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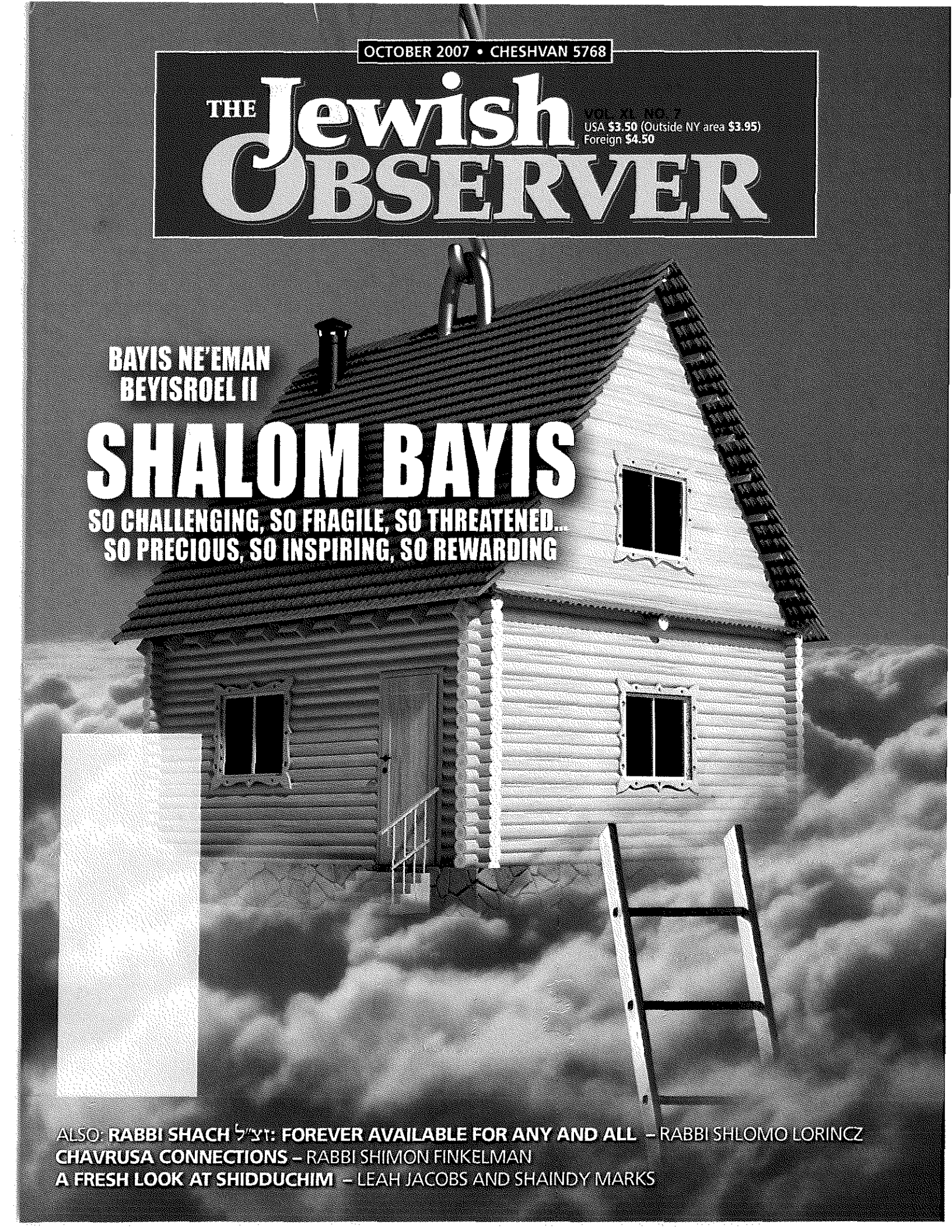

BAYIS NE'EMAN BEYISROEL II

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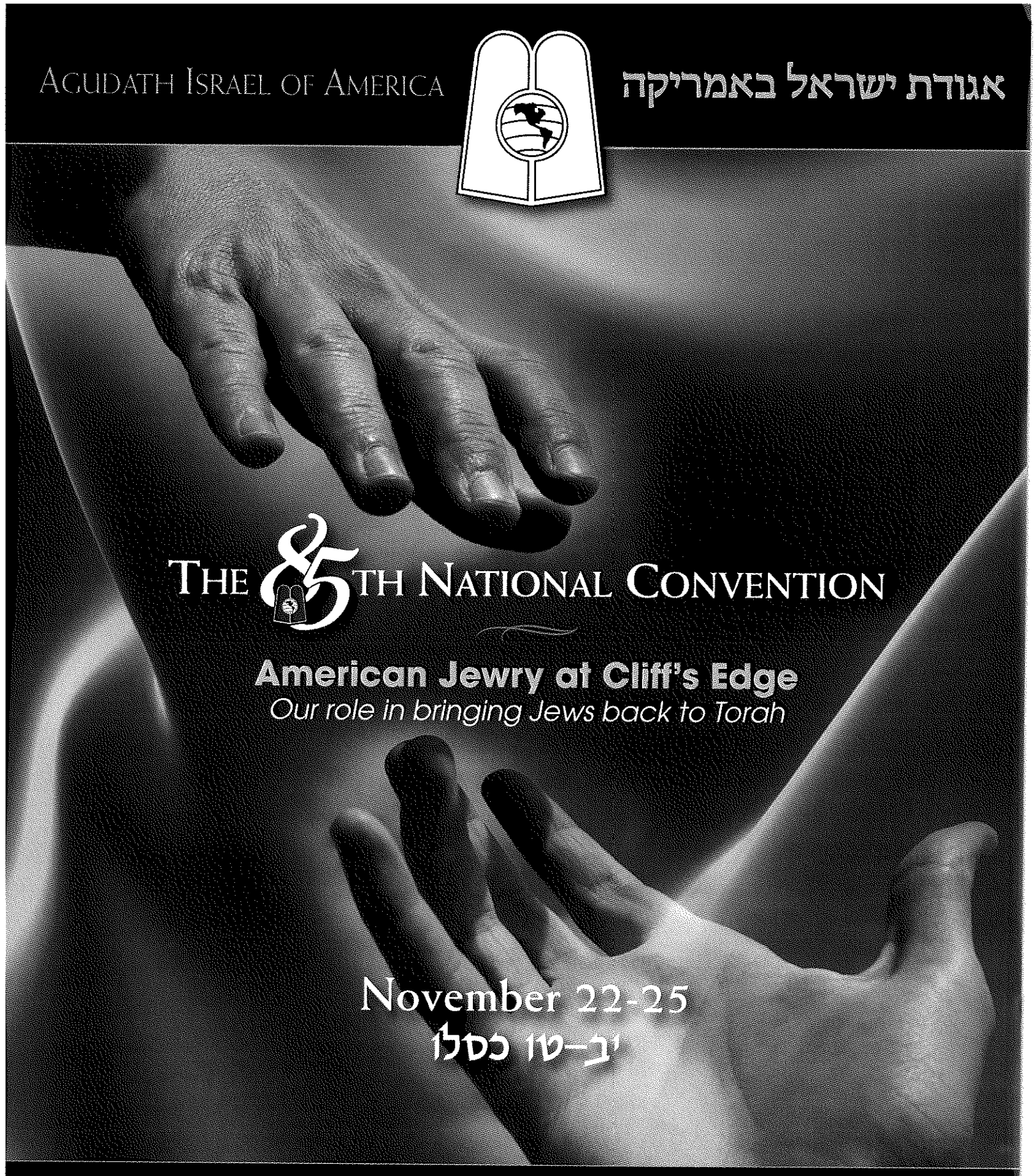

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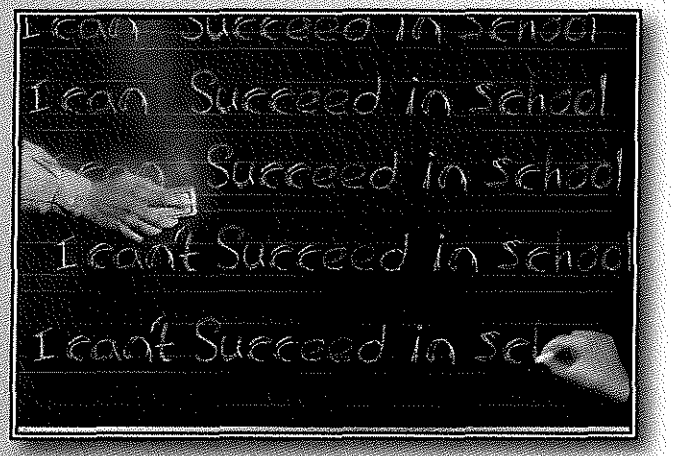

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דעת תורה

בס"ד, אייר תשס"ז

May, '07

Dear Acheinu Bnei Yisroel, Fellow Jews from all corners of the globe.

We urge you to participate in the charity **Kolel Chibas Yerushalayim, Reb Meyer Baal Haness.**

Need we add to what the Tchebiner Gaon זצ"ל wrote in 1963 "The charity of **Reb Meyer Baal Haness, Kolel Chibas Yerushalayim** was founded and upheld by the tzadikim of previous generations... It has sustained thousands of Torah Scholars, the elderly, the weak, widows and orphans, by giving them the aid and support they so urgently need."

The Kolel is presently providing for the sustenance of Bnei Torah and **hundreds of widows and orphans** ר"ל. Additionally, they provide wedding expenses, medical bills, post natal expenses and regular stipends to the general needy public. An interest free loan program is available to those in need. **In total, tens of millions of shekalim** are distributed to thousands of families every year.. All this is done with the utmost privacy and respect.

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We'd like to end with an additional quote of the Tchebiner Gaon זצ"ל "I ask all Bnei Yisroel to lend an ear to the crying of thousands of their brethren who are poor, downtrodden, and deeply pained. I ask you to please go out of your way to help **Kolel Chibas Yerushalayim**... In that zchus, Hashem should bless every one of you who responds by taking part in this charity with blessings for all times."

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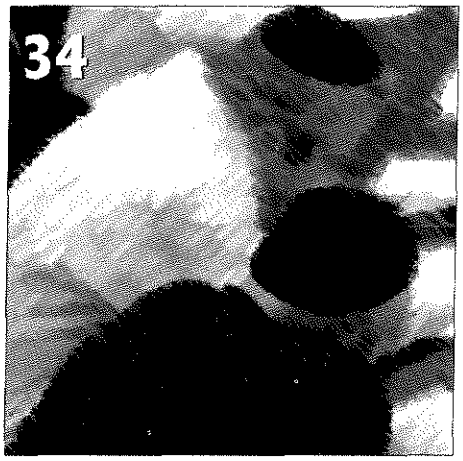

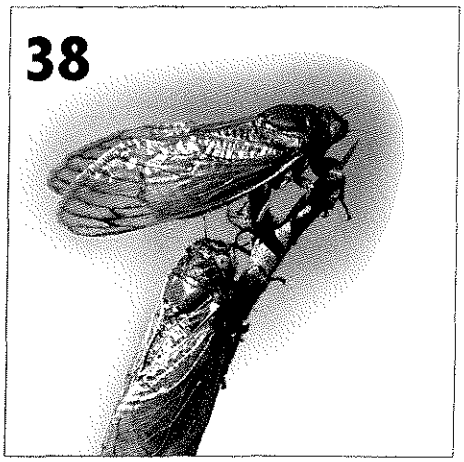

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OCTOBER 2007 / VOLUME XL
NO. 7

IN THIS ISSUE

6 READERS' FORUM

BAYIS NE'EMAN BEYISROEL II

10 HOMES ON FIRE, *Rabbi Pinchos Jung*

13 SHALOM BAYIS, LIKE IT WAS NOT TOO LONG AGO, *Mrs. Sarah Medwed*

19 THE JEWISH WOMAN'S CHALLENGE: FULL-TIME MOM OR FULL-FLEDGED PERSON?, *Mrs. Miriam Kosman*

23 A FRESH LOOK AT HISHTADLUS IN SHIDDUCHIM, *Leah Jacobs and Shaindy Marks*

30 BE CONSOLED: A LETTER THAT SHOULD NEVER BE USED, *Rabbi Yosef C. Golding*

THE CHAVRUSA CONNECTION

32 WHEN GIVING IS RECEIVING, *Rabbi Shimon Finkelman*

34 PARTNERS IN LEARNING... CHAZARA... AND LIFE, *Ephraim Jaffe*

MUSINGS

36 KATTOWITZ LIVES, *Rabbi Avi Shafran*

37 OF PUBLIC RECORD

38 A CICADA INVASION, A DIVINE ORCHESTRATION, *Mrs. Marsha Smagley*

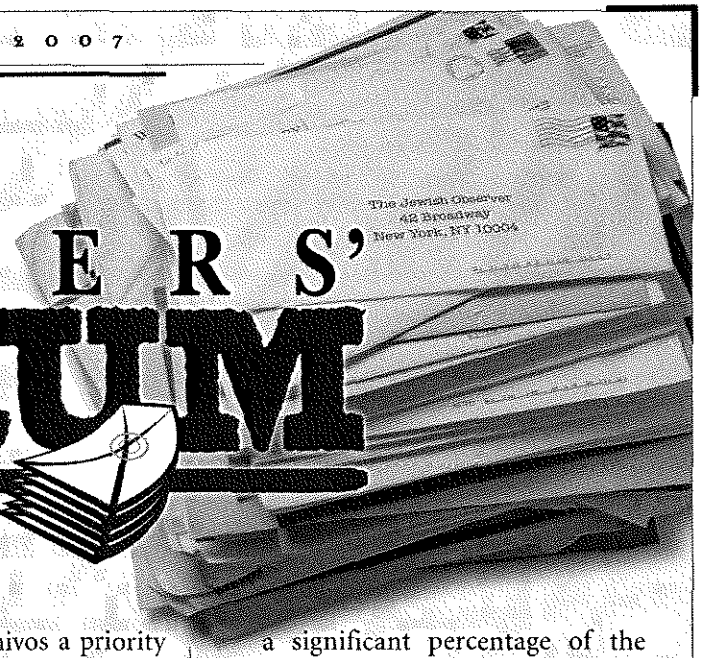
LETTER FROM JERUSALEM

41 EARTHSHAKING DIGS ON HAR HABAYIS, *Yonoson Rosenblum*

43 RABBI ELAZAR MENACHEM MAN SHACH זצ"ל, FOREVER AVAILABLE FOR ANY AND ALL, *Rabbi Shlomo Lorincz, prepared for publication by Yonoson Rosenblum*

STATEMENT OF POLICY

THE JEWISH OBSERVER HAS DEVOTED A GREAT DEAL OF SPACE TO THE PERILS OF THE INTERNET AND TO THE NEED FOR EVERYONE TO BE EXTREMELY VIGILANT IN ITS USE. WE HAVE ECHOED THE PLEAS OF OUR GEDOLIM THAT IT SHOULD NOT BE IN USE, UNLESS IT IS AN UNAVOIDABLE NECESSITY, AND THEN ONLY WITH ALL SUITABLE SAFEGUARDS. WHILE ITS DANGERS MUST BE RECOGNIZED AND CONTROLLED TO EVERY POSSIBLE DEGREE, OUR GEDOLIM RECOGNIZE THAT MANY PEOPLE AND BUSINESSES REQUIRE ITS USE, AND THEREFORE IT HAS NOT BEEN BANNED. THIS IS WHY WE ACCEPT ADVERTISEMENTS LISTING WEBSITE ADDRESSES, BUT IN NO WAY DOES THIS IMPLY THAT THE GEDOLIM OR THE JEWISH OBSERVER CONDONE CASUAL USE OF THE INTERNET.



READERS' FORUM

CONFUSED PRIORITIES: AN OLD PROBLEM

To the Editor:

Once again, Marvin Schick has struck between the eyes ("The Orthodox Community's Confused Priorities," June/Summer '07).

Appropriately, the article appeared during the period when *parashas Mattos*, which contains a telling dialogue between the tribes of Reuven and Gad with *Moshe Rabbeinu*, was read In their presentation, the tribes said (*Bamidbar* 32,16): "We will build enclosures for our flocks here and cities for our children" – namely, we will first secure our livelihood, then take care of our children.

But *Moshe Rabbeinu*, in his response (ibid. 32,24), said: "Build for yourselves cities for your children and enclosures for your sheep." As *Rashi* points out (ibid. 32,16), *Moshe Rabbeinu* was advising them that they had their priorities confused.

Apparently, the process described by Dr. Schick has a long and noble history.

ELKANAH SCHWARTZ
Brooklyn, NY

SUCCESS IN SOME IMMIGRANT SCHOOLS

To the Editor:

In reference to Marvin Schick's article "The Orthodox Community's Confused Priorities," I agree with his major premise that many of our leaders, including rabbis, don't make yeshivos a priority for financial support, and I agree that our Orthodox leaders and lay members have not used their influence with the Federation or made it as a priority (especially in NY) to deal with it. However, I wish to correct two points of misinformation in the article:

1. "The decline in enrollment in outreach and immigrant schools is extraordinary." I have been the principal for the past six years of an immigrant school in Forest Hills called Sharei Zion Ohel Bracha. We began six years ago with 60 boys and have grown to over 280 students. We cater to the *frum* Bucharian community, and we receive zero financial support from our Federation, and some support from the Avi Chai Foundation. Our tuition is low (below $5,000) because most of our families are lower- or middle-class. We don't have any support from the Ashkenazi community, although they were instrumental in supporting many immigrant schools in the 80's and 90's. We are struggling, dependent on the support of the lay members of the Bucharian community, who also support our synagogue. We also take pride in providing excellence in education and in never having been late with the payroll. Mr. Schick, we are an example of an immigrant school where enrollment is extraordinary in a positive way; let's present the positive as well.
2. "It should not be surprising that a significant percentage of the students in our poorer schools, which include immigrant and *kiruv* schools, do not continue in a religious high school." We have now graduated two classes. Last year, eight of the ten graduates were placed in yeshiva high schools and this year, 14 of 14 have been placed in yeshiva high schools.

I must comment, however, that it's not easy to place our students. More and more yeshiva high schools have a low tolerance level for students who don't fit the mold or who are not on the highest academic level. A yeshiva high school must understand that some students don't reach their potential in elementary school, but with the proper direction, can reach their potential in high school. It's not an exaggeration to say that some of our *gedolim* of today, and some of our rabbanim and rebbei'im of today, would not have been able in their youth to meet the entrance requirements of some of our yeshivos and would have been rejected.

Mr. Schick, your premise is correct. Something has gone wrong. However, some immigrant yeshivos succeed, despite the lack of support of our great Orthodox community. What has also gone wrong is that the idealism of helping immigrants has dissipated. We were all at one time a community of immigrants. Let's not forget our past, and let us use our positive experiences of the past to continue to help our new immigrants so that the yeshivos will thrive.

RABBI DOVID ABRAMCHIK
Principal, Sharei Zion Ohel Bracha
Forest Hills, Queens

PROHIBITIVE TUITION COSTS, LOSS FOR ALL CONCERNED

To the Editor:

Pertaining to "The Tuition Dilemma" issue of *The Jewish Observer* (Jan.-Feb. '07), I would like to comment as follows:

Although parents are responsible for their children's religious education, what occurs when they refuse to accept this responsibility? Denying children a place in a yeshiva or Jewish day school is in many cases not the answer. In today's times, we find that many Jewish parents unfortunately do not have a clue as to what Judaism is. They themselves were raised in secular environments with limited, if any, religious education. To expect such people to sacrifice vacations and material possessions in order to finance yeshiva tuitions is unrealistic. Many might prefer to enroll their children in Jewish day schools or yeshivos for reasons of their own. These include:

- Not wanting their children to mix with those of a "lower class" (who may even be bussed in to their children's schools from other neighborhoods).
- The fear of drug use, alcoholism and/or violence, which they perceive as being more prevalent in public schools.

Despite such factors, however, most opt to go the public school route when confronted with the high cost of yeshiva tuitions. Even if parents who make such decisions suffer, in the final analysis, it is the religious Jew committed to Torah and mitzvos who suffers even more. This is so because the children in question grow up with little or no Jewish identity or spirit. Many never learn to make a *beracha*, never attend a *Shabbaton* or a seminar which contains Jewish content, never attend a Jewish camp in which Jewish rituals are practiced, and never experience the true joy of Jewish holidays. Can we afford to decry the success of missionaries, the high intermarriage rate, the anti-Jewish positions advocated by secular Jewish academics, and the declining Jewish birth rate and population if we accept no responsibility for Jewish children from such homes? Can we afford to ignore the fact that children from non-religious homes who are placed in Jewish schools very often turn the whole family around?

Resources and energies are spent (and rightfully so) on establishing tuition-free schools and attempting to salvage Jewish *neshamos* from the former Soviet Union. Do Jewish children in our own backyards not deserve at least equal consideration? Should they, Heaven forbid, get lost, it is the entire *klal* that loses. Placing blame on the parents does not alter the end result.

IRWIN GOLDSTEIN
Ra'anana, Israel

TUITION DILEMMA: MISSING THE POINT

To the Editor:

Dayan Shmuel Fuerst was asked at the Agudah convention forum on the tuition issue: Can a parent prioritize supporting children in *kollel* over paying tuition? Rabbi Fuerst answered that a parent's first priority must be to their younger children's education.

