Along Jordan River Kayaking, Water Sports A Full Day of Water!!	July 17 יב תמוז Tzipori (Maknah written there) Klar Kedem, Donkey Riding Fantastic Hike Down Arbel Mountain	July 18 יג תמוז Short סדר Day Off	July 19 יד תמוז OFF SHABBOS בלק פארש'ס
July 20 טו תמוז Return by 12 P.M. Regular סדר Evening Swim	July 21 טז תמוז See Old City from Haas Promenade, Visit לוד עיר הודו וקוקו & Cave of the שילוח	July 22 יז תמוז Fast Day שבתה עשר בתמוז	July 23 יח תמוז Jewish Quarter: Cardo, Burnt House Southern Wall Excavations	July 24 יט תמוז תקצי ימים קיבוץ Water Park & אמנון מערות תולדות באר	July 25 כ תמוז Sports & Field Day in נן סאקר	July 26 כא תמוז IN SHABBOS מוצ"ש Briefing & Packing for South פארש'ס
<b>5 DAY TOUR TO THE SOUTH</b>						
July 27 כב תמוז Drive to Maale Akravin, Hike Mt. Ovedat Oasis Prepare sleeping camp	July 28 כג תמוז Jeep Ride into Ramon Crater, Eliat. Hike קוקו וקוקו נהל שלמה & Dinner on Yacht, Red Sea	July 29 כד תמוז Gulf of Elba Underwater Observatory Parasailing & Mahana Boat	July 30 כה תמוז Eilat Snorkeling & Swim Thana Copper Mines & Reserve Camp in בראשית	July 31 כו תמוז Hike Masada for Sunrise Davening & Touring Attraction 2000 Return to ירושלים	Aug. 1 כז תמוז Short סדר Day Off	Aug. 2 כח תמוז OFF SHABBOS פארש'ס פארש'ס פארש'ס
Aug. 3 כט תמוז Return by 2:00 P.M. Regular סדר	Aug. 4 אב ארץ גליליתים Stalactite Cave, Caves קבר רחל וקוקו נהל שלמה מערת המכש	Aug. 5 ב אב Jewish Quarter Museum of חקוקים כלי חכונת Visit at חכונת	Aug. 6 ג אב Sports & Field Day in נן סאקר	Aug. 7 ד אב Special Visit To Yad Vashem!	Aug. 8 ה אב SHABBOS IN עפת קבר רבי עקיבא, חרמ"ם מוצ"ש Biry'a Forest קבר קודשם כנרת & מקוה תאריזו פארש'ס	Aug. 9 ו אב IN SHABBOS מוצ"ש Swimming
Aug. 10 ז אב Return to ירושלים Regular סדר	Aug. 11 ח אב Special Tour of Western Wall Tunnels בערב תשעה באב	Aug. 12 ט אב תשעה באב מושב מתחזיזו Mincha at Kosel תשעה באב	Aug. 13 י אב Mountain Bike Trip Along Burma Road חיי יחודה וחזותו ירושלים	Aug. 14 יא אב Midbar Yehuda Desert Sports, Rappelling at Mitzpe Shalem	Aug. 15 יב אב Swimming In Herzeliya Beach	Aug. 16 יג אב IN SHABBOS מוצ"ש Swimming פארש'ס
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Aug. 17 יד אב יקר בראשית Maxima / Water Park	Aug. 18 טו אב Beach נהנו Horseback Riding Return to ירושלים	Aug. 19 טז אב Shopping in Geula Farewell & Dinner מעריב at כותל	Aug. 20 יז אב Departure from Ben Gurion Airport & Return to New York	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Round trip airfare, food, lodging, touring all admissions, laundry, health and hospitalization insurance included.</li> </ul>		

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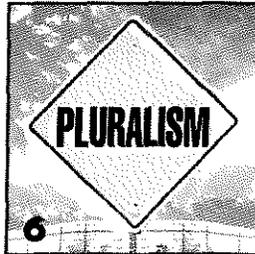
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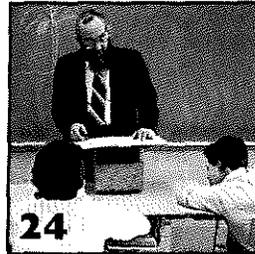
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# Seizing The Silver Lining

## Opportunity in the Pluralism Controversy Raging in Israel and America

It would be wrong, even dangerous, to underemphasize the dire nature of the “pluralism push” in Israel or the effects of the misguided anger being stirred up as a result among American Jews. Yet there is a silver lining to the dark cloud. For with the Reform and Conservative movements’ sudden, shocking and quite telling abandonment of their decades-old “live and let live” approach — their jettisoning of the “respect” they always claimed to have for Orthodoxy — and their declaration of “open war” on halachic standards, the true meaning of Judaism is finally, inescapably, in the spotlight.

### LOSING OUR LETHARGY

We can do little, though, unless we overcome our own complacency. Too many of us are too little concerned with the implications of the import of American-style “Jewish religious pluralism” to Israel. “What real difference would it make? In the end, there will still be *frummeh Yidden* and *frei'eh Yidden* — in the end, truth will triumph.”

We would do well, though, to take note of a stunning comment that Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, זצ"ל, makes in the name of the *Nefesh Hachaim*. The final *Mishna* in *Mesechta Sotah* describes how in the terrible times that will precede the arrival of *Moshiach*, “the wisdom of sages will be mocked,” how “those who fear sin will be ridiculed,” and how “truth will cease to exist” — and then follows with the words: “And on Whom can we rely? On our Father in heaven.”

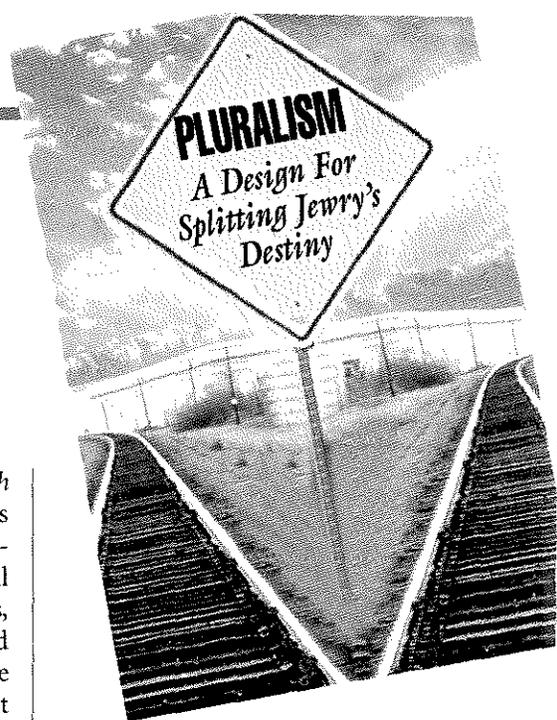
Rabbi Shafran, director of Public Affairs of Agudath Israel of America, is a frequent contributor to these pages, most recently with “Taking the Prize” (Sept. '97).

Those final words, says the *Nefesh Hachaim*, are part of the curse; indeed its worst element! For they refer to the complacency that G-d-fearing Jews will exhibit in the face of the other curses, their reluctance to exert the required effort to meet the challenges before them. Let us not, *chas v'shalom*, be part of that curse. We need to recognize the terrible effects of the lies being propagated — the modern “blood-libel” accusing us of rejecting Jews who affiliate with non-Orthodox movements as no longer part of the Jewish people, the insinuation that Israeli democracy is somehow threatened by the State’s continued acceptance of halachic standards in matters of personal status, the claim that “religious coercion” is the Orthodox agenda in Israel, and similar untruths designed to turn our fellow Jews against us.

The falsehoods must be countered by truth, first and foremost in the form of Torah-study: more *talmidim*, more *yeshivos*, more *kollelim*. Indeed, it was no coincidence that the *Siyum HaShas*, still reverberating in our hearts and minds, came in the very midst — *zeh le'umas zeh!* — of the assault on Torah in *Eretz Yisroel*. But we must counter the lies directly, too, through efforts like Agudath Israel’s recently announced “*Am Echad* — Preserving One Jewish Nation” campaign, which is pledged to present the Jewish public with the truth about “Jewish religious pluralism” — and Orthodoxy — through advertisements and other educational endeavors.

### TRUTH ON TWO FRONTS

In *Eretz Yisroel*, we need to educate the masses about a “Judaism” that embraces the cardinal sins of “idolatry,” immorality and — if we include



the maligning of Torah-observant Jews — a form of bloodshed, as well. We must present Israeli Jews with the frightening facts about the exponential growth of assimilation and intermarriage in the U.S., about Reform rabbis who readily perform marriage ceremonies between Jews and non-Jews — and about those in that movement who would radically redefine the concept of “marriage” altogether. We must inform them that the Conservative movement is *not* “*Halacha* with progress,” as a prominent Israeli rabbi reportedly remarked — but simply a less openly brazen Reform movement, lagging a few years behind the original. And we must present them with telling images, like the Conservative rabbinical training school dean’s reassurance to angry students that his suggestion that they refrain from promiscuity was only “a personal statement, not a matter of seminary policy.”

Here in the United States, though, it is, unfortunately, too late for such warnings. Too many, sadly, are simply too accustomed to the plagues of assimilation and intermarriage to be shocked by them, too inured to *kefira* — denial of basic principles of faith — to understand it as such. There were warnings, decades ago, from our *Gedolim*, but so many of the ears on which they fell proved deaf, and those who did take the alarm signals seriously had neither the numbers nor the resources to head off the religious chaos that ensued.

■

We must focus on utilizing the Anglo-Jewish press — through carefully written letters to editors and articles — to reach the non-Orthodox laity and counter what their leaders are telling them — and to present Torah-perspectives clearly and properly.

■

Today, however, while the plagues still rage unabated, there is still much we can and must do, particularly as the American non-Orthodox Jewish movements determinedly labor to move on from the demographic chaos they have created here and insinuate themselves into Israeli society.

#### SPEAKING UP

We must focus on utilizing the Anglo-Jewish press — through carefully written letters to editors and articles — to reach the non-Orthodox laity and counter what their leaders are telling them — and to present Torah-perspectives clearly and properly.

And sensitively. There is an effective way to say: "What the rabbi asserts is inconsistent with the facts" — and a way that might afford the writer catharsis, but accomplish no good at all. And those who can't differentiate between the two are better off silent.

It is obviously not a job for everyone, but communal groups and professionals (Agudath Israel among them) certainly stand ready to help evaluate and

critique material written for the general Jewish press. The larger Jewish world needs to hear our voices.

#### REACHING OUT

Secondly, we must resolve to not succumb to the peace-and-unity song of the compromise sirens, and to categorically reject any falsification of our tradition and any alliance of any sort with those who promote the same. At the same time, though, we must recognize — and act on — the distinction between the Jewish leaders who consciously champion the abandonment of our *Mesorah* in whole or in part, and their followers, who are in most cases entirely unaware of how the movements with which they affiliate differ from classical Judaism. We need to display — and, more importantly, *have* — unbridled *ahavas Yisroel* for those innocent if misled fellow Jews.

Accordingly, we must seize every opportunity for personal interaction with Jews who do not yet understand what living a Jewish life means. Whether we are speaking with relatives, co-workers, casual acquaintances or simply Jews who signal to us in public places — with a dangled *mezuzah*-necklace or a dropped Yiddish word — that they too are Jewish, we have the responsibility — and the *ability* — to make a difference in their Jewish lives. We need to seize every chance for interaction, whether through a conversation on the spot, an invitation for a *Shabbos* meal, or the arrangement of *chavrusa*-joint study sessions. We may have questions, hesitations and fears about *kiruv*, but let us ask and confront them. We can match the non-Orthodox leadership's aggressive outrages with our own aggressive *outreaches*.

There are millions to reach, yes; but the key lies in each of us focusing on one Jew at a time. Let the non-Orthodox rabbis fulminate; we need "facts on the ground," individual Jews helped to face the meaning of their Jewishness.

*I once witnessed a scene that will long stay with me. A Chassidische yungerman at a bus stop was approached by a middle-*

*aged Israeli couple, sans kippa or tichel. The Israeli man, in Hebrew, told the Chassid they were visiting American relatives and asked about the bus route. After he assured them they were at the right bus stop, the Israeli gentleman asked him if he had change for a dollar, for the fare.*

*"No, but please take this," he responded, offering a bus token. "Thank you very much," said the Israeli, taking the token and offering two dollars in exchange. The Chassid refused the remuneration, even when the visitor reduced it to one dollar, less than the token's worth.*

*"Lo, lo, b'vakasha!" insisted the Chassid. "Please, no! Take the token. Matana ketana l'chvod Shabbat — It's just a small gift in honor of Shabbos."*

I don't know if there was any amazing ending to the story, if the couple radically changed their lives or turned out to be magnates who subsequently founded a yeshiva. What I do know is that the *Chassid* set a wonderful example for us all in *ahavas Yisroel*. And we need to nurture precisely such *ahavas Yisroel* for our fellow American Jews as well, whatever prefix they unthinkingly choose to append to their Jewish identity.

#### LOOKING INWARD

Most important and rudimentary of all, though, we need to be what we are *supposed* to be as observant Jews. While the majority of the ill will arrayed against us has been manufactured by those who stand to gain from its effects, some of the animus is, unfortunately, of our own making.

For the deleterious influences brought to bear on to us by the larger society in which we live are not limited to the realms of *tzenius* and *minus* — personal modesty and apostasy; they include the realm of *menschlichkeit* and *middos* (character) as well.

The urban areas where most observant Jews make their homes afford us certain benefits — like the security we feel in living near others like us, the abundance of resources and opportunities unavailable in "small towns"; but they can also take a dire toll on our gen-

eral demeanors, temperance and *mid-dos*. A society where insults are considered high humor, and impatience a virtue; where rudeness and cynicism are celebrated — and even generously rewarded — cannot but have an effect, if even only a subtle one, on all who live and breathe within it.

