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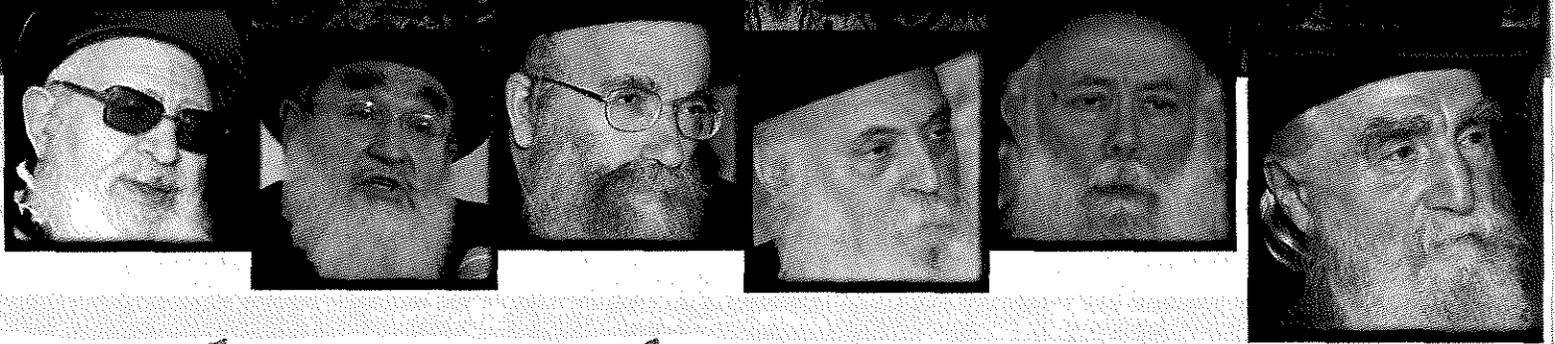
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CHOOSING PRIORITIES

**SPIRITUALITY
VS. CAREER
ADVANCEMENT**

**ALSO: LETTER FROM JERUSALEM –
GROWING PAINS, YONOSON ROSENBLUM**

**MISHENICHNAS ADAR... A TIME FOR JOY:
ESSAYS BASED ON SHIURIM BY RABBI NACHMAN BULMAN זצ"ל
AND RABBI CHAIM PINCHAS SCHEINBERG שליט"א**



The Eternal Jewish Family (EJF) — Preserving Kedushas Mishpachas Yisroel

Before EJF

Intermarriage and Assimilation

The soaring rate of intermarriage in North America continues unabated. 71% of America's non-Orthodox Jews intermarry. While most of the Jews who intermarry are lost to the Jewish nation forever, a significant number of these intermarried Jews wish to remain part of the Jewish people.

The Decision — Couples Who Choose Judaism

In these cases, both the Jew and the non-Jewish spouse resolve to raise their family as Jewish. **20% of intermarried non-Jews will undergo fraudulent or problematic conversions.** This exercise will have little or no halachic significance but will create untold consequences for the family and for Klal Yisroel.

The Tragedy —

When Families Discover They're Not Jews

In communities throughout America, this "new Jewish family" including the Jewish spouse, the newly converted husband or wife and their children are being absorbed into the local Jewish community. Some of these children, products of a problematic *geyrus*, may even end up in the local Jewish day school. With a Jewish surname, the odds of acceptance are in their favor. This child can potentially go on to a yeshiva or seminary and marry a Jewish girl or boy.

But then something happens: A child tries to marry someone in Israel or the truth comes to light by chance or through research — a family learns that they have been living a big lie: their conversion is not universally accepted and they begin the pursuit of a legitimate and recognized *geyrus*.

The Lone Rabbi — Carrying the Torch

In most cases, there is a good chance that in search of a universally accepted *geyrus*, the intermarried couple will find their way to a kiruv organization or an individual rav (and perhaps his rebbeztin) who will meticulously guide them through the process of *geyrus*. Their first order of business, of course, will be to investigate the sincerity of the interest, as is dictated by halacha. Many of these rabbonim then find themselves literally under siege and in need of an organization that would help guide them and their charges through the process.

*noted Lomzer Rav Chelek Vov — Siman 19, and Rav Yosef Sholom Elyashiv — Kovetz Tshuvos end of Siman 140. In addition Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky and Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach have all made statements on *geyrus* in support of these positions. A recent letter from Rav Yitzchak Zilberstein quoted his father-in-law Rav Elyashiv which echoes this position on the subject.*

The Mission —

Universal Conversion Standards in Intermarriage
EJF's mission is to help preserve the sanctity of the Jewish people by ensuring that the conversion process for intermarried non-Jews will proceed in the strictest accord with the dictates of halacha — without compromise — as directed by the leading Torah authorities of our time. Thus, EJF has striven mightily to promote the adoption of



Enter EJF

The Baal Teshuva and the Ger — The Halachic Imperative

Fully cognizant of the many pitfalls and complex halachic issues involved in intermarriage conversion, and with careful and deliberate consideration of the sensitive nature of this issue, the Eternal Jewish Family was founded in 2005 with the encouragement and support of many leading Torah authorities, for the express purpose of helping safeguard the sanctity of the Jewish people.

Conversions in an intermarried context are different from ordinary conversions, which, as is well known, should be discouraged, according to halacha. In the case of an intermarried couple, it involves a Jewish spouse who is committed to becoming a fully observant Jew and a non-Jewish spouse who is prepared to become a sincere and fully observant convert. Leading Torah authorities (see below) have said this is a phenomenon that *must be responsibly addressed* and not left to those involved in "revolving door" conversions that will ultimately have such profound consequences for the individuals and their families as well.

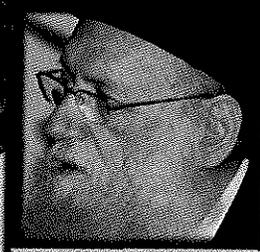
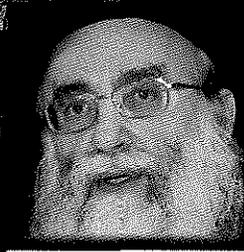
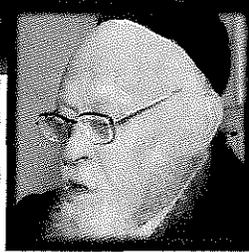
Sources: Tshuvos Harambam — Peer Hador 132, Rav Shlomo Kluger, Rav Chaim Ozer — 3rd volume of Tshuvos Achiezer 28, Igros Moshe — 3rd Chelek of Yoreh Deah, Siman 109t, Rav Shalom Mashash — Tshuvos Tvuot Shemesh {Yoreh Deah 104}, Tshuvos Divrei Malkiel —

universally accepted standards for conversion, both in terms of substantive guidelines for the conversions themselves and the credentials of the Beis Din that will be making the crucial judgments as to their implementation in particular cases. In addition, by promulgating these guidelines, EJF protects sincere and genuine converts from fraudulent and problematic conversions that will haunt them for generations to come.

The Policy —

The Piskei Halacha of Torah Luminaries

The halachic policies of the *Eternal Jewish Family* are based on the pesakim of such luminaries as Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l, yb"l Rav Yosef Sholom Elyashiv and leading Sephardic authorities in Eretz Yisroel. In addition, EJF has brought together the foremost rabbinic leaders from across the spectrum, including Roshei Yeshiva, Chasidic leaders, and leading rabbonim from the Ashkenazic and Sephardic communities in setting standards for a universally accepted conversion in the context of intermarriage. They include Harav Reuven Feinstein, and Harav Shmuel Lazer Stern, a senior dayan of the Beis Din of Harav Shmuel Vosner. The EJF Vaad Harabbonim, chaired by Harav Leib Tropper, Rosh Hayeshiva of Kol Yaakov/Horizons, includes such well known halachic authorities as Harav Aharon Felder, Harav Nachum Eisenstein (Beis Din of Va'ad L'Inyonei Giyur, Yerushalayim) Harav Yaakov Kapelner, Harav Pinchas Rabinowitz and Harav Mendel Sendrovic.



EJF: Serving the Frontline Rabbonim and Dayanim
EJF's programs are designed to support the efforts of rabbonim and dayanim who are involved in the conversion of non-Jewish spouses in intermarriage who sincerely commit to a conversion process that meets the highest standards of halacha, without compromise. EJF organizes rabbinic conferences, halachic forums, and dayanim seminars in cities throughout North America. In addition, a major conference was held in Yerushalayim in June 2006. These conferences were blessed with the participation of some of the most prominent Gedolei Yisroel from all over the world.

The conferences gave the rabbonim an opportunity to hear many halachic presentations on universal conversion standards in intermarriage, including the issues of kabbalos ol mitzvos, havchono, ger koton and more. EJF serves as an ongoing resource for the rabbonim and dayanim and as a network for the exchange of information and experiences. It also facilitates the transmission of important shailos to the Gedolei Hatorah of our generation.

EJF: Assisting Rabbonim

EJF works **only** through rabbonim and kiruv organizations and **does not** in any way solicit intermarried couples. Rabbonim and kiruv professionals refer couples they are already working with to EJF. In many cases, these couples have already undergone a conversion that is not acceptable. In order to proceed, a couple has to commit to a challenging and demanding conversion process, as is required by halacha. EJF has sponsored a number of programs for couples that are seriously interested in pursuing the halachic process, referred to EJF by rabbonim

or kiruv professionals, in accordance with the wishes of the Gedolei Hatorah.

EJF: Recommending Botei Din

EJF does not and will not set up its own Botei Din. It will, however, recommend Botei Din that subscribe to the goals of EJF in promulgating the guidelines of the foremost halachic authorities in geyrus in intermarriage. The Botei Din must be independent and fully functioning entities that are capable of accepting referrals from rabbonim who live in the region or from EJF itself. These Botei Din are headed by renowned talmidei chachamim versed in all aspects of Shulchan Aruch, including mamonos, ishus, gittin, issur v'heter and Shabbos as well as geyrus. Some of them have interned with such great luminaries as Rav Moshe Feinstein, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, and Rav Yosef Sholom Elyashiv.

EJF Programs at a Glance

- Organizes halachic forums and gatherings to help dayanim, rabbonim and others involved in geyrus
- Publishes and distributes publications and other materials on geyrus in accordance with halacha
- Helps prepare serious, intermarried candidates for conversion who have been referred by rabbonim and kiruv organizations. This is accomplished by providing and supervising mentors who study with the prospective convert. Working with their local rabbi, the candidate learns the necessary halachos required by the Beis Din. Both the Jew and the non-Jewish spouse's commitment to observance is monitored and nurtured in preparation for the conversion.
- On campus programs to fight intermarriage and assimilation.



 **Eternal Jewish Family**
THE LILLIAN JEAN KAPLAN JEWISH PRIDE THROUGH EDUCATION PROJECT

For further information, please contact:
Eternal Jewish Family ■ 845 425 0550 ■ ejf.org ■ info@ejf.org

The Eternal Jewish Family (EJF) is an independent program of Horizons, an internationally recognized institute of Jewish education based in Monsey, New York. It was founded to confront the issues related to the halachically recognized special case of the conversion of the non-Jewish spouse in an intermarriage. The Eternal Jewish Family, is affiliated with Kol Yaakov Torah Center in Monsey, and is funded by the Lillian Jean Kaplan Jewish Pride through Education Project.

EJF's Plans for the Future

1. Fully cognizant that EJF is a program that deals with the after effects of intermarriage, EJF will expand its college campus initiatives worldwide to combat intermarriage before it happens.
2. EJF will be expanding the number of regional Rabbinic liaisons in the coming months.
3. Through newsletters and other planned publications, EJF will continue to expand its efforts to disseminate teshuvos on geyrus from Torah Gedolim of the past and present.

it's a
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(Pele-Yoetz- R. Eliezer Papo zt"l)

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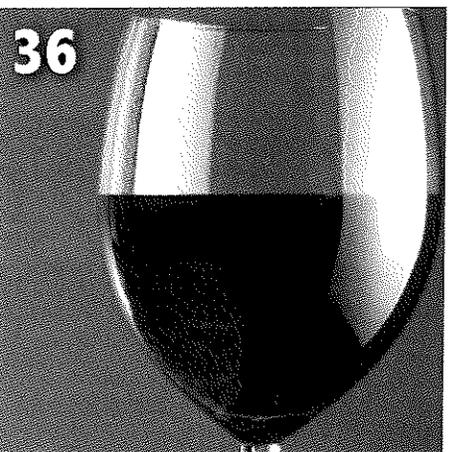
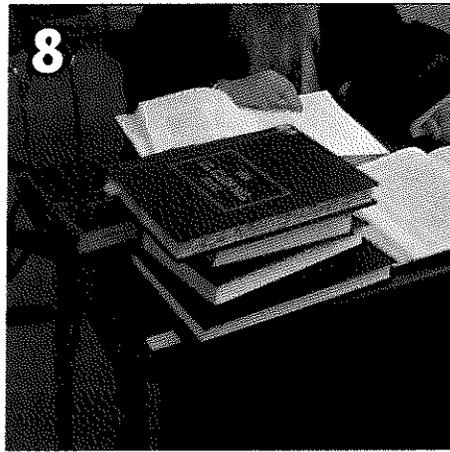
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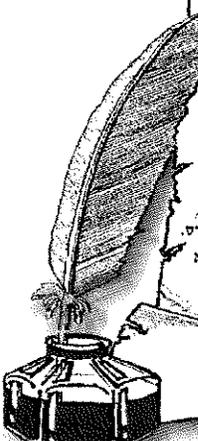
LETTERS OF ENDORSEMENT OF THE OD YOSEF CHAI MATANOS L'EYONIM CAMPAIGN

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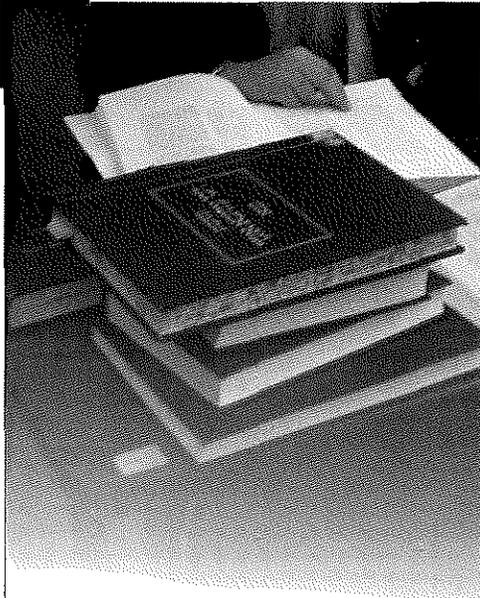
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Ben Torah in the Workplace

Balancing the Challenges, Opportunities & Obligations

ONCE UPON A TIME, there was a fabled job waiting for the *ben Torah* who was prepared to enter the workplace. He (and it was only he in those days) would start working at this job at 9:00AM after a learning *seder*, breakfast with his children, and a minimal commute to and from work. He would be finished working by 5:00PM, after which he would be free to attend to his family, his learning, his health, and communal activities. His work day would be totally self-contained – he would never bring home his work or work-related concerns, and he would be inaccessible to coworkers after hours. He would not be expected to work late, travel for work, work on Sundays, or socialize with co-workers or clients. His income would be sufficient, and he would certainly have no need for a second or third job in his “free” time.

Perhaps these idyllic jobs actually existed and supported the economic needs of a *ben-Torah's* family. They rarely exist now. For many working *bnei Torah*, much of what is described above is a dream. Some of this stems from changes in the workplace, others from changes in expectations and demands upon the family, especially the head of the household. This article discusses these changing demands: How the demands of work can overwhelm other important aspects of life, the value of balancing work and non-work roles, and the steps an individual may consider taking to incorporate more balance into his life.

[The general concerns in this article apply equally, or moreso, to working women, and they also apply to men engaged in *klei kodesh* roles, in many cases. For the sake of brevity and focus, however, the specific examples and frames of reference for this article will be primarily men working in secular occupations.]

RABBI MAEL IS THE AUTHOR OF *SEFER SHIVTEI YISRAEL*, A STUDY OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TWELVE TRIBES BASED ON CHAZAL AND LATER SEFARIM. HIS PREVIOUS ARTICLE IN *JO* WAS “OF UNIQUENESS AND UNITY: AN APPRECIATION OF REB TZADOK OF LUBLIN” (JUNE 2000). HE PRACTICES AS AN ORGANIZATIONAL CONSULTANT AND EXECUTIVE LIFE COACH.

THE CHANGING WORK WORLD

The world of work has changed drastically over the past few decades. The global economy has fostered an intensely competitive work environment that puts a premium on individuals, justifying their contributions to their employers by working longer and harder. The sheer number of hours per week that Americans work has risen steadily over this time, from 43.6 hours per week in 1977 to 47.1 in 1997.¹ This does not include (possibly extensive) commuting time. In addition, advances in information technology such as cell phones, email, and PDAs have contributed to employees being accessible at all times with little freedom from the demands and expectations of clients or supervisors. The result has been an increase in numerous indicators of stress, even among secular workers, who generally have fewer competing family, religious, and communal demands than ever before. These indicators include rises in workplace violence, absenteeism, and workers' compensation claims. National studies show that well over two-thirds of workers feel that job stress is affecting their health.² Furthermore, a wide range of physical ailments, emotional problems, eating disorders, addictions, and mood disorders have been associated with increased work stress and its encroachment on all aspects of life. In addition, the more time required to work in order to get ahead or stay employed, the less time a person will have available for all other aspects of life.

THE ORTHODOX WORKER - MORE, OR LESS, STRESSED?

In some ways, the Orthodox Jewish worker should have some inoculation from these stresses. He has the

1 Bunting, M. (2004), *Willing Slaves: How the Overwork Culture is Ruling our Lives*, Harper Collins.

2 Clark, C. S. "Job Stress." *CQ Researcher*. 4 Aug. 1994. *CQ Researcher*. 1 Mar. 2007 <http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrr1995080400>

potential benefits of a rich community life and the likelihood of seeing friends and acquaintances regularly in shul and at events, access to mentors and rabbanim, the likelihood of marriage with someone sharing similar values about spirituality and having children, Shabbos observance as a built-in safeguard against constant work, and learning Torah as a counterpoint to the obsessive values of the workplace.

And yet – there are countervailing forces that make the demands on the Orthodox Jewish professional, businessman or employee even more daunting than those of his secular counterpart. These fall in the areas of financial expenses, time pressures and internal expectations. The financial demands on members of the community are well-documented and are repeated here only for their impact on work choices and work life. Families are larger, increasing the basic expenses needed to support a family, plus children's private school tuition. Expectations regarding seminary, *shidduchim*, weddings and other norms, such as summer camps or vacation homes, ensure that even the person who wishes to live simply may have to generate money in line with others' expectations. Religious communities tend to congregate in relatively expensive urban areas, and the need for

many homes within walking distance to shuls makes housing even more expensive than in adjoining neighborhoods. This may lead some to move to more affordable communities at the cost of a longer and often grueling commute for the family worker(s).

Regarding time, the Orthodox male is expected to work the same hours as his secular counterpart. However, he is likely to have commuted further; he probably woke up earlier to *daven* and perhaps to learn; he may have more family responsibilities, starting with homework, car pools, and spending time with his greater number of children; he has many more joyous and other occasions to attend (weddings, *sheva berachos*, shiva calls, *bar mitzvahs*, etc.) than his counterparts; he must somehow fit the errands that others do on Saturdays into his evening hours; and he has an internal obligation to be learning and doing other mitzvos in his "spare" time. The Orthodox male often marries earlier and starts working later (in some cases, much later) in life than his secular counterpart, so that his career often starts when he already has debts, is pressured to cover tuitions, or needs larger housing. In his fifties and sixties, he may have an "empty nest" at a later age than his secular counterparts. Even when he does, it will be a mirage, as he is likely

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on time.



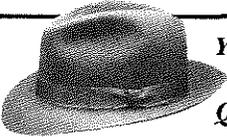
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to be continuing to provide significant support to married children. Thus, the pressure to work full time lasts longer, and the period of working for a "nest egg" is often deferred indefinitely.

The result is that many individuals, despite their valiant efforts to do everything right and to do right by everyone in their lives, feel overwhelmed. They feel that they come up short in many areas. They may perceive their employers or competitors as faulting their lack of single-minded devotion to work, or they may feel themselves torn between work and competing demands. They may feel the disdain of those within their communities, expecting them to have more money for charity pledges, tuition, and *shidduch*-related commitments. They may carry a nagging sense of not learning enough, not doing enough, and not helping enough in the community. They feel a lack of time to rest, to eat properly, to exercise, or to lose weight, and so physical and mental health suffer. They may have a vague, or not so vague, sense of not spending enough time with their spouses or children. And when an actual or perceived family crisis occurs, there may be little resilience left to weather the storm.

Other articles and discussions have focused on specific community-wide issues, such as the costs of making weddings, the costs of tuition compared to typical incomes, and the mismatch between incomes and the expectations tied to *shidduchim*. These issues are beyond the scope of this article and

somewhat beside the point, as the focus here is on the individual's need to try to take control of his own life, his own schedule, and his own *tachlis* (destiny). He is responsible within the limits of his own *nisyonos* to manage the quality of his life and health on a daily basis. This article is for the individual who, in spite of these pressures, wishes to reassert some balance between work and life, and not allow work and the obsessive pursuit of *parnassa* to drown out the ability to make choices.

**WHAT IS WORK-
 LIFE BALANCE?**

The concept of work-life balance is admittedly vague and does not have a universally accepted definition. It generally conveys a sense of having sufficient time to meet commitments both at home and at work, and a perceived balance between work and the rest of life. The concept will have different connotations to a secular audience, for whom it may mean balancing achievement and enjoyment, or parceling out life into various areas of achievement, enjoyment and leisure. A Torah perspective does not view a wide range of leisure pursuits as an ideal or necessity. What can be said is that a person will not thrive on spending almost all his time involved only in activities that are merely a means to an end, such as earning money to buy products or services. A person needs to spend time regularly, if not daily, on activities that matter intrinsically, such as spiritual pursuits or relationships. A person is also likely to benefit from activities that refresh and rejuvenate the body and mind, be they exercise, sleep or any other needed relaxation.

Realistic balance does not have to mean a set schedule in which one always has a daily allotted time for all these activities. Trying to advocate such an approach would be naive for some professions that have especially busy seasons or periods, or for anyone who has an irregular schedule. Balance is more of an attitude, a mindset of making choices.



WHERE TO BEGIN

If you (or others you care about) are beset by this sense of a life in imbalance, a life overly dominated by work, one in which there seems to be no time for the things that matter, there are a number of steps to take.

1. You need to evaluate regularly what your priorities in life are and should be. This means *your personal priorities*, not those of your boss, your parents, your friends, or the magazine or flyer on your table. You need to ask yourself: How would you wish to spend your time? Granted that you may have to spend much of your time doing work or other activities that you would rather not do – but what are your priorities among the discretionary activities?
2. Then, evaluate the time that you are allotting to activities now in relation to whether or not they are consistent with your priorities. If something is a stated priority (learning, exercise, talking to your children) and you are not finding time for it, then either it is not really a priority, or there is likely a mismatch between your values and your allotment of time.
3. Acknowledge that time is precious and is finite. If you add activities and commitments to your schedule, they will come at the expense of something else. If you are fortunate, you will find that you were wasting some time and that the new priorities can be fit in by being more efficient. If you were already being efficient, then sadly, you will have to make hard choices between bigger and smaller priorities.
4. Making choices means that you will sometimes have to say *no* – sometimes to others and sometimes to your self (“I can’t do everything”). Sometimes you will have to choose between very important options: the act of choosing is a way of fully honoring commitments and priorities rather than pursuing a series of halfhearted ones, and sometimes misleading yourself and others.

SPECIFIC AREAS OF BALANCE

The following section presents a brief overview of how to take a work-life balance approach to different areas of life. Each of these is worthy of an article in and of itself. Not everyone will find that they need to add elements of every category into their lives. Rather, every individual needs to think about what would be useful to incorporate into his regimen to add more balance.

WORK

Often, your first response in an imbalanced work-life situation is that you have no choice but to work as much as you do. That may very well be true. You may already be

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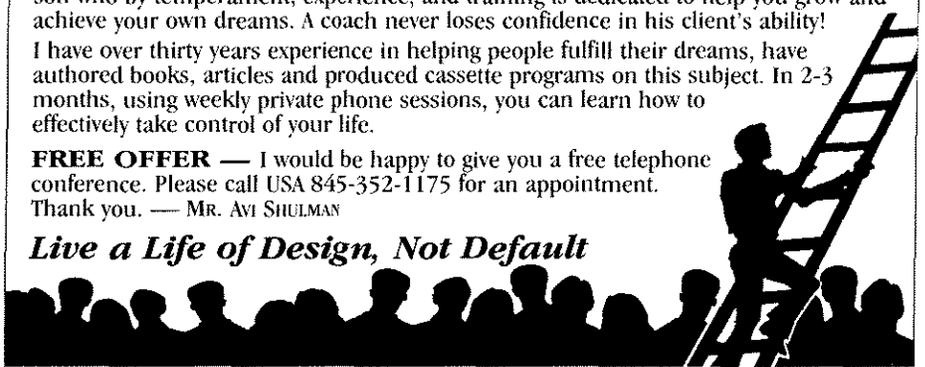
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working the minimum time required of you as an employee, and it still takes too much out of you. Or you may objectively have too much to do for the allotted hours of the workday, and then must work additional hours. If these are the realities of your life, you will have to find solutions from within your discretionary hours. This, however, is not always the case. Your workday may be artificially long and adding unnecessary pressure to the rest of your life. Consider these other possible reasons for your

current state of overwork:

Inefficiency: You may be spending too much time on email, surfing the Internet, or allowing coworkers to waste your time (in ways that are not constructive for networking or team-building). You may have some control over lengthy and unproductive meetings in your workplace that you could streamline or eliminate. Determine if there are ways that you could get more accomplished within the confines of the work day.

Leadership style: You may be prone to micromanaging your subordinates, and reluctant to delegate responsibility and tasks. Besides being demoralizing to your staff, it makes your day much longer, and ties you that much more tightly to your place of work. Determine if you are willing to learn to delegate and trust your employees.

Commuting: Are there ways that you and your workplace could be in closer proximity? If not, determine if your employer (who may be you) can find ways for you to work more often from a home or local office.

Beliefs: Some people take the patterns of *hasmada* they learned in yeshiva and misapply them to the workplace. Whatever they do, they must give themselves over to it completely. For others, the same competitive drive that spurred them to be *masmidim* drives them to keep up with their all-work, all-the-time workplace colleagues. Still others become workaholics and find that they feel most accomplished and alive in the workplace and are most at home in that milieu. If you are working all the time, really don't want to work less, and are mainly feeling pressured by others who want you to work less, it is important to understand what is going on. It is understandable that the sense of success, of making deals, of recognition and of tangible and measurable achievement could be thrilling. You need to be alert to your potential, creeping isolation from your spouse, family, Jewish friends, Jewish values, and learning, and to monitor your larger priorities.

LEARNING

A Jewish man is not only required to learn, he *needs* to learn on a deep intellectual, spiritual, and emotional level. Whatever learning one can fit into one's life is certainly a priceless mitzvah. Your learning choices, however, can affect whether your learning will be a source of rejuvenation and an antidote to workplace stresses, or

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Simcha Guidelines

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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- The total cost of these items for the entire wedding should not exceed \$1,800.

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whether it will be yet another source of frustration and another competing demand at which you barely or hardly succeed. Consider these contrasting examples:

Shlomo loves his Daf Yomi shiur in the morning. He enjoys the maggid shiur's breadth and wit, the chabura's camaraderie, and the pace and level of discussion are attuned to his experience. He leaves the shiur feeling supercharged for the day. Because he has enough time to review on the train, he feels he is retaining information.

Chaim is frustrated by his Daf Yomi shiur. He usually attends, but is often too tired or confused to follow the shiur (especially when he has missed a few days). He has no rapport with the maggid shiur, has no time for chazara, and doesn't really feel he has been mesayeim any one masechta. He keeps attending instead of setting up a seder with a chavrusa because he is afraid that with his busy schedule, if he gives up this kevius, he won't learn at all.

Optimally, you should be periodically evaluating if the learning schedule and content that you have established for yourself is fulfilling your goals and priorities. This means asking the following questions;

- What do I hope to accomplish in learning?
- What are my priorities in terms of knowing, remembering, or just enjoying immersion in learning?
- Does my schedule allow for structured learning in one place with others (*shiurim*, face-to-face *chavrusos*), or do I need a more flexible format?
- Will I find the areas and formats of learning that I wish to emphasize sufficiently engrossing and compelling enough so that I will persevere in them despite my busy schedule, or am I engaging in wishful thinking that will result in less learning and more frustration?

You have many sources of advice available to you on these issues, but ultimately you must take the initiative to structure your learning schedule so that it will be congruent with and enhancing to your current situation and beyond.

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RELATIONSHIPS

The importance of maintaining and cultivating relationships with one's spouse and children, as well as with other family members, goes well beyond the scope of this article, and need not be reiterated here.

One issue that affects some busy men immersed in their careers is their unintended detachment from friends. Unlike their secular counterparts, many Orthodox men do not schedule any social time with friends. With the exception of *chavrusas*, they usually see friends at chance meetings in the presence of others, often beginning and ending at a moment's notice, such as in shul or at a *simcha*. As a busy working person in the secular world, you may find yourself gradually slipping out of touch with other *bonei Torah*. It becomes problematic when you have no one to use as a like-minded frame of reference, or when the people you most often confide in are the secular men (and sometimes women) in your workplace. If you see this happening and it concerns you, consider it a warning sign of alienation, which calls for making time to correct by reaching out to *chaveirim*.

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We are a wonderfully blessed community to have so many *se'machos* going on throughout the year. Living in a larger community, you may be invited to multiple such events on any given night, as well as the fundraising banquets, parlor meetings, and other similar activities. You are likely affiliated with numerous worthy *mosdos* whose meetings, banquets, parlor meetings and other activities vie for your time. Hopefully, you want to be *me'urav im habriyos* and do your part to help the community. Still, be aware: Each time you choose to go to an event, you are choosing *not* to do something else.

Saying that you *have* to go to an event does not generally make it less of a choice. Sometimes the choice may be less dramatic: If your whole family is invited to a family *simcha* on a Sunday afternoon, you may have a relatively painless choice. If, however, on a Tuesday night you have to choose between a wedding, a parlor meeting, a *chavrusa*, homework with your children, and exercising, you are being forced to set priorities. (Some mistakenly think that in this example there are only two choices, the wedding or the parlor meeting, because the others can all be made up. There is a fallacy in that logic that can repeat itself endlessly night after night.) Once again, these are decisions that *you* make, not situations that are forced upon you.

EXERCISE

Physical health often takes a back seat for the busy working *ben Torah*. Sedentary lifestyles and rushed schedules leave little time for exercise, and the outlets for male-only adult exercise are very limited in some communities. A sedentary lifestyle exacerbated by excessive, rushed and stress-generated eating can lead to obesity and obesity-aggravated illnesses, including diabetes and cardiovascular ailments. Beyond the purely physical benefits of exercise, it is likely to provide you with positive mood benefits, relaxation of

stress, or other salutary advantages that would actually provide you with more time and energy for other activities. Seek guidance regarding the type of exercise that would fit your schedule, be best suited for you, and be sufficiently enjoyable to maintain your interest.

LIFE-WORK IMBALANCE

This article has focused almost exclusively on imbalance coming from work encroaching on other areas of life. It is worth noting briefly that the reverse can also be a problem for some people. You may have taken on so many family and communal roles and responsibilities, ones that may in fact provide you with more satisfaction, that you now find yourself devoting insufficient time to your *parnassa* efforts, or even shortchanging your responsibilities to an employer and endangering your livelihood. Or the boundaries between your work time and family time may have slowly evaporated so that you are dealing with regular interruptions in the midst of trying to do good work. When imbalance works the other way, boundaries often need to be reestablished, both for yourself and for others. *Parnassa* should not be taken for granted.

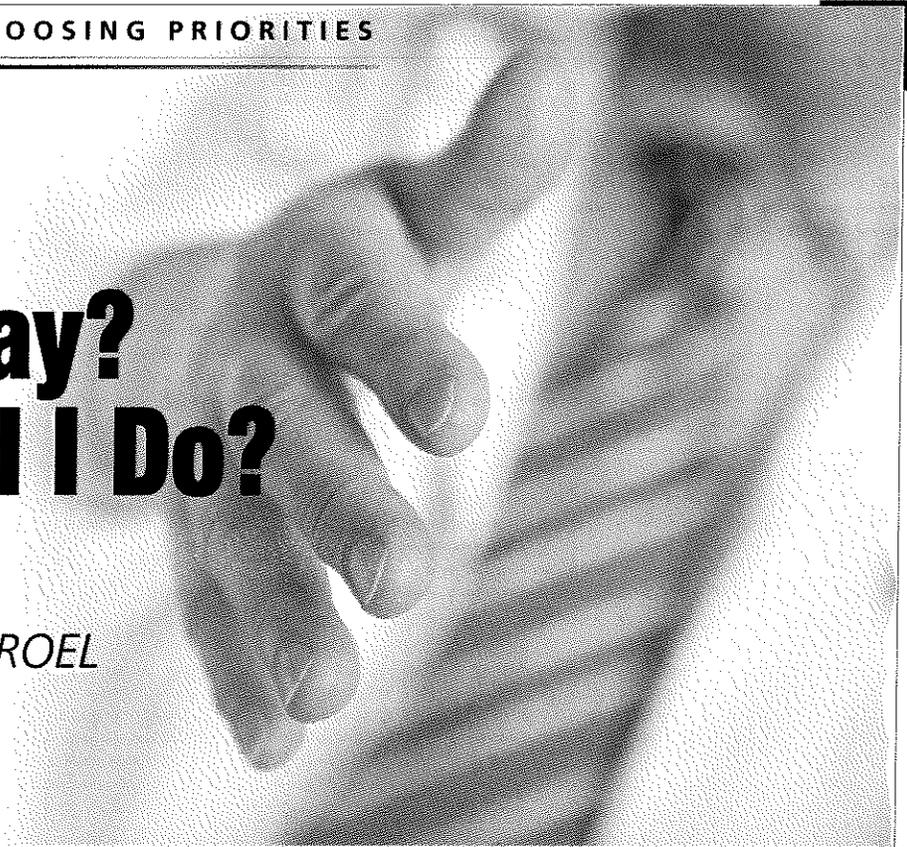
ULTIMATE GOALS

Many working *bonei Torah* live noble and often courageous lives. Performing demanding jobs structured for the lifestyles of people with fewer external responsibilities, they perform admirably, while also dedicating themselves to *tefilla betzibbur*, regular learning, caring for large families, and the needs of many institutions. Sometimes, though, despite one's best efforts, the demands become oppressive, and *simchas hachayim* or *menuchas hanefesh* suffers. In those times, it is important to reestablish some balance in one's life and to reassert one's priorities. One wants to continue to grow and thrive rather than simply persevering. One wants to continue to be a *ben aliya*. □

RIFKA SCHONFELD

What Do I Say? What Should I Do?

CHALLENGES FOR THE
BEN TORAH AND *BAS YISROEL*
IN THE WORKPLACE



ONCE ASKED a highly respected *talmid chacham* who also happens to be an attorney about the challenges he faces in the workplace. I'll never forget what he answered me. "Challenges? In the workplace? Are you kidding? The moment you step onto that subway platform, the challenges begin. And they don't end. Ever. No matter how many years you've been working, no matter how high you've climbed up the corporate ladder, no matter how many guidelines you've set for yourself. It's a never ending series of *nisyonos* – challenges and tests."

Yet, despite the inherent difficulties and struggles that come with working in the secular environment, many members of our community are forced into that position. Some are women who are trying to help support their *kollel* lifestyles, some are young people who tried to gain employment in *mosdos haTorah* but couldn't find a job, and some are *bnei Torah* who joined the workforce simply because they desperately needed the *parnassa* and there was no other alternative. While they are all certainly relieved to have discovered a viable source of income, they are also aware of the many pitfalls and dangers that come together with the package. We have been especially reluctant for our women to engage in employment in non-religious or totally alien surroundings. It is these types of situations that I will be addressing in the pages that follow.

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STEPPING IN WITH CHANIE

Chanie, a Bais Yaakov graduate, recently earned her degree from an all women's college. Eager to help support her learning husband, she accepted a position in a prestigious law firm. Chanie faced the first day on the job with great expectations. She was looking forward to being an asset to the company. But not ten minutes into her first day, she ran into "big challenge number one," which presented itself as her co-worker, Michael.

"Nice to meet you," the young man said. "My name's Michael. Welcome aboard." And with that, he extended his hand warmly, expecting a firm handshake.

"Oh, no," Chanie panicked. "What do I do now?"

Welcome to the outside world, Chanie. You grew up in a *heimishe* community and you were educated in the Bais Yaakov system all your life. You did well – in fact, you even excelled. But now you find yourself on what appears to be a different planet. In this nine-to-five workplace, you are confronted with

a whole different set of rules. The secular workmates that you will meet – some Jewish, some not – are generally polite, well meaning, and friendly. But they represent a different culture, and the clash between the two worlds can be the source of some awkward moments and unpleasant situations.

So what's Chanie to do? The Michael challenge is only the beginning, of course. Sooner or later, Chanie will have to deal with the power lunch, the shmoozing by the water cooler, the offers for rides, and, of course, the annual office holiday party. She can handle each of these situations one by one as they arise, hoping that the correct responses will pop into her head at the right moments. Or she could prepare herself ahead of time by consulting halachic authorities, *frum* professionals, or others who have encountered similar challenges and issues.

FOREWARNED IS FOREARMED

I firmly believe that forewarned is forearmed. A person who knows what to expect ahead of time and prepares for those awkward moments in advance is better able to deal with them when the opportunity arises. Otherwise, you're almost guaranteed to make mistakes.

In my Brooklyn office, I spend a lot of time on social skills training for the yeshiva community. Many of our youngsters lack the basic social skills they need to maintain healthy interpersonal relationships. But even those who breeze through their formative years, even the "social butterfly," the "chevra-man," the "bubbly young lady," and the "geshmake yungerman" find themselves having a hard time adapting to the social atmosphere in the secular workplace. Here, there is a completely different set of rules. Even the language that is spoken can be shockingly unfamiliar to a *ben Torah* or a *bas Yisroel*, adding to the confusion and the anxiety that he or she is experiencing.

I would venture to suggest that some of our "kosher" institutions of higher education should offer social skills

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It never occurred to Chani that she would one day have to rein in her warm, outgoing nature and present herself in a different light. It also never occurred to her that she would become a full-time emissary of her community, her every move being watched and considered by those around her.

training for *bnei Torah* and *bnos Yisroel* in the workplace. I am not familiar with anyone who is offering such a service at this time, but I do think it would save a lot of young people a lot of aggravation. A little guidance could go a long way in maintaining healthy and halachically correct relationships in the workplace, as well as in creating the proper *kiddush Hashem* we are all striving for.

Many of our young people find they have to reprogram themselves – like Chanie, for instance. She was the class “all-star” – bright, hard working, talented, great personality, impeccable *middos*, etc. It never occurred to her that she would one day have to rein in her warm, outgoing nature and present herself in a different light. It also never occurred to her that she would become a full-time emissary of her community, her every move being watched and considered by those around her.

“It happens all the time,” says Sori, who works in the field of education with a group of non-Jewish colleagues. “You come out of the ladies’ room mumbling the *beracha* of *Asher Yatzar* to yourself, and your co-worker is just staring at you trying to figure out what you’re doing. Or, you have to explain why you are wearing a wig and why you can’t join the office holiday party.”

KEEPING IT SIMPLE

Most of the time, people respect the differences, especially if they are explained calmly and intelligently. Ilana learned quickly that it’s best to keep it simple. “Don’t try to prove yourself to anybody,” she says. “Don’t preach to others about your

lifestyle as if you are some kind of missionary. They don’t want to hear our lengthy *hashkafa* lectures. They’re just curious about some of our customs. If we answer them in a friendly and forthright manner, it shows that we feel they are intelligent enough to understand. It makes a bigger *kiddush Hashem* than you can imagine.”

Many *frum* people in the workforce find that the “silent treatment” is also not productive. “Some of my friends,” says Sori, “would rather avoid the questions and the stares, so they withdraw completely from social interaction with their co-workers. They build an invisible wall around themselves, which people instinctively recognize. That certainly helps reduce the stares and the endless questions, but it also gives an appearance of snobbishness and even arrogance.” Eventually, the new employee becomes a social pariah.

What works best for most people, it seems, is to maintain the proper balance. Be friendly, polite, open, and helpful – but never cross over the invisible line in the sand, the one that says we’re different.

**MORE SERIOUS,
MORE COMPLEX**

When it comes to inter-gender social situations, the issues are more serious and much more complex. There are stringent halachos that dictate virtually every conceivable situation. There are also a number of excellent publications (I recommend “Nine to Five: A Guide to Modest Conduct for Today’s Workplace,” by Rabbi Shmuel Neiman) which deal with

a wide range of topics such as *yichud*, office chatter, *tzeniut*, and, of course, the ubiquitous handshake. Once again, a course on proper speech and behavior would prove invaluable. As far as I am aware, no such class exists. Therefore, those who are entering the workforce would be well advised to consult with a *rav* privately, and to be prepared and educated well in advance of the first day at the office.

Even in these areas, open communication works best. “I walked in to my boss’s office on my first day at work,” says Avi, “and I explained to him the various rules I was committed to living by. Yes, I ran the risk of being fired right then and there. After all, who needs a new employee if he comes with so many ‘issues’? But my boss appreciated my candor and respected my beliefs. He knew what he was dealing with, come what may. And as for me, I felt I had covered as many awkward scenarios that I could possibly foresee. No surprises would await me.” In the end, Avi had a long and productive relationship with his boss and spent fifteen years with that firm.

THIS TIME, SHE KNOWS

Open communication. Forthrightness. Intelligent responses. Advanced preparation. These are the elements that make that transition into the “outside world” easier. Now let’s review the original scenario. This time, Chanie knows what to expect and has come to work well prepared. When Michael introduces himself, he holds out his hand expecting a warm handshake in return.

This time, Chanie doesn’t panic. She smiles sweetly and politely says, “It’s nice to meet you. My name is Chanie. Sorry, but I don’t shake hands for religious reasons.” End of conversation. Michael may be taken aback for a moment, but he’ll respect Chanie’s space and will know better next time. Congratulations, Chanie. Your first day at work, and already you made your very own *kiddush Hashem*. □

YONOSON ROSENBLUM



PHOTO: N. JAROSLAWICZ

GROWING PAINS

BLINDERS CALLED "YIHIYEH TOV"

IT IS SAID THAT JEWS in each country take on some of the national characteristics of their host countries. And it would appear that is true of Torah Jews in Israel, as well. Something of the "yihiyeh tov" ("it will be alright") attitude for which secular Israelis are famous has rubbed off on Israeli Chareidim.

I have a friend who is a *rosh yeshiva* of a *yeshiva ketana* in Jerusalem. He is American-born and his partner is Israeli-born. Recently I called him to speak to him about the impact of the threatened cut-off of all government funding for *yeshivos ketanos* on his institution and others like it. He told me that when the Supreme Court ruled two years ago that the government can no longer fund *yeshiva ketanos*, unless they fulfill part of the core curriculum required by the Education Ministry, he approached his partner in panic. His partner assured him that the government would never cut off funding, and he should stop worrying.

The same thing had happened a few years earlier when all the secular parties were calling for dramatic reductions in child subsidy benefits. His partner assured him that it could never happen. But sure enough it did.

Due to this attitude of "yihiyeh tov," our Knesset representatives too often themselves trying to marshall their forces at one minute to midnight in response to a threat that has been looming for some time and could have been anticipated much earlier.

RABBI ROSENBLUM, WHO LIVES IN JERUSALEM, IS A CONTRIBUTING EDITOR TO *THE JEWISH OBSERVER*. HE IS ALSO DIRECTOR OF THE ISRAELI DIVISION OF AM ECHAD, THE AGUDATH ISRAEL-INSPIRED EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH EFFORT AND MEDIA RESOURCE.

The rapid growth of the Chareidi population is a great blessing. But it will present a whole host of new challenges – both internally and in our external relationships with the rest of Israeli society.

Child support payments are a good example. Had Chareidi MKs analyzed many of the reasons why those benefits were vulnerable, they might not have been so quick to vote to dramatically raise those benefits, and in such a way as to primarily benefit large Chareidi and Arab families – i.e., by increasing the per child amount for each successive child. As soon as the secular MKs saw that it was possible to dramatically raise benefits that had been in place, with minor adjustments, for decades, they figured out that it is also possible to cut those benefits drastically. *Tafasta meruba lo tafsta*. An oversized grip never holds.

Some awareness of the impact of large child subsidies and of world economic trends would have shown why they were vulnerable. By far, the largest beneficiaries of the child allowance subsidies were Israeli Arabs, who outnumber Israeli Chareidim more than 2:1. The subsidies constituted a massive incentive for large Arab families (often with multiple wives), and for such practices as registering Palestinian children as Israeli-born Beduins. That alone was a significant threat to Israel's demographic future, and an immense financial drain, as well.

In recent years, economists have placed great emphasis on rates of labor force participation as a crucial determinant of a country's economic health and future prospects. Large child care benefits are widely viewed as disincentives to labor force participation. The trend is towards job-training and a negative income tax for low-earning workers as a means of encouraging entry into the labor force, as happened in the United States in the Clinton era welfare reforms. Knowing this, Chareidi MKs could have anticipated that a Treasury

Minister with training in economics, like Binyamin Netanyahu, was likely to make good on promises to dramatically cut child benefits. Such understanding could also spare us a lot of futile hopes that child benefits will return to their former levels.

Child benefits are only one example of the need to anticipate future challenges and develop strategies before it is too late.

OF NUMBERS AND OPPORTUNITIES
.....

The rapid growth of the Chareidi population in Israel over the last 60 years is a *nes nigla* – an open, recognizable miracle. When Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion agreed to the military deferment for yeshiva students, there were only a few hundred post-high school yeshiva *bachurim* in the country. Not only did Ben-Gurion never anticipate the huge growth of that number, few in the Chareidi world were filled with optimism about the future of community.

The small, highly committed group of *bonei Torah* who fell under the influence of the *Chazon Ish* has today multiplied into a community of tens of thousands of *lomdei Torah*. Most estimates place the size of the Chareidi community at over half a million souls. A recent study by the Education Ministry projected that within five years, a full 30% of Israeli students will be in Chareidi educational frameworks.

Size has never been the principal measure of Chareidi society. Purity is our standard. From a pure core, size will come, Rabbi Eliyahu Dessler taught, but the opposite is not the case. And indeed, the rapid growth of the Chareidi population has immense ramifications for the

internal well-being of the community. A community of 500-600,000 people is not just a core group of a few hundred intensely committed individuals writ large. It is something entirely different. Societal models that were appropriate for the intense core group will not serve all members of the vastly larger Chareidi society, which, in the very nature of things, includes individuals and families of a wide-range of abilities and spiritual commitments. It is unrealistic to think that one model will fit all.

Rapid growth presents new challenges not only for Chareidi society internally, but also in our relationship with the larger Israeli society. On the one hand, the projected growth of the Chareidi community would seem to guarantee that the political power of Chareidi parties will continue to grow. But on the other hand, the size of the community makes likely intensified confrontation with other elements in Israeli society. As Chareidi political representation grows, it is possible that secular parties will overcome their own ideological differences and join together in order to restrain Chareidi political power.

STRATEGY, BASED ON UNDERSTANDING OTHERS
.....

One of Rabbi Moshe Sherer's great strengths as a leader was his ability to understand the point of view of potential adversaries or allies. That ability helped him analyze where compromise was possible and where efforts in that direction were unlikely to succeed. Some understanding of secular Israeli society today will similarly help the Torah community to chart a strategy.

As the Chareidi community grows from a minority of 10% of the population to 20% or even more, the chances that the secular majority will acquiesce in some form of de facto autonomy for the Chareidi population decrease. Let us examine some of the possible areas of intensified confrontation in the years ahead.

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The biggest area of tension will likely be that of education and curriculum control. At least since 1967, the Israeli government has borne much of the cost for the Chareidi education system, while attempting to impose few curricular requirements. For their part, the *gedolei Yisroel* have always absolutely rejected giving a secular government any say in the methods or content of Chareidi education.

So long as the Chareidi educational system constituted 10% of the overall educational system, one could hope that the government would continue to provide large-scale support without imposing any curricular requirements. But as the Chareidi educational system approaches 30% of the whole, it is fanciful to believe that that situation will just continue.

And, indeed, it has not. In response to a series of lawsuits initiated by the Reform Movement in Israel, the Israeli Supreme Court has issued a number of decisions designed to force the Chareidi community to choose between government financing and the imposition of elements of a core curriculum developed for all Israeli schools. The threatened cut-off in funding to *yeshivos ketanos* is but the first salvo in that battle.

Even without the intervention of the Supreme Court, it is likely that the government would have moved in the same direction. Israel's economic future is largely dependent on brainpower and an educated workforce. No developed Western economy would calmly accept a situation in which close to 20% of the school age population was not receiving a basic secular education. (Most Chareidi girls learn secular subjects at a level comparable to their secular counterparts.)

It goes without saying that the goal of the Chareidi educational system, particularly for boys, is to produce *talmidei chachamim*, not the hi-tech workers of the future. Most Chareidi males stop all secular studies by the time of their bar mitzvah, and even in the *chadarim*, they are unlikely to receive training in English or computers, two crucial skills in the global economy.

It is true that the intellectual abilities that are honed by years of Talmud study are ultimately more important than the specific content learned in school, even for those Chareidi males who eventually enter the workforce. But that is a hard sell to Israeli policymakers, and the fact remains that many Chareidi males who decide at one stage or another to enter the workforce have to undergo a preparatory period involving subjects like math and English before they can begin training.

The bottom line: Curricular issues are almost sure to become increasingly contentious in the years to come, and we need to not only brace ourselves now, but begin preparing strategies well in advance.

**IDF:
 SECURITY AND
 SOCIAL COHESION**

The draft deferment for yeshiva students has long been one of the bitterest issues in eyes of secular Israelis. But until now, it could not be argued that the draft deferment constituted a threat to the capabilities of the IDF. The IDF does not currently suffer a manpower shortage. But if the Chareidi draft cohort jumps from 10-15% of the overall draft cohort to something closer to 30%, as seems possible a decade or two down the line, the situation will look considerably different.

In addition to its crucial role in defending Israel from security threats on all sides, the IDF provides one of the last sources of social cohesion remaining in Israeli society. As long as only the chareidim and Arabs did not serve, their absence did not constitute a significant threat to the social glue provided by the IDF. But in recent years, the incidence of draft avoidance among secular youth has skyrocketed, particularly among the most affluent. The social glue is fraying.

High Chareidi and Arab birthrates mean that most of the Chareidi and Arab populations are concentrated in the younger age brackets. As a consequence, a draft cohort in which 40-50%

of those eligible for military service are Chareidim and Arabs is foreseeable. When that happens, the whole ideal of universal military service will have been shattered. It will no longer be an issue of everyone serving, with only a few exceptions, but rather of half the country's draft age men serving and half not.

As Defense Minister Ehud Barak recently put it to *The New York Times'* Steven Erlanger, "From the army of the people, the Israeli Defense Forces are gradually becoming the army of half the people. A soldier must not feel that when he goes to battle that in the eyes of part of the society he's a sucker."

For this reason, we can also expect to see the already bitter confrontations over the draft issue to become increasingly so in the years to come.

SILENCE VS. SIGNIFICANCE

There is one other area in which the rapid growth of the Chareidi population has immense implications for us. Until now, the primary thrust of Chareidi political participation has been to protect the interests of the community and to ensure that we can live as *frum* Jews. The Chareidi parties have consistently tried to avoid exercising the decisive votes on issues connected to security – in part, out of acknowledgment that the Chareidi community will not bear the initial brunt of any war because of the army deferment for yeshiva students.

That approach, however, is viable only so long as the Chareidi parties were relatively small – e.g., United Torah Judaism has never held more than seven seats in the 120 member Knesset. But as Chareidi political power grows in accord with our rapidly expanding population, it will become much more difficult to avoid speaking up on a wide variety of issues, including the life-and-death security issues.

In addition, as a major segment of the total Israeli population, we will have to engage in a dramatic rethinking of our relationship to the secular

population, and, indeed, about what type of government we would seek for Israel, prior to *biyas Hagoeil*. Not since Dr. Isaac Breuer's has such a systematic effort been undertaken.

In sum, the rapid growth of the Chareidi population is a great blessing. But it will present a whole host of new challenges – both internally and in our external relationships with the rest of Israeli society. The time has come to start thinking about those challenges and preparing ourselves.

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Uttered words can sometimes be more revealing than their speakers intend. They can be a source of deeper understanding—some yielding smiles; others, tears. With the goal of mining contemporary quotations for insights, intended or otherwise, *The Jewish Observer* here continues its feature, “Of Public Record,” which presents illuminating citations culled from various media.

Of Public Record

“Wow, we’re going to have a Jewish person, what’s going to happen? Are the kids going to have to pay for lunch?”

– Angie Vazquez, parent of a student at a South Bronx public school, recalling her first reaction to the appointment as principal of Shimon Waronker, an observant Jew. She was later “won over” by the new principal’s performance.
The New York Times, February 8

“Someone could say we don’t understand the humor.”

– Simonas Gurevicius, executive director of the Jewish Community of Lithuania, explaining why members of Vilna’s Jewish community do not protest an annual celebration in that country that includes the practice of “*eiti zydukais*,” or “going as Jews”—the wearing of masks with grotesque facial features, beards and payos
Forward, February 8

“One sociologist suggests that 50 percent of [those] concerned with Jewish life may be Orthodox.”

– Steven Bayme, director of the American Jewish Committee’s Department of Contemporary Jewish life, speculating about “who will be [the American] Jewish leaders in the year 2050... who is going to be sufficiently concerned about Jewish community and Jewish peoplehood activities”
Jewish Telegraphic Agency, February 5

“Raucher”

– The German word for “smoker,” currently displayed, as “Jude” once was, on yellow stars, these on t-shirts being sold in protest of bans on smoking in restaurants and bars.

The Jerusalem Report, February 4

“I want the dead to rest in peace.”

– Naples Chief Rabbi Pierpaolo Pinhas Puntarello, explaining his refusal to meet the mayor of the city after the latter compared the Israel-Palestinian situation to the Nazi occupation of Europe
Jewish Telegraphic Agency, January 29

“May the day come when neither of our sides knows such pain.”

– Noam Shalit, father of captive Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, in a letter of condolence to a senior Hamas leader whose gunman son was killed by Israeli forces near Gaza City
Jewish Telegraphic Agency, January 17

“So you can be a rabbi-like doctor.”

– Dr. Judah Folkman’s father, a rabbi, responding to his then-young son’s announcement that he would rather be a doctor than a rabbi. Dr. Folkman, on whose revolutionary research several successful cancer-fighting drugs are based, was recently *niftar*.

Jewish Telegraphic Agency, January 16

“I was most impressed that people, in the face of horror and evil, would not forsake their G-d.”

– President George W. Bush, after emerging from Yad Vashem
The New York Times, January 12

“We should have bombed it.”

– President George W. Bush, who “reportedly teared up,” speaking to Secretary Condoleezza Rice after viewing an aerial photograph of Auschwitz at Yad Vashem
The New York Sun, January 15

“a group of extremist sources who are trying to bring other students back to religion”

– Officials of the Ohel Shem public high school in Ramat Gan, assigning blame for what they termed a “provocation”: students *davening* on school grounds during breaks
Arutz-7, January 8

“In Egypt, it’s the way we pray; we probably hit our heads harder than most in order to get one ... people here like to show off their piety.”

– Ahmed Fathalla, providing his take on the prevalence in his country of the “*zebiba*,” a dark circle or bump above the eyes, created when worshippers press their foreheads to the ground during prayers
The New York Times, December 18, 2007

TREATING THE SYMPTOM Dept.

“Our people don’t have a sense of mission.”

– Ron Wolfson, co-founder of “Synagogue 3000,” explaining why Reform leaders would do well to follow the example of Christian “megachurches,” and create services that feature “greeters,” musical performances and dancing
Jewish Telegraphic Agency, December 19

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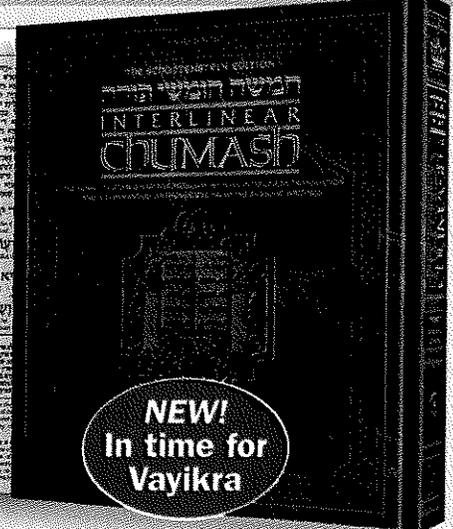
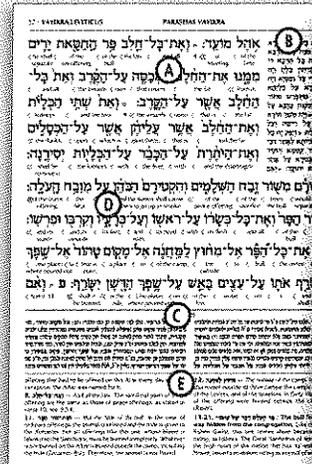
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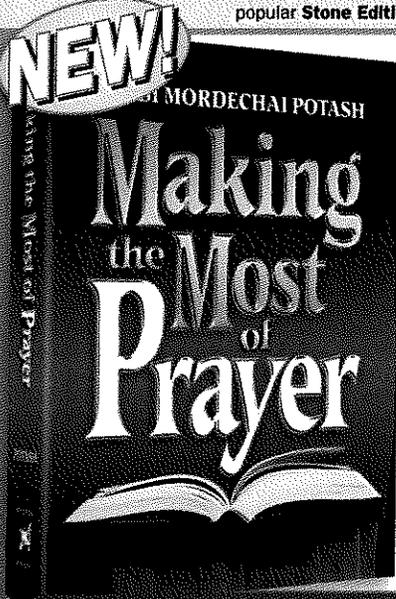


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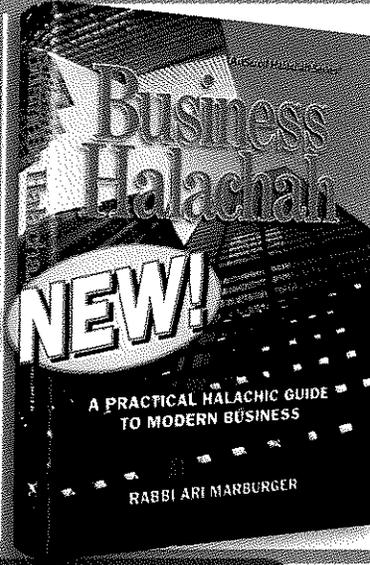
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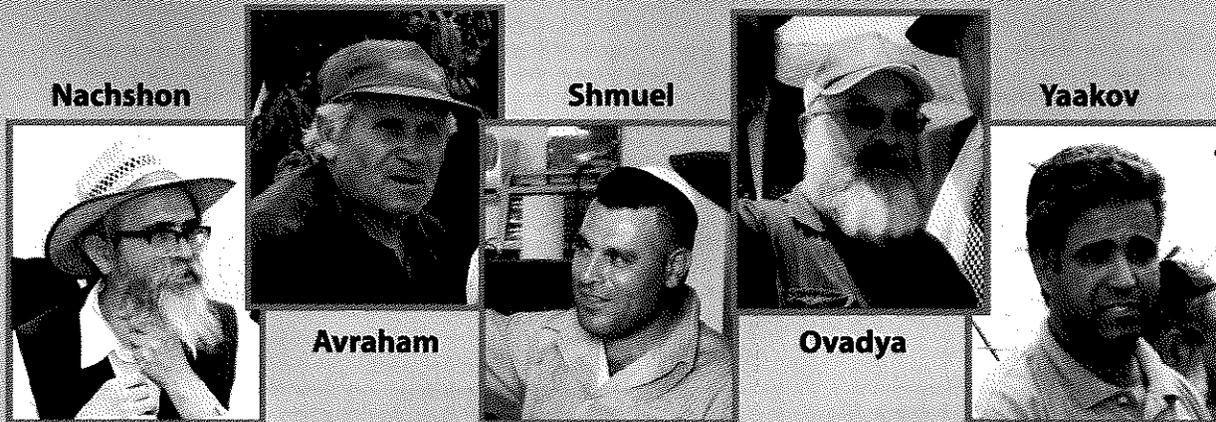
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הערה כלה - מהמלה "כל" המובן
 פה - אהבת כל החיים, הכלה וכו'



Who can understand
 The conversation between
 The Rose and the Thorn?

Rose: I am the dream,
 Hope, beauty, love, happiness –
 Song of all joys of worlds,
 “Why” are we, opposite partners,
 Living on the same stem?

Thorn: “Why,” I also ask,
 Do I grow nothing but
 Daggers that sting,
 To hurt the whole world?

But we are born
 From the same root –
 It is the choice
 Of the One Up Above,
 Which cell will produce
 A Rose or a Thorn.

He made us be born
 From the same root,
 Therefore, we exist
 On the same stem!

Chassan and kalla
 Under the *chupa*,
 Joined by the One Above,
 Have rooted their union
 For love of all of life.

For rejoicing in friendship,
 Their lives they entwined
 On the same stem of destiny –
 Some cells of their lives will grow Roses,
 Others will bear Thorns.

When they cease to ask “Why?”
 Their minds’ eyes will conceive
 That Roses and Thorns of life
 All come from the same root –
 The One Up Above.

When they will
 Accept their lot,
 Though not understanding
 The “Why?” beneath it all,

Then in some future,
 He will bless them
 From the *Beraicha* of *Bina*,
 From the well of understanding,
 Thus changing Thorns to Roses.

For only He knows
 Answers
 To the “Whys” of life...

MRS. SUSHOLTZ, OF BROOKLYN, NY, IS A PUBLISHED POET
 WHOSE WORKS HAVE BEEN FEATURED IN THESE PAGES.

RABBI YONASON GOLDSON

THE ARBA PARASHIYOS



4 Stages of Renewal

Adapted from a *shiur* by
RABBI NACHMAN BULMAN זצ"ל*

**“Now we are slaves;
next year we will be free,”
we proclaim at the
Pesach Seder.**

This is *cheirus*, freedom, the overarching theme of Pesach, the idea that defines the first of the three festivals.

But there is another theme, perhaps even more fundamental to appreciating the significance of the season: *geirus* – conversion. The exodus from Egypt marks not only our emancipation from slavery but also our inception as a people. Although the 600,000 people who went out from Mitzrayim were all descendants of Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, it was on that first Passover that

RABBI BULMAN זצ"ל, NOTED THINKER, AUTHOR AND LECTURER, WAS THE FOUNDING EDITOR OF THE JEWISH OBSERVER. HE SERVED AS MENAHEL RUCHANI IN YESHIVA OHR SOMAYACH, JERUSALEM FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS.

RABBI GOLDSON TEACHES JEWISH HISTORY, NAVI, AND HASHKAFAT AT BLOCK YESHIVA HIGH SCHOOL IN ST. LOUIS, MO, WHERE HE ALSO WRITES AND LECTURES. HIS ARTICLE, “UNDERSTANDING THE FIFTEEN STEPS TO REDEMPTION,” APPEARED IN JO APRIL '07.

we became an *am hakodesh* – a holy people.

But it is not enough to simply remember the exodus: *In each generation, every person is obligated to see himself as if he personally went out from Egypt.* It's a tall order to not only reenact, but recreate the experience of *yetzias Mitzrayim*. Indeed, it is virtually impossible without preparation, and that preparation begins six weeks before Pesach with the *Arba Parshios*, the four special Torah portions that usher us into the season of redemption: *Shekalim*, *Zachor*, *Parah*, and *Chodesh*.

These four weeks are neither separate nor disconnected. Together they constitute a progression that, if observed correctly, enables us to derive the greatest possible benefit from the Festival of Freedom.

I. *Shekalim*: FACILITATING YAAKOV'S FULFILLMENT

It was Hashem's original intention, explains the *Ramchal*, to create a universe in which the spiritual and

the physical coexist without the slightest tension or disharmony.¹ According to this design, the flow of spirituality into the material world requires a physical vessel able to receive and hold the infusion of *kedusha*. Ostensibly, the altar of the *Mishkan* or the *Mikdash* served this function. Ideally, the Jew himself becomes the altar of Hashem.

An altar must be constructed and maintained physically before it can function spiritually. As the *Mishnah* says: “*Im ein kemach, ein Torah* – If there is no flour, there is no Torah.”² The spiritual survival of the Jewish nation requires, most fundamentally, the provision and maintenance of material resources.

From the very beginning, the Jewish people understood this principle implicitly. Zevulun worked to support the Torah study of Yissachar, just as the whole nation donated the priestly tithes to support the spiritual service of the *Kohanim* and *Leviim*.³ And even earlier,

* 25 Adar 1, 5746, Yeshivas Ohr Yaakov, Zichron Yaakov

1 Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzatto in *Derech Hashem* 1:3:4

2 *Avos* 3:21

3 *Rashi* on *Bereishis* 49, 13 from

Yaakov and Eisav were to have had a similar relationship, with Eisav, the man of the field, supporting the spiritual pursuits of Yaakov, the one who dwells in the tents of Torah study.⁴

But Eisav's rejection of that partnership necessitated a change of plan. Yaakov would have to shoulder both burdens – the material support and the spiritual service.⁵ That dual mission would pose such enormous challenges to the descendants of Yaakov that, by virtue of the natural limitations of the

Tanchuma 11; Bamidbar 18,21-24
4 Bereishis 25,27 (and Rashi ad loc);
Seforno on Bereishis 27,29-28,4
5 Seforno loc cit

physical world, they could not possibly succeed. Only supernatural effort and merit could keep the Torah alive.

This is the significance of the battle between Yaakov and the *malach*, identified by the Sages as the guardian angel of Eisav.⁶ Although Yaakov ultimately prevailed over the *malach*, the contest left him wounded in the hollow of his thigh. This injury of the lower extremities, the more physical part of the body adjacent to the organs of reproduction, alludes to a future conflict regarding the role that was originally intended for Eisav.

6 Rashi on 32,25 from Bereishis Rabba 77:3

And so, the Sages describe Yaakov's injury with the expression *noga be'tamchin deOraissa* – a defect in the support of Torah. They foresaw that the day would come when those Jews possessing the material means of supporting Torah institutions would no longer recognize their responsibility to do so, when their respect for Torah scholars would diminish to such an extent that they no longer consider themselves partners in Torah survival.⁷

In such a generation, Yaakov Avinu limps. And yet, although he limped away from his confrontation with Eisav's *malach*, Yaakov returned *sholeim* – intact – from his encounter with Eisav himself. If so, what must we do to enable Yaakov's recovery in our generation?

HARMONY OF THE MATERIAL & THE SPIRITUAL

Rambam offers a solution. In the generations since the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*, the Tribe of Levi has redefined its role from ministering as priests to serving as scholars and teachers of the Jewish people. And it is not only those Jews born into the Levitical tribe who have donned this mantle, but all who devote themselves exclusively to Torah study that have the responsibility to teach their brethren through words and through example.⁸

When a Torah scholar conducts himself *lifnim mishuras hadin*, by upholding the spirit as well as the letter of the law – when he speaks pleasantly with all people, when he shows concern for them and greets them cordially no matter what their station, when he offers no insult and conducts himself impeccably in business, when he performs his mitzvos meticulously and carries himself with dignity – then, promises Rambam, his fellow Jews cannot help but be drawn to him and to the Torah that is the guiding influence in every aspect of his life.⁹

And if we find that those of our fellow Jews who are not immersed in

7 See Zohar, Bereishis 171a
8 Rambam, Hilchos Shemitta Veyoveil 13:13
9 Rambam, Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah 5:11

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Torah and mitzvos are not inspired to be partners in the support of Torah, then the community of scholars must accept much of the responsibility upon itself, and must rededicate itself to the task of *kiddush Hashem*.

Herein lies an understanding of the first step in rebuilding the altar of Hashem, the foundation of which is secured only through the contribution of material resources – *shekalim*. In contributing to the literal and figurative foundations of the *Mishkan*, every Jew was equal to every other Jew. Only in this way, through the harmonious combination of the material and the spiritual, can the service and the sanctification of the Jewish people become complete.

We find this very ideal expressed in the *Yotzros*, the liturgical poems added by many congregations to the service of *Parshas Shekalim*:

Who can surmise the numbers of those "counted ones,"

Who are not countable through any kind of lottery?

Hashem struck a covenant with them from then, from the time of that census,

That there should never be lacking from their number a basic blend....

Whether through war or plague or pogrom, Hashem has promised that there will never be fewer than the number of Jews who left *Mitzrayim*. Yet this number comprises not the total count of the Jewish population, but the number of "counted ones," those marked by their commitment to Torah, the *basic blend* of Zevulun and Yissachar who serve as partners to ensure the material and spiritual survival of the Jewish nation. Within the context of this partnership, money becomes as *kadosh* as Torah itself.

And if from those counted ones there will be left only a few, Their number would never fall below 600,000 marked ones.

And even in times of vulnerability to epidemic or violence from above,

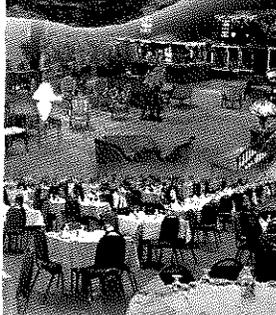
These counted ones can be redeemed through the atonement of silver.

When a Torah scholar conducts himself *lifnim mishuras hadin*, by upholding the spirit as well as the letter of the law... then, promises Rambam, his fellow Jews cannot help but be drawn to him and to the Torah that is the guiding influence in every aspect of his life.

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For the achievement of true atonement, however, both Zevulun and Yissachar must be worthy. Who can count the millions wasted in the name of Jewish philanthropy to build so many balloon-like institutions? And who bears responsibility for the money donated for scholars who fail to conduct themselves as genuine Yissachars?

Both givers and receivers must accept responsibility. When money is given and received with purity of purpose as the foundation of authentic Torah institutions, it elevates the giver, the receiver, and the money itself to the highest level of kedusha, tilting the scales of Divine judgment and hastening the completion of the third and final *Beis Hamikdash*.

Always positioned at the outset of *Adar*, the month in which we celebrate the holiday of Purim, *Parshas Shekalim* prepares the way for our proper appreciation of the national redemption we commemorate in that month. It is no coincidence, therefore, that our reenactment of the contribution of shekalim in

the desert falls out in this season. Indeed, it was those very shekalim, donated by the Jews toward the construction of the *Mishkan*, that generated the merit that saved the Jewish people from the silver offered by Haman to destroy them.¹⁰

II. *Zachor:*

THE BATTLE FOR MORAL CLARITY

But material resources provide only the first step. Without Torah guidance, a Jew cannot differentiate between right and wrong, between good and evil. This is the battleground of Eisav's grandson Amaleik, the nation that risked annihilation for the sole purpose of sewing doubt among the nations of the world and in the minds of the Jewish people. As with modern day terrorists (who learned their tactics from Amaleik's suicide attack upon the Jews in the desert), there can be no peace

with any ideology that would rather die than bow before *Malchus Shamayim*.

But today we don't know how to identify Amaleik, since the Assyrian king Sancherev scattered the nations and confused their ethnic origins.¹¹ How, then, to carry on the battle against Amaleik?

Our world today contains no shortage of nations eager to carry on Amaleik's military campaign against the Jewish people. And just as there could be no compromise with those intent upon our annihilation then, similarly is compromise with those determined to annihilate us now an irrational dream. We must be prepared to fight for our survival, to take up arms to defend ourselves and our land, to recognize the enemies that threaten our existence and not be seduced by false promises of peace.

But it is the irrationality of the dream that poses the greater threat. It is the cultural attack from the more subtle

10 *Megilla* 13b

11 *Berachos* 28a

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**The Torah makes us a promise:
if we make the effort, we can find such
resources of internal power that when
we face the obstacles of the soul, we will
muster the strength to rebuild ourselves.**

descendants of Eisav who, instead of striving to bite us to death, feign brotherhood in hope that they may kiss us to death.¹² It is the cultural assault from the culture of secularism that seeps into every facet of society, from literature and music, from movies and what today passes for art. True, Chazal tell us there is wisdom among the nations.¹³ But we must be ever watchful for the insidious messages of modern society that seek to infiltrate and confuse the clear thinking of the Torah mind. The self-hating Jews, the apologists, the moral equivocators, and the halachic revisionists are among those who, no matter how sincere, have been won over by the seductive cultural terrorism of Amaleik.

Zachor – remember Amaleik, for what they did and for what their philosophy of ambivalence continues to try to do. As zealous as we must be in our war against external enemies, we must devote even greater passion to the battle for moral clarity and integrity.

III. *Parab.*

**DEALING WITH
THE ENEMY WITHIN**

Even after recognizing the enemy without and preparing ourselves for the battle of ideas, we dare not consider ourselves secure. There is an enemy inside, as well, one far more dangerous than the one outside. Against external enemies we can accept the reality of standoffs or partial victories, but against the influence of *tuma*, the forces of spiritual impurity, we can settle for nothing short of absolute triumph. There are no half measures

¹² See Rashi on Bereishis 33, 4
¹³ Eicha Rabba 2

in the *milchamas hayeitzer*, the war for spiritual purity; *tahara* must be 100%, or it remains *tuma*. We must recognize and acknowledge our own shortcomings, then labor feverishly to correct them all.

But the battle seems pitched against us. With so much impurity in the world, how can we keep ourselves pure without withdrawing, like monastic monks, and hiding ourselves from the outside world?

This was the question of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Kavsi when he contemplated the mitzvah of *Para Aduma*.¹⁴ The Torah's description of the process, whereby one who is *tahor* sprinkles the ashes of the red cow to purify one who is *tamei*, seems to imply a one-to-one equation: one *tahor* is necessary to purify one *tamei*. If that would be so, the impurity of the outside world would seem unconquerable.

¹⁴ Eicha Rabba 2

So thought Rabbi Yehoshua, until he discovered the ancient records of Yavneh, wherein he learned that even if all the members of the Jewish nation would render themselves defiled, a single *tahor* could come and purify them all.

Rabbi Meir Shapiro (of Lublin) explains that Rabbi Yehoshua had originally believed that only when the power of the spiritual exceeds the power of the physical can it prevail. Yavneh, not only through its writings but through its very existence, disproved this assumption.

Faced by the inevitable destruction of *Yerushalayim*, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai won the favor of the Emperor Vespasian, whom he asked to grant the Yeshiva of Yavneh and its sages immunity from Roman interference. Imagine Vespasian's astonishment when, after having offered Rabban Yochanan anything he desired, the rabbi asked for an insignificant academy in an obscure village.¹⁵ How Vespasian must have laughed up his sleeve when he consented to Rabban Yochanan's request.

Four centuries later, the Roman Empire had crumbled, while the Babylonian Talmud was on the brink of producing an explosion of Torah scholarship throughout the Jewish Diaspora. The little Yeshiva of Yavneh had secured the future of Torah survival,

¹⁵ Gittin 56

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and the immeasurable might of Rome had vanished.

Similarly, the internal purity of conduct and conviction of a single Jew will inexorably bring a hundred Jews closer to the Torah heritage of which they have been dispossessed.

IV. Chodesh:

THE GIFT OF RENEWAL

Human beings are not static. We are constantly in flux – moving forward, or slipping back.

Jews are no exception. Having laid the material foundations for spiritual growth, having identified and taken action against our external enemies, whether physical or philosophical, and having labored to refine and perfect our inner character, we dare not believe that we have finished the job. With each new victory, with each new achievement in spiritual growth, we face new challenges and new obstacles.

Reality is a cruel reminder. *Rabbeinu Tam* describes the human condition of the *yemei ahava* and the *yemei sina*, the

natural human cycle of optimism and pessimism, of idealism and cynicism, of enthusiasm and emotional paralysis.¹⁶ And when we fall into the dark side of the cycle, we forget that the wheel will turn and that we will eventually find our way back into the light.

Whereas the nations of the world are compared to the sun, shining brightly for their brief moment before disappearing forever, the Jewish people are compared to the moon, subtly changing, growing bright, diminishing, seeming to have disappeared completely before reappearing once again.¹⁷ Every month, every chodesh, is a season of *his'chadshus*, renewal. The new moon reminds us not only that there is always more for us to accomplish, but that the darkness of the spirit will inevitably pass.¹⁸

“*Hachodesh hazeh lachem* – this month is for you,” says the Torah.¹⁹ It is not the Torah that needs renewal, but we ourselves: a new heart, a new out-

16 Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe זצ"ל in *Alei Shor*,

from *Sefer Hayashar*

17 *Shemos Rabba* 15

18 *Sefas Emes* on *Parshas Bo*

19 *Shemos* 12,1

look, a new hope that we will overcome the difficulties of the future as we have overcome the difficulties of the past. With this sense of inner renewal, we are finally ready for *Pesach*; we are ready to accept the yoke of Torah and the challenges of freedom once again.

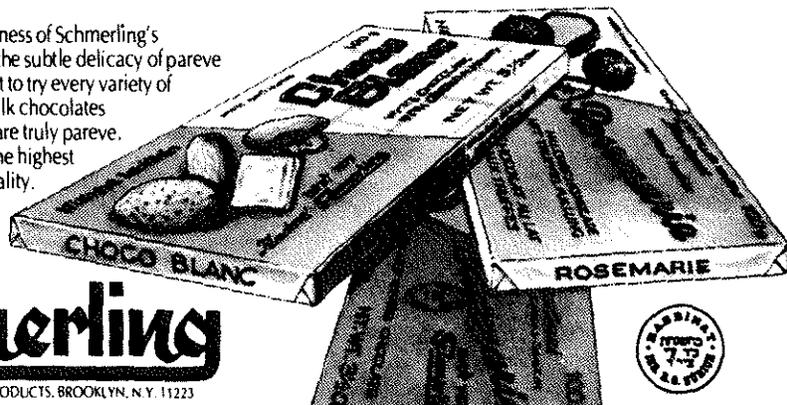
The Torah makes us a promise: if we make the effort, we can find such resources of internal power that when we face the obstacles of the soul, we will muster the strength to rebuild ourselves, to become fresh, to be fresh, to count ourselves among the counted ones of *Yisroel*, for whom *Hashem* redeemed His nation 33 centuries ago, and for whom He will redeem us again.

And so the *piyut* of the *Yotzros* concludes:

*How precious to me are those counted ones,
Those who are counted and who allow themselves to be counted.
Guard those who are counted, whether consciously or unconsciously;
Keep watch over and mark those who would be marked and leave their mark,
That they should all bow to You.* □

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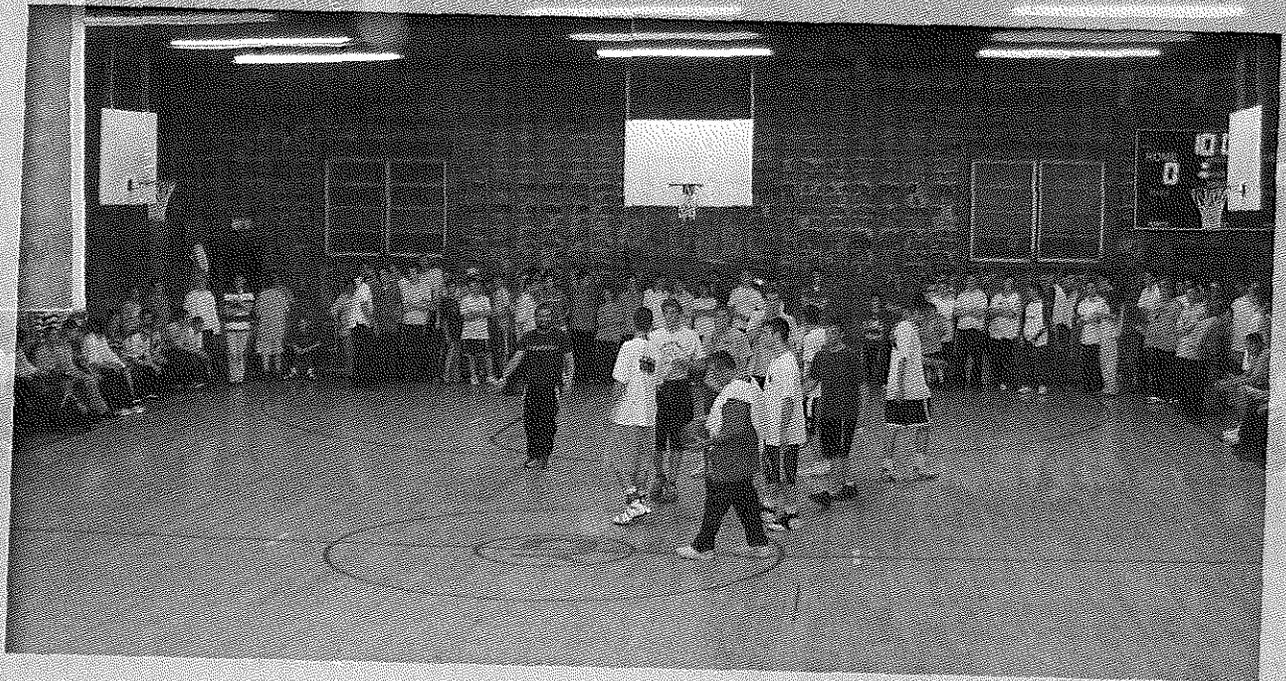
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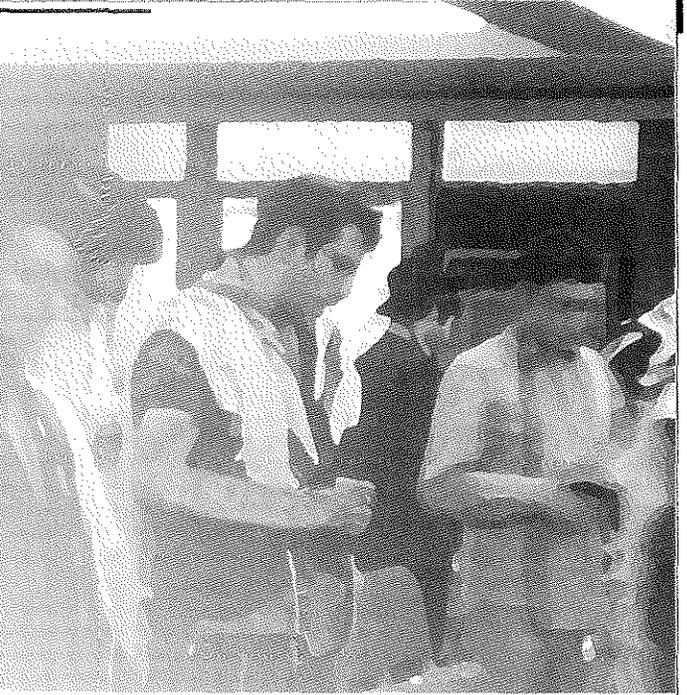
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YOSSI HUTTLER

Mincha

REFLECTIONS

BEEFLECTIONS?



ACHDUS IN THE AFTERNOON

Much has been written about the fractious nature of Jewry. So much so that one may be excused for wondering where and when one can experience *achdus* in any form. Personally, I found it right in front of me, though I had not noticed it for the longest time.

But first let me tell you about something that I treasure: my weekday workplace *Mincha* minyan. Like many of its kind, it convenes in a commercial district, and affords me the opportunity to daven the *tefilla* with a *tzibbur*. Our sages tell us (*Orach Chayim* 90:9) that *Hashem* listens to the *tefillas* of a *tzibbur* in a qualitatively different manner than to the *tefillas* of an individual. This factor is particularly valuable for *Mincha*, the afternoon prayer, which has the most limited window of opportunity to be recited, roughly between a short time after midday until dusk. Complicating matters is the reality that for most working people, *ze'man Mincha* usually falls during the middle of the workday, making it a challenge just to make time

to daven, let alone daven with a minyan. Adding yet another degree of difficulty is that during the winter months, when the evening deadline can come well before the workday ends, one has no choice but to find time – sometimes even “steal” time – just to be able to fulfill this obligatory mitzvah. Given these daunting circumstances, having access to a minyan in which to daven *Mincha* is invaluable.

One particularly noteworthy feature of my weekday *Mincha* minyan is something that is probably characteristic of most weekday *Mincha* minyanim. I would guess that most business districts, particularly in the large cities with sufficiently substantial populations of observant Jews that can sustain a weekday *Mincha* minyan, are not peopled by one specific kind of Jew. More likely, the jobs in these areas are held by Modern Orthodox Jews and yeshivish Jews, Sefardi and Ashkenazi, and in some places, Chassidische Jews, as well as less- or non-observant Jews.

I would speculate that this interaction of “types” of Orthodox Jews that occurs in a weekday *Mincha* minyan is, for most of the participants, unusual. As a general matter, most people tend to live among those who are like them. While the non-Jewish or non-Orthodox world might view us all as very similar (our general failure to likewise do so

being something worth pondering), most Orthodox Jews recognize differences, both subtle and obvious, in our various camps. (Some of us even make a fetish of enumerating and cataloging these distinctions.) These differences are reflected in values, worldviews, *minhagim*, *nus'chaos*, even things as basic as clothing. Living in communities of like-minded people, most of us do not come into regular contact with other types of Jews, even other types of *frum* Jews.

And therein, behind that premise of presumed homogeneity, lies my modest idea for fostering a little more *ahavas Yisroel*. When ten Jewish men of a halachic majority age assemble in an office, conference room, warehouse, or any other locale where a weekday *Mincha* minyan meets, they implicitly recognize the worth of every “type” of Jewish male who is over the age of 13. Every member of the minyan is as valuable and necessary to the undertaking of *tefilla betzibbur* as the next man – no matter how he is dressed, what *nusach* he may daven, how accented or polished his English may be, or what his thoughts on various theological questions (e.g., college, Israel) may be. Consider how many opportunities we have to demonstrate such solidarity. That we can come together to daven speaks well of our capability, even under these limited circumstances, for *achdus*.

YOSSI HUTTLER, WHO LIVED IN STATEN ISLAND, NY, WHEN HE SUBMITTED THE ABOVE ARTICLE, CURRENTLY LIVES IN LOS ANGELES. HE IS AN ORAL HISTORIAN, HAVING CONDUCTED OVER 120 INTERVIEWS OF SURVIVORS OF CHURBAN EUROPE FOR THE SHOAH FOUNDATION. HIS POEM, “SHAMASH,” APPEARED IN JO, DEC. '05.

**A LAUNCHING PAD
FOR AHAVAS YISROEL**

Why not take that event and make it an even greater opportunity to foster *ahavas Yisroel*? Why not take a son (or daughter) to work one day – perhaps during the summer when school is out, or during a school-year break – and bring him (or her) to a weekday *Mincha* minyan? What better opportunity to show him or her how observant Jews of all backgrounds are capable of uniting for a sacred purpose – to communicate with our Creator. Why not show him (or her) how that different Jew is just as concerned with *tefilla*, and *tefilla betzibbur*, as Jews like you are. Perhaps that other “type” of Jew will bring *his* child and show him that *you* are no different either, that you value davening, davening with a minyan, “even” with people like him? In this way, each participant would affirmatively demonstrate to each other, and their children, that they do not merely tolerate each other, but rather actively collaborate on a holy endeavor.

One might think that this proposal would address the need of fostering *achdus* in the *frum* community, which is a tall order in and of itself. In fact, this idea carries the potential to extend into the farthest reaches of the collective Jewish world. It is a reality of many weekday *Mincha* minyanim in business districts that one will often observe a less observant Jew – sometimes totally unaffiliated – come in to say *Kaddish* for a parent or other close relative, either during the year of mourning or even on a *Yahrzeit*. These people are often easy to spot, based on their appearance or their noticeable lack of familiarity with the Hebrew language and/or the davening service.

Think about it. People who may otherwise not be *shomeir mitzvos* in the traditional Orthodox sense – observing the hallmarks of *kashrus* and *Shabbos* – deem the memory of a parent, the *kibbud av va'eim*, important enough to break away from their workday to come in and honor their parents with a *Kaddish*. How unique an opportunity to show a child that this otherwise unob-

To stand for those ten or so minutes is to witness something subtly, sublimely magical: a simple, straightforward demonstration of an elementary proposition of *Yiddishkeit* – that every Jew counts.

servant, unaffiliated Jew cares enough to come to minyan so that he can say *Kaddish*, and that this person also makes up part of your minyan as much as anyone else in the room. To show a child that a Jew, who, whether because of upbringing or choice, may not be *shomeir* many mitzvos, will still come in and add his presence, his *neshama*, to create the halachic quorum that allows everyone present to say *Kedusha*, answer “*Yehei Shemei rabba...*,” to say *Kaddish*, to be credited with *tefilla betzibbur* and the special appreciation that *Hashem* accords such prayer.

I don't presume that such an undertaking will generate automatic understanding of differences in worldviews and other values that characterize present-day Jewry. In fact, though I've davened in the same workday *Mincha* minyan for a number of years, I have not developed deep friendships with other congregants. What I have developed, though, is an appreciation for the collective Jewish corpus, a realization that we have so much in common, as *Bnei Avraham*, *Yitzchak*, and *Yaakov*, such that when we assemble for Divine

purpose, we can do great things, our whole being greater than the sum of our individual selves.

To stand for those ten or so minutes, five afternoons per week, moments in which barriers come down, if only temporarily, is to witness something subtly, sublimely, magical: a simple, straightforward demonstration of an elementary proposition of *Yiddishkeit* – that every Jew counts.

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CELEBRATING MIRACLES

Hashem chose wine as the catalyst to spark the miracles of Purim. To celebrate these miracles, we have a mitzvah to drink wine until we confuse the difference between Haman, who is cursed, and Mordechai, who is blessed. This mitzvah needs explanation. First, drunkenness is contrary to the spirit of Jewish life and religious conduct. Second, before we can ever hope to achieve confusion – properly, according to halacha – we must know clearly the true difference between Mordechai and Haman.

Chazal (*Megilla* 14a) teach us that when Achashveirosh removed his ring and gave it to Haman, this act was more effective in inspiring heartfelt reliance and return to Hashem than all the prophecies and warnings of our forty-eight prophets and seven prophet-

esses. The transferal of the king's ring gave Haman absolute power to do as he hatefully pleased. Haman embodied wealth, glory and power. He had everything one could possibly want in the world – except the Jews. In spite of all Haman's plans, all his resources and all his hatred, he failed to accomplish his goal of destruction. Haman, however, did achieve what the prophets did not accomplish – a renewed *kabbalas haTorah*, an enduring affirmation and acceptance of Torah.

Haman's demise resulted in a grand, unparalleled success. Amazingly, even some of Haman's grandchildren converted. Chazal (*Gittin* 57b) tell us that they ultimately devoted themselves to learning Torah in Bnei Brak! As puzzling as this may be, we should not be surprised. Life consists of two forces, construction and destruction. When these opposite forces merge, life becomes confusing. We all experience aspects of life that build and aspects that destroy. Success can sometimes eventually cause failure. From ruins, renewal and redemption can spring forth. Our own *ba'alei teshuva* are living examples of this process. In many cases, they emerge from the shameful pits of earthly

pleasures and achieve unexpected levels of excellence in Torah, *middos* and *mitzvos*. Obviously, a thoughtful individual, despite the tremendous influence of the world's pleasures, can realize that commitment to pleasure seeking is not what life is all about, and that self-gratification is a path to destruction.

THE PARADOX OF PLEASURE

Purim is a confrontation between two exceptional personalities. Haman was a mastermind. His plot to destroy stemmed from great intelligence. His downfall was a result of his arrogance and pride. In contrast, Mordechai possessed wisdom and faith, culled from a life of Torah. Mordechai was a builder. Haman was a destroyer. Hence – *baruch Mordechai* and *arur Haman*. With good reason, wine was the means that Hashem chose to carry out the demise of Haman and promote the renown of Mordechai. Wine has remarkable dual properties. Wine can induce euphoria, and wine can bring misery. When people are sad, wine will cheer them up and can intensify joy. It all depends on how much wine one drinks. If taken in moderation, it is won-

RABBI FURST, WHO IS MASHGIACH RUCHANI IN KOLLEL RUACH CHAIM, IS AUTHOR OF NESIVOS CHAIM - THE TORAH WAY OF LIFE SERIES (THUS FAR, ON BEREISHIS AND SHEMOS) BASED ON THE MOTZA'EI SHABBOS LECTURES OF RABBI CHAIM PINCHAS SCHEINBERG. HE IS A FREQUENT CONTRIBUTOR TO THESE PAGES, MOST RECENTLY WITH "THE LOUD AND CLEAR MESSAGES OF LASHON HARA," DEC. '07.

derful. It gives a lift. If taken excessively, Heaven forbid, it causes drunkenness and ruin, shame and injury.

Wine brought death into the world. According to the *Medrash Rabba* (*Bereishis* 19:5), the *eitz hada'as* was a vine of grapes. On the other hand, during the miracles of Purim, wine saved our lives. The miracle of wine is that it mimics the reality of life — drunkenness. This is the lesson of Purim, taught especially with and through wine. We, too, can experience the miracle of wine, when used in moderation; alternatively, we can sink into chaos if it is misused. We must be cautious, for the *yeitzer hara* tempts us with the thought of pleasures, which have very little lasting benefit and in essence are meaningless. Exaggerated by the imagination, an image is presented of something that is wonderful and appetizing — everything that a person could want. The superficial illusion becomes perfectly clear, for the prospect of physical pleasure glorifies it. Hence, the dangers of misusing this world's pleasures are neither recognized nor considered.

Obsessed with *olam hazeh*, people lose their sense of purpose and direction. Around and around, people circle from one sip of this world's pleasures to the next. Finally, in a dizzy, they crash — never realizing that life has a noble purpose. People turn to drugs to deaden their *seichel* (intelligence); they suspend their common sense and rational thinking. Unshackled from their sense of responsibility, they feel free to do whatever they wish. They would never allow themselves such liberties without the influence of drugs — they would feel guilty and ashamed. Drugs provide an excuse for their behavior.

The world's enticements, like wine, will invariably prevail over their intelligence, creating a state of confusion from what should be clarity. The purpose of life will be lost. When drunk, one cannot sense what is safe or what is dangerous, what death is and what life is. Once *seichel* ceases to function, it cannot protect the person from harm. This is destruction. Pleasures are very tempting, but risky. For instance, a delicious meal

is appetizing, but if we indulge, we can suffer from indigestion — or worse — for constant overeating is unhealthy. Indulgence, if not checked by reason, can lead to chronic illness. The lure of immediate pleasure convinces the mind to ignore any harmful consequences. We must realize the paradox of pleasure: Pleasure is temporary — its damage is permanent. This is life.

TRUE LIGHT

Purim pitted the royal decadence of Achashveirosh's feast against the Torah and its way of life. Haman's harsh decree of extermination was a response to *Klal Yisroel's* participation in the Feast of Achashveirosh. Deliberately, his royal pleasures tempted us for one hundred and eighty days — concluding with another seven days of private festivities reserved for his capital city of Shushan. Entertainment became a lifestyle. "Living it up" caused the decree of destruction and the darkness of *hester panim*. We lost *Hashem's* favor because we strayed from the Torah's way of life. The light of Torah had dimmed in our eyes. The glitter of this world's pleasures became more attractive than the radiance of Torah.

Torah, however, emerged supreme. The Gemara (*Shabbos* 88a) discloses that prior to the miracle of Purim, there was an element of coercion in our original *kabbalas haTorah*. *Har Sinai* was held over our heads in order to induce us to accept the Torah. Since our original *kabbalas haTorah* was not wholehearted, worldly interests could lure us away from the life of Torah. After the miracles of Purim, we willingly accepted the Torah. *Tosafos*, on this Gemara, explains that it was possible because of our "love over the miracle of Purim." The miracle caused such gratitude and devotion to *Hashem* that our hearts could clearly see the light of Torah — to know exactly how much it means for our success and survival. Without any doubts, we understood that Torah is the essence and the purpose of our lives.

Purim initiated a new *kabbalas haTorah*, a "*kiymu vekiblu*" — a renewed



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relationship between *Klal Yisroel* and *Hashem*. We realized and appreciated the significance of Torah to our lives. The *passuk* (*Melligas Esther* 9,27) testifies, "The Jews affirmed and accepted upon themselves ..." which means, "They affirmed what they had already accepted."

Chazal (*Yalkut Shimoni; Mishlei, remez* 954) teach us that Purim will always endure. This new *kabbalas haTorah* is forever. There was light for the Jews: the light of Torah — Torah in its full reality. One cannot experience a *kiymu vekiblu* if one craves this world. As long as one yearns for pleasures, one will never reach excellence in Torah. The Vilna Gaon (*Evven Sheleima* 2:9) has said, "It is not possible to serve *Hashem* except after the elimination of worldly desires and pleasure...and it is impossible to sense the sweetness of Torah except through discomfort and restraint."

LASTING JOY

A sincere approach and a clear understanding of our daily prayers will counteract the false and shallow distractions of this world's pleasures. Each morning we recite *Birkas haTorah*, a daily acknowledgement that we are "commanded to engross ourselves in the words of Torah." The mitzvah is not simply to learn. We must be engrossed and preoccupied with our

Life is our choice... Wine, when used correctly, can enliven & elevate – as happened to Mordechai. On the other hand, when misused, wine can sadden & destroy – which is exactly what happened to Haman.

learning, so much so, that it becomes a joy. This happens when we delve so completely – with such interest – that the truth becomes clear. Henceforth, the words of Torah become sweet and a delight to learn.

Just before reciting the "Shema," we make a fervent plea to *Hashem*, "Instill in our hearts to understand and expound upon, to listen, learn, teach, safeguard, perform and fulfill all the words of Your Torah's teaching with love." Our prayer continues with yet another request for an even greater spiritual attainment, "Enlighten our eyes in Your Torah." We ask for more: "That our hearts shall cleave to Your commandments." Finally, we ask that "our hearts be unified to love and fear Your Name" – a request that we attain a loyal relationship with our Creator, so exclusive that all worldly concerns simply fail to interest us.

The pleasure of learning Torah dispels all longings for fleeting, material enjoyments. Existence becomes life, real living – freedom from the pursuit of pleasure and happiness. *Ohr Hachaim Hakodesh* explains that the message of the *passuk* (*Devarim* 26,11), "You

shall rejoice with all the goodness that *Hashem*, your G-d has given you ...", is that *Hashem* is the "source of all good." The *Ohr Hachaim* also explains that this ultimate goodness refers to Torah, for *Chazal* (*Pirkei Avos* 6:3) teach us, "'Torah and goodness are synonymous.' If people would experience the sweetness and pleasantness of Torah, they would be enthralled and they would run after it. A world's worth of gold and silver would be as nothing before their eyes – for the Torah contains all the goodness in the world. Torah includes everything that is good in the world." The *passuk* uses the expression "all" – everything. It is impossible to believe that any physical pleasure – a chocolate bar, a dinner or a vacation – embodies goodness! True, the moment's fleeting pleasure is undeniable, but rationally, we should realize that the craving for the next time certainly lasts longer than the pleasure itself.

CELEBRATING LIFE

Chazal (*Shabbos* 152a) teach us that as *talmidei chachamim* become older, they gain more

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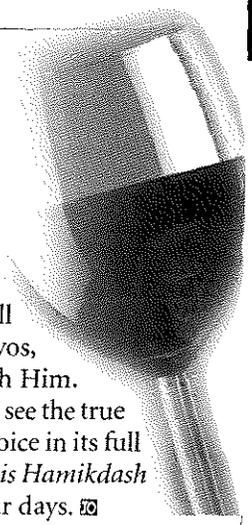
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stability of mind. Knowing that they have done what they should have done gives them peace of mind. They have no guilt feelings, doubts or confusion. They are happy with their lives. In contrast, when people who hunger for the pleasures of this world get older, they realize that their previous thrills can no longer excite them. They become more confused and worried. They realize that they lived a life of emptiness, triviality and foolishness. Sadly, it is too late.

Life is our choice. In the words of *Megillas Esther* (8,16), "For the Jews had light and gladness, and joy and honor." *Chazal* teach us that light is referring to Torah. This is the miracle of Purim: Wine produced clarity, elation and life, and at the same time, wine caused confusion, oblivion and death. The mitzvah of Purim is to confuse the difference between *baruch Mordechai* and *arur Haman* – to realize that this is the reality of life. Wine, when used correctly, can enliven and elevate – as happened to Mordechai. On the other hand, when misused, wine can sadden and destroy – which is exactly what happened to Haman.

This was Purim: *olam hazeh* against Torah. We all face this battle. Sometimes people forsake learning because they prefer an affluent lifestyle. The prospect of enjoying all sorts of foods, furnishings, and gratifications is very tempting. Luxuries become necessities, and if a person is not affluent enough to have them, or does not desire them – something is wrong with him. On the contrary, it is the greatest advantage to be free from all these things – and their temptations. The joy of learning Torah and the beauty of Torah life shines far brighter and further than the false glitter of this world.

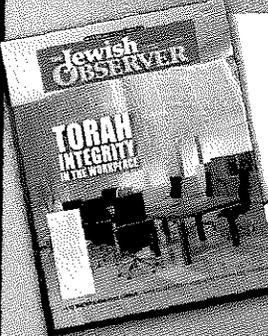
The splendors of *olam hazeh* cannot give true life and true *simcha*. Purim, just like life, is for us to enjoy, but one can become drunk. Wine has the potential to build and to destroy. A life steeped in *olam hazeh* brings destruction – nothing is built. In old age, this is understood, but it will be too late. There is no longer the time or energy to build.

The days of Purim are for feasting and festivity, a time to enjoy this world.

On Purim, we drink wine Wine is a wonderful thing. It can make a person happy, but at the same time, it can make a person drunk – and all that one ate comes spewing out. Likewise, if one abuses life, turning *olam hazeh* into a feast of *gashmiyus*, then life, like the stomach of a drunkard, is empty.

Haman had all the powers of *olam hazeh* at his disposal, and he became cursed. *Lehavdil* Mordechai clung to

Torah, and *Hashem* blessed him. May we, too, merit *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* blessings. May our mitzvos of Purim, and all our Torah and mitzvos, always find favor with Him. May we also be able to see the true light of Torah and rejoice in its full brilliance with the *Beis Hamikdash* rebuilt speedily in our days. ☞




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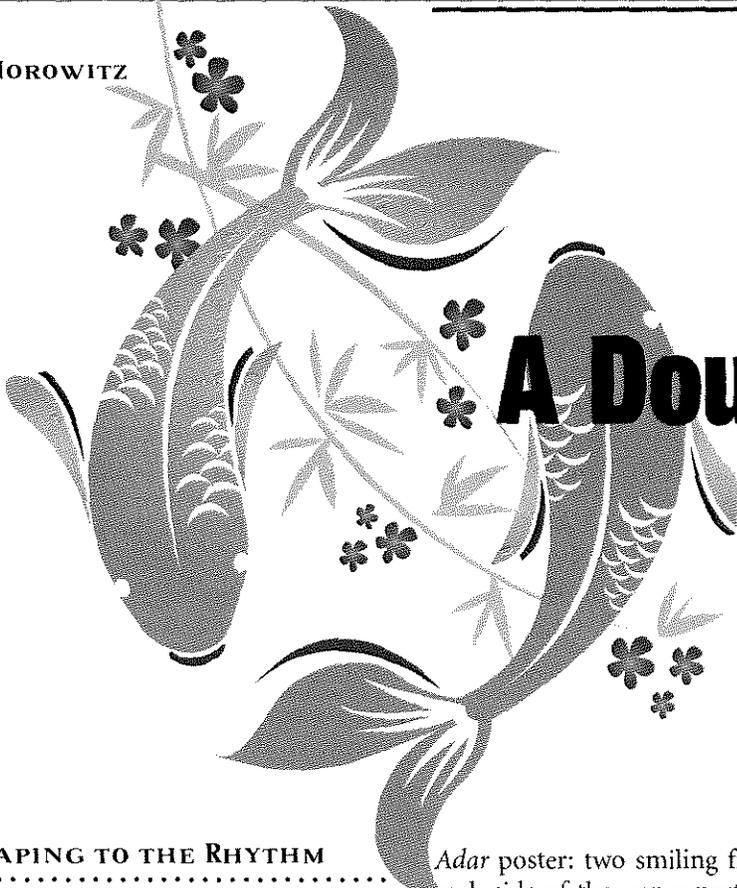
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S. HOROWITZ



A Double Dose

LEAPING TO THE RHYTHM

I have a perfect view through a crack in the *mechitza*. My heart leaps as the band suddenly launches a rhythmic and blaring bout of *Mishenichnass Adar*. The magical power of Adar has burst into the wedding hall.

An oversized clown, bunny, and duck are suddenly bounding in single file. A panda and a monkey are following close behind, and the bouncing animals are automatically taking first place on the dance floor. The surrounding men are loosening their gait and leaping higher into the air, empowered by the sight of the dancing zoo.

The lively atmosphere is infectious; even the women at the *mechitza* are tapping their feet, thoroughly entranced.

But wait a minute. I wonder; it's only the first Adar And what a delightful scene; it feels like Purim, yet Purim is still a good six weeks away. Is this Purim celebration not a bit premature in time?

On second thought, however, I recall the classic picture on any *Mishenichnass*

Adar poster: two smiling fish, one on each side of the upper part. I recall as well how a teacher had explained that the two fish are for the two Adars.

Every month has a *mazal*, a symbol that pertains to the time, and generally the *mazal* is mentioned in a singular form. The *mazal* of Adar, however, is *dagim*, fish in the plural form, to include the two Adars of the Jewish leap year. In that case, Adar is Adar and the first Adar is no less Adar than the second; and the Purim music is most appropriate.

"Ay, ay, ay - *mishenichnass Adar*" I think my eardrums, along with my heart, are also pounding to the rhythm.

My eyes are riveted and my feet glued to my lucky spot. The scene that I behold is as *Purimdik* as ever, and invigorating. I guess a double Adar in the Jewish leap year provides double cause to leap for joy. What a bonus!

Some more women are joining the group and craning their necks to catch a glimpse.

While thoroughly relishing the spirit, I wonder: What is really the joy of Adar?

Is it the blaring music and the bouncing animals in and of themselves? Is it the party snappers, invisible ink, or

laughing bags that my children are already collecting? Or is it a more profound joy, of which these delights are, in effect, a manifestation or expression?

What could it be - the cause for this extraordinary, even intoxicating ecstasy?

THE AGE-OLD ANSWER

Again, the picture of the two smiling fish revives the age-old answer.

Unquestionably, the joy of Adar, as the symbol of fish denotes, is Torah. Just as fish can only thrive in water, so the Jewish nation thrives only through Torah. And that, really, is the essence of our happiness.

The true happiness that the months of Adar are associated with is one that emanates from the power of Torah, which is the strength and lifeline of the Jewish nation. Limited as our minds are, though, it can be difficult to properly comprehend this profound joy. Thus, the costumes and merrymaking that personify Adar create the thrills that are easier to recognize. Indeed, how powerfully they lured the men into

MRS. HOROWITZ LIVES IN BROOKLYN. HER ARTICLE "THE 'HERO' SANDWICH" APPEARED IN *JO*, APR. '07.

The prime time for celebrating is during the months of Adar, for, as the water-dependent fish suggest, Adar is a time particularly potent for achieving and experiencing the true joy of Torah, which is our lifeline.

It is an opportune time for accepting the yoke of Torah with love, free will, and true happiness, as the Jews did at the time of the miracle of Purim.

vibrant action and the women into a spellbound audience.

But are we, I wonder, achieving a measure of ecstasy, as well, over the true cause and source of this joy?

The great men of our nation have achieved and lived the concept ... in a real way. They have indeed drawn the very equation ... between *Purimdik* ecstasy ... and Torah.

As the *gaon* and *rosh yeshiva*, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter ז"ל, once commented – in the powerful words that only he could articulate – on people in the old town of Telz who were thoroughly immersed in Torah:

"Shikkur mit Torah zenen zei geven!"

Head over heels!

Drunk!

With a Purim-like excitement over Torah ... a cause indeed worthy of their linking arms and leaping high into the air in utter jubilation ... a cause worthy of the most powerful demonstrations of joy.

The *Be'er Shmuel*, the *gaon* and *tzaddik* Rabbi Shmuel Rosenberg (1842-1919), Rav and *rosh yeshiva* in Unsdorf, conveyed this message with an anecdote from his youth:

During his teenage years, while learning in the Yeshiva of the *K'sav Sofer*, he attended an additional nightly *shiur* that was given to businessmen by the *gaon* Reb Nuta Volf ז"ל.

Reb Nuta Volf was famous for in his in-depth learning of a *daf* of Gemara.

The *Be'er Shmuel* claimed that he had learned *Rashi's* commentary so precisely at this *shiur*, that, inevitably, all of the questions of *Tosafos* had already been answered therein.

The *gaon* Reb Nuta Volf was actually of German origin; thus, the young Shmuel had difficulty understanding his language. Nevertheless, since his desire to learn from him was so great, he persisted, attending the *shiur* every evening for several weeks, until he began understanding his language and mastering the lessons. His happiness then was immeasurable. He related how he would eagerly await that hour of the day when

he would obtain this profound spiritual pleasure in his learning.

He concluded about the joy he experienced at this *shiur* that it would not be possible for a human being to derive so much joy from any worldly pleasure like the joy that he derived from Reb Nuta Volf's teachings!

Such was his love of Torah ... to be deemed far surpassing and way, way above and beyond any imaginable pleasure in the world.

THE INNERMOST SECRETS

But the real secrets regarding his diligence as a *bachur* in the *K'sav Sofer's* yeshiva were revealed to his students at a time when the *Be'er Shmuel* was indeed a bit *shikkur* or lightheaded. And that was on the day of Purim itself.

Purim is a day when innermost secrets of great people can come through, and so it happened that he disclosed valuable personal information.

There were two hundred and fifty *talmidim* learning in his yeshiva at the time, with amazing diligence. The Unsdorfer Yeshiva could not provide the luxury of proper meals served in a

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spacious dining room. On the contrary, the boys subsisted usually on a simple diet of bread and milk. There were even those who could not afford milk, and drank water with sugar instead. Nevertheless, these hardships did not deter the *bachurim* in the least from their *avodas Hashem* and Torah learning. Their self-sacrifice only strengthened their cause, and they were indeed diligent in their own right!

Yet, at a peak of merriment, the *Be'er Shmuel's* voice rang out with vehement words of wisdom and *mussar* to his students in spite of their remarkable diligence!

"You think your toil in Torah is considered self-sacrifice and living with a bare minimum?" he exclaimed. "I will tell you how I, as a young *bachur*, toiled and learned Torah – with the barest minimum of physical pleasures! That was when I learned at the yeshiva of the *K'sav Sofer*. My father was a *rav* in Tissa-Firred and provided me with money for rent alone. During the week, I did not

eat meals in other houses; I ate just a dry piece of bread with salt and a cupful of water. I barely knew what breakfast, lunch, and dinner were.

"With my overwhelming passion for Torah, I learned immediately after *Shacharis* without pause, until later, when I felt hungry and weak. Then I ate my dry bread and salt at about eleven, twelve o'clock, and sometimes, again at two in the afternoon. My dinner at about midnight consisted of the same menu. And I learned with great diligence and joy, for most of the night!

"Every Thursday I fasted. Thursday night, which is *leil shishi*, I stayed awake and learned straight through the night. Friday, too, I learned without stopping for a rest, until the onset of Shabbos. Friday night was the one time that I ate my fill of sumptuous food in the home of a wealthy businessman, and after that, overcome with fatigue, I slept soundly through the night."

He added, regarding his continuous self-deprivation, "*Ess hut mir Baruch*

Hashem kein mahl nisht geshadt (This never cause me any harm.)

"On the *Yom Tov* of Sukkos, in Pressburg, several neighbors would share one sukkah and take turns eating their meals. I, too, took my turn, but only after the others had all finished theirs, for I feared that someone would catch a glimpse of my meager plate. All I had for the meal was a roll!"

With a laugh, he added, "I had dairy too. A *milchige messer*, a dairy knife!"

Thus escaped an inadvertent account of the *Be'er Shmuel's* self-sacrifice for Torah and superior diligence during his teenage years, through his own lips!

So great was his passion for Torah – that, although, during those years, his physical sustenance was meager, he felt no discomfort or deprivation. On the contrary, he was thrilled and ecstatic, and felt fortunate to be acquiring the greatest wealth in the world, Torah.

Indeed, at a time when he was literally *shikkur*, his true passion and self-sacrifice for Torah came through in a burst of exuberance.

He was "*shikkur mit Torah*" on that Purim night ... and *shikkur mit Torah* every day of his life.

LET THE DRUMS ROLL

Let the drums indeed roll, with the onset of Adar, and the music blare in honor of Torah; it is a genuine cause for celebration. We can already throw some party snappers. The prime time for celebrating is during the months of Adar, for, as the water-dependent fish suggest, Adar is a time particularly potent for achieving and experiencing the true joy of Torah, which is our lifeline. It is an opportune time for accepting the yoke of Torah with love, free will, and true happiness, as the Jews did at the time of the miracle of Purim.

This year we have two Adars, doubling our chances.

May a double dose of Adar, with its additional aura, increase our awareness and understanding ... of our life's truest joy.





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CHAIM DOVID ZWIEBEL

★ No Ordinary Tuesday ★

**Tuesday, February 5, 2008,
was no ordinary Tuesday.**

It was "Super Tuesday" – the day on which no fewer than 24 states conducted primary elections or caucuses to determine the Democratic and Republican presidential nominees. Never before in the history of the United States had so many states conducted their primaries on the same day.

Indeed, for political junkies enthralled by all the hoopla and drama of presidential election campaigns, February 5 was more like "Super Duper Tuesday." Both the Democrats and the Republicans seeking to succeed President Bush were locked in tight races. The February 5 vote tallies would separate the contenders from the pretenders, and perhaps even determine the actual nominees. The political stakes couldn't be higher.

For us in the Jewish community the stakes were high as well. The next president, whoever he (or she) may be, will be assuming the reins of power at a critical juncture in modern day history, a time when Jews in general, and our brethren in *Eretz Yisroel* in particular, are facing enormous challenges and

potential dangers from so many different angles.

It was surely no coincidence that the *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah* of America had decided just a few weeks earlier to issue a *kol koreh* urging all eligible voters to vote. Although the proclamation is stated in general terms, without any specific reference to the primaries, the timing of its publication was clearly designed to impress upon the community the importance of participating in the selection process for the respective parties' presidential nominees.

While many *gedolei Yisroel* of this generation and previous ones have published statements calling upon Jews to vote, this was the first time the *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah* as a body issued such a call. In doing so, the *Moetzes* emphasized not only the general civic obligation of voting but also the practical impact of making our voices heard through the ballot box:

"First, it is incumbent on us to be concerned about the interests of our fellow Jews, and we have indeed merited to see great accomplishments that American Jewry has attained with the help of Heaven through participation in the electoral process. Second, Divine Providence has placed the United States today in the position of being

the single greatest ally of the Jewish nation that lives in the Holy Land, concerned with protecting it from the '70 wolves' that surround it to destroy it, G-d forbid."

The message was clear: If we are truly concerned about the wellbeing of our Jewish brethren in the Holy Land at this difficult time, and if we wish to do something tangible about it, we should take the time to vote.

From my experience in working with government officials, I can attest to the simple truth that politicians pay attention to communities that vote. There is usually a clear correlation between high voter turnout and high governmental access.

Those of us who went to vote on Super Tuesday, therefore, were being "*shtadlonim*" in the true sense of the word. We can justifiably take pride that, in carrying out the directive of our Torah leaders, we made a real difference on behalf of *Klal Yisroel*.

★ ★ ★

**Tuesday, February 5, 2008,
was no ordinary Tuesday.**

It was *Erev Rosh Chodesh Adar Rishon*, the eve of the new month when we would be ushering in the wonderful days of *marbin be'simcha*.



**It was Erev Rosh Chodesh Adar Rishon,
"Yom Kippur Kattan." Countless Jews across
the globe added special prayers to their daily
routine, focused on the "difficult situation of
the Jewish community in Eretz Yisroel."**

Erev Rosh Chodesh is known as "*Yom Kippur Kattan*" – a miniature *Yom Kippur* – because according to our *mesorah*, the last day of a Jewish month is a time for special prayer and supplication to *Hashem*.

On this particular *Erev Rosh Chodesh*, countless Jews across the globe added special prayers to their daily routine, in response to a call from the *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah* of Agudas Yisroel and *Degel HaTorah* in *Eretz Yisroel*, independently co-signed by the *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah* of America.

Their *Kol Koreh* focused on the "difficult situation of the Jewish community in *Eretz Yisroel*." The proclamation noted that, in addition to internal problems affecting the Torah community, "during these days, items are on agendas that could place entire populations of Jews into grave danger, G-d forbid – including those in the holy city of Jerusalem." Therefore, implored the *Gedolei Yisroel*, "Dear brethren, awaken and inspire yourselves to pour out prayer before the Creator of the world, that He have pity and protect His nation from all who stand up against us, that He abolish the intentions of those who hate us, and nullify the plots of our enemies ..."

The *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah* was reminding us that, ultimately, there is no earthly power on whom or which we can rely in times of crisis. Our sole source of salvation comes from *Hashem*, and it is toward Him that our hearts and prayers must be directed if we truly seek safety and security against the evil intentions of our enemies.

Those of us, therefore, who said an extra "*kappitel Tehillim*" on February 5, and participated in *Yom Kippur Kattan* services, were being "*shtadlanim*" in the true sense of the word. We can take pride

that, in carrying out the directive of our Torah leaders, we made a real difference on behalf of *Klal Yisroel*.

**Tuesday, February 5, 2008,
was no ordinary Tuesday.**

It was a day in which we had an opportunity to fulfill two distinct directives from the *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah*: first, to exercise our right in this country to vote in a presidential primary election whose outcome could have a profound impact on the wellbeing of our brethren

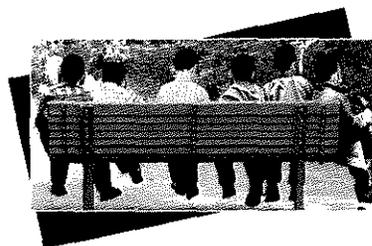
in *Eretz Yisroel*; and second, to lift our voices in prayer to *Hashem*, for it is He who runs His world, it is He who controls the hearts of kings, it is He who ensures the wellbeing of our brethren in *Eretz Yisroel*.

The *Chovos Halevavos* in *Sha'ar Habitachon* (Chapter 4) addresses the apparent paradox that we, as believing Jews, face in every aspect of our lives: the need for us to do our *hishtadlus* – to earn a living, to find a *shidduch*, to seek out the best doctor, to vote for the best candidate – all at the same time recognizing that *Hashem* is the *zan u'mefarneis lakol*, the *mezaveig zivugim*, the *rofeh chol basar*, the *mamlich melachim*.

The challenge this places upon us is twofold.

First, we must recognize that despite our earthly *hishtadlus*, ultimately it is *Hashem* who pulls all the strings. We invest time, energy, focus, labor, money into our endeavors – as we must, at least since *Adam Harishon* was told that his

**If he cannot learn the way we teach,
we had better teach the way he can learn.**
- Robert Burns



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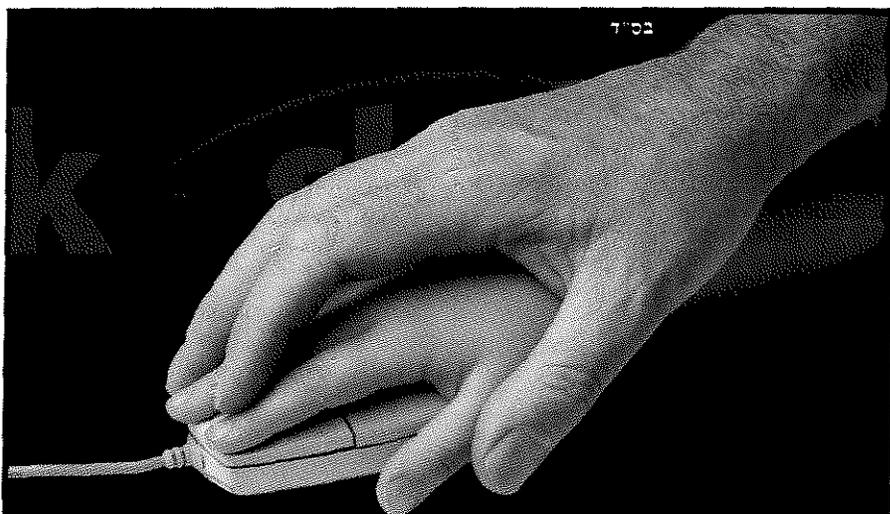
sustenance will come about through *zei'as apecha*. But all those investments, necessary though they may be, are dangerous – for they can easily lead to the *kochi ve'otzam yadi assah li es ha'chayil hazeh* syndrome, a sense that we are the masters of our own destinies, when in fact *Hu hanosein lecha ko'ach la'asos chayil*, it is *Hashem* who blesses us with whatever we are able to achieve. As the *Chovos Halevavos* states, "A person must have clear belief that his affairs are given over to the decree of the Creator ... and while he must busy himself seeking to improve his condition and choose that which appears to him to be appropriate under the circumstances, he must also realize that *Hashem* will do according to His predetermined decree."

Second, we must simultaneously recognize that despite the fact that it is *Hashem* who controls everything, we are nonetheless obligated to go through the rigors of our *hishtadlus*. Again, the words of the *Chovos Halevavos*: "Even though a person's end and the length of his days are determined by the decree of the Creator, it is incumbent on him to strive for a means of obtaining his livelihood – food, drink, clothing, shelter according to his needs. He must not leave this to *Hashem*, saying, 'If it is ordained for me to live, *Hashem* will sustain me without food throughout my life, and I need not go to the bother of working for a living.'"

Living with the knowledge that *Hashem* is pulling the strings, and with the simultaneous obligation to do all in our earthly power, may on the surface seem to be a logical impossibility. But in fact, there is no contradiction between *bitachon* and *hishtadlus*. Incorporating both into one's daily life is the essence of a believing Jew's challenge in this world.

* * *

Lay the two *kol korehs* of the *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah* side by side. The underlying message is: go out to vote, say a *perek Tehillim* while you wait on line – and see the lesson of the *Chovos Halevavos* come alive before your very eyes. 



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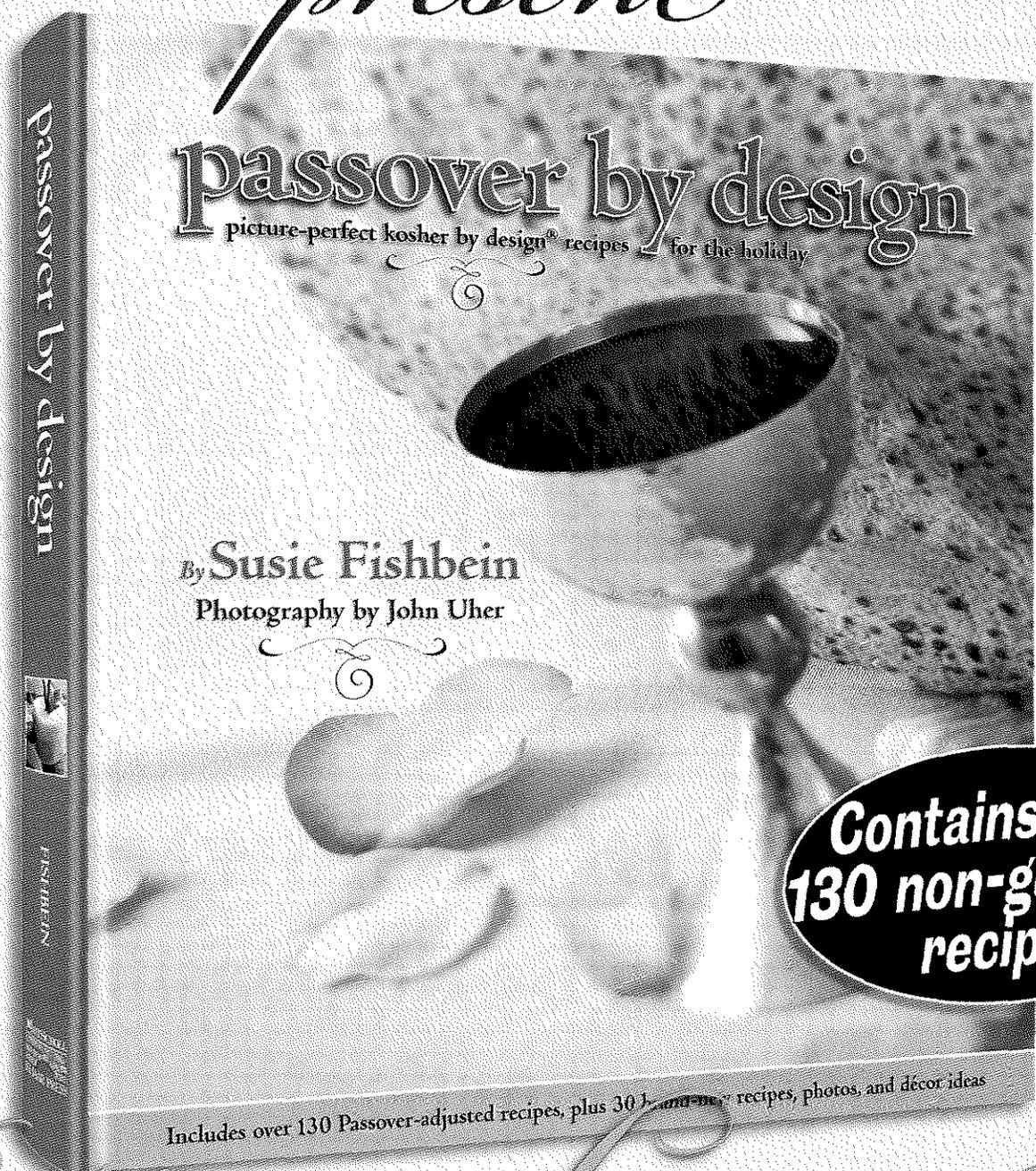
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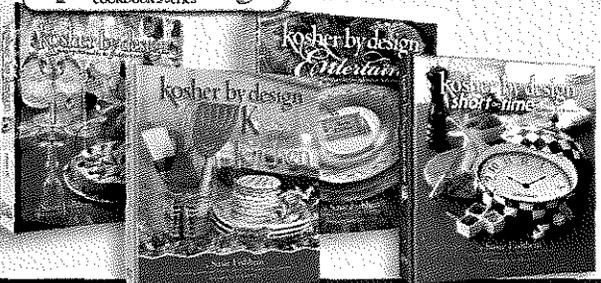


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