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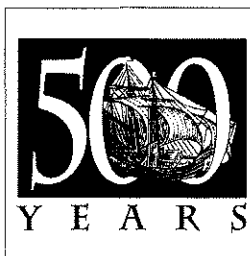
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6

Chovos Halevavos: Beyond the Arena of Action
Rabbi Yitzchok Kirzner זצ"ל

10

An FFB's Return—A Tribute to Rabbi Kirzner
Menucha Lev

13 THE AMERICAN JEWISH EXPERIENCE

—FIVE HUNDRED YEARS SINCE THE DISCOVERY OF AMERICA

14 The Rabbi of the Potomac, Lynn M. Berkowitz

22 The Poilisher Shtiebel, Lipa Brenner

29 Glimpses of an American Tzaddeikes, Yaakov Siegel

33 What Makes an American Jewish Community?
Levi Reisman

38

Of Celebrations and Unrealized Goals,
Rabbi Joseph Elias

41 SECOND LOOKS AT THE JEWISH SCENE

When Jews Fail to Grasp What Even Bilaam Knew

42 POSTSCRIPTS:

**After the Election: Not Against Shulamit
Alone Do We Protest**

Books in Review: A Clarification

45 LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POETRY:

11 For Rabbi Kirzner, Israel Kashkin

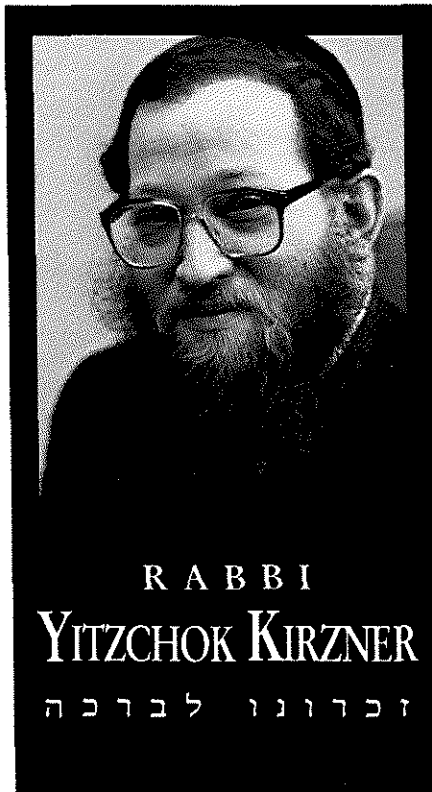
12 Reverse Charges, M. Neuhaus

44 Tuning in Late, Bracha Goetz

Rabbi Yitzchok Kirzner, זכרונו לברכה, an outstanding lecturer, kiruv figure, and rebbe-mentor to thousands, passed away on October 23/26 Tishrei, at the age of 41, cutting short a life rich in contributions to the spiritual growth of countless people, leaving a promise of further contributions unfulfilled.

While Rabbi Kirzner's background is typical of hundreds of men of his generation, his sphere of activity and influence was anything but ordinary.

A talmid of Yeshiva Nachlas HaLeviim, under Rabbi Feivel Cohen זצ"ל שליט"א, and then Bais Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, New Jersey, Rabbi Kirzner subsequently became a member of the "Lakewood Kollel" in Los Angeles where—to the surprise of his colleagues—he emerged as a leading kiruv figure, developing the Jewish Learning Exchange of Ohr Somayach on the West Coast. It was in this capacity that he succeeded in reaching thousands of students and followers through his compelling lectures on the depth and beauty of Judaism, which attracted non-religious and long-frum alike. Six years ago, his wife, Rebbitzin Frummie Kirzner, was appointed to succeed her late mother, Rebbitzin Vichna Kaplan ז"ה, as dean of Beth Jacob High School and Teachers Seminary in Brooklyn, and the family moved back to the New York area. Change of scene did not mean a change of activity for Rabbi Kirzner. To the contrary, for the past five years he has served as director of the Jewish Renaissance Center, a women's institute for baalos teshuva, where he had been lecturing regularly. In addition, he organized study groups during and after working hours in



various New York boroughs and suburbs, and was founding Rav of the Kol Yehuda Congregation in Boro Park.

Two years ago, Rabbi Kirzner assumed the position of Mashgiach ruchni (spiritual mentor and dean of men) of the Yeshiva Rabbi Jacob Joseph High School and Beis Medrash, in Edison, New Jersey. His penetrating lectures and personal counseling invariably inspired the talmidim. A collection of his lectures to them was published under the title, Ma'oz LaTom. Similarly, his analytic, instructive lectures on tefilla were recently published in a widely acclaimed volume, The Art of Jewish Prayer.

This past summer, Agudath Israel of Edison-Highland Park, New Jersey, elected Rabbi Kirzner as its Rav, a position he was eagerly looking

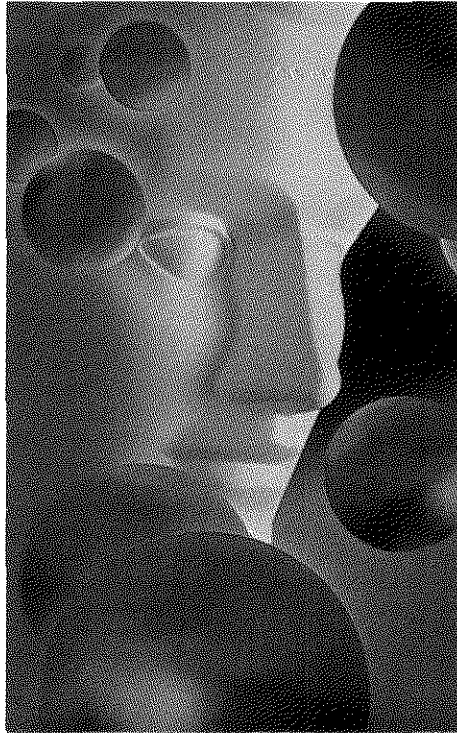
forward to using as a springboard for leading his congregants into growth in Torah and avoda.

Rabbi Kirzner was a much sought-after lecturer, speaking at many venues, including a plenary session at the 1991 National Convention of Agudath Israel of America, last November, when he delivered the lecture that serves as the basis for the article that follows. A tape library of over 1000 cassettes has been created, featuring Rabbi Kirzner's broad-ranging lectures, many of which teach or elaborate on themes from writing of the 18th Century Kabbalist and philosopher, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto.

In his hesped (eulogy) for Rabbi Kirzner, the Philadelphia Rosh Hayeshiva Rabbi Elya Svei זצ"ל שליט"א described him as "a giant in our midst." He reached a remarkably broad range of people—youths and older people, men and women, alike—people of all levels and degrees of religious commitment. The thousands of openly weeping mourners at his funeral, many of whom were heard to say, "He was my only rabbi," or "He was the only one who could answer all my questions," bore tearful testimony to this tribute. The short "letter" that follows Rabbi Kirzner's article is an example of their intense feelings.

Rabbi Svei pointed out that Rabbi Kirzner always focused on the good of the person he was dealing with. Moreover, he never compromised his message to accommodate an audience of weaker commitment, as Rabbi Kirzner himself advocates in the essay that follows. Perhaps that was the touchstone of his unusual effectiveness.

There is a profound relationship between the practical, action-oriented mitzvos and those that are addressed to the heart and mind. Each has an enormous effect on the other. In the essay that follows,



Rabbi Kirzner deals with the critical manner in which an intellectual approach to serving G-d can promote a much closer, deeper relationship with one's Creator—an approach prescribed by Ibn Pakuda's Chovas Halevavos.

Chovos Halevavos: BEYOND THE ARENA OF ACTION *Engaging the Mind and the Heart in Service of G-d*

I. THE CONCEPT

THE ABSTRACT DIMENSION

In the introductory chapter of the *Chovas Halevavos* ("Duties of the Heart"), the author points out that the greatest gift that Hashem bestowed upon us was the ability to have full awareness and understanding of the world—and ourselves—through the knowledge that we amass, absorb, and integrate. Just as knowledge of science, physics, and mathematics

assists us in the recognition and proper usage of our physical surroundings, *Chochmas Elokus*—spiritual knowledge—affords us the ability to understand Hashem's will, and shows us how we possess the potential to fulfill that will, thus enabling us to achieve an intimate relationship with our Creator.

This spiritual knowledge affords us the ability to observe the two well-known categories of Torah, *Chovos Ha'eivarim*—the duties of action—and *Chovos Halevavos*—the duties of heart and mind. Any sort of a rela-

tionship with G-d must include some sort of action, but the connection certainly becomes more profound through involvement of heart and mind. Some action-oriented *mitzvos* appear to be rational, while others evade rational explanation. By and large, however, the duties of heart and mind do lend themselves to human perception. This implies that a person can achieve a deep connection with G-d, since he engages his intellect and emotions in his service to Hashem.

To limit the end-purpose of serving

G-d to the "action" aspect of *mitzvos* would be a gross over-simplification of the sophistication and depth with which we are meant to serve Him. One *mitzva* performed with desire, joy, and the exhilaration of knowing that "I can perform *Hashem's* will" may be equivalent to hundreds of *mitzvos* performed without this type of dedication. The same is true in regard to *aveiros* (transgressions), for *Chazal* teach us that *hirhuvei aveira*—obsessive thoughts that generate an unbridled desire for *aveiros*—are more spiritually damaging than the *aveira* itself, for they corrupt the mind and heart in a way that mechanically performed deeds cannot.

The need to engage one's heart and mind in the performance of *mitzvos* is not a *milsa de'chassidusa*—a lofty level of service reserved for the great; every aspect of Torah and every level of *avoda* is consistent with this perspective. When a person perpetrates a grave *aveira* deliberately and with clear knowledge, he can be liable for capital punishment, but the same act done without full awareness and intent, carries a much lighter sentence. The degree of premeditation indicates the extent to which the individual has become connected with negative forces, earning him a more severe punishment. The same can surely be applied to the enhancement of *mitzvos*—positive acts of *avodas Hashem* (serving G-d)—by virtue of premeditation.

One could take this point of *mitzva*-enhancement a step further: Shouldn't Man be expected to serve *Hashem* with his greatest endowment—his intelligence and passion—and not limit his service to his weaker dimension—his physical being? Does it make sense to assume that in commanding *mitzvos* to cultivate a bond between Man and his Creator, G-d would not require engaging the heart and mind as well in His service? They are surely of major importance.

THE EXTRA DIMENSION OF MOTIVATION

There is yet another significant reason to serve *Hashem* with intellectual and emotional commitment: the close relationship

between desire and behavior. It is unreasonable to demand of ourselves "acts" of service, in a total vacuum of any true desire to serve. Can man function in a framework that demands deeds without true motivation? Such an approach is a sure formula for relegating Torah, *mitzvos* and all things spiritual to total insignificance and ultimate oblivion. Enlisting a person's thoughts and feelings in his *mitzva* performance, then, is the prescription for motivation.

Another relevant observation: by its very essence, *avodas Hashem*—envisioning oneself as a servant of G-d—is an all-encompassing concept, and applies in all times, places and situations. It would seem logical, therefore, to assume that *Chovos Halevavos* must play a major role in promoting man's constant intellectual and emotional involvement with G-d.

II. OVERCOMING THE HURDLES

ADDRESSING THE FEARS

Discussions of this sort usually prompt fears of inadequacy: Am I equipped to approach *Hashem* and His world intellectually?—to divine the purpose of existence and the role that I must serve within *Hashem's* great plan? The truth is, however, that we are *not* inadequate. Many of us are involved in deep discussions of Torah logic in our study of Talmud, often pondering abstract points of no immediate relevance. And we engage in such intense study out of the conviction that an honest attempt to understand Divine wisdom leads to an ultimate embrace of *Hashem*, so to speak. How much more so should we delve into the knowledge of *Hashem's* ways and His relationship to Man, which has such very clear and compelling relevance to the quality of our *avodas Hashem*!

Another fear in regard to the imperative to approach *Hashem* intellectually is the fear of confusion or of an inability to accept a particular article of faith. This fear, too, is baseless. Firstly, we are expected to accept all essential principles and articles of faith from a standpoint of *emuna p'shuta*—a belief grounded in the rea-

sonableness of trusting in G-d, based on the reliable transmission of these principles of faith from Sinai to this present generation. Our faith, then, never really depends on the outcome of our logical processes. We are, however, obligated to build upon that *emuna p'shuta* with a depth of understanding, in order to enhance our connection and commitment to *Hashem*. This requirement is encompassed in the Torah's injunction: "*Veyodata Hayom*—And you shall know on this day and take to your heart that *Hashem* is the only G-d—in heaven above and the earth below—there is no other" (*Devarim* 4, 39). In addition, one should always bear in mind that with true commitment to intellectual honesty, we have nothing to fear: our belief system is in total harmony with reality. A compelling truth will naturally resonate within the deepest elements of our spiritual essence.

Finally, we must confront any insecurity that may grow from our fear of emotional vulnerability: In large part, our desire for what *we* believe to be good, as opposed to G-d's definition of good, is at risk if we open ourselves up to an emotional bond with G-d. The only remedy for such fear is to enter this inner realm of Divine connection, meet its challenges head on, and realize that it is the only source for true inner peace and serenity in our lives, for if we could have a clear understanding of *Hashem's* commitment to our ultimate good, we would not feel vulnerable at all. Perhaps the simplest way to reflect on our duties intellectually and emotionally, is to recognize that harmony of function requires a symphony of heart, mind and action. Anything less would fall short of a true presentation of ourselves to *Hashem*. For this reason, *bnai Torah* should endeavor to forge a firm connection to *Hashem*, fostered by a program of study of the sefer *Chovos Halevavos* to enhance their serious study of the practical "how to's" of *mussar* (ethics).

In his concluding chapter of the *Moreh Nevuchim* ("Guide to the Perplexed"), the *Rambam* compares the lack of intellectual bonding with *Hashem* to an individual who circles the grounds of the king but never en-

ters the royal courtyard to communicate with the king. So, too, we cannot expect to accomplish the demands of *mussar* and self-improvement without a sense that we truly stand in the courtyard of the King. Similarly, the *Zohar* explains that one's ability to absorb the spiritual rewards of after-life is wholly dependent on how strongly one sought to establish an intellectual and emotional relationship with *Hashem*, within the observance of the duties of action. This relationship can best be fostered by studying and appreciating *Chovas Halevavos*.

A PLEASURE THAT GROWS FROM AWARENESS

Within this frame of reference, we can now understand what Rabbi Moshe Luzzatto (hereafter, the *Ramchal*) teaches us in the beginning of his classic *sefer Mesillas Yesharim*: that G-d created the person for one purpose, for one ultimate goal — that the person should be able to have pleasure from his *yachas*, his relationship with G-d, and that he might derive pleasure from the brilliance of G-d's presence. From these words we learn of the significance of a person being able not only to serve G-d, but to be able to find pleasure in his *avodas Hashem*. In the words of the *Ramchal*: "For this is the greatest pleasure that a person can experience."

One must take note of these words of the *Ramchal* because there is a certain premise in them, which we often miss. That is, that G-d created a person with a tremendous ability and drive to absorb this pleasure. And the *Ramchal* comments on that premise: that G-d created the person with a drive and a thirst for pleasure that will be realized by his relationship with G-d.

And now for the implications of the *Ramchal's* teaching: First, we need to recognize that—if we are but the "Adam" that the *Ramchal* refers to—we thirst for pleasure, a thirst that we might not be able to define or understand, but one that certainly creates within us a sense of something lacking within us, until we achieve that pleasure. If that is the case, it is both a *beracha* (blessing) and a challenge.

It is a *beracha* in the sense that we were made as *keilim*—that is, receptacles—that are capable of receiving pleasure. But it is also a challenge because we need to determine, and then to cultivate, the kind of pleasure *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* had intended when He fashioned us into the *keilim* that we are.

Certainly, His intention when designing us was for us to receive a pleasure of *ruchnius*—spirituality. And that a person should come to understand that that is the most authentic and meaningful pleasure that he was created to absorb. But this is built on a number of qualifications, a number of prerequisites: **Number 1:** There has to be the *emuna* within us that there is pleasure—a deep pleasure—the most all-encompassing pleasure—in *ruchnius*. A true understanding of *avodas Hashem* goes beyond the physical performance of *mitzvos* to encompass what *mitzvos* really constitute. As *seforim* teach us, the word *mitzva* comes from the word *tzavsa*, a relationship with G-d...a recognition of everything that constitutes G-d and His relationship to every *Yid* in *Klal Yisroel*. And through *kiyum hamitzvos*—fulfillment of *mitzvos*—a person is developing a *yachas* with G-d. Just as we can be

Look at a *Yid*, peer into his insides, and you will see a dynamism that is bursting and screaming, starving to find delight in G-d. But these hundreds of thousands of Jews all over America—and all over the world for that matter—are victims...not of choice, but of circumstance.

successful in our search for meaningful human relationships that will give us pleasure in life, so too are we supposed to find pleasure and *nachas* in the fact that we are *ovdei Hashem*.

The second prerequisite is that not only do we need to have the *emuna* that there is pleasure in *ruchnius*, but that we can find our sought-after pleasure in *ruchnius*; that "there is deep gratification for me, personally, in *ruchnius*."

The third prerequisite is a willingness to live with the discipline that makes it possible to enjoy *ruchnius*, that we don't bombard our spiritual taste buds with the "junk food" of the world in a way that will render us insensitive to savor the fine points of the pleasures of *ruchnius*.

III. THE IMPLICATIONS

THE OUTREACH IMPERATIVE

This concept, this *yesod*, gives us a way of understanding many difficult and challenging situations, and provides us with the necessary insights to resolve these challenges successfully. Take the example of the non-observant, non-affiliated Jew who, judging by his outside appearance, and certainly by his lifestyle, has a philosophy of life not much different from that of the ancient Greeks. But we cannot, and must not, shy away from our responsibility to reach out to such people, for according to the *Ramchal*, we must believe that every single other Jew was created to find delight in *Hashem* and that the inner make-up of every Jew is such that ultimately he can achieve *nachas* in *avodas Hashem*. False leaders that misrepresent *Yahadus* would rather accommodate a Jew where he is, compromising Judaism and bringing it down to his lower level. But true leaders have the capacity to inspire the *emuna* that *Klal Yisroel* is precisely of the calibre described by the *Ramchal*.