I believe that the question missed the point. Oftentimes, the reality is that parents who want to get a suitable date for their daughter are forced to commit to supporting them for a number of years. The question is not about the parents' priorities in supporting their children's learning. Rather, it is a question of prioritizing marrying off their child or paying tuition.

RIVKA RHODES
Oak Park, MI

JEWISH MUSIC: CAN'T BE BEAT

To the Editor:

A standing ovation is surely in order in response to Rabbi Golding's courageous article about the current state of "Jewish" music today ("How to Get the Entire Jewish Music World Angry at Me," May '07). While quantitatively, there are so many albums and performers today, I strongly feel that the quality leaves much to be desired.

Technology has expanded the possibilities of what we can produce, and vast audiences are being exposed to countless performances, yet, the essence of music, the soul, the *kedusha* has often been lost. I miss the simpler music of the "good old days." The fact that some of the "oldies" are being revived surely indicates that I am not alone in my feelings.

Being a musician myself, I know full well the power of music. As a music teacher, I see every day how music affects those who are exposed to it. Music is a strong vehicle for *chinuch*. Music is the power of the soul; it is the *neshama* speaking. When used properly, it can elevate both the performer and the listener. When we imitate the outside world, whether in type of song or mode of expression, it instead degrades both. I have cringed hearing the holiest words in our davening sung as rock. I have heard "African" style renditions of the words sung by our forebears on the way to the gas chambers, and it has filled me with sorrow. I have heard the joyous fanfare for a *chassan* and *kalla* being introduced "for the very first time as Mr. and Mrs. Ploni" replaced by ear shattering disco instead. Where has the *kedusha* gone? All of us in the music field have an *achrayus* (responsibility) to use our G-d-given talents to elevate *Klal Yisroel*.

It would be remiss not to mention the beautiful performances our schools and groups put on and their tremendous potential for good. The *achdus*, the opportunity to use one's talents, and the personal growth I have seen in many students is laudable. However, we have to be very careful not to emulate the dance and performance style of the outside world. *Vehameivin yavin*. We teachers are role models to young, impressionable minds. Our goal is *chinuch* in Torah, not Broadway.

MRS. SARAH ROTHMAN
Brooklyn, NY

CHOOSING YOUR HARMONIES

To the Editor:

I was once challenged by my friend to listen to the music of Simon & Garfunkel, which I must admit had a beautiful harmonious sound to it. If it weren't for the music of MBD, I would have fallen for MTV, *r"l*! The *geshmake*, *lebedike*, yeshivishe beat from such music stars as Mordechai Ben David, Avrohom Fried, Yaakov Schweky, Yerachmiel Begun & MBC, and my good friend Shloime Dachs kept me away from the *yeitzer hara* of listening to Rock and Roll groups. Nachum Segal's JM in the Am Jewish Radio morning & evening shows have kept us away from listening to other rock stations, *r"l*.

I once asked Rabbi Label Katz שליט"א: What's the *hetter* for listening to music *bi'zeman hazeh*, given that the *Shulchan Aruch* prohibits listening to music due to the *Churban*? He answered that *Klal Yisroel* is in a status where people are very stressed out and need the extra boost of energy that music provides to keep us from getting too down in our challenging lives. I do agree that there are Jewish singers who cross the line of the Rock and Roll & Rap secular world. I called up an organization and protested that their Rap singer did not live up to his namesake from the *Chashmona'im*. I called up a producer and composer to tell him to "stop" a certain wild Goyisher sounding song that belongs on a Rock station, not in a *Yiddishe* home. However, we have already banned the Internet, TV, movies, secular music, etc. Please don't take away my *olam hazeh-mei'ein olam habba* of nice-sounding Jewish music. Do we want to ban everything? People need a little break in life. What's wrong with "Ben Bag Bag" or "Ma Ma Ma," if it will lift up our spirits a little bit? "*Ein Hakadosh Baruch Hu mashreh Shechinaso ella mitoch simcha.*" *Mitzvah gedola liheyos besimcha.* The bottom line is that whereas my father enjoys listening to Chazzan Yossele Rosenblat, and Rabbi Yosef C. Golding loves the old JEP records, I need a little more updated musical sound, such as Avrohom Fried's "*Ba'ashonim*" and Shloime Dach's "*Yigdal*" and Ohad's "*Ve'eirastich Li*." Yes. I almost fell for my friend's challenge; I would have fallen for the *Satan's* spell of "Sounds of Silence" by Shimon Garfunkel! B"H, there was MBD to save me with his *Da'aga Minayin*, *Yidden*, *Moshiach*, *Neshomah*, *Yerushalayim*, and of course, everyone's favorite MBD song (from JEP: Suky @ Ding) "Someday We Will All Be Together."

RABBI MOSHE SHOCHET
Brooklyn, NY

CORRECTION

In my article, "Your Children: These Are Your Disciples" in the May/Iyar issue, I wrote about the emergence of Ichud and Project Learn, both designed to service special needs children "who until then were only accommodated in the public schools." Prior to their introduction, there were other special education programs that have been servicing – and continue to service – our community for numerous years, including P'TACH, YES, Tehila L'Dovid, Gesher Yehuda and others. The new programs, however, are open to children whose parents do not have the means to cover the costs of previously existing programs. Without Ichud and LEARN, these children would have had no recourse but the public schools. With the help and guidance of Project LEARN, the special education schools and programs have been able to make use of funding mechanisms which have made them more accessible to the general public.

Rabbi Nisson Wolpin

CORRECTION

The biography of the author of "Inscribe Us in the Book of Life," which appeared on page 9 of the September '07 *JO*, was incorrect. It should have read as follows:

RABBI CHESIR. OF MONSEY, NY, IS A REBBI IN THE MESIVTA OF THE HEBREW ACADEMY OF NASSAU COUNTY. THIS IS HIS FIRST APPEARANCE IN THESE PAGES.

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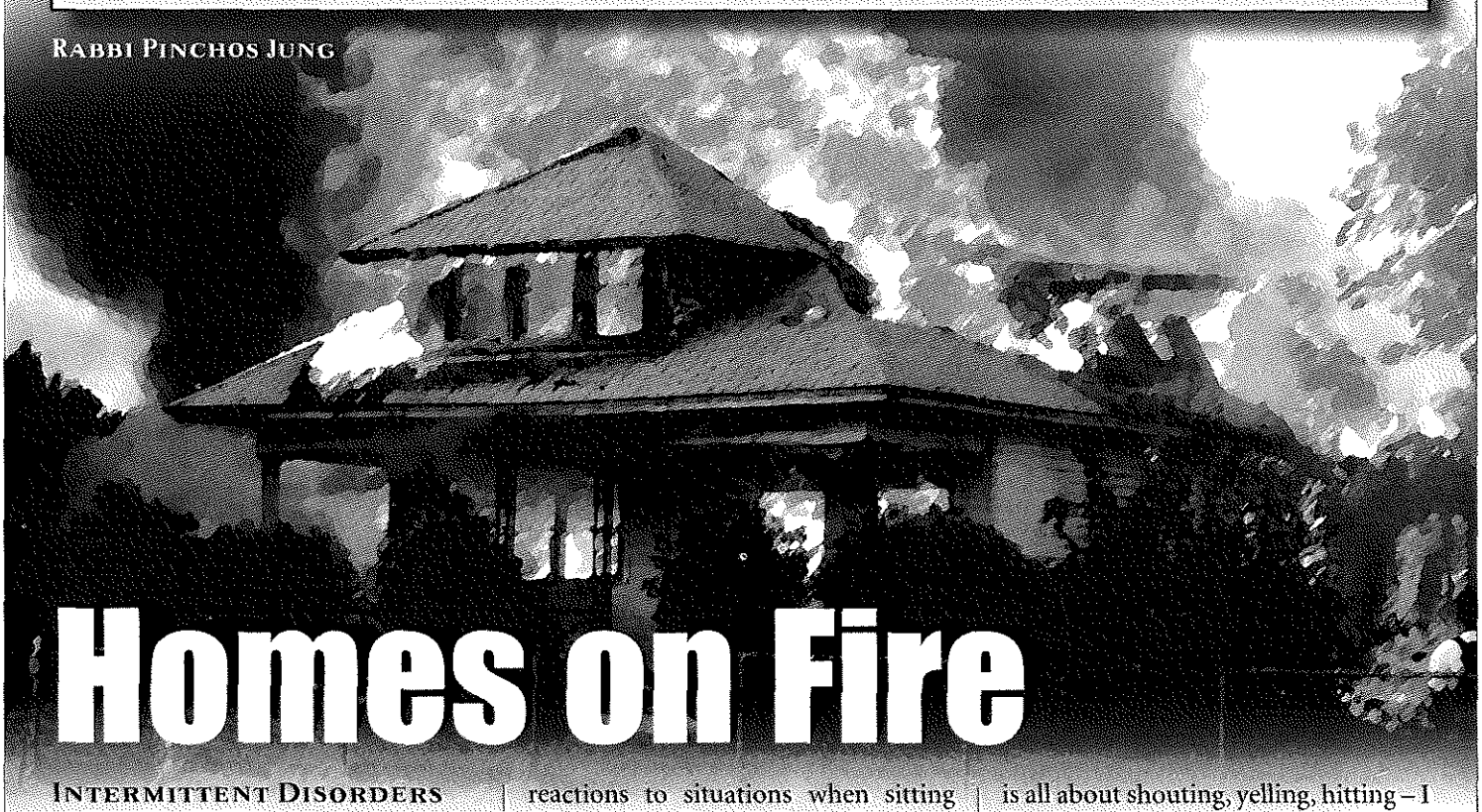
"Tizku livnos bayis ne'eman beYisroel!"

The words of this classic blessing introduced a group of essays in the June issue of *The Jewish Observer* dedicated to the theme of "establishing a loyal household in Israel," dealing primarily with the *shidduch* process. In the pages that follow we present three additional articles, focusing on how to achieve and maintain a Jewish home that can prove worthy of serving as a place where the *Shechina* dwells, plus one more article guiding singles (and their friends, parents and mentors) in navigating the sometimes stormy waters of the *shidduchim* scene to arrive at a safe, protective port... the *bayis ne'eman beYisroel.*

RABBI PINCHOS JUNG



Homes on Fire

INTERMITTENT DISORDERS

Daily news reports on the havoc caused by roadside bombs in Iraq have made the initials IED (Improvised Explosive Device) familiar to many Americans. A recently released medical study has brought another meaning of IED to the public's attention – intermittent explosive disorder – frequently manifesting itself in the form of road rage.

IED is marked by "irrational, sudden and uncontrollable anger grossly out of proportion to any precipitating psychosocial stressor." There are individuals, otherwise civilized and cordial, whose reactions to situations when sitting behind the wheel are beyond recognition. Minor irritation can swiftly turn into madness and insanity with devastating results.

Others seem prone to this disorder without the assistance of the steering wheel. The volatile IED condition seems to be present in the comfort of their own home, and the explosive disorder is not necessarily so intermittent. Sad and shocking as it may sound, the day when IED is most likely to erupt is that one day of rest, bliss and holiness that *Hashem* gave us as an exclusive gift. And those eruptions are prone to occur at what ought to be the highlight of the Shabbos experience – the *seudos.*

An exchange between two adolescents was recently noted. "You enjoy Shabbos?! You must be joking! I don't believe you! What d'you mean, Shabbos is all about shouting, yelling, hitting – I hate it!"

"Okay, so come to us one week and maybe you *will* believe me. Yes, I *do* like it. I love it!"

Askanim, mechanchim and social workers will be able to confirm these disturbing facts. They will describe the profoundly damaging effects IED has on children. They will report the trauma experienced, the deep scars, the long-term frustration and the wounded souls, ill-equipped to face the realities of life.

THINK FIRST, EXPLODE NEVER

The *Tzemach Tzeddek* זי"ע once had a good reason to become really angry. He paused and said

RABBI JUNG SERVES AS EDUCATIONAL DIRECTOR OF PARTNERS IN TORAH, AS WELL AS DEAN OF BETH ROCHEL SCHOOL FOR GIRLS, IN MONSEY, NY. HIS ARTICLE, "WHERE DO YOU BELONG?" APPEARED IN *JO*, OCT. '05.

to himself, "Steady! Anger is a serious *aveira*. If we wish to permit it, we'll have to find a genuine *hetter* in the writings of the *poskim* (halacha authorities). So we'll have to do considerable research, much as we would do before permitting an *aguna* to remarry. In no way can we clarify this in a fleeting moment. A great deal of thought will have to go into this question, as it cannot be settled in a hurry." Needless to say, we are not all on the impressive level of the illustrious *Tzemach Tzeddek*. *Ralbag* (*Melachim* II, 12,18) points out that "anger extinguishes the light of wisdom." Caught in the grip of rage, the most intelligent can act in a totally irrational, illogical manner. When the storm is over and calm prevails once again, we might just recognize the folly of our behavior. But the damage has already been done....

There are, however, situations in which we do manage to maintain a calm disposition and the explosion does not occur. If we picture ourselves in the presence of a *gadol*, our boss, or a law enforcement officer, we seem to be able to control our emotions. So it can be done!

Thus, anger, including road rage or domestic rage, is preventable. It depends largely on who's watching.

THE ROAD TO MANAGEMENT

What needs to be understood, is that the offender's outburst – typically in the case of road rage – is not a reflection of his acute appreciation of the value of time. It is not provoked by the frustration suffered when precious moments are apparently wasted. (Incidentally, what better way could there be to spend those valuable moments than to engage in a personal "Let's keep calm" exercise.)

The IED condition is the direct result of an all-too-common disposition in which people are tense, nervous and impatient. The Gemara observes that city life is strenuous (*Kesubos* 110b) because of overcrowding (*Rashi*) – this phenomenon robs people of their peace of mind.

The causes of IED are actually numerous, but the outcome is always unhealthy, dangerous and antisocial. At least, if we pause to consider the devastating results of the loss of self-control for even one unguarded moment, we will be prompted to try that bit harder to maintain our sanity in crises.

Anger management *is* achievable, as mentioned, because we do manage to govern our emotions when in the company of people of consequence. A remarkable technique that is worth trying is called visualization, or anticipation. If we would imagine the worst case scenario and plan our reaction in advance of the event, it would so much easier to push the right buttons in the moment of crisis. Picture the scene when the reality has not yet materialized, and work out the best response when all is calm. If the conflict does not arise, nothing is lost. If it does, strategy is already in place and coping skills will avoid the confrontation (see *Praying With Fire*, Day 69).

THE RIGHT APPROACH TO REBUKE

We have a phenomenon that could be described as "homes on fire." The Torah tells us that on Shabbos, we are not to light a fire where we live (*Shemos* 35,3). The *Tikkunei Zohar* (*Tikkun* 48) explains that this refers to the flames of anger. These are harmful enough during the week, but far more damaging on Shabbos *Kodesh*. It has already been said that, sadly, Shabbos seems to be the commonest casualty of IED episodes.

Whenever it occurs, chronic parental anger can terrorize children to the point where they are too traumatized to function, too damaged to recover without extensive therapy, and too devastated to continue living at home.

Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe זצ"ל wrote that screaming at a child could be worse than spanking him. When this happens, the child is so terrified that he begins to tremble. The shouting affects the youngster's nerves to the point that he begins to shake. Rav Chaim of Volozhin זצ"ל taught that anyone who angers easily and cannot speak calmly and softly at a time of tension is exempt from the mitzvah of *tochacha* (rebuke), and should not be working in the field of *chinuch*. This *pe'sak* was given almost 200 years ago. Evidently, already then it was recognized that harsh words and irrational deeds cause hurt and don't heal; they inflict serious damage and don't repair easily. What should we say today, when our children are so sensitive and fragile whilst the adults are frequently so easily provoked?

THE FALLOUT FROM VERBAL ABUSE

Rabbi Wolbe's observation enables us to understand a hair-raising statement in the Gemara (*Shabbos* 32b). "When there is quarreling in the home, the wife miscarries and the children die young" (*rachmana litzlan*). As a result of fear generated by the outburst of anger, the childbirth is thwarted, and the children lack the wherewithal to function and make progress. *Chazal* apply the term "death" to spiritual paralysis and dysfunction. Unfortunately, that is precisely what tends to happen to those innocent, traumatized youngsters.

We are speaking here of parental discord rather than anger directed towards unruly children. Couples who verbally abuse each other, who forever raise voices at each other, create a toxic atmosphere in the home. Even the tender, immature child knows, albeit subconsciously, that harmony should prevail between parents. Where that breaks down, he or she senses that something is radically wrong. Before long, all his trust in them is eroded. This may extend to other figures of authority, too, and, in extreme cases, to all adults.

Naturally, he cannot share his inner pain with the offending father or mother, and it is unlikely that he will share it with his rebbi. He may just talk to a sibling, but more likely, to a friend, who cannot be expected to react appropri-

ately. For the most part, the pain lingers within, undermining his inner peace and mental stability. It threatens his personal equilibrium and brings him dangerously close to the paralysis and dysfunction mentioned above. By now, the already angry parents assume that they have every excuse to vent their fury on the children who fail to perform at home and in school. Little do they realize that they are the direct cause of these behaviors, and that they themselves have set their own home on fire. By the time the "fire brigade" arrives, the home is almost reduced to ashes. The poor, helpless children have to be saved from the inferno at all costs. In some cases, alternative accommodations will have to be found for them.

The warm-hearted foster parents will be well-meaning and generous, but they cannot be expected to be qualified therapists. It might take them several months to assess the damage the child in question has suffered. Even the finest professionals, with all their experience, will need time to diagnose and draw up a plan of action. Then they will need an unlimited amount of time to implement their plan with effect.

Of Crutches and Cures

At this point, it would be timely to mention the tendency to simply recommend medication as the definitive cure for the injured young soul. While this topic is beyond the scope of the present article, one detail ought to be recorded here. One cannot deny that there are, unfortunately, cases where long- or short-term medication is necessary and will stabilize the child. In the "IED – Home on Fire" type of syndrome, however, pills alone cannot possibly repair the profound psychological scars inflicted on the victims of chronic anger. They might simply brush those scars "under the rug," and that is no cure.

Moreover, some of the most basic principles of normal, healthy, responsible living, along with the maintenance of sound, lasting relationships, are frequently almost unknown to those battered youngsters. A total program of reeducation will probably be called for.

Finally, we turn to the original cause of the breakdown of the family unit. The shortsighted couple were too busy demolishing each other in the presence of their offspring to consider the serious aftereffects. They set their own home on fire, and the flames raged out of control. The first victims were those dearest and most precious to them – yes, their own family. But once the damage is done, regrets and guilt feelings cannot turn the clock back. Now, outsiders have to be called in, shameful as that must be. The children have to embark on an unknown journey – the tedious, endless road to recovery. If a collision on the road can take seconds to happen but countless hours of painstaking labor to repair the damage, what can one say of collisions between spouses when the shock is prolonged and has impacted tender young souls?

Saving Generations

Control of human impulses, postponement of potentially explosive arguments or caustic outbursts, will save generations to come from unwanted grief. These virtues will pay back greater dividends than we realize, and produce well-adjusted future generations. They will not only preserve *shalom bayis* in the conventional sense, they will also accommodate the successful upbringing of happy, healthy, contended children, equipped to face the challenges of life with confidence, conviction and consistency.

The purpose of these lines is clearly not an attempt to solve a horrendous, widespread problem. The aim is, at best, to create an awareness of the situation and to update the reader on what many selfless volunteers and professionals are called upon to deal with.

Above all, maybe this message will serve as a prevention rather than a cure, to contain IED before it develops into a destructive monster.... If only we could re-channel all that energy in a positive direction.

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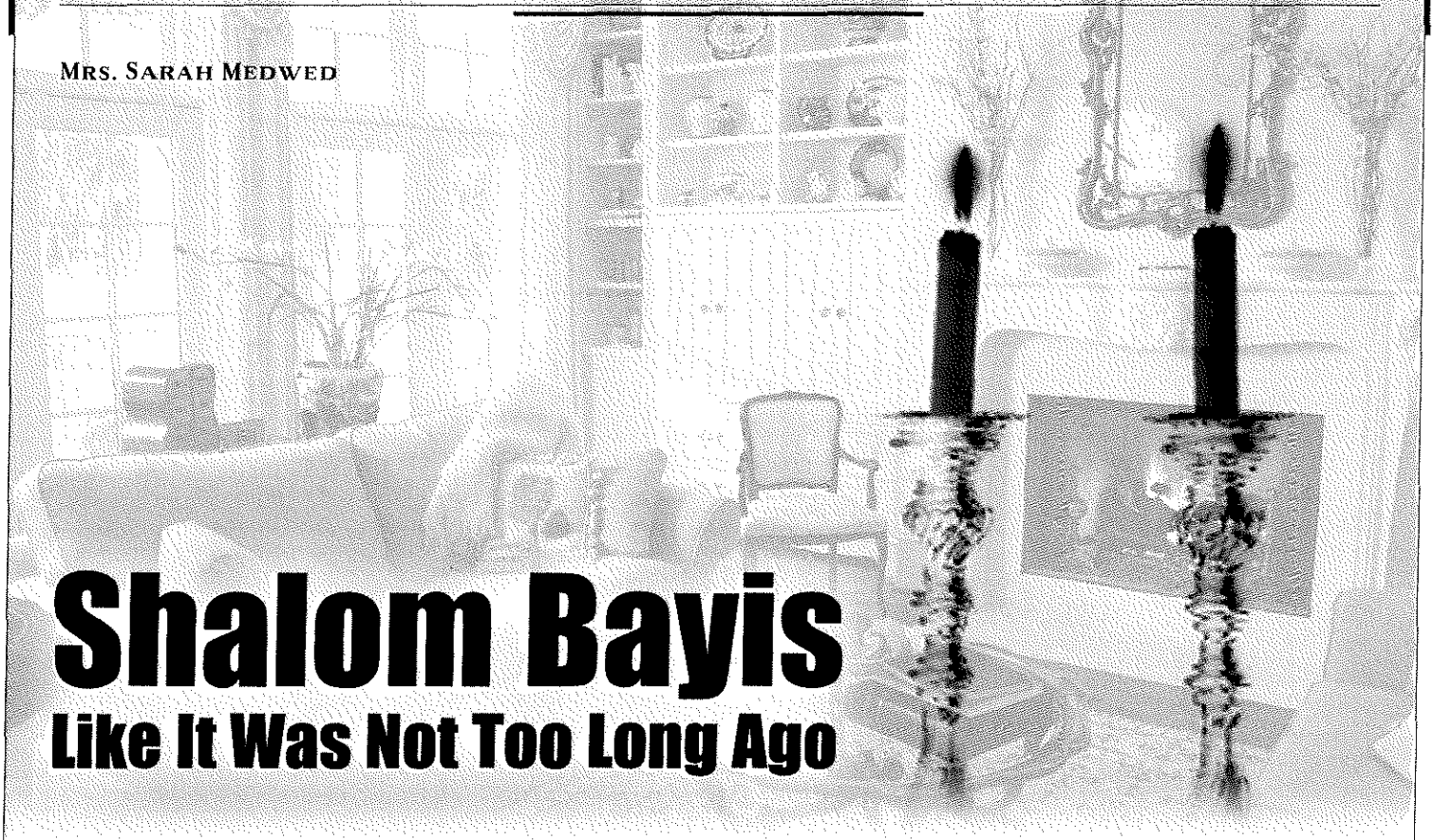

Shalom Bayis
Like It Was Not Too Long Ago

Traveling through Tel Aviv recently, we saw a billboard – it was actually a huge painting on the side of a building. A ruggedly handsome young man stood next to a road, hills in the background. With a far-off gaze in his eyes, a jacket slung over his shoulder, he held a sign in his other hand – made of a torn piece of cardboard box. On it was written one word: "Anywhere." "Anywhere?"

"Anywhere" means no goal, no direction.

"Anywhere" means "Nowhere."

It means emptiness; a total void – a lost life.

As soon as I saw that sign, I thought of Rabbi Leib Tropper's suggested name choice for this discussion: "*Shalom Bayis*, Like It Was Not So Long Ago." *Shalom Bayis* with no goal and no direction can lead to the devastating result of a home totally lacking harmony between husband and wife. While it's beyond me to definitively declare what was, we can see obvious differences between the current status of dedication to Jewish marriage and the way it used to be. Not too long ago, a Jewish husband and wife possessed a clarity in making *Hashem's* Presence actually felt in their household – knowing what their goal was and how to attain it. Jewish marriage is a mitzvah, and as such, there are Torah values and texts to learn, and it must be performed according to *retzon Hashem*. The following story illustrates this point.

Two burly fellows were hard at work on a city block in New York City. Every couple of feet, one would dig a hole, and then the second would come right behind him and fill it up.

The two workers went down the block, crossed the street and came up the other side, working the entire day without stopping. An elderly man, sitting on his front porch, took notice.

After a few hours of watching their backbreaking work, the elderly person approached the two workmen and said: "I've been noticing how incredibly dedicated you two are. You work all day without letup. But why do you dig a hole and then fill it in? What is the point of all this work?"

One of the workers responded: "We normally work as a three-man crew. The third person of our unit called in sick today... but we wanted to keep working anyway. He places the little tree saplings in the ground after I dig the hole...."

Obviously, the *nimshal* is clear. The two laborers are husband and wife; the third partner is *Hashem*. How many of us spend our married lives digging holes only to have our spouse fill them? What's the point of the work if we're not planting? If we're not going to include our third Partner, all our efforts are futile. With *Hashem* in our marriage, we're planting; our marriage becomes a living entity that will *im yirtzeh Hashem* grow. It is not automatic. It takes thought-out effort. If we're simply stuck "doing what we do," each partner solely concerned for his or her own "happiness," we are defeating the purpose of our marriage.

THE TRIANGLE CONCEPT

Picture marriage not only as three partners – *Hashem*, husband and wife – but as a triangle. The foun-

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dation for marriage is the knowledge that *Hashem* is the cause and basis for our coming together. He is the upper point on the triangle, while the two bottom points are husband and wife. If we remember to look upward, aware that we are part of a triangle, then husband and wife share a common, united goal – namely, fulfilling *Hashem's* desire.

With the concept of a triangle, marriage takes on an entirely different dimension. When I speak to my husband, or act toward him in a certain way, I am always conscious of *Hashem's* presence. This takes the subjectivity out of marriage. If he says or does something, I won't necessarily respond simply based on my mood or other personal considerations. Rather, I'll respond in line with *Hashem's* agenda. When both our behaviors are conducted with the awareness that our marriage is on a higher plane, and we are partners with *Hashem*, we act differently. It gives us focus, and at the same time, it removes the personal biases from our outlooks. In times past, Jewish spouses lived with this awareness of the goal of marriage.

If he comes home late, his greeting won't be from a complaining wife. Rather, his wife will respond based upon *retzon Hashem*. If the wife burns dinner, there's no name calling.... The husband will think: "What does *Hashem* want me to do or say now?" The results will be far different.

The following incident depicts the value system of our Bubbies and Zaydes:

I was visiting my Bubbi and Zayde when I was about sixteen years old. Bubbi was sitting on the sofa and so was I. Zayde was on a chair next to her. She asked Zayde to make her a cup of coffee. He went to the kitchen and came back with a cup of coffee on a saucer. "Chaiya, here is your coffee."

"Who told you to make a coffee?" She stood up, took the coffee, walked to the kitchen and poured it down the drain. She sat back down on the sofa, called Zayde again and asked why he still hadn't brought her coffee. Zayde quickly turned, went to the kitchen, prepared another coffee and brought it to her – as if nothing had happened.

I guess I looked up at Zayde with an odd look on my face – as if Bubbi's actions struck me as erratic. He looked at me, offered a gentle smile, and waved his hand. "Don't worry. It's not the Bubbi's fault. Bubbi's getting old."[1]

They were not as fragile as today's couples. They were from the "old country." This behavior showed that *Hashem's* presence was felt in this house. There was an acceptance of *Hashem's* plans, acting accordingly.

When Love Increases

In *parashas Vayeitzei*, the Torah narrative describes Yaakov's working seven years in order to marry Rachel, and Lavan's devious placing of Leah in Rachel's stead. Yaakov, anticipating such an attempt by Lavan, had devised a set of secret passwords and signs that only he and Rachel would know. And yet, Lavan succeeded in his treacherous act.

Klal Yisroel exists today due to Rachel's incredible self-sacrifice in passing on the signs to Leah.[2] Yet, from Yaakov's standpoint, wasn't Rachel as deceitful as Lavan? Wasn't she an active participant in this deception of Yaakov? Didn't Rachel cheat Yaakov? Wouldn't we feel deceived? Yet, Yaakov marries Rachel immediately afterwards, loves her with a love such as the world has never known since, and never broaches the subject to Rachel. Why?

Reb Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev and the Maharil Diskin[3] offer the same explanation. The *passuk* tells us: "*Vaye'ehav Yaakov es Rachel miLeah* – And Yaakov loved Rachel even more than Leah." Both explain that Yaakov's

1 As Reb Elimelech miLizhensk said, "*Tein beli-beinu shenireh kol echad ma'alas chaveireinu ve'lo chesronam.*"

2 *Pesichta deEicha Rabba* 24

3 *Kedushas Levi* and *Maharil Diskin, Bereishis* 29,30

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love for Rachel increased as a result of Rachel's deeds *concerning* Leah. Because Rachel shared the *simanin* (signals) with Leah, Yaakov loved Rachel even more.

This is true *ahava*! Yaakov did not look subjectively, with a "me" mentality, at what Rachel "did to him." Instead, he looked objectively at what Rachel did and why. And as a result, he saw an awesome display of *avodas Hashem*. Whatever he saw in Rachel until then paled in comparison to what he now saw. His respect and love increased.

This answer also explains the *passuk*, "And Yaakov worked for Rachel seven years, and they were in his eyes like a few days in his love for her."[4] The more Yaakov loved her, the more he should have felt the torture of each day as he waited. One would expect the *passuk* to say that his love for her was so great that a few days were like seven years. Yet, the Torah tells us just the opposite.

Yaakov is called "*ish ha'emes* – the man of truth." Had Yaakov's love for Rachel been based on selfish reasons, then every day would have seemed like years.[5] But Yaakov regarded Rachel as the future matriarch of the Jewish people, whose greatness knew no equal. To acquire such a woman, seven years of labor was a paltry sum indeed. For greatness such as Rachel's, seven years were like a few days.

As is explained in greater depth elsewhere, Yaakov looked objectively at the entire picture.[6] We, too, must fight the prevailing "me attitude" of today's society – the concern with "What's in it for me? What am I going to get out of it?" In earlier times, they looked *objectively* and this was a great key for *shalom bayis*.

Besides enumerating the laws of marriage, the *Rambam* actually assures us of marital harmony in his *Yad Hachazaka*:[7]

> ***Chazal*** **commanded a man to respect his wife more than himself and to love her as he loves himself. And if he has money, he should spend it on her according to his wealth. He should not make her frightened of him, and he should speak to her gently, and not display bitterness or anger.... A wife is obligated to respect her husband to the extreme. She must hold him in reverance, doing his bidding. He should be like a minister or king. And the wife walks in the path of his desires, avoiding what he finds distasteful. [The *Rambam* continues by assuring the holy and pure *B'nos Yisroel* and *B'nei Yisroel* that by following in these ways, their marriage will be pleasant and blissful.]**

If we live according to the *Rambam*, we will merit marital harmony. Unlike the American constitution, which catalogues all the rights of its citizens, the *Rambam* does not list "rights" or "entitlement." He lists obligations, responsibilities. He doesn't give any *hetteirim* for not complying. He does not make the obligations dependent upon any behavior of the spouse. If we fail – no matter how we justify ourselves

4 *Bereishis* 29,18-20
5 *Malbim, Bereishis* 29,20
6 "*Together We Are One*," Medwed (Feldheim, 2004)
7 *Rambam, Hilchos Ishus* 15:19,20

בס"ד

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THE VORT

• The *Vort* celebration is to be discontinued. The *L'chaim* (held at the time that the engagement is announced) should also not turn into a *Vort*.

THE WEDDING

• For typical families, only 400 invited guests may be seated at the *chassuna seuda*. (The Guidelines make provision for exceptional circumstances – see full text.)

• The *kabbolas panim* smorgasbord should be limited to basic cakes, fruit platters, a modest buffet, and the caterer's standard chicken or meat hot dishes.

• The menu for the *seuda* is limited to 3 courses followed by a regular dessert.

• No Viennese table and no bar.

THE MUSIC

• A band may consist of a maximum of 5 musicians (one of the musicians may act as a vocalist) or four musicians and one additional vocalist.

• A one-man band is recommended.

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– we have transgressed. Thus does the *Rambam* obligate us.

We must realign our thinking. We have been raised and influenced by a disposable society.... This is not Torah. We live in a world of takers and we have absorbed some of their lifestyle. The Torah enumerates *our* obligations. The Torah lists *our* responsibilities.

The "Instant Coffee Syndrome"

Someone once attributed the downfall of America to instant coffee. In the "olden days," if someone wanted a cup of coffee, he went to the A&P, bought beans, had them ground, went home, percolated the coffee, and, in the end, enjoyed his cup of brew. The advent of instant coffee introduced the concept of instant gratification without *ameilus* (laboring) – "I want it, and I want it now." This, more than anything else, destroyed the moral fabric of America.

The point is well taken. We live in a society mired in instant gratification, self-centeredness – a disposable society. Marriage, yes, marriage, no... divorce, too, doesn't shock anyone anymore. It has become part of society, almost fashionable. One of our children was on a bus coming back from Kiryat Sefer when a ten-year-old boy on the seat in front of him started talking to him. "My parents are doing what's *bamoda* – 'in style.' They're getting divorced." These were the actual words from a *frum*, Chareidi child!

A young couple came to the great Ohr Samei'ach, the Rav of Dvinsk. "We want the Rav to arrange a get for us. We want a divorce."

The Ohr Samei'ach spoke at length with the couple, trying to find an answer for their problems. But his efforts were futile; the couple remained insistent on their desire to separate. Finally, at the end of their discussion, the rav asked, "Do you have any children?"

"Yes," they responded, "only one. A son, six years old."

"Come back in three weeks and we'll arrange your get. When you come, though, bring your son."

While they failed to understand why the Rav would want their son present, they were willing to comply, in order to finally be divorced. On the appointed day, the couple arrived, as intent as ever on receiving their get.

The rav began reasoning with them again, attempting to look for an alternative answer, but they cut him off: "You promised to give us a get; we did not come to speak."

The rav sighed. "Alright.... Is this your child?"

"Yes."

"Come, yingaleh. *Come to me, my child," the rav said gently to the boy.*

The rav sat him on his lap, lovingly patted his face, and suddenly burst into tears. Through his sobs, he looked the boy in the face and said, "Sweet child, in five minutes you will become an orphan." With that, he burst into uncontrolled crying.

Seeing the rav crying, the child, too, burst into tears. Soon, the mother was crying, and then, the father also began crying.

After a few minutes, the couple exhorted the rav, "Give us one more chance." With that, they took their child and went.

They never returned.[8]

Divorce means making orphans out of our children. And who does it? The parents! Nobody is saying that there is never a reason for divorce; it is part of Torah. But we must invest more into marriage. Divorce cannot be resorted to "because it's in style."

Marriage does not come easily. Nothing of value does. It takes effort, sometimes superhuman effort, but that is what makes marriage so lasting, so solid, so vibrant.

Sefer Hachinuch[9] says: "*Adam nifal kefi pe'ulosav* – A person is influenced by his actions." He explains that even if the person's heart is "not in it," as long as he does what he is supposed to do, he will eventually come to desire doing the good that he has, in fact, done. All one has to do is "do."

Chazal *teach us that the Torah begins with* chessed *and ends with* chessed[10]. *After the sin of* Adam Harishon, Hakadosh Boruch Hu *prepared special garments for Adam and Chava – and even dressed them. Divine* chessed! *The Torah ends with* chessed *when Hashem buried Moshe.*

The chachmei hamussar *(sages of ethical teachings) ask: Was this the first act of* chessed? *The very creation of* Adam Harishon *in Gan Eden was an unmatched act of perfect kindness: forming and perfecting the world, making the heavens and earth, creating Gan Eden.... Obviously, the creation of* Adam Harishon *was an act of kindness. Why does the Gemara overlook this as the first instance of* Hashem's *kindness to man and instead cite the making of clothing and dressing* Adam Harishon *as* Hashem's *first act of kindness?*

The answer is that to do chessed *with* Adam Harishon *is very easy – effortless. There is nothing exceptional in the act itself because knowing the greatness of the recipient automatically spurs us on to perform acts of kindness with him. Our intelligence supplies us with enough drive to do* chessed *with a noteworthy dignitary.*

What, however, would our common sense tell us about Adam Harishon *after his sin? Through his sin, he brought death and destruction to the world. After the sin, logic puts an end to our desire to bestow kindness upon him. Our natural inclination to be kind and giving becomes stifled. What was the easiest, most desirable thing to do is now difficult, even impossible to imagine.... Obviously,* Hashem *infinitely exceeds our mortal limitations of mind and wisdom.*

We do, however, see that Adam Harishon *acted towards Chava after the sin in a special way, and that we can certainly relate to.*

Adam Harishon *named Chava,* "Eim

8 Rabbi Shalom Schwadron זצ"ל (heard from Rabbi Avner Kavas)

9 Mitzvah 16

10 *Sota* 14a

kol chai, *the mother of all life" after the sin. Logic would say just the opposite, to name her the mother of all death. Eating from the* eitz hada'as *brought death to the world. How does* "Eim kol chai" *befit Chava after her sin?*

In spite of what happened, Adam recognized Chava's greatness and her potential for life. Adam was not numbed by the sin and its consequences. It is chessed *to forgive and forget. Life could and would go on – Chava would help him bring life to the world.*

Therefore, it is precisely after the sin when the Torah reveals what true chessed *is – not* chessed *based on common sense, but* chessed *based on Torah.*

Yes, the Torah begins with chessed, *the kindness that* Hashem *did with Adam and Chava after their sin. Likewise, the time for* chessed, *real* chessed, *is when our spouses need our forgiveness, and our hearts are willing to look beyond the mistakes and frustrations of daily life, and see the spouse's true virtues and greatness.*

The chessed *that the Torah expects of us must be done in spite of imperfections, disappointments and frustrations.* Chessed *can not be dependent on perfection and joy, for who is always perfect and who is a constant source of joy? In spite of the fact that our intelligence says "no," the Torah says "yes."*

Don't we all yearn for homes based on such lofty ideals?

MARITAL BLISS – BY WHICH BOOK?

How can we aspire to this lifestyle if today's teacher of *chassanim* and *kallos* is not the *Torah Hakedosha*, but books like *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus* – boasting a subtitle: "Getting what you want from your relationships"? This is classic "*Chessed le'umim chattas*." – Give, but only in order to get. All such giving is really taking. [This is an extremely deep point, beyond the scope of this article.]

Chazal tell us, "*Chachma bagoyim ta'amin, Torah bagoyim al ta'amin*" –

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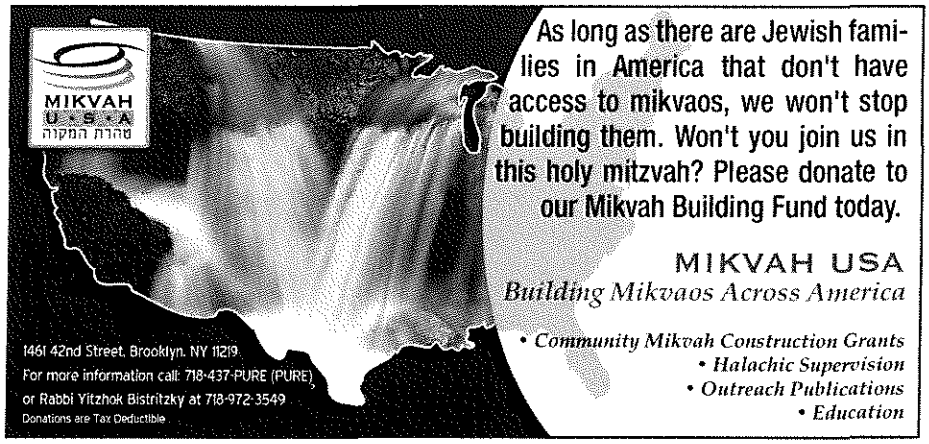

IS YOUR ....

PARENT-TEEN RELATIONSHIP @ RISK?

CONNECTED OR DISCONNECTED?

IMAGINE...

- **a renewed parent-teen relationship based on respect, understanding & open communication**
- **replacing criticism, control & consequences with love, listening & acceptance.**

Devorah Weiss, M.S.W.
Certified Parent-Teen Coach
Author: "My Son on the Rebound" JO Jan. 06

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There is wisdom among the nations, but they do not possess Torah. Marriage is called, "*Toras hanisu'in*." It is Torah, not *chachma*. What do those outside the realm of Torah know about the Shechina (Divine Presence in the Jewish home), about true *chessed*, about *tzenius*? Can they teach us anything about intimacy according to the Torah? Are their books meant to be teachers of our children? We devote twenty or more years of our lives to raising our children, and ensure that they are imbued with the *chinuch* that only our yeshivos and Bais Yaakovs can provide. Do we then give them books from Barnes & Nobles as a guide to Jewish marriage? It takes effort, but we cannot opt for the easy way out. Valid points do not justify an approach that is antithetical to Torah. Our children will suffer, their marriages will suffer... and in the end, we will all suffer.

• • •

We, as parents, and we, as teachers, are obligated to raise our children in Torah-imbued homes, and to make whatever effort necessary to properly prepare them for *shidduchim* and marriage. The Torah is our teacher, the *Rambam* is our teacher, the *gedolei mussar* are our teachers, the Chassidishe rebbes are our teachers.

Once, a father came to the Steipler, telling him that his son was now a chassan *and he wanted to know who would serve as a good* madrich *(mentor) to teach his son and prepare him for his* chasuna. *The Steipler became agitated and said, "The reason you're asking is because you yourself don't know. But you've allowed yourself to slide along with whatever you do know. You apparently know that you don't know enough to teach your son, and you don't want him to go down the same path, so you want me to recommend someone else.*

"Know that it's not the same if a child learns from his parent. He's supposed to learn from his father; it's part of the mesora. *It means much more to the son when he can look up to his father as his teacher.*

"Therefore, I'm telling you to go to so-and-so, so you will learn from him. After you've learned properly, then you can teach your own son." [11]

The bottom line is that we are the teachers. We are responsible for teaching our sons and daughters. The way to give *mussar* is to be *mussar*. We must redouble our efforts to live *al pi Torah*. And we must establish our homes with a proper atmosphere of Torah, of love, of respecting our spouses, of *chinuch banim ubanos*, of opening our homes and welcoming others, of *kiruv rechokim* and *kiruv kerovim*. Our *ahavas Yisroel* demands we dedicate ourselves to sharing this message and our *Torah chinuch* with families whose homes never merited such an atmosphere. We owe it to them. This is the *areivus* (mutual responsibility) of *Klal Yisroel*.

We have to make our marriages, our homes and the marriage preparations for all those who come to share in *Toras hanisu'in* equally pure in Torah *hashkafa*.

The Steipler dropped the gauntlet, so to speak. It is up to us to pick it up. Our future, the future of *Klal Yisroel*, depends upon it.

11 Heard from Rabbi Moshe Shochotovitz

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MRS. MIRIAM KOSMAN

The Jewish Woman's Challenge

Full-Time Mom or Full-Fledged Person?

Dear Miriam,

It always bothers me that women in Judaism seem to be so tied up with their children. It's almost as if they don't have an identity except as mothers and wives. What about developing their own talents and personalities? After all, not everyone is cut out to be a mother. Is mothering the only thing worth investing in?

From someone who is not a feminist but is a realist.

Dear Not...:

Thank you for your interesting question. It really is a good question, since there is no doubt that having children and building a home hold a very central place in Judaism. But still, it is important to see the wider picture.

I don't know if I ever told you about the book that my father wrote about parenting. He called the book *Parents and Penguins*. In the very first chapter, he explains why he gave the book such an interesting title. He quotes a passage from the Gemara that says that there are a lot of things we humans can learn from the world of animals. We can learn cleanliness from the cat, and diligence from the ant, etc. But there is one trait that we see in the animal kingdom which really stands out that this Gemara does not mention. That is parenting. My father provides many examples of the incredible sacrifice animals have for their young. The central example he brings is of the emperor penguin, and if you were lucky enough to see the documentary, *The March of the Penguins*, you will be able to relate to it. These animals literally live for their offspring. They undergo unbelievably difficult travails in order to bring their children into the world and to sustain them.

There are other examples. The female locust, for one, lives under the ground for seventeen years, surfaces, lays her eggs and dies. Seventeen years underground in order to produce a child? And we thought nine months was hard....

Or the example (that some of the more radical feminists among us might enjoy) of the spider who, eats her mate immediately following impregnation, in order to nourish their young....

Doesn't all this sound like good Jewish parenting? Didn't you ever hear of the old Yiddish saying, "*Alles far de kinder*"? It brings to mind all those jokes about the Jewish mother.

"How does a Jewish mother change the light bulb? "Oh, that's okay. I'll sit in the dark."

Or, *"You eat the meat. Don't worry about me. I'll eat the three-day-old bread."*

Those penguins and spiders actually sound quite Jewish! And yet, that kind of parenting, the kind that penguins and spiders do, is diametrically opposed to the Jewish perspective on parenting. Animals have children for one reason. They must propagate their species. They

MRS. KOSMAN IS A LECTURER FOR NEFESH YEHUDI. HER ARTICLE, "OF EXPOSURE, VULNERABILITY, AND PROTECTIVE ISOLATION," APPEARED IN *JO*, JAN.-FEB. '07. THE ABOVE WAS TRANSLATED FROM THE HEBREW, FROM A QUESTION-AND-ANSWER COLUMN FOR SECULAR ISRAELI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS, IN NEFESH YEHUDI'S MAGAZINE, *PHARHESYA*.

are willing to live and to die, and to suffer in between, in order to bring the next generation into the world.

Where is that final child that will have made all those other generations worthwhile?

Holding a Candle for the Future

When I used to give my Jewish Philosophy course to American overseas students, I would think about those penguins. Come Chanukah, I would ask them if they lit candles at home. American students who actually make it to Israel for a semester usually have a stronger Jewish identity than the ones who stay in America. The answer, invariably, would be, "My parents used to light Chanukah candles when we were kids, but now that we are grown up and gone, they don't anymore."

"Why did they light candles when you were young?" I would ask the girls.

"So that we would light Chanukah candles when we grow up."

"And do you light Chanukah candles now?"

"No, but when I have children, I will."

"Why?"

"So that they will light when they grow up."

It always reminded me of the famous story of the Kotzker Rebbe who used to ask people to show him "the final child." He used to say that he wanted to meet the person who will make this whole world worthwhile. When people asked him what he meant, he would explain that often, people say, "I would like to spend more time on spiritual pursuits, but I have to put money aside in a college fund for my kids (or I have to earn money to buy them a house, or get them set up in life, or give them ballet lessons – fill in the blanks...)." So then you go to the child when he is grown, and he also says, "Yeah, my father supported me through college, and now I am putting away for my child's college fund." And the grandchild? He is also busy as a bee – making sure his children will have what they need. The Kotzker would say, "So this generation is living to provide for their children, and they for their children, and on and on. Where is that final child that will have made all those other generations worthwhile? Why don't we all just get off the train right now?"

If the whole purpose of lighting candles is to get the next generation to light candles, then I have a great idea. Let's all stop lighting candles now. We'll save a lot of oil and wicks (to say nothing of not having to argue with children who want to go out with their friends instead of staying home to sing *Maoz Tzur* with their parents).

I will tell you a little secret. If I light Chanukah candles, not because I want my kids to, but because of my personal relationship with G-d, then there is a good chance that they will light, too. That means that I am not worrying about Jewish continuity, nor about propagating the Jewish species. I came here to do a job. G-d sent me with a mission. At the moment, this requires Chanukah candles.

Modeling Judaism

If I have been blessed with children, it could be that even the lion's share of my time and energy will be channeled into my children. As a parent, I must constantly be cognizant of my responsibility to model for my child what it is like to live a life with an awareness of *Hashem* – what it means to be a growing human being. But the motivating force is G-d and what He wants from me. First and foremost, I am an *eved Hashem* (servant of G-d). Trying to be a good parent and trying to make Judaism and *Hashem* central to my children's life, is a consequence of being an *eved Hashem*. When a child grows up in a home where he sees that the parent puts his relationship with the *Ribbono shel Olam* first, there is a good chance that he, too, will experience his Judaism as central to his life. Jewish continuity is a byproduct of this lifestyle – it's not its main goal.

And that's why your question is important. You asked why parenting plays such a central role in Judaism and in particular in a woman's life. I am not going to discuss here the tremendous value Judaism puts on Jewish life, nor the value of filling the world with G-d-fearing people. I am not going to delve into the incredible significance of the Jewish home, which is an actual workshop where Judaism is produced and remains a living, vibrant, creative entity. I am not going to dwell on the importance of the home as a vehicle for

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BEYOND APPEARANCES

My point is just that appearances are deceiving. Having a big family might look like a woman's entire identity is tied up with being a mother and wife. But not being a penguin, she has a higher goal. Her identity is about being a human being created in the image of G-d, who was sent down here with a mission. If she is lucky, her mission might involve having children, and once she has them, the significance of building a Jewish home and raising developed human beings might take up the bulk of her time and energy – but ultimately, she has a totally separate identity. She is here to create herself. She is her most important child.

And there is something interesting here. If her goal is self-creation, if her goal is building a human being, then of all the activities she might engage in – career, volunteering, developing her talents, interpersonal relationships – it is probably her parenting that will force her to get in touch with her deepest self. Parenting touches us in our most vulnerable spots. It reveals parts of us that we may wish we never knew about. (I have a friend who laughs – albeit ruefully – when she says, "I always thought I was a nice person, until I had children....") Our children know us when our defenses our down, and what's more, they mirror back to us our true selves, and not necessarily the image we want to portray to the world. The home is the crucible where real human beings are forged, and ultimately, Judaism is in the business of producing human beings. Parenting requires that a parent understand the depth of his child's uniqueness, and requires that the parent help the child actualize the unlimited potential that he holds within him. Parenting requires that the parent expand the borders of his constricted self, and through his love for the child, deepen his own ability to love which will widen his human experience exponentially.

UNSYNCHRONIZED DEVELOPMENTS

Often, in our society, people will be encouraged to develop themselves professionally, to reach great heights in their career. Other times, people will invest all their energies into developing their talents; achieving excellence as a writer, singer or artist. But often, what ends up developing is a caricature of a person. The career might be advanced, the talent may be developed, but the human being might still be in kindergarten. Too often, there is a thunderous clash between the public persona o f the successful career person, or the talented artist, and the private persona. We all know what it takes to be successful at anything in our society. It is a cutthroat world out there, and to get to the top of the field, any field, you have to be single-mindedly invested in

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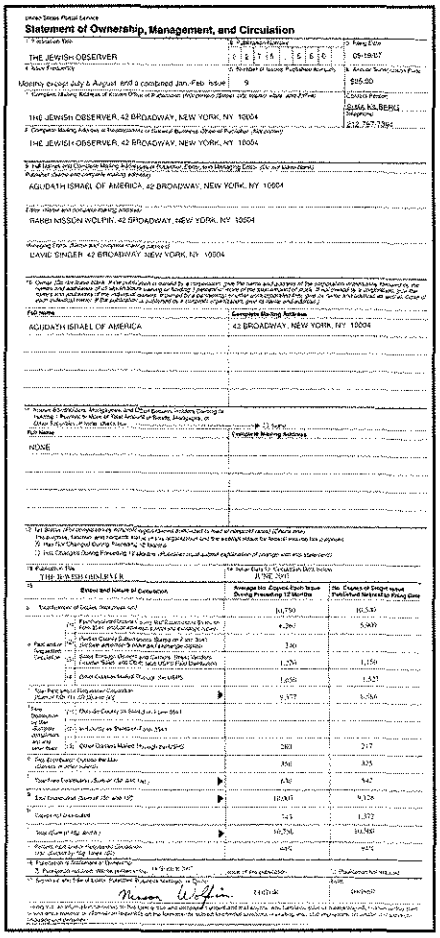

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that goal. It doesn't leave a lot of time, energy, and, most importantly, emotional space to invest in one's primary goal of building one's self.

Judaism maintains: have the career, develop your talents, but just remember your ultimate goal. Don't get lost in the world of illusion. You came to this world not to propagate your species, not to become a great lawyer, doctor or Indian chief. You came to this world to do a job that only you can do: develop yourself as a human being, a *tzellem Elokim* – and it is your home and children that will ultimately help you come face to face with the real you.

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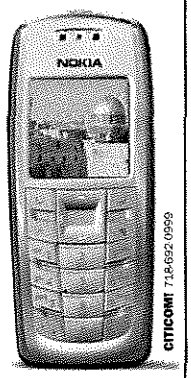

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LEAH JACOBS & SHAINDY MARKS

A Fresh Look at Hishtadlus in Shidduchim

YOUR EFFORT CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

You're doing everything you can to find a *zivug* (mate) for yourself or your child. You've spoken to *shadchanim*, friends, and neighbors, gotten *berachos*, and of course davened. Is there anything else you can do?

We have been dating mentors for single people for fifteen years, and we have yet to meet someone who could not do more. The *hishtadlus* (personal effort) that we prescribe is to first gain clarity about what might be standing in your way to marriage, then work to discover what you truly *need* in a marriage partner rather than what you *want*, and then take this clarity with you as you date.

It all starts with understanding your own needs.

LEAH JACOBS AND **SHAINDY MARKS**, AUTHORS OF *SHIDDUCH SECRETS*, PUBLISHED UNDER PSEUDONYMS BY ARTSCROLL, HAVE BEEN MENTORING SINGLE PEOPLE FOR OVER FIFTEEN YEARS. THEY HAVE DEVELOPED A METHODOLOGY THAT HAS A PROVEN TRACK RECORD OF SUCCESS. ALL OF THE ANECDOTES IN THIS ARTICLE ARE TOLD IN THE SINGULAR FOR EASE OF READING. PLEASE ACCEPT THE AUTHORS' HEARTFELT APOLOGIES - THEY ARE NO LONGER AVAILABLE FOR PRIVATE CONSULTATION AS THEY MUST ATTEND TO THEIR FAMILIES. THEIR BOOK, AND THEIR BLESSING, IS OFFERED IN THEIR STEAD.

RENA

Rena came from a fine family. She came to see me because she was twenty-four and most of her friends were already married.

"What kind of boy are you looking for?" I asked, as she sat down across from me.

"A learner, a mentch. I'll know it when I find it," she pronounced a bit smugly.

I nodded my head slowly, wondering where to begin.

"Have you given any thought to which character traits are most important to you?"

"He's got to be kind, creative, have a sense of humor and, of course, *yiras Shamayim*."

"That's it?" I asked.

"Look," she said, obviously not wanting to delve deeper, "all of my friends just knew he was their *bashert* the moment they set eyes on their *chassan*."

"Can I ask you a question?"

Rena nodded.

"Let's say a friend of yours dates someone for four weeks. During that time, she grapples tirelessly as she wonders whether he is 'the one' or not. After much heart-wrenching deliberation, she finally decides to trust her rabbi, who thinks that the boy's shortcomings are just due to nervousness. They get engaged.

"Now you bump into your friend in the market. What do you think she will say to you?" I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I'll tell you," I said, and then comically raised my voice an octave, "'Oh Rena! He's so wonderful! I knew the minute I saw him that he was my *bashert*!'"

Rena broke into a knowing smile.

"Your friend isn't a liar," I continued. "It's certainly nobody's business what doubts she had – besides that, it would be *lashon hara* to share them. She actually may not remember much of the confusion. She just knows that she's getting married and wants to share her joy with everyone."

I finally had Rena's interest.

"So what should she have said?" she asked.

"Maybe she could have shared her joy without perpetuating the myth

MAKE A TOP TEN LIST
(Don't Settle! Prioritize!)

1. Make a list of all of the qualities you seek in a spouse.
2. Delete all *wants* from your list, leaving only your true *needs*.
3. Eliminate all contradictory traits.
4. Trim your list to ten items.
5. Prioritize your list in order of importance.
6. Scrutinize your list with a parent or mentor.
7. Use your list to both screen and evaluate *shidduchim*.

that fairy tales are true, and that 'love at first sight' is common."

"And here's another thing to think about," I said, taking care to soften my voice. "What would you say if I told you that the more delirious you are over meeting someone for the first time, the higher the chances are that you won't make the right decision about marrying him?"

She stared at me blankly, waiting.

"I am about to tell you something that goes against everything fairy tales teach us to do: You must use your head, not your heart, when seeking your *bashert*. That's the only way you can truly judge whether someone is right for you or not. So many people think that *hishtadlus* is to date an endless string of people until that one enchanted evening when all of the fog dissipates and *Mr. Bashert* is miraculously sitting before us. But the real *hishtadlus* that we must do is to carefully reassess our ideals and expectations, and then figure out what we truly need in order to build our own Torah home."

After some work on Rena's top ten list, Rena left smiling, with a whole new focus to her search.

• • •

Rena did a lot of dismantling of her old ideals. She discovered that having a husband who was emotionally stable and responsible was far more important to her than someone who was humorous and creative, two attributes she had always been steadfast about.

Rena was engaged within four months – mostly because of her willingness to change her lifelong ways of thinking.

ELI

Despite being the "top" *bachur* in his yeshiva, Eli was still single at thirty-two. He was "*redt*" to Devoiry by Sruly, a *kollel yungerman* in his yeshiva who only had words of praise for her. Sruly's wife had recently given birth to triplets, and Devoiry, their neighbor, had been her right hand for the past few weeks. After a full day at work, Devoiry would come to help feed, bathe, and hold the new babies. She was responsible, compassionate, and had a marvelous sense of humor.

Out of appreciation to her, the new parents were trying to help Devoiry find her *bashert*. She didn't look it, but she was twenty-eight, and it was getting harder for her in the *shidduch* scene.

Based on this glowing report, Eli agreed to meet her. After two dates, he began to see clearly the *Yad Hashem* (the Hand of G-d) – all those years of waiting had been necessary for him to gain the maturity to truly recognize Devoiry's special qualities. She was a soft glowing light, whereas he had always been looking for a flame. His parents began to hope that at long last there might finally be a *simcha* in the family.

By coincidence, Eli's mother bumped into a longtime friend of hers who was the principal of Devoiry's old high school. Eli's mother couldn't contain herself.

"Do you know my son is seriously dating one of your former students?" she burst out with excitement. "We think that he has finally met the right one! Her name is Devoiry S."

Her friend's face turned white. "What! You are letting your son go out with *her*? Don't you know her background? When she was in our school, she was so defiant and rebellious that if not for rabbinic intervention, we would have thrown her out! All she did was aggravate the teachers and administration."

Eli's mother was horrified. They had been so taken by the *kollel yungerman's* recommendation that they had neglected to do their own checking. She rushed home to inform Eli of this new development.

"Eli, it's over! I heard the most appalling information about Devoiry's past, and there is no way that such a scandalous *shidduch* is going to happen in our family. What will everyone say about us? Think of our standing in the shul, and Abba's position in the Vaad. We can't let ourselves be dragged down to settle for a *shidduch* with such a girl. What will be with our reputation?"

This news didn't affect Eli quite the way it affected his mother. He was not ready to give up so quickly. Eli had heard that I counsel singles and came to me for my opinion on the matter. He respected his parents and didn't want to hurt them, but he truly felt that Devoiry had the

qualities that he was looking for in a wife.

Eli was able to list Devoiry's fine traits and felt that she had long outgrown her rebelliousness. She seemed sensible and well grounded. Yet, he was concerned about how his parents would feel about their social standing in the community.

So we created a plan. Eli would consult with another source of information who currently knew Devoiry very well. If the information he received was positive, he would then speak to his *rosh yeshiva* about the *halachos* of *kibbud av va'eim* (respecting one's parents) and how to approach his parents. Eli seemed relieved – at least now there was hope.

Baruch Hashem, things worked out well for Eli. His "second opinion" was someone reliable and respected. She acknowledged that Devoiry had experienced difficulties as a teenager, and was considered somewhat rebellious in school. This had never affected the kindness of her personality nor her good *middos*. Devoiry had long since gotten past that whole period of her life. Now, it seemed like a lifetime ago.

With his *rosh yeshiva's* support and the additional reference, Eli was ready to face his parents. Although it was difficult, he was able to convince them that the information from Devoiry's former principal was not the whole picture. He emphasized her fine *middos* so that they were more open to the idea. And then, Eli brought Devoiry over for dessert with his parents. *Baruch Hashem*, she made a wonderful impression, and Eli's parents grew very fond of her.

As public opinion had always been important to Eli's family, this was just the bolstering they needed to brace themselves for whatever comments they might get in the future.

At their wedding, Devoiry pulled me into the circle of dancers and held me tightly. Although I had, of

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ARTICLE 2 INCOME CRITERIA CHANGES
Claims Conference Secures Compensation Program Expansion

The Claims Conference makes monthly payments to Nazi victims under the Article 2 Fund who meet certain persecution and other criteria and who have an income below a level specified by the German Government.

Following recent negotiations with the German Government, the Claims Conference secured amendments regarding the income that shall be considered when determining if an applicant is within the income limit. The income limit is $16,000 per year after taxes. The following are the new regulations:

- Only the income of the applicant shall be taken into account (not the income of his/her spouse) – this is a change from the current rule.
- From October 1, 2007 onwards, when determining whether the income limit is met, the following types of pensions will **NOT** be considered as income:
  - Old age pension (including: governmental pension, social security payments, occupational pension or retirement plans) and/or
  - Pensions awarded for reduction in earning capacity, for industrial injury or occupational disease, for loss of life or any comparable payment.

The changes are summarized above but specific details (including what payments constitute comparable payments) are still being discussed with the German Ministry of Finance.

Full eligibility details for the Article 2 Fund and further information about the abovementioned changes are at www.claimscon.org and further announcements regarding these criteria will be posted as they become available. Please note that the eligibility criteria concerning persecution history, also specified by the German government, have not changed.

If you believe that you may be eligible or are not certain if you are eligible, you should file an application now. Please note that under the current guidelines, payments to eligible persons are backdated to the later of October 1, 2007 or the date the application form is received. Application forms are available at www.claimscon.org. If you cannot access the form via the website, please contact your local Claims Conference office. There is no fee to apply.

Claims Conference ועידת התביעות
The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany

Claims Conference
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course, never mentioned our intervention to anyone, apparently, Eli had told her of our little meeting.

• • •

We can all gain *chizuk* from Eli's courage. How many people would simply bow to communal opinion and not want to be involved in anything that even hints at something that other people might judge unfavorably? How many people would be willing to risk hearing unpleasant comments about their *shidduch*, even if the people saying those things were being cruel and unjust? How many people would give someone a chance, even if it might affect their own reputation?

Maybe because of Eli's stature in the community, he could better afford such a risk. After all, people would likely assume that if Eli married her, the yentas must have been wrong or exaggerated about Devoiry's past.

Nonetheless, while it is essential to obtain opinions about a prospective spouse from respected sources, it is also important that a negative comment be researched fully before a *shidduch* is summarily terminated. It is also crucial that we take the responsibility to learn the laws of *lashon hara* as they pertain to *shidduchim*.

Nowhere is this more difficult to do than when we hear a comment that makes us shudder at what the yentas will say. But at that very moment, if we recognize it as a direct challenge, a personal test from *Hashem*, we will gain the strength necessary to do the right thing. The future of *Klal Yisroel* depends upon it.

Common Obstacles

As we all know, there can be many obstacles that get in the way of finding one's *bashert*. Unfortunately, it is difficult to recognize our own blind spots. By understanding the most common obstacles that stand in many people's way, however, we are better able to understand our own obstacles.

1. Moving the Mountain – overcoming issues that might hold us back from recognizing our *bashert*.

2. Chasing Fairy Tales – recognizing that we have all kinds of fantasies in our mind about what a potential spouse should be like and look like. Often, we don't even realize that we are measuring every potential marriage partner against an image of someone who doesn't (or couldn't) even exist.

3. Toxic Expectations – realizing that many of our expectations are not our own, but are a product of the influence of secular society on our subconscious desires. Before you hold out for something that you are determined to get at all costs, sit down to examine whether it is a Torah value, and if getting it will truly make you happy in the long run.

4. The Yenta Trap – many wonderful potential spouses are overlooked because we are so concerned about what other people will think. We ourselves might be willing to give them a chance, but we aren't willing to risk losing public approval.

5. Smorgasbord Syndrome – picking positive attributes from various people and creating a composite image of our ideal *bashert*. Of course, no one will ever match up to that fantasy image.

6. Misguided Pickiness – being picky about the wrong things, such as unimportant attributes or traits. The only way to avoid this is to gain clarity.

7. Warped Mirror – failing to recognize our own shortcomings, so that we expect much more in a potential partner than we would demand even of ourselves.

8. Comfort Zone – being so attached to our lifestyle that we can't bear to give it up, even if it means losing the opportunity to grow and share our life with our true *zivug*.

9. Familiarity Factor – being so drawn to a certain personality type, irrespective of the fact that it possibly mimics a warped or even unhealthy relationship from our past.

10. Prejudgment Pitfalls – recognizing that there is a natural tendency to jump to conclusions about a person, rather than to take the time to really get to know him (or her). If we gave

someone a chance, she (or he) may be just the person we have been looking for all along!

The better you understand your own obstacles, the better equipped you'll be to get beyond them!

BRACHA

Dovid carefully wrapped the ornate silver Kiddush cup in tissue paper and placed it back in the box. He put it by the other gifts that his mother would be returning. The jarring sound of the telephone jolted him out of his stupor and he stood listening for the machine to pick it up. It was another wedding guest expressing his sympathy for the broken engagement. Dovid choked up when the man mentioned what a mentch Dovid was and how he'd be engaged again in no time.

But he was sure that there would be no next time. Dovid's heart was broken beyond repair. Bracha was his *bashert;* he was certain of that. She was so refined and gentle that even Bracha's principal told Dovid's mother that she was a role model for many of the students. But most importantly, she was the person with whom Dovid wanted to spend the rest of his life.

He knew that she had commitment issues – they had been dating off and on for a while. But this last time, Bracha had told the *shadchan* that Dovid was truly everything that she had always wanted – so kind and considerate, full of depth and emotion. It had just taken her a long time to see it.

So they were engaged, and Bracha seemed to be the happiest person in the world – up until two weeks before the wedding. A simple phone call from Bracha, and Dovid's world had fallen apart.

For the rest of his life, Dovid will be left to wonder what really happened.

But I know the truth. After a bit of a confrontation, I weaseled it out of her. Bracha told me that she didn't feel "stars" when she was with him, and she couldn't go through with it.

No matter how much I tried to explain to her that you don't make such a momentous decision based on a transitory feeling, Bracha didn't care. She was holding out for stars – even if it meant losing the best thing that might ever happen to her.

• • •

Bracha is looking for some fantasy image of what she thinks will make her happy. I'm fairly certain that Bracha never went to movies, but societal values have seeped into the *frummest* circles. Maybe it's something that a camp friend said, maybe a book that she read, maybe an older sister told her what she had felt when she met her *bashert* and exaggerated the encounter to make it sound more exciting.

Obviously, Bracha had it stuck in her head that she should have certain swooning emotions to confirm that she was marrying the right man. Here

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was a textbook case of exaggerated expectations, and she had zero interest in hearing my counterarguments.

Beyond Our Own Emotions

If by some chance, the beginning of a relationship is romantic and fantasy-like, where the match is made based on well-thought-out criteria, this infatuation deepens to a healthy, mutually satisfying relationship. But I've talked with couples who based their entire marriage commitment on feelings, and a few years down the road, there was a level of contempt for each other that is shocking. Why? Because eventually, the fantasy picture cracks and they are left with a less-than-perfect reality. And the letdown is devastating. Far better to feel content in the beginning than to feel ecstatic.

It is quite common to feel jittery leading up to the wedding, but Bracha blew this feeling way out of proportion. She assumed that it meant that Dovid was not her *bashert*. If she had written down a list of what was most important to her, and used that "reality check" to see her through the rough moments, she might not have lost such a *shidduch*. The point is to have clarity about your needs and to let your feelings take a back seat. At a time like this, a parent, a rav, or a mentor can help someone to recognize momentary swings of emotion. Unfortunately, Bracha was unable to get herself out of a misguided mindset, and she was not willing to listen to reason, even if it was in her own best interest.

Many people have unrealistic expectations. They walk in with a list a mile long of what they are looking for in a spouse. There is a certain haughtiness that often comes with these lists, as if the bearer of the list is entitled to only the very best. Our grandparents went looking for a "good enough" husband or a "good enough" wife, not someone so special that their friends would tear their hair out. And once married, they worked, and they compromised – life wasn't about "rights," it was about "obligations."

But today, some of the demands are so misguided. Unfortunately, there are also many potential *shidduchim* that are rejected based on external or unimportant factors before they even have a chance to get off the ground.

Gaining Clarity

Identifying our own obstacles gives us great insights into dating, but we also need to have a clear idea of what we need in order to build an *erliche bayis ne'eman beYisroel*.

Often, people let "gut feelings" and "chemistry" determine how they choose their spouses. Sure, it's important to be attracted to someone, but it's not the most important criterion in determining if someone is your *bashert* or not. Creating a personalized list will help you to choose criteria that will enable you to find the person who is right for you.

The system we developed encourages singles to make a list of their ten top criteria for a spouse. We teach singles how to differentiate between needs and wants – essential and non-essential qualities – and how to avoid looking for contradictory traits, such as meticulous neatness and "a laid-back attitude." We also encourage people to analyze the reasons that they seek a particular trait. Why do you want someone who is a *macher* – is it to enhance a relationship or to look good for others?

This step-by-step involvement of making a top ten list will not only help you to determine and prioritize what you value most, but it will help you to more easily determine after each date whether or not you should continue dating based on whether the person conforms to your list or not.

People often use arbitrary and meaningless criteria to judge someone. By creating your list, you now have the tools to recognize which criteria you should be determined to get, and which are really less important, "picky" items that you should work on dropping. The bottom line is: The more clarity you have about what you truly need, the better your chances of getting it.

Baruch Hashem, this approach of recognizing obstacles and making a list, along with *tefilla*, has helped many people hone in on what they were truly seeking so that they successfully met their true *zivug*. May you be blessed that it happen to you soon!

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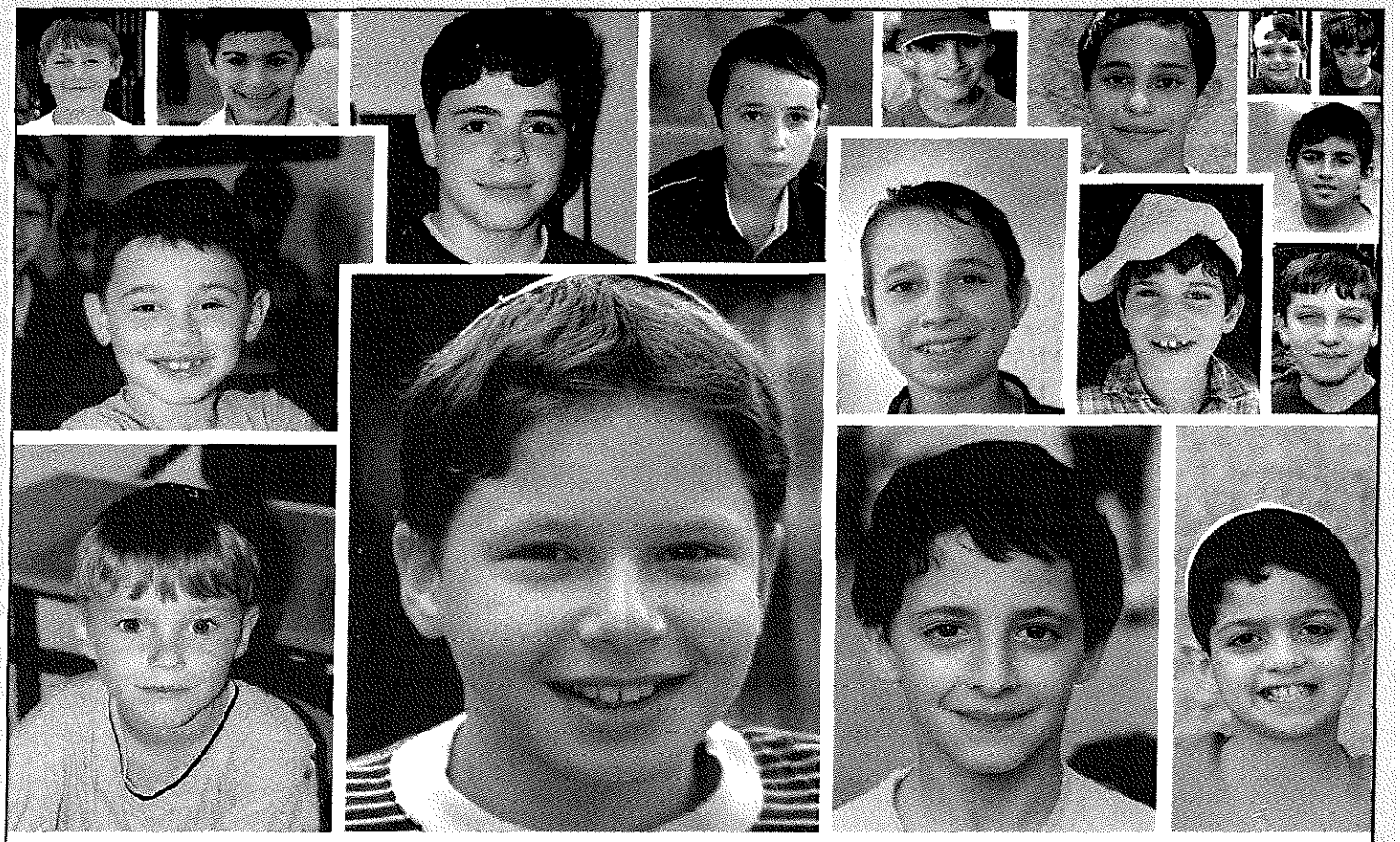

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Be Consoled

RABBI YOSEF C. GOLDING

A Letter That Should Never Be Needed

Recently, many unfathomable tragedies have occurred within the Jewish community at large. It is no secret. It seems to be happening more often than ever. Young yeshiva boys; wonderful Bais Yaakov girls... the immensity of these tragedies defies consolation. I do not venture to offer words of comfort or words of explanation. However... **Horav Moshe Mordechai Epstein** זצ"ל, *the Slabodka Rosh Yeshiva in the era of the Alter of Slabodka (Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel,* זצ"ל*), was capable of doing so. Today, unfortunately, many of our children do not even know who the* ***Levush Mordechai*** *was! Suffice it to say that a list of some of his* ***talmidim*** *includes: Rabbi Aaron Kotler, Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky, Rabbi Dovid Lebowitz and Rabbi Yitzchok Halevi Ruderman* זכרון צדיקים לברכה.

In 1926, shortly before Rabbi Moshe Mordechai opened the branch of Slabodka in Chevron, Palestine, he traveled to the United States to raise much needed funds for the Yeshiva. While in New York, he was the guest of Mr. and Mrs. Sam Golding in Tannersville, NY, as well as in New York City's Upper West Side. It was then that he met little Yossi Golding, whom he referred to as the "Goldener Yossi."

Alas, on a Shabbos afternoon in 1928, on the day of his Bar Mitzvah, a car jumped the curb as Yossi was walking with two friends, and killed him.

In Chevron, upon hearing of this tragedy, Rabbi Epstein sent a four-page, handwritten letter of consolation to the Golding family in New York. I am in possession of this letter, and have oftentimes offered a copy to bereaved families. With the help of my father-in-law, Mr. Joseph Friedenson, editor of ***Dos Yiddishe Vort****, and Rabbi Ephraim Wachsman, Rosh Yeshiva of Mesivta Meor Yitzchak, I have translated this letter with the hope that, in the future, no one will ever have to be consoled by it.*

RABBI GOLDING, WHO SERVES AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ROFEH CHOLIM CANCER SOCIETY (RCCS), LIVES IN MONSEY, NY.

• • •

26, Iyar, 5648 (1928)

"Hashem should console you amongst the mourners of Tzion and Yerushalayim.

To my honorable friend and great supporter of Torah, Shimon Gedaliah Golding, and to the dear supporter of Torah and *tzidkanis*, the wise Mrs. Necha, together with their dear children, may you live long and be consoled from the One Above.

My dear friends: It is a mitzvah to comfort mourners, to console those who have suffered a tragedy. But, my dear friends, it is very difficult to be consoled when faced with this great tragedy, when the precious, golden Yoseif, *zichrono livracha*, is suddenly no longer here. And regarding such a tragedy, how can I offer words of consolation to others when I cannot find consolation for myself? My hands are trembling, and my heart is broken, and, unwillingly, tears are pouring from my eyes. So great is this tragedy – too difficult to find any proper words of comfort – regarding such a child, in whom we hoped to see exemplary prominence and greatness.

But we have to take into account that this tragedy did not occur in the usual way. Since the tragedy took place on the day of his Bar Mitzvah, something was being conveyed from Heaven; this can not be taken as happenstance. It must have a deeper meaning.

This reminds us of what is written in our holy Torah, that on the very day when the children of *Aharon Hakohein* were to become *kohanim*, a fire came and consumed them, and then the One Above said to Aharon, "Do not leave your heads unshorn and do not rend your garments,... the entire House of Israel shall wail over this conflagration" (*Vayikra* 9,6).

The import is this: When, G-d forbid, a great tragedy must befall the entire Jewish nation, in order to save the Jewish nation, the One Above takes a singular sacrifice, thereby rescuing the entire Jewish Nation from major tragedy. And the One Above chooses the sacrifice from the best.

It was a child of Aharon, in the time

of "*Bekarvasam lifnei Hashem* – when they drew close to *Hashem*" – in that loftiest moment, when a *korban* can save the Jewish nation. And *Hashem* said to *Aharon Hakohein*, "This child does not deserve this tragedy, but the Jewish nation does, and they must cry. And know, Aharon, that your children are the sacrifice needed for the sake of the Jewish nation."

At that point, "*Vayidom Aharon*." And Aharon was personally consoled.

It is similar to nations of the world who, when faced with tragedy, send out their best sons to give their lives to save the Fatherland.

Dear friends: Our holy *Chazal* tell us that when *Hashem* chooses a special *neshama* on behalf of the generation to save the generation, He takes the sacrifice from the *tinokos shel beis rabban*, a child from the yeshiva, and he is the savior for that generation. When, G-d forbid, the sins of the generation are gathered, like the sin of desecrating the Shabbos which is punishable by stoning, and other similar offenses for which the greatest punishments are deserved, He takes a singular sacrifice from the yeshiva community, and with this, the entire generation is saved from calamity.

I declare to you, precious parents, my heart personally feels along with your "parents' hearts" regarding this tragedy – specifically with you, Mrs. Golding, [who has] a "mother's heart," as you are touched [as only a mother can be touched] by such a tragedy. But *Hashem* showed through the fact that this calamitous tragedy happened "*Bekarvasam lifnei Hashem*," in the time when he was to become a Bar Mitzvah, that at that time the generation needed a *korban*. G-d forbid, the account of the generation's sins became full – *chillul* Shabbos and other, similar devastating transgressions – necessitating, G-d forbid, a punishment to the entire generation. *Hashem*, therefore, took the precious Yosef ז"ל, your precious son from amongst the *tinokos shel beis rabban*, from the yeshiva children, from such a precious home, from you who is a unique *tzidkanis* of this generation, may *Hashem* give you long life.

From you, He chose the *korban*; he [Yoseif] received the punishment, thereby saving the entire generation from calamity. To your *frum* heart, I implore: Be consoled by this knowledge that your precious son was a sacrifice for the entire Jewish nation – you are parents who relinquished their son's life for the "Fatherland," thereby saving the land.

But you can be consoled by the great *zechus* that your son, *zichrono livracha*, has in the World Above, the True World, in which, through his punishment, he merited to save the entire generation. Do as Aharon did. He stopped moaning, knowing that his children were most endeared to the One Above, and He took them for the sake of the generation.

May your precious, *frum* hearts be strengthened, and it will be a *zechus* just like the *Akeida*. And *Hashem* will bless you that you will never know such pain, only *nachas* from all your precious children.

In our yeshiva, we say Kaddish and learn Mishnayos for his holy *neshama*. I, also, learn Mishnayos for his soul.

(He then writes a few personal lines to a few individual members of the family and ends):

Be well, be consoled.

Your devoted friend who hopes only for your good,

Moshe Mordechai Epstein.

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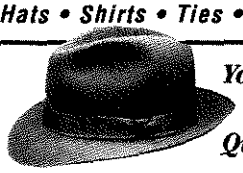

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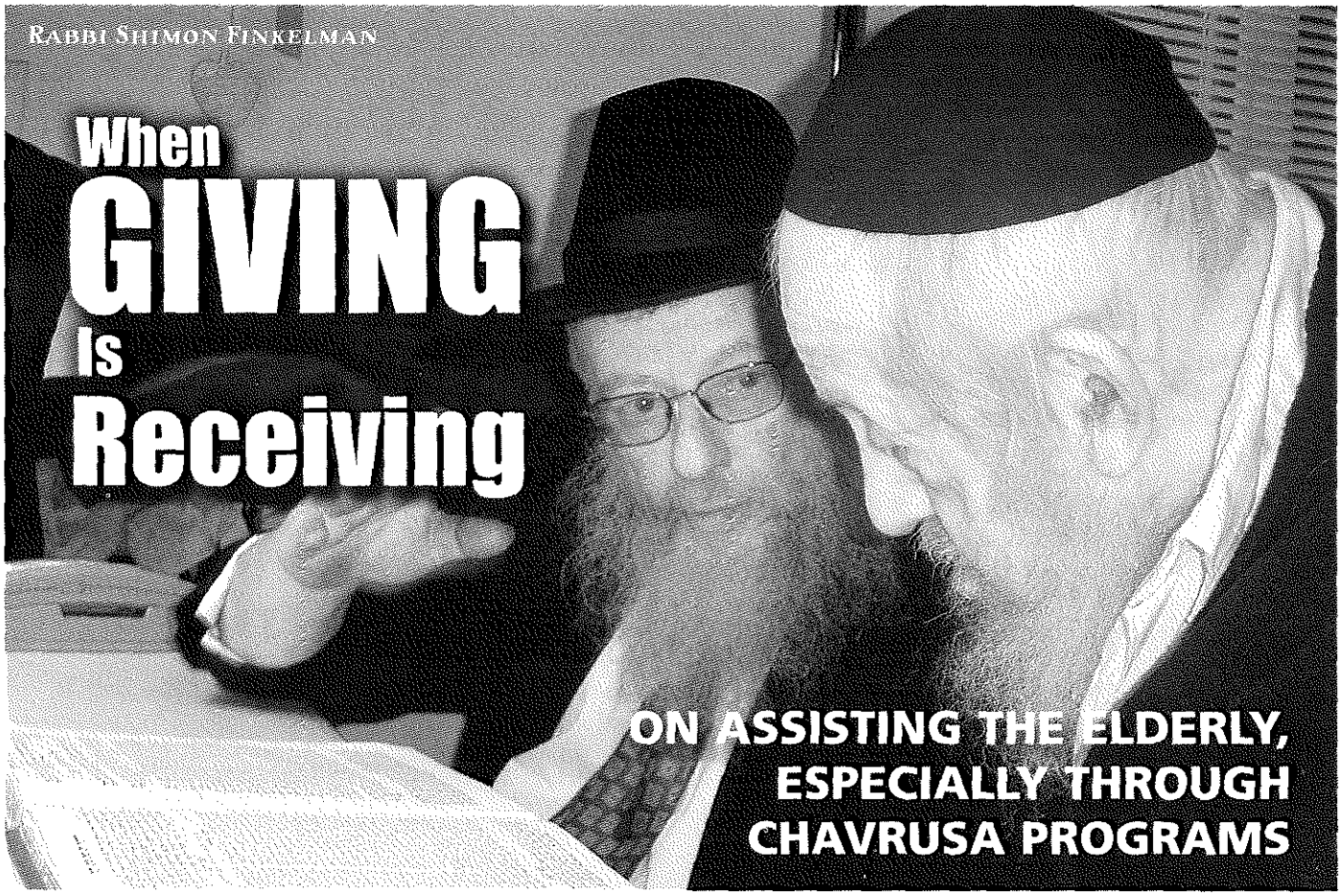
RABBI SHIMON FINKELMAN

When GIVING Is Receiving



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REB ELYA

When I entered Beth Medrash Govoha of Lakewood some thirty years ago, I noticed that every morning, a *bachur* would carry a tray of breakfast from the dining room and out of the building and carry it down the block. I soon learned that he was bringing the food to Mr. Elya Harris, an elderly, handicapped Jew who had no family to care for him.

"Reb Elya," as he was fondly known, was American-born, and had no yeshiva background. He was poverty-stricken for most of his life, and had joined the Lakewood Yeshiva's kitchen staff in 1972. Two years later, one of his legs became infected and was amputated. Except for doctors' visits, participation in *simchos* of Lakewood *talmidim*, and *Yom Tov* meals in the yeshiva dining room, Reb Elya was confined to his crowded, stingy, one-room apartment for the last six years of his life.

For those six years, the Lakewood *talmidim* gave to Reb Elya constantly. They brought him three meals a day, arranged his doctors' appointments, chauffeured him to weddings and *be'rissos*, and most of all, visited him regularly. At the same time, Reb Elya gave to them, by imparting lessons for life that not everyone learns.

Despite his handicap and limitations, Reb Elya was usually in high spirits. He would frequently express his gratitude to the *Ribbono shel Olam*, and would always thank those who visited him.

He lived for Shabbos. Throughout the weekdays, he subsisted on the yeshiva meals. A sizable amount of the paltry sum he received each month from the government was used to purchase cake, fruit and grape juice for his guests to enjoy in honor of Shabbos. All he asked in return was that his visitors join him for one or two *zemiros*.

This man, who had so little to celebrate in his personal life, rejoiced in everyone else's *simcha* as if it were his own. If he was informed of an engagement or a birth, he would share the good news with every visitor that day, and his face would shine as if the *chassan* were his son; the newborn, his grandson.

Though he was not knowledgeable in Torah, he loved the Torah dearly. At a time when *Daf Yomi* did not enjoy the widespread popularity that it enjoys today, Reb Elya would inform his visitors of that day's *daf*.

A visit usually ended with Reb Elya showering *berachos* upon his visitor.

RABBI FINKELMAN, A *REBBE* IN YESHIVA DARCHEI TORAH, FAR ROCKAWAY, NY, IS A FREQUENT CONTRIBUTOR TO THESE PAGES. HE IS THE AUTHOR OF SEVERAL BIOGRAPHIES PUBLISHED BY ARTSCROLL MESORAH PUBLICATIONS, MOST RECENTLY *FIVE GREAT LEADERS*.

Thus, those who gave to Reb Elya Harris received immediate, immeasurable dividends.

There are other ways, as well, that one can benefit in this world from volunteering to help the elderly.

TORAH – THE "FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH"

In *Sefer Tehillim*, *Dovid Hamelech* pleads: "Do not cast me off in [my] time of old age" (*Tehillim* 71,9). The Baal Shem Tov taught that the "time" referred to in this verse is actually "timeless." "Old age" can refer not only to a person's advancement in years, but to an aging spirit, a lack of enthusiasm. Here, *Dovid Hamelech* pleads for ongoing passion and excitement in serving *Hashem* throughout his entire lifetime.

It is truly amazing to see how enthusiasm for Torah study keeps the biologically aged young in spirit. One only has to be at Boro Park's legendary "Shomer Shabbos Shul" at 11:00 a.m. weekday mornings to see men advanced in years, some wielding canes and a few assisted by family members or personal attendants, waiting with anticipation for the Gemara *shiur* of the distinguished *Rav*, Rabbi Yehudah Tirnauer.

But there are many Jewish men, particularly among the elderly, who simply cannot leave their homes. They are homebound, but they want desperately to enjoy learning Torah, and it is difficult for them to study alone.

The late Mrs. Miriam Wilhelm ע"ה, was devoted to the mitzvah of *chessed*, especially to arranging *chavrusos* (study partners) and *shiurim* for her homebound husband, Reb Yosef עמו"ש. Following Mrs. Wilhelm's passing, her children, with the guidance and encouragement of Rabbi Hillel David שליט"א, founded the Chasdei Avos organization, which arranges *chavrusos* for the elderly and homebound. Since its inception some three years go, Chasdei Avos has paired homebound men with volunteers who come to their homes to learn with them, thus involving over 200 people. The results have been extremely rewarding, for both members of each partnership.

One of these volunteers comes to the home of this writer's father עמו"ש six mornings a week to learn Gemara with him. Our family is in awe of this unassuming, humble man, whom my father respects and enjoys so much. This man treats this mitzvah as if he were being paid a salary. If, on rare occasion, he cannot come, he makes every effort to stop by and apologize in person.

LETTERS OF GRATITUDE

From the daughter of one elderly man:

Dear Mrs. Borenstein: Your wonderful project has connected my father with an outstanding teacher (not that he is a teacher by profession). He is a man of humility who possesses fine *middos* and a keen understanding of how to relate to an elderly person. Because of the patient way that he imparts Torah (in this case, *Pirkei Avos*), and because of the utmost respect that he displays towards my father, he has elevated him to a higher level of spiritual endeavor. This is all beyond our expectations.

May you and your volunteers continue to have *hatzlacha* in bringing the light of Torah to our precious *avos*.

THE VIEW FROM THE OTHER SIDE

A volunteer sent the following letter:

Dear Chasdei Avos:

Words cannot suffice to express my gratitude to your organization for the work you do for the homebound and for the volunteers you recruit to fulfill this important mitzvah.

I am a volunteer and I am inspired on a daily basis as I watch my *chavrusa*, a brilliant man, who had an impressive career before he was confined to a wheelchair due to multiple sclerosis, overcome his difficulty speaking as he struggles to enunciate the words of Torah.

My *chavrusa's* face lights up when I relate thoughts of the *Rishonim* and *Acharonim* and this, in turn, presents me with the responsibility to prepare well for our daily study session – another benefit I receive from learning with him.

A DISAPPEARING OPPORTUNITY

How often do we read, upon the passing of an elderly *gadol*, that "a link to the previous generation has now left us"? Learning with the elderly is a unique opportunity to learn with, and at the same time, learn *from*, those who saw the spiritual grandeur of previous generations.

Among Chasdei Avos's volunteers is a retired *mechaneich* who studies with three homebound *chavrusos* each day. His kindness and sensitivity towards these elderly men is something special. From his vantage point, this man sees *himself* as the one who is gaining from these learning "partnerships." In his words:

Many of us have read books about Jewish life in the 1930s and 40's. The lives of Rabbi Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, Rabbi Shlomo Heiman, Rabbi Boruch Kaplan, Mike Tress and many others spring from the pages.

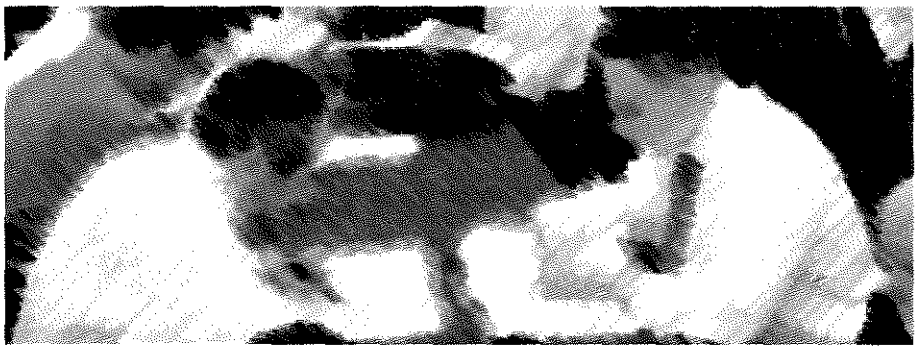
Today, it is possible to speak to people who lived in this era. How? I became a volunteer for the *Chasdei Avos* organization. Even though some of these elderly men are in their 80s or 90s, their memories from their youth are still with them. (The writer goes on to relate a few anecdotes told to him by his elderly *chavrusa*.)

Thus, assisting the elderly, especially by learning with them as a *chavrusa*, provides the volunteer with a unique opportunity – to give, to receive, and to grow.

And all it takes is a phone call.

To contact Chasdei Avos, please call (daytime) 718-337-3273 or (evenings) 718-692-2898. Lakewood: 732-901-9935, Monsey: 845-425-6640.

EFRAIM JAFFE



Partners in Learning... Chazara... and Life

STARTING IN QUEENS

It all started innocently enough. I had just met Zelig in Queens, and he told me that he and his family were moving to a new *frum* community in Passaic, NJ. As it happened, my wife had been freaking out about some mice in our apartment, so we decided: Why not check out Passaic? Soon, our two young families had moved across the river to new homes west of the Hudson. Realizing that we had similar "BT" backgrounds, we thought, "Why not start learning together in the morning?" I had been learning in the wee hours before *Shacharis* in Queens, and Zelig was open to the idea. When we met at 5:45 a.m. on "Opening Day," we were the first ones in shul.

We quickly discovered that we had much in common – a few years of "serious learning" under our belts, partly in Israel and partly in the States. We grew up with the same music and culture of the sixties and seventies, although Zelig is from suburban New York and I am from Oregon. We both grew up with non-observant backgrounds. Our families became friends and we shared Shabbos meals and lazy summer afternoons together. Zelig and I played basketball with a group of young men from the community every *Motza'ei Shabbos* – until our bodies told us it was time to quit when we pushed forty.

Looking back over twenty years, much has changed. Passaic has grown to be a major Torah community, our oldest children are now over twenty, and Zelig has even started a second family with a second wife and three young children under the age of five! We've had our ups and downs: Zelig, a divorce and six years living in a basement apartment; my problems have revolved around raising children who have gone through all kinds of difficulties, including my daughter's five-year bout with anorexia. About the only thing that hasn't changed is our *seder* together, still going strong after twenty years.

THE NATURE OF CHAVRUSA LEARNING

To learn with a *chavrusa* is a uniquely Jewish tradition. The experience transcends the utility and practical advantages of bouncing ideas off of another like-minded person. Jews throughout the centuries, who have struggled to understand the exact same nuances of the Gemara, *Rashi* and *Tosafos* texts, are at our side. Because of the unique structure of the Talmud and its lack of punctuation, the learning process is dynamic, like a Rubic's cube, a prism of endless possibilities, each piece of information flowing through the entire structure in a cascade of cause and effect.

Just as you can tell people about the experience of observing Shabbos, but can't convey the essence of the experience, you can read a book about Judaism, but you won't capture the essence of the Torah transmission experience. Over the years, the basis of whatever *emuna* I have developed is the day-to-day involvement in the *chavrusa* process, above and beyond the Talmudic content. Perhaps "*Daf Yomi*" learners feel the same way; I feel that Zelig and I were created to be *chavrusa* learners. Frequently, over the years, the *daf shiur* has played as background music to our *chavrusa* relationship, roaring past and disappearing into the distance. Our *chavrusa* is like the two friends on a railroad track in an old silent movie, with the two-man hand apparatus, pumping up and down, propelling forward foot by foot, sweating it out and enjoying the scenery along the way.

We started learning the tractate *Babba Basra* in 1987. Clearing the cobwebs at 5:45 a.m. takes some getting used to, especially after getting up a few times in the night for a crying baby, but we got used to the schedule – I, with the aid of coffee (except for the three and a half years that I quit) and Zelig, without any artificial stimulants. One year I had bronchitis all winter and was up most of the night, but I still got up to learn (the benefits of youth!). The cold dark nights of winter were the hardest, especially for Zelig, who rode his bike to shul every morning, parking it afterwards near the train or bus station on his way to work. We were both determined to maintain our Torah learning jump-started from our yeshiva years into our working years, and we often joked about how difficult the yeshiva years were, endless days and years stretched out before us with nothing but learning Torah... or so we thought. Having only a limited time to learn every day was liberating and greatly enhanced the quality of learning.

Zelig remembers key landmarks in our lives, like my younger son's *bris*, by what *daf* (page) we were on: *Babba Basra* 8b. A Bar Mitzva might be *daf* 23a. When did we switch shuls? *Babba Kamma*, 3a... the

EFRAIM JAFFE LIVES IN PASSAIC, NJ WITH HIS WIFE AND THREE CHILDREN. HE WORKS AS A CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER IN ROSELAND, NJ. IN HIS SPARE TIME HE WRITES ARTICLES FOR JEWISH PUBLICATIONS.

Torah version of remembering a popular song by association of time and place.

SHARED AND INTERFACED PROGRESS

Our *chavrusa* immediately and seamlessly blended personal friendship with Torah learning. We would have been friends if we hadn't learned together, and we would have learned together well if we hadn't been friends. We both like to go slowly over the Gemara and chew it over like a good meal, with no concern over the amount of pages covered. We both take joy in the "aha!" moment when we understand the Gemara's question, or a nuance in *Rashi* and *Tosafos*. My strength is reading and phrasing the words; Zelig's strength is knowing the structure of the Gemara. Over time, Zelig developed another level of expertise: memorizing large tracts of Talmudic real estate, despite having grown up with the self-perception of a "slow learner" with a "poor memory." I have seen that a person can transform his greatest weakness into his greatest strength.

People started mixing us up, calling me "Zelig" at times and Zelig "Efraim," which is funny because we don't look at all alike. I think our identities became so inextricably bound in people's minds that they morphed us into one unit, a "Lennon and McCarthy" symbiosis that focused on the whole being greater than the sum of the parts. People have asked over the years, "Are you guys still learning together?"

What makes for a successful *chavrusa*? I guess the first answer is to quote a famous comedian, "95% of life is showing up." Early morning is the best time, because nobody competes for your time in the early morning (except my dog, who often hears me sneak out and demands to take care of her business). The second key is mutual respect. We often insist that the other person read – an aid to concentration. I don't remember an argument in twenty years – I guess neither one of us is *makpid* on our *kavod*. The third key is looking for the truth, regardless of who comes up with it. And I'll throw in a fourth criterion, maybe not for the purist: sometimes the valuable learning time is needed for discussing personal matters, or for just plain schmoozing and sharing a laugh. The word *chavrusa* comes from "*chibur*" – connection... two people coming together through Torah, connecting on many levels.

AND WE STILL FORGE AHEAD

I arrive at 6 a.m. on a typical weekday; Zelig is already dug in at the far end of the *beis midrash*, facing the entrance, totally unaware of my arrival. He rocks back and forth with eyes closed, the memorized pages of Talmud flowing out in an endless stream. The Talmud lives within him; I come to learn, his foil, happy to keep his engine running and feeding off the energy that flows from his steady drumbeat and haunting flow of Hebrew and Aramaic.

Twenty years have come and gone. And still we forge ahead. All the mundane struggles of life will soon be long forgotten, but perhaps someday, 100 years from now, a wind will blow through Passaic, NJ, and a quiet voice will reverberate: "Here sat Zelig and Efraim, partners in Torah, day by day, word by word, as the decades flew by." ◻

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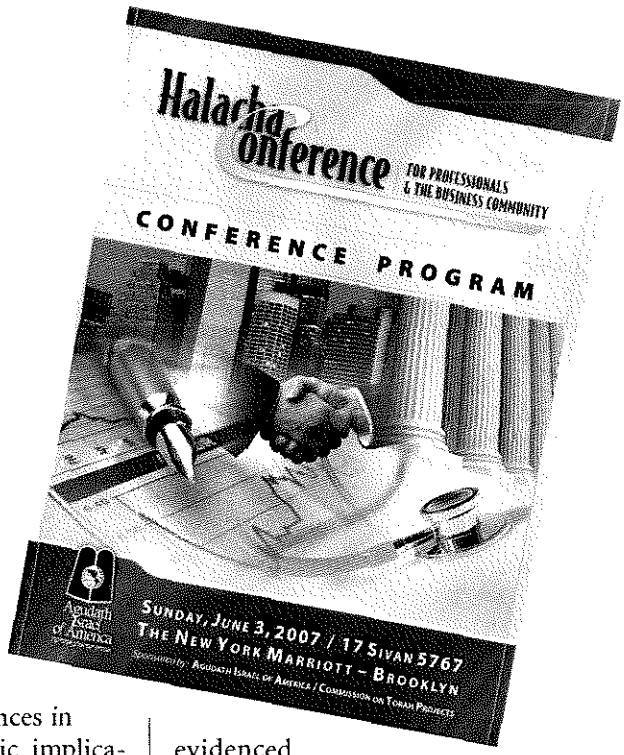
RABBI AVI SHAFRAN



Kattowitz Lives

A MUSING ON THE OCCASION OF A RECENT CONFERENCE

As usual, it was an impossible predicament. It would have been easier had I been a lawyer. Or a doctor. Or a mental health professional. (Actually, my dealings with the media have at times afforded me some familiarity with psychological impairment, but I am not credentialed.) And I'm certainly no businessman; my wife handles all our finances.

So my quandary remained: which track of Agudath Israel of America's Halacha Conference for Professionals and the Business Community to join? Which stream of lectures and panel discussions did I want to listen to and learn from?

Even though I possess "none of the above" professional qualifications, I do have a longstanding and abiding interest in *hashkafa* and halacha relevant to medical issues. Agudath Israel, moreover, is often consulted by members of the media to comment on contemporary social issues with medical dimensions, from stem-cell research to euthanasia. As Agudath Israel's director of public affairs, I would gain from greater awareness of developments and halachic approaches to such issues. And so, although all the offerings beckoned, I chose the medical track. I wasn't disappointed.

From a learned exploration of halachic concerns with regard to infertility treatments to a survey of recent advances in genetics and their halachic implications, from a wide-ranging examination of end-of-life issues to a well-informed overview of the challenges presented by managed care, the morning quickly turned to afternoon and, all too soon, the conference had concluded.

Tapes of the presentations – not only the medical tracks but all the others as well, and Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon's inspiring words at the luncheon to all the conference participants about *kiddush Hashem*, during the luncheon – are available from Agudath Israel, so I won't squander this space to paraphrase what can be heard in its complete and original form.

There is something, though, that isn't available on audiotape, yet merits mention. It wasn't spoken from any podium over the course of the day, yet was bespoken constantly throughout the conference. It was evident, I'm sure, during each of the different tracks' multifaceted sessions, but was perhaps most strikingly apparent at the luncheon, when the hundreds of participants all gathered in one large room.

It was their variety. There were men who were clearly from "yeshivish" backgrounds and others whose dress or head coverings indicated they were not; others still were unmistakably from the Chassidic world. The women in attendance, I imagine, evidenced similar diversity. And yet, all were part of a unified whole. They had gathered, after all, in one venue for one purpose: to better understand what the Torah has to say to them regarding situations and challenges they face in their professional lives. It was not only a beautiful sight, but a testament to the unifying power of Torah. It was also a realization of the dream of Kattowitz.

When Agudath Israel was founded in 5672 (1912) in Kattowitz, Poland, *Moreinu* Yaakov Rosenheim, a leader of the Frankfurt Orthodox community and the first president of the international movement, defined its aim: "... *to revive an ancient Jewish possession: the traditional concept of Klal Yisroel – Israel's collective body, animated and sustained by its Torah as the organizing soul...*."

The movement forged in Kattowitz indeed included delegates from Jewish communities as diverse as those of Poland and Germany, from streams as disparate as the Chassidic and Lithuanian worlds. Each was unique, but all still recognized their commonality – their commitment to the Torah that unified their ancestors "as one person, with one heart" at the foot of Har Sinai – and the need for its assertion in a world grown increasingly alienated from authentic *Yiddishkeit*.

RABBI SHAFRAN SERVES AS AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA'S DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND AS THE AMERICAN DIRECTOR OF AM ECHAD, THE AGUDATH ISRAEL-INSPIRED EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH EFFORT AND MEDIA RESOURCE.

A similar coalition of Jewish leaders built the edifice known as Agudath Israel of America, too, and the American Agudah likewise came to encompass a broad span of the Orthodox spectrum – the organization was and is an umbrella designed to cover as many heads as it can. And so the unity of Torah-purpose amid diversity of background and appearance at the recent Halacha Conference was not insignificant. The spirit of Kattowitz, it silently said, lives and thrives.

Twenty-four years ago, at Agudath Israel of America's 61st Anniversary Dinner, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky זצ"ל noted how the *degalim*, the banners representing each of the *shevatim*, the Jewish "tribes" and designating their encampment, were not put in place until the *Mishkan*, the Tabernacle, itself was erected. "For the presence of the *Mishkan*," he said, "negated the potential for divisiveness within *Klal Yisroel* that otherwise could have been engendered by the *degalim*." The *Mishkan*, in other words, defined the criterion for the commonality.

The *Mishkan*, of course, was where the Presence of *Hashem* was manifest during our ancestors' years of the wandering in the Sinai Desert, and the repository of the *aron* that held the *Luchos* (Tablets of the Law) and the *sefer Torah*. The Torah remains the definer and the center of true Jewish life, the eternal gift in which *Hashem* remains manifest for *Klal Yisroel*.

The participants at Agudath Israel's recent Halacha Conference may not have borne banners. (They would have, in any event, surely caught on the doorways as crowds rushed from one lecture to another.) But they did clearly represent various "tribes," and yet, were unified by their common focus on understanding and fulfilling the will of *Hashem* through the study of the Torah and its laws, and their application, through the knowledge and labors of Torah decisors, to every contemporary challenge.

The doctors and lawyers and mental health professionals and businesspeople (and hangers-on like me) were truly unified – and by the very same Unifier – as were our ancestors thousands of years earlier in the desert.

Uttered words can sometimes be more revealing than their speakers intend. They can be a source of deeper understandings – some yielding smiles; others, tears. With the goal of mining contemporary quotations for insights, intended or otherwise, *The Jewish Observer* here introduces a new feature, "Of Public Record," which will present illuminating citations culled from various media.

Of Public Record

"Somebody has a load of antipathy that he has decided to bring down on the hesder soldiers."

– Rabbi David Stav, spokesman for the Union of Hesder Yeshivot, on an Israeli officer's alleged coercion of religious soldiers during basic training to cut their prayers short.

Jerusalem Post, August 27

"The students were taught that boys and girls should be separated – the former will put on phylacteries and the latter will light Shabbat candles."

– An Israeli Education Ministry report, criticizing schools for not, as it claims they agreed to do, teaching "the many faces of the Jewish culture."

Haaretz, September 4

"Democracies always take their time, often too much time, to recognize and face a totalitarian threat when it is posed in ideological terms."

– British House of Commons member Denis MacShane, commenting on "the new anti-Semitism" he sees sweeping Europe.

The Washington Post, September 4

"The rules of kashrut pertaining to wine are antithetical to our principles as Reform Jews."

– Reform Rabbi Justin Jaron Lewis, complaining in a letter to the editor about an article in the Reform movement's magazine that explained what makes a wine kosher.

Reform Judaism, Summer 2007

"You need to run for political office. The only way you can achieve your goals is to stand up and say who you are and be proud of it."

– Democratic National Committee chairman Howard Dean, speaking to a large gathering of the Islamic Society of North America, which international communication professor J. Michael Waller told the U.S. Senate in 2003 is "an influential front for the promotion of the Wahabi political, ideological and theological infrastructure."

Chicago Sun-Times, September 2

DON'T STRAIN YOURSELF NOW Dept.

"I think it's something that I have to condemn."

– European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana, referring to Palestinians' launching of rockets into an Israeli day care center.

Associated Press, September 3

WELL POISONING 2007 Dept.

"[Israel] undermines the international community's reaction to global warming."

– British Parliamentarian Clare Short, who explained that the Middle East conflict distracts the world from climate change that, she said, will lead to "the end of the human race."

Wall Street Journal, September 3

A Cicada Invasion

A Divine Orchestration

MRS. MARSHA SMAGLEY

ONCE IN SEVENTEEN YEARS

I do not like bugs. Other than my entomology class, better known as "Bugs 118," I have not given them much thought – that is, until recently.

On a warm spring night this past *Shavuos*, I recited my prayers in my backyard, while enjoying the serenity of the outdoors. Then I suddenly saw something I had not seen before. A cicada (it resembles a locust, but is not, and is harmless) slowly emerged from its underground tunnel, and after living for seventeen years below the earth's surface, humbly made its way to see for the first time, with its little red eyes, the vast night sky. I stared in wonder as it proceeded to crawl along the ground, finding its way to the patio floor. Then, to my surprise, it stopped at my chair and held on.

I brought my family outside to see my discovery. We had been anticipating their arrival – rather, I should say their "invasion." It was well broadcast that the periodical cicada, which surfaces every seventeen years, was to arrive in our area, as well as across the northern hemisphere, during the months of May and June. They had already dug hundreds of tiny holes on our property, so we knew they would soon surface,

I vividly recall my first exposure to the cicada seventeen years ago (when I was a child, we lived in the city, so I had not seen them before). This was before I was blessed with two children, now ages nine and sixteen, and before I came to Torah. It seemed like a lifetime ago.

My husband and I were living in this same home in Highland Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, with many long-standing trees. As a Chicago native, I cherished my time outdoors, only to find it shortened because of an infiltration of dying bugs. I felt that I was continually surrounded in carnage and they ruined my summer.

As a female, and one who is not particularly drawn to studying nature, it is unusual that I would now want to learn about these bugs. Maybe I had not taken serious note of them before because my eyes had not yet been opened to seeking G-d.

Without any prior entomological research skills, I decided to Google "cicada." I soon discovered that this was no ordinary bug. The periodical cicada emerges every seventeen years, after developing underground during that entire time period, only to finally dig its way at night to the surface, climbing on to a tree trunk, a plant, or in my case, a chair, and shedding its skin (exoskeleton) for the last time, to emerge fully grown with wings.

MARSHA SMAGLEY RESIDES IN HIGHLAND PARK, ILLINOIS, WITH HER HUSBAND AND TWO CHILDREN. SHE HAS DEVOTED THE LAST SEVEN YEARS TO STUDYING TORAH, BECOMING OBSERVANT, GUIDING HER FAMILY IN TORAH LIFE, AND RECENTLY, WRITING ARTICLES THAT CONVEY HER HEARTFELT JOURNEY TO TORAH.

Their short life above ground is only for two to six weeks. During that time, I told my nine-year-old daughter, they get married and have babies, and the female lays several hundred eggs in a small slit she makes in the bark of a branch, until they hatch into miniature cicadas, which fall to the ground and make their way underground, beginning a new seventeen-year life cycle.

The cicada's wings are beautiful and most unusual. They are silver and translucent, outlined in a shining copper color; they can actually protect against ultra-violet rays. Their eyes are usually red, but I have seen many that were copper in color. They can also be white and, most rarely, blue.

They play music. Different from other insects, the male has a musical drum built into its abdomen, which is mostly hollow to amplify the sound as it resonates. They actually play a chorus of three different songs – for morning, afternoon, and evening – designed to attract a specific mate. They even have a fourth song to signal distress; I heard it when I tried to remove one that landed on me.

Countless numbers have surfaced on our property and in our area since my first *Shavuos* sighting. Not only are they in every tree and shrub, they are also in every inch of the grass, on the back porch, doorways, in the garage and driveway, and literally everywhere outside – even nestled above the mezuzah on our garage.

My daughter has been taking pictures of the hordes of cicadas on a large oak tree in front of our home. I actually saw for the first time, on this same tree, a cicada shed its skin and crawl out of it. It looked like a little yellow pipe cleaner, bending its head and body, completely in harmony with finishing its life cycle. It was fascinating to watch.

My daughter thought that she would be scared of them but she has not been frightened at all. A cicada followed us to school one day. Just as my daughter was about to leave the car for school, she excitedly said that there was one in the back of the car. We decided to not let it out because there were few in that area.

What is most remarkable is that you can simultaneously witness all aspects of the cicada's short life span aboveground, in one panoramic view. As one neighbor pushing a baby stroller described it, "I am amazed and grossed out at the same time." Their life cycle appears to be magnified and moving in fast forward before your very eyes – cicadas soaring in flight, their shed skins blanketing the ground (that's the gross part!), the beginning of new life, and life's very end.

RETURNING TO HIM THROUGH HIS WORKS...

Since, as already mentioned, I'm not one who is drawn to observing nature, what about this humble bug has inspired so much wonderment in me? My experience this time is so different than it was seventeen years ago, before I came to Torah. In my first experience, I had felt that I was being "invaded" by cicadas; now I feel that I am being "touched" by G-d.

I came to observance within the last eight years through the study of Torah. We learn that *Hashem* is speaking to us within each precious word of His Torah. With each word I read, from the very first one, *Hashem* has been speaking to my *seichel* (mind), to my *leiv* (heart), and to my *neshama* (soul). The light of His Torah has resonated within my entire being and has forever changed how I see His world. Although I was unaware of it at that time, His truth had been hidden from me, only to finally be discovered, while I slowly, but gloriously, emerged to His light.

Observing this new invasion of cicadas, and seeing how *Hashem* has built His will within each facet of its life, has afforded me a new appreciation for the very Source of all Creation. Witnessing His magnificent mastery of nature is causing me to return to Him anew. I came to observance through the study of His words, and now I am returning to Him though the study of His works.

The *Rambam* wrote that when a person delves deeply into *Hashem's* works and His wondrous creations, he sees from them that His wisdom has no limitation. He immediately loves G-d and praises Him and has a great yearning to know Him. It unveils a thirst in his soul, and a longing in his flesh to love Him, inspiring an awe of *Hashem* when comparing his own lowliness to the greatness of *Hashem* (*Yad Hachazaka, Hilchos Yesodei Hatorah Peirek* 2, halacha 12 and *Peirek* 4).

Avraham *Avinu* came to believe that there is one G-d by observing His creations – the sun, the stars, the moon, and nature. The Hebrew word for world, *olam*, is from the root word *nellam*, which means "hidden." After Adam ate from the Tree, G-d hid His Presence within nature. Man's mission then became to bring down His light to this world by following His will, and causing His Presence to be revealed.

"Raise your eyes on high and see Who created these [things]! He brings forth their legions by number; He calls to each of them by name; by the abundance of His power and by vigor of His strength, no one is missing!" (*Yeshayahu* 40,26) "Who created these" in Hebrew is "*Mi bara eileh*," the same letters that form the very words "*Bara Elokim*," meaning "*Elokim* created [these]!" *Elokim* is the name of G-d as He rules nature.

Although it is far beyond my ability to understand why a cicada has to live so many years below the earth, it is interesting that it takes specifically seventeen years to surface. Seventeen is the numerical value for the Hebrew word *tov*, which means "good." In the six days in which *Hashem* created the world, the word *tov* was used to convey that Creation conformed to His Divine plan. No matter what its meaning, I marvel at seeing His handprints. I am in awe of seeing that He directs each of His creations with a Divine purpose.

"Who cannot know from all these things that the Hand of G-d made this? That in His hand is the soul of every living thing and the spirit of all mankind?" (*Iyov* 12, 9-10).

WHEN SONG BURSTS FORTH

The book *Peirek Shira* (Chapter of Song) records how all of Creation, from the mighty heavens to the

lowly ant, constantly sing – through their existence and functions – their unique praises to *Hashem*, each with its individual song composed of verses from Scripture. Man was placed on this earth to conduct this spiritual symphony, to bring to fruition all of G-d's creations, and to give voice to its song. This can only be accomplished by striving to see His Hand within Creation, and by yearning to sing His praises.

Hashem imbued within each creature a Divine purpose and lesson from Torah for us to learn. From the cat, we learn the trait of *tzeniyus*, modesty; from the lion, we learn the trait of *gevura*, strength and control; and from the ant, we learn not to steal. There are many lessons I can glean from the cicada. It helps me to appreciate that the things that I do really can matter, no matter how small; that every seed I plant can ultimately bear fruit, even if it is after the passage of a tremendous amount of time. I can also strive to humbly submit my will to my Creator.

As I watch it, emerging to complete its G-d-given *tafkid* (mission) in only a few short weeks, I must admit that I almost envy how it knows exactly what to do, and is busy doing it. I wish that it were that easy for us. I am reminded that I, too, have a mission in this world, and a relatively finite period of time to achieve it, so I must be busying myself in doing whatever is needed each moment to serve Him and fulfill His will.

What is *shira* – a song? Words are spoken from the mind, but in a monotone way, as compared to song. A song soars; it can express the depths of emotion, and the deep yearnings of the soul. It transcends mere words and the physical dimension; it is the fullest expression of the *neshama*. One only needs to listen to children sing to experience the beauty of their souls.

The particular melody of the cicada's *shira* is beyond description. It resembles a powerful symphony of harmonized sounds that resonate everywhere, day and night, and can even be heard inside. This resounding symphony beckons even someone who is disinterested to stop and to listen.

The Torah's definition of a "song" is a profound and unique spiritual phenomenon. It is a response to one of those rare times when we attain true insight and see *Hashem's* Hand orchestrating all, and can truly understand how every note, instrument and participant in G-d's symphony of Creation plays its role. Such was the experience of the Song by the Sea, the first time the Jewish people collectively sang their praises to G-d, after being rescued from the hands of Pharaoh. Creation became a symphony, a song, because all understood how every unrelated and incomprehensible event was part of the harmonious score that led up to that greatest of all miracles (from the *Stone Chumash* Commentary on *Parashas Beshalach* ArtScroll-Mesorah Publications).

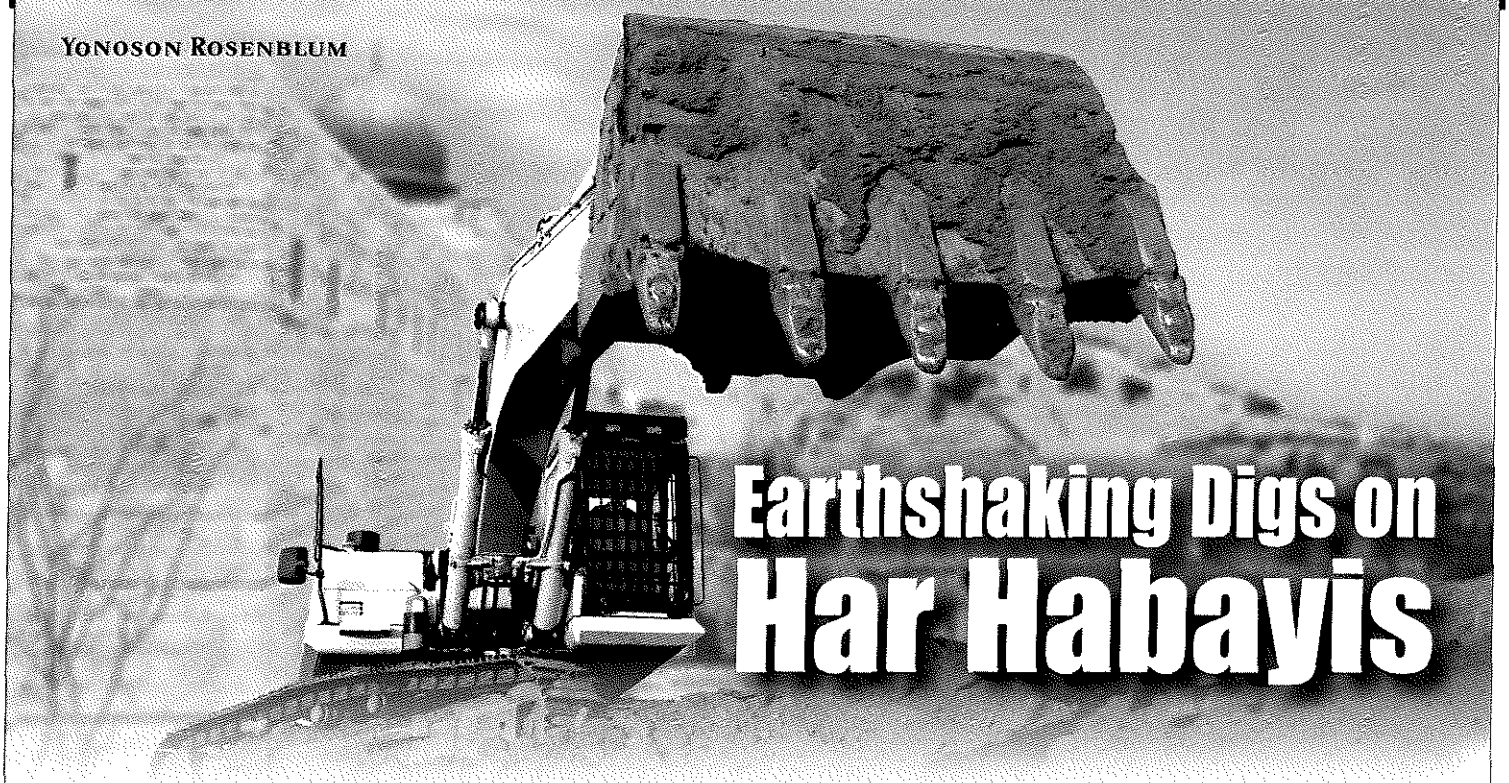
Joining in Its Shira

"The loftiest work of the human spirit in which his noblest energy unfolds is when it is inspired by thoughts of G-d, itself a work of G-d" (Rabbi Samson Rafael Hirsch).

Listening each day to the intensity of the cicada's *shira* has awakened my soul to the magnificence and harmony of His handiwork. It was not until my life became invaded by them that I even noticed the masterpiece of nature. I appreciated its beauty, but I did not strive to see its G-dliness. I can now appreciate that every aspect of nature is truly a profound spiritual symphony of constant miracles performed for us each moment by *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

It is now two months later, the cicada invasion is over, and their outpouring of life and song has sadly vanished. I pray that even without the beckoning of their continual *shira*, I will continue to be touched by G-d. I yearn to sing my praises to *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, to give voice to His Creation, and in doing so, to help bring the Heavens down to His spiritual symphony on earth.

YONOSON ROSENBLUM



Earthshaking Digs on Har Habayis

THE AGITATED MK'S MESSAGE

I will never forget the meeting of the second Am Echad mission to Israel with a group of Knesset members in 1999. One of those with whom the delegation had arranged to meet was Eliezer (Cheetah) Cohen, of the Yisrael Beytenu party. Cohen rushed into the meeting late and in a high state of agitation. "I just received information that they are destroying *Har Habayit* (the Temple Mount)," he informed us. And he proceeded to describe the massive construction projects then taking place to build a new underground mosque on the Temple Mount.

What struck me at the time was that the ponytailed MK and much decorated IDF helicopter pilot seemed considerably more upset by these reports than we in the Am Echad delegation. He could not contain his outrage or pain; we absorbed his report calmly, with an odd "Tsk, tsk" interjected here and there.

We were not alone in our calm. Apart from a few professional archaeologists and specialty journals like *Biblical Archaeology*, no one in Israel seemed particularly exercised. In 1999, then Prime Minister Ehud Barak permitted the Muslim Wakf to turn an underground area known as Solomon's Stables into a new mosque. Though the Israeli Antiquities Law requires all construction work at archaeological sites to be conducted under the supervision of professional archaeologists, the Wakf removed 6,000 tons of dirt from the site. Among the items dumped unceremoniously in the Kidron Valley was a three-foot fragment that one archaeologist described as "the most important artifact ever recovered from the Temple Mount, and it could very well have been from one of the entrances to the Temple itself."

In January 2001, the Wakf began digging a long underground tunnel from the Al Aksa Mosque, which is above the Hulda Gate to the Second Temple, eastwards towards Solomon's Stables. One Israel radio journalist reported seeing what appeared to be an ancient floor through a grill above the digging. Another 1,500 tons of dirt were removed – again, without any archaeological supervision. According to Zachi Zweig, a graduate student in archaeology, who first started searching through the dirt dumped in the Kidron Valley, thousands of artifacts going back thousands of years were discovered.

Just recently, the Wakf decided it was time to replace some electric cables, and to that end began digging a trench 1,300 feet long and five feet deep, using bulldozers and heavy machinery – all with the permission of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. The Israel Antiquities Authority was supposed to supervise the digging at all archaeological sites, but it has neither done so, nor inspected the site to determine if anything of value has been uncovered.

In the course of the digging, the bulldozers came upon what some archaeologists think was a foundation wall of the *Ezras Nashim* in the *Beis Hamikdash*. If so, it would have been the first wall of the *Beis Hamikdash* exposed since the *Churban*, and one of the most important archaeological discoveries ever made on the Temple Mount.

But archaeologists who have attempted to examine the wall have been prevented from doing so by the Wakf, backed up by the Israeli police. Hershel Shanks, the publisher of *Biblical Archaeology* magazine, published an op-ed in *The Wall Street Journal* on July 18, in which

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he charged that the displaced earth from the trench contained pottery vessels and carefully carved and decorated building stones typical of the Second Temple period. In a later piece, he described the newly discovered wall as having been destroyed in the process of digging.

Digging for Unearned Legitimacy

The Wakf's repeated digging on the Temple Mount serves two distinct long-term Palestinian interests. The first is to remove any traces of a Jewish presence on *Har Habayis*, particularly of the *Beis Hamikdash* itself. At Camp David, Yasir Arafat assured an astounded President Clinton that no Jewish Temple ever stood on the Temple Mount. That claim has long since been standard fare in the Palestinian media. Destroying the evidence of the Temple thus furthers Palestinian myth-making.

But Arafat also revealed a more subtle intent at Camp David – to sever in the minds of the Jews of *Eretz Yisroel* any connection between themselves and the Land. He always understood that the weaker Israelis' sense of connection to themselves as Jews and to the Land, the weaker their willpower in the face of Palestinian terror. Arafat's refusal to accept any compromise on the issue of sovereignty over the Temple Mount flowed from that agenda. It was designed to force the Jews of Israel to admit that the Temple Mount is more important to the Palestinians than it is to them.

The current digging on the Temple Mount advances that agenda by humiliating Israel, and forcing Israelis to confront and acknowledge how little they care about the Temple Mount. To bring out the point, consider the following thought experiment: Imagine what the Moslem reaction would have been had Israel attempted to prevent the Wakf's major construction projects or even the laying of new electric lines. Riots would have broken out over the entire Moslem world over Israel's attempts to assert the most minor prerogatives of a sovereign. Millions of Moslems care very deeply about the Temple Mount – a place of very minor importance to Muslims until very recently.

From this perspective, perhaps the most important aspect of the Wakf's most recent attempts to destroy evidence of the Jewish presence on the Temple Mount has been the apathy of the Israeli public. The public has greeted the story – to the extent that that the media has covered it at all – with a barely disguised yawn. Even the deeply unpopular Olmert government was able to authorize the Wakf's digging with bulldozers without arousing any opposition or any public outrage.

Nor has that apathy been confined to the secular public. In the Israeli Torah community, the story has barely generated any media coverage. Those who turn their hearts in prayer towards *Har Habayis* three times a day seem little concerned that the remains of the *Beis Hamikdash* are being destroyed before our eyes. There is no Cheetah Cohen raising the alarms in the Torah world.

And that cries out for explanation. Perhaps the long-standing antagonism between the Torah community and Israeli archaeologists has made it harder for the Torah community to join the cries of protest of a handful of professional archaeologists. Certainly, the solution from the perspective of the Torah community is not for Jewish archaeolgoist to go up to *Har Habayis* to supervise the Wakf's construction projects. It is easier to avoid thinking about the Wakf's desecrations than to provide solutions.

But, I suspect, there is something else going on as well. We have so etherealized *Har Habayis* and the *Beis Hamikdash* that we have forgotten that these are real places, not just concepts, and that the Temple really stood on the mount behind the Kosel.

The Gemara at the end of *Makkos* (24b) relates how Rabban Gamliel, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, Rabbi Yehoshua, and Rabbi Akiva came to *Har Habayis*, and they saw a fox emerge from the place where the *Kodesh Hakadashim* had stood. They cried, and Rabbi Akiva laughed. Rabbi Akiva asked them why they cried, and they answered, "Of this place it was said, 'A non-*kohein* who enters will die,' and now foxes walk through it. Should we not cry?"

Today we see before our eyes worse things than foxes walking through the ruins. But we have lost the ability to either laugh or cry. We just don't care.

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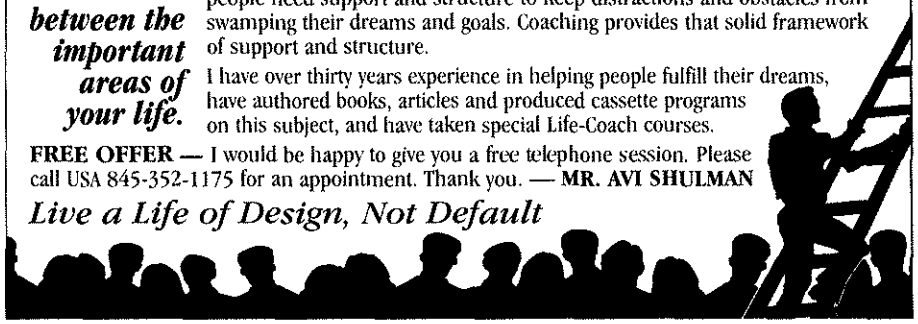

RABBI SHLOMO LORINCZ
PREPARED FOR PUBLICATION BY YONOSON ROSENBLUM

Rabbi Lorincz represented Agudath Israel in the Israeli Knesset from 1951-1984, during which time he was an intimate of a number of Torah luminaries of the past half century. The extensive notes that he kept on those meetings serve as the basis of this article on his relationship with Harav *Hagaon*, Rabbi Elazar Menachem Man Shach זצ"ל who served as the Ponovezher *Rosh Hayeshiva* from 1951 until his *petira* (passing) in 2001/5762.

Rabbi Elazar Menachem Man SHACH

FOREVER AVAILABLE FOR ANY AND ALL

Rabbi Shach felt that a person could only be considered a *gadol* if he possessed a finely developed character. He practiced what he preached. Despite being thoroughly engrossed in Torah study, he managed to be a *ba'al chessed* of the highest order. *Hagaon hatzaddkik* Rav Yechezkel Levenstein, *Mashgiach* of Ponevezh, once called Rabbi Shach, "the greatest *ba'al chessed* of our generation" (*Shimusha shel Torah*). And Rav Chatzkel was known never to exaggerate to the slightest degree. The reminiscences recorded here all relate to this aspect of the *Rosh Yeshiva*.

"HEFKEIR FOR KLAL YISROEL'S BENEFIT"

Tzvi Eisenstein of Yeshivas Tiferes Tzion once excused himself for burdening Rabbi Shach with his problems. Rabbi Shach took his hand in his own, and said, "For seventy years, I was engrossed only in Torah study. Now I am past 83. I have already celebrated a bar mitzvah since living out the years described by the verse, 'The days of our years among them are seventy years' (*Tehillim* 90,9). Since *Hashem* has allowed me to continue living, I declare myself *hefkeir* (ownerless property that anyone can take) for *Klal Yisroel's* use."

When Rabbi Shach's vision deteriorated to the point that he could barely study, he was very demoralized. But when his personal doctor asked him if he wanted to continue living, Rabbi Shach answered, "I want to continue living because people still come to seek my advice."

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS A DAY

People often knocked on Rabbi Shach's door at two o'clock in the morning, well after the family had gone to sleep. Rabbi Shach would open the door and usher in the visitor. When people asked him why received visitors at such unearthly hours, he explained, "My uncle, Isser Zalman Meltzer, taught me to make myself available 24 hours a day. Rav Isser Zalman felt compelled to open the door when people knocked in the middle of the night because it was impossible to know who the visitor was. Perhaps it is a brokenhearted Jew, desperate for some help. It is worth opening the door on that off chance."

At one stage in his life, the family hung a sign on the door stating that Rabbi Shach would not be seeing people that day. Rabbi Shach noticed that there were less visits than usual, and asked why. When family members explained that there was a sign on the door warding people off, Rabbi Shach went to the door to take down the sign. "I do not set limits. Anyone is allowed to come in to see me, whether or not I feel well," he declared.

If a visitor happened to arrive while Rabbi Shach was eating, he would immediately take a break to meet with the visitor. The family had no choice but to make sure that no one entered the house while Rabbi Shach ate, so that he could finish his meals in peace.

RABBI ROSENBLUM, WHO LIVES IN JERUSALEM, IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR TO *THE JEWISH OBSERVER*.

NO CONVALESCENCE HOME

I once noticed that Rabbi Shach looked like he was exerting himself to the point that it was making him very weak. I asked if everything was all right, and he admitted that he was pushing himself to the limit. I knew that he would never agree to go to a rest home. So I offered to host him in my home for a few days until he could recuperate. At that time, I lived on Rechov Hashomer in Bnei Brak, an area that was not very inhabited. My house was isolated from the main section of Bnei Brak, and Rabbi Shach would be insulated for a few days from the visitors who kept him busy day and night. "My wife readily agrees with the invitation," I added, "and we would be honored to host the *Rosh Yeshiva*."

"You want me to isolate myself from the public, hidden away so that no one can find me?" Rabbi Shach exclaimed. "I cannot do that. I must be available for people who need my assistance."

On a different occasion, Rabbi Shach returned home after undergoing a serious operation in such pain that he told Rabbi Meir Heizler that he barely had energy to speak. Reb Meir asked, "Can the *Rosh Yeshiva* learn?"

"No," Rabbi Shach replied. "I cannot even move my head."

"If so," asked Rav Meir, "why did the Rosh Yeshiva come home? Why doesn't the *Rosh Yeshiva* go to a convalescence home?"

"I cannot learn," explained Rabbi Shach. "Perhaps one of the girls from Ohr Hachaim or another institution will come to pour out her heart to me. Although I cannot help her in my state, I can at least empathize with her. As long as I can help people, even in the slightest way, it is worth being home."

Rabbi Shach felt that his role required him to be at the public's disposal at all times. In his words, "Maybe some heartbroken person is standing at my door."

"MY DOOR IS ALWAYS OPEN"

I once asked Rabbi Shach, "People come to me all day with requests. I am so busy filling these requests that I do not have any time to myself. I am not looking for time to rest, but I need some time to study Torah. Sometimes, I get so bogged down by visitors that I do not even have enough time to prepare a speech that I must deliver in the Knesset, or review all the material that I need to know to fulfill my duties properly. (At the time, I chaired the Knesset Finance Committee.)

"People come all day one after another," I continued, "and take the little time that I have for myself. In many instances, I am not even the person that they need. Some people who come to me should actually seek help from other public officials, not a Knesset member. Others need an attorney.

"Can I instruct my family to tell people that I am unavailable?" I asked.

Rabbi Shach thought about it for a long time, and finally, with astounding humility, he said, "I cannot rule what should be done in your case. I can only tell you what I do.

"I am also busy. I have to prepare *shiurim*, and I have to learn. I find it extremely difficult to start to learn, and to begin to get involved in the *sugya*, and then someone knocks at my door and I must stop to help them. Nevertheless, I stop.

"You say that some requests should not be brought to you. I am also interrupted frequently by visitors who should not have come to me. Just last night, a woman came to my home and said, 'Rebbi, I want you to teach me briefly the main concepts of *emuna peshuta* (pure faith).'

"I was surprised. Why would a woman come to *me* to teach her something so basic? But I taught it to her anyway, and she thanked me and left.

"Fifteen minutes later she was back. 'Rebbi, I am afraid that I will forget what you taught me, so I brought a notebook and pencil. Can you please write down what you told me?'

"I took the notebook and wrote down what I had taught her. Another quarter of an hour passed by, and she was at my door once again. She was having a hard time reading some of the words, and she was afraid that at some point in the future, she would not understand what I wrote. Could I please clarify for her? I fixed all the words that were unclear, and she thanked me and left.

"Sure enough, she was not gone for long. She kept coming back, and each time I did as she asked. Why? Because I saw that this woman was very nervous, and my attention calmed her nerves. I also figured that by calming her down I was doing her husband a big favor.

"This is my personal approach," concluded Rabbi Shach. "I do not have so much time available, and not everything that comes to me needs my attention. Nevertheless, I give people my time. I cannot decide for you, however. You are a public servant, and you probably have more people coming to you than I do. I cannot rule for you."

Without ruling for me, Rabbi Shach had solved the issue. I walked away from that meeting embarrassed. If the *gadol hador* – whose time was more valuable than anyone else's – had time to deal with a woman who could have requested assistance from any Bais Yaakov teacher, who was I to feel that my visitors were wasting my time?

SERVING THE PUBLIC IS NO EXEMPTION

Rabbi Shach viewed caring for individual members of the community as a crucial part of a public servant's life. "Know that caring for individuals is of primary importance. Never ignore that obligation. Being busy with matters of public significance is not an excuse for overlooking the needs of individuals," he once told me.

A young man came to Rabbi Shach on the night of *bedikas chameitz* to discuss his problems. Rabbi Shach determined that the boy needed professional help. He called R' Shlomo Hoffman of Jerusalem, a well known

Chareidi counselor, and requested that he meet with the boy.

R' Hoffman was shocked, and exclaimed, "I will be happy to meet with him, but on the night of *bedikas chameitz*?"

"Yes," Rabbi Shach answered. "I want you to see him tonight. The boy is going through a major crisis, and we must help him. I am also taking time to talk to him tonight. I will accompany him to Jerusalem to meet with you."

Realizing the seriousness that Rabbi Shach ascribed to the issue, Reb Shlomo agreed to meet with the boy, but on one condition. "I do not want the Rosh Yeshiva to make the trip to Jerusalem. Let the boy come here by himself."

The boy reached R' Hoffman's home at midnight, and they spoke until 2:00 a.m. When the boy walked out, R' Hoffman saw Rabbi Shach waiting downstairs for him. R' Hoffman ran down and asked, "I thought that we agreed that Rav Shach would not come. Why did the *Rosh Yeshiva* come?"

Rabbi Shach's answer transcends words. Only the heart can appreciate his simple explanation: "You do not send your son alone."

Every year before the blowing of the shofar on Rosh Hashana, Rabbi Shach would approach me with a request to do some favor or another for someone. I understood that he felt that the greatest merit for having one's *tekios* accepted by the *Ribbono shel Olam* is doing an act of *chessed* for one's fellow man.

PERSONALLY MAKING THE TREK TO JERUSALEM

A *kollel* student was offered two teaching jobs - one in his home town of Bnei Brak and one in Jerusalem. He came to ask Rabbi Shach which one he should accept. Rabbi Shach requested a few days in which to examine the matter.

When the *avreich* returned a few days later, Rabbi Shach advised him that the Jerusalem offer was better. At the meeting to finalize his appointment, the rosh yeshiva of the Jerusalem yeshiva asked the new *maggid shiur*, "What is your connection to Rabbi Shach?"

"I don't have any special connection," responded the *avreich*. "I only went to ask his advice as to which position to take."

"I cannot believe it!" the rosh yeshiva exclaimed. "Rabbi Shach came down here personally to investigate the terms of our offer. It seems that he did so just to advise you appropriately."

From His Sick Bed

One day, Rabbi Shach was laid up in bed with fever. He was told that a certain young man wanted to speak to him. Rabbi Shach knew the young man, and he knew that his issues were very serious. He immediately got dressed and went down to the street to speak to him.

When Rabbi Shach returned, the members of his household asked him why he had extended himself to such a degree. "We understand that this issue was important, and that the *Rosh Yeshiva* felt that it was important to speak to the young man. But why did the *Rosh Yeshiva* have to go outside with 40 degree (104° Fahrenheit) fever?"

"I was not sure how to help this young man with his problem. But I reasoned that if I were to show some *mesirus nefesh* for the cause, *Hashem* would help me find a solution to the problem," Rabbi Shach explained.

Here, too, every additional word is extraneous. This story is so incredible. Only someone completely infused with a passion for *chessed* and with love for people could be so selfless.

"I Cannot Dance"

At Rabbi Yechezkel Eschayak's daughter's wedding, Rabbi Shach just sat at the side of the hall, and did not join in the dancing. Those in attendance were shocked. Rabbi Shach danced at the wedding of each of his students, and at the wedding of the daughter of his devoted student – who had selflessly cared for him for years – he would not join in the dancing?

"Today a *talmid* told me that the doctors determined that he and his wife would never be able to bear children. I am so distraught for him that I cannot dance," explained Rabbi Shach.

He Gave His Eyes and His Heart

During the first war in Lebanon, Israel suffered a number of casualties each day. While engaged in a Torah discussion with his *talmidim*, Rabbi Shach halted and tears began to stream down his face. "What is going to be? What is going to be? Each day, we sacrifice more Jewish souls. What is going to be?"

Rabbi Shach turned to his *talmidim* and said, "You look at the youngsters in the army as soldiers, but they are really just young children, and each one has a mother who suffers from the loss. *Oy*! What will be?"

Rabbi Shach added some criticism for those responsible for the war. "The blame lies with the arrogant officials who decided, of their accord, to go into Lebanon. When the Jewish nation was at the height of its glory, the king would only go to war with the consent of the Sanhedrin and the *Urim Vetumim*. Nowadays, a few haughty officials are willing to make such weighty decisions on their own."

Peacemaker

Once, some horrible rumors were spread about a *talmid* that had recently become engaged, and the bride's family was considering breaking the engagement. As soon as Rabbi Shach heard about the rumors, he traveled to Tel Aviv to the future father-in-law. "I came to wish you Mazal Tov, and to tell you that you are getting a really special son-in-law," he told the man, and then began to list the groom's good qualities. By the time Rabbi Shach left, the issue had been laid to rest.

Rabbi Shach devoted much time to helping people maintain or restore *shalom bayis* (marital harmony).

Rabbi Shach instructed a newlywed student, "Make sure to come home with a smile, and leave home with a smile."

In his eulogy for Rabbi Shach, Harav *Hagaon* Rav Shmuel Berenbaum, *Rosh Yeshiva* of Mirrer Yeshiva in New York, recalled Rabbi Shach's devotion to marital harmony:

"Rabbi Shach was the matchmaker for a certain couple, and many years later, they were undergoing a stormy phase in their marriage. For more than two years, Rabbi Shach regularly traveled to their home to restore peace between the couple. When I tell people this story, they have a hard time believing it. Rabbi Shach was not a young man at the time, but he made the difficult trip anyway. Only someone who appreciates Rabbi Shach's greatness can understand this story."

Chessed: A Sugya to Study

Rabbi Shach was engrossed in Torah at all times, and the nitty-gritty details of daily life were far from his mind. But that was only true of his own needs. His approach to the needs of others was exactly the opposite. He could focus on the smallest details, as if those details pertained to a difficult *sugya* in *Bava Kamma*.

When a new family moved into his neighborhood from Jerusalem, Rabbi Shach knocked on their door to provide them with some "important" information: In Bnei Brak, unlike Jerusalem, chickens were unavailable on Friday, so they should make sure to purchase chickens on Wednesday or Thursday.

Harav Feivel Steinberg told me that after his engagement, he arranged to study with his younger brother-in-law. Several days later, Rabbi Shach came over to him and said, "You should not learn with your brother-in-law. He has to learn with boys his age, or he will lose his relationship with his friends."

Rabbi Shach's concern for the wellbeing of others not only inspired him to surmount difficulties of age, weakness, or inconvenience. He also overcame barriers of convention, when necessary, to help others avoid painful circumstances that they would not even anticipate, so strong was his identification with the needs of others.

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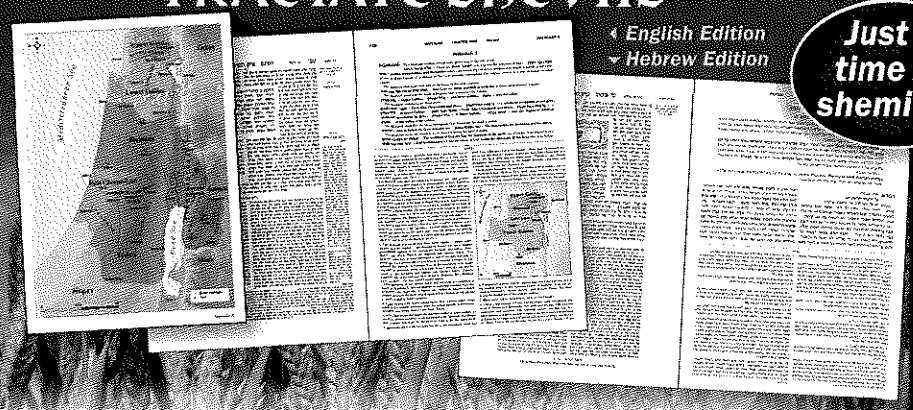

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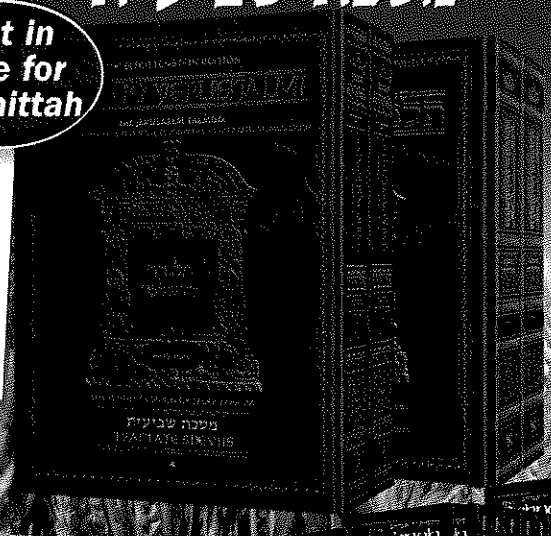

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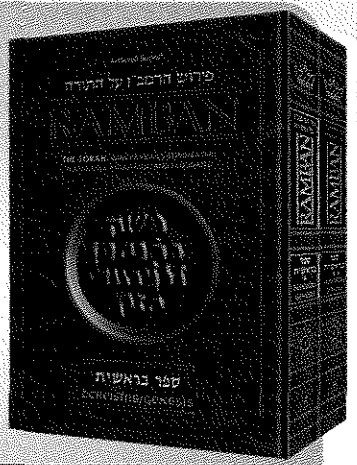

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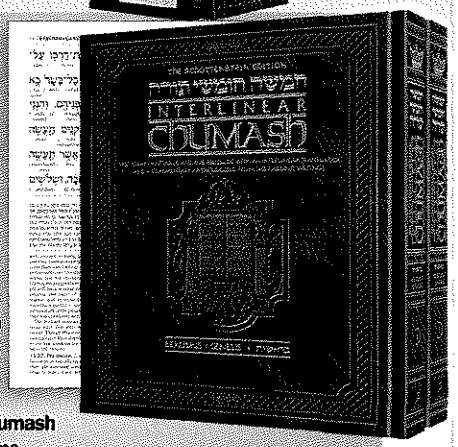

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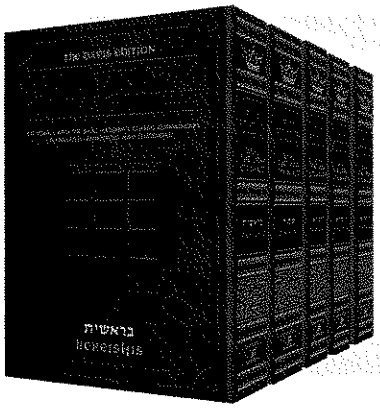

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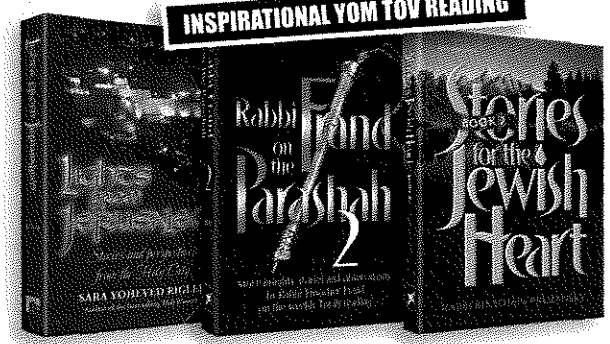

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