*I recall once witnessing, on an erev Shabbos, an observant-looking woman driver stop her car in the middle of a busy avenue — there were no parking spaces within sight — and sprint into a store. Her car, in which she had left an elderly gentleman and a*

*child, was blocking traffic. Cars honked and drivers stuck their heads out their windows and cursed. Several minutes that seemed like hours passed, and the woman returned to her car, without so much as an apology to the long line of cars backed up behind hers, and drove away.*

We must judge all Jews favorably; maybe she had an emergency. But the store was a bakery.

I wonder if even a lack of *lechem mishneh* (two *challa* loaves) for *Shabbos* would be a justifiable reason to do what she did.

■

We can match the non-Orthodox leadership's aggressive outrages with our own aggressive outreaches. There are millions to reach, yes; but the key lies in each of us focusing on one Jew at a time.

■

We city-*Yidden* need to fight this societal influence too, to consciously resist the self-centeredness, greed and discourteousness that are the regrettable hallmarks of the "big city," to act in ways that not only do not offend, but so beautifully stand out from society's norms that they inspire awe in others at our conduct — and its source.

The vilifiers will still vilify us, of course; they have too much at stake. But imagine what would happen if the non-*frum* Jew on the street could find nothing in his personal experience to support the slander he hears; if he were daily impressed by an Orthodox community whose civility, politeness and idealism were omnipresent and unmistakable.

■

An unprecedented opportunity lies before us. All eyes are on Orthodox Judaism and Orthodox Jews. It is incumbent on us to provide the larger Jewish world with both vital information and shining examples.

If we do so, we may just turn a silver lining into a red carpet — for a poor man riding a donkey, bearing good tidings to the world. ■

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# A Call To Men of Integrity

## A THREAT TO ERETZ YISROEL... UNDER THE UMBRELLA OF TRUTH

The Reform and Conservative Movements pose a particular problem today that calls for special vigilance on our part. The roots of the problem go back over a hundred years in this country, but its branches have grown into an all-out war against Torah, against Orthodox Jewry, and its bitter fruit threatens to poison the very future of *Eretz Yisroel*.

The problem is compounded by the fact that the vast majority of Jews in Israel do not even begin to comprehend the threat. *Chazal* ask: "What language did the *nachash* (Biblical serpent) use in tempting Chava to eat the forbidden fruit?" They answer: *Lashon hakodesh*. Holy words can cause well-intended people to make fatal errors in judgment. Reform rabbis are coming to *Eretz Yisroel* today, sporting a *yarmulke*, though the mouths beneath have eaten *tarfus* for years. Even at their recent national convention in Dallas, where their president focused on "Torah study," they had non-Kosher food on their dinner plates. But when they come to *Eretz Yisroel* they talk *lashon hakodesh* — not only flowing *Ivrit*, but words about *kedusha*: "We're here to bring you spirituality...; we're here to do great things for you...; we're here to reach the hundreds of thousands of Jews who are not religious, and introduce them to Judaism."

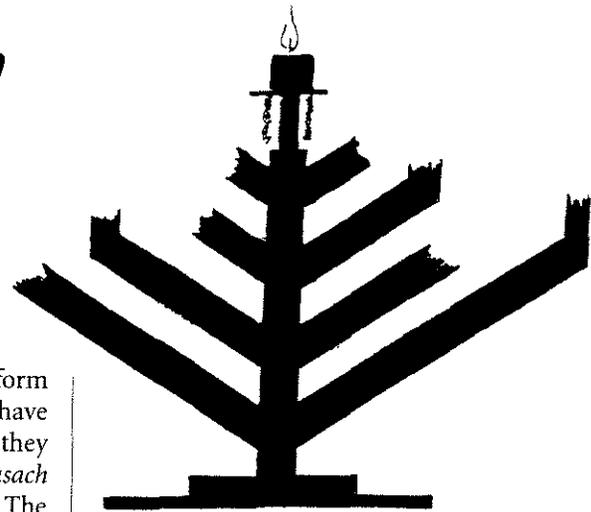
Unfortunately, through a well-financed campaign they have been able to deceive much of the public, and a large percentage of the Israeli populace

Rabbi Sherer is president of Agudath Israel of America, and chairman of the Agudath Israel World Organization.

now is beginning to believe that Reform is benign. "We Jews in Israel have *Nusach S'fard*, *Nusach Ashkenaz*," they assume, "and now there's a *Nusach Reform* — it's just another *nusach*." The public does not realize what Reform and Conservative belief is — and isn't.

Israelis must be informed that many Reform clergy perform mixed-marriages. They have gone so far as to condone — and some of them even perform — same-gender "marriages." A short time ago, the media carried a story of how one of the leaders of the Reform movement made an "*aufbruch*" in his Temple for his assistant rabbi — her name is Rabbi Karen Bender — who was to join Rachel Bernstein in matrimony that week. After the "*chupa*," he issued the following statement: "I offered a prayer for their life-long commitment to each other, asking G-d to bless them with fidelity... to the highest Jewish values of home and family."

The people of *Eretz Yisroel* must recognize what they will be facing if the Reform and Conservative movements succeed in their efforts. At this point, they began by demanding equality in regard to *geirus* — conversions — and then *chupa v'kiddushin* — the right to officiate at weddings. But that is not their ultimate goal. They will eventually demand that, just as there is an Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi and a Sephardic Chief Rabbi, there must be a Reform Chief Rabbi. (In fact, Rabbi Aaron Kotler, זצ"ל, with his great vision, warned me some 45 years ago that some day there will be a Reform chief rabbi in *Eretz Yisroel*.) Their tactics are aimed at getting a foot in the door, for the moment. The ultimate result, if they succeed, will ל"ג be catastrophic.



THE BIG LIE

To advance their cause, the Reform leadership has not hesitated to use the big lie, to arouse their constituents to despise Orthodox Jews, to fight us with the canard that we consider any Jew who is not Orthodox to be not Jewish. Recently, one of the most popular newspapers in the United States, the *Los Angeles Times*, carried a cartoon on its editorial page showing a broken menorah, topped with the silhouette of a Jew's head, complete with black hat and *peyos*. The caption says: "Only I am a Jew!" This is an outgrowth of their attempt to blacken our name, and to mobilize their dormant troops by providing them with a cause, by waging a "holy war" against Orthodoxy.

I maintain, too, that Reform leaders are trying to influence United States congressmen and senators to pressure the Israeli government to oppose the Orthodox position. In fact, on May 1 of this past year, a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Stephen Coffey, in testimony to the United States Senate "Hearing on Religious Freedom in the Middle East," lumped Israel together with Algeria, Iran and Iraq for violating religious freedom. On what basis? Because in Israel, he reported, "Orthodox religious authorities have exclusive control of marriage, divorce and burial." He did not dream this up. Someone had to have slipped that thought into his ear for it to emerge from his mouth.



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**PLURALISM = DISUNITY**

Some American Jews are concerned about the fact that the State of Israel looks to *Halacha* - traditional religious law - as its exclusive standard governing marriage, divorce and conversion. But there's good reason for that policy, which has been in place since the birth of the State.

*Halacha* is the one unifying standard we have. Marriages, divorces and conversions performed in accordance with *Halacha* are accepted by all Jews. To introduce other standards in Israel under the banner of "religious pluralism" would cause an irreparable schism in the Jewish State.

That is why David Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, delegated all personal status matters to the State's official Rabbinate. Although he was a secular Jew, he realized that for there to be one Jewish people, there must be one Jewish standard.

**EDUCATION = CONTINUITY**

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out offensive to continue unchallenged in a measure commensurate with the size of their barrage.

False idols cannot be toppled by words alone, though. This dangerous situation calls for a powerful counter-offensive. Were our own children, or our mothers or fathers, as maligned as the Torah and its adherents are today, would we keep silent? We surely would speak up loudly, clearly and unceasingly. We must therefore bear in mind: *Chazal* admonish us that the *Ribbono Shel Olam* says — "*Bichvod basar vadam mechisem ulech'vodi lo mechisem?*" We protest for the honor of mortals, yet when it comes to *K'vod Hashem*, where are we?

**A THREE-PRONGED RESPONSE**

At the recent 75th annual convention of Agudath Israel of America, we announced that we are launching a three-point program to counteract the barrage of misinforma-

tion that is endangering the spiritual atmosphere of *Eretz Yisroel*, besmirching our name and compromising *kedushas ha'aretz* and *kiddush Hashem*. At stake is the very Jewishness of the Jewish state and the removal of *Chillul Hashem* being generated by those who distort all that Orthodoxy truly represents.

- We are *be'ezras Hashem* undertaking a special \$2 million campaign, which we hope will involve the participation of others, for a coalition effort — "*Am Echad: Preserving One Jewish Nation*" — to undertake a massive media campaign in Israel and the U.S.A. These funds will be sequestered and used only to counter — point-by-point — the lies that are being spread about Orthodoxy, and to expose the true face of those who

**BATTALIONS OF FIGHTERS FOR TRUTH**

The Kotzker *Rebbe* commented that when *Moshe Rabbeinu* was putting together his corps of advisors — officers over groups of 10, over 100's and over 1,000's — he sought, among other qualifications, *anshei emes*, men of truth. How, he asked, did *Moshe Rabbeinu* determine who should rank higher to lead the larger groups? Of course, he noted, there are no degrees of truth; truth is an absolute. But there are nevertheless three degrees of *commitment* to truth: Men who tell no lies, men who speak only truth, and men who are willing to *fight* for the truth. The first category can lead groups of ten... but only the third category can lead communities of a thousand.

The Agudath Israel movement was

created to galvanize *anshei emes* who fight for the truth, not people who are "armchair generals" who merely talk about the struggle. We must be honest with ourselves and recognize that while Reform leaders have been attacking us in every conceivable manner, hurling barrages of insult, we Orthodox Jews have been silent. Israeli government officials tell me that they receive dozens of faxes every day vilifying the Orthodox. They tell me that the media is filled with fabrications about us Orthodox Jews. Streams of delegations of Reform representatives have flown in from America to attempt to influence Israeli officials and opinion makers, and infiltrate even small towns to "sell their wares" to innocent young people. (Bet Shemesh is a sad example of this effort.) We Orthodox Jews cannot permit this all-

■

We are launching a three-point program to counteract the barrage of misinformation that is endangering the spiritual atmosphere of *Eretz Yisroel*, besmirching our name and compromising *kedushas ha'aretz* and *kiddush Hashem*. At stake is the very Jewishness of the Jewish state and the removal of *Chillul Hashem* being generated by those who distort all that Orthodoxy truly represents.

■

aspire to seize control of religious matters in *Eretz Yisroel*, trumpeting that they are the true guarantors of "Jewish identity."

- We are organizing the sending of faxes to key government people in Israel. Until now Israeli officials were receiving such missives day after day from Reform and Conservative activists. Where, they asked, are the Orthodox? Already many have rallied to our call to fax Israeli administration leaders and members of the *Knesset* our point of view, but there is need for many more to do so.

- The non-Orthodox groups are sending delegations to convey falsehood. We must organize a "Truth Delegation" to go to *Eretz Yisroel* to demonstrate our dedication to *emes*, to articulate the truth.

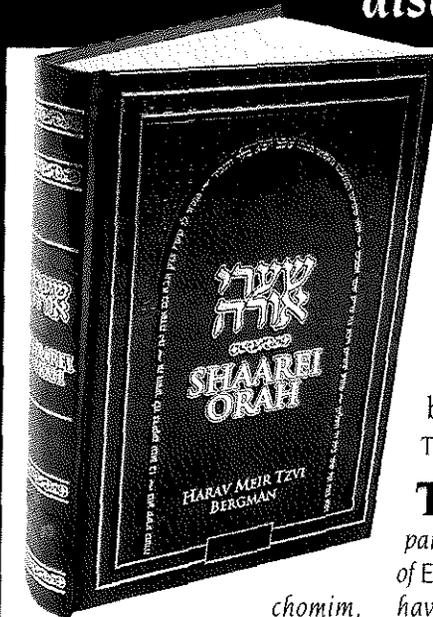
It is certainly our belief that an issue as critical as this will enlist the broadest circles of Orthodoxy to join us in our undertaking, and all who read these words will join us in this effort.

What we are witnessing is actually part of the historic struggle between *shekker* and *emes*, which has been going on since we became a nation. Our current battle is compounded because we are being challenged by an opposition that is mobilizing advanced technologies to spread *shekker* ever further. All of us, together, must actually engage in this current battle for *kedushas ha'aretz* and for *kiddush Hashem*, as *anshei emes* who fight for the truth with all our

heart. And in that merit, *be'ezras Hashem*, the truth will prevail.

*Editor's Note:* Since the writing of the above article, the first ad in a series has appeared in *The New York Times* (see adjoining page). Also, a delegation of Orthodox leaders and representatives of Jewish communities from the length and breadth of the American continent has been mobilized and is scheduled to depart on a three-day mission to act on this proposal. ■

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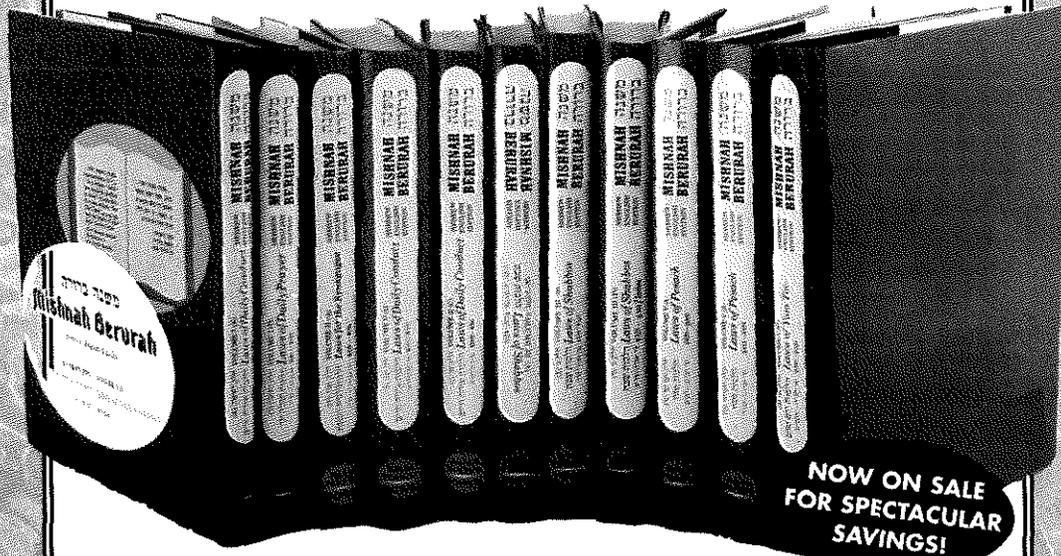
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# The Denver Joint Conversion Plan: History — and Revisionist History

There is the history of the Denver joint conversion plan — and there is the revisionist history. It is the revisionist history that has been amply presented to the Ne'eman Commission in Israel, and — at least according to reports presented in the media — the Denver plan is being seriously considered by the Commission. I shall present both the history and its revisionist version.

**Here is the history:** From approximately 1977 to early 1983, the Rocky Mountain Rabbinical Council operated a "joint conversion program." The participants included Reform and Conservative rabbis, and rabbis with an Orthodox *smicha* but not an Orthodox synagogue. No Orthodox rabbi with an Orthodox synagogue (i.e., one that had a *mehitza*) participated.

**The program worked as follows:** Prospective converts were directed to a class on Judaism jointly designed by all participating rabbis. The class was weekly and lasted from 20 to 26 weeks. Individual rabbis had the option of imposing whatever additional study or ritual requirements they desired. At the end of the preparation period, the prospective converts appeared before a "joint Beth Din," composed of the full variety of rabbis participating in the program. If the candidate passed the Beth Din's examination, the participating traditional-Orthodox rabbis then supervised immersion in a *mikva* and circumcision.

The questions asked of the candidates by the *beis din* were general. Asked about *Shabbos*, for example: if a candidate indi-

cated that he or she lit *Shabbos* candles, that was deemed sufficient. So it was with every *mitzva*. There was no demand for *kabbolas mitzvos* as defined in *Shulchan Aruch*. Halachic observance of *Shabbos*, *kashrus* or *taharas hamishpacha*, for example, were not demanded, even in principle.

No careful records of the program were kept. There is no agreed-upon figure as to how many converts passed through the program. Estimates have ranged from some 150 to some 750. The number changes virtually every time one of the participating rabbis is asked. One has since passed away.

**The program broke down in 1983. There were several reasons.**

1. Pangs of conscience struck at least one of the traditional-Orthodox rabbis, who wanted to and did pull out, and whose exit had an impact on the other two traditional-Orthodox rabbis. The compromise of *halacha* became too blatant to bear.

2. One Reform rabbi reserved for himself a "safety catch," by which he allowed himself to do a certain amount of his own conversions on the side, despite the commitment of all the participating rabbis to direct all conversion candidates to the program. The compromise of autonomy became too much to bear.

3. The acceptance by the local Reform rabbis of the Central Conference of American Rabbis' new policy on patrilineality (March 1983) was taken as an unfair partisan act that upset a delicate balance of compromises.

4. The number of conversion candidates coming from the non-Orthodox rabbis far outweighed the number coming from the other rabbis, thus imposing a heavy burden on the time of the

traditional-Orthodox rabbis. They were literally constantly running to the *mikva* and the *mohel*. Besides the time pressure, this "factory" quality of the program depersonalized it and left a bad taste for the traditional-Orthodox rabbis.

5. Personality conflicts among some rabbis.

So much for the history. Here, now, is the revisionist history that is being foisted upon unknowing, interested parties around the world.

## I.

**Revisionist history:** *National pressure broke up the program. Left to its own devices, it would have survived, possibly even become an international model for resolving a difficult problem. It is only fanatics on the national scene, particularly the Orthodox national scene, that doomed this program.*

**The truth:** There was no national pressure from any rabbinic body until after the program ended. It could not have been otherwise for the simple reason that the program was kept secret. Not a single interview, nor even a single press-release, about the program was issued during its entire existence. Further, when word about the program spread in 1983, requests for information were routinely denied. *The Intermountain Jewish News* "Conversion and Patrilineality" 12-page special of Dec. 2, 1983, which disseminated news of the program throughout the world, was prepared only months after the program had ceased. [See *The Jewish Observer*, Jan. '84 for a report on the same. N.W.] No one would cooperate before that. The program did not collapse due to publicity or national pressure. It collapsed of its own weight.

Rabbi Hillel Goldberg is executive editor of the *Intermountain Jewish News* and active in a wide variety of outreach efforts, including the *mikveh* team of Torah Community Project.

Only after the program's collapse (and after it became known in Dec. 1983) did the Rabbinical Council of America, to which the three participating traditional-Orthodox rabbis belonged, appoint an investigative committee. It was headed by Rabbi Gedalia Dov Schwartz, then a congregational rabbi and now head of the RCA *Beis Din*. The committee "censured" (or some similar term) the three participating traditional Orthodox rabbis, deemed the program halachically invalid, and reserved judgment on individual conversion candidates in case a few had actually assumed a genuine *kabbolas mitzvos*.

## II.

**Revisionist history:** *The Jewish bonafides of the conversion candidates who passed through the program have never been questioned, including in Israel.*

**The truth:** The reason why the Jewish bonafides of the program's conversion candidates have not been questioned is not because the candidates have been universally accepted as Jews. It is because most of the candidates have simply vanished from Jewish sight. Most are untraceable.

A very small percentage of the conversion candidates did end up assum-

For an Orthodox rabbi the bottom line is *halacha*, and the traditional-Orthodox rabbinic participants in the joint program compromised *halacha*. For a liberal rabbi, the bottom line is autonomy, and the liberal rabbis in the program compromised their autonomy.

ing a genuine *kabbolas mitzvos*. If they have been accepted by Orthodox authorities anywhere, it is because of their genuine halachic commitment, not because of the level of commitment

required by the joint conversion program. As to whether these halachically observant candidates were required by other Orthodox authorities to undergo a second *tevilla* or *mila*, I do not know.

## III.

**Revisionist history:** *Since the program broke down in Denver for local reasons alone, it remains, in principle, a viable, creative solution to a vexing problem. For this reason the program should be reinstated in Israel to solve the conversion crisis.*

**The truth:** While there were some localized reasons for the program's breakdown in Denver — especially the personality conflicts among certain rabbis — the essential preponderant reasons for the breakdown were structural. For an Orthodox rabbi the bottom line is *halacha*, and the traditional-Orthodox rabbinic participants in the joint program compromised *halacha*. For a liberal rabbi, the bottom line is autonomy, and the liberal rabbis in the program compromised their autonomy.

## PROSPECTS FOR "DENVER" IN ISRAEL

The variation on the Denver plan now being discussed for Israel would only exacerbate both the Orthodox and the liberal sensibilities.

**Orthodox:** In Denver, the tradition-

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al-Orthodox rabbis became worn out and demoralized because of their factory-like processing of *hundreds* of converts. In any Israeli variant of the Denver program, in which, at a minimum, a non-Orthodox rabbi would have the right to *suggest* conversion candidates, the Chief Rabbinate would be dealing with *thousands* or *tens of thousands* of candidates whose liberal-based bonafides it will not accept. The Orthodox rabbinate would consume its manpower in a sterile process. This will explode.

**Reform:** In Denver, the traditional-Orthodox rabbis and the liberal rabbis sat jointly on the *beis din* to examine the

conversion candidates. No Orthodox *talmid chacham* anywhere deemed this halachically valid; no one in the Chief Rabbinate will authorize this for any Israeli variant of the Denver program. Therefore, the Israeli Reform and Conservative rabbis would be even further stripped of their autonomy, reduced merely to watching Orthodox rabbis rule on the bonafides of all the candidates they suggest. This will explode.

Because the Denver program didn't work in Denver, it won't work in Israel. The dynamics are universal. This joint conversion program tried to square the circle. It can't be done. It

can only increase tensions and deepen divides, as it did in Denver. It is a "solution" worse than the problem it intends to solve. ■



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# All in The Family

## (Sometimes)

### I. EXPLORING THE LIMITS OF FAMILY TIES

It's a truism, almost a cliché. Differences can — and should — be put aside for familial ties. "Family members do not always agree, and do not always get along — but they are still family, sharing a common past and a singular destiny."<sup>1</sup>

How does that play in real life? Let us offer several thumbnail scenarios, and you decide.

#### Scenario #1:

*Devastating.* No other word for the impact of Hurricane Harry on Cousin Yitzzy's home and hostel in Boca Raton. So he, Esti, and the kids are coming to us with a few bags filled with memories, and nothing else. No room? There's gotta be room for them. We'll double up our own children to make room. After all, family is family.

#### Scenario #2:

Cousin Avie is coming from Detroit, and will be staying with us for a few days. His wife Suri has a very *laissez faire* attitude toward child-rearing and gives their kids free rein to jump on the furniture, leave the table during meals, nibble in bed. They're also permitted to express opinions contrary to their parents' — that is, talk back.

Our furniture will withstand the invasion — I mean, visit. And our kids will eventually overcome the negative influences. Let'em come. Family, after all, is family.

#### Scenario #3:

Vicki ran off. Stewart — my brother-in-law — is left with the three kids.

<sup>1</sup>Source: Joint letter that follows.



Amy, his eldest, has her own apartment near her work, but Jack — a troubled teenager — and his kid sister, Julie, are in his care. So here they are on my doorstep. "Just let us stay in your walk-in flat. You're not renting it out now. We

just need a couple of weeks to pull ourselves together."

The kids go to a private school, where Jack discovered the delights of drinking himself silly, and picked up a vocabulary that would make a rock star blush. My own two mesivta

sons are appalled, and just a little intrigued. (Is Jack doing drugs, too?)

Hardly pleasant, but family is family. I guess.

#### Scenario #4:

Mom's older brother, Uncle Larry, died. We're only 40 miles away from Boulder, so we drive over for the Friday morning funeral and stay at his son Buddy's rambling ranch house. Mom would never understand it otherwise. We can't stay at Buddy's over *Shabbos*. His wife, Nicole, was only recently converted to Reform Judaism. Their children are "Jewish" as per patrilineal descent, but not as far as we and our van-load of children are concerned. Electric Chanukah menorah in the window and pine tree in the den — you know, the cultural thing. No religion involved. How can we stay at Buddy's?

But how do we go elsewhere? Isn't family family?

### Some Pertinent Questions Re: Impertinent Relations

Many emotions, ideological convictions and personal obligations come into play in dealing with these scenarios. How far do obligations toward members of one's family go? To what extent should one incur expense, suffer embarrassment, endure discomfort, or compromise propriety when becoming involved with their needs?

To what extent are we compelled to overlook matters of personal principle when dealing with family? Is there a line that cannot be crossed?

At what point do we say, "I can deal

with certain given situations, but I do not want my children to be exposed to such challenges"? Furthermore, doesn't my apparent acceptance of Buddy and Nicole's lifestyle send a message to my children that although we may go through the motions of con-

To what extent are we compelled to overlook matters of personal principle when dealing with family? Is there a line that cannot be crossed?

demning some acts as intolerable, we seem to overlook them after the fact? But what are we to do? Isn't family family?

On the other hand, doesn't honoring family ties call for chastising, just as it calls for embracing? Doesn't tough love convey more concern than accepting, fuzzy-focused love? Isn't that what family is *really* about?

**II. A JOINT LETTER FROM AN  
ORTHODOX RABBI AND THE  
PRESIDENT OF THE REFORM  
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

*Rabbi Marc D. Angel, of Congregation Shearith Israel in New York City, is past president of the (Orthodox) Rabbinical Council of America. Rabbi Sheldon Zimmerman is president of the (Reform) Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. The two men co-authored a statement, "We Can, And Do, Work Together," which was featured in, among other papers, The N.Y. Jewish Week, November 28, 1997. We present here an abridged version, with comment to follow.*

**We are** a Reform rabbi and an Orthodox rabbi... [who have been] working to help Jews in need, striving to strengthen the cohesiveness of our community, drawing on shared ideals to make our world a better place. We found, and still find, that we share many ideals, that we can work together respectfully and sympathetically. Our friendship continues to be a valued part of our lives.

We have differences. Orthodoxy has very different views on the nature of Torah, mitzvot, halacha. These differences are deeply held on both sides. The gap between us in these areas is not bridgeable.

And yet we are friends, we work

together, we believe all Jews should be working together in a shared direction. Whatever one's religious perspective, each Jew is a part of the historic people of Israel. We share a common past and a singular destiny....

We, along with a great many thoughtful and sincere Jews, are deeply concerned by the increasing polarization within our community....

Yes, we have strong disagreements....

Yes, we want our views to prevail.

But no, the way to deal with each other is not through confrontation.

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, of blessed memory, taught that the Jewish people are bound by a covenant of destiny. As children of Israel, we are connected to each other by familial ties. Family members do not always agree, and do not always get along — but they are still family.

\*\*\*

**While we** argue about definitions of Jewishness, the outside world has little difficulty knowing who is a Jew: Anti-Semites and enemies of Israel put us all together in the same basket. They do not care about the theological distinctions among ourselves....

Sometimes family members become angry at each other, and

sometimes they even become estranged. The only way to effect healing is for family members to rise above their differences, to overlook insults (real or imagined), to sit down together again in a spirit of reunion.

By seeing each other as partners in a shared destiny rather than as combatants, family members can begin to grow closer and regain trust in each other.

We — a Reform rabbi and an Orthodox rabbi — want the Jewish family to come back together. We want Jews of all backgrounds to spend more time with each other in a spirit of working together, not at odds. We need to understand each other's deepest feelings and concerns. Recognizing that there are areas of difference which may never be resolved, we cannot let these differences paralyze us or cause us to attack or insult each other....

We should not be seeking hollow "victories," if the result of these "victories" is to deepen the fragmentation of the Jewish people. It takes wisdom and moral courage to back off from hostile and self-destructive confrontation. It takes true greatness to have the strength to stand back from the precipice, to have a larger vision of what is at stake....

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take the long view of our peoplehood, and not engage in destructive confrontation. We need to work together, to build a future together, to retain our sense of family togetherness.

Let us talk with each other, let us embrace each other as family.

And let us create the framework for the future peace and happiness of the Jewish people.

### III. AN ANGUISHED PLEA TO RABBI MARC ANGEL:

The letter you wrote jointly with Sheldon Zimmerman, president of HUC-JIR (the Reform Rabbinical School), is a warm gesture toward unity with our Reform brethren, and is bound to inspire positive feelings in most readers of *The Jewish Week*. It comes, however, at an extremely high cost: misleading fellow Jews in regard to our essential attitudes toward basics in *emuna*.

First, permit me to state unequivocally: Every Jew, observant or otherwise, is deserving of our unconditional love (with certain notable exceptions, as per classic halachic sources). Included in this unquestioning embrace are Conservative, Reform and secular Jews, as well as non-observant Orthodox Jews. Each is endowed with a *neshama* that is *cheilek Elokah mima'al* — G-d's own breath of life, as it were, animating each and every Jew with a sacred dimension that we all share.

So yes, I join you in expressing feelings of familial bonds with Reform Jews — and even perhaps with Sheldon Zimmerman, as an individual.<sup>2</sup> But your joint declaration went far beyond that, to areas totally unacceptable to Jewish law and tradition, and *Mesores Avos*.

<sup>2</sup> Sheldon Zimmerman just might be in the category of *tinok shenishba*, a victim of circumstances that had prevented him from ever hearing about the Torah heritage of our people, thus fully deserving of our compassion as a fellow Jew. On the other hand, in his professional capacity, he heads an institution dedicated to severing the Jewish people from Torah — a *meisid umeide'ach*, one who promotes the uprooting of all basic principles of faith... hardly earning respect or endearment. In either case, focus of this discussion is on public posture.

How does one preach *achdus* — unity — with the determined leadership of a movement that challenges the essence of Jewish peoplehood and seeks to negate the very forces that bind us together? Rav Saadya Gaon said it definitively over a thousand years ago: "We are only a people because of Torah." The Reform Movement denies the divinity of Torah.<sup>3</sup> And Conservative leaders freely trample on the sanctity of Judaism and inviolability of *halacha*. How, then, can representatives of such conflicting views of peoplehood

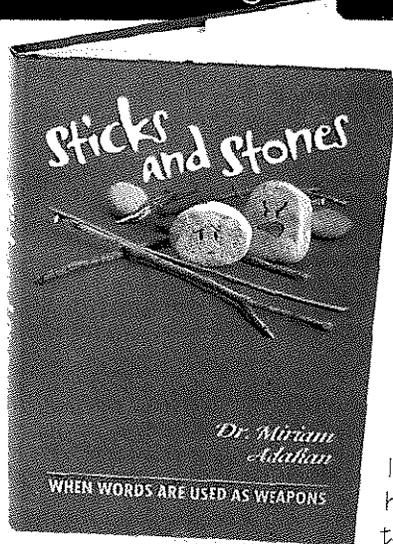
be framed as "partners"?

Your statement posits: "Whatever one's religious perspective, each Jew is a part of the historic people of Israel. We share a common past and a singular destiny."

The salient event of our "common past" was the Divine revelation at

<sup>3</sup> The reader is referred to "One Hundred Years of Reform Jewry in America" (*The Jewish Observer*, May '74), which includes in its footnotes quotations from the Movement's founding Pittsburgh Platform, which, among other outrages, characterizes "the Bible [as] reflecting the primitive ideas of its own age" — *afra lefuma*.

"Sticks and stones may break my bones but ...



...words will hurt me!"

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Mount Sinai, but the movement Rabbi Zimmerman represents denies the historical veracity of this momentous encounter. Our "singular destiny" is to live as a "*mamleches kohanim vegoy kadosh*" — a priestly nation responding to a sacred calling, anticipating the coming of *Moshiach*. None of these words in their intended meaning, as we understand them, have any message to Conservative or Reform rabbis (who totally reject the goal of rebuilding the *Beis Hamikdash* and restoring its Divine service<sup>4</sup>), or *nebach* the followers they mislead. How can one express kinship with them based on "common past and singular destiny"?

Respectfully, Rabbi Angel, before you go further in your pursuit of "sitting down together in a spirit of reunion," may I suggest that you review

<sup>4</sup>Not only is Return to Zion obliterated from their prayerbook, their Sabbath service totally omits *Mussaf*, since it is meant as a verbal substitute for the Divine service in the Holy Temple!

the *Rambam's* Commentary on the *Mishna* for *Perek Chelek*, in which he presents his Thirteen "*Ani Maamin*" / Principles of Faith. Or if you wish, simply flip open a *Siddur*, and turn to the shortened form: I invite you to examine the list, in search for one — one out of thirteen, mind you — that the Reform movement subscribes to with "*emuna sheleima* — a complete faith." Peruse the six that deal with G-d as the omniscient, omnipotent, timeless Creator and faultless Governor of all that exists. Check out the four that express firm belief in the divinity of Torah, in the authenticity of the Prophets' message as G-d's word. Take the one that says prayer is effective as a means of talking to G-d, the two that deal with *Moshiach* and *tehiyas hameisim*, the quickening of the dead. Are your Reform "partners" there with you on all of them? On any of them?

I would then respectfully refer you to the *Amida*, several pages earlier in the *Siddur*<sup>5</sup>, where Rabban Gamliel insert-

ed a nineteenth blessing in the classic *Shmoneh Esrei* (Eighteen Blessings) — number eleven, "*Birkas Haminim* — Against Heretics." The *beracha* is a plea for the "destruction of all evil" — an unequivocal reference to denial of the Torah, and other heresies. Yet you and a Reform representative somehow "see each other as partners in a shared destiny." Who's off base, Rabban Gamliel or Rabbi Angel?

This adversarial approach, as opposed to a linking up in unity, is spelled out unambiguously by the *Rambam* in his halachic code, time and again. For example, the *Rambam* states:

*Apikorsim* are those who stray after their own speculative views, to the point of highhandedly violating open Torah commands. One may not consort with them or respond to them (*Hilchos Akum* 2:5).<sup>6</sup>

This is not angry "right wing" rhetoric. This is *our* shared heritage of values, Rabbi Angel, the values that are basic to your outlook and ours.

*When Achdus Takes  
Uncontested Precedence*

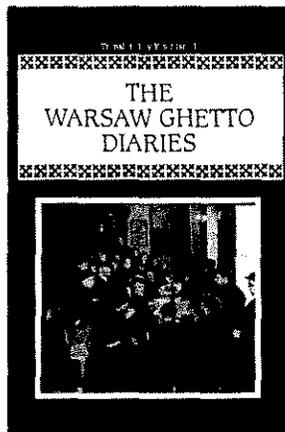
**R**abba said that it takes forty years for a disciple to fully comprehend his *rebbe's* intentions (*Avoda Zara* 5b). One may understand a *shiur* or appreciate the importance of a particular *p'sak halacha* — a specific discussion in Torah Law. But its full impact is not fathomed until after forty years have passed.

Just over 40 years ago — on 18 Adar 5716 (March 1956) — eleven leading *Rabbanim* and *Roshei Yeshiva*<sup>7</sup> issued a *p'sak* that "it is forbidden by the law of our sacred Torah to participate in the New York Board of Rabbis and similar groups composed of Reform and Conservative 'Rabbis'... as well as the Synagogue Council of America, which is composed of Reform and Conservative organizations." They added that this prohibition applies to joining them "either as an individual or as an organized com-

<sup>5</sup>Or consult *Rambam's Hilchos Tefilla* 2:1.

<sup>6</sup>See also: *Hilchos Teshuva* 3:6; *Hilchos Shechita* 4:14; *Hilchos Rotze'ach* 4:10.

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munal body.”

While individual rabbis and rabbinical groups as well as communal organizations that identify with the Yeshiva-Agudath Israel worlds conformed with this *p'sak*, it is a matter of record that until recently, some Modern Orthodox groups did not. Their rationale was that their affiliation with “mixed groups” was not meant to confer legitimacy on the other denominations, but ideally to act as a containing force, to prevent the further radicalization of the other movements. The vacuity of this hope is evident in the trail of flagrant desecration of Torah law and Torah values left in the wake of these movements during the past decades, ranging from sanctioning driving an auto on *Shabbos*, to permitting the marriage of a *kohein* and a divorcee, both in violation of explicit Torah law, as well as the ordination of women as rabbis and *chazaniot*, by the Conservative movement. This has been compounded by the Reform movement’s proliferation of *mamzeirim* through the granting of invalid divorces, conducting intermarriages, engaging in “outreach” and conferring of ritual honors to intermarried couples (in response to the 60% intermarriage rates in their Temples), recognizing non-Jews as Jews by virtue of patrilineal descent, officiating at same-gender “weddings”... need we go on?

But our discussion here goes far beyond organizational affiliation, to the expression of camaraderie. Your joint letter seems to encourage your readers to surmise that there are alternative forms of Jewish belief and worship, all of them more or less equally acceptable: “Reform? Reconstructionist? Well, it’s not the Judaism of our choice, but basi-

<sup>7</sup> Listed in Hebrew alphabetical order: Rabbi Avraham Joffen (Beth Yosef), Rabbi Avraham Kalmanowitz (Mir), Rabbi Aaron Kotler (Bais Medrash Govoha), Rabbi Gedalia Schorr (Torah Vodaath), Rabbi David Lifshitz (Yeshivas Rabbi Isaac Elchanan), Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Katz (Telshe), Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky (Torah Vodaath), Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchok Halevi Ruderman (Ner Israel), Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner (Rabbi Chaim Berlin), Rabbi Menachem Yosef Zachs (Yeshivas Rabbi Isaac Elchanan), Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem).

cally, it’s OK for you. Just as Orthodoxy is OK for me.” In the words of your joint statement: “We — an Orthodox rabbi and a Reform rabbi — have a long-standing friendship based on *our shared commitments* as human being and *as Jews*.” (Italics mine. N.W.)

It is unlikely that 40-plus years ago, when the landmark *p'sak* was issued, that organizational collegiality was expected to lead to the issuing of such joint sentiments as yours. But now, in retrospect, one can appreciate the prescience of the *Rabbanim* and *Roshei Yeshiva* who joined in the *p'sak*.

You base the spirit of your letter on the alleged perspective of your late mentor:

“Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, of blessed memory, taught that the Jewish people are bound by a covenant of destiny. As children of Israel, we are connected to each other by familial ties. Family members do not always agree, and do not always get along — but they are still family.”

Doesn't honoring family ties call for chastising, just as it calls for embracing? Doesn't tough love convey more concern than accepting, fuzzy-focused love? Isn't that what family is really about?

Rabbi Soloveitchik had been variously cited as the source for working with other religious denominations — on issues *klapei chutz* as opposed to *klapei fnim* — that is, in regard to matters of external (i.e., social and political) concerns, but not on matters of religious practice and values. Such guidelines,

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The Jewish Observer, January 1998

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however, had never been committed to paper by Rabbi Soloveitchik. Nor did he ever, to our knowledge, countenance a joint declaration of kinship with lead-

ers and teachers of *minus* and *apikorsus*. On the other hand, he did issue a position paper on the topic of organizational affiliation that was published in the no-

longer-existing Yiddish-language daily, *Der Tog-Morgen Jurnal*, November 19, 1954, wherein he said (translated from the Yiddish):

## ON UNITY

“What ties the Yemenite water carrier in Tel Aviv to the Jews of Boston? A uniform *Orach Chayim*, the *Shema Yisroel*, *Shabbos*... *Kashruth*, *Tefillin*, the hope and waiting for redemption. In brief, a collective testimony.

It therefore goes without saying that the Jew who erases from his memory this great testimony, and destroys the unique collective tradition, breaks the tie which joins him with the Jewish community as a congregation, as a spiritual Torah entity.

With regard to our problem (within the Jewish community), however, our spiritual-religious interests, such as Jewish education, synagogues, councils of rabbis, where unity is expressed

through spiritual-ideological collectivism as a Torah community, it is my opinion that Orthodoxy cannot and should not unite with such groups which deny the fundamentals of our *Weltanschauung*.

It is an ideological entity where members work for one purpose and for one ideal. The fundamental difference in ideology and in observance make such a unity impossible. From the point of view of the Torah, we find the difference between Orthodoxy and Reform Judaism much greater than that which separated the Pharisees from the Sadducees in the days of the Second Commonwealth, and between the Karaites and traditionalists in the Geonic era. Has Jew-

ish history ever recorded an instance of a joint Community Council or a joint Rabbinical Council which consisted of Karaites and Torah-true Jews?

## ON FRAGMENTATION

In internal problems, where the unity of Israel is based upon the concept of *Edah* (congregation), it is halachically more advisable and practically wiser not to unite with Reform or semi-Reform movements. Too much harmony and peace can cause confusion of the minds and will erase outwardly the boundaries between Orthodox and other movements.”

Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik זצ"ל  
November 19, 1954

### Pushing the Family Card Too Far

Yes, family is family. But the defining characteristics of family — our family, at least — flow from: “Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders and they will inform you” (*Devarim* 32,7). That is a far cry from knowing who and what we are because “the outside world has little difficulty knowing who is a Jew,” as you put it. It is incredible how this facile declaration of fraternity so easily papers over profound differences in regard to basic principles of faith!

Nor are we family because of a shared history of enduring discrimination, persecution, pogrom and genocide. True, “Anti-Semites and enemies of Israel put us all together in the same basket. They do not care about theological distinctions among ourselves” (from your joint letter). Such common suffering may strengthen existing bonds, but do not create a peoplehood. (Noted historian Salo Baron once termed this victim-based approach “a lachrymose view of Jewish history.” It certainly is a

negative criterion for nationhood!) We are a people because of Torah. Not in spite of Torah. And surely not without Torah.

We have every obligation to reach out to fellow Jews who have not had the benefit of a Torah upbringing. Our message to them may well be: *We are capable of and willing to overlook the shortfalls of your background. But there certainly is no point in helping you embrace a Judaism that “doesn’t require Torah,” or one that can manage well without Torah.*

A feel-good Judaism with none of the richness, meaning and purpose of its sacred destiny is next to worthless. We owe them the full experience. Or at least the hope — or possibility — that they come to recognize it and ultimately return to it. After all, family is family.

We would hope, Rabbi Angel, that you would be of like mind, with us, in understanding Jewish unity as requiring a Torah base, so we could advance together toward a Torah-defined shared destiny. ■



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# An Appreciation of Rabbi Yehudah Naftali Mandelbaum ז"ל

In his two decades in Baltimore, Rabbi Yehudah Naftali Mandelbaum, Rebbe of the 8th grade in Yeshiva She'aris Hapleita, touched, in one way or another, virtually every member of Baltimore's Orthodox community, and many Jews outside the Orthodox community as well. Hundreds poured into Baltimore from Lakewood and New York on short notice for his levaya — the largest funeral ever seen in Baltimore. The maspidim (eulogizers) included some of America's most prominent roshei yeshiva and Baltimore's leading rabbanim. The niftar was described as the "conscience of Baltimore." In every car, the same question was asked: "How could one man have so many best friends?" "How could one rebbe have so many closest talmidim?"

How, indeed, did one Jew — a Jew who sat with everyone else in shul, a rebbe in the local cheder — affect so many so profoundly in his tragically shortened life?

## I. THE MEASURE OF A MAN

From an early age, Reb Yehudah Naftali was distinguished by his seriousness. Younger friends from Philadelphia Yeshiva recall how late at night, after they were already in pajamas, Yehudah Naftali opened up for them the world of *Sefer Chovas HaTalmidim*, the world of spiritual striving. With that

Yonason Rosenblum who lives in Jerusalem is a regular contributor to *The Jewish Observer*, including his recent article, "Why Should We Care About the Conversion Law?" (Dec. '97). He is also a featured columnist in the *Jerusalem Post*. He is the author of many works, including biographies on leading Torah personalities, published by ArtScroll.



seriousness went a maturity far beyond his years and a profound understanding of people. While still a *bachur* in Lakewood, married men came to him for advice in matters of *shalom bayis* (marital harmony).

He thought deeply about every aspect of Hashem's world — above all, about His Torah, but with a similar intensity about a spider spinning its web, and human relationships as well. "He never failed to find a new dimension," remembers his friend Rabbi Naftoli Kempler, "in what others found ordinary."

Every aspect of his life was thought out, with a *shitta* (reasoned principle) for everything. Yet he could say without irony that a *baal shitta* (strongly principled man) is a very dangerous person. That too was a *shitta*.

Rabbi Moshe Eisemann, who taught Reb Yehudah Naftali in the Philadelphia Yeshiva and whom he continued to view as his *rebbe*, applied to him the words of Shmuel (mentioned in the Talmud) upon hearing of the death of Rav: "A man has died of whom I was afraid."

"Around him there were no half-truths, no sweeping problems under the rug. Every word and deed had to be true. He was a man from whom I had no secrets," Rabbi Eisemann confessed. "He was able to look through me, and if something was not as it should have been, he knew; and he wasn't shy to tell me."

His powerful emotions were nurtured until they burst forth in action. Every summer the Mandelbaum family took a camping vacation, to which the entire family eagerly looked forward all year. In 1982, the

day the much needed vacation was to begin, coincided with the Israeli army's Peace for Galilee campaign in Lebanon. Reb Naftoli Yehudah called Rabbi Eisemann and told him that he did not feel right going on a vacation while Jewish boys were dying in war, and asked him what he should do.

That *she'eila* exemplified for Rabbi Eisemann Reb Yehudah Naftali's whole life:

*Of course, we were all shattered to hear of yet another war. [But] we are quite resilient, and life goes back to normal very, very fast. The difference between an ordinary person and a person that touches greatness is that the great person fights that resilience. He holds on to those emotions and doesn't allow them to dissipate.*

His seriousness did not cut him off

from more ordinary Jews and leave him alone with his own thoughts. Just the opposite. The priceless diversity of *Hashem's* Chosen People were not mere ideas for him; they penetrated his heart.

He was perpetually exuberant — in the words of his brother-in-law Akiva Wagshal, “The least emotionally restrained person I ever met.” He consciously followed the advice of the *Chovos Halevovos* that no matter the sadness in one’s heart, only joy should be seen on his face.

He cried at every funeral and, what is far more rare, rejoiced wholeheartedly at every *chassana*. Many a father of the *chassan* or *kalla* wondered whether he or Reb Yehudah Naftali was happier. Once in a class on parenting, he mentioned as an aside how it bothered him to see Jews unable to rejoice in the *simchas* of others — the perfunctory Mazel Tovs and desiccated smiles.

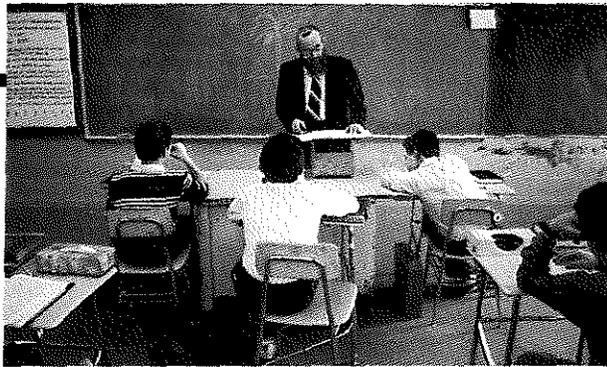
#### *An Intuitive Sensitivity to Others*

Rebbi Mandelbaum had an intuitive sensitivity to the feelings of others. When friends in another city felt shunned by those who did not know what to say after the birth of a child with Down Syndrome, Reb Yehudah Naftali called up with precisely the right words of encouragement.

Nothing disturbed Reb Yehudah Naftali more than communal apathy. When Baltimore was beset by a succession of tragedies, he was at the forefront calling for communal *takanos*, and went from person to person, like a Biblical prophet, asking, “Why don’t we wake up?” He took everything to heart. “Do you know how many broken people there are in this city?” he would cry, as he contemplated the plight of widows and divorced women.

What escaped the attention of others, Reb Yehudah Naftali noticed. What others noticed but were prepared to

<sup>1</sup>He made it a point to attend funerals of people he barely knew when he suspected the turnout would be small.



whenever they were in need, and his advice was sought on every subject from dealing with teenagers to diapering a baby to paneling a basement.

*Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb and his family were on the way to Boston one Erev Rosh Hashana to spend Yom*

*Tov with the Bostoner Rebbe when their car broke down just outside of Baltimore. They called their neighbor Rabbi Mandelbaum, who not only hurried to pick them up but also lent them his station wagon to drive to Boston. When Rabbi Gottlieb returned the car and started to thank Rabbi Mandelbaum profusely for his generosity, the latter stopped him with the comment, “I already received my reward. The smile on your face when I offered you the car was worth more than anything.”*

In his own personal life, Rabbi Mandelbaum was something of an ascetic, yet he fulfilled Rabbi Yisroel Salanter’s dictum that one should treat his fellow Jew’s *gashmius* as one’s own *ruchnius*. He was the driving force behind Baltimore’s Ahavas Yisrael organization. Nothing connected with the organization’s work was beneath him. When the organization was given a storage room, Reb Yehudah Naftali did all the electrical wiring himself and fixed the locks on the door. One student was amazed to watch his *rebbe* spend four straight hours on his hands and knees folding and sorting used clothing for redistribution.

#### *From Idea to Action*

None of his projects gave him more pleasure than those designed to increase Torah learning.

Shortly after arriving in Baltimore, he and his lifelong friend Rabbi Moshe Juravel established a *Mishnayos* learning program for youngsters called Chemdas. The highlight of Chemdas’s year was an out-of-town trip to a famous yeshiva or other Torah center. One year, the end-of-the-year trip turned out to be a complete fiasco. Nothing seemed to go right, including the weather. To compensate, Rabbi Mandelbaum arranged for the boys to go to a large amusement

leave for someone else to do, he immediately did himself. If the walkway to the Agudah *shul* was covered with snow, everyone knew they could count on Rabbi Mandelbaum and his sons to dig out the path. Though his time, especially that for learning, was extremely precious, he did not resent the hours spent on activities that those far less busy than himself could have done as well. A *chashuv* (important) person, he used to say, is one who fulfills his task to the fullest, and there was nothing that needed doing that he considered someone else’s task.

Because he was capable of expressing his love for his fellow Jews so openly, he had the rare ability to give rebuke. When he pointed out ways in which a person could improve — always discreetly — that person went away warmed by the depth of Reb Yehudah Naftali’s concern for him.<sup>2</sup>

He refused to ignore anything in the community that was not as it should be. Once someone reported to him that a girl in the Bais Yaakov had told a classmate, “I’m going to be elected class president because I’m more popular than you.” That a Jewish girl could boast about her popularity and lord it over another girl gave him no rest. He called up the Bais Yaakov principal to discuss what could be done to remedy what he viewed as a tragic intrusion of secular values into the school.

Reb Yehudah Naftali certainly did not look for things to criticize. He was far happier effusively praising people for doing things that might not have seemed noteworthy to anyone else.

Everyone instinctively turned to him

<sup>2</sup>He did not offer such suggestions unless he was confident that they would be listened to, and even then if there was the slightest suspicion of having hurt someone’s feelings, he would write them seeking their forgiveness.

park the last day. The overcast skies seemed to assure that immodest attire would not be a problem, but just before the boys arrived at the park, the sun started shining bright and clear.

When Rabbi Mandelbaum and Rabbi Juravel saw how the women in the park were dressed, they did not know what to do: To go in was impossible; to disappoint the boys again, almost as difficult. They need not have worried. The boys themselves sized up the situation, and announced that they could not go

into the park. That they had reached that level of understanding turned the disastrous trip into one of the happiest days of Reb Yehudah Naftali's life. For months afterwards, he spoke with awe to anyone who would listen of the elevated *madreiga* (spiritual level) that his students had shown.

Reb Yehudah Naftali also founded a Yeshiva Bein Hazemanim ("Intercession") that in time became the pride of Baltimore. Though he was treated as an equal by the leading *talmidei chachamim*

of Baltimore,<sup>3</sup> he never said the daily *shiur* in the Yeshiva Bein Hazemanim. Instead, he took care of all the practical details involved, and used the yeshiva to keep contact with *talmidim* from years past who had returned home for *Yom Tov*.

<sup>3</sup>Though Rabbi Mandelbaum often lamented that he did not have enough time to learn, the breadth and clarity of his Torah knowledge frequently astounded others. He initiated Torah correspondence with his son-in-laws. After excusing himself that he was not really "holding in the *inyan*," he would proceed to write several pages on whatever subject they were then learning.

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Rabbi Moshe Heinemann remarked wryly that the Yeshiva Bein Hazemanim was probably the first recorded instance of someone founding a yeshiva so that he could be the garbage man. After every *minyan* in the Agudah *shul*, Reb Yehudah Naftoli would announce the day's learning schedule. In between announcements, he hurried downstairs to prepare the food for breakfast and to clean up from the previous shifts. Yet for all the hard work involved in organizing the Yeshiva Bein Hazemanim, Rabbi Mandelbaum used to say that the sight of so much learning filled him with excitement that lasted until the next *bein hazemanim*.

## II. PARADIGM REBBE

In 1976, Rabbi Mandelbaum moved to Baltimore from Lakewood and began teaching in She'aris Hapleitah, a yeshiva for boys up to high school age. The Hebrew word for son — *ben* — has the same root as the word for building — *boneh*: the father builds his son. So Reb Yehudah Naftali built his *talmidim*. The goal of a Torah education, in his view, was not the accumulation of information but the creation of a Torah personality — a personality filled with awe at living in the presence of *Hashem*.

As a *rebbe*, he profoundly affected hundreds of boys and their families over the next 19 years. Even after he had become one of the best-known elementary-school *rebbe'im* in America, he was not above traveling to other *yeshivos* to observe, or asking his class at the end of the year what he could do to improve.

Within She'aris Hapleitah, he was the mentor for all the younger *rebbe'im* and the one to whom the entire staff always looked when a problem arose. Reb Yehudah Naftoli used to say that an educator must view his class like a father views his family. If a father has eight children, and seven are flourishing, while one is floundering, his worry over the one in trouble will not be diminished by the success of the others. Similarly, a *rebbe* cannot be satisfied unless every single boy in his class is growing.

He frequently described how Rabbi Elya Svei had been like a father to him when he had learned in the Philadelphia Yeshiva, and he played the same role in the lives of his students. In the outpouring of condolence letters from former students, one of the repeated themes was his preternatural sensitivity to the needs of his *talmidim*. One boy from a Chassidic background related how he was uncertain as he approached bar mitzva age whether to put on a *gartel* for *davening*. Somehow Rabbi Mandelbaum anticipated the boy's concern about sticking out. In the weeks just before the boy's bar mitzva, he spoke three times about the beauty of different *minhagim* (customs) among Jews and the importance of preserving one's own traditions, preparing the way for the boy's acceptance.

Another former student's primary memory was of "how warm" Rabbi Mandelbaum's hand was: "I remember clearly holding his hand and how he would put his hand on my shoulders

and neck and squeeze me. The warm feelings are still with me."

Just as a father cannot bear to see his children fighting with one another, so Reb Yehudah Naftali could not bear any form of discord among his students. "If he saw or heard about us fighting, he didn't just tell us to stop. *Rebbe* literally begged us to stop, as if we'd be doing him a personal favor," wrote one student. In fact, he always looked for ways to instill a sense of unity in the class. His face would light up any time the subject of *ahava* or *shalom* arose in learning, and he would emphasize how life is unbearable without *shalom*.

The fourth-graders he was teaching at the time of his passing related the various things he did to give them a feeling of being one group. When they played baseball, he made sure that they switched positions frequently so that every boy would get a chance. The message got through: "One thing Rabbi Mandelbaum taught me is to count everybody in a game even if he wasn't

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my best friend or not good at it.”

The boys marvelled at the *simcha* with which he did everything. Even making hot chocolate for them in the morning was done with zest.

Rabbi Mandelbaum never stopped stressing what it means to be a *ben Torah*. Rather than attacking TV, he instilled in his *talmidim* a fierce desire to be a *ben Torah*, and on their own they understood that TV was not appropriate. He was once asked by his students whether it is permissible to go to baseball games. Though as a halachic mat-

Similarly, he criticized in his parenting classes the presentation of *tzenius* to girls as a series of restrictions, which results, at best, in the letter of the law being observed while its spirit is blithely ignored. His approach instead was to emphasize the glory of being a *Yiddishe tochter* (Jewish daughter) in such a way that the girls would understand why certain things *pas nischt* (are unacceptable) for them.

ter he felt there was no problem of “going in the ways of the nations” involved, he returned the query: “Would you invite [Baltimore Oriole’s star] Cal Ripken to your *succa*? Well then, why do you go to his *succa* [i.e., Camden Yards Stadium]?” he asked.

### The Delight of Torah Study

He conveyed the *geshmack* (excitement) of learning without prizes. Token prizes were given in recognition of achievement, not as rewards for learning. Rabbi Mandelbaum knew that for every boy, there would come a day when no one would offer him a prize for learning and the motivation must come from within.

For him the excitement of learning came from looking deeply into a problem and working it through. And he

sought to encourage that same *ko’ach ha’iyun* (power of in-depth analysis) in his *talmidim*. He refused to allow the boys to remain at the level of understanding of *Chumash* of their early years. His goal was never to convey a particular *p’shat* of his, but to make his *talmidim* realize the depth of meaning in each word of Torah. His message: *Open up your eyes and think*. Reb Yehudah Naftali’s list of common mistakes made in learning *Chumash* became well-known among both students and fellow *rebbe’im*. Equally famed were his interpretations of the relationship of Yaakov and Eisav, which was built on 32 distinct questions; and that of Dasan and Aviram to Moshe based on 26 questions. In his account, Eisav and Dasan and Aviram became much more than stock villains, as they are usually portrayed.<sup>5</sup>

The key to teaching, Rabbi Mandelbaum once told a son-in-law, is not simply conveying the material to the child. Even when the subject matter has been taught many times, each boy’s uniqueness must be taken into account.

Like the relationship between father and son, his relationship with his *talmidim* was not confined to the classroom nor to the year that the boys spent in his class. One year Rabbi Mandelbaum had a particularly brilliant boy in his class. He discovered that the boy did not know how to ride a bicycle, and spent two consecutive Sundays teaching him. He feared that for all his brilliance the boy might become something of a social misfit if he did not master basic skills, and in time his inability to integrate with his peers might prevent him from reaching his potential.

As an eighth-grade *rebbe*, one of Rabbi Mandelbaum’s tasks was to place boys in *yeshivos* for the coming year. This became an almost full-time job for him. “Every yeshiva is the right yeshiva,” he

Rabbi Mandelbaum’s insights into *Chumash* reflected the depth of his thought. Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetsky kissed him on more than one occasion after hearing one of his original insights. Old friends from Philadelphia Yeshiva, who are themselves prominent *rabbanim* today, find themselves remembering *vertlach* they heard from him more than thirty years ago, every time they review the *parsha*.

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used to say, "You just have to know for which boy." He traveled frequently to various *yeshivos* to observe them first-hand, and was in constant contact with *menahalim* and *roshei yeshiva*. A boy from another yeshiva in Baltimore once approached him and asked him for advice about where he should go for high school. Reb Yehudah Naftali told him, "I don't know you, and I don't know how you learn, so I can't advise you. But if you want, we can learn together for two weeks, and then I'll be able to help you."

Even after his students left to other *yeshivos*, Reb Yehudah Naftali was in frequent touch with them. When former students had problems finding *chavrusos* (study partners) or adjusting, they would call Reb Yehudah Naftali, knowing that he would straighten out the problem. On more than one occasion, unfortunately, he warned parents that their sons, who were widely viewed as among the outstanding students in their respective *yeshivos*, were on the verge of breakdowns from the pressure on them. In each case, he was the first to pick up the problem.



One of the highlights of *bein hazemanim* for former students was coming back to Baltimore and receiving Rabbi Mandelbaum's warm *Shalom Aleichem*. What other *rebbe* from twelve years earlier, one former

student asked in a condolence letter, was prepared to give former students a *chassan shmuess* on a few hour's notice, spend his own money to travel to their weddings, make *Sheva Berachos* for them, or was filled with such excitement to see their babies?

One former student told Rabbi Mandelbaum that he would be driving with his family from Baltimore to Detroit for his wedding. Rabbi Mandelbaum, however, insisted that as a *chassan* he needed to arrive completely relaxed, and must fly. He told the young man that he knew a *gvir* (wealthy man) who would pay for the plane ticket. Only later did the *chassan* realize that the *gvir* had been none other than Rabbi Mandelbaum

\*Though no one else could understand how the large Mandelbaum family lived on his salary as a *rebbe*, Reb Yehudah Naftali always insisted that he was a *gvir*, which he defined as one who has the money to buy whatever he wants.

himself.<sup>6</sup>

As half of Lakewood seemed to be emptying out on the day of Reb Yehudah Naftali's *levaya*, one resident was unable to fathom how so many *talmidim* from years past had not thought twice about driving back to Baltimore for the *levaya*. "If you met him today, would he even remember your name?" he asked. "That person had obviously never met Rebbe," commented the former student who related the story.

### III. FAMILY

One of the hallmarks of greatness for a Jew is consistency — a life lived no differently in the privacy of one's home than in the public eye. Rabbi Mandelbaum met that test completely. His children's respect for him and his wife was unmistakable. He had but to get down on the floor and start cleaning up, for all his children to immediately follow suit. His sons invariably joined him for his various *chessed* projects, and his daughters bore the stamp of the Mandelbaum home in everything they did.

Members of the Baltimore community saw the children that he and his wife produced and begged him to give *shurim* in *chinuch bannim* (childrearing). They glimpsed the serenity of the Mandelbaum house and urged him to start another series on *shalom bayis* (marital harmony). "I always felt calmer after

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spending time in your house," was a typical comment, despite the constant hustle-bustle.

Like everything else in his life, Reb Yehudah Naftali was a superb father and husband because he worked hard at it. He made it a rule never to enter the house without a smile on his face, no matter how draining the day had been. For all the demands on him from every side, his family never felt short-shrifted. From the early days of marriage in Lakewood, he always ate with his family. He was available to talk to his children, and they used every available moment to speak to him. The same capacity to listen and to give a non-judgmental response that drew so many to him was present in his childrearing. "Delight in them; listen to them; don't put them down," was not just advice for others. It is how Reb Yehudah Naftali raised his own children.

Rabbi Mandelbaum was himself very much the product of his own upbringing. His high-mindedness, self-discipline, and devotion to the community were a direct legacy from his father.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Rabbi Eisemann, for whom the senior Mandelbaums had been surrogate parents when he was a young refugee in Shefford, England, once described Reb Chaim Mandelbaum ז"ל as precisely the type of Torah Im Derech Eretz Jew Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch had envisioned. A graduate of the Wurzburg Teachers Seminary,

Reb Yehudah Naftali fashioned his children into thinkers without making the mistake of treating them as little adults. The Mandelbaum children were not shielded from serious subjects. Death, for instance, was a frequent topic — not in a morbid fashion, but so the children would understand that this world is not the ultimate goal.<sup>8</sup> He was free about discussing his own feelings with his children as a means of nurturing the depth of their own feelings and their comfort with expressing them. In

Dr. Hugo (Chaim) Mandelbaum was a *mechanech* (Torah educator) in Germany and later the first principal of Bais Yehudah in Detroit. Most of his professional career, however, was spent as a professor of mathematics at Wayne State University. As soon as he retired, he devoted himself to full-time Torah study, eventually finishing the entire Talmud three times, as well as *Mishna Torah*, *Tur*, and *Shulchan Aruch*.

As the only son raised in America, after the Mandelbaum's traumatic flight from Germany and years as refugees in England, Reb Yehudah Naftali had an unusually close relationship with his father. From his father came his seriousness and self-discipline; from his mother, Serach, whose advice was sought by hundreds over her long life, came his warmth and deep insight into people.

<sup>8</sup> At the same time, he was ever alert for signs of the children losing their spontaneity and joy in life. He once told a daughter that if Rabbi Moshe Feinstein didn't say, "*Im yirtzeh Hashem*," every three words, most likely she need not either. If a son was learning without break, he might insist on their going bowling together.

His seriousness did not cut him off from more ordinary Jews and leave him alone with his own thoughts. Just the opposite. The priceless diversity of every Jew and the wonderful diversity of Hashem's Chosen People were not mere ideas for him; they penetrated his heart.

the Mandelbaum home, the children were never told, "We cannot afford this." The question instead was: *Is this necessary?* If — after evaluation — it was, the money was there.

The effect of living in a house where the family conversation was not just a means of filling time was felt from an early age. The teacher of the Mandelbaums' eight-year-old daughter once called to report how during a class discussion of *tzaddikim*, the little girl had blurted out, "My father says a *tzaddik* is someone who does what is right." She was echoing what she had heard at her dinner table.<sup>9</sup>

The Mandelbaum children imbibed his love for doing *chessed* and internalized his *Klal Yisroel* perspective. His

<sup>9</sup> Reb Yehudah Naftali once asked his eighth grade class to define a *tzaddik*. The *talmidim* responded with their own extravagant notions of a *tzaddik*: "A *tzaddik* is someone who learns 20 hours a day." "A *tzaddik* is someone who fasts every Monday and Thursday." In other words, someone so far removed from themselves that there was no point in seeking to become one. Reb Yehudah Naftali, however, taught them that being a *tzaddik* was a goal for which they must strive, for a *tzaddik* is nothing more than "a person who does what is right."

His own life was an object lesson in the influence that can be wielded by one Jew who seeks to do only that which is right — nothing more or less.

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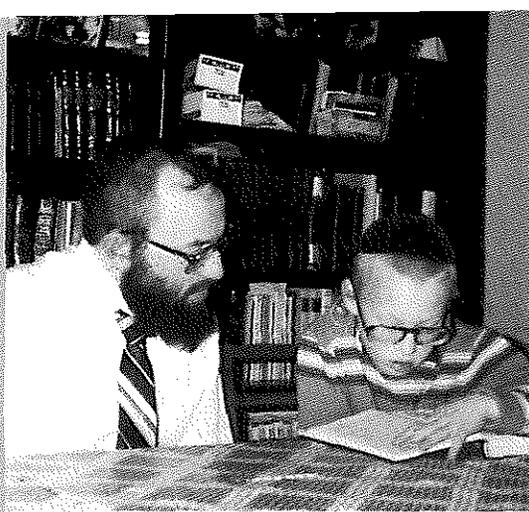
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daughters refused to take money for babysitting for neighbors or friends so as not to be deprived of the *mitzva* of doing *chessed*. Eventually the neighbors stopped calling them. Rabbi Mandelbaum was then left with the difficult task of convincing them that it would be a *mitzva* to take money so that people who wanted to go out would not hesitate to call them.

The Baltimore Bais Yaakov has always drawn from an extremely wide cross-section of the community. Someone once suggested to Rabbi Mandelbaum the creation of a more "right-wing" Bais Yaakov, to which he replied that he would not send his daughters to such a school because it would encourage looking down at other Jews. There was no such thing as certain children not being allowed to play in the Mandelbaum house.

Sensitivity to others was constantly reinforced. His greeting was "*Shalom aleichem, shalom aleichem.*" The repetition made clear his sincerity and interest. And the children were taught: "Hello" means I care about you; "Please" means that nothing is coming to me; "Thank you" means I am grateful for whatever you've done for me. The many *baalei teshuva* who frequented the house, Rabbi Mandelbaum explained to the children, were not to be viewed as "*kiruv* projects," but as "our *Shabbos* guests."

When Rabbi Mandelbaum's young son was told by his *rebbe* that his father had passed away suddenly while on a *Lag b'Omer* outing with his class, his first stunned reactions all concerned spiri-

tual matters: "Who will be there for my *siyumim*? Who will teach me the family *minhagim*? Who will lead me to the *chupa*? I was so much looking forward to learning Torah in his class."

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like that which the Mandelbaum children received stays with them, even after the father is gone. The greater challenge will be for the rest of us to apply the lessons of Reb Yehudah Naftali's life to our own. ■

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# The Perversion of Truth

## Why do opponents of Orthodoxy persist in ascribing to Torah Jewry things they know are not true?

**B**ernard Wasserstein? Bernard Wasserstein? The name rang a bell. I must have encountered it before.

I was reading a recent article in the *Yated Ne'eman* — the review of a book by Bernard Wasserstein about the imminent demise of traditional Judaism; in the words of the reviewer, it was distinguished from other books of this type “only by the particular viciousness of [Wasserstein’s] hatred of the *haredim*.... The *haredim* are described as brazen, duplicitous, violent and corrupt. Their rabbinic authorities are ‘shadowy characters,’ their learning is ‘intellectual mud that numbs the mind’.... They are characterized by ‘shameless filching from the public purse’ and ‘hypocrisy’.... In short, they constitute a ‘savage society’ led by their ‘primitive fear’ of modernity into ‘barbaric reactions.’”

As I was reading, I suddenly realized how I knew the author’s name: in 1979 he had published an earlier book, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*. It was a learned volume, giving evidence of the author’s wide-ranging research. I was somewhat familiar with the subject; in fact, I had a minuscule part in the rescue work of the Chief Rabbi’s Emergency Council; I eagerly opened the book, to be greeted by a long list of individuals and institutions consulted, from the major agencies down to the British government’s Public Record Office and Sheffield Central Library. But, strangely, the Chief Rabbi’s Emergency Council and the World Agudah Archives

Rabbi Elias is a member of the editorial board of *The Jewish Observer*. He is the author of a number of published works, including *The Haggadah* (ArtScroll/Mesorah) and a commentary, with new translation by Karin Paritzky, on Rabbi S.R. Hirsch’s *The Nineteen Letters* (Feldheim).

It should also be noted that the names of Rabbi Weissmandl, Isaac Sternbuch, *Vaad Hatzolah* and Agudath Israel do not appear in Wasserstein’s book; after all, they all were Orthodox individuals and institutions.

were not mentioned.

I turned to the index in the back of the book; I found people like Major Desmond Morton who makes a fleeting appearance in the book — but Dr. Solomon Schonfeld, and Harry Goodman, both of them deeply involved in rescue work and in constant touch with the government, did not appear.

I kept on searching. There were sixteen pages of sources, published and unpublished documents, newspapers and books. The list was comprehensive, in line with Wasserstein’s pompous declaration, at the beginning of the book, that “fairness requires that the evidence be presented in as complete a form as possible.” It was — except that any mention of Orthodox organizations and individuals was carefully suppressed. Thus the *Jewish Chronicle* was listed, but not the organ of the “*hared-*

*im*,” the *Jewish Tribune*.

Wasserstein, with a consistency that, under other circumstances, would have been admirable, followed this policy throughout the book. Three examples of his distortion of the historical facts will suffice.

### 1. *Refuge for Jewish Immigrants in Britain.*

Wasserstein writes (p. 10): “The Academic Assistance Council... helped to find positions in British Universities for many refugee scholars.... In December 1938, a Movement for the Care of Children from Germany was formed which arranged for the immigration of nearly 10,000 children (90% Jewish) by September 1938/9; most were lodged with foster parents, many of whom were non-Jews.”

That is all that the author had to say on the subject. Yet obviously the Academic Assistance Council had no interest in rabbis or religious teachers. Rabbi Dr. Solomon Schonfeld, Chief Rabbi Hertz’s son-in-law, took the initiative in founding the Chief Rabbi’s Religious Emergency Council which devoted itself in the first place to bringing over religious functionaries. But it soon had to deal with a much bigger problem. The Movement for the Care of Children placed its charges (many of them from observant families) without any regard to the religious factor. I know of one young man, from a well-known Jewish family who was placed with an Anglican clergyman, and is today a church organist in Britain. But even when children were placed in Jewish homes, they were generally lost to *Yiddishkeit*. Even if the Anglo-Jewish establishment had wanted to, they could not have found enough religious homes able to

receive them. Dr. Schonfeld stepped in and got visas for several large children's transports, to be placed in hostels and to attend Jewish schools and *yeshivos*. Not having the backing of the Anglo-Jewish establishment, he could not rival the numbers handled by the Movement; but the children that went through his hands not only received a Jewish education, but had a crucial role in the rebuilding of Torah life in England and America. Many of them became *rabbanim* and communal figures — one of them was Chief Rabbi Lord Immanuel Jakobovits (for details see *Solomon Schonfeld, His Page in History*, by D. Kranzler and G. Hirschler). It is utterly inconceivable that Wasserstein was unaware of these facts. Obviously he chose to ignore them.

### 2. The Search for Places of Refuge Outside Britain

The deliberate "editing" of the historical facts is even more obvious when we read Wasserstein's discussion of the wartime search for places of refuge. Wasserstein wrote (p. 46): "Exotic proposals for Jewish refugee settlement in a number of improbable places... flourished briefly in the official files, and were quickly consigned to the oblivion of the archives." Yet these "exotic" proposals were by no means all of them impracticable. Several of them were put forth by Dr. Schonfeld, such as the purchase of Stranger's Key, a small island in the British West Indies, as a potential haven for refugees. In 1943, together with Eleanor Rathbone (a member of Parliament repeatedly men-

tioned by Wasserstein, but never in connection with her joint efforts with Dr. Schonfeld), he got a majority of the members of Parliament to favor a resolution for places of refuge — but a Labor-Zionist member of Parliament opposed it because it did not specifically mention Palestine, and the British government thereupon gladly dropped the whole project (see *To Save a World*, vol 2, pp. 165-6). This remarkable episode was written up in the *London Times* — but ignored by Wasserstein.

### 3. The Bombing of Auschwitz

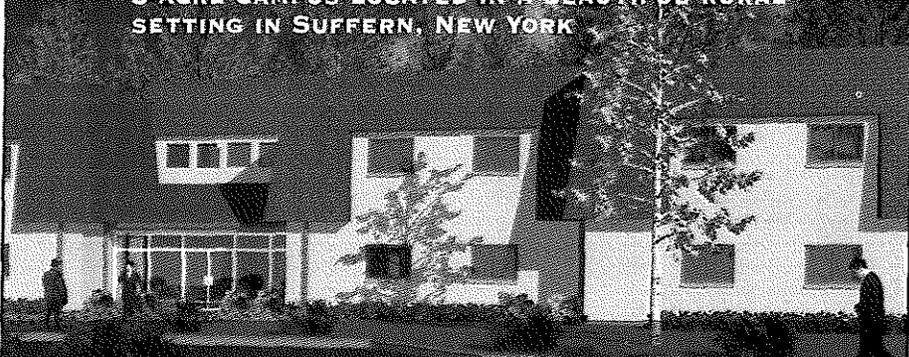
This is probably the area in which Wasserstein's prejudice is most obvious, for he gives lengthy space to this topic and hence his omissions are particularly glaring. He writes (p. 307): "Meanwhile, a proposal was put to the British government for a different form of bombing which, it was argued, might have a direct effect on the Nazi process of mass murder."

The idea had come up first in the

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summer of 1943, when technical difficulties ruled it out. In the summer of 1944, a renewed "request was made [to the British government] on behalf of the Jewish Agency, by Weizmann and Shertok.... On 30 June a memorandum from Shertok to the foreign office... outlined the reasoning behind the Zionist request" (pp. 309-310). Now let us see what really happened, based on the classic works of M. Penkower (*The Jews Were Expendable*) and D.S. Wyman (*The Abandonment of the Jews*).

On April 15, 1944, two fugitives from Auschwitz reached Slovakia with the first full details of Auschwitz, including maps. By May 16, a detailed letter as well as a coded cable went out from Rabbi Michael Ber Weissmandl to his contact in Switzerland (Isaac Sternbuch) asking him to spread the news and urging the Allied powers to bomb the rail lines to Auschwitz. Weissmandl referred specifically to the British airforce, and Isaac Sternbuch, who received the cable on May 19, traveled on that same Friday

night to Berne where he woke up the British military attaché, to ask him to relay the same request to the British government. Sternbuch also relayed Weissmandl's plea to the American military attaché who cabled it to Washington. By then the *Vaad Hatzolah* in New York had received word, and on June 18, Jacob Rosenheim, president of Agudath Israel, submitted a specific proposal to the American government. Unfortunately, however, the pressure on the Allied governments, from all sides, during the next few weeks, did not move them to bomb the railroads to Auschwitz and thousands of Jews continued to be deported to their death (full details are in Penkower's chapter 7 and Wyman's chapter 15).

It should be noted that the names of Rabbi Weissmandl, Isaac Sternbuch, *Vaad Hatzolah* and Agudath Israel do not appear in Wasserstein's book; after all, they all were Orthodox individuals and institutions. For the same reason, the bombing proposal had to be presented as a "Zionist request," put forth

on June 30, a ludicrous misrepresentation if ever there was one.

#### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SPOTLIGHTING WASSERSTEIN'S "SCHOLARSHIP"

Why is it worth our while to throw a light on Bernard Wasserstein's "scholarship"? It is of course instructive to see how pathologically obsessive hatred of traditional Jews can bring a person — a professor at Oxford University, no less — to distort history and lay himself open to the very same charges that he so readily levels — intellectual mud, duplicity, shamelessness (indeed, in using public funds from the Memorial Foundation and other charitable funds for such a book, he may also qualify as "filching from the public purse").

But the issue transcends Bernard Wasserstein. In the first place, it highlights the need to use extreme caution in dealing with Judaic studies courses and publications, whether concerned with the Holocaust or other areas. Wasserstein may be an extreme case; but he is not unique. The famous statement that "statistics don't lie — but liars use statistics" is also true of other scholarly fields. There, too, a person's preconceptions and bias can produce poisonous fruits (we need only remember Nazi racial theories). Not for nothing do we ask that, even in the study of Torah, we should be spared from erring.

Indeed it is just in the approach of Torah that our *yeitzer hara* seeks most strongly to mislead us: untruth cannot tolerate truth — and, least of all, absolute truth, as represented by G-d's teachings. This explains a phenomenon that just in our days puzzles us. We can well understand that the Reform and Conservative movements, engaged in a desperate battle for survival and acceptance as legitimate Jews of Judaism, will make every effort to present their case. But why do they persist in accusing Torah Jewry of things that they themselves know are not true — that we do not consider their members Jews, that excrement was thrown at the *Kotel*, etc. etc.?

As our Sages put it, "Hatred perverts a straight line." ■

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# Protest Pays

**W**hat do you expect? After all, we're living in *galus*." This is the attitude many of us take when we encounter affronts to our Torah standards in the larger society. So when we see something offensive to our sense of decency, we generally look away and



then walk away. Our only response is to shrug our shoulders, shake our heads and mumble to ourselves, "What more can you expect from *goyim*, today?"

While we may have discharged our duty to ourselves by this approach, do we ever consider the impact our inaction is having on the next unsuspecting *Yid* who may come along? We feel responsible to kick aside a physical *michshol* (stumbling block) on the sidewalk that may cause someone to trip and fall, *chas v'shalom*. Then why don't we feel similarly compelled to attempt to remove spiritual *michsholim* from the public thoroughfare?

I am not suggesting that we adopt the strong arm tactics of those who would resort to vandalism to make their point. But there are respectful, civil means to lodge protests which do not involve destruction of property.

Perhaps people refrain from complaining because they feel it will be useless. "Why bother," some might argue. "No one is going to listen, anyway."

I believe that it pays to protest for two reasons. Firstly, it is possible that you will, indeed, bring about an improvement. But even if not, you will be heard and your voice will combine with those who follow you, resulting in a cumulative effect down the road.

Eliyahu Mayer, a New York-based writer, is a frequent contributor to these pages, most recently with, "First Fruits: Shavuos Musings," May '97.

## A CHOL HAMOED FIASCO

**T**o illustrate these points, I would like to present excerpts from some personal correspondence following a recent *Chol Hamoed* outing I took with my family. Following the guidelines set

forth by *The Jewish Observer* ("Preventing a *Chol Hamoed* Fiasco: Practical Guidelines for Successfully Entertaining Children," March '88), I took my family to a museum in Connecticut. What seemed like an educational and wholesome outing turned into a spiritual fiasco.

The museum screened what was billed as an "educational film" entitled, "The Grand Canyon." Additional details provided by the museum staff were that the 40 minute film included breathtaking aerial views of the Grand Canyon. Innocently feeling secure that all was in order, we bought tickets and entered the large-screen Imax theater.

The first two minutes of the film contained scenes that are objectionable by Torah standards, but apparently not by "educational" standards.

In my letter of protest, I included the following: "... For a museum that is supposedly geared to families with young children, we would have expected at least a warning in the literature about the film or from the staff that the film contains

scenes that some may find objectionable.... Our complaint is not that you screened the film, which you have every right to do. Rather our complaint is that you gave no warning whatsoever that the film contained a scene which would warrant a PG rating in a regular theater."

## WE WERE NOT ALONE

**M**y family and I were not the only Brooklyn refugees who viewed "The Grand Canyon" that *Chol Hamoed* afternoon. At least a dozen other recognizably *frum* people exited the theater together with us. I polled a few on their reactions.

"Breathtaking views of the Canyon," one bearded man observed.

"Unbelievable photography," another noted.

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"What did you think of the opening scene?" I probed one of my interviewees.

"Uh, well,... I guess that really was unnecessary. I just closed my eyes and asked my wife to let me know when it was safe to open them again. I think the rest of the film was O.K., though."

"What do you plan to do about it?" I asked further.

"What can you do about it? Letter writing never helps. They do what they want at these places, anyway."

**YOU CAN FIGHT CITY HALL**

When I got home, I couldn't decide whether I was more bothered by the policy of the museum in not providing a warning about the film or by the attitude of my neighbor who was shrugging the whole thing off. I decided to write a letter of protest to the museum, to address the former, and then prepare this article to deal with the latter. To my surprise, I received a most respectful reply which taught me that you can, indeed, fight city hall.

The following is excerpted from the letter I received from the President of the museum:

"... We appreciate your input, because it is only through comments such as yours that we can be alerted to a problem... We have contacted the producers of the movie, and they informed us that they received very few complaints since the movie opened over 10 years ago; however, they have indicated that they do plan to recut the movie and remove the scenes that offended you."

During the past 10 years, I wondered, how many *frum* people had seen this film? If every one of them had sent a letter of protest after returning home, I believe the offensive scenes would have been deleted long before this past *Chol Hamoed*.

A letter of protest not only allows you to let off steam and express your moral outrage. It can also serve to protect the rest of us from encountering the same spiritual pothole in a *reshus harabbim* — a public thoroughfare.

Of course, learning that protest pays was not the only lesson to be gleaned from my *Chol Hamoed* outing. I also learned the wisdom of *Shlomo Hamelech* who cautioned, "*Ashrei adam mefacheid tamid* — Fortunate is the man who is always fearful" (*Mishlei* 28,14; see also *Gittin* 55b). In other words, regardless of the assurances of the staff regarding the content of a movie, a theater, even in a museum, is never a guaranteed spiritually-safe venue for a *Chol Hamoed* outing.

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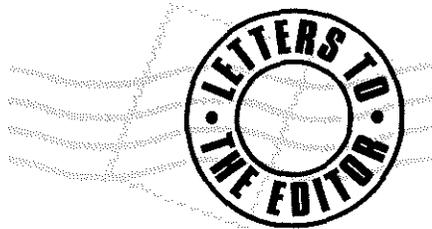
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### CORRECTION

In the Readers' Forum in *The Jewish Observer* of December '97, the signatures on the letters on page 37 were misplaced. The letter titled "Daily Encounters" was written by Avi Lasdun of New York City, while the letter "Sharing the Glow" was penned by Mrs. M. Anteby of Brooklyn.

### APPRECIATION FOR DR. WIKLER'S COMFORT FOR NON-AVEILIM

To the Editor:

After reading Dr. Wikler's guide to comforting non-*aveilim* (May '97), I want to thank the writer for an article that I, myself, tried to put together. Having recently suffered the loss of a dear mother-in-law, I felt so much of what Dr. Wikler wrote. If I may, I would like to add a few points:

1. The *shiva*, for various reasons was at my husband's and my home. Although I and my children were not, *ב"ה*, *aveilim*, I needed to "sit" with my husband as much as possible. The loss was tremendous, and quite sudden, and we had been *very* close. Many of my friends came by and spent time here, but others remarked afterwards that they were given a *p'sak* that if no women are "sitting," women should not pay a *shiva* call. I understand the *p'sak*, but should there not be some exceptions or accommodation — such as women calling on us to visit with the women?

2. My children were very close to their *Bubbee*, and while some of their *Rebbe'im* and principals came to "pay a *shiva* call," others had no representatives. *ב"ה* my children were NOT *aveilim*, but they felt as if they were. One daughter, attending a different school from the rest of my children, particularly felt dejected when not *one* of her

teachers came to the house (as I said, the *shiva* was in *our* home).

3. My husband is now a true *yasom* — no parents. Would it not be a kind gesture of others to go out of their way to include *yesomim* on their *simcha* invi-

tation list? True, he cannot attend, but being thought of, especially now, means so much.

4. This past Pesach, we all missed my mother-in-law in *shul*, where for close to 25 years, she had been a *davener par excel-*

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lence. If even one person would've said they miss her presence, we wouldn't have felt she was "gone and forgotten."

A BEREAVED NON-AVEIL  
(NAME WITHHELD BY REQUEST)

*The author responds:*

Most readers don't realize how much authors appreciate letters-to-the-editor about their articles. Besides stroking the author, letters-to-the-editor serve to communicate to the readership at large

that the issues addressed in an article are real and shared by others. The above letter, for example, helps to demolish the walls of silence and secrecy that surround so many bereaved individuals who feel isolated in their suffering. The letter tells them that they are not alone.

There are a few specific points raised in her letter that I would like to address:

1. Some *poskim* would allow women to pay a *shiva* call to a man sitting *shiva*, under certain conditions. But even

those *poskim* who might rule otherwise would never prohibit women from making a telephone call to the wife of a man sitting *shiva*. Those who chose not to call you, based on the *p'sak* they received, either misapplied the *p'sak*, were too uncomfortable to speak with you, or both.

2. The *mitzva* of *bikkur cholim* is one with which most people are much more comfortable than with *nichum aveilim*. It does not evoke the same intense awkwardness and anxiety in adults, all the more so in children. For these reasons, perhaps, when a student is out sick, most *Rebbe'im* in *yeshivos* and teachers in *Bais Yaakovs* will encourage the rest of the class to visit, phone and/or write. But when a student suffers a loss, and there is no structure of a *shiva* call, some *mechanchim* unfortunately do miss this *chinuch* opportunity to teach their *talmidim* and *talmidos* the *chessed* of comforting the bereaved who are not *aveilim*.

3. Yes, *aveilim* should be kept in the loop and notified of *simchos* in the community. Being unable to attend does not mean that an *aveil* should be denied the opportunity to express his *mazel tov* wishes. But even more than *aveilim*, *almanos* (widows) should not be forgotten when invitations are sent out. *Ba'alei simcha* often rely on their *shul's* mailing list to prepare their guest list for a *chassana* or a *bar mitzva*. Because her late husband is no longer a member of the *shul* often means that an *almana's* name does not appear on the *shul's* mailing list, thereby taking her out of the loop of *simcha* news and invitations just when she needs it the most.

4. Many people meet bereaved individuals in *shul*, on the street, or at work after the week of *shiva*, and do not mention the loss for fear of "upsetting" them by "reminding them of their loss." If these people realized how much suffering they cause by ignoring the loss, they would offer some words of acknowledgment — words that actually comfort the bereaved more than they realize.

Finally, since the publication of my article, many formerly bereaved people

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have approached me in person or by phone telling me how much they agreed with what I wrote and how the article validated their own experiences and feelings, all of which illustrates the words of Chazal, "Ein chacham k'baal nisayon — There is no wise person like one with personal experience" (*Milei D'Avos* 10b).

May we soon merit the time when no one will suffer mourning, as we see the fulfillment of the prophecy of *Yeshayahu* (25,8):

He will destroy death forever; And the Eternal G-d will wipe away tears from all faces....

MEIR WIKLER, D.S.W.

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# Saying "Y.E.S." to Our Disaffected Youth

## New Agudath Israel Enrichment/Employment Program to Assist "Out of Yeshiva" Orthodox Teens

Though the proliferation of teen-aged Orthodox "underachievers" has long been a source of deep concern to Orthodox Jewish leaders — and families — across the country, the topic has swiftly moved to the community's front-burner over the past year or so.

First there was Rabbi Yakov Horowitz's series of eye-opening articles on the topic in *The Jewish Observer*, then his addresses on the issue at a Torah Umesorah national convention and, along with Dr. Yaakov Salomon, at last year's Agudath Israel national convention. The sheer number of responses to both the articles and the addresses, not to mention the urgency of their tone, were unmistakable indications that a resonant chord had been struck in the community.

At this year's Agudath Israel convention, the challenge of Orthodox youth unenrolled in yeshiva was the focus of one of the Friday morning "roundtable forums" as well, and words turned to concrete action with the announcement that Rabbi Horowitz, who serves as *Menahel* of Yeshiva Darchei Noam (Monsey), will be heading a major new Agudath Israel endeavor: "Project Y.E.S.". Respected *Roshei Yeshiva* had urged both Rabbi Horowitz and Agudath Israel to create a means of addressing the situation, and — with the help of community activists Shia Markowitz, Richard Schuster and Moshe Hertz — Project Y.E.S. emerged.

### The Meaning Behind Y.E.S.

The words behind the acronym — "Youth Enrichment Services" — well capture the positive and enthusiastic tone of the project, which aims to provide a number of options to

Orthodox Jewish youth who are, for a variety of reasons, not enrolled in any educational institution.

In many cases, all that is needed to allow teens to resume productive yeshiva or Bais Yaakov careers is individualized guidance for them and their parents. And where family or individual professional counseling is deemed appropriate, Y.E.S. will provide referrals. In other situations, though, a youngster may be not equipped or able to assume a full-day educational regimen. "Such young people," explains Rabbi Horowitz, "are often shuffled from yeshiva to yeshiva, not only severely taxing the resources and attention of devoted *mechanchim*, but adding to the youths' feelings of inadequacy and frustration — hardly a recipe for their success as Jewish adults." Major calamities — diminished Jewish observance, alienation from family, even substance abuse — can all too easily follow. "And the most effective point of intervention," he stresses, "is as soon as the youth is no longer attending yeshiva. The passage of mere weeks or even days can immensely complicate things."

In many cases, he goes on to explain, specialized part-time educational programming — a mentor for a young woman, or a night-time *shiur* and *chavrusa* for a young man — is the most effective option. At times, the addition of a day-time work setting, with a caring Jewish employer who can also double as mentor, can produce astounding results, both emotionally and educationally. "Sometimes," says Mr. Markowitz, "a job in a stable environment can be all that is needed to help save a kid."

"After mere months, or even weeks,

of successful work experience," Rabbi Horowitz relates, "these youngsters take their lives as Jews, their employment responsibilities and their studies seriously." They learn not only to manage the money they make, he explains, but the value of time — and, above all, of personal responsibility.

### Not Just a New York Phenomenon

Though the largest number of "out of yeshiva" Jewish teens is in the Greater New York area — estimated in excess of one thousand — there are young men and women in need of options like those Project Y.E.S. will provide in many Jewish communities. Agudath Israel has therefore issued a call for qualified volunteer couples — both within New York and surrounding areas as well as in communities across the country — to serve as counselors and contact persons for the central Project Y.E.S. headquarters in Monsey. Rabbi Horowitz is currently meeting with local *Rabbanim* and lay leaders in a variety of communities to enlist their invaluable assistance as well. A hotline has been set up to enable parents and teens to confidentially discuss sensitive issues with *mechanchim* and other professionals. Additional details are expected to be forthcoming in coming weeks.

Once a cadre of volunteer counselors is established, Rabbi Horowitz explains, a training seminar will be held for them, to ensure that they are adequately prepared for the work that lies ahead of them. Presenters will include leading *mechanchim*, mental health professionals, and youth counseling experts.

The special Hotline number is 718-375-3900; Mon.-Thurs., 12noon-4pm; Sun.-Thurs., 9pm-11pm. ■



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- Modern Orthodoxy** Orthodoxy's Move to the Right/Rabbi Nisson Wolpin, Feb. '97; Orthodoxy and Feminism: How Promising a *Shidduch*?/Rabbi Nisson Wolpin, Apr. '97; Orthodoxy's Move to the Right (Readers' Forum), Apr. '97.
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S.H. = Siyum HaShas Daf Yomi  
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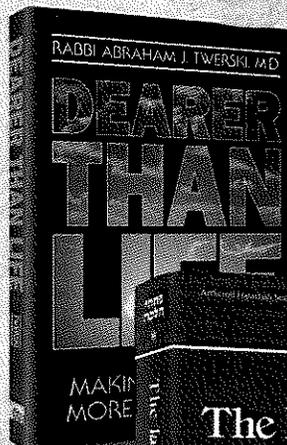
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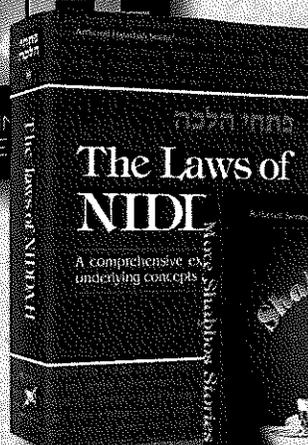


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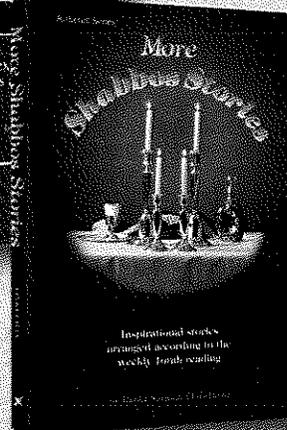
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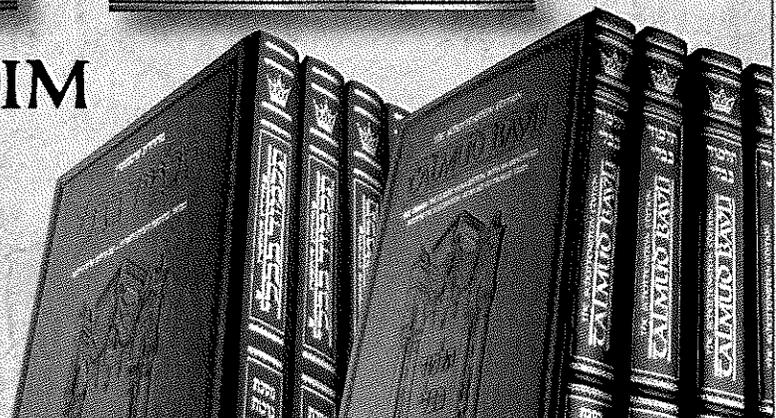


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