

THE JEWISH OBSERVER

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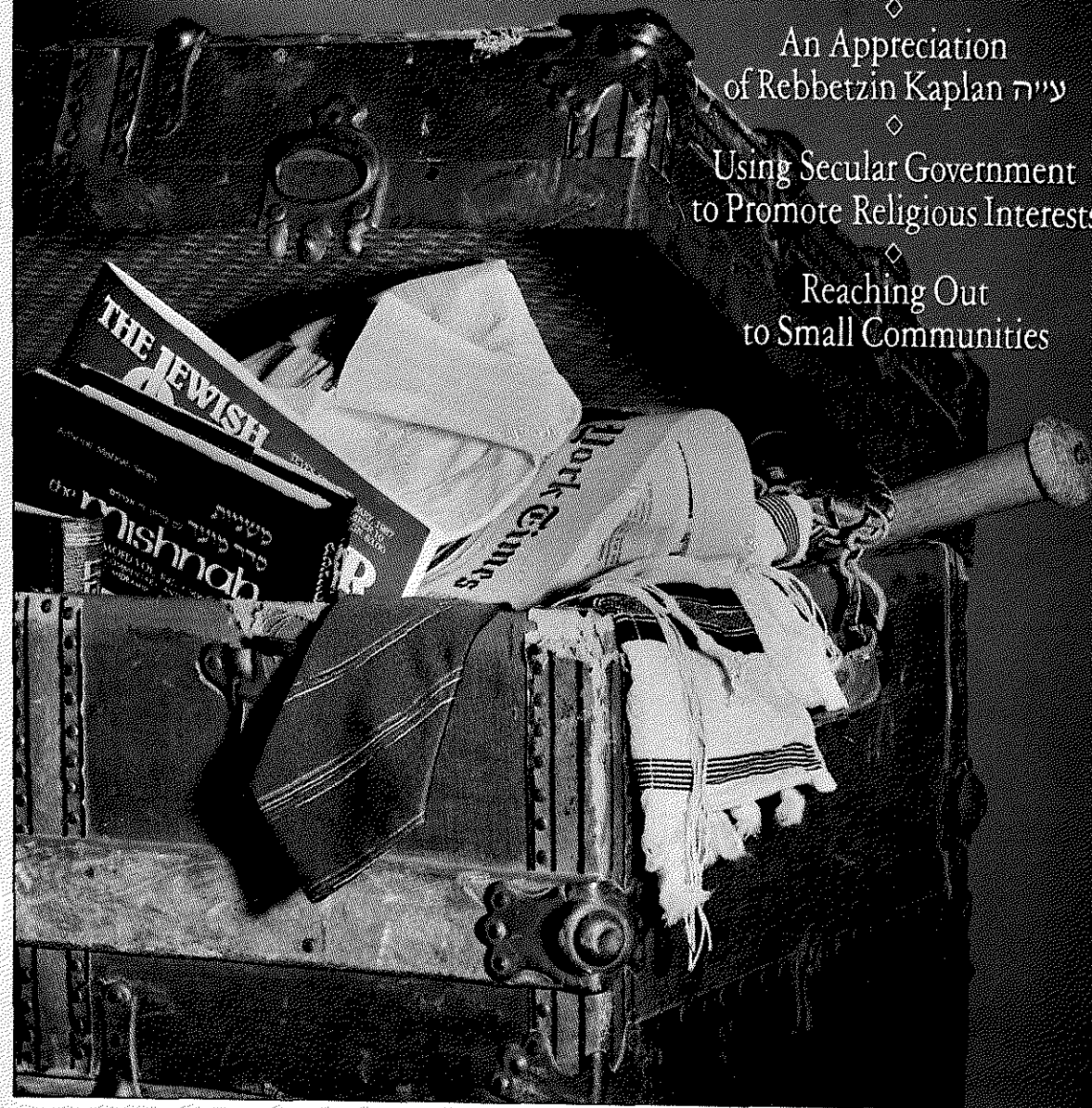
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Are We Still in Golus?

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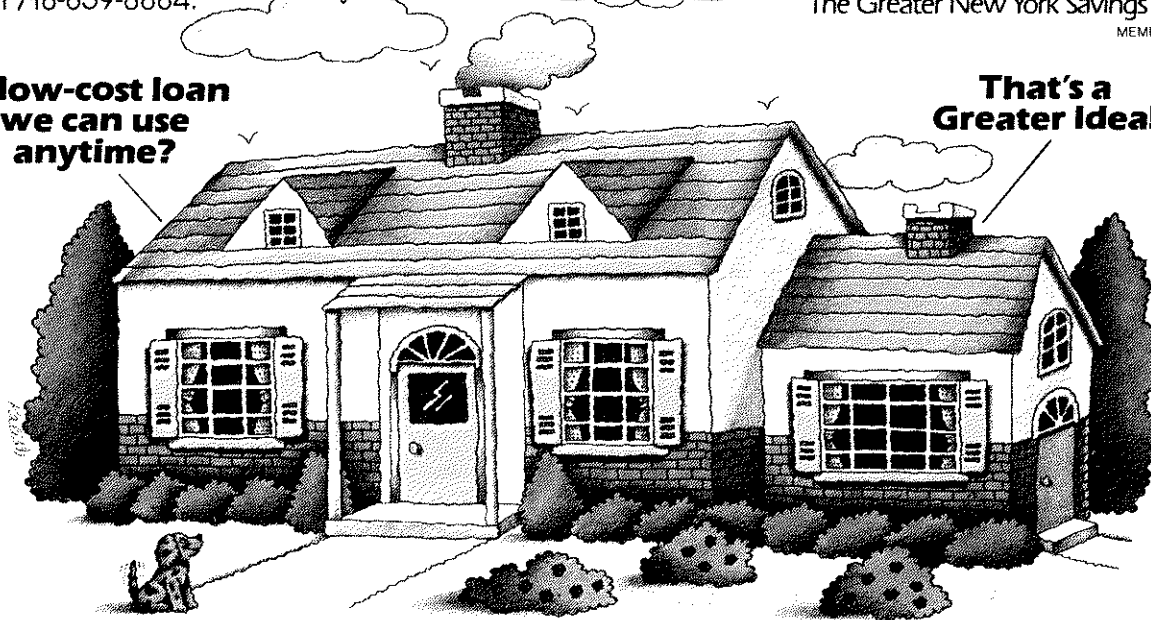
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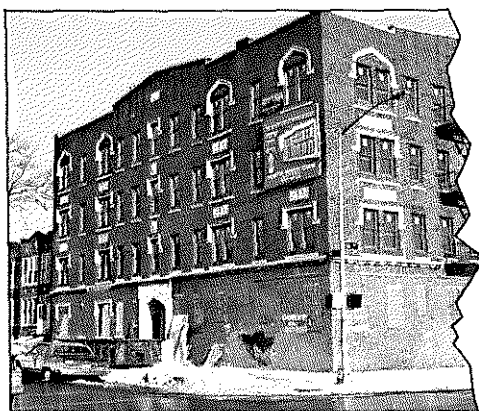
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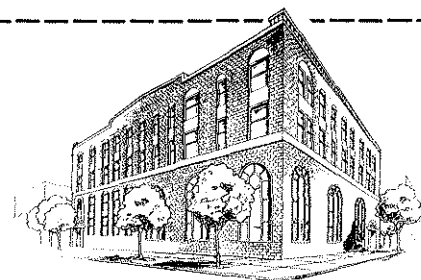
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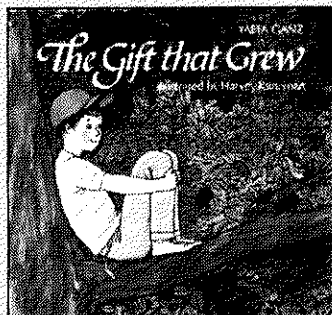
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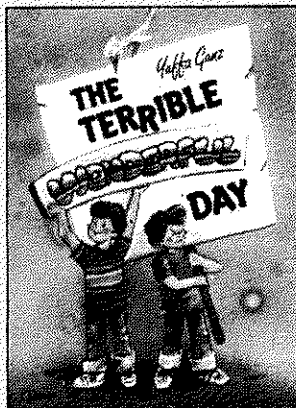


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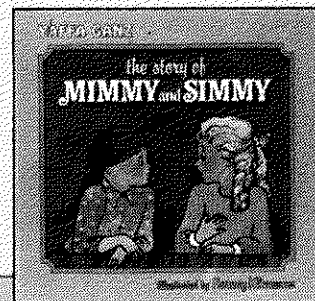
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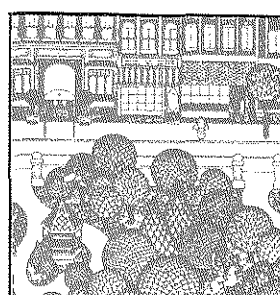
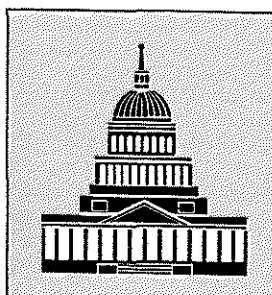
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VillageView



VOL. 1 NO. 1

WINTER 1986

BORO PARK VILLAGE

THE GROUND HAS BEEN BROKEN: BORO PARK VILLAGE IS COMING

Bright yellow "Boro Park Village is Coming" buttons were pinned on the lapels of jackets and on dresses last September 28th at the groundbreaking ceremonies marking the beginning of construction of a unique community. Boro Park Village, a multi-faceted development located on 52nd Street between 18th and 19th Avenues and 19th Avenue between 51st and 52nd Streets will include condominiums of various sizes with many four bedroom maisonettes (see separate story) and special units with facilities designed for senior citizens and smaller families. ■



The ceremonies were opened by Shmuel Lefkowitz, Chairman of Prime Resources Corporation, the co-developer and marketing agent for Boro Park Village. With partner Joel Kaplan, Lefkowitz helped to structure Boro Park Village into



a complex that is "just what the community ordered." Co-developer Charles Reiss of Housing Futures Inc. in Manhattan called it "a dream project for any borough but of particular significance to Brooklyn where there is a need for such housing." ■

Under a huge tent which had been especially erected for the occasion, leaders of the community joined City Comptroller Harrison J. Goldin and Brooklyn

Borough President Howard Golden in feasting on gefilte fish, chopped liver, kosher Chinese food and a variety of hors d'oeuvres. With the Neginah Orchestra playing lively Jewish wedding music in the background, the jubilant crowd congratulated the developers, the contractors, La Sala Construction and the local dignitaries such as Congressman Charles Schumer, State Senator Martin Solomon and Councilman Noach Dear for supporting the Brooklyn complex. ■

DEMOLITION IS COMPLETED AND CONSTRUCTION BEGINS

Interior demolition for Boro Park Village has been completed and the new housing complex is under construction. A spokesperson for La Sala Construction, the well-known New York construction firm, said that plans for the complex are well ahead of schedule. He added that their work reflects the high standards and approach typical of Manhattan luxury developments which his firm will be bringing to Boro Park Village. The main site, 52nd Street, has been the scene of major construction activi-

ty, with the crews careful not to destroy the quiet ambience of the surrounding streets. "The 52nd Street Block Association has been terrific and looks forward to welcoming their new neighbors," according to the spokesman. ■

Boro Park Village will be a major showplace indicative of Manhattan-type style and fast paced yet careful construction. ■

arate recreation rooms. All complete with convenient city living. ■

Joel Kaplan of PRG, co-developer of the complex, says "Boro Park Village will be known for the most creatively designed layouts in Brooklyn. We have a variety of floor plans available from which our future residents can choose." Shmuel Lefkowitz, Mr. Kaplan's partner, adds, "Boro

Park Village is certainly keeping up with the times in terms of architecture and day-to-day living." Mr. Lefkowitz added, "Each unit will have a porch leading from the master bedroom and a separate entrance, some from grass-covered interior courtyards." ■

Boro Park Village is an ideal setting for a growing family, which hopes to be close to schools, synagogues and shopping. The convenient location has the best to offer in religious and cultural life in Brooklyn. ■



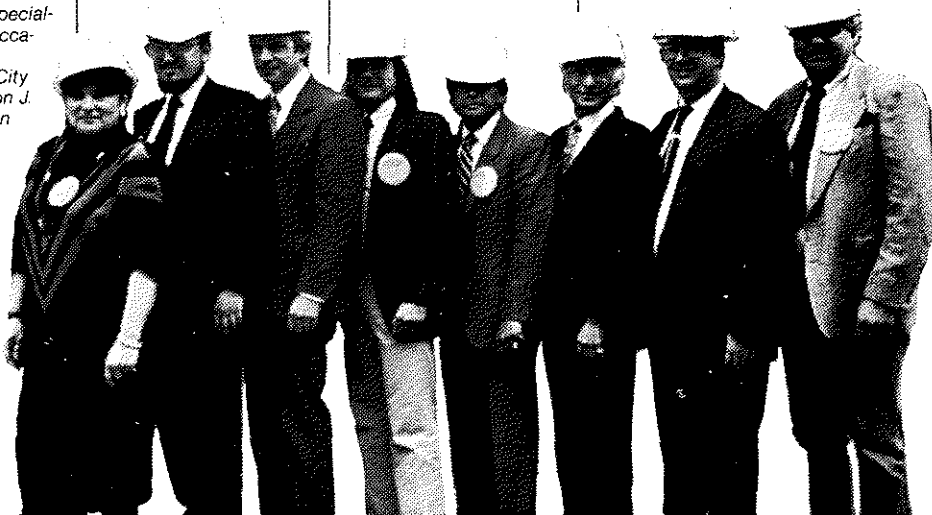
FRENCH STYLE MAISONNETTES IN BORO PARK?

French style "Maisonettes" are coming to Boro Park, Brooklyn. They best describe Boro Park Village's multi-level four bedroom units with private front entrances, eat-in kitchens, private patio, rooftop gardens and sep-

(Top) Brooklyn dignitaries attending the important groundbreaking ceremonies of Boro Park Village included Borough President Howard Golden (left) and Councilman Noach Dear.

(Right) Boro Park Village notables included (l to r): Rita Gluck (PRG, Salesperson); Shmuel Lefkowitz (PRG); Charles Reiss (HF); Lee Weintraub (Landscape Architect); Steve Goodstein (investor); Al Olin (investor); Joel Kaplan (PRG); Richard Ferrara (architect).

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ARE WE STILL IN GOLUS?

I recently conducted a workshop at a convention of several Bais Yaakov high schools. The girls came from the New York metropolitan area and other parts of the East Coast. The workshop was titled, "The Jew in an Alien Society."

It was during the week of *Parshas Lech Lecha*, and I had developed several approaches to the subject, all based on the idea of *Avraham Avinu* standing alone against the rest of the idolatrous world. To get the discussion started, I posed the question, "Did any of you ever experience any anti-Semitism?" To my surprise, not one girl responded with a "yes." In my disbelief, I repeated and rephrased the question, thinking that perhaps they had not understood it at first. Yet the response was the same. This led me to think about our situation here in America and the title of this article.

Obviously we *are* still in *Golus*, and I believe our position in *Golus* is always precarious. Yet for a major portion of the Jews in Orthodox enclaves, the reality of *Golus* hardly exists. Perhaps this lack of *Golus*-

awareness is the real reason for many ills of our society that have been written about in the past.

THE UNIQUE EXPERIENCE OF AMERICA

There is no doubt that the present Jewish experience in America is unique and unparalleled in all of our history. Never before did Jews have the opportunities to have what they want without ostensibly having to give up anything. When before did doctors walk the hospital corridors with yarmulkas on their heads? Or when did obviously Chassidic Jews teach at all levels of the university or practice in Wall Street law firms? During the peak periods of Jewish involvement in non-Jewish society—the Golden Age of Spain or Post-Emancipation Europe—there was always a price and a deep fear attending any such involvement.

Never have Jews been able to earn as much money from so many diverse types of occupation. The religious community seems almost untouched by the economic cycles affecting the rest of the community. This is an unparalleled situation. It

may well be partially responsible for the un-*Golus*-like attitude we have developed; and it is also part of our battle against this lack of awareness that these opportunities have to be utilized properly.

There are three levels on which a *Golus*—or lack-of-*Golus*—awareness operates. One is the internal perception, within our community, of what *Golus* means. The other two deal with how we conduct ourselves—amongst ourselves, on the one hand, and our behavior vis-a-vis our neighbors, on the other. In all of these areas we must re-train our own thinking and re-focus the emphasis of the *chinuch* (education) of our children. None of the root causes of the problem are easy to deal with, nor are any of the solutions easy to put into effect. But we must begin somewhere.

THE STRUGGLE

There are two forces struggling for pre-eminence in our society. One is the tremendous spurt and growth of Torah Judaism and Torah learning on a level and scale undreamed of in recent times; the other is the trend towards in-

Rabbi Brafman, *menahel* of Yeshiva Derech Ayson of Far Rockaway, NY, is a frequent contributor to these pages.

creased materialism and hedonism. The second pattern is the *atzas hayeitzer* to undermine the first.

After all, with what can the *yeitzer hora* (evil inclination) tempt the American Orthodox community? He certainly cannot lead them astray with opportunities for *Chillul Shabbos* or non-kosher food! But he can create a kosher lifestyle with a stress on designer Judaism and the pursuit of pleasure, which can corrode the society from within. It can rob us of the time and will to learn, as more time must be spent at work and in pursuit of the hedonistic lifestyle. And that, as we all know from *Rashi* in *B'Chukosai* (*Vayikra* 26,14), is the beginning of the pattern that leads to destruction. It also robs us of the *Golus* awareness, which, if remembered, makes us more sensitive to the spiritual status of *Klal Yisroel*.

This "who's in *Golus*?" illusion is already at work. Witness the millions of dollars being sunk into more luxurious edifices, which are beyond need or even comfort. Let us take note of what the *Shela Hakadosh* (R' Yisroel Halevi Horowitz, 1560-1630) writes at the end of his commentary to *Mesechta Succa*:

"It has always incensed me to see Jews building palatial residences [in the Diaspora], thus sinking roots into this world and into an impure land... It appears to be, G-d forbid, a diversion of attention from the redemption. Therefore, my children, even if G-d grants you great wealth, build homes according to necessity, and not more. Do not build towers and walls in arrogance, but a home in which you can, according to your means, live comfortably, with rooms to find solitude for Torah and repentance."

Thus, the first step is the creation of an inner awareness of our *Golus* status and a modification of our materialistic lifestyle. If the reason people do not move to *Eretz Yisroel* is a legitimate philosophical or halachic one, so be it. But woe to all of us for the *bizayon* of *Eretz Yisroel* if we stay here merely for the sake of comfort!... Which brings us to our next point.

We must strive to achieve an awareness of what the *Churban Bais Hamikdosh* and exile from *Eretz Yisroel* really mean. Have we not relegated the destruction to a few hurriedly said *Kinos* on *Tisha B'Av*? It is not merely a ritual to break the glass under the *chupa* and to have its import ignored the rest of the year!

Have we forgotten the spiritual disappearance of millions of Jews to *Klal Yisroel* in our own time? Do we not have to yearn for the time when we are restored to the level of our ancestors?—when the *Shechina* will dwell openly in our midst?—when "all your sons will be learned of *Hashem*"? Do we find ourselves oblivious of what the *Bets Hamikdash* meant to us as well as to the entire world? There is still so much to long for and pray!

In summary, we must endeavor to place a greater emphasis on those very things we yearn for as part of the *Geula*, while beginning the process of scaling down the trend of needing everything and trying to have everything.

A LESSON FOR OUR TIMES

This awareness, and all that we must internalize in ourselves and our children, are essential parts of the *chinuch* process. Of course, these ideas are not new. They are found throughout *Sifrei Mussar* and *Chassidus*, and more recently they've found their way into a *teshuva* (halachic responsa) by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל (*Yoreh De'ah* III, 71). Reb Moshe outlines some of the essential concepts a Yeshiva *rebbe* should try to inculcate in his *talmidim*. He writes in part: "In our country [America], which G-d has blessed with material abundance, there is a strong desire and obsession [in people] to have and participate in all the available forms of earthly pleasures and to have what is called a 'good time.' This attitude destroys the individual, for it fosters the habit of always desiring things one does not need. It corrupts a person's character and ultimately he

can become a totally animalistic individual. ... The process can ultimately lead one to stray totally from G-d and Torah. For the passion to have and indulge will ultimately lead him to transgress, and partake of what is forbidden. Then, needing justification, he will begin to deny the validity of the Torah itself. This is illustrated in the statement of *Chazal* that the deeper motivation behind *Klal Yisroel's* worship of the Golden Calf was the [search for] license to indulge in immorality."

Reb Moshe goes on to discuss the importance of impressing young children with these concepts and instilling in them an appreciation and reverence for elevated behavior and living, demonstrating his point with an insight into a *Rashi* (*Vayikra* 26,5). The Torah describes the idyllic state of *Eretz Yisroel* when G-d will shower it with a bounty of good. After foretelling of an overabundant harvest of crops, the Torah says, "You will be satisfied with your bread." Quoting the *Midrash*, *Rashi* explains this to mean, "You will eat a small amount and it will be blessed in your insides." Asks Reb Moshe, "Wouldn't this blessing be totally unnecessary after the Torah has described an abundance that would enable everyone to eat to his heart's desire?" But the answer, says Reb Moshe, is exactly as discussed. For a person striving for perfection controls and limits his indulgence and his desire for physical pleasure, even when he has an overabundance. He realizes that the great bounty G-d has showered upon him is not so that he may become a glutton, but rather that what is essential to his health should be more easily obtainable, and that the pleasures that one needs for a normal life, or for *Shabbosos*, *Yomim Tovim* and other *simchos shel mitzva*, should also be easier to come by.

Thus, the Torah adds the blessing of satisfaction with even a little, to spare the *adam hasholeim*—the complete man—from over-investing resources of time and money in eating and drinking. This certainly implies that when we are blessed with an abundance of wealth (as we are

Sabbath desecration or laxities in Kashrus no longer tempt us. Today, we are plagued by designer Judaism and the pursuit of pleasure, which can corrode our society from within.

now), we should not conclude that it is G-d's desire that we pursue the earthly pleasures to a greater degree than before. Rather the wealth is ours to facilitate occupying ourselves with Torah and *maasim tovim*, which is the ultimate goal in both this world and the world-to-come.

THE OSTENTATION FACTOR

Aside from how conspicuous consumption limits our awareness of our *Golus* situation, and quite apart from how this misappropriation of funds costs us dearly in missed opportunities to accomplish more for Torah and *Yiddishkeit*, our ostentation and external show of wealth feeds the latent anti-Semitism of Eisav. This is expressed very succinctly by the *Kli Yokor* in *Parshas Devarim* (2,3).

Regarding the command, "Turn to the north (*tzefona*)," the *Kli Yokor* explains a deeper meaning. "It appears to me that the Torah is teaching us that if a Jew is financially successful, he should conceal it from Eisav [*tzefon*—hide, alluded to by the word '*tzefona*']. For they, as a people, are extremely envious of us, and view whatever fortune we have amassed as stolen from them. This stems from Yaakov having taken the *brachos* from Eisav. Similarly, Yaakov told his sons (*Parshas Miketz*), 'Why make yourselves conspicuous?' [*Rashi* explains this to mean—'Why appear before Eisav and Yishmael as being satisfied?']. For Yishmael considers Yitzchak as having taken his wealth, and Eisav blames Yaakov for the same. Therefore the Torah commands us here to specifically skirt Eisav's territory. This is contrary to the practice today by Jews living in the lands of their enemies. One who has hundreds of dollars to spend dresses so lavishly and lives

so grandly as to appear as if he possesses many thousands. This practice antagonizes the nations and violates, 'Turn to the north—*tzefona*!' This practice has spread among many of our brethren and is a cause of many of the difficulties which befall us. Those with the proper understanding should take this to heart and understand how to act."

In addition to flaunting our wealth, we sometimes are guilty of flaunting our power, making news in ways that I doubt would have taken place in European lands or should be made into issues here. Just as we decry the bravado of the militant-type organizations, which seem to ignore that we still are required to follow the pattern of our *Avos'* conduct in *Golus*, so too is this same lack of awareness exhibited in recent cases where non-Jewish communities are angered by excessive assertiveness for "rights" on the part of Orthodox Jews—all in the name of Torah, of course.

While I do not advocate compromise in issues where *Yiddishkeit* is at stake, there have always been areas where the *halacha* of "*Eiva*" is applied—to avoid antagonizing the gentile population unnecessarily. In each case, we must ask: Is this behavior sanctioned by a particular *gadol* or *poseik*? Or is it being promulgated without prior thought or consultation by people who fail to realize its potential harmful results? To this writer, such conduct often represents a failure to perceive our true situation, beyond the illusory comforts of the here and now.

A TIME OF UNUSUAL OPPORTUNITY

Our unusual affluence and upward mobility are sure indications of tremendous opportunities that we dare not quan-

der. Coming so close on the heels of the Holocaust, our responsibilities become more awesome, for we must question ourselves—did the *Hashgacha* save American Jewry solely for the purpose of living the good life? Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler זצ"ל (*Michtav Me'Eliyahu*, Vol. IV) discusses the Emancipation of the Jews of Europe in the 1800's: "We stand in shock over the terrible destruction that our nation experienced [during World War II] and we ask ourselves, why did G-d do this to us? ... What was the cause for such anger? But let us think for a moment. The entire period prior to the rise of Hitler was a time when the oppression [we had experienced in Europe] was getting lighter and life was becoming easier for Jews. ... The Emancipation had given Jews equal rights in many European countries. ... The nations even began to talk about granting Jews the right to settle in *Eretz Yisroel* in peace. ... It is clear that G-d granted us this opportunity to help us prepare for the coming of *Moshiach*. This is why the *Golus* became easier."

Rabbi Dessler goes on to describe the spiritual preparation necessary to receive *Moshiach*, and how this would be difficult in a position of total suppression. ... "However, since we misinterpreted the purpose of emancipation and, instead of viewing it as an opportunity to prepare for *Geula* in joy and *harchovas hada'as*, we used it to assimilate and become more enmeshed with the gentile world; ... this misused opportunity ultimately has to lead to destruction"—as he discusses at length. He then ends by saying, "If after this awesome destruction we again experience a period of tranquility and opportunity, let us not repeat the mistakes of the past, but rather recognize the message from

“Do not build towers and walls in arrogance, but a home in which you live comfortably, find solitude for Torah and repentance.” —SHELA HAKODOSH

above and use the opportunity to return to *Hashem*.”

Complementing our unequaled wealth and opportunity is an unprecedented willingness to listen and receptiveness to Torah on the part of our alienated brethren. It is only a matter of those of us who have been favored by a superior education to

reach out and share our spiritual riches with others. The response is most remarkable.

All this means embarking on a concerted effort to be *mechanech* the young generation that one need not have everything just because it's there, and for the senior generation to embark on an effort toward mo-

desty and sensitivity... to contemplate the true position of *Klal Yisroel* and to turn the financial and spiritual energies that we've been blessed with to achieve even greater *ruchnius* growth and *chesed*, in which *zechus* we will be *zocheh* to the *geula* and be spared any further *chevlei Moshiach*. ■

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AN APPRECIATION OF REBBETZIN KAPLAN ע"ה

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the ages, certain *gedolim* have stood out as the *rabban shel kol bnei hagolah*—the master teacher of his generation. These past four generations had two women who served as great leaders. Sarah Schenirer who passed away almost 52 years ago on 26 Adar, 5695 (1935), stemmed the tide of assimilation of young girls enrolled in Polish "Gymnasiums" (high schools) by founding Bais Yaakov schools, thus preserving *Yiddishkeit* as it had been in the past.

• ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Mrs. Kitevits, a graduate of Bais Yaakov Seminary, is principal of the evening department of the Seminary. This article is excerpted from a full biography in preparation. She expresses gratitude to Rabbi Avrohom and Rivke Kaplan, who are the source of much of the material in this article.

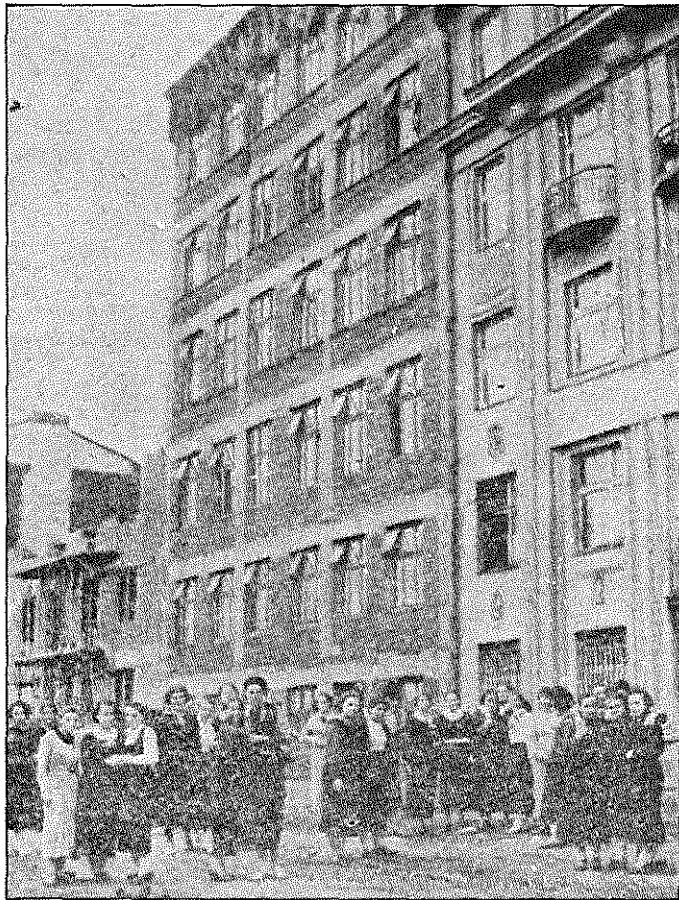
Portrait especially executed for The Jewish Observer by Elic Benzaquen (see page 29).

Rebbeitzin Vichna Kaplan, a disciple of Sarah Schenirer, toiled for 49 years, carrying Sarah Schenirer's message to America. She founded the first Bais Yaakov High School and Teachers Seminary in America. Not only did she keep Jewish daughters loyal to their faith, she guided them in creating Jewish homes and founding a tradition, the likes of which America had never seen. She imbued her students with a philosophy of life, and through them and their households, through their children and their students, her impact was far-reaching—fomenting a virtual revolution in American Jewish life.

Whereas the influence of *gedolim* generally filters down to women through the medium of the man's world—the yeshiva, the *psak*, the *tisch*—Rebbeitzin Kaplan's influence was directed towards the women and

girls themselves. We felt that she belonged to us—the girls and women—someone whom we could embrace and confide in, who not only understood our problems, but had experienced them . . . someone through whom we could become great by listening to her speak, by walking with her, by sharing in her work, by doing some humble task for her.

We lost our personal *gedolah*. Now, when we aspire to greatness in our daily life, we must look for the path she paved for us. We have no choice but to live with the memories she gave us and learn from them.



Bais Yaakov Seminary building in Cracow.

I. EUROPEAN YEARS

Her Heart Was On Cracow

Rebbetzin Vichna Kaplan was born in Slonim, Russia, about 1913. Her father, Reb Ephraim Yehoshua Eisen was famous for his *tzidkus*. Her mother, Mereh Gitel, was the daughter of Rabbi Chaim Leib Lubchansky זצ"ל, *Rav* of Baranovich.

By the time she was eleven both her parents had passed away. She and her brother, Dovid, went to live with their mother's brother and sister-in-law who had no children of their own—Rabbi Yisroel Yaakov Lubchansky

זצ"ל, the famed *mashgiach* in Reb Elchonon Wasserman's yeshiva in Baranovich, and his wife, daughter of the *gaon*, Reb Yoisel Horowitz, "The Alter of Novarodok." Vichna Eisen, her cousins, and friends attended "Meselevsky's," a private religious school for girls.

When sixteen, Vichna read about the Bais Yaakov Seminary in Cracow and set her heart on going there. But the Seminary refused her application because she lacked a diploma from preparatory school. Not content with the refusal, Rebbetzin Kaplan wrote directly to Sarah Schenirer: "Should my whole future be changed because of such a small matter?" Still she did manage to earn that diploma by taking private lessons. However, she had no funds to pay the Seminary tuition and was only able to attend because of Reb Shmuel (Dr. Leo) Deutschlander זצ"ל, who obtained a scholarship for her.

Sem Rules and Regs

Upon arriving in Cracow as part of a group of some 150 young girls, she was presented with the conditions that Seminary students were required to sign before beginning their two-year course of study:

Upon completion of Seminary every girl would have to teach for two years. This could not be in the graduate's hometown, where presumably she would be too busy with her own family to devote herself fully to her teaching career. After the initial three months in Seminary, the administration would evaluate each student's performance. Girls judged to lack the potential for teaching would be asked to leave.

The girls were deeply upset by the rules. They feared that their opportunities for marriage would be seriously limited if they were forced to live away from their hometown. Others worried about the blot on their reputations if they would be sent home from the Seminary.

Her former classmates,¹ who had met Rebbetzin Kaplan in Warsaw on the way to Cracow, recall how she had encouraged the other girls not to despair, but simply to get started.

They also remember her as the top student in her class. Besides knowing much more than the average girl, she had a superior intelligence, and made memorable presentations at assemblies. In time, young Vichna began to assist Sarah Schenirer in various ways, such as collecting *tzeddaka* from house to house for her fund to support poor families.

The Seminary program was quite intensive. The entire day was dedicated to formal classes and study, with no distractions whatsoever. The only breaks in the schedule were the Pesach and Succos intersessions. Even one additional visit home required special permission.

The only other allowance for travel was to help start a new Bais Yaakov school in one of the small *shtetlach* of

¹ Rebbetzin Basya (Epstein) Bender and Rebbetzin Chava (Shlomovitz) Wachtfogel, who joined the high school and Seminary in 1939 and 1944, respectively, greatly assisted Rebbetzin Kaplan in many matters. Many of Rebbetzin Kaplan's colleagues from her own seminary days taught in her Bais Yaakov, despite lucrative offers to teach elsewhere. Together with her they forged a strong, unique link to the original Bais Yaakov in Cracow.

The same self-effacement that made her see herself as a messenger from the last generation made her the living example for our generation.



Sara Schenirer

Poland. This was usually launched by a team of a teacher and a Seminary student. Rebbetzin Kaplan was once dispatched to Baranovich with a teacher, Miss Hamburger, to lobby for opening a Bais Yaakov school there. Her speech had unusual impact,² and Baranovich opened its Bais Yaakov school.

Dr. Judith Rosenbaum³ would teach *Shir Hashirim* Friday nights. After *Shabbos* the girls would approach Rebbetzin Kaplan: "Vichna, please tell us over the *shiur* so we can write down notes. You know it the best." With her characteristic humility, she would say, "I don't know it the best, but I'll tell it to you anyway." And then she repeated the *shiur* verbatim—not using her own language, but the teacher's words.

Rebbetzin Kaplan told her children that when she left for her first intercession trip home, Sarah Schenirer confided in her, "From the first letter you sent me, I saw that you are going to help me in the movement." Others who were present remember Frau Schenirer saying, "You will succeed me, but you will be greater." Rebbetzin Kaplan, of course, never repeated this.

Indeed, all her classmates knew that she was the closest *talmidah* to Sarah Schenirer but no one was jealous, because they all recognized that she had earned the special relationship.

² According to her Baranovich friend, Sora Baila Gutman (Rebbetzin Mendel Kaplan)

³ Rebbetzin Dr. Judith (Rosenbaum) Grunfeld, the Seminary girls' favorite teacher, lives in London now.

The Years in Brisk

The two years in Cracow came to a glorious end on her graduation night—an event that Rebbetzin Kaplan often recalled for her *talmidos*: "Sarah Schenirer danced and sang 'Vetaheir Libeinu (Purify Our Hearts)' with us the entire night."

Rebbetzin Kaplan was sent to Brisk where, for some five years, she served as the only teacher for *limudei kodesh* in the school, besides studying with girls in their older teens before school hours. She frequently consulted the Brisker Rav, Rabbi Yitzchok Zev Soloveitchik זצ"ל, who was responsible for the school.

Rabbi Dovid Soloveitchik שליט"א, of Yerushalayim, writes: "I remember how ... my sainted father and teacher would be extremely lavish in his praise of the *chinuch* for the Torah and *yiras Shomayim* that [Rebbetzin Kaplan] implanted [in her charges]. He would add that she had a great advantage in that she was raised and educated in the home of her uncle, the *gaon* and *tzaddik* Rabbi Yisroel Yaakov Lubchansky זצ"ל and that she had absorbed much Torah, *yiras Shomayim* and exemplary *midos* from him, which she drew on to be *mechanech* (educate) her students."

Twenty some years later, an American girl undecided about which seminary to attend in *Eretz Yisroel*, consulted the Brisker Rav in Yerushalayim. He advised her: "Return to Vichna Kaplan's seminary. There you will learn how to educate the next generation."

When she was in Brisk, the Jewish community was threatened with a pogrom. In response to her query, the Brisker Rav advised her to leave, since she could not help in the situation. On the last day of school before the feared pogrom, Rebbetzin Kaplan was preparing to flee to Kamenitz, but first she hired a taxi to take home several girls who were stranded at the school. Only then did she leave.

Once, before returning home for vacation, Rebbetzin Kaplan decided not to return to Brisk. The city lacked funds for her salary and she could not afford to work without pay. She later received a telegram from the Brisker Rav telling her to come back, so she returned—only to discover that the telegram had been forged! She stayed on anyway. Perhaps she reasoned that if the people in town had to lie to keep her they must be in desperate straits.

In view of her financial situation, the following incident becomes more poignant. Rebbetzin Kaplan and the writer were once discussing a specific book for use in our Child Guidance classes in the Brooklyn Seminary. Because of a questionable anecdote in the book, Rebbetzin

The Jewish Observer, February 1987

“From the letter you sent me, I knew that you were going to help me . . . You will succeed me, but you will be greater.”

—SARAH SCHENIRER TO VICHNE KAPLAN

II. THE BAIS YAAKOV COMES TO AMERICA

Early Attempts⁴

In the 1920's the only Hebrew schools for girls were afternoon Talmud Torahs and Sunday schools with co-ed classes, and boys' Bar Mitzva classes, which some girls joined. These schools were basically culture-oriented and not religious in content. Some more religious girls studied privately at home.

Inspired by Sarah Schenirer in Europe, Reb Binyomin Wilhelm together with his brother-in-law, Ben-Tzion Weberman, and Rabbi Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz זכרונם לברכה (*menahel* of Torah Vodaath) and other community leaders founded the Beth Jacob Hebrew School for Girls in 1925—the first all-girls afternoon school.

Two Bais Yaakov-type elementary day schools later opened in Williamsburgh—Bais Sarah and Bais Rochel, through the initiative of Mr. and Mrs. Avrohom Spinner—but these attempts did not last more than two or three years. Then, through the Herculean efforts of this enlarged group of *askonim*, the Beth Moses Hospital building was purchased, and the Bais Yaakov elementary (day) school in Williamsburgh was opened in the winter of '37 with a kindergarten and several grades. The founding principal was Rabbi Kreiser, followed by his successor, the late Rabbi Avrohom Newhouse.⁵ This Bais Yaakov grew and blossomed for many years.

Mrs. Fruma Laya Mandel, mother of Rabbi Manis Mandel,⁶ started *frum* girls' groups on *Shabbos* in East New York and then in Williamsburgh. These Bnos Yisroel groups became part of Bnos Agudath Israel. Rebbetzin Mandel also held night classes for girls in Williamsburgh for a year or two. . . .

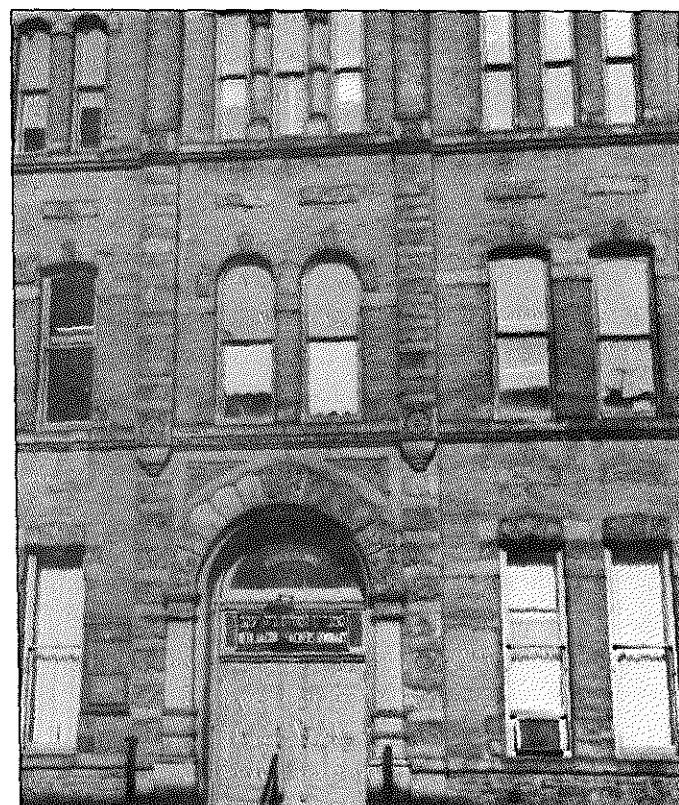
When Rebbetzin Kaplan arrived, there was as yet no religious school for teen-age girls. Rebbetzin Kaplan began with a class of seven eager girls⁷ of high school age, who gathered around the dining room table in the Kaplans' small apartment at 134 So. 9th Street in Williamsburgh. Here the beginnings of the Bais Yaakov High School and Teachers Seminary took place.

Mrs. Genauer recalls: "Rebbetzin Kaplan was an answer to my parents' prayers. The only other Jewish high schools were far to the left in religious orientation, and many parents later did not eat in their children's homes. We had heard about Sarah Schenirer and the Bais Yaakov in Cracow from Rebbetzin Pincus⁸ when she had come back and called a meeting to organize us. We fell in love with her. She had so inspired us that we were prepared for Rebbetzin Kaplan and her plans.

"As a fifteen year old, I went to public high school, then travelled to the Bronx to teach a Talmud Torah class, and then returned to Williamsburgh. From 7 to 10 PM *every night* we learned around the dining room table in Rebbetzin Kaplan's house.

"Rebbetzin Kaplan's devotion was always apparent. She knew what each one of us needed and lacked. She

⁸ Rebbetzin Chava (Weinberg) Pincus, born in America, studied in Bais Yaakov Seminary in Cracow. She taught for Rebbetzin Kaplan until she and Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Pincus moved to *Eretz Yisroel* in '64. They are currently in Santiago de Chile, where Rabbi Pincus is connected with the Kollel.



Bais Yaakov building in Williamsburgh.

⁴ The historical background was furnished by Mrs. Leah (Wilhelm) Herskowitz

⁵ Rabbi Newhouse ז"ל led the elementary Bais Yaakov school for many years. He also pioneered the concept of *frum* girls' camps, as we know them today, when he opened his famed Machane Bais Yaakov in Ferndale.

⁶ Dean of Yeshiva of Brooklyn, which includes separate schools for girls and boys.

⁷ Sylvia (Pilchik) Tehillim, Faigy (Pilchik) Genauer, Sora Wolfson, Rochel Rose (Wolf) Gitelis, Faigy (Rubin) Horowitz, Chanie (Mendlowitz) Greenbaum, and the late Rivky (Mendlowitz) Karp ז"ל.

Allotted fifteen minutes to address the audience, she practiced again and again with a timepiece, to make certain that she would not be using time that was not hers.

had an all-encompassing memory about each of us. I was ambitious at eighteen and could not decide whether to marry then or not. Through her influence I married my late husband, an American who had learned in Kelm.

"I visited her in the hospital after she had given birth. She was preparing her *shiurim* in the hospital bed! ... She took our notebooks home to mark—even the spelling—making notations, i.e., 'This thought is not written out clearly.'

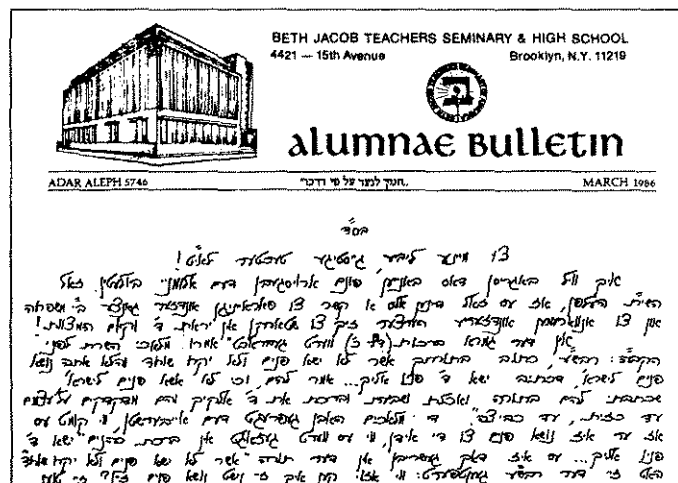
"From Rebbetzin Kaplan's house we moved to Keap Street, then to the 'old Mesifita building' [at Bedford corner Taylor]. By then we were already two classes. Then, to 143 South 8th Street, the address that thousands of Bais Yaakov students will always remember. We thought it a beautiful building! [Rabbi Boruch Kaplan then left his position as a *maggid shiur* in Mesivta Torah Vodaath to help his wife carry the financial administration of Bais Yaakov.] My father, Reb Nissan Pilchik, used to go out nights soliciting money for the school."

Friday nights, at Bnos Agudath Israel groups on *Shabbos* afternoons, even had *Seudah Shlishis* and *Melave Malka* with them. This *Shabbos* spirit drew many girls to join her school.

Rebbetzin Esther Weissman (who joined Bais Yaakov a few months after it opened) recalls one stormy Friday night when Rebbetzin Kaplan came to the Bais Sarah Talmud Torah building where the *Shabbos* group met. When they entered the building they found the lights were off. Someone called in the janitor to put them on—and Rebbetzin Kaplan left into the rainy night for a few minutes. She had gone to inquire if it was permissible to use the room now that the lights had been opened especially for them. ... There were so many *halachos* that the girls never even heard about—which she taught them by example.

After five years, the first group of girls graduated. The school was growing. Yet the love and attention for each student was not diminished. Rebbetzin Chana (Fish-bein) Lubart⁹ came from Chicago straight to the Kaplans' home. They had found her a room with the Pilchiks, walked her over to her new quarters, and gave her \$7 to pay for the room-and-board for the first week—as they continued to do for several weeks, until her older sisters, who were working, could support her.

This *ad hoc* approach changed in 1944, when a dormitory was opened in the South 8th Street building.



Her newsletter.

The Ruach Dimension

The Kaplans borrowed money to open a summer 'learning' camp at Engl's farm in Connecticut. For many of the girls, it was their first adventure in the country. As in the city, Rebbetzin Kaplan was the only teacher in camp, and taught the girls all morning, despite her young, growing family. She even tried to bring *Yiddishkeit* to the people in the area, and invited people from New Haven to special events, such as the campfire.

Rebbetzin Kaplan strove to bring the *ruach* of her Cracow years to Williamsburgh. She met with the girls on

The All-Day High School

Rabbi and Rebbetzin Kaplan opened the full-day high school in January, 1944. It was the seventh year of the school's existence, but attending a Bais Yaakov high school was not a matter of course as yet.

Rebbetzin Chana Adler Wessel¹⁰ was about to graduate public elementary school in January 1945, and saw nothing wrong with staying on in public high school. Most of the girls in her class were religious, the mode of dress was proper—boys were permitted to wear only white shirts, ties and slacks, and girls were required to wear dresses with some sort of sleeve. There were separate entrances and separate seating for boys and girls, and a chapter of Psalms was recited at the opening of each assembly! The public school building's physical plant and the honors given to a bright student were attractions.

⁹ Formerly principal in Crown Heights and Williamsburg branches of Bais Yaakov High School, currently assistant principal of Bais Yaakov Elementary School in Boro Park.

¹⁰ Teacher in Bais Yaakov High School since 1954.

She acceded to her father's wishes and went to Bais Yaakov in fall '44, with the understanding that if she chose she could return to public school after several months.

"I feel that Rebbetzin Kaplan saved my life," says Rebbetzin Wessel. "If not for her, I dread to think what would have happened to me and my sisters, who followed in my footsteps. She gave me a feeling of worth, importance. Rebbetzin Kaplan taught this class *all* the subjects (sometimes with a child on her lap when her babysitter didn't show up) with infinite patience, despite the class knowing so pathetically little. She built our confidence by keeping her beautiful lessons simple and not beyond our grasp. . . . She broadened our horizons. She gave us a dream, a purpose: We were pioneers, building Yiddishkeit in America. We learned that there's a Jewish future for the Jewish woman.

"There was another facet to Rebbetzin Kaplan. She was approachable, she listened and took things to heart. A girl could share her teenage dreams and problems with Rebbetzin Kaplan, and even 40 years later tell her things that she could not tell anyone else. She never failed to ask later how this one or that one was doing."

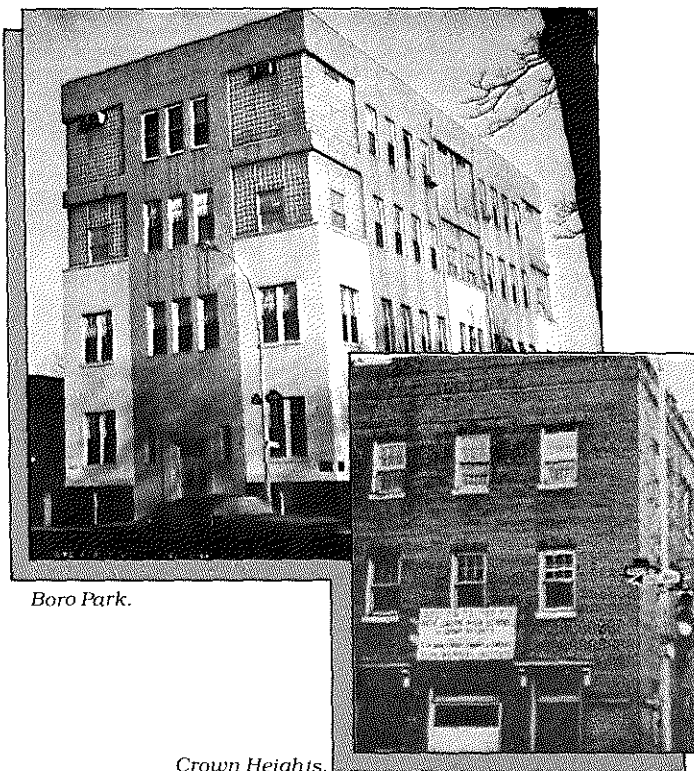
During the war years, the Kaplans applied for thousands of student visas to enable many refugees to enter this country. The Bais Yaakov Seminary was far above all other educational institutions in the number of girls that it saved from Europe, despite harrassment from the Immigration Department, which had difficulty accepting that one institution could support and guarantee for such a large amount of girls.

Growth and Expansion

As the Orthodox community grew, so did the Bais Yaakov School. In September '58 a branch was opened in the Boro Park section of Brooklyn, soon to equal—and then surpass—the main Williamsburgh school, which eventually closed, in '77. The one-year Intensive Seminary program began in September '68—a new concept in its time—in which girls immerse themselves fully in *limudei kodesh* from 8:15 AM to 3:30. The observation and student-teaching programs have become fine-honed and demanding.

Rebbetzin Kaplan's students are today teachers and principals all over the world—from the largest Bais Yaakov High School and Seminary in the world (Yerushalayim) to the largest Bais Yaakov elementary school (in Boro Park)—from Tifrach to Flatbush. Chassidic schools sprang up, and again Rebbetzin Kaplan's students helped establish them, teach in them, and head them—in Puppa, Ger, Bobov, Lubavitch and Satmar.

Despite the fact that Bais Yaakov schools in America are not affiliated in any formal way, Rebbetzin Kaplan's advice and suggestions were sought after. "What does the Rebbetzin say?" was a constant consideration. When Bais Yaakov-type schools organized a mass *tznius* rally at the Brooklyn Academy of Music some 15 years ago, of course Rebbetzin Kaplan addressed the audience. And



Boro Park.

Crown Heights.

when 5,000 women and girls gathered to commemorate the 50th *Yahrzeit* of Sarah Schenirer in Adar 5745, Rebbetzin Kaplan was a leading force in the assembly.

She felt that her responsibilities extended beyond the school walls. In the past few years, Rebbetzin Kaplan called camp directors together to discuss the *ruach* in their camps: it should be a continuation of what the schools strive so hard for during the year, to be reflected in the camp activities as well as in conduct on days off.

Whether it was a man from Toronto crusading against the evils of television or a teacher from Flatbush concerned about the erosion of *tznius*, an educator doing *kiruv* work in New Jersey or a former *talmidah* begging her and ילליה Rabbi Kaplan to say *Tehillim* for a sick family member—each one found his way to Rebbetzin Kaplan's office.

III. LEADER OF THE REVOLUTION

In the past fifty years, women have changed the face of Jewish Orthodoxy in America, with Rebbetzin Kaplan at the helm of the revolution. And now, just study the contrast: In 1937, the *frum* Jewish girl wore pants and sleeveless garments. Now the discussion is whether knee socks are "good enough". . . . Married women covering their hair was an unheard-of rarity; now they are grappling with what style *sheitl* is suitable for a young Rebbetzin. . . . No one was called by his/her Jewish name; today it's almost an oddity to hear a yeshiva boy or Bais Yaakov girl called by an English name. . . . When a match was proposed, the first question the young lady asked was, "What does he do for a living?" Today, it's: "How long

will he learn?" When the highest level of *frumkeit* was identified as a home where the father *davened* and attended a *shiur*, Rebbetzin Kaplan taught the girls to dream of being worthy of marrying a *talmid chacham*.

Rabbi Aharon Kotler זצ"ל is quoted as having said, "If not for Bais Yaakov, all the yeshivos would be forced to close!"

His late Rebbetzin, Rivka Chana Perel Kotler ז"ל, said that Reb Aharon held that Rebbetzin Kaplan did more than all the *roshei yeshivos*. Rabbi Elya Lopian ז"ל concurred: "The yeshivos are very important, but the Bais Yaakov is more important. Without the Bais Yaakov the yeshivos could not exist." . . . The Satmar Rebbe זצ"ל once dispatched his *hoiz bachur* to say "*yeyasher koach*" to Rabbi Boruch Kaplan, thanking him for making it easier for his boys to find suitable *shidduchim*.

She demonstrated to the girls and the women how to elevate oneself to the highest level. The prevalence of *chessed* and *tzeddaka* organizations, *shiurim* for women, *shmiras halashon* classes and telephone *chavrusos*—and the joy that her students find in being devoted mothers and teachers of *Yiddishkeit*—these are the embodiment of her teachings. The fervor in contemporary women's *avoda*, the integrity of their *emuna*, their aspiration to true *shleimus*—and the will to perpetuate these ideals to future generations—these are the fruits of her labor.

The Power of Personal Sacrifice

How could one person create so many followers, and evoke such a strong response in them that they pattern their very lives after hers? Perhaps it was the personal sacrifice that was invested in her work.

Rebbetzin Kaplan's greatest dream for her students and for her own children was that the girls marry *talmidei chachamim* and the boys should be *talmidei chachamim*, never to leave the *koslei beis midrash*. When someone brought her regards from one of her sons saying that he is known to be a great *talmid chacham*, Rebbetzin Kaplan commented, "You know just what to say to gladden a mother's heart!" She avoided disturbing her sons during their *seider* (learning period), and when forced to do so, she would ask him to please pay back the time of their conversation during free time, and to ask his *chavrusa* to do the same.

And despite her profound love and respect for learning, and despite Rabbi Boruch Kaplan's success as a *rosh yeshiva* in Mesivta Torah Vodaath—he was ready to make the almost unbearable move of leaving the *Beis Midrash* to help the school; that was the first sacrifice.

Rebbetzin Kaplan's second sacrifice was the time not spent with her own children. In an interview for a magazine article about the working mother, Rebbetzin Kaplan was asked what type of work is suitable for the woman who seeks something to do with her time once her children are in school. "Do you mean dealing with the empty nest syndrome?" asked Rebbetzin Kaplan. "I thought

that only set in after all the children married. While her children are in school, doesn't a mother have enough to do in the home? Why should a woman feel useless simply because her children are away from home for several hours?"

She then went on to describe the anguish and inner conflict that she had experienced every day that she left her children when they were younger. "Why must I leave my children with someone who will tell them the story of the 'The Three Bears' while feeding them, when I could give them so much *yiras Shomayim* with every spoonful of cereal? And, even in the best of cases, when I would



Rebbetzin Kaplan with a grandchild, 1973.

have the most wonderful babysitter, I agonized over why I must leave my children's *chinuch* to someone else while I leave them behind to tend to someone else's children!" She added that for years she had wished she could meet *Eliyahu Hanavi* and he would tell her what to do. If he would tell her to go home, she would do so joyfully. If he would tell her to continue on to school, then she would at least know that she is doing the right thing.

When her first graduate married a Kollel man, put on a *sheitl*, and taught in a Bais Yaakov School, then she knew she had made the right choice! The conflict was resolved, but the anguish of leaving her children at home never left her. . . .

IV. MASTER TEACHER

Rebbetzin Kaplan taught by example—not only by what she did, but by what *she was*. "I feel as if I grew up under her. I received my education in *Eretz Yisroel*, but my *l'maaseh* (practical application) came from Rebbetzin Kaplan"—in the words of Rebbetzin Dvora Zoberman.¹¹

¹¹ On the faculty of the Bais Yaakov High School and Seminary since '57.

Anivus

Rebbetzin Kaplan was an ordinary housewife at home. So much so, that her own daughter-in-law said that it took years for her to realize that she was a public figure. Even in school, despite being the dean—head of all the departments and principal of the Seminary—Rebbetzin Kaplan did not put on airs.

Those close to her saw how nervous she was before delivering a speech, despite a career of over 55 years of speaking! "The world is made up of two halves," she told a close worker, "the fortunate and the unfortunate. And the unfortunate have to speak."

She refused to allow a car to be sent to pick her up for a N'shei Ahavas Chessed speech. "The bus stops right there." And yet, she would worry about the same extra-curricular trip being too strenuous for other senior staff members and insisted that the school provide car service.

Rebbetzin Kaplan's youngest daughter, Blumie (Rosengarten), was making a sign "W. KAPLAN" for her mother's office door. "That's all you're going to write? Won't you write 'Dean' on the sign?" a student demanded. Her daughter explained that she was bound by *kibud av vo'eim*—that is what her mother told her to write. "Well," said the girl, "someone else can add a word or two." So she put "REBBETZIN" before the "W. KAPLAN" and added "DEAN" at the end. Rebbetzin Kaplan looked at the completed sign, and—not wanting to insult anyone—just never used it.

When entering a classroom to take over for a master teacher, she told her: "It will be hard to teach this class after they had an expert like you on the subject."

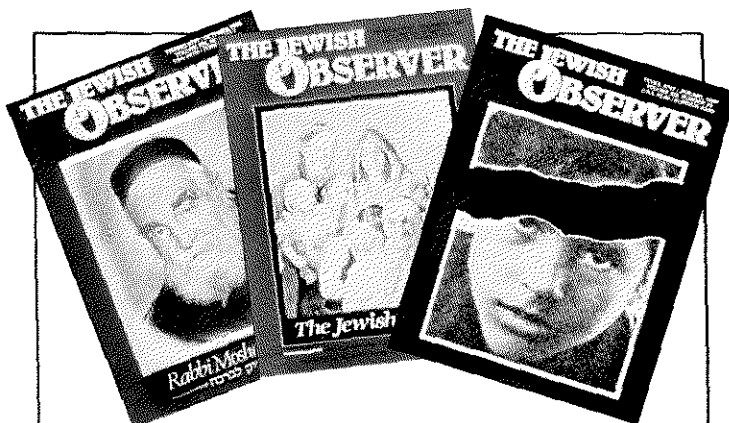
Rebbetzin Kaplan always convened meetings to weigh any decisions or changes in the school. Good ideas were always given consideration no matter who presented them. A radical change was once seriously considered, and a protest was voiced: "But you've been doing it the other way for 50 years!" Rebbetzin Kaplan answered in her quiet, but firm way: "I will listen even to a child if it's the right thing." She was not embarrassed to admit that we may have overlooked something for 50 years.

Rebbetzin Kaplan's yardstick till her death in guiding her own school was, "What would Sarah Schenirer say to this?" *The same self-effacement that made her see herself as a messenger from the last generation, made her the living example for our generation.*

Kavod Habriyos

Rebbetzin Kaplan dealt diplomatically and graciously with every situation. With two phones ringing, a third line buzzing, someone knocking on her office door, and someone already seated in her office, Rebbetzin Kaplan took care of each one without slighting the others. Always careful to offer a visitor a seat, to offer her teachers lunch when it was lunch time, she realized her visitor's needs before they themselves were aware of them.

At staff meetings, she always took the time to explain the situation and to give every person a chance to express



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his or her opinion. She only interrupted—"We have to be careful to say only what is *noge'ah* (relevant)"—when she sensed that a remark was leading to *lashon hora*, *avak lashon hora* or *rechilus* (slander or gossip). When she had to reprimand someone, she did not wait for the situation to become embarrassing, but nipped it in the bud—in advance. Rabbi Uri Hellman, principal of the Bais Yaakov High School, describes how Rebbetzin Kaplan would remind the staff at the opening of class meetings that only what is relevant may be said, and nothing may be said about any party who is not involved. Indeed, Rabbi Boruch Kaplan remarked that in all the years he knew her, he never heard his wife express a *ta'anah* (complaint) about anyone, nor ever say a word of *lashon hora*.

She was meticulous in avoiding hurting others: Rabbi Hellman says that in the 40 years that he worked for Rebbetzin Kaplan he could not recall a single incident in which she issued a command.

The writer's mother *ע"ה*, who worked for the ladies auxiliary of Bais Yaakov, told her children: "Rebbetzin Kaplan never hangs up the phone first. She waits to hear you hang up."

When announcing a *simcha* to her children, she called them in order of age to avoid making an older child wonder why he was called *after* a younger one. ... Rebbetzin Kaplan always asked the director of the school plays to make sure that the script contain no line that might prove insulting to a public school janitor who might watch the play. ... When a new private nurse walked in during Rebbetzin Kaplan's confinement in the hospital, she complimented her with, "I heard so much

about you! When my daughter-in-law called the agency they recommended you so highly." A bright smile lit up the nurse's face.

To an alumna of 20 years, Rebbetzin Kaplan said, "I was waiting many years to meet you. I've been wanting to ask your forgiveness."

The *talmidah* expressed astonishment, to which the Rebbetzin explained, smilingly, "You remember how you often came late to class. I once commented, 'Late again!' Please forgive me for the remark."

Her Responsibility and Love to Each Student

Every school has to make crucial decisions about accepting students into the school, about expelling students when necessary. One administrator postulated that if Bais Yaakov would accept a below-average student in the freshmen class, it would reflect badly on the school. Rebbetzin Kaplan answered, "I couldn't care less for our reputation as long as we do the right thing. Is she basically a good girl, or will she *ו"ן* have a bad influence on others? Each and every girl is entitled to a Bais Yaakov *chinuch*."

Rebbetzin Kaplan could spend hours deciding an individual girl's class placement. There were times that she spent sleepless nights out of concern that each girl should be in the right place and develop properly. If a girl wasn't accepted into the group, she would call in key students and discuss with them ways to make the student feel accepted.

Rebbetzin Kaplan would convene a faculty meeting before demoting a student from full-day Seminary to the



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Rebbetzin Renee (Adler) Hershberg¹² recalls a meeting weighing expulsion of a girl from the school. When it seemed as if her fate were sealed, Rebbetzin Hershberg said, "Yes, but. . ."

Rebbetzin Kaplan interrupted her—"We're keeping her." A mere "but" about expelling her was sufficient reservation to warrant keeping the girl in the school.

One of the students in question later commented: "She did not expel me. I sensed that she had some kind of trust in me. She saw something that no one else could see, an expectation that I had to fulfill. I remember the first time she called me by my first name—I was shocked that she knew me as a person. I remember feeling loved when she said it. . . She never reprimanded me. Once or twice she questioned me very softly, very quietly. She made the decision to keep me. I owe a lot to that." Imagine Rebbetzin Kaplan's *nachas* when she learned of the marvelous work for *Yiddishkeit* this student does in her town!

Rebbetzin Miriam (Weiss) Dissin¹³ writes in *Hamodia*: "Rebbetzin Kaplan would call in a girl and talk about various subjects, and then say, 'I was told you did this and this, and I said it's impossible. A girl like you couldn't have done that. There might be a mistake. Or maybe you fell in this one time.' The girl couldn't disappoint Rebbetzin Kaplan."

Adas Rebbetzin Engelsrath,¹⁴ "I never saw a girl come out of Rebbetzin Kaplan's office crying. She always had something positive to add with the *mussar*."

She arranged private meetings with small groups of Seminary girls, and would even sit in at conferences on high school students, to get to know them all. "One of our main goals," said Rebbetzin Kaplan, "is to discover every Seminary girl's talent and develop it."

A broad range of extra-curricular activities were scheduled to encourage each girl to find her particular niche. Among the many activities, however, never did she permit a Broadway production to be used as school plays for the public.

Rebbetzin Kaplan sent many a student to summer

camp, paying from the school's meager funds, or somehow getting the money together. If the school decided a student would be better off in a Seminary away from home (such as Gateshead), Rebbetzin Kaplan would even foot the expense.

Rebbetzin Kaplan added *חיל* on a girl's record if it were noted that she was orphaned or otherwise marked by misfortune, needing special treatment.

At school plays, she checked that each performer had transportation home.

During a visit to *Eretz Yisroel*, Rebbetzin Kaplan met a *talmidah* who had been active in drama and dance. Not seeing the heavy grandmother standing before her, Rebbetzin Kaplan asked, "Do you still dance?"

Years ago, a group of former students decided to travel to *Eretz Yisroel* by Zim Lines, leaving on *Erev Shabbos*, which is contrary to *halacha*. In addition, Rebbetzin Kaplan feared a harmful precedent, so she personally visited the most influential girl of the group to convince her to change her reservation. While she was talking to the girl, a call came from the Kaplan house that one of the children was hurt, to which Rebbetzin Kaplan said, "I don't care what the *sotton* will do, I'm not leaving till she agrees." The girl changed her reservation, as did the rest of the group.

An applicant to the Seminary lived in the Southwest. Rebbetzin Kaplan arranged for some seniors to correspond with the girl, and even meet her at the airport. On Orientation Day Rebbetzin Kaplan opened with: "Usually, I speak in *Yiddish*, but I'm sure there are many girls here who don't understand *Yiddish*, so I'll speak in English." Staff members were certain the switch was made in deference to that one student, who needed special *kiruv*, because the following year the orientation speech was in *Yiddish* again. This student was very unhappy, despite all the efforts of the *hanhala* and her fellow students. Rebbetzin Kaplan gave her carfare to visit her parents—round-trip, of course. The girl never did come back, but she left feeling Rebbetzin Kaplan's boundless love.

At times, Rebbetzin Kaplan would direct a full speech to an individual. A former *talmidah* wrote her that she feels as though she failed Rebbetzin Kaplan because she's not a teacher. Soon afterward, Rebbetzin Kaplan

¹² Guidance Counselor, Bais Yaakov High School, former *talmidah*.

¹³ Rebbetzin Kaplan's secretary and program coordinator in the early 60's.

¹⁴ An associate of Rebbetzin Kaplan since 1963.

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spoke about the beauty of motherhood, and fulfillment achieved in the home. . . . When she heard that some girls felt like second-rate citizens because their *chassanim* were not going to sit and learn, at that Seminary graduation (5745) she spoke about the *talmid chacham* who has to go to work. In essence he's a *talmid chacham* even though necessity forces him into business. Just like the *Schneider* (tailor) in Mir who repaired shoes, but was still called the town *Schneider* not the *Schuster* (a cobbler—his temporary occupation, but not his true profession). . . .

A graduate teaching in *Eretz Yisroel* wrote her that she felt shunned by students and staff alike, without knowing why. Some time later, the principal of her school walked into her classroom and announced to the class, "We don't know what a treasure we have amongst us. This teacher is one of the *choshuv'steh talmidos* (outstanding students) of Rebbetzin Kaplan, and she is married to a great *talmid chacham*." This was the turning point in her career. It seems that Rebbetzin Kaplan

understood the source of the problem from a distance and had written a letter to this principal, explaining that the students should not disrespect this teacher simply because she wore cosmetics. It is the American fashion. "I, too, wear lipstick at times," wrote Rebbetzin Kaplan.¹⁵

Ne'emonus V'Emes/Trust and Integrity

Her secretary of twenty-five years ago noticed her marking down every time she ate a school lunch, and paying for it at the end of the week—even though she offered lunch to her staff and considered it part of their salary.

- Clips or rubber bands in her house that may have come from school were excluded from personal use.

- Even though complimentary tickets to the annual school play were given to staff members, Rebbetzin Kaplan always paid for hers.

- Whenever her children called her in school she marked down how many minutes she spoke to them and deducted the time from her salary base. (She was paid on a per-hour rate.) She kept a small notebook to record these and similar notations.

- She was allotted 15 minutes to address the audience at the Sarah Schenirer 50th *Yahrzeit* gathering. She practiced her speech with a timepiece again and again, to make certain that she would not be using time that was not hers.

- Her co-workers never heard her discussing her own personal matters on school time. When asked about a family member, she answered briefly and went on with her work. "Sometimes we worked together for hours at a stretch. I do not recall her once mentioning family in the middle of work," reports Rebbetzin Engelsrath.

- In the '40's, Rabbi and Rebbetzin Kaplan faced a crucial decision. They had to part ways with Mr. X, the school benefactor, who felt peeved when his offer to sponsor a "charm course" for the girls was summarily overruled by the Kaplans. The financial burden was awesome; no other laymen had been cultivated during the time that Mr. X underwrote all the bills. Rebbetzin Kaplan called an assembly and explained the situation

¹⁵ Rebbetzin Kaplan opposed the use of heavy make-up. It was a theme in her last letter to her *talmidos* in the *Bais Yaakov Bulletin*. She never failed to put it into the context of how wonderful her *talmidos* are—if only their "outer selves" would reflect their pure "inner selves."

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carefully to the students. She would not compromise, even when the school's very existence was at stake.

• Many years ago, Rebbetzin Wessel applied to Rebbetzin Kaplan for a teaching job and was turned down. She had six years of teaching experience, was highly successful—and could not understand the rejection. She pressed Rebbetzin Kaplan for an explanation, who said, "Your school is about to establish a high school. I don't want to take good teachers away from them." Only after assuring Rebbetzin Kaplan that she was leaving the previous school, regardless of whether she was accepted in Bais Yaakov, did Rebbetzin Kaplan accept her.

Seeds of Chessed

In his *hesped*, Rabbi Avrohom Kaplan related how his parents spent hours trying to gain the release of two old women from a mental hospital where they had been coerced to commit themselves. It was close to sundown on Friday when the Kaplans finally found an old-age home to which the ladies could be transferred. The Kaplans left their belongings behind and walked home. The Kaplan children visited these women with *Shabbos* food every Friday, and Bais Yaakov girls visited with them during the week... Very likely, this was the beginning of the expansive *chedsed* and *bikur cholim* activities in this school, as well as schools all over the globe.

Rebbetzin Kaplan had her own agenda of private *chasodim*. For instance, she used to visit a *giyoress* on *Shabbos* and study with her. Later, she traveled by bus to have her *sheitl* done by this woman, to keep up the contact.

She never lost control of herself, even in the most trying situations. She once told Rebbetzin Bender that arriving home from work she would sometimes find all the chil-

dren crying. To whom should she give her attention first—to the baby who's most helpless, or perhaps to another child whose need is more urgent? She would listen to each child's story, and then decide who earned priority.

Rebbetzin Kaplan *never* raised her voice, not at home—even when the nine boys and four girls *נבי"ה* were very lively youngsters—and not at school. Rabbi Avrohom Kaplan does not remember his mother ever ordering her children to do something. She always said, "If it's not too hard, maybe you could do this or that..." adding, "If you don't do it, you won't be *oveir kibbud eim*"—derelict in honoring your mother.

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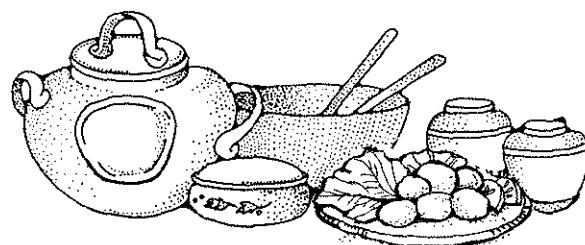
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Her office: Lunchtime, and hundreds of girls are milling about, there's laughter and music, and you're standing next to Rebbetzin Kaplan's door—knocking. You strain your ears to hear the melodious "Come in," lest you cause her to run and open her door for you. You take a deep breath to gain composure, turn the knob slowly, and prepare yourself—to face the *Shechina* that rested upon her.

Others may question this, but this is how we *talmidos* felt. Maybe that explains her *hatzlacha*. She said "*Tzeis'-chem l'shalom*" to a busload of students leaving to a Bais Yaakov convention and told them they should make a great *Kiddush Hashem*. That group ended up in eight newspapers and on many radio stations—because, caught up in a blizzard, they refused to violate the *Shabbos* and elected to stop in a village midway to their destination. ... When a student requested permission to work in a camp where there were not many Bais Yaakov girls—but she felt she could influence others—Rebbetzin Kaplan wished her *hatzlacha*, and the following year many girls from that camp joined the Seminary.

Her own children were also amazed: If Rebbetzin Kaplan said, "I don't see what you'll have from this job," the job didn't work out. If she said, "Yes, this could be," then it did work out. No wonder we'd be eager to discuss our plans with her; we felt that her *bracha* would make things go well. ...

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V. CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Erev Shabbos Nachamu, Rebbetzin Kaplan jumped out of bed two hours before *lichtbentshen*; she had dreamed that she missed candle-lighting. She bentched right then because she knew her family would not wake her again to light the candles. She refused to come to the Shabbos table. She was too weak to dress for Shabbos, and said it would not be a *kavod* for the Shabbos table.

As she was leaving for the hospital on Sunday, the phone rang. Rebbetzin Engelsrath was calling about certain decisions. Rebbetzin Kaplan told her that she (Rebbetzin Engelsrath), together with Rabbi Kaplan's son Reb Yisroel Yaakov, and Rebbetzin Bender should make the decisions.¹⁶ "Hashem should give you the *da'as* to make the right decisions."

"Omein," answered Rebbetzin Engelsrath.

At that moment Rebbetzin Kaplan transferred her life work to others.

The doctors did not give up. "You're a diamond and we have to polish you up," they told her. They recognized the shining brilliance of this patient who, when requesting something, cautioned her children, "Maybe there isn't enough for the other patients."

Her condition deteriorated rapidly. Nothing could be done, and our diamond was taken from us. In the midst of the frenzied calls to all camps and yeshivos to say *Tehillim*, the message was changed: *We can't daven for her refuah anymore.*

Again calls were made, and we gathered to perform the final act of charity that we could do for our great leader.

¹⁶ Rebbetzin Kaplan's daughter, Rebbetzin Frumie Kirzner, has moved to New York from Los Angeles to become a member of the school leadership, which consults Rabbi Boruch Kaplan. Rebbetzin Kaplan had mentioned several times that she would like Frumie to come and work with her.

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POSTSCRIPT

"Mommy, are you in *aveilus* for Rebbetzin Kaplan?" asks the writer's 5-year-old when she sees the tears streaming down my cheeks. Yes, the tears were hot under my lids when I wanted to say *Modeh Ani*, because Rebbetzin Kaplan is my conscience. "What would she think?" is always in mind when making a *bracha*, because her *brachos* were always loud and clear... when taking a *bentcher* in hand to say *Birchas Hamazon*, because Rebbetzin Kaplan always reached for her *Siddur* after lunch... What would she think of my *davening*—she, who put on her *sheitl* and slipped on her shoes and, when asked by her children, "Ma, where are you going?" answered, "I'm not going away; I'm going to *daven Mincha*"... Would she approve of my aspirations, she who ended her *brachos* with *חַת וְזֶל הָאֵבֶן נֶחֱמָה* "The main thing is that *Hashem* should have *nachas*".... When I want to answer my children, my students, impatiently—and when I do answer them impatiently—what would she think?... There is so much I still wanted to tell her, so much more time that I wanted to spend with her, so much more to learn....

When Sarah Schenirer passed away, the little girls in Bais Yaakov of Brisk cried. They saw all the adults crying. Rebbetzin Zeilberger remembers someone telling Rebbetzin Kaplan to calm down the little children. Rebbetzin Kaplan answered through her tears, *זאלן זיי וויינען. זאלן זיי וויינען* "Let them cry. They should cry."

And so should we. ■

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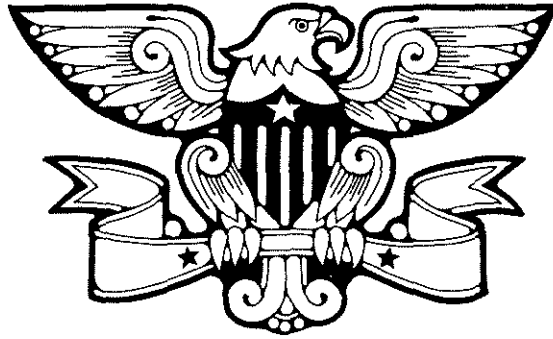
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AUTO PARTS, DESIGNER JEANS AND "TASHMISHEI KEDUSHA"

In early 1986, at the request of Agudath Israel of California, Assemblyman William Filante introduced a bill in the California legislature requiring sellers of religious articles such as *tefillin* and *mezuzos* to disclose to consumers the identity of the manufacturer of the article and any supervising authority.

The genesis of Assemblyman Filante's bill, according to Rabbi Chaim Schnur, director of Agudath Israel of California, was a series of complaints brought to his office concerning blatantly unkosher *tefillin* and *mezuzos* that were flooding the California market. Asked to crack

down on the perpetrators of this consumer fraud, the California Attorney General's office issued its legal opinion that "it would be extremely difficult" to address the problem under existing anti-fraud law. Hence the need for new legislation, to ensure (in Rabbi Schnur's words) that "purchasers of religious articles receive no less consumer protection than those who purchase mislabeled designer jeans or defective auto parts."

Where Agudath Israel and the Attorney General's office saw enhanced consumer protection, however, others saw dangers lurking in the shadows. The local Reform Rabbinate, especially, took strong exception to Assembly Filante's bill. Typical was the protest voiced by Rabbi Sanford Ragins of the Leo Baeck Temple in Los Angeles: "For any relatively small group within the Jewish community to seek to impose its will upon the rest of the community and,

moreover, to impose its will with the use of the state's power, is outrageous." ("Bill on Misrepresented Mezuzos Stirs Controversy Among Jews," *Los Angeles Times*, April 19, 1986)

Another Reform spokesman, Rabbi Leonard Thal, Pacific Southwest regional director of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, echoed the same theme:

"By and large, Reform Jews will not care very much whether it [i.e., a *mezuzah*] is done by hand by a scribe ... or whether it is mass-produced ...

"If this were the only bill of religious consequence promoted by Agudat Yisroel, that would be one thing. However, these are the same individuals who promoted the unfortunate ... *Get* (Jewish divorce) legislation, the *Kashruth* legislation and who now have initiated a time-of-death bill which would establish separate criteria for Jews.

"[I object] to the continuing efforts of a small segment of the Jewish community to turn to well-intentioned legislators in

Mr. Zwiebel, an attorney, is Director of Agudath Israel of America's Office of Government Affairs. His "Where Do Our Secular Jewish Brethren Stand on Government Aid?" was featured in JO of Nov. '85.

Discharging our responsibilities of being a light unto the nations and rebuking Jews who stray from the path of righteousness requires us not only to lead by example, but to raise our voices and make our position known.

an effort to use the legislative process to impose their own Jewish practices and observances on others who, in our open society, have chosen to embrace a different set of Jewish practices and observances." (*Ibid*: letter of April 24, 1986 to Assembly Filante)

Apparently these protestations proved persuasive. Assemblyman Filante's bill failed to pass.

WOEFUL IGNORANCE OR WILLFUL DISTORTION

The charge that Orthodox Jews in general, and Agudath Israel in particular, seek to utilize the secular governmental process to impose their own view of Jewish law upon those who do not share that view, is hardly a new one—although, as Rabbis Ragins and Thal so eloquently demonstrated, it is often a frivolous one.

Consumer fraud statutes, including labeling requirements and full disclosure provisions, have been enacted throughout the United States. To press for similar legislation to protect consumers of *tefillin*, *mezuzos* and the like, is a perfectly appropriate exercise of political advocacy. On the other hand, to resist such legislation on the patently false ground that it represents an effort by the Orthodox to use government to impose *halacha* on the non-Orthodox, is to seek to deny Orthodox Jews the same legal rights enjoyed by other consumers. Who, then, was really guilty of manipulating California's "well-intentioned legislators"?

There are numerous other recent contexts in which our critics betrayed either woeful ignorance or willful distortion of Agudath Israel's legislative objectives. Some examples:

- the contention of some prominent New York-based Reform Rabbis that a bill mandating hospitals to advise parents of newborn baby boys that hospital circumcision may not satisfy religious requirements was designed to force *bris mila k'halacha* upon willing parents, when in fact it was designed to protect parents who want their son to have a proper *bris mila* but in their ignorance assume that hospital circumcision satisfies *halacha*;

- the charge that New York's "get law" was developed by Agudath Israel to "impos[e] ... Orthodox Jewish religious requirements upon virtually all New Yorkers" (September 1984 letter to *The New York Times* from the Director of the New York Federation of Reform Synagogues), when in fact the law would encourage the giving of a *get* only where the couple had initially been married by a rabbi who would insist on a *get* as the means of terminating the marriage;

- the argument that our endeavors to obtain tuition tax relief and other forms of public aid for parents whose children attend religious schools are aimed at obtaining special status for religious education, when in fact we are fighting only for the right of tax-paying parents to recover a fraction of their educational tax dollars to help defray the costs of exercising their constitutionally guaranteed right to educate their children in non-public schools;

- the claim that Agudath Israel's efforts to secure a legislative exemption to the commonly accepted "brain death" standard "would establish separate criteria for Jews" (Rabbi Thal, *supra*), when in fact our efforts in this regard are designed

solely to safeguard the civil liberties of individual patients whose religious beliefs regarding the definition of life and death do not coincide with government's.

TESTING OUR CRITICS' UNDERLYING PREMISE

Often, then, our critics' charge that we seek to use the machinery of secular government to compel an unwilling public to observe *halacha* is transparently false. But there are contexts in which the charge is not so easily dismissed.

In recent years, Agudath Israel has spoken out on a host of contemporary social and moral legislative issues. We have opposed "gay rights" bills and the Equal Rights Amendment. We have supported proposed laws to restrict the availability of pornography and abortion on demand. Having taken such positions, are we not guilty as charged of utilizing government to impose on others our own parochial religious views?

Before entering a plea of innocent or guilty, let us pause for a moment to consider a more fundamental question: So what if we are guilty?

Our critics' charge of impropriety is based on the premise that there is something sinister about enlisting the secular law to help promote *halachic* values. Some in our community would contest the validity of the premise. They would argue that it is perfectly proper for organized Orthodoxy to employ whatever means available, including political advocacy and legislative enactment, to encourage respect for and observance of the eternal truths embodied in Torah. They would further argue that government inevitably teaches

when it legislates, and that we in turn have the right to seek to influence the substance of that teaching on the basis of our religious beliefs.

Others in our community would agree with our critics' basic premise that enlisting secular government as an active partner in promoting Torah values and observance is a mistake. Orthodox Jews in the United States are, after all, a minority within a minority. Thus, the argument goes, American Jewry has a great stake in preserving the so-called wall separating church and state; were it to crumble, it is indeed the church—not the synagogue—that would dominate the state. According to this view, in the long run our community is better off keeping Jewish religious values out of the legislative process, else majoritarian religionists could utilize the same process to impose anti-Jewish values on us.

THE IMPLICATIONS OF OUR LIMITATIONS

Without taking sides in this debate, I believe that certain basic facts dictate the posture the American Torah community should adopt vis-a-vis government. (The reader is cautioned to take note of the two disclaimers implicit in the previous sentence: that what follows is my own personal view; and that I offer my opinion only in the context of the American system of government.)

Orthodox Jews in the United States are a community of limited means and limited political clout. Common sense dictates that we must husband the resources we do have and establish a hierarchy of legislative priorities. With all due respect to those in our camp who would press government to make Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur national holidays, and to those who would expend their energies on having certain street blocks renamed in honor of leading Orthodox figures, we should be concentrating on issues that are more fundamentally crucial to our ability to survive and thrive as a Torah community.

Establishing a hierarchy of legis-

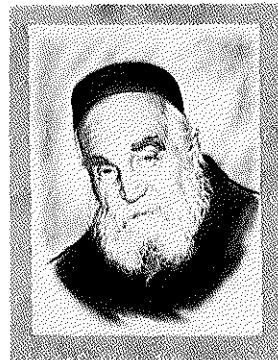
lative priorities requires us to identify those issues in which our stake is substantial and direct, and those in which it is only peripheral and indirect. Where our primary motivation in seeking legislation is not to preserve our own rights, but to compel society at large to act in conformance with *halacha*, we should think twice before committing ourselves to such an initiative. Granted, we have a responsibility to promote Torah values and observance among the ignorant or forgetful. (More on that subject in the final section of this article.) Enlisting the secular law to help us discharge that responsibility, however, is no easy task, could prove counterproductive, and is a questionable use of limited resources.

It is thus in our community's ultimate interest, I believe, to recognize the secular character of American government and the limited resources that we have for influencing government, and to formulate our legislative priorities accordingly. In that limited sense, critics like Reform Rabbis Rugins and Thal may have a point. American Orthodox Jews should not focus their energies on persuading government to make *halacha* the law of the land, thereby converting the police power of the state into an enforcement arm of the *Shulchan Aruch*. Rather, our domestic legislative agenda should be designed primarily to preserve and advance our right to lead full lives as Torah-observant Jews in the United States.

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*As appeared on the cover of the Jewish Observer, October 1986.

OSMOSIS AND BEYOND

To return now to the question posed above, have we not strayed from our basic purpose in speaking out on the broad range of social and moral issues that come before legislative bodies in contemporary U.S.A.? Is it not a misuse of our limited resources to seek laws that promote general social morality? Are we not in fact guilty of asking secular government to impose our religious views upon society at large?

I think not. Our stand on these types of issues is designed primarily to protect ourselves and our families. The Torah community's way of life is threatened when government encourages or permits conduct that leads to social and moral decay. I refer not merely to the indirect threat posed by the osmosis of contemporary secular mores into our own homes and values—*vie es kristalt zich, azoi yudelt es zich*—but to a direct and substantial threat to our ability to lead our lives in accordance with *halacha*.

Thus, we oppose "gay rights" not so much because of the negative moral impact such legislation is likely to have on society at large, but because parents whose religious and moral convictions demand that they shield their children from conduct they believe to be deviant should not be required by law to violate those convictions. We oppose E.R.A. not so much because we want government to deliver the message that woman's role in life is different than man's, but because E.R.A. could lead to a "gender neutral" military draft and the withdrawal of tax exempt status from single-sex religious institutions. We support curbs on pornographic materials not so much because proliferating pornography debases society at large, but because it makes it impossible for our families to walk the streets without being assaulted by offensive images. Stated otherwise, in each of these contexts we seek first and foremost to protect our own civil rights.

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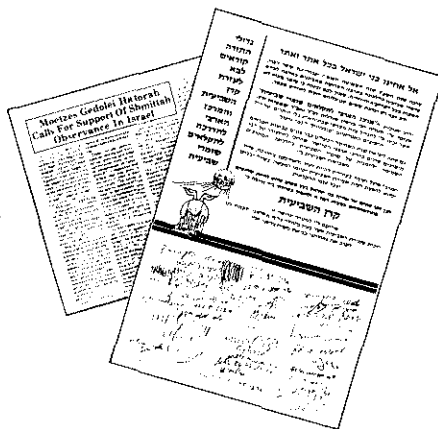
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OUR STAKE IN THE ABORTION DEBATE

Agudath Israel's support of legislative efforts to ban or curtail abortion on demand is perhaps the most difficult of all to justify within the framework of Orthodox Jewish civil rights. After all, no woman is compelled by government to terminate her pregnancy. Nothing in the law permitting abortions impacts directly upon our community's ability to lead full lives as Torah-observant Jews. How, then, can we justify our appeal to government to deny women the right to choose whether or not to carry their pregnancies full-term? Isn't that appeal an attempt to use the secular law to impose our own religious viewpoint on others?

The question is a good one. Perhaps it is precisely because our community's stake in the debate over legalized abortion is not so direct or substantial that Agudath Israel's *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah* has instructed us not to make this issue the high-level legislative priority it has become for certain other reli-

gious groups (*l'havdil*). In fact, when we have spoken out on the subject, we have expended as much energy in insisting that anti-abortion legislation not preclude abortions in cases where *halacha* would permit or require them—a classic example of advocating Orthodox Jewish civil rights—as we have in expressing our basic support for laws prohibiting abortion on demand.

Nonetheless, we have expressed our support for such laws, and in no uncertain terms. In my view, there is substantial justification for doing so, despite the absence of any readily discernible impact on the Torah community.

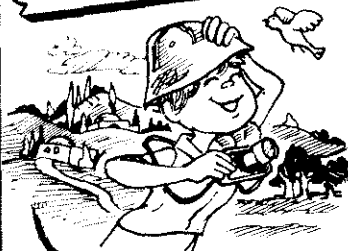
A woman's decision to abort her child is fundamentally different from virtually any other decision one can make. For the innocent fetus whose life (or, at a minimum, potential life) is being snuffed out, the woman's decision to abort is tragically irrevocable. To speak out against legalized fetacide upon demand is to speak out for the rights of the weak and helpless, not for religious coercion; it is less an imposition of our views on others than a protest against permitting women blanket license to impose their views and conveniences upon the unborn.

The propriety of pressing government to protect fetal life becomes even more evident when one considers the magnitude of the abortion

tragedy. An estimated 1.5 million legal abortions annually have been performed in the United States since the Supreme Court's decision 13 years ago that abortion is a constitutionally protected right. More than

one of every four pregnancies now end in abortion, at the rate of approximately 4,000 each day. Indeed, as a recent cover story in a national magazine makes clear, the legalization of abortion may be only the first

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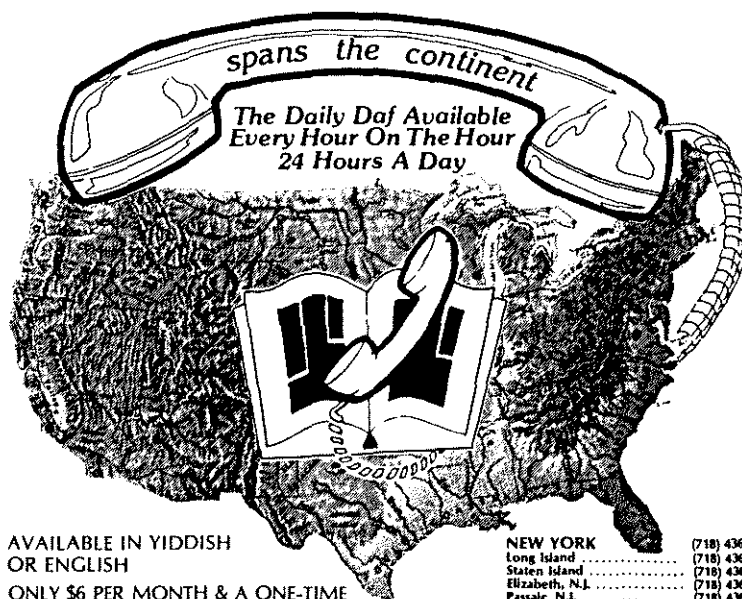
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The Torah community's way of life is threatened when government encourages or permits conduct that leads to social and moral decay.

step down a slippery slope leading to unfathomable depths:

"I don't think abortion is ever wrong," argues psychiatrist and anthropologist Virginia Abernathy of Vanderbilt University's School of Medicine. 'As long as an individual is completely dependent upon the mother, it's not a person.' In this view, which is shared by other pro-choice theorists, an individual becomes a person only when he or she becomes a responsible moral agent—around age three or four, in Abernathy's judgment. Until then, she thinks, infants—like fetuses—are nonpersons; defective children, such as those with Down's Syndrome, may never become persons. The claim they have on persons, she says, is compassion, not a moral right to life: 'Compassion is always very important, but [it] loses when weighed against the rights of a person.'" (*Newsweek*, "America's Abortion Dilemma," January 14, 1985)

Dare we remain silent in the face of attempts to legitimize the unthinkable?

I stated before that our community's stake in the debate over legalized abortion is neither direct nor substantial. In a very real sense, that is incorrect. Jews, especially, should require no reminder that a society that permits euthanasia and other forms of killing the innocent is a society that desanctifies and devalues human life—and, ultimately, permits or encourages the destruction of Jewish life.

DELIVERING THE MESSAGE WITHOUT GOVERNMENT'S HELP

Government, I have argued, is not an ideal partner to help Torah Jewry deliver the message of Torah to the ignorant masses. That does not mean the message should not be delivered.

We can and should make better use of modern media to articulate and disseminate the Torah view-

point on issues of contemporary relevance. *Klal Yisroel* has a responsibility, collectively and individually, to serve as *ohr la'goyim*, a light unto the nations; and to fulfill "*hochei'ach tochi'ach es amisecha*, Rebuke your fellow Jew" when he strays from the path of righteousness. Discharging that responsibility requires us not only to lead by example, but to raise our voices and make our position known.

We can and should tell the world that there is a Supreme Being who created the entire universe and who commanded Noach and his descendants a series of laws that are universally binding upon all mankind; that human beings were created *b'tzelem Elokim*, in the Divine Image, and are accordingly entitled to life, dignity, respect and sustenance; that men and women have different roles to play in G-d's master plan for the human race; and that activities and policies that undermine the traditional family structure strike a body blow at the very foundation of civilized society.

By the same token, we can and should tell our brothers and sisters who are ignorant or forgetful of Torah that the Jewish nation is the *am haniivchar*, chosen by HaShem for a special mission on this world and a special portion in the world to come; that Torah is both the legacy and responsibility of every Jew; that the rabbinic leadership of those expressions of Judaism that are premised on the denial of the simple fact that Torah as it was given at Sinai is both eternal and constant are falsifiers of our heritage whose teachings have led countless Jews astray.

And, yes, we can and should let our fellow Jews know that *tefillin* and *mezuzos* are acceptable only if they conform precisely to the requirements of *halacha*. ■

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Ari in the Clouds...



*I can hardly bear myself think. I really had no idea that helicopters were so noisy from the **inside** of*

one. But the view of our homeland from this altitude at 11:00 P.M. is diverting enough to screen out the hum of the propellers above me.

The pilot tells me we'll be landing in ten minutes at the Army base from where he picked me up just hours ago. And it was only yesterday that Alex, my division commander, shocked me with the news that I'd be receiving private helicopter service to Yerushalayim in order not to miss the MIFAL HASHAS monthly examination.



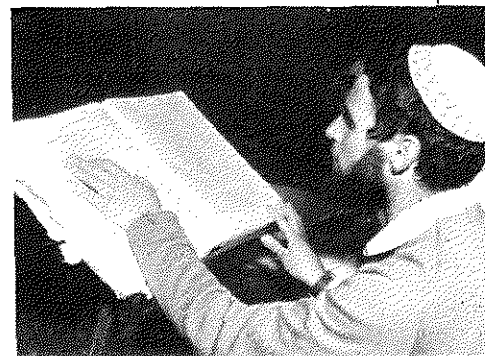
Several times he "caught" me with my tiny flashlight illuminating my tiny "Pesachim" at an hour before day break. His lips told me to "get some rest," but his eyes spoke volumes about pride, conviction, and commitment.

*The double message was obvious but **not** confusing. I responded by learning. And he responded with special orders and travel arrangements.*

But my surprise paled in comparison to the stunned faces of my MIFAL HASHAS "chaverim," when they saw me enter the exam auditorium. The send-off they gave me after-



*wards, surrounding the helicopter with cheers and tears, will forever be branded in my memory. No matter where I am in 8 years, when I make my "Siyum" on Gantz Shas, I'll make sure that Alex is there with me. **Even** if I have to send a helicopter.*



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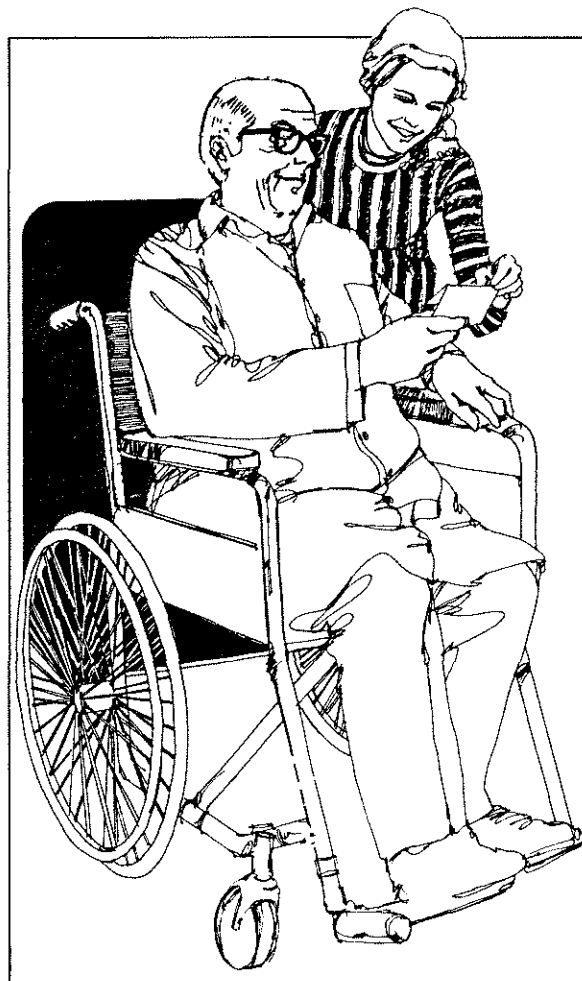
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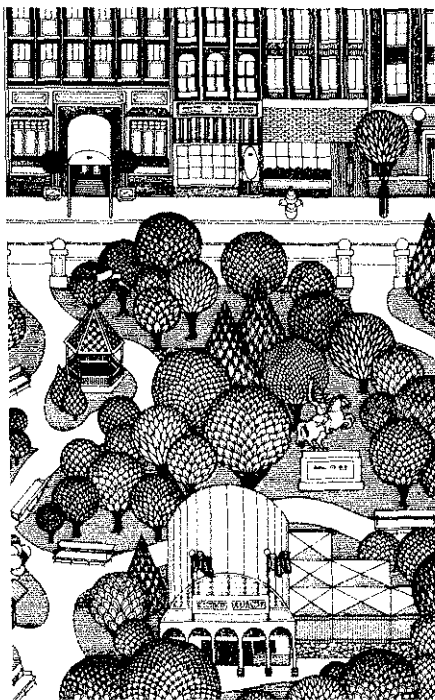
Rabbi Hillel Goldberg

Yesharim darchei Hashem. I hear this phrase from *Hoshe'a* (14,10) reverberating in my mind, over and over, endlessly. I hear it because the man who quoted it, Rabbi Yitzchak Orlansky—one of the last surviving disciples of the *Alter* of Novarodok—said it over and over, endlessly, as his credo for disseminating *Yiddishkeit*:

When a person banishes every thought or act that deviates from the derech of Hashem, then only good can come forth, for "the ways of Hashem are yesharim": upright, straightforward, the essence of integrity.

Do. Act. Follow the darchei Hashem. Because they are yesharim, absolutely nothing but good can come from acting on them, no matter how unlikely the prospects of success, no matter how far-fetched the possibility of such action working a sacred effect, no matter how unrealistic the direction that the derech of Hashem seems to be leading in.

Rabbi Hillel Goldberg is Senior Editor of the *Denver Intermountain Jewish News*, and Halachic Adviser of Torah Community Project.



Unlikely? Unlikely, absolutely—or so I thought. A Reform temple in a small town in the Southwest wishing to consider the possibility of installing a *mechitza*? Members of said temple building a kosher *mikva*?—kashering their homes?—paying big telephone bills to hear Torah *shiurim* because there is no appropriate teacher within 500 miles? Unlikely indeed.

Or so I thought.

But: *yesharim darchei Hashem*. The path of Hashem is upright. Why should it not penetrate there, too, if a Jew is honest in his search? Who said that any Jew is permanently cut off from Torah? Who issued the *heter* for despair?

And, actually, if you think about it—as I have in astonishment and gratitude for some months now—why should the path of Hashem not penetrate there with a special ease, a special receptivity, a special *ruach* and power? Wherever there is a Torah vacuum, should it not be especially likely for Torah to fill it?

Yes, I said. I cannot do other than follow the *derech Hashem* wherever it leads. There is a message here, a Message, if you will; something special, something powerful, something I must listen to. If Torah is Eternal, it can reach everywhere, no location excluded, no Jew precluded: *yesharim darchei Hashem*.

Rabbi Orlansky's lesson kept reverberating.

The new development, now, is that this message is taken by my friends and disciples and co-workers—I do not know what to call them—in a certain small town, in a separate

It started with a simple lesson, learned 17 years ago: When a new face appears in shul, go over to him; welcome him; make him feel at home.

building of whose temple Jews now savor the sanctity of Torah.

And this revolution is just beginning.

It started with a simple lesson, learned 17 years ago from another great teacher in our generation, the Bostoner Rebbe: *When a new face appears in shul, go over to him; welcome him; make him feel at home.*

Last April, a new face appeared in shul. I went over; I welcomed him.

This guest is from out-of-state. He tells an incredible story: Jews in his small town are genuinely searching. They have a spark, initially nurtured by Lubavitch, and others. Of Torah they have almost no definition and no knowledge, but one thing they have: a thirst.

Gilbert, my partner in all this, and I say to him: We shall come to your city and make a Shabbaton. We shall bring a major Torah personality.

And we shall fund it.

You want Torah? We shall find a way.

Our guest demurs. "Too heavy, too soon. Better: let us come up to you."

Fine.

We make a Shabbaton in Denver, last May, to strengthen our own community, also to strengthen theirs. One of our rabbis—Rabbi Rafael Grossman—a powerful orator, opens eyes to Torah. An intense discussion takes place with our visitors around one issue: how do Jews in a small city, with precious little access to Torah, proceed?

The rabbi says: I cannot judge without being in your city.

We plan a Shabbaton for that city.

"We" is the Torah Community Project, founded by Gilbert and myself, energized by a small group in the East Denver Orthodox Synagogue, Denver.

In July we hold this Shabbaton in a hotel in that city. How does one show up, suddenly, with a *mechitza*? How does one get kosher food for 80 people to a non-kosher hotel in a city with only one kosher kitchen? *Yesharim darchei Hashem*. When the will to do the will of *Hashem* is straightforward, a way is found.

We arrive. Straight from the airport we travel to a half-built *mikva*! We flinch.

The sense of wonder is overwhelming.

These Jews have constructed the *mikva* with their own hands, excavating the earth, pouring the concrete. The two families then observing *taharas hamishpacha* use a lake, accessible in winter only by walking through a mile of snow.

"This is the Western Wall of the Western hemisphere," pronounces our rabbi.

What other metaphor is possible?

We proceed: *Shabbos, davening, seudos, divrei Torah* into the wee

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We talk extensively on the telephone. After a while, the calls move in the opposite direction.

Calls arrive in Denver: *I wish to go kosher*.

Head of the Vaad Hakashrus of Denver flies to this city, *kashers* four homes.

Calls arrive in Denver: *We want Torah*.

A *rosh yeshiva* at Yeshiva Toras Chaim in Denver and his wife travel to this city to spend *Shabbos*, to give *shiurim*. He is given no rest: hours and hours of *shiurim*. She is given no rest: hours and hours of questions and camaraderie.

Calls arrive: our local *rav* and *poseik* is asked *shellos* in *hilchos nidah* (the *mikva*, whose construction was supervised by our Denver rabbinical authorities, went into operation last December).

A letter arrives from another small city, this time in Colorado: "From your article in the *Intermountain Jewish News* on the *Shabbaton*, we see that you care about Jews in small towns. Will you come to our city, to help us?"

I fly to that city.

Torah Community Project establishes a lecture series there.

In that city, they had no link to davening, to *mikva*; no interest in a *Shabbaton*.

Fine.

We'll start where you are ready to start, we told them.

We want lectures, they said.

Fine. I lectured on the *Mussar* movement. A Lubavitch *shaliach* in Colorado lectured on the Hassidic movement. Another local *musmach*, a computer programmer by trade, lectured on our ties to *Eretz Yisroel*.

All this, for starters.

Perhaps we could provide a candidate for a scholar-in-residency at the local college?

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known Eastern seaboard *Kehilla* is due to arrive in this city next week, for three weeks of fruitful teaching in a small community yearning for activity and direction.

Invitations go out from Denver: Please attend the Torah Community Project Shabbaton-Denver, in late January, with the Bostoner Rebbe.

Replies: eight times as many people as the original response to our first Shabbaton; and they arrive not from one state, as originally, but from four states. They come not from one city, as originally, but from seven cities.

I could go on and on. The details here, in Colorado, are not the point. The point is this: Jews await us. Jews in out-of-the way places have the same potential for Torah, for *kedusha*, in their *neshamos* as Jews anywhere.

Still more.

Jews in out-of-the way places have one advantage. Almost always, no one else reaches them. The various

negative preconceptions arising out of intimate contact with non-halachic or anti-halachic institutions barely exist.

There is a second point: anybody can do this work. Of course, Torah learning, proper sensitivity, and funding help. But that all comes. Those factors are critical, but they are not the starting point, which is love of Torah, the desire to see it lived.

The desire is of the essence. *Yesharim darchei Hashem*: the way of Hashem goes straight, everywhere. Every Jew and every Jewish community can be touched, no matter how remote.

A third point: Don't take your own community for granted. It probably has many valuable resources you might not have thought of in outreach terms. Mobilize *all* of these resources: *rabbanim* in pulpits and not in pulpits; lay people skilled in Torah knowledge, in singing, in *keriyas HaTorah*, or in organization; *shomrei Shabbos* families; learned or friendly women; anyone with *any*

special Jewish talent. Sometimes sooner, sometimes later, people will give of their time or money to a coherent program.

In sum: Some people in small towns are touched by learning, others by observance of this or the other *mitzva*, others by simple friendship. Look for the point of contact. Each person, each community, has its own point.

Of course, there are knotty problems—intermarried couples and non-halachic converts, to name the most prominent—but, with good thinking and consultation with the proper halachic authorities, for every problem there is a resolution.

Every time a community contacts us, we go; and sooner or later we locate its point of contact, its link to *kedusha*.

It all starts, however, by asking to go. We look for opportunities.

Whoever looks, will find.

You start by giving *hisorerus*—the inspiration you hold within you. You end by receiving *hisorerus*—the inspiration your Jews give you.

Can it be done? There is nowhere it cannot be done. For the first community you touch sooner or later becomes not so much the object of your outreach. It becomes the originator of its own outreach.

A secret source of *Yiddishkeit*: small towns.

That's where the Alter of Novorodok was active. That's how he molded disciples, like Rabbi Yitzchak Orlansky, who, 90 years later, still plants the seeds that transform precious *neshamos*.

Yesharim darchei Hashem: the ways of Hashem have integrity, they are communicable—to any Jew, to every Jew.

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'Shiur' Enjoyment

*Rabbi Yissacher Frand's weekly Torah 'shiur,'
or class, is the largest one of its kind in Baltimore,
attracting more than a hundred men.*

Gary Rosenblatt

He is a rabbi with no congregation but a large and loyal following.

Every Thursday night at 9 p.m. more than a hundred men, young and old, from various segments of the Orthodox community, some wearing black hats and suits and others wearing knitted kipot and jeans, converge at the Agudath Israel congregation on Park Heights Avenue to hear Rabbi Yissacher Frand give his *shiur*, or class, on the weekly Torah portion.

The most popular lecture of its kind in town is exactly an hour, to the minute, and each week it deals with a relevant halachic issue that is alluded to in the week's Torah reading, ranging from medical issues like abortion to the obligations for giving charity or the halachic status of Ethiopian Jews. Rabbi Frand's pattern is to trace a topic literally through the ages, researching and summarizing opinions offered by different scholars from different generations, up to and including modern times.

Often there is no clear-cut practical conclusion but that is not the purpose of the class, which, according to Rabbi Frand, is "to discuss relevant issues and show how the halacha (Jewish law) deals with them. We try to show the process—how decisions are derived so people understand that they are not arbitrary or capricious."

The loyalty of attendees to the class is strong, and whether they

would otherwise be immersed in Torah study at a synagogue on Thursday nights or sitting home watching "Cheers," they adjust their hectic schedules to make time for Rabbi Frand's *shiur*.

The rabbi's appeal is not only to men. He recently gave a lecture, sponsored by the Mikvah of Baltimore, for husbands and wives on the topic of *shalom bayis*, or family harmony, and drew an overflow crowd of about three hundred people.

A native of Seattle who has been affiliated with the Ner Israel Rabbinical College here for more than 20 years, first as a high school and rabbinical student

and more recently as a member of the faculty, Rabbi Frand clearly is tuned into both worlds, the secular and the spiritual. His weekly Thursday night *shiur*, for which he prepares about three days and spends six to 12 hours on Wednesdays writing it out, includes numerous references to modern-day situations (from child-rearing to sports) as a means of casting light on age-old ideas. He recently dealt with the question of whether an army is obligated to rescue soldiers who had endangered themselves against orders and were captured by the enemy. He refers to a class he gave on Hallel's Comet as "a rainy day *sugya*," or topic.

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Gary Rosenblatt is editor of the Baltimore Jewish Times, where this article originally appeared in expanded form.

(Rabbi Frand is the first to admit that his speech pattern is a peppered blend of English and "yeshivish," filled with Hebrew, Yiddish and Aramaic phrases from the Talmud. At least one regular at the weekly shiur was surprised to learn that Rabbi Frand is native-born. "Around here," he says, pointing to the Ner Israel study hall, "I hardly speak a complete sentence in English.")

Last Shavuot marked four years that Rabbi Frand has been giving his weekly class, a program started by the Ner Israel Kollel, or post-rabbinical department, as a means of spreading Torah knowledge from

the yeshiva to the community. Rabbi Frand takes pride in the fact that during that time he has not repeated a topic. "We're trying to expand our sensitivity for a large and diverse group," says the modest rabbi, who rarely uses the word "I." He says that he tries to strike a balance in his approach, being neither too arcane nor too scholarly.

Rabbi Frand feels that one of the outgrowths of the resurgence in Orthodoxy is that people need less instruction on the mechanics of Judaism—how to light Shabbos candles or when to eat

Shmura Matzah—and more about incorporating religion into their daily lives. People want Jewish guidelines for practical situations like raising children, getting along with in-laws, having a working wife, dealing with non-Jews, and other areas not explicitly found in halacha.

"These are tough subjects to prepare because you can't just look it up in a *sefer* (scholarly Jewish text), you have to glean from everywhere," says Rabbi Frand. "The areas of strict halacha are the easiest to deal with, like how to *kasher* a microwave oven. It's the human, psychological issues that are tougher, but they're very important. There are so many more pressures on people now, life is not as simple as it was in the 50's."

(That's when Rabbi Frand grew up and attended a modern day school in Seattle.)

He is clearly satisfied with his chosen calling. "Part of being a Jew is to emulate G-d," he says, "and after all, G-d taught Torah to the Jewish people." He likes to repeat the definition of a rebbe as one who tutors G-d's children.

Rabbi Frand says that he tries to stress that there is a difference between a *halacha* and a *chumra*, between fulfilling a law and insisting on the strictest interpretation of that law.

"Sometimes we get too caught up in minutiae and we lose perspective," explained Rabbi Frand, noting that some novices have trouble distinguishing between what is and what isn't important. But he notes with pleasure that the level of knowledge among observant Jews over the last decade or two has increased, having progressed, he says, "from the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* to the *Mishna Brura*," citing two authoritative texts, the second more detailed than the first.

The growing popularity of the Thursday night shiur attests to how much the attendees enjoy the sessions. Rabbi Frand also enjoys his Thursday night community shiur, seeing it as somewhat of a platform where he is free to offer his views without fear of reprisals from disgruntled congregants. ■

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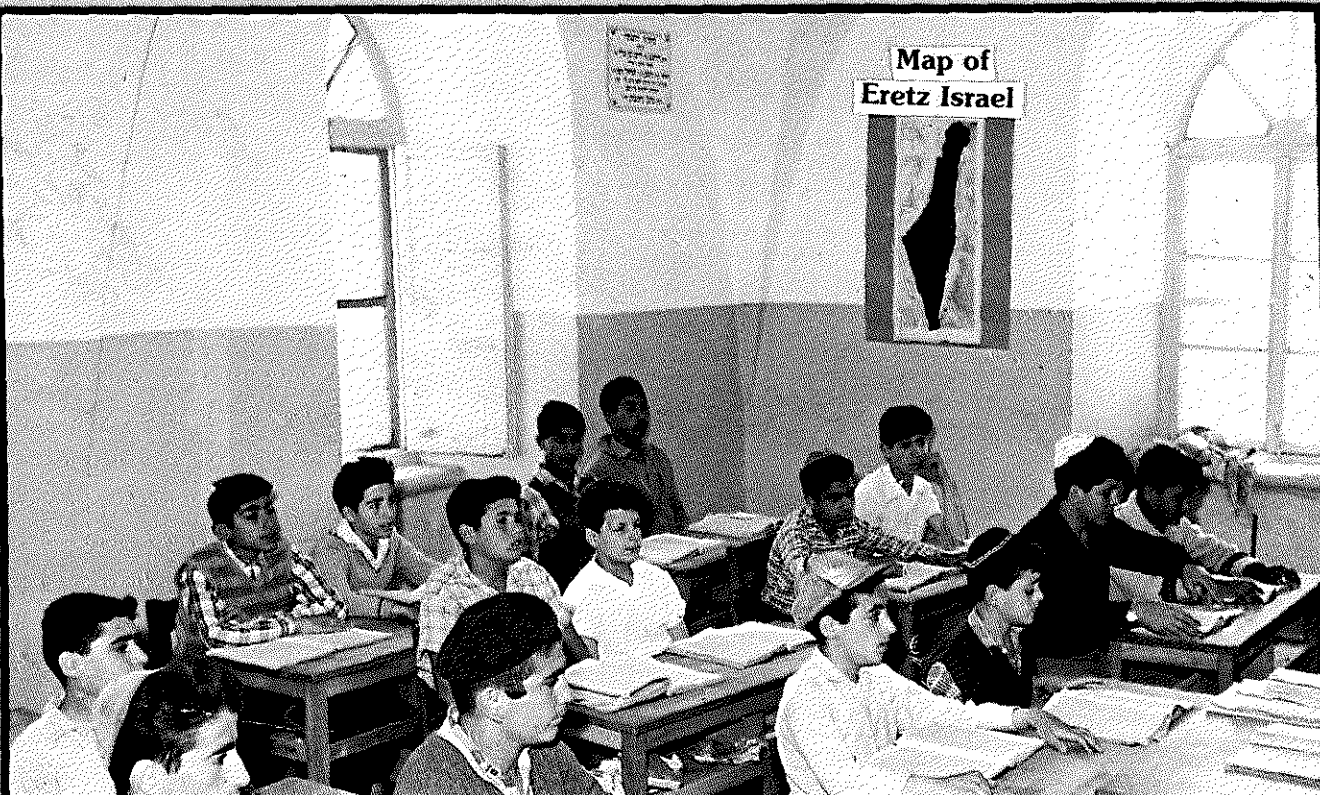
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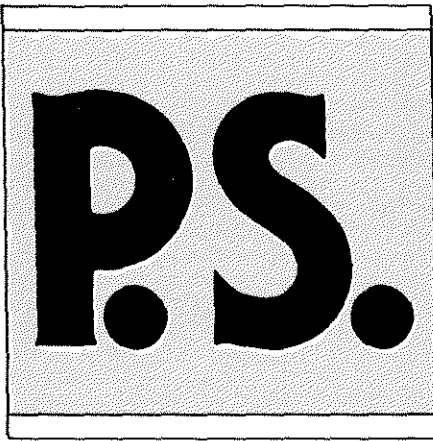
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Love and Marriage and Honor

Rabbi Yechezkiel Abramsky זצ"ל, famed *dayan* of London who lived his last years in the Bayit Vegan section of Jerusalem, commented on the *halacha* that requires a man to "love his wife as much as he loves himself and honor her more than himself." The *dayan* questioned the necessity to so honor one's wife. After all, his love for her should be enough of a guarantee of her honor, without requiring "honoring her more than himself."

Dayan Abramsky's question (and his answer ultimately) becomes enhanced by Rabbi Gottlieb's description of "The husband and wife who achieve the 'I' relationship [as] not being a two membered group in the 'we' mode, but rather a new organically integrated whole" (JO-Nov. '86). Having assumed a shared identity, there is the ever-present danger that the husband will then behave in his wife's presence with the same relaxed, totally undignified manner that he may permit himself in solitude. "After all," he will reason, "it's only I in the room—I in the corporate sense, that is." And loving her no less than he loves himself, he can be guilty of offensive behavior that compromises his privacy and violates her sense of dignity.

Thus, says the *dayan*, the necessity of "honoring her more than himself," even though he already "loves her as much as himself"—to respect her dignity even when he personally senses no need for enhanced privacy. S.N.

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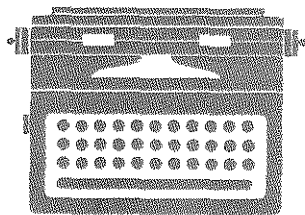
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Letters to the Editor

GENERAL STUDIES IN THE YESHIVA—BY A NON-JEW?

To the Editor:

Mrs. Diskind's article offers a wealth of insights into *limudei chol* in Torah schools, but I fear there is among many gems one dangerous fallacy. "The availability of teachers of general studies who are imbued with Torah and *Yiras Shomayim* and are attuned to the delicate requirements of *tznius* and other *mitzvos* and *hashkafos*, is actually a mixed blessing."

From the point of view of *halacha* as handed down by *Gedolei haDoros*, such teachers are in fact the only teachers allowed to teach in Jewish schools. Part of my twenty years in teaching was spent in two *Charedi*

schools in London which had non-Jewish head teachers and as far as possible non-Jewish teachers for all *limudei chol*. After seeing the grave moral danger the children faced, I spent time studying halachic sources for this non-traditional practice. None of the sources I found permitted the option of using non-Jewish or non-religious Jewish teachers.

The Maharal of Prague, for instance, distinguished between using books written by non-Jewish scholars—which he permitted—and entering into a pupil-teacher relationship with a non-Jewish teacher—which he prohibited on the grounds that the subtle influence exerted by such a relationship could not be controlled. In modern terms, one might say that attitudes are "caught" rather than "taught." In the times of

the *Chasam Sofer*, when there were attempts to expand the curriculum in Jewish schools to include more general education, the *Chasam Sofer's* objection to changes in the curriculum was based not on any problem with general education as such, but rather on the lack of Orthodox Jewish teachers. The *Chasam Sofer* appears to have held that it was forbidden to allow secularist Jewish or non-Jewish teachers to teach in Torah schools, and this view appears to have been the basis of the ban on secular education in Jerusalem's *yeshivos* and *chedarim* in the Nineteenth Century, because in Jerusalem, as in Pressburg, *yirei Shomayim* teachers for general studies were in short supply. That this was the reasoning comes out clearly in the ruling of Rav Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, at the height of the ban, that yeshiva students could receive private lessons in general subjects on condition that the tutor was known to be a *yorei Shomayim*.

In Western Europe, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, writing in *Jesurun* in 1854 (translated in *Judaism Eternal*, pp. 155-173), rules unequivocally that all education in Jewish schools must be presented from a Torah perspective and that if a community says it cannot find Torah-true teachers for general education, then it must continue looking! It is worth reading Rav Hirsch's view in full as the point he makes most eloquently is as relevant today as it was in 1854. For a child to be influenced by his/her teachers is unavoidable, and this influence is neither conscious nor of a particularly academic nature.

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In our own century, in *Fortress of Faith*, the Chofetz Chaim cries out against *Rabbonim* who sanction the appointment of teachers in Jewish schools who are not *yirei Shomayim*. In the post-Holocaust era, when *Gedolei Chassidus* rebuilt their communities in the West, they incorporated general education in varying degrees into their schools and *chedarim*, and not surprisingly they followed the lead of earlier *Gedolim*; and the late Satmarer Rav, for instance, made it a policy that no teacher could be appointed to any Satmar school unless it was known that the teacher kept basic *mitzvos* like *Shabbos*, *Kashrus* and, where applicable, *Taharas haMishpacha*.

There is today in London one Chassidic boys school which goes so far along with Mrs. Diskind's suggestion that non-Jewish teachers exert less influence, that it hires as far as possible non-Jewish women for *limudei chol*, making *limudei*

chol appear to be not only non-Jewish but unmanly to boot. I can assure Mrs. Diskind, as a rare Jewish male to have taught in that school, that all teachers of young children exert an enormous influence, to the extent that one heard young boys bragging that when they grew up they were going to marry Miss X., their non-Jewish teacher, with whom they were infatuated!

In matters of *chinuch*, as in all other matters, we must accept that *Chazal* got it right and that it is at our own peril that we tamper with rulings handed down by generations of *Gedolim*.

JOSEPH A. FELD
London, England

AUTHOR'S RESPONSE:

I thank Mr. Feld for pointing out the misleading implications of *frum* secular teachers being "a mixed blessing." I am in full agreement with him and it was a wrong choice of words. What I intended was that we should avoid complacency, in the recognition that students are likely to accept our teachings without any question and we are in an extremely influential position. We, therefore, must recognize and accept the responsibility of teaching secular studies in the complete spirit of the Torah, regardless of accepted curricula, readings, etc., heretofore.

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The Council on Postsecondary Accreditation periodically reviews the procedures and practices of its member accrediting bodies. The Accreditation Commission of the Advanced Rabbinical and Talmudic Schools is seeking continued recognition and is scheduled for review on Tuesday, July 14, 1987 in Washington, D.C. Deadline for receipt of third party comment or request to present oral testimony is May 14, 1987. Comments must be addressed specifically to the Commission's compliance with COPA's "Provisions for Recognition" which may be obtained from the COPA office. The Accreditation Commission of the Advanced Rabbinical and Talmudic Schools application and materials submitted by third parties shall be available in the COPA office for public review until June 15, 1987. Third party comment or request for appointment should be sent to the attention of Dr. Gloria Chermay, COPA, One Dupont Circle, N.W., Suite 305, Washington, D.C., 20036, (202) 452-1433.

CORRECTION

The couple that took in a foster child suffering from Down's Syndrome ("A Special Visitor," JO, Jan '87) were misidentified in the introduction to the section on special children last month. They are Dovid and Naomi Greenwald of Spring Valley, New York.

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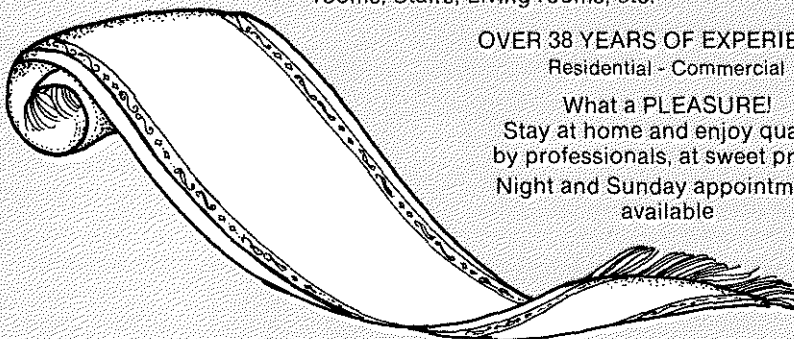
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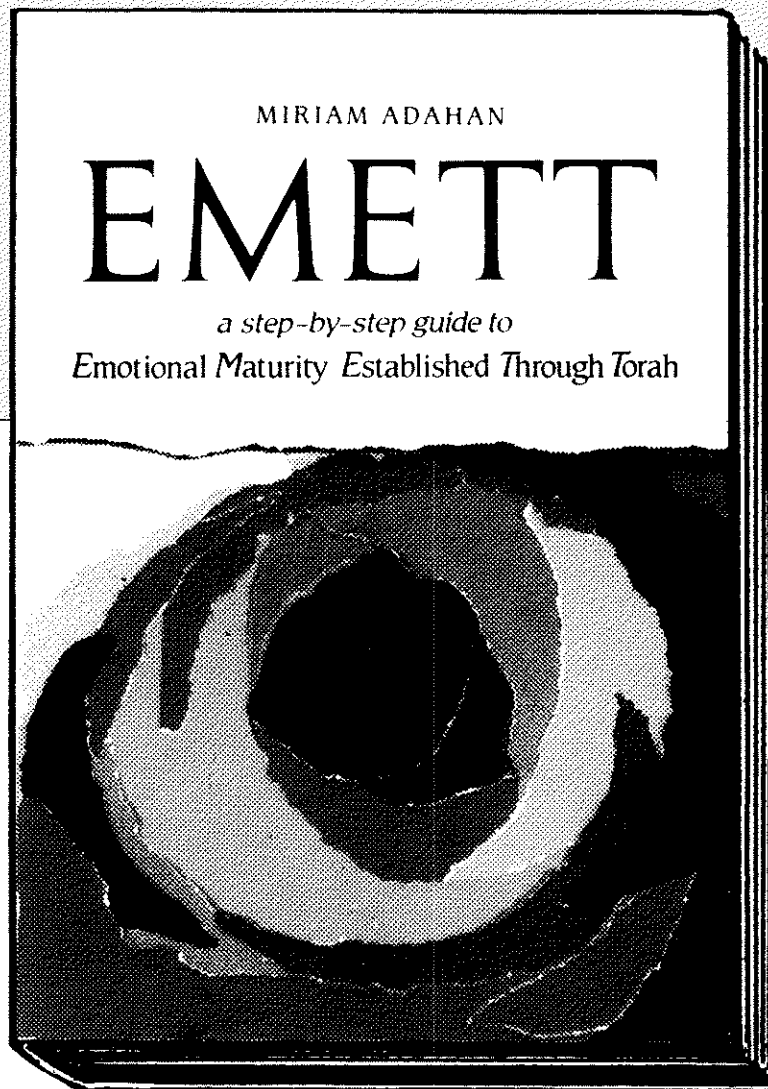


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