Look at a *Yid*, peer into his insides, and you will see a dynamism that is bursting and screaming, starving to find delight in G-d. But these hundreds of thousands of Jews all over America—and all over the world for

that matter—are victims...not of choice, but of circumstance. Where did they ever have the opportunity to learn the *emuna* that *ruchnius* can give them pleasure?—that G-d implanted in them a yearning for spiritual pleasure? Who could have taught them that they themselves could receive pleasure from *ruchnius*? Where would they learn to master the life-styles, the disciplines, that would nurture rather than ruin their spiritual taste buds, so that they might be able to appreciate and know that all of the pleasures and delights they are seeking are represented in their relationship of *avodas Hashem*?

I have found—as many have found—that when you take the typical non-observant, non-affiliated, self-proclaimed, atheist, Reform or Reconstructionist Jew, and sit him down and learn Torah with him, the *koach haTorah* and the delight that is inherent in *limud haTorah*, and the pleasure that is found in absorbing *chochmas haTorah*, and the *ahava*—the boundless love that *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has for *Klal Yisroel*, which is found in Torah—will speak to the *neshama* of the most distant Jew. Suddenly, in one swift moment, the most distant Jew realizes that there is a concept of joy in *Avodas Hashem*. *Dovid Hamelech* communicates this idea eloquently in *Tehillim: Toras Hashem temima meshivas nefesh, eidus Hashem ne'emana machkimas pessi, pekudi Hashem yeshorim mesamchel lev, mitzvas Hashem bara m'eiras eina'im*. "The Torah of Hashem is perfect, restoring the soul; the testimony of Hashem is trustworthy, making the simple wise. The orders of Hashem are upright, gladdening the heart; the command of Hashem is clear, enlightening the eyes."

GOLUS CHALLENGES

G-d challenges us to pay attention, in every way possible, to the thousands of victims of *Golus*, who by no choice of their own do not realize that their deepest pleasure and the deepest meaning for existence lies within their *Yiddishkeit*. We must be their teachers and their guides.

We must believe that every single other Jew was created to find delight in Hashem and that the inner make-up of every Jew is such that ultimately he can achieve *nachas in avodas Hashem*.

We must, however, take an even deeper look at the nature of our challenges in this long and bitter *Golus*. The external *Golus* that we live in is only a mirror of the internal *Golus* that the *Yiddisha neshama* experiences; the nature of the *Golus* we inhabit reflects back to us something that is missing within ourselves. Thus, when we are presented with so many hundreds and thousands of Jews that are so distant from an awareness that pleasure is available in *ruchnius*, we must ask ourselves: What is it that such a *Golus* is teaching us? When there are so many false leaders in *Klal Yisroel* who would rather water down *Yiddishkeit* and not believe in the greatness of *Klal Yisroel*, what signal is it sending back to us? I would like to share a recent incident with you:

A Chassidish young man—an erlicher fellow, by all appearances—approached me in the street, and said, "I want to talk to you for a few moments." Holding back his tears, he blurted out, "I don't know you, but I have heard some of your tapes. I have a problem. I am losing it, and I'm losing it fast. I don't have a feeling for davening anymore. I barely learn. In fact, I learn only to keep my wife happy. The temptations in business are impossible. I feel like I am drowning. I need help."

So I asked him a naive question: "Is there anything in your *Yiddishkeit* that gives you *yenika* (nourishment)?" (There is no way in the world, said *Reb Yeruchem Levovitz*, the revered *Mashgiach in pre-World-War II Yeshiva of Mir*, that a person can grow without

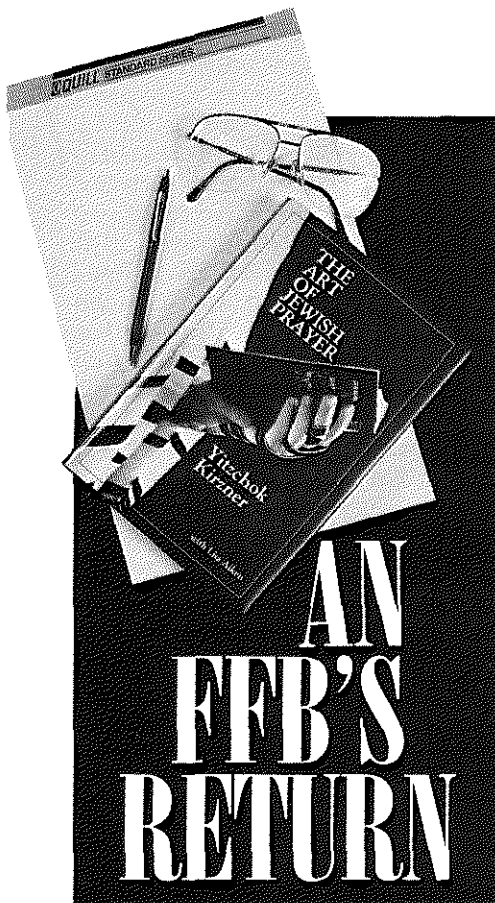
yenika.)

Sadly, he answered, "No, I have nothing. Nothing in *Yiddishkeit* makes me feel that I am spiritually nourished."

I dare say that he is a brave soul to admit it, for there are thousands like him that are not prepared to own up to their spiritual emptiness. But where does this condition come from?

The *Alter of Kelm*, *Rabbi Sicha Zissel Ziv*, points out that *Yaakov Avinu's* punishment for a lack of honoring his parents sufficiently was his being led to believe for 22 years that *Yoseif* was not alive. This caused *Yaakov Avinu* incredible anguish as a father, but he also suffered in a *ruchnius* sense, for he was also denied *Ruach Hakodesh* for 22 years—unbelievable pain! Said the *Alter of Kelm*, This serves as a model for how a person can experience extreme pain from a lack of knowledge. *Yaakov Avinu's* anguish consisted of a lack of knowledge that his son was alive, compounded by a spiritual alienation. We also go through our lives, a day at a time, with a lack of knowledge, without making any effort to understand the greatness of the Creator, without giving a thought to the greatness of *Klal Yisroel*. We perform *mitzvos*, and perhaps even do so with *dikduk*—great care and precision. We are expert in entire sections of *Shulchan Aruch...Mishna Berura*, but are we experiencing, and seeking to catch a glimpse of, the Giver of the Torah? Are we striving that our *Yiddishkeit* should give us a *yenika*? Without *yenika*, a person cannot live. And if one's *yenika* does not come from his *Yahadus*, he is going to seek it elsewhere.

I would humbly present a proposal: That each person purchase a copy of *Ibn Pakuda's* classic *sefer, Chovas Halevavos—Duties of the Heart*—and learn what G-d asks of us. Become involved in *kiyum hamitzvos* with an inner involvement, bond intellectually and emotionally with *Hashem*, and begin to quench the deep spiritual thirst that has left our *neshamos* parched. Let us put an end to our alienation from the Divine, and mitigate our internal *Golus*. This can spell out appreciable progress in our advance toward our ultimate *Ge'ula*. ■



Dear Rabbi Kirzner, זצ"ל

This morning I awoke with a sense of uneasy anticipation. No, not the exhilaration that I experienced before dashing off to your *shitur*, with a song in my heart. It is a morbid eagerness of going to bid you a final farewell.

My hand quivers, my heart is a festering wound in my chest as I attempt to convey to you what I had intended to write you in those last few days before you were so abruptly and painfully wrenched from us. Perhaps I could elaborate on what Rabbi Twerski שליט"א of Milwaukee so eloquently and passionately cried out, "I, too, am one of your Baalei Teshuva!"

Rabbi Kirzner, I am also, technically, an FFB—*frum* from birth—and yet I was not inherently *frum* at all. To the naked eye, I was a model of Jewish behavior. I grew up in a totally *frum* environment, attended a school well-known for its commitment to

Mrs. Lev lives in the Borough Park section of Brooklyn.

educating Jewish girls *al taharas hakodesh*, and was surrounded by a family steeped in tradition. I בן"ד married well, a true *ben-Torah* of similar background. I meticulously donned my white *tichel* every Friday night before *benching licht*, cooked all the required "*Heimische*" kosher foods, painstakingly curled my sons' *peyos* before they boarded the bus to a well-established yeshiva, and squeaked through the *Yomim Tovim* and life in general, knowing that I'm a Jew and yet wondering all along. *Why? Why am I blindly going through these motions? For whom? For what ultimate purpose?*

Why did there seem to me that there were so many contradictions in the Torah? What was Tisha B'Av really all about? How are we truly expected to grieve over something that occurred so long ago, something that we never experienced? What message is Pesach really transmitting to us TODAY? What about *bechira? Emuna? Bitachon* and *hishtadlus*? Why did *Keil Malei Rachamim* seem to me so contrary to what I perceived in my life as *HaKeil HaNora*, a somewhat frightening and punishing G-d? How do we reconcile the two? What about *nisyonos*, and pain and suffering? Jewish suffering throughout the millennia?

To all these questions and countless others, there actually were answers. And you, in your impassioned, inimitable way sparked my *neshama* with your heartfelt involvement with *Hashem* and His Torah. Suddenly, it was wonderful be-

I am also, technically, an FFB—*frum* from birth—and yet I was not inherently *frum* at all.

ing Jewish. More than ever, I felt "*shelo asani goy.*"

Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur were moments that were cherished opportunities instead of dire consequences looming ahead. Tisha B'Av was not merely killing time for the fast to be over. Pesach was no longer equated with cleaning hysteria and *matzos*. And "*Yizkor*" — how could I fail to mention the meaning that you lent to this age-old tradition?

How many people can profess to being touched so profoundly as to be affected in their day-to-day living? My personal choices and decisions were colored by the rainbow of truths that glistened from your words. I, too, experienced what Rabbi Yaakov Busel שליט"א (Rosh Yeshiva in Edison) so movingly expressed in his *hesped*. You were a two-year meteor that streaked through my understanding of the quintessential truth called *Yiddishkeit*. Not simple, robotical movements performed by rote, but by learning who *Hashem* is and His infinite kindness — the *chovos halevavos* that you breathed until your very last day.

You reached out, touched my cynical, hopeless, and tired *neshama* that had shrunk to the size of a withered seed. And then, slowly, the synthesis of your exploding revelations, radiance and love for *Hashem*, watered that abandoned seed, bit by bit. It drank thirstily, relentlessly, tirelessly. Amazingly, that hardened pit gradually softened and tender shoots pushed through that frozen barrier. Then, just as the first buds began to appear...you disappeared.

Rabbi Kirzner זצ"ל, I cry out in utter despair — who will nourish my soul with kindness, with your embodiment of *Nishmas Hashem*, with your purity that transcended all your anguish and suffering? Who will continue to light my way with the brilliance of *Ohr Torah*, so that I may emerge from my confused and fogged

state to a clear-headed direction and devotion to *Toras Hashem*? Who will prop me up when I stumble so often in my quest for *sh'leimus*? Where will I run in those tenuous moments when faith, hope and courage seem so far removed because of *Hashem's Hester Panim* in this world?

My eyes blur with tears. I can hardly see the words as they are being written....Yet I must write. Perhaps it is a catharsis for my grief. Perhaps it is my need to thank you, though thanks seems like such of a powerless word to describe my profound debt. How can a mere thanks suffice for the transformation of a *neshama*, a human life? So often you spoke to us so movingly of our tremendous obligation to G-d for all the good that He bestows upon us, that we are eternally in debt. In a certain sense, I can comprehend it so much more clearly now. Reams of paper and oceans of ink could never fill that desire, that need to offer thanks — the depth of gratitude is bottomless.

An aching heaviness weighs on

To all these questions and countless others, there actually were answers. And you, in your impassioned, inimitable way sparked my *neshama* with your heartfelt involvement with *Hashem* and His Torah. Suddenly, it was wonderful being Jewish.

me. *Where do I go from here? How do I pick up the pieces to face life in a positive way?* But wait...in a flash I see your face aglow, expounding a lesson in *Shir HaShirim*:

"I opened for my Beloved; but, alas, my Beloved had turned His back on my plea and gone. My soul departed at His decree! I sought His closeness but could not find it; I beseeched Him but He would not answer."

You taught us this passage with a poignant parable.

When a child takes his first steps, we hold both his hands to help him walk. As the child shows signs of increasing agility, we grasp only one hand. Then we slowly release our fingers, one by one until he haltingly toddles towards us. And then, even as the child heads towards us, we inch backward to encourage him to walk on his own.

*So it is with Hashem's dealings with us, you declared, your voice rising with fervor. Many times it seems to us that just as we have committed ourselves to begin forming a relationship with Hashem, He seems to present us with all kinds of *nisyonos* and difficulties. What for? we ask ourselves. Why am I being tested precisely at this point in my life when I am trying so desperately to fulfill Hashem's will? So gently, so soothingly, you explained that just as a parent slowly slackens his grip on the child's hands and edges backward in order to urge him to walk unaided, Hashem, too, (so to speak) takes backward steps, in the forms of *nisyonos* and *Hester Panim* so that we may take bigger, stronger and more purposeful strides in His direction.*

So it is, I reflected somberly. With awesome *Hashgacha* (Providence) your teachings entered my life at the point I needed them so desperately. In the short while that I knew you, you were my inspiration, my crutch. I had been incapacitated in my growth in *ruchnius*. You supported me, walked with me, guided and encouraged me in the ar-

duous path towards spiritual soul fulfillment.

And now, Rabbi Kirzner זצ"ל, *Hashem* in His infinite wisdom asked you to let go. Of me. Of us. Of *Klal Yisroel*. Now we will walk alone. The beam of light that you shone upon us will, in all its splendor, eternally leads us towards the ultimate goal of *hisdabkus*—clinging to G-d. It is that specific concealment of *Hashem's* countenance, you elucidated, that is so vital to our *bechira* — our free choice — and our ultimate reward. For who would choose wrong in the stark revelation of right?

That is our life's mission, you often clarified, the revelation of *Hashem's* honor in our world of obscurity. ■

For Rabbi Kirzner

A candle
and a wind which blew in behind a
sea fog
rushing faster than time
and once snatching him
paused
for effect
sweeping him slowly away as I
clutched his leg.

He is gone
and I am alone
fearing the rest of my life
without my Rebbe
whose timing it seems differed from
mine.

ISRAEL KASHKIN

Mr. Kashkin resides in Monsey, N.Y. This is his first appearance in these pages.

As we go to press, we note with profound sorrow the passing of Horav Hagaon Reb Simcha Wasserman זכר צדיק לברכה on 2 Cheshvan, October 29. Last surviving son of the pre-War Torah giant, Horav Hagaon Reb Elchonon Wasserman הי"ד—Rosh Hayeshiva of Baranowitz, author *Koveitz He'oros* and *Koveitz Shiurim*, who was martyred by the Germans י"ט 52 years ago—Reb Simcha was a vibrant, inspiring personality reflecting that lofty level of scholarship and piety that was the hallmark of the European yeshiva world. He combined this with a singular warm, human touch, and a capacity to



**REB
SIMCHA
WASSERMAN**
זכר צדיק לברכה

understand and deal with all sorts of people—from the dedicated *masmid* to the tentative *baal teshuva*. He could teach and advise them all, making him one of the outstanding *Mechanchim* of the past 50 years, spreading Torah on four continents—Strasbourg and Aix les Baines in France, in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in Detroit and Los Angeles, and most recently, in Jerusalem, where he headed the Yeshiva Ohr Elchonon, and—in addition—lectured and counseled in Yeshiva Ohr Somayach. He combined vast knowledge and rare accessibility in a way that endowed him with a special aura that will be sorely missed.

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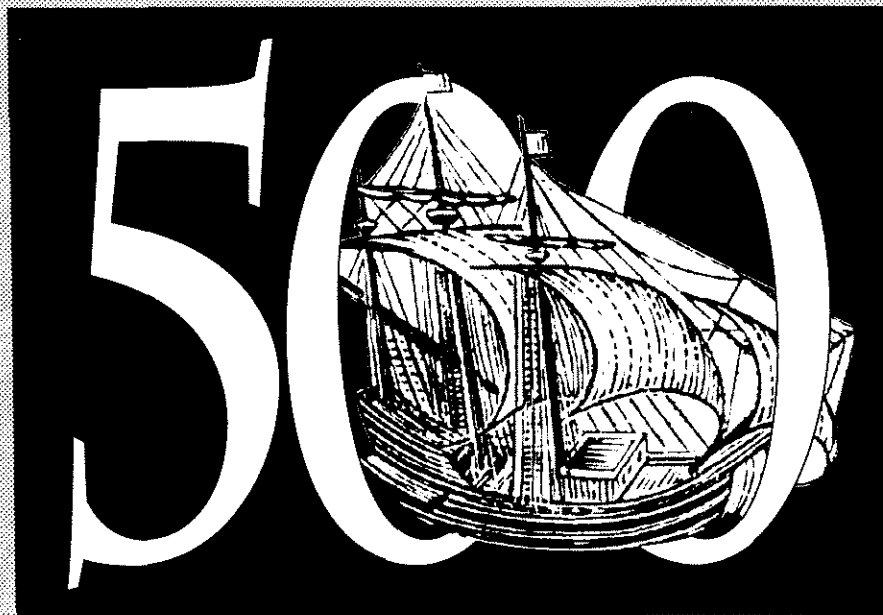
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*I don't deserve to dial now
But I'm still calling, anyhow
There's still a lot I have to say
There's still a bill I have to pay*

*Connecting the lines needs concentrated thought
Yet I find my mind all full of naught
I've nothing to pay with, but please accept
My tefilla, though I call collect.*

M. NEUHAUS

THE AMERICAN JEWISH EXPERIENCE



Y E A R S

Since The Discovery of America

This past month marked five hundred years since Christopher Columbus reached the American continent, radically changing European man's concept of the world, opening up new vistas for exploration and settlement while extending his horizons in the world of ideas. To be sure, any such momentous event must have ramifications for the Jewish People; this was highlighted by the entry in Columbus's diary making note that on the day before his departure, the Jews of Spain who chose exile over conversion to Christianity were crowding the docks to gain passage on ships to safe ports. How dramatic and compelling is the Hand of the *Hashgacha* that on that day in August, 1492—Tisha B'Av, at that—a major chapter in Jewry's wanderings was drawing to a tragic

close. And on that very day, a voyage was launched, which resulted in the discovery of a haven for Jews who would be suffering persecution during the next five centuries.

