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כשושנה
בין החוחים

Family Values

A Torah Perspective



Chaim Shapiro's
The Litvakes

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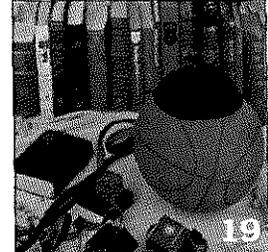
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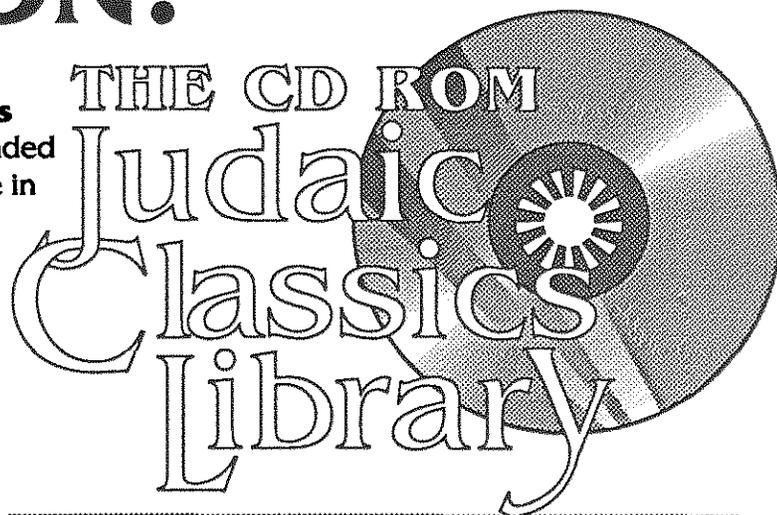
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The Gelb family, Khust, Czechoslovakia, 1937



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כששנה בין החוחים

Family Values: A TORAH PERSPECTIVE

Based on a presentation at the 70th Annual Convention of Agudath Israel of America

AS THE NORM HAS SHIFTED

During the recent presidential election, "Family Values" became a major issue¹. Even though it failed miserably at the polls, it set off a great deal of serious discussion in some unexpected quarters².

In the words of Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, in an ad in the *New Republic* (Nov. 30, '92):

"When the Republicans began stressing traditional family values in the recent presidential campaign, they got a lot of flak