Interestingly, a bit more than three hundred years later, when the Vilna Gaon's prime disciple, Reb Chaim, was laying the cornerstone for his Yeshiva in Volozhin, he called attention to the potential haven for Torah lying across the ocean, which was to figure so prominently in Jewry's future: Reb Chaim was shedding tears at this moment of celebration, tears that were mistaken for an expression of joy. "No," Reb Chaim protested, "these are the tears of sadness. Were Volozhin to be the last station for Torah's wanderings before *Moshiach's* arrival, I would cry for joy.

But Torah is destined to wander further, to the wilds of America, before *Moshiach* finally comes."

Apparently, Torah study and Torah life, *nusach* America, is distinctive enough to form a *golus* all its own. And, indeed, the challenges, opportunities, and pitfalls of the American experience, with all its unbridled freedoms, its emphasis on growth and innovation, as well as its policy of open-armed acceptance of immigrants, makes America unlike any past *golus*.

This issue of *The Jewish Observer*, as well as others that will follow during this quincennial year, will focus on the unique experiences and problems that distinguish the Jewish sojourn in America.

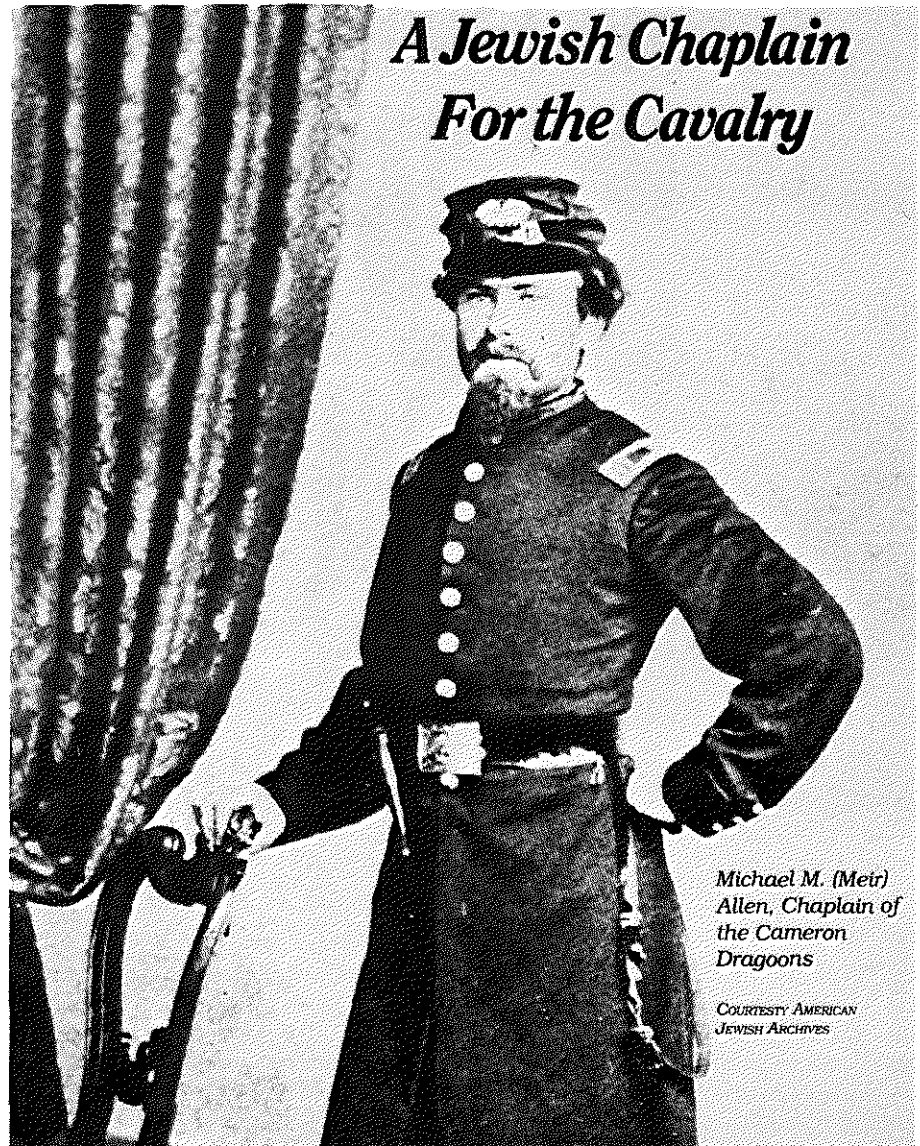
THE RABBI OF THE POTOMAC

I expected to have gone home for "New Year" but could not get a furlough, so must content myself with the prospect of visiting home very soon, hoping and trusting in the One Above that the coming year may be one of health not only to my dear family, but of peace to us all and also to our distracted country.¹

With these words, a young Jewish cavalry officer in the Union Army expressed his hopes and his fears on the eve of *Rosh Hashana*, 1861 (5622). This officer—Michael M. (Meir) Allen, of Philadelphia—in civilian life was a Hebrew school teacher and assistant *chazzan* at Rev. Isaac Leeser's Orthodox congregation *Beth El-Emeth*. Allen was of Sefardic descent—his ancestors had been living in America since the time of the American Revolution. Although strictly observant, young Michael Allen volunteered for service in the Civil War, becoming a Captain in the 5th Pennsylvania Cavalry, or "Cameron Dragoons," a regiment assembled in Philadelphia by Col. Max Friedman. This regiment, which contained a significant proportion of Jewish volunteers, had elected Allen as regimental chaplain, the first Jew to serve in this capacity in the United States armed services.

Michael M. Allen was a non-denominational chaplain for all the soldiers of his regiment. Allen was not an ordained Rabbi, but neither was Rev. Isaac Leeser, the leading Orthodox spokesman of that period, nor Isaac Mayer Wise, the champion of Reform; nor were most of the Jews who functioned as congregational leaders in American synagogues. *Chazzan* and *shochet* were requirements demanded by American congregations, far more often than formal rabbinic ordination. The few qualified ordained rabbis in North America at that time included Rabbi Abraham Rice,² of Baltimore, Rabbi Morris Jacob Raphall, of New York City, and

Mrs. Berkowitz, of Southfield, Michigan, is working on a novel about Jews and the Civil War. This is her first appearance in these pages.



A Jewish Chaplain For the Cavalry

Michael M. (Meir)
Allen, Chaplain of
the Cameron
Dragoons

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JEWISH ARCHIVES

Rabbi Ber Illowy,³ of New Orleans, all ordained in European *yeshivos*—none existed in the United States at that time. Michael Allen had studied *Shulchan Aruch* with Isaac Leeser, in particular *halachos* of *tefilla*, and in 1850 had been *farherred* by Dr. Max Lillenthal, who at that time was still accepted as an Orthodox Rabbi prac-

ticing in New York City, although his credentials were suspect.⁴ Lillenthal gave Allen a certificate naming him *chaver*,⁵ which meant that he was an observant Jew who understood the commandments but needed to consult with an ordained Rabbi for implementing the laws.

As regimental chaplain, Michael

¹ De Sola Pool, David, "The Diary of Chaplain Michael M. Allen, September 1861." Publications of American Jewish Historical Society, vol. 39, 1948.

² More details see Shmuel Singer's "From Germany to Baltimore," in *JO*, Jan. '75.

³ See Singer's "Rabbi of the Rebels," *JO*, May '76.

⁴ Schneerson, Rabbi Joseph I., *The "Tzemach Tzedek" and the Haskala Movement*, translated by Zalman Posner, New York: Kehot Publications, 1969.

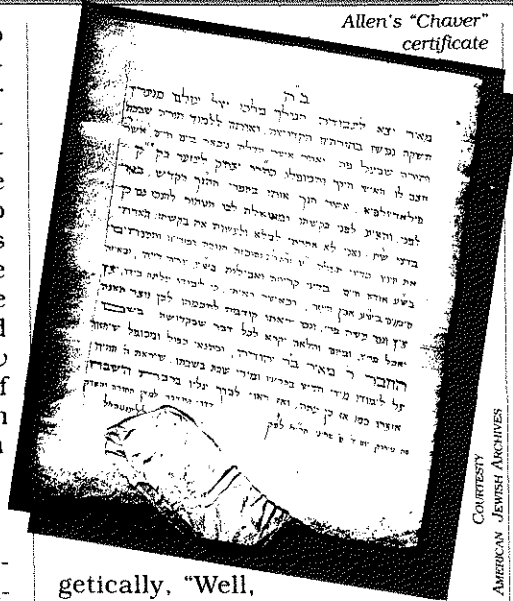
⁵ Hebrew document identifying Meir ben Yehudah, a *talmid* of Isaac Leeser, as *chaver*, on file in the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Allen did nothing specifically Jewish to meet the spiritual needs of his comrades. He obtained permission for himself to attend *Rosh Hashana* services at the Washington Hebrew Congregation, a half hour's walk from the 5th Pennsylvania's bivouac at "Camp Stoneman." On *Yom Kippur* he was granted a furlough to go home, where he led the Franklin Street synagogue Beth El-Emeth in *Shacharis* and *Mincha*. For *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov* meals, he was a guest in the home of Washington photographer and Jewish activist Adolphus S. Solomons. On Sundays, he held a non-denominational service and preached an inspirational sermon, usually dedicated to some patriotic theme or the importance of brotherly love, carefully avoiding any sectarian topics so as not to offend anyone. Ever the teacher, Allen also offered to tutor those recruits who were immigrants and needed instruction in the English language.

CHAVER, YES; CHRISTIAN, NO

Chaplains in Civil War times were not appointed directly by the government, but were elected by vote of the officers of the regiment; in the 5th Pennsylvania Cavalry the majority were Jewish. Chaplains did not enjoy the loftiest of reputations in the Union Army. Wrote one Maine officer: "Our chaplain... drives a fast horse, has never spoken of religion...since he has been in the army." Wrote a private: "I have lost all confidence in the chaplain. He lied to me about carrying the mail & does nothing at all but hang around his tent & sort the mail. He never goes around any amongst the men & I think he is nothing but a confounded humbug & nuisance." Another complained, "The people at home have an idea that the soldiers cannot appreciate a good chaplain so that the scum is sent to the army."⁶ One regiment, the 48th New York, carried a special privilege of sanctity because so many of its officers were ministers. It fell from grace, however, when a brigadier general asked the lieutenant colonel if he really was a preacher. He replied apolo-

⁶ Wiley, Bell Irvin, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1971., p. 263-265.



Allen's "Chaver" certificate

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getically, "Well, no General, I can't say I'm a regularly ordained minister. I'm just one of those—local preachers."⁷

Despite being a modest, devout young man, Allen—more than any of these others—was disqualified for the chaplaincy: On July 22, 1861, Congress had enacted a law which required all chaplains appointed "by the vote of the field officers and company commanders, must be a regular ordained minister of some *Christian* denomination." Allen's *chaver* certificate and unusual experience

⁷ Catton, Bruce, *Mr. Lincoln's Army*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1962, p. 176.

as a *chazzan* might have been "proof" of ordination, but he certainly did not meet the denominational requirement. A representative of the Young Men's Christian Association of Philadelphia, visiting the encampments in the Washington, D.C. area to check out the qualifications of chaplain, was appalled to discover that the spiritual leader of the 5th Pennsylvania Cavalry was a *Jew!* Despite the scandalous antics of the other reverend gentlemen, the Y.M.C.A. agent immediately publicized Allen's religion and the young officer was ordered to disqualify himself from the regiment or face suspension without pay. Rather than subject his family to the humiliating ordeal of his dismissal, Allen turned in his resignation on Sept. 23, 1861 (5th day of *Chol Hamoed Sukkos*), citing poor health as the reason. Thus ended the brief career of the first Jewish chaplain in United States military history.

REJECTION BY THE SECRETARY OF WAR

Colonel Friedman was outraged. The forced resignation of Michael Allen, when so many unqualified chaplains professing Christianity went unchastised, was to him an act of anti-Jewish bigotry that should not go unanswered.

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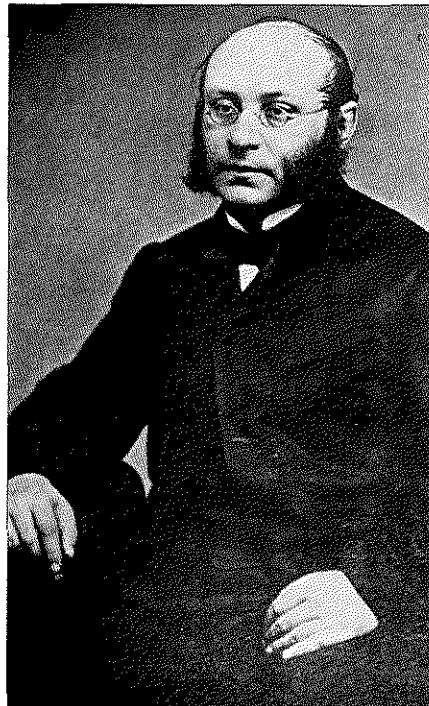
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HIGH SEASON SUPPLEMENT

Friedman was determined to appoint a Jewish chaplain for his regiment, but he wanted to have a man of impeccable credentials, whose rejection by the government could be for no other reason than religious prejudice. He turned to the Board of Delegates of American Israelites—a body that had been established two years earlier to safeguard the civil rights of the Jewish community, both in the United States and abroad—to recommend a suitable candidate.

The man selected was a civilian, Reverend Dr. Arnold Fischel, a Dutch Jew educated in England, who had recently resigned as Rabbi of New York's Sefardic Congregation *Shearith Israel*, after having occupied that position for five years. Fischel was an enthusiastic student of American Jewish history, having delivered two lectures on the subject at the New York Historical Society, and was preparing a manuscript on "The History of the Israelites in America." He was about to embark on a tour of the United States, to continue his research and to accept invitations for speaking engagements in various cities. Prior to his coming to the United States, he had been Rabbi in two congregations in England, in Portsmouth and in Liverpool. Like most 19th Century American Jewish personalities, the details of his early life, his education and credentials, are hard to pin down, but he apparently enjoyed a reputation as a scholar while still in England, although the source of his



Reverend Dr. Arnold Fischel
COURTESY AMERICAN JEWISH ARCHIVES

doctorate and his *semicha* is not known. What is known, is that on October 17, 1861, Dr. Fischel wrote to the War Department, at the request of Col. Friedman, applying for a commission for the chaplaincy office vacated by Michael M. Allen. In reply, he received the following communication from the Secretary of War, Simon Cameron:

War Department, October 23, 1861.

Rev. A. Fischel, Rabbi, Jewish Synagogue, No. 5 Carroll Place, New York:

Sir,—Your communication of the 17th inst., enclosing a letter from the Honorable F.A. Conkling, in reference to the Chaplaincy of the Cameron Dragoons, has been received.

In reply, you are respectfully informed that by the 9th section of the act of Congress, approved July 22, 1861, it is provided that the Chaplain appointed by "the vote of the field officers and company commanders, must be a regular ordained minister of some Christian denomination." A like provision, also, is made in the 7th section of the act of Congress, approved August 3, 1861. Were it not for the impediments thus directly created by the provisions of these two acts, the Department would have taken your application into its favorable consideration.

I have the honor to be,
Very respectfully,
SIMON CAMERON,
Secretary of War

This rejection, signed by none other than the Pennsylvania Cabinet member for whom the "Cameron Dragoons" was named, caused an uproar when released to the press. There could be no question now that this was an issue of civil rights, and a case of clear-cut religious discrimination. The Jews, it was argued, were loyal citizens, paid taxes, volunteered to defend the Union and the Flag, paid with their blood, and were therefore entitled to a minister of their own faith. Others defended the Congressional act. *The Presbyterian*, an Evangelical Christian periodical published in Cincinnati, voiced its objection to the concept of Jewish chaplains: al-

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Separate Program for Beginners

though they had a profound interest in the "spiritual welfare" of the Jews, there was no reason why the government should "foster their prejudices" and "harden them in unbelief" by allowing chaplains of the Jewish faith to minister to Jewish soldiers. The notion that all religious groups in America should be equal before the law was "as broad and universal, as it is wicked and pernicious."⁸

BRINGING THE CASE TO PRESIDENT LINCOLN

The Board of Delegates realized that Rabbi Fischel's responsibility to the Jewish soldiers went far beyond those who enlisted in the 5th Pennsylvania Cavalry. On Dec. 5, 1861, the ex-minister of *Shearith Israel* was appointed to supervise "the general spiritual welfare of the Israelites in the camps and military hospitals attached to the Department of the Potomac."⁹

Arnold Fischel wasted no time in embarking on what he now saw as a holy mission to all the Jewish soldiers in the Army of the Potomac. He obtained letters of reference from a number of prominent individuals in New York, and stopped in Philadel-

⁸ Korn, Bertram W., *American Jewry and the Civil War*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1950, p. 64.

⁹ Letter dated Dec. 6, 1861, from Myer S. Isaacs, secretary of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, to Dr. Arnold Fischel, document on file in the American Jewish Historical Society.

phia only long enough to collect more petitions, letters of introduction to the President, and the blessing of Rev. Isaac Leeser in his endeavor. His mission was to be twofold: to work for the elimination of the requirement that Chaplains must be "of some Christian denomination," and to serve as an unofficial, civilian chaplain for the Jewish soldiers until he obtain a government commission.

Upon arriving in Washington, Fischel established his "command headquarters" in the photographic studio of Philp & Solomons and immediately went to the White House to seek an interview with President Lincoln. He wrote:

"All the influential gentlemen, with whom I spoke on the subject, assured me that it would be impossible for me to get an audience, as the President's time was altogether taken up with public business."¹⁰

Fischel was not discouraged, however, and gained the attention of the President, but his letters do not reveal what resourceful means he employed. His letter states:

"Seeing that I could not obtain admission by the usual process, I had to devise a plan whereby the subject could be at once brought under the notice of the President, and in this I was perfectly successful. I called this morning at ten o'clock at the White

¹⁰ Letter from Arnold Fischel to Henry Hart, dated Dec. 11, 1861, on file in American Jewish Historical Society.

House where hundreds of people were anxiously waiting for admission, some of whom told me that they had been for three days awaiting their turn. I was, nevertheless, at once invited to his room and was received with marked courtesy."¹¹

President Lincoln listened to Rabbi Fischel's petition, asked for additional details and then assured Fischel that he believed the exclusion of Jewish chaplains had been altogether unintentional on the part of Congress, that this was the first time that the subject had been brought to his attention, and that he would give it his serious consideration.

The Rabbi thanked Lincoln for the interview, and assured the President that he had come to contend for the principle of religious liberty, as guaranteed by the Constitution.

HEADQUARTERS IN WASHINGTON

Washington, D.C., at the end of 1861 was home to about 2,000 Jewish civilians, and an equal number of Jewish military personnel. There were six kosher restaurants, two kosher boarding homes, and one synagogue, the "Washington Hebrew Congregation," which boasted twenty-nine paying members and gathered for worship in a second-story room of a commercial building at D Street and 12th.¹² Dr. Fischel

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *The Jewish Messenger*, Jan. 24, 1862.

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rented a room in a more central section of the city, eating at one of the kosher restaurants.¹³

Having met with the President and established his influence with the congressmen on the Military Affairs Committee, who had the power to amend the Volunteer Act regarding chaplains, Dr. Fischel now set out on his primary activity, visiting the Jewish soldiers in all the hospitals, forts and encampments of the Army of the Potomac, to strengthen them in their *Yiddishkeit*.

Fischel had no difficulty obtaining the passes required, as a civilian, to gain entry to the various forts, hospitals and army camps. He wrote,

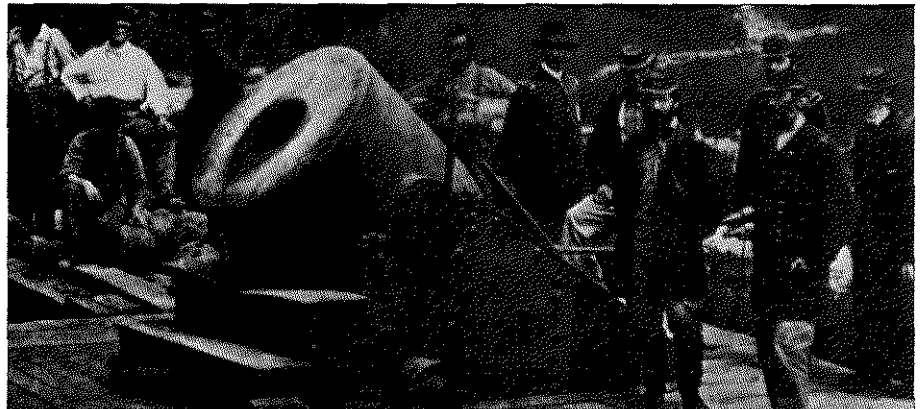
"The number of Jews in the army is very large, I found some even among Berdan's Sharpshooters.... They are not known as Jews, but hundreds with whom I have conversed express their anxiety and hope that

¹³ Letter from Arnold Fischel to Henry Hart, Dec. 13, 1861, on file at the American Jewish Historical Society.

some provision may be made for them, so that in case of sickness or death, they be not left to the mercy of strangers. This was more forcibly impressed upon my mind by the numerous Jewish patients I visited in the

souls' (!), and all expressed the wish to be interred in a Jewish burial-ground."¹⁴

At the outbreak of the war, the idea of establishing a military hospital for



hospitals, nearly all of whom complained that they had not seen a 'Yehudee' since they entered the hospitals, that they have in addition to the sufferings of disease, to submit to the torture of religious controversy, forced upon them by Christian clergymen, who are anxious 'to save their

Jewish soldiers was suggested, modeled after the Jews' Hospital of New York City, "where Jewish nurses can moisten the parched lips, bathe the fevered brow, and smile and breathe words of comfort to the suffering patient; where nutritious food, cooked under the prescribed Laws of our Faith, can be administered; where experienced *medical and surgical attendance* will do all that science and kind treatment can accomplish, and where the last moments of the *dying* can be soothed by the שמע ישראל of the attending Hazan."¹⁵ Dorothea Dix, the superintendent of nursing services, was consulted and promised to give such a hospital her best services, and her support in its establishment. Unfortunately, a similar interest was not found among the Jewish community, and the project was abandoned for lack of funding.

TENDING THE NEEDS OF THE TROOPS

While many Jews chose to conceal their identity, others did not wait for Dr. Fischel to remind them of their heritage. One unidentified young recruit in the Army of the Potomac, who wrote a series of letters to *The Jewish Messen-*

¹⁴ Letter from Arnold Fischel to Henry Hart, dated Dec. 20, 1861, on file at the American Jewish Historical Society.

¹⁵ *The Jewish Messenger*, letter from "Semi Occasional" dated May 26, 1861.

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ger signed only "A Jewish Soldier," described the activities of his comrades:

"It is quite common for Jewish soldiers belonging to the same company, to meet together for worship on Sabbath....The character of these devotions is not the less interesting from the fact that they are always performed in solemn silence, and in some secluded spot, where the noise of the camp cannot penetrate....When looking on those groups, I cannot help reflecting on the remarkable history of our race. Here are the descendants of the Hebrew patriarch who smote the confederated kings near Damascus, the descendants of those who overthrew the colossal hosts of proud Egypt, and conquered the powerful nations of Philistea, who, under the Maccabees, triumphed over the Syrian despot, the survivors of all ancient dynasties, the participants in every remarkable event of history, behold them now in the New World, shedding their blood for the maintenance of the liberties secured to them by this Republic. Whilst thus reflecting, I feel most solemnly impressed by hearing in these Virginian forests my brethren utter the *Shma Israel*, which first our great lawgiver proclaimed in the plains of Arabia."¹⁶

Corporal Joseph C. Levi of the 37th New York, commented on the lack of kosher food:

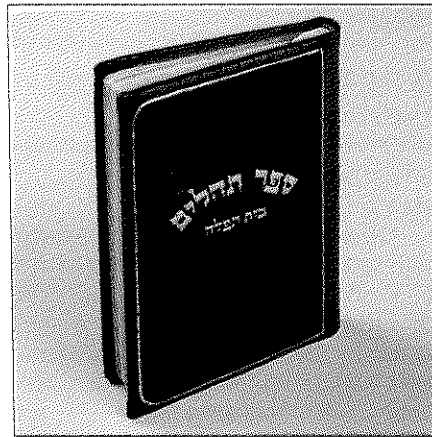
"In the matter of rations, perhaps as a good Orthodox, the less I say on the subject the better. If first our bill of fare was bread, coffee and pork for breakfast, coffee, pork and bread for dinner, and pork, bread and coffee for tea, it has, at all events, improved with time...."¹⁷

While Rabbi Fischel encountered no difficulty in gaining access to the encampments and military hospitals, he was forced to pay his expenses out of pocket. The Board of Delegates had promised to reimburse him for his food, lodging and travel, and Fischel was counting on the Board to conduct fund-raising on his behalf, as his own time was completely taken up with his lobbying and *kiruv* work. This could be quite costly. One expe-

¹⁶ "Sketches from the Seat of War", by A Jewish Soldier, *The Jewish Messenger*, Feb. 7, 1862.

¹⁷ Letter from Joseph C. Levi to *The Jewish Messenger*, June 12, 1862.

dition, to visit Jewish soldiers attached to General N.P. Banks Western Maryland division, took eight hours by railroad car and cost \$20, "a journey as expensive as it is dis-



agreeable," Fischel commented.¹⁸ But he added that the trip had been worthwhile: he met some soldiers who belonged to his former congregation who expressed great enthusiasm

¹⁸ Letter from Fischel to Henry Hart, dated Dec. 27, 1861, on file at the American Jewish Historical Society.

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for his mission.

In those days before dog-tags were invented, Fischel had visiting cards made up which he distributed among the Jewish soldiers, so that he could be contacted by anyone needing the attention of a Jewish clergyman. He put *bikur cholim* on a higher priority than *kiruv*, and visited the military hospitals daily, the encampments less frequently. When a Jewish soldier died in one of the military hospitals, Dr. Fischel informed the family and arranged to have the body sent home for Jewish burial. Besides this, he continued to work for an amendment to the law that would modify the exclusion of Jewish clergy from the chaplaincy.

The young Rabbi contracted cholera as a result of his frequent visits to the military hospitals, and he was confined to bed for a week. Dr. Fischel begged the Board of Delegates not to release this information to *The Jewish Messenger*, which had been providing weekly updates of his mission, "as it may alarm my relatives abroad."

When he recovered, he resumed his activities. He asked to have *Siddurim* and *Tehillim* sent, the smallest size available, and reminded the Board of Delegates that he was running low on funds, as his traveling and illness had made a deep hole in his pocket. But he was not about to discontinue his good work.¹⁹

THE REFORM OPPOSITION

Not all Jews were pleased with Rabbi Fischel's chaplaincy. Isaac Mayer Wise, the fiery leader of the Reform movement in America, had castigated the Board of Delegates of American Israelites and ridiculed Fischel's mission. Although invitations to join the Board had gone out to all parties within American Jewry, the founders were Orthodox and only Orthodox congregations chose to participate. Wise feared that a united Orthodoxy might slow down the momentum of his Reform program, and he therefore denigrated the Board of Delegates from the pages of his weekly newspaper, *The Israelite*.

Wise and his Reform colleagues

¹⁹ Letter from Arnold Fischel to Henry Hart, dated Jan. 2, 1862, on file at the American Jewish Historical Society.

now tried to undermine the activities of Dr. Fischel. On Jan. 6, 1862, an advertisement appeared in the leading newspapers of Washington, Philadelphia, and New York, issuing a "Protest" against the Board of Delegates for claiming to speak in the name of all American Jewry, signed by Isaac M. Wise, David Einhorn, Samuel Adler, Henry Hochheimer, Bernard Felsenthal and Max Lilienthal.²⁰ No motive, other than spite, malicious mischief and jealousy of Dr. Fischel's success, has been given for this action on the part of Wise and his colleagues.

Fischel was outraged. "Those reformed Rabbis seem to have no other object than to injure the cause of Judaism both socially and religiously," he wrote angrily in a letter to the Board of Delegates.

In any event, the "Protest" had made no impression on the Military Affairs Committee, and excited ridicule rather than sympathy. So Fischel cautioned *The Jewish Messenger* not to respond to the venom-

²⁰ *Sinai*, Feb. 1862.

Not all Jews were pleased with Rabbi Fischel's chaplaincy. Isaac Mayer Wise, the fiery leader of the Reform movement in America, had castigated the Board of Delegates of American Israelites and ridiculed Fischel's mission.

ous attack of Wise and his confederates with unseemly invective.

Although Fischel gives no description in his letter of celebrating Purim or Passover among the soldiers, he did accompany the Army of the Potomac into Virginia for part of General McClellan's "Peninsula Campaign." He was travelling with the "left wing" of the army, and was excited and optimistic. He promised to send his next report to the Board of Delegates from Richmond, once it had been captured by Federal troops. We have no more letters from him after that, other than his "Final Report," dated April 3, 1862. In it, he reiterated his conviction for the necessity

of a chaplain for the Jewish soldiers, and thanked the Board of Delegates for having given him the opportunity to officiate in that capacity. It is not known if he actually ministered to Jewish soldiers while on the battlefield, although he is thought to be the author of an anonymous article in *The Jewish Messenger*, titled "A National Disgrace," poignantly describing the death of a Jewish soldier at the Battle of Williamsburg, Virginia, whose body could not be recovered for Jewish burial. The article spoke about the Jewish soldiers:

Poor fellows—they have risked all—even their lives, to assist in restoring peace and concord to our distracted country. They have displayed bravery worthy of the Maccabeans, endurance and courage befitting heroes—but their brethren have forgotten them, have neglected their silent but powerful appeal—and they are left to die among strangers, their last moments agonized by the attention of ministers and "Sisters of Mercy"—well meant—for who can fail to recognize the kindly, the noble motives by which they are actuated?—but utterly foreign to what they would wish to receive, and so harsh and painful to Israelites looking for the soothing consolations of divines of their faith. They are left to be buried near the field of battle, "unwept, unhallowed and unsung," their graves unmarked—whereas, they should be interred in consecrated ground, where rest the bones of their ancestors, and co-religionists should be with them when on their beds of sickness, to administer consolation, and soothe their dying moments, receive their parting requests, and, if death should claim them, bear their bodies tenderly to their former residence, and relieve the anxiety of their distressed families by assurances that they died as Jews in the faith of Israel.²¹

DISHEARTENED BY APATHY AND INDIFFERENCE

Rabbi Fischel was ultimately forced to give up his activities of strengthening *Yiddishkeit* among the Jewish soldiers in the Army of the Potomac as a result of apathy and indifference on the part of the Jewish community. He commented bitterly that American Jews could contribute ten thousand dol-

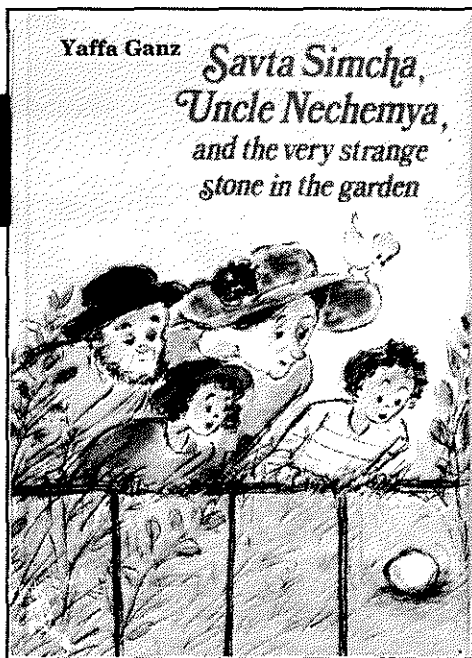
²¹ *The Jewish Messenger*, May 30, 1862.

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lars for the Jews of Morocco, but could not raise one tenth of that sum for their brethren at home defending their country and liberties.²²

Disheartened, the dedicated young Rabbi returned to New York. When the chaplaincy clause was finally amended, and Jewish clergy given the right to serve as military chaplains, the first appointment, given on Sept. 18, 1862, went to Rev. Jacob Frankel, of Philadelphia, the *chazzan* of Congregation Mikveh Israel. Dr. Fischel certainly deserved a commission for his

²² Letter from Arnold Fischel to Henry Hart, dated Jan. 2, 1862.

activities, the first such actions on behalf of Jewish soldiers in the United States Armed Services, but he was never honored for his self-sacrifice. He remained in New York for two more years, appearing occasionally at public functions. He was the keynote speaker at the dedication of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum in 1863, at which he spoke most eloquently of the home providing a haven for the orphaned children of Jewish soldiers who fell in the service of their country. Finally, on August 21, 1864, he left the United States to return to England,

where his family had remained. He died in Holland in 1894.²³

Dr. Arnold Fischel was a man who accomplished many firsts: the first permanent minister of the historic Shearith Israel congregation, the first serious scholar to write on American Jewish history, the first Jewish chaplain to United States servicemen; and yet his achievements have been passed over and more credit is given to those who came later. ■

²³ Korn, op cit., p. 77.



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environment of intense Torah study and *Yiras Shomayim*, where the goals were mastery of *Shas* and *poskim* through *hasmada rabba*—the devotion of days and nights to the understanding of Torah. To gain an idea of what the Poilisher Shtiebel was like, let the following pages portray an average evening there.

DOORWAY TO STAIRS ASCENDING

The entrance on Division Avenue was unassuming. Most striking was the large sign advertising the *mikveh* in the Shtiebel basement, with the names of the certifying rabbis, such as Rav Zelmanovitz (succeeded by Rav Pesachowitz as *Rav* of the Shtiebel), Rav Y. Bunim and the old Novominsker *Rebbe* of Williamsburgh, Rabbi Yehuda Arye Perlow ז"ל. Opening the door, the damp dense air from the lower floor wafted above your head, and you knew immediately where you were. You mounted the steep staircase to the first floor, and opened the door to the sound of shouting voices. Each table was surrounded with groups and *chavrusas*, each learning their daily *sefer* with vigor, with enthusiasm, with *lebedigkeit*. The room would be humming with the exhilaration of Torah study. Each group had its *maggid shiur* who pounded away his points of emphasis and made every effort to get every one of his group to understand the topic at hand.

There were great scholars in that room, who had gone through *Shas* numerous times. Yet they gave of their time and effort to help others, less proficient in learning. There, in the center of the Shtiebel, is a man learning with a *bachur* just beyond Bar Mitzva. This young fellow had learned in yeshiva all day and now needed someone to review the *Gemora* with him, and perhaps explain some difficult *Tosafos*. This was

The Poilisher Shtiebel

Reflections on Life in Williamsburg in the 30's & 40's

newed efforts at rescue and salvation. But more about that later.

"*Gai lernen in der Poilisher Shtiebel*" were the words of Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, *Rosh Hayeshiva* of Mesivta Torah Vodaath, to many a student who came late to sessions or failed to attend *shiurim*. The *Rosh Hayeshiva* knew well that although the *bachur* would be removed from the structure of a *yeshiva* in the Poilisher Shtiebel, he would be in an

The Chevra Bais Aharon Anshe Sfard, popularly known as the Poilisher Shtiebel, was founded in 1910 by Jews of Polish extraction who had begun to stream to the United States at the turn of the century, due to the political and economic difficulties experienced under Czarist rule. The flow of immigrants intensified with the defeat of Russia by Japan, and the subsequent Revolution of 1905. Following the First World War, a flood of families uprooted by the war brought many observant Jews from Poland to these shores. They came to Williamsburg directly from the boat, or after a stay in Manhattan's Lower East Side. And they founded the Shtiebel. Little did they know that this *shtiebel* was to become the central point of Orthodox Jewry in Williamsburg in the years preceding World War II and during the years immediately following. These were memorable times: in this small corner of the world, days were filled with desperate efforts to save the remnants of our people from Hitler's butchers, and nights were occupied with meetings planning re-

Rabbi Brenner resides in Brooklyn where he is active in communal affairs. He is a frequent contributor to Jewish periodicals, and is represented in *The Jewish Observer* by "Why Auschwitz Was Never Bombed" (May '78) and "Song of Faith" (Jan '78).



Reb Moshe Bunem Doppelt םע, a diamond merchant by trade, who had come home from a busy day on 47th Street, had eaten supper (prepared by his wife, Chana Sara, a *tzaddeikes* who raised large sums to help hundreds of needy families) and had rushed over to the Poilisher Shtiebel to learn with the boys who lined up each night for his help. While childless, the Doppelts had fostered numerous young people in their home (for example, Rabbi Dr. Moshe Lonner, principal of Mesivta Torah Vodaath High School, and Dr. Yaakov Gneiwish, currently a surgeon in Cincinnati—both refugees from Europe). Reb Moshe Bunem acted as a surrogate father to many of us young people who waited for his kind and devoted attention each night. We came not understanding the *Gemora* or the *Tosafos*, and went away with a full understanding of the entire *sugya* (topic). With his comprehensive knowledge of the *blatt* (page on hand), he imbued us with an enthusiasm for learning, and gave us the encouragement to seek new meaning and conclusions from what we had mastered. He made us feel important, and that he wanted us to know more. Above all, we knew that he loved to help us and he felt good fathering us.

The room was crowded with people learning; latecomers had a difficult time finding a seat. The walls were stacked from floor to ceiling with *seforim*, many out of print and generally unavailable. I recall how many times we stood in line to look into a *Chiddushei HaRamban* and other (then) rare *seforim*. The Poilisher Shtiebel also had the *seforim* of Reb Tzaddok *Hakohein*, which at that time were not yet reprinted. And then there were locked closets containing *seforim* accessible only to the chosen few.

THE CAST OF CHARACTERS

The vast library was guarded by a man known as "Mendel." A simple fellow, by appearances, yet ask for any *sefer*, and Mendel would tell you where to find it. He also returned the *seforim* to their assigned shelves each night. Many a time you would find Mendel dozing on one of the upholstered benches, but as soon as

someone asked for a *sefer* he was wide awake, cheerful and encouraging.

The *shammus* at the Poilisher Shtiebel was Reb Hillel Perlowitz םע, the classical "simple Jew"—truly *ehrlich*—whose joy was to raise his children to be *talmidei chachomim* and *yirei Shomaytm*. Reb Hillel eked out a very sparse living by selling eggs from house to house, earning whatever extra income he could glean from being *shammus*. He took care of the Poilisher Shtiebel, prepared *Shalosh Seudos*, *simchos*, and *Kiddushim*. Was he required by contract to pre-



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pare tea upstairs in the women's gallery? Who knows? He seemed to relish serving tea to the denizens of the Shtiebel. Extremely kind and accommodating, he made everyone, even the youngsters, feel at home.

The most captivating character in the Poilisher Shtiebel was Reb Chazkel Engelman, ז"ל. With a long white beard flowing down his chest, Reb Chazkel cut a terrifying figure. When he walked in the wind, his beard parted like the *Yam Suf*; we youngsters imagined that he looked like *Eliyahu Hanavi*. Reb Chazkel invariably helped people get seated, putting away their outer clothing, offering them tea. He kept several cigar boxes filled with eyeglasses, especially useful on *Shabbos* for those who had come without their reading glasses. Rumor had it that Reb Chazkel had received a blessing from the *o l d* Komarna *Rebbe*, who had

He was seen mostly saying *Tehillim* and joining in with some of the *chaburos* (small groups) in learning each night. Every *Erev Yom Kippur*, he asked forgiveness of each and every one of us, even some of the youngest *bachurim*. He must have had some source of income because he always

particular table boasted three *chavetrim* who learned together for many years: Reb Shmuel Leib Wolfson (the father of Reb Moshe Wolfson, שליט"א, the *Mashgiach* of Mesivta Torah Vodaath), Reb Yankel Novak (the father of Rabbi Yehudah Novak) and Reb Henoah Blum (the father of Rabbi Zishe Blum and grandfather of Rabbi Mattis Blum, known for his weekly Torah pamphlet, *Torah Lodaas*, of 17 years consecutive publication). Reb Shmuel Leib was also the *Baal Shacharis* in the Poilisher Shtiebel for which he was eminently qualified, not only by virtue of his fine voice, but also for his *ehrllichkeit* and *temimus* (sterling character). He eked out a meager living from a small grocery store, delivering by hand-

You mounted the steep staircase to the first floor, and opened the door to the sound of shouting voices. Each table was surrounded with groups and *chavrusas*, each learning their daily *sefer* with vigor, with enthusiasm, with *lebedigkeit*. The room would be humming with the exhilaration

of Torah study.

contributed to the Shtiebel's many appeals for worthy causes. In addition, he maintained a *Gemillus Chessed* fund, which helped many people in need. His sudden and violent death following a bus accident in front of the *shul* shook the entire membership of the *shul* and his funeral was attended by all.

TWOSOMES, THREESOMES AND MORESOMES

Each table had a collection of *chavrusos* (twosomes) or *chaburos* of unusual, delightful characters. For example, one par-

cart early each morning orders of no-more-than milk, butter and two rolls. He refused a position as *Mashgiach* over *Kashrus* (too weighty a responsibility) and would not serve as *Baal Shacharis* in a large, affluent *shul* that would have required him to modify his Chassidic pronunciation.

Reb Yankel Novak also had a grocery store (Bedford and South 8) and was extremely busy. But that did not stop him from attending his *shiurim* in the Poilisher Shtiebel; his learning came first. Reb Henoah Blum worked hard all day at his own millinery shop, devoted himself to the education of his four children, yet found time to learn each day. Although a *baalebos* (layman), his grasp of Talmudic reasoning was phenomenal.

Reb Henoah had been an out-

wished him, "*Du zolst zein an alte Yid un gebben far Yidden tea.*" We tried to speak to him in our broken Yiddish and, surprisingly, he'd reply in pure, articulate English.

Reb Chazkel was always in the Poilisher Shtiebel: early mornings and late into the night, perhaps the last person to leave. Little was known about his past or about his family life. Always cheerful, deeply involved in the operation of the Shtiebel, he enjoyed lengthy discussions with the youngsters and the older people alike.



standing scholar in his hometown of Ostra, and was sought after by a philanthropist who wanted to sponsor him. He could not accept this offer since his father was ill and he was called upon to support the family. He knew *Unkeles* and *Tehillim* by heart. Reb Henoah attended a *shiur* given by Rabbi Meir Weinberg, a Rosh Yeshiva in Torah Vodaath, in the Poilisher Shtiebel. Rabbi Weinberg described him as a scholar who made himself into the student by asking the appropriate questions, leading the discussion along exciting, productive paths. He was the prototype *Shtiebel Yid*: learning, contemplating, discussing, arguing in front of an open *Gemora* at any and every opportunity—mornings, evenings, Friday nights, *Shabbos* day and night, Sundays and holidays.

EXTRA CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES AT THE SHTIEBEL

Many of the *Shtiebel Yidden*, immersed in Torah as they were, were also distinguished for their other areas of activity and accomplishment; for example, a particular threesome, which included Reb Shammai Meizner ע"ה, who was recognized as a *lamden*, and knew the *Be'er Mayyim Chaim* (a commentary on *Chumash*) by heart; possessing a great sense of humor, he was conversant with current events and understood the business world well. People would discuss their problems with him, seeking his advice. With him was Reb Aaron Seif, a pioneer of Agudath Israel of America, who moved to Williamsburgh in the early forties and had come to the Poilisher Shtiebel at the behest of his dear friend (my beloved father-in-law), Reb Hershel Berliner—another Agudah pioneer. Reb Hershel was responsible for the finances of upkeep and payroll of the *mikveh*, which for a long time was the only *mikveh* to serve that neighborhood.

In those years, the Poilisher Shtiebel was a familiar address to those involved in rescue work, resettlement of refugees, the raising of funds for *yeshivos* and for the needy. Suffice it to say that the efforts to rescue the Gerer *Rebbe*, the *Imrei Emes*

ל"ז, and his family from the hands of the Nazi murderers were made in the Poilisher Shtiebel by its *Rav*, Rabbi Zelmanowitz and by many of its members—most prominent at the time, Reb Mordche Goldman פ"ע (founder of *Otzar Hasefarim*). There were certainly others, but the names of these two shine out amongst those who took an active role in that particular episode.

Most of the members of the Poilisher Shtiebel were called upon daily to join in helping rescue the remnants from destruction. Some

mortgaged their properties, while others tapped their savings accounts, time and again, to guarantee affidavits, enabling visas to be sent to Europe to save more people.

I am reminded of Reb Fisch "Baachy," the name given to the Hungarian Jew who stubbornly knocked on all doors to rescue entire families from the war's destruction. He would be found in the Shtiebel quite often to rally support.

Reb Hershel Berliner often booked one *Shabbos* after another for appeals, to help cope with the great de-

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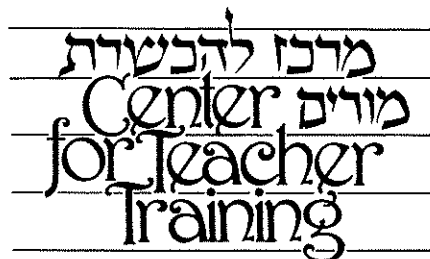
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mand for help... devoting weekdays as well to raise funds for those refugees who made it to our shores. As a devoted Agudist, he helped Reb Elimelech ("Mike") Tress זצ"ל in his endeavors at rescue and helped raise fortunes of money for many of the Agudath Israel projects that Reb Elimelech ran.

OTHER SHTIEBEL GEMS

Reb Mechel Cohen זצ"ל was certainly a jewel in the Poilisher Shtiebel. It was said that he knew the *Tur Orach Chayim* and *Magen Avraham* by heart. He had the great distinction of being the first father-in-law to go along with the visionary plan of Rabbi Aaron Kotler זצ"ל for his Kollel in Lakewood: His children, Rabbi and Mrs. Nochum Goldberg, were among the first Kollel couples in Beth Medrash Govoha.

The regular *Baal Koreh* was Reb Shimon Shain, זצ"ל. Reb Shimon was a *shochet* and one of the anchors of Torah-true *Yiddishkeit* in pre-World War II America. Reb Shimon's most imposing presence and his earnestness accompanied him wherever he went, even at the Torah reading. When he read the Torah, the words came to life. As Reb Moshe Wolfson so aptly described his reading, "*Es hot getraiselt de bainer* (Our very bones trembled)." His life story was briefly



would only add that he brought to the Shtiebel his great *Yiras Shomayim* and *mesiras nefesh* for Torah. He rallied the support of every member of the Poilisher Shtiebel for his campaign to strengthen *Kashrus*. He constantly warned us that the greatest danger in the field was consumer complacency. Ever the fighter, his zeal showed in every cause he championed, whether for *Shabbos*, *Kashrus*, *Taharas HaMishpacha*, supporting *yeshivos*, *Bais Yaakov* or *Hatzala*. The generations of *ehrlicher Yidden* that followed him attest to his greatness.

Another imposing figure in the Poilisher Shtiebel was Reb Gershon Henech Eichorn, זצ"ל. A Radziner *Chassid*, the blue *techeiles* thread in his *tzitzis* always provoked discussion.

And then there was Reb Moshe Mintz זצ"ל, who had been the favorite student of his father-in-law, Rav Levenberg זצ"ל, who had founded America's first out-of-town *Yeshiva Gedola*, in New Haven, Connecticut. Reb Moshe Mintz was one of the very few reliable butchers in Williamsburg at the time. His wife, Bracha, was a well-known radio personality who spoke on behalf of many worthy institutions. In the Shtiebel, she became the "*Zogarke*"—the woman who read the prayers aloud for the other women to repeat after her, word for word. Her reading inspired the others to shed forth tides of tears in the

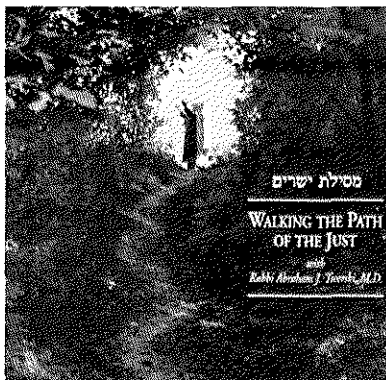
Reb Hirsch was the prototype Shtiebel Yid: learning, contemplating, discussing, arguing in front of an open Gemora at any and every opportunity—mornings, evenings, Friday nights, Shabbos day and night, Sundays and holidays.

told by his daughter-in-law, Ruchama, in her classic of Orthodox Jewish Americana, *All For The Boss*. I

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women's gallery.

And of course, Reb Yaakov Einsiedler, ר"ע, who spent every spare moment learning in the Polisher Shtiebel. His constant study of the Rambam won him the nickname "The Rambam."

One must not forget Reb Aaron Dovid Bernstein, the president of the Shtiebel, who could be found at another table, sitting and learning whenever he had a spare moment. Reb Aaron Dovid was well known for his kindness and his eagerness to give *tzeddaka* with an open hand. After an appeal he would sit down and write out a check that seemed well beyond his means. He would always say that he was giving only his vacation money. He would send his wife to the mountains to spend the summer in a hotel and he figured that his share, since he stayed home, belonged to *tzeddaka*.

Rabbi Michoel Ber Weissmandl, ר"ב, came to the Polisher Shtiebel right after the war and spent days and nights there. He wept during the *davening*, he wept during the *laining*, and he wept during the learning. Some days he would weep without pause. The people in the Shtiebel knew well why he was shedding those tears and many cried along with him. Others interrupted his crying, pleading with him to go home, to eat, to sleep. Subsequently he gained control of his emotions, remarried, established a family and threw himself into the monumental task of building the Nitra Yeshiva Farm Settlement in Mt. Kisco, New York.

A LASTING IMPRINT

I had come to the Polisher Shtiebel as a young student of Mesivta Torah Vodaath. The Shtiebel was very convenient for my studies, for

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the Mesivta Beis Midrash, at South 3rd Street, was a long hike from my home at Ross Street and Bedford Avenue. So I joined the many other Torah Vodaath *talmidim* who congregated in the Poilisher Shtiebel to learn at night. I was drawn to the Poilisher Shtiebel on *Shabbos* afternoon by a neighbor of mine, Rabbi Chaim Ciment מ"ע, the principal of the Lubavitcher Yeshiva in Boston. Although many people napped on *Shabbos* afternoons, the Poilisher Shtiebel hummed with a younger element—mostly Torah Vodaath boys, like myself—who used the time to catch up on our learning. I have fond memories of my days and nights in the Poilisher Shtiebel in the company of such a blessed assemblage.

The Poilisher Shtiebel typified what was successful about Orthodoxy in America. It fostered Torah learning and Torah adherence with a sense of joy and the passion of com-

mitment—the only *krechitz* that escaped the lips of a Shtiebel Jew was for the regret of not being better than one was. Youngsters were part of the

The members of the Shtiebel mortgaged their properties, while others tapped their savings accounts, time and again, to guarantee affidavits, enabling visas to be sent to Europe to save more people.

scene and always felt welcome. Yes, Torah study was the curriculum, but the extra-curriculum was also important. The Poilisher Shtiebel supported and encouraged many a movement to promote Torah study and foster Torah observance in this country... indeed, one of the true pioneer institutions of Orthodox Jewry in the United States. ■

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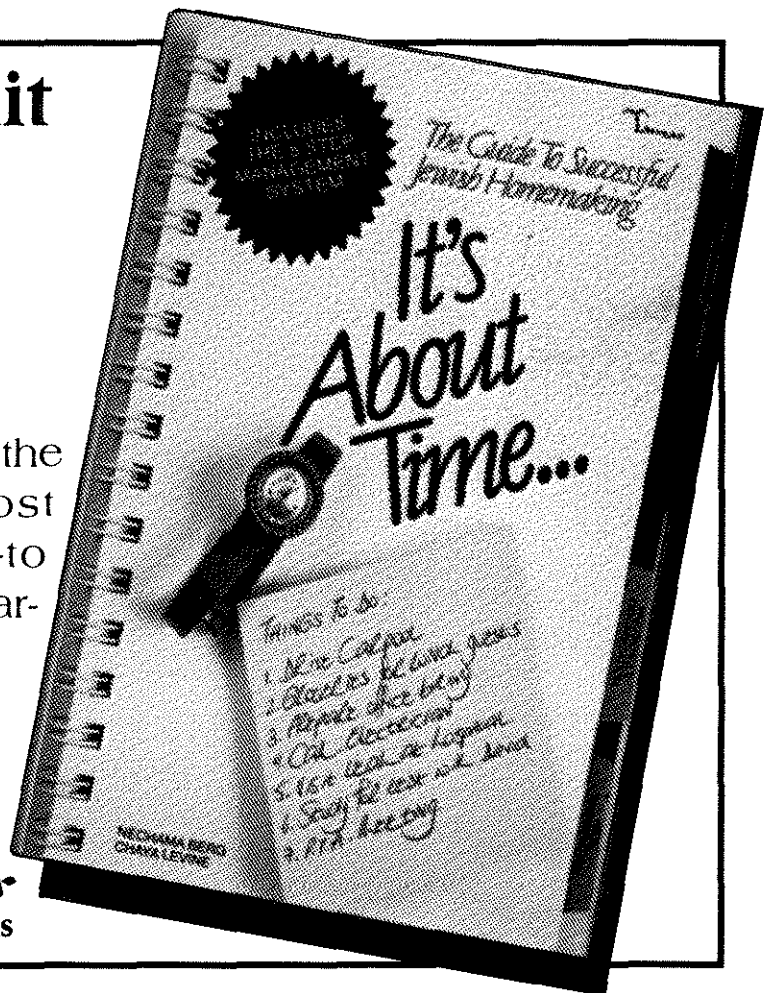
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Glimpses of an American Tzaddeikes

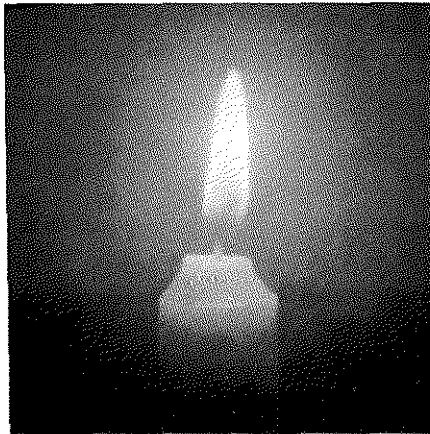
The "Roaring Twenties" in the United States of America were certainly not conducive to adherence to Torah and *mitzvos*. The wave of immigration into the *Goldene Medtina* brought Jews into incredibly difficult circumstances, and many of them succumbed to *Chillul Shabbos* and the like, having been told countless times: "...If you don't come in Saturday—don't come in Monday!"

The Reform movement was making headway into the mainstream of American Judaism, and the fledgling *yeshivos* that were in existence at that time were struggling to keep their doors open. Few believed that America would ever be a host to serious Torah study on any scale.

Yet, within this American wasteland, there rose a few individuals (the Wilhelms, Androns and Hermans come to mind) who bucked the tide and refused to give in to the blandishments of the American dream. One such individual was a woman whom Rabbi Aharon Kotler, זצ"ל, called the "*tzaddeikes hador*," the most righteous woman of her generation—Necha (Annie) Golding, nee' Lentschner.

Mrs. Golding came to America at the turn of the century, married Shimon G. (Sam) Golding, who later became a successful textile merchant, and began raising a family of what eventually turned out to be eleven children, in Manhattan's affluent Upper West Side. It was not an

Mr. Siegel, originally of Brookline, Massachusetts, now with a public relations firm in New York City, based this article on information culled from the vast collection of letters in possession of the Golding family, and from extensive interviews with family members.



easy task. Mr. Golding spent a great deal of time away from home on business trips, and the brunt of childrearing fell on her shoulders, not made any easier by New York's permissive atmosphere.

TORAH SUPPORT WAS HER MISSION

In the mid-nineteen twenties, Mrs. Golding took upon herself the task of providing for the *yeshivos* in Europe. Utilizing her home as a literal *Beis Vaad L'Chachomim* (meeting place for rabbis), Mrs. Golding became host for just about every European *Rosh HaYeshiva* who came to the United States to raise funds for his institution. (The family is today in possession of hundreds of original letters in the hand-

writings of the Chofetz Chaim, Reb Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, Reb Elchonon Wasserman, Reb Boruch Ber Lebowitz, among many others.) She housed them in her large West Side apartment, or, in the warmer months, at her Upstate home in Tannersville, New York, where the rare American commodity of *Cholov Yisroel* milk was always in ample supply (they maintained their own small farm).

An incident that occurred in 1926 was typical:

Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein (the *Lvush Mordechai*) the venerable *Rosh Yeshiva* of Knesses Bais Yisroel in Slobodka, was their guest in Tannersville. Reb Moshe Mordechai, although not in the best of health, came to the United States to raise funds for his yeshiva, and its projected expansion to Chevron in (then) Palestine. After one week's rest, Reb Moshe Mordechai was ready to leave.

"Stay one more month," pleaded



Mr. Golding. "Be our guest. Your health is not the best. After all, what is the most that you could raise in one month?"

"If the *Ribbono Shel Olam* helps me," said Reb Moshe Mordechai, "I can possibly raise \$5,000 (an unusually large sum in those days)."

Without blinking an eye, Mr. Golding countered, "If I give you a check for \$5,000.00 today, will you stay with us for one more month?" After a moment's hesitation, Reb Moshe Mordechai answered, "Yes!" And the check was delivered that day!

STRENGTH IN ADVERSITY

In 1928, the Goldings celebrated the *Shabbos* Bar Mitzva of their son, Yosef — a kind, *frum*, intelligent young man. It was a lavish affair, befitting the family's status.

That afternoon, after *Shabbos* lunch, Yosef was taking a walk with some of his friends on Riverside Drive when a car jumped the curb, fatally injuring the boy. People arrived at the Golding residence that night, bearing

Bar Mitzva gifts, unaware that they were entering a house of mourning.

The funeral on Sunday was possibly the largest such procession for a religious Jew in the United States up to that time. And as the lifeless body was lowered into the grave, Mrs.

And as the lifeless body of her young son was lowered into the grave, Mrs. Golding lifted her eyes to the heavens and in a deep, clear voice shouted, "*Ribbono Shel Olam!* You gave me *ah gohrnisht* — an empty vessel. I give you back a *tzaddik!*"

Golding raised her hands for quiet. She lifted her eyes to the heavens and in a deep, clear voice shouted, "*Ribbono Shel Olam!* You gave me *ah gohrnisht* — an empty vessel. I give you back a *tzaddik!*"¹

REACHING FOR HIGHER GOALS

Mrs. Golding made her children's growth as devout Jews a top priority. In fact, she hired a private *Rebbe*, Rabbi Yisroel Stamm, זצ"ל, to live with the family and teach the children Torah and *Yiddishkeit*. In addition, Mrs. Golding enrolled some of her children in Yeshiva D'Harlem, an elementary school, and sent two of her sons, ages 14 and 15, to the Mirrer Yeshiva in Poland. Unfortunately, her efforts did not always meet with success.

During this time, Mrs. Golding helped found the Mirrer Yeshiva Ladies Auxillary, which raised money

¹ See copy of four-page handwritten letter from Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein, extending *Nichum Aveilim* - condolences.

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for "Der Mir" for many years—through its tumultuous wanderings in Europe, to Shanghai, and eventually, to Jerusalem.

In 1933, after several lengthy illnesses, Mr. Golding succumbed to tuberculosis, leaving Mrs. Golding in a widowed state for the next twenty years. Mrs. Golding no longer had the wealth she had been accustomed to, yet she continued to raise money for yeshivos and

Another relative offered to set up the orphaned Golding family in a luxury apartment near Riverside Drive, on one condition: that "those European rabbis" not be housed on premises. Mrs. Golding refused the offer.

FURTHER CONTACT WITH TORAH LEADERS

One of the European Rosh Ha-Yeshiva who never came to the United States was the saintly Chofetz Chaim, Reb Yisroel Meir HaCohen. Mrs. Golding decided to visit him in Radin, instead. It was at that meeting that a famous exchange took place. After noting the sparse wooden benches, Mrs. Golding offered to buy the Chofetz Chaim more comfortable furniture. The Chofetz Chaim asked her, "Where is your furniture?"

Answered Mrs. Golding, "Back at home. I'm only traveling through."

"So am I," answered the Chofetz Chaim.²

When she rose to leave, she bowed towards the Chofetz Chaim and said, "Ah gutten Tog (good day), Chofetz Chaim."

"Ah gutt Yor (good year), Mrs. Golding," answered the Chofetz Chaim.

She walked towards the door, turned around, walked back and said again, "Ah gutten Tog, Chofetz Chaim."

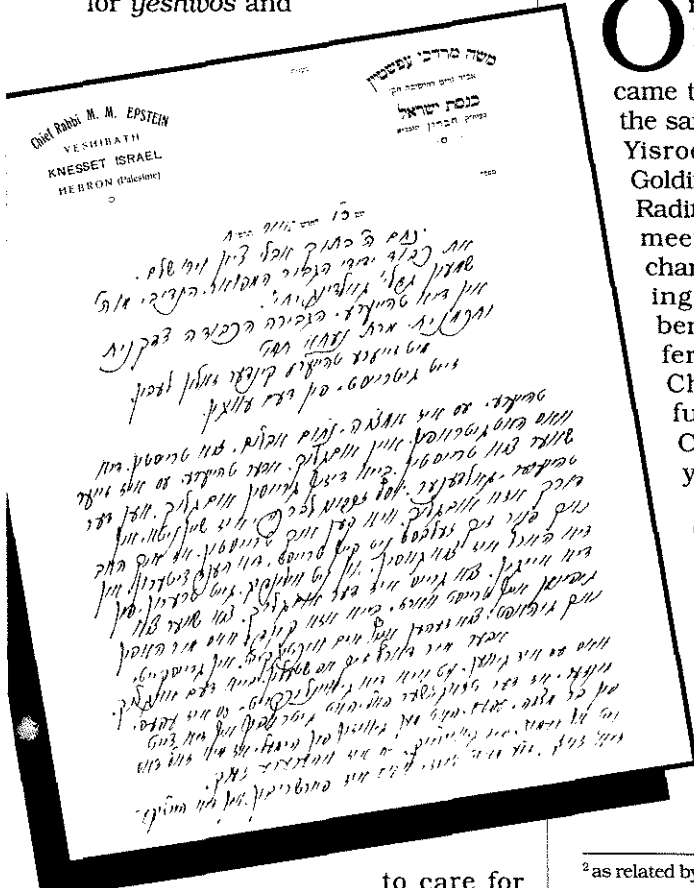
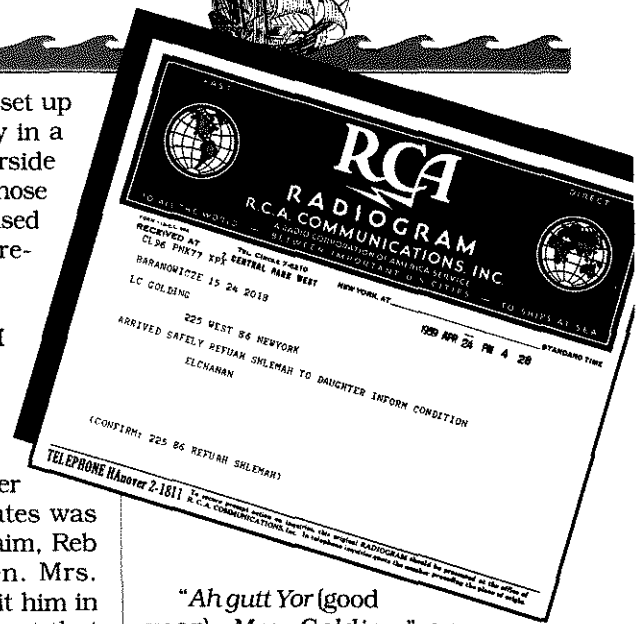
"Ah gutt Yor, Mrs. Golding," repeated the Chofetz Chaim.

Only then did she leave.

Her young son who had witnessed the proceedings, later asked her, "Why did you do that?"

She answered, "I wished the Chofetz Chaim a good day, he wished me back a good year. Should I not go back and receive another *beracha* for a good year?"

Rabbi Simcha Wasserman, זצ"ל related that when his father, Reb Elchonon זצ"ל, arrived in New York, a driver showed up unexpectedly and informed him that accommodations



to care for the Roshei HaYeshivos who came to the United States.

On a subsequent visit by Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein, one of Mrs. Golding's daughters complained bitterly to him about a family member who had unscrupulously wronged her mother financially, leaving her with precious little. The *Lvush Mordechai* leaned forward and said, "Chana Leah, *zorgt zich nisht. Der vos fangt on mit eyer Mutter, fangt on mit G-ttl*" (Don't worry, Chana Leah, he who starts up with your mother starts up with G-d.) In the coming years, one of the people involved in the controversy lost all of his three sons!

²as related by Rabbi Lipa Brenner

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had been arranged for him at 225 West 86th Street. Reb Elchonon soon became a regular member of Mrs. Golding's household, until that fateful day when he left to join his *talmidim* in Europe at the start of World War II. (See telegram.)

When Rabbi Aharon Kotler, אהרן, arrived in New York during World War II, his first residence—not surprisingly—was in Mrs. Golding's apartment on the West Side. After all, the family is in possession of some thirty letters from the Kletzker Rosh Yeshiva before he came to America.

Rebbitzin Mendel Zaks, מנדל, the late daughter of the Chofetz Chaim, told her son that she never understood the meaning of *savlorus* (patience), until she witnessed the following incident: After the war, a widow from a prominent family arrived in the United States, and Rebbetzin Zaks asked Mrs. Golding to procure an apartment for her. Mrs. Golding did so and personally purchased quality linens to accommodate the lady. When they proudly presented the apartment to the widow, she looked around... opened the door to the bedroom... turned to them, and said, "What do you think I am—a peasant?"

Mrs. Golding immediately apologized. "I'm so sorry. We are used to different styles here. Tomorrow, you and I will exchange these linens and you can choose the style befitting a woman of your stature!"

* * *

Mrs. Golding financed the building of the *shul* and *mikveh* in Tannersville; and, in Florida, traveled from hotel to hotel to raise money for Miami's first *mikveh*.

As vice-president of the Ladies Auxillary of Telshe Yeshiva, of Knesses Beis Yitzchok in Kaminetz, and of the Mir, she organized parlor meetings, together with her saintly sister, Mrs. Sadie Soloff, and a group of her friends, and continued to send money, even during World War II (to Vilna, Shanghai and to *Eretz Yisroel*).

OF BIRTH AND PASSING

From 1928 through 1953, no one had named a baby after her bar mitzva boy, Yossi, for fear of bad *mazel*. In February of 1953, on *Shabbos Parshas Yisro*, Mrs. Golding told Rabbi Stamm about a dream that she had had the night before. Her son Yossi had come to her with the following message, "Mamma, tonight is a *simcha*. Fill up the cup and let it run over."

The following night, the news arrived that a baby boy had been born to one of Mrs. Golding's children. Various rabbis were consulted, and they agreed that they should name the baby after him, "Yosef Chaim," meaning, "may He add life."

Several months later, an inoperable brain tumor ended her life's work

on this world. She would not get the opportunity to wear the special "Moshiach" dress that she had purchased for the exclusive use of greeting *Moshiach*. (The dress still hangs in her closet.)

Several months later, an inoperable brain tumor ended her life's work on this world. She would not get the opportunity to wear the special "Moshiach" dress that she had purchased for the exclusive use of greeting *Moshiach*.

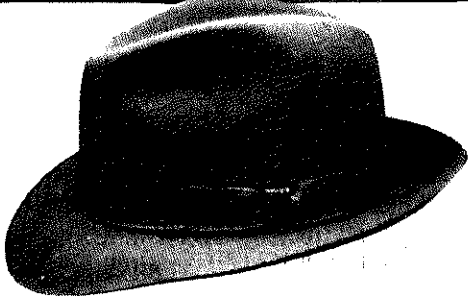
The lengthy funeral procession began from her apartment. A young Jewish woman who had just moved into the building recounts, "I couldn't believe my eyes. Rabbis with long white beards and long black coats were reaching to touch the coffin. I wondered, which great rabbi had died? I was amazed to find out that it was an ordinary woman!"

At Rabbi Stamm's *shul*, only the *Raw* and Rabbi Aharon Kotler were chosen to speak. It was then that Reb Aharon, in a tear-streaked face said that "she was the *Tzaddeikes Hador*. There will never be another like her." He cried... and said, "She was like a daughter to me, I cannot continue...." ■

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WHAT MAKES AN AMERICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY?

Comments on a Book on the Fate of Jewish Boston...and its Echoes

UPWARD MOBILITY, ABANDONMENT AND SELL-OUT

Recently, the secular Jewish press has lavished critical attention on the book, *The Death of an American Jewish Commu-*

Mr. Reisman, a certified public accountant and attorney in private practice in New York, is author of several articles in JO, including a biographical tribute to the first Bostoner Rebbe, 5737, in Jan. '92.

nity—A Tragedy of Intentions, by sociologist Hillel Levine and journalist Lawrence Harmon, which describes how Boston's Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan, erstwhile home to 90,000 Jews, became a slum populated by 120,000 blacks. The authors examine the external factors that accelerated and possibly caused the change: government urban renewal programs, bank-lending policies and blockbusting real estate agents. The

book also relates how the Jewish community, as it became more "American," split along class and income lines, and assimilated upper-income, suburban Jews sided with blacks against the more traditional, lower-income Jews left behind in the city. Let us follow the population flow.

It all began in the early twentieth century, when large numbers of Jews immigrated from Eastern Europe to Boston, eventually moving to the



more middle-class neighborhoods of Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan. At the same time, southern blacks were moving into the adjacent Washington Square neighborhood.

After World War II, Jews began moving to suburbs such as Brookline and Newton. Simultaneously, urban renewal and gentrification acted to displace blacks from Washington Square even as larger numbers of blacks were moving in from the south. And so blacks began to move into areas previously inhabited by Jews. As the rich and powerful moved

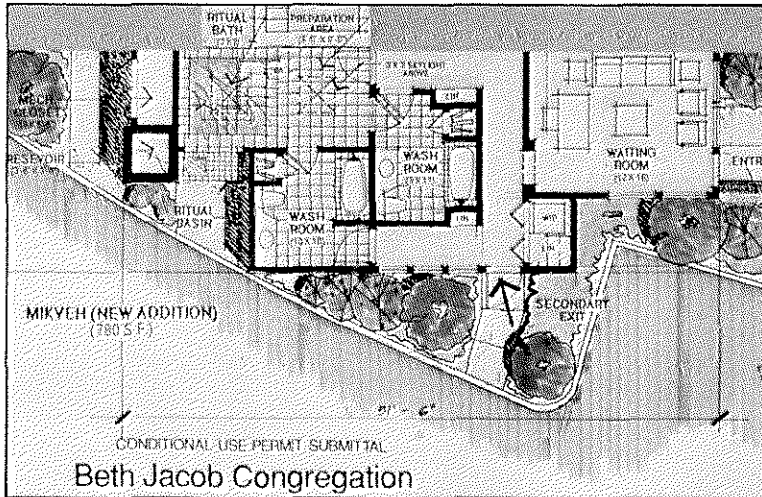
to the suburbs, the institutions they dominated began to abandon the old neighborhood. Hebrew Teachers College, a non-Orthodox institution, moved to Brookline in 1953. Rabbi J. B. Soloveichik's Maimonides School tried to buy its old building, but could not raise the necessary funds. Freedom House, a black organization, purchased the property with substantial help from the same Jewish philanthropists and organizations that refused to help Rabbi Soloveichik. In 1954, Mishkan Tefila, a giant Conservative temple, moved

to suburban Newton. Poorer members were left behind, unable to maintain the old building themselves and prevented by exorbitant dues from joining the suburban congregation. The old building was finally sold to the local Lubavitcher Yeshiva for a fraction of its value.

SUBURBAN JEWS: WHOSE FRIEND?

In the 1960s, rising black militancy increased the pressures on Dorchester's Jews. They were left to fend for themselves as suburban Jewish leaders focused their attention on the problems of the blacks.¹ The final blow to the community came when Boston's banks decided to make federally-insured mortgage money available to black, first-time home buyers. Since Irish and Italian neighborhoods would resist attempts at integration, it was decided that mortgages would be offered only in Jewish Dorchester and Mattapan. What was previously an exodus became massive flight. Real estate agents blockbusted aggressively, buying houses from Jews at two-thirds their value and selling them to blacks for triple what they paid. Since the government insured the mortgages, the banks didn't seem to care that prices were outrageously inflated, or that purchasers did not earn enough to make payments. Very quickly, a middle-class Jewish neighborhood became a black slum as banks foreclosed and houses were abandoned.

¹ The 1968 gift of the Mishkan Tefila building to a black arts school provides a bit of black comedy. Principal Elma Lewis wanted the building, but could not convince the Lubavitchers to sell. Instead, she played on the conscience of the Jewish Federation leaders and convinced them to acquire the building and gift it to her. Various elements in the black community took up her cause; young hoodlums threatened to burn the property down if it were not transferred. In the end, the Federation raised \$250,000 (nearly one million dollars in today's money) to purchase a new building in suburban Brookline for the Lubavitcher Yeshiva. The Federation gave the new building to the yeshiva in exchange for Mishkan Tefila and gave Mishkan Tefila to Elma Lewis's black arts school. Ms. Lewis is still remembered as a Jew-hating monster, but in retrospect she is something of a heroine. In 1967 she did what no one else had been able to do: convince a federation to give direct aid to a yeshiva.



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The authors are fairly objective in their portrayal of the Orthodox Jews and of religious issues in general. When (Orthodox) Congregation Bethel moved to Newton in the 1960s, it maintained its old building for the members remaining in Dorchester, with the rabbi alternating *Shabbosos* between the two.

Not every Conservative and Reform rabbi was a villain and not every Orthodox Jew was a hero; yet, by and large, the Orthodox were more committed to the old neighborhoods.

EVERYTOWN, U.S.A.

Boston was certainly not unique; most cities in America have seen Jewish neighborhoods disintegrate. In New York, for example, there were the Greater Lower East Side, Harlem, the Grand Concourse, Brownsville, East New York, and East Flatbush. At the same time, some Jewish neighborhoods have stayed Jewish. The authors argue that Dorchester and Mattapan could have been preserved if Jewish communal leaders had not abandoned them and if government and bank policies had not conspired to drive blacks in and drive Jews out.

At least one secular reviewer, however, took issue with this thesis, arguing that Jews would have moved to the suburbs in any event, and new Jewish families were not moving in. Vacant apartments were inevitable, and the black exodus from the South was a fact. Even without all the other factors, it is possible that the old Jewish neighborhoods would have declined nonetheless.

Why do Jews in some neighborhoods stay put while in others, they moved? The answer lies beneath the surface of Levine-and-Harmon's book.

The book begins by describing Dorchester and Mattapan as a melange of synagogues and stores. The center of this community was the G & G Delicatessen, which "enjoyed the greatest drawing power of any institution in the Jewish community." People gathered there to eat and do business; politicians came to campaign. "G & G" evokes the most nostalgia among former residents. However, it was not Kosher.

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If Jewish Boston's central institution was not Kosher, what can we say about the rest of the community? The largest congregation, Mishkan Tefila, was Conservative. The larger Orthodox synagogues were dominated by

the non-observant. If the community numbered 90,000, at least 20,000 must have been children of school age. Yet there were only two Jewish day schools, and they enrolled barely five percent of that number. *Yeshivos*

Gedolos? Two attempts to start one met with local indifference and failed miserably. Old Jewish Boston, even if almost exclusively Jewish, was not overwhelmingly Torah-observant. Roxbury, Dorchester and Mattapan were not Boston's Borough Park or Flatbush.

Other urban American Jewish communities exhibit the same pattern. The massive neighborhoods of Harlem, the Grand Concourse and Brownsville were populated by Jews who were, by and large, not committed to Torah observance. Although overwhelmingly Jewish, most Jews defined their Jewishness primarily by ethnic or cultural identification.

What of those neighborhoods that did boast strong Torah-observant communities, but also went under? Some were populated largely by those who either wanted to escape from Torah or see their children assimilate. Others were tenement slums, fated for eventual abandonment, and not comparable to the middle-class Brownsville or Dorchester.

THOSE THAT HELD FAST

And what of the communities that did not change? Until the 1930s, Williamsburg was similar to Brownsville. As less observant Jews began to move away, the character of the neighborhood changed, and the Torah-observant Jews who were anchored around the neighborhood's premier institutions—Mesivta Torah Vodaath and the Beth Jacob High School and Seminary—remained behind and began to predominate. Thus Williamsburg's Jewish community prevailed over the havoc caused by the building of the Brooklyn Queens Expressway, which sliced it in two, and it prevailed over the disruption caused by the introduction of public housing. Undeniably, the infusion of the Satmar *Chassidim* gave it its current vitality....Borough Park stabilized when older residents who frequented the large synagogues gave way to those who invested heavily in their children's *chinuch* instead.... Crown Heights stopped bleeding when the center of power shifted from the Brooklyn Jewish Center to the

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Lubavitcher Beis Midrash....When the old Jewish neighborhood of Cleveland began to change in the 1940s, the community moved to Cleveland Heights, Shaker Heights and other suburbs. However, only Cleveland Heights attracted the Orthodox, and in spite of various pressures, the community has largely stayed put²....In Boston, the Orthodox community relocated itself in the Brookline-Brighton area and has stayed there for thirty years; this is almost as long as Jewish Dorchester and Mattapan existed.

Does this mean that Torah-observant Jews are the only ones who can preserve a Jewish neighborhood? More importantly, it means that Torah observant Jews are the only ones with a reason to preserve Jewish neighborhoods.

Does this mean that Torah-observant Jews are the only ones who can preserve a Jewish neighborhood? More importantly, it means that Torah observant Jews are the only ones with a reason to preserve Jewish neighborhoods. Because of our way of life, we look not only for places to worship, but for places to educate our children in Torah. We look for establishments that will facilitate our observance of the *mitzvos*...food shops, *mikvaos*, even clothing stores that cater to our needs (black hat, anyone?). We look for the *sevivta*, the surroundings, that reinforce our Torah values. To the outside world, this

²Cleveland has learned the lessons of Boston; one cannot comment on the viability of Cleveland Heights without mentioning the aid the Cleveland Federation gave the community to resist block-busting and other pressure tactics.

translates into a neighborhood.

Some would argue that the Torah Jew cannot afford to move as easily, since he has so much invested in communal institutions. This, however, is an effect, not a cause. Without the Torah, there is no need to build those institutions, just as there is no need for Jewish surroundings. Ethnic identity alone is not reason enough to prefer an inner city row

house to a suburban house on a quarter-acre plot. Jewish identity based on ethnicity alone will fade with time and increasing assimilation. Rabbeinu Saadya Gaon stated it a thousand years ago: we are a nation only because of the Torah. Without the Torah, there is no reason to identify as Jews—not as individuals, not as a community, and not as a neighborhood. ■

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Of Celebrations and Unrealized Goals

Post-Simchas Torah Reflections

UNREALIZED ASPIRATIONS

Simchas Torah—the most joyous of all our *Yomim Tovim!* How strange, then, that in its center stands the death of Moshe Rabbeinu. The focal role of this event is demonstrated by the fact that we do not read on Simchas Torah the Haftorah prescribed by Chazal (*Berachos* 3a), which deals with King Shlomo. We read instead the beginning of the Book of Yehoshua, which starts, “And it was after the death of Moshe, the servant of G-d” (see *Tosafos ad loco*).

Moreover, the death of Moshe is given added poignancy by the emphatic words addressed to him at that time, that “you will see the land—but you will not come there” (*Devarim* 32:52, reiterated Ch. 34:4). The goal of the exodus from Egypt was the entry into *Eretz Yisroel* (cf. Ch. 26, 8-9); and yet Moshe, who longed with all his heart to reach the goal, was not permitted to attain it.

Perhaps, however, this is in a deeper sense the fate of the Jew in general: to strive for a vision but not to attain it. It is told that Rabbi Akiva Eger, in his old age, burst into tears when called up as *Chassan Torah* on Simchas Torah: “I have been a *Chassan*

Rabbi Elias, *menahel* of the Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch Beth Jacob High School for Girls and the Rika Breuer Teachers Seminary is a member of the editorial board of *The Jewish Observer*, and author of a soon-to-be published new translation and commentary on Rabbi Hirsch's *The Nineteen Letters*.

so long and I still do not know the *Kallah!*” And, “The cedars are consumed by fire; what shall the wall plants say?” What can we plain people hope to attain? As we grow older and we feel the sands of time running out, we see the goals of our youth receding from our grasp. Thus the outcry at *Selichos* time: “Do not throw us away in our old age; as our strength ebbs away, do not forsake us.”

Is this the message, then, that *Simchas Torah* brings us with its account of Moshe Rabbeinu's death? Most surely not. Obviously, an entirely different perspective is called for.

“STRIVING” AS A GOAL

Perhaps we are told here that what matters ultimately is not the goal that we pursue, but our striving for it. Well known is the Chofetz Chaim's explanation of the phrase we recite when we complete the study of a *Mesechta*: “We labor and they labor; we labor and receive remuneration, and they labor but do not receive remuneration,” referring to those laboring for worldly ends. But does not any worker receive a reward for his work? Explained the Chofetz Chaim: “He only receives reward for what he produces with his labor, not for the effort itself—whereas the pursuit of Torah itself merits reward, irrespective of how much we achieve by it.” Before the first World War, Reb Chaim Shmuelevitz זצ”ל, visiting the Novaradoker Yeshiva in Bialystock,

asked a friend who the most outstanding disciple was. One student was pointed out as possessing the sharpest mind, another as the most erudite, but Reb Chaim persisted in his question, whereupon they pointed out one disciple as the most outstanding because he was a seeker, the greatest striver. That disciple later became world famous as the Steipler Gaon.

“Rabbi Yitzchok said, ‘He who loves money will never be sated with money; he who loves *mitzvos* will never be sated with *mitzvos*’ (*Koheles* 5, 9). You find two great men, Dovid and Moshe, who never became sated. When G-d told Dovid, ‘You will not build this house for me,’ (*Divrei Hayamim* II 6, 9), David said to himself, ‘Because G-d told me this, I should sit [and do nothing]?’ What did he do? He exerted himself and made all the preparations for it before he died. Likewise, when G-d told Moshe, ‘You will not pass over this Yarden,’ Moshe said, ‘I should pass from this world and not set aside for them cities of refuge?’ And at once he set them aside” (*Devarim Rabba* 2:18).

There is thus a challenge to persevere; to keep on striving. This indeed was the characteristic of Yehoshua, described as a *na'ar*, a youth, when he was already advanced in years. Youthful striving can be directed toward undesirable goals, but it is of inestimable value when used for the right purposes. Hence G-d's statement that “Israel is a youth and I love it.” Yehoshua's intense striving led him to serve Moshe, never leaving his

tent. Says the Midrash (*Bamidbar Rabba* 12:11):

"He who guards the fig-tree shall eat its fruit." (*Mishlei* 27, 18). This speaks about Yehoshua who served Moshe... and he inherited his place."

It is in the nature of man's striving that he encounter obstacles, frustration, set-backs. Yet, "the *tzaddik* falls seven times but rises up again" (*Nachum* 7, 8). What is asked of us is the determination to persevere to the very end. This may be the lesson to be learned from Moshe *Rabbeinu*—and of all times, on *Simchas Torah*. At the time when we make yet another beginning in our annual cycle of Torah reading, rededicating ourselves to growth in Torah study, we are enjoined:

Do not be disheartened by lack of success in achieving the goals you had set for yourself. Continue to strive for those goals!

(Rabbi Shraga Feivel Mendelowitz used to stress that the word "*hakafos*"—the circuits that we perform with the Torah scrolls on *Simchas Torah*—can be understood in terms of the Mishnaic word for borrowing, as in "*chenvani makif*."

That is, we may feel that are not entitled to celebrate the completion of the Torah when our goals are not yet realized. Yet we do celebrate, on account of what we are determined to strive for in the year ahead. In effect, we are borrowing.)

And this rejoicing is at an appropriate time. After all, *Sukkos* and *Shemini Atzeres* are the *Yomim Tovim* dedicated to the physical and spiritual survival of the Jewish people, each one completing the cycle begun at the start of the Festival series: Pesach celebrates the physical birth of Israel, and Shavuot, the spiritual birth of our people. We survived for forty years in the *midbar* (wilderness) because of the *sukkos* in which we dwelled, commemorated on the festival of *Sukkos*; and our souls were nurtured by the Torah, which we

complete on *Shemini Atzeres*, the special day of intimate rejoicing with G-d. This, then, is the time when we are forcefully reminded of the need to keep on striving toward the goal set by G-d in spite of setbacks. And our Torah reading reinforces the message. (See Rabbi S. R. Hirsch's *Horeb*.)

THE DEFINITION OF A HUMAN BEING

The crucial significance of this endeavor deserves perhaps some further consideration. What defines a human being? Surely not his possessions, which he can lose at any time; nor the talents which G-d has given him, for which he cannot claim credit. The one thing that is uniquely a man's is his will—that which he desires. Thus, Rabbi

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When Jews Fail to Grasp What Even Bilaam Knew

"Let me die the death of the righteous and my end be like his!"

Bamidbar 23,10

Bilaam was engaged by Balak, King of Moav, to curse the Jewish People, so as to prevent them from sweeping the Moabites away in their march to conquer the Land of Canaan. As is recounted in *Chumash*, Bilaam addressed the fate of *Klal Yisroel* four times, but—as a result of Divine intervention—each of his intended curses was articulated as a blessing. The first singled out the Jews as a nation that transcends conventional criteria of evaluation, such as number and physical prowess. Bilaam even admired them in their death and envied their portion at the end of the life cycle: "Let me die the death of the righteous...."

Over the generations, there have unfortunately been Jews who succumbed to all sorts of pressures to conform to this or that assimilatory trend. They bent, distorted, compromised and dropped *mitzvos*. They

adopted non-Jewish forms of dress, relaxation, culture, and worship. They looked like Germans, Spaniards, and Americans, worshipped like Christians and Moslems.

Obviously, some inner need to be "like everybody else" is met when members of a minority make a point of copying others. But what satisfaction does one gain when—after crossing over the line of consciousness to oblivion of this world and its blandishments—a person's remains are treated to excessive, ostentatious funeral practices—such as display of the corpse, long-time postponement of burial, use of ornate caskets, or cremation of the remains?

Bilaam—an outsider possessing an uncanny insight—said it: "Let me die the death of the righteous...." While his life, as he lived it, earned him no such deferential treatment (he was a self-indulgent, greedy megalomaniac, and died by the sword), every Jew, regardless of how he lived his seventy years, does receive precisely the same care that marks "the end...of the righteous."

Yet Menucha Nechona, a group in Israel, petitioned for the right to establish a non-Orthodox burial society; and the national High Court of Justice granted the request, ordering the Ministry of Religions and the Israeli Land Administration to accommodate the group in every way possible.

This is troubling on two levels—the national and the personal. On the one hand, we have here another case of the secular courts dictating to the *Misrad Hadatot* as to whom to recognize as entitled to perform a religious function—a further erosion of the integrity of religious institutions and practice in Israel, casting further shadows on the Jewishness of the state. And on the personal level, it is deeply saddening that there are Jews in the Holy Land who are so driven to cast away Torah and tradition that they sense an urgency to proclaim their rejection of the elementary deficiencies of *kavod hameis*—the traditional dignity to which the dead are entitled—a treatment that possessed virtues that were even apparent to the likes of Bilaam. ■

P.S.

After the Elections: Not Against Shulamit Alone Do We Protest

In his analysis of the results of the recent Israeli elections (JO Sept. '92), Yonason Rosenblum reported that United Torah Judaism (the reunified electoral list of the two parties, Agudath Israel and Degel HaTorah) refused to join Prime Minister Yitzchok Rabin's government as long as that coalition included the radical left wing Meretz Party, with Shulamit Aloni as Minister of Education and Culture. It is inconceivable, the UTJ protested, that the education of a million Israeli children should be entrusted to the rabidly anti-religious, devout secular-humanist Aloni. To illustrate the terrible harm Ms. Aloni is capable of wreaking on the *hashkafa* of these children, JO printed a selection of some of her outrageous comments against Torah, Jewish tradition, and religion in general.

Since then, Ms. Aloni has not rested on her laurels, but has spewed forth new reasons for rejecting her control of the hearts and minds of Jewish children. Not only has she called for omitting G-d's name from the *Yizkor* prayer for Israel's fallen sol-

diers, she criticized the Israeli high schools' curriculum for emphasizing the Holocaust; was quoted in an internal ministry magazine as lamenting, "At a time when man is flying to the moon, our schools are still teaching that the world was created in six days"; and has proposed that Israeli schools restrict mandatory matriculation exams to Hebrew, one foreign language and mathematics, with one more exam in **either** science **or** Bible. No wonder she has embarrassed the Labor leaders of the government and has infuriated the (religious Sephardi) Shas party, which is an essential member in Rabin's coalition. Should Shas walk out, he would be dependent on five Arab votes to stay in control.

The Aloni factor is not a secret. In a *Jerusalem Post* column by Sol Liebgott (former chairman of South African Zionist Federation, currently a governor of Hebrew University), entitled "You Don't Have to be Haredi..." (July 28, '92), the author found her vocal promotion of defiance of Israeli law (e.g. encouraging civil marriage) and tradition (disavowing the Bible, the source of Jewish rights to Israel) as fatal disqualifications for leadership. Even *TIME* magazine ran an essay on her ("Shulamit Has a Big Mouth"—Sept. 21, '92).

But the problem does not end with Aloni. The position of Minister of Absorption is held by Meretz member Yair Tzaban. Perhaps not as high-profile as Aloni, he nonetheless is as dangerous, considering that he is in con-

trol of the crucial information-and-orientation process for new immigrants. One of his first acts as minister was to dump the Russian-language booklets prepared by his predecessor to the ministry, Rabbi Yitzchak Peretz (Shas), acquainting *olim* with Jewish laws and practices, festivals and customs. Out went *brit mila* as a sacred covenant. The Torah sources of holidays was replaced with anthropologically inspired accounts of how this and that *Yom Tov* "really" evolved from customs of ancient agrarian cultures.

How ironic—and how tragic—that after suffering seventy years of religious oppression under Communism, Jews of the former Soviet Union are finally being permitted to return to their ancient homeland, hopefully to be re-united with their sacred heritage. And instead, they are being fed spiritually destructive nonsense! How ironic—and how insufferable—that ministers within the Israeli government are actively engaged in uprooting treasured practices and sacred values, which Jews over the millennia have upheld at the cost of their lives—never mind ministerial posts and positions of power and prestige.

In a rare act of protest, *shuls* and *batei midrash* all over Israel delayed the Torah reading on *Shabbos Shuva* to express outrage at this insidious campaign against Torah and *mitzvos*. It is difficult to imagine that religious Jewry will tolerate this Meretz-directed violation of all that we hold sacred much longer! ■

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Books in Review

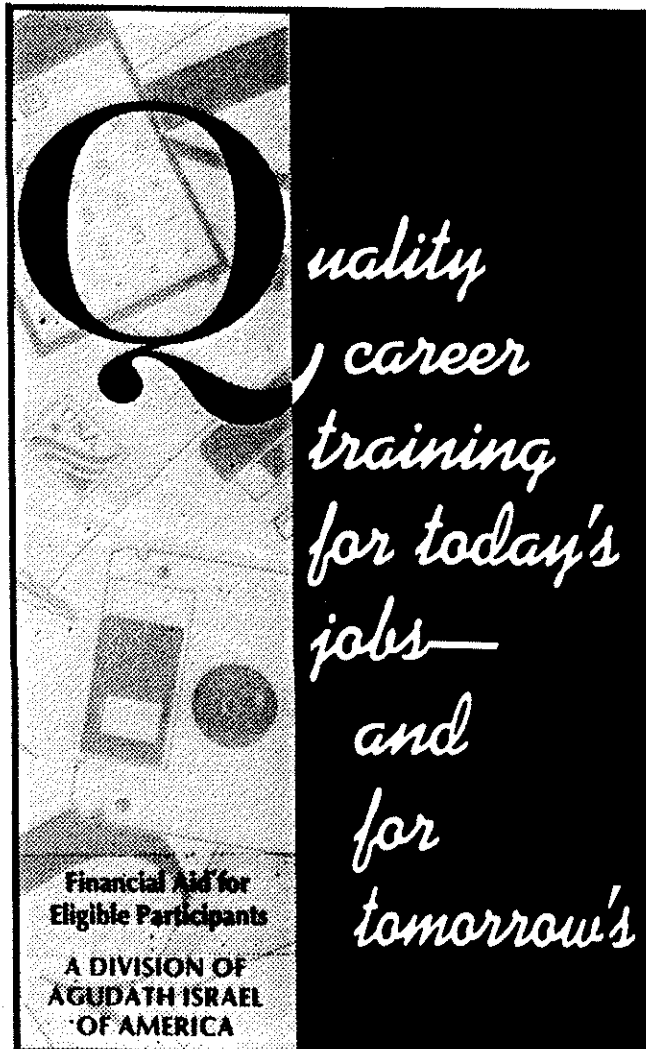
In discussing books that are written with the best of intentions, yet somehow fall short of their goals (Books in Review, Oct. '92), reference was made to Devora Bat Am's *Song of Ascent* (Targum Press) as the portrayal of a *baalas teshuva* who "never makes it all the way to her goal." We very much regret that, through poor

wording, this remark could be misunderstood as a reflection upon the author, whereas it was meant only to indicate some reservations about the book. This was never meant as an *ad hominem* criticism, for it was not aimed at Mrs. Bat Am but at her book. I did and still do feel that it did not go far enough in its description of Torah *Yiddishkeit* to provide a satisfactory picture of it.

The book is a brilliant and lyrically written description of the author's way to Torah. Central to it is her "battle to retain [her] identity without feeling [she] had to conform or compromise parts of it in order to live a Torah life." She was able to resolve her problem, and she deserves all the credit for it. Why, then, reservations about the book?

In her happiness about having

found her way to combine "a passionate commitment to Torah life" with her life in the world, as represented by her professional studies at an out-of-town university, the author does not do justice to the very real problems, halachic, social, and intellectual, that have to be faced if one goes this way. (I do not know whether Mrs. Bat Am referred to them when she writes cryptically of "many unanswered questions" she still has to face.) They may, indeed, not pose such a serious danger to the *Baal Teshuva*; after all, he has experienced it all, and rejected it. But the dangers are there, and the reader should not be permitted to forget about them, tempted as he may be to follow the author's path. Moreover, these problems certainly should make us understand those who will not go this



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TUNING IN LATE

road. Yet somehow they do not fare very well in this book—"The usual *yeshiva* student, who hardly ventured past the pages of his books or the cultural walls of the *yeshiva*," or "many of the women here [who] seemed to feel that they had learned in seminary already and now their primary role was that of wife and mother." The author disliked the pressure and scrutiny of the community, and they can indeed be irksome, yet should there not be some recognition of the positive aspect of community influence in keeping us on the straight path that we may miss without such pressures?

I hope I have made clear why I believe that the picture of Torah life which is drawn is incomplete and, for that reason, almost misleading. This is not a question of challenge to Mrs. Bat Am's way (and certainly, in no way to her personally), but rather a matter of presenting her approach in a manner that deals with all its attendant pros and cons.

The review of the *Seventh Volume of the Collected Writings of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch* (Sept. '92) described Rabbi Hirsch's presentation of the contribution of general studies to a Jewish child's education as written for "a wider public, assimilated or non-Jewish, and this naturally affected style and emphasis." This did not mean to imply that the ideas he was conveying would vary in accordance with the intended audience. As noted, the differences were only in style of expression and emphasis.

The reviewer

Rabbi Aryeh Schechter

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*I looked in your room
And suddenly saw
Something I never
Had quite faced before.
My oldest—you've grown up
Right before my eyes
An innocent victim,
Inundated with lies.*

*You sat there, absorbed.
You did not see me staring.
Why, after all these years
Was I caring?
You're fresh. You do things
You would never have done.
You seem like a stranger
Yet you are my son.*

*Were you once really tiny
A warm bundle to hold
A pure trusting neshama
I had one chance to mold?
When you were little
Your face looked so sweet,
Once learning with Abba
Was your biggest treat.*

*Then oh so quickly
You got "retrained"*

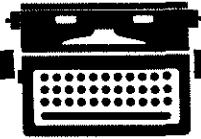
Mrs. Goetz, a published author and poet, lives in Baltimore. Several of her poems, including "A Hellinist Left Standing," "Wonder Woman," and "Dear Mom," were featured in JO (Dec. '89, June '90, and June '91).

*Now you just expect to get
Entertained
And once your heroes were men
Good and wise
Now you pick your heroes by
Their muscle size.*

*But what could I do?
When the kids were all bored
It sure kept them busy.
And there were good shows.
What could be so bad?
How the children would nag me:
"Everyone else had!"*

*It made my life easier
What could be so wrong?
I promised I'd never
Let them watch too long.
But it was such a help
At the end of my rope.
It seemed more and more often, though,
I couldn't cope.*

*Street fantasies poured in
They're lodged there - inside.
What I say hardly matters.
You have a new guide.
I looked in your room,
And wish I didn't see
That I let you get lost
Just by watching T.V.*



Letters to the Editor

FAULTS CRITIQUE OF BOOK'S DEPICTION OF EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY

To the Editor:

Your September issue included a harsh critique of *Playing With Fire* ("Who's Telling Stories to Your Kids?"), which was recently issued by our publishing house. As one of the editors of the book, I must take issue with your reviewer.

As you noted, *Playing With Fire* tells the true story of Tova Mordechai, who, although Jewish, was raised in an evangelical church and grew to become a preacher before finding her way back to Judaism. While you acknowledged that her story is a moving one, you criticized us for detailing Mrs. Mordechai's experiences in her church, stating that it is improper to expose Jewish to what goes on in such a setting. You wrote that her experience "can only prove disturbing and distasteful to the religiously committed Jews."

You are absolutely correct; of course her experience is distasteful to us. But we believe her story must be heard—especially its depiction of the evil evangelical mission to the Jews. Contrary to what your reviewer apparently believes, we did consult with eminent rabbanim, and an effort was made to minimize the discussion of Mrs. Mordechai's life in her father's church. However, it would have been impossible to retain the impact of her transformation without dealing with the powerful forces which held her in their grip.

We were sensitive to the fact that *Playing With Fire* is not for everyone. That does not mean, however, that it was not worthy of publication, an impression lent by your review. We at-

tempted to attain a balance by advertising *Playing With Fire* as suitable for mature audiences.

Whenever Tova Mordechai speaks, her story has great impact upon her listeners, in many cases striking the Jewish chord which others have been unable to strike. There may be more

than 100,000 Jews worldwide who have been snared by the trap of Christianity. We need to be aware of what is happening outside the *frum* community.

We do agree with the general premise of your review; that parents must scrutinize the reading material brought home by their youngsters. But we part company when it comes to a general condemnation of a book such as *Playing With Fire*.

AVRAHAM M. GOLDSTEIN
GENERAL EDITOR, BP, INC.
Brooklyn, N.Y.

The reviewer had found the description of Mrs. Mordechai's infatuation with the church excessively detailed, in effect agreeing with Mr. Goldstein that the book "is not for everyone."—N.W.

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The Jewish Observer

WHO HAS THE TIME TO CARE?

To the Editor,

I would like to thank the "Baal Nisayon" for his letter to the JO (Oct. '92). It gave me a lot of *chizuk* by validating a lot of my feelings.

My husband had ל"ג mononucleosis a month before one of my sons was born. The same week he was diagnosed, I lost my job. We had no money and help whatsoever.

But what I found to be galling was the complete insensitivity of his friends and their spouses. They kept on giving me suggestions as to what I should do and where I should go. Totally lacking, however, was any concern from his fellows. I had to fight and push their wives to fight and push their husbands to call my husband. His *Rosh Hayeshiva* somehow seemed to have the time and called. I was very touched. How is it that he who is one of the leaders of our generation found it in himself to call but those wannabes couldn't?

NAME WITHHELD BY REQUEST

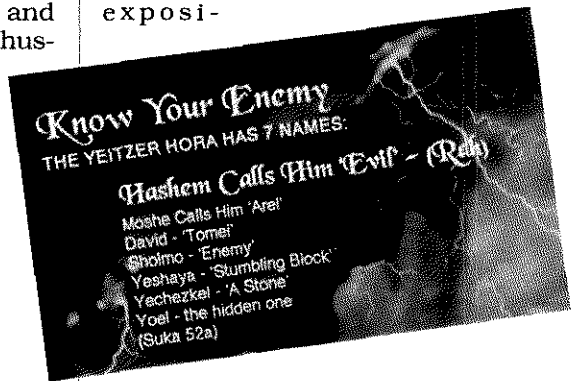
A MISSING FACE OF EVIL

To the Editor

Please allow me to make some comments in regards to the article on "The Seven Faces of Evil" in your Elul issue.

In the opening translation of the source (*Succa* 52a), one of the seven names is omitted, presumably a printer's error. It makes one think how the *yeitzer hora* attempts to mislead people even while they are studying his ways. While we are exposing him, he may be "playing along" and concealing components that he will use against us when we least expect it.

Readers of the article may be interested in a further exposi-



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tion on the topic by Horav Moshe Feinstein ל"צ in the *sefer Dorash Moshe, Drosha* #5. He used this topic as his major theme for his *Shabbos Shuva Drosha* in 5688/1927. He deals with seven phases of a person's life, in which one is confronted by one after other of the seven facets of the Evil Inclination, and also the seven groups of opposition to Torah and *mitzvos* that are manifestations of the seven personalities of the *yeitzer hora*.

We have produced color cards on "Know Your Enemy," with the seven names of the *yeitzer hora*. (See sample.) If readers would like a copy, we would send them free of charge in response to a written request.

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**THURSDAY AFTERNOON
November 26**

CONCURRENT SYMPOSIA

THE INTERACTION OF HUMILITY AND SELF-ESTEEM

Rabbi Michel Twerski
Rabbi Shmuel Dishon

MAKING BUSINESS DECISIONS AS A TORAH JEW

Rabbi Chaim Kohn

THE CUTTING EDGE IN THE JEWISH KITCHEN

Rabbi Moshe Heinemann
Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Lowy

THE INTERMARRIAGE CRISIS

Rabbi Menachem Greenblatt
Rabbi Yerachmiel Milstein
Rabbi Yisroel Rokowsky

**THURSDAY EVENING
November 26**

Greetings from the Nesius: Rabbi Yosef Harari Raful

Symposium: שיהא שם שמים מתאחד על ידך
"THAT THE NAME OF HEAVEN BE MADE BELOVED THROUGH YOU": DOES OUR PUBLIC IMAGE MEASURE UP?"

Speaker: Rabbi Yaakov Perlow (Novominsker Rebbe)

Discussants: Rabbi Yisroel Miller
Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Feuer

**FRIDAY MORNING
November 27**

ROUNDTABLE FORUMS:
OPEN DISCUSSIONS ON CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

- I. Can the yeshiva system handle its projected growth?
- II. Must *frum* professionals and businessmen maintain a higher standard than the accepted norms?
- III. Communal tzedaka controls
- IV. Who will open home and heart to Russian and Syrian arrivals?
- V. Will the next generation remember Churban Europe?
- VI. Can an educated kosher consumer *really* make a difference?
- VII. Do we have any business entering society's moral kulturkampf?
- VIII. Agudath Israel plans ahead

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Convention Chairmen:
Dovid Hofstедler - Yaty Weinreb

SHABBOS ADDRESSES

In order of appearance: Rabbi Chaim Stein
Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Levin
Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg
Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Horowitz (Bostoner Rebbe)
Rabbi Elya Fisher
Rabbi Aryeh Malkiel Kotler
Rabbi Elya Svei

Symposium: ERETZ YISROEL TODAY (In Yiddish)
Rabbi Avrohom Atlas (Haifa)
Rabbi Boruch Mordechai Ezrachi (Jerusalem)

40 YEARS OF CHINUCH ATZMAI
Rabbi Avrohom Yosef Leizeron

Symposium: "FAMILY VALUES": A JEWISH APPROACH (In English)

Message: Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller

Respondents: Rabbi Paysach Krohn
Rabbi David Ozeiry

**MOTZOEI SHABBOS KEYNOTE SESSION
November 28**

Haskoro in memory of the Gerer Rebbe, zt"l: Rabbi Dovid Olewski

Addresses: Rabbi Avrohom Pam
Rabbi Shimon Schwab
Rabbi Moshe Sherer

Greetings from Eretz Yisroel: Rabbi Avrohom Atlas (Haifa)
Rabbi Boruch Mordechai Ezrachi (Jerusalem)

Address: Rabbi Dovid Gottlieb (Jerusalem)

**SUNDAY MORNING
November 29**

RUSSIA - ONE YEAR LATER
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Symposium: LOOKING TO GOVERNMENT TO SOLVE RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS: OPPORTUNITY OR TRAP?

Rabbi Berel Wein
Nathan Lewin, Esq. (Washington)
Chaim Dovid Zwiebel, Esq.

AGUDAH WOMEN OF AMERICA CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS

FRIDAY ROUNDTABLES

ISSUES IN THE SECULAR WORKPLACE: Meeting the challenges
KIRUV RECHOKIM: How far must we reach?

KABBOLAS SHABBOS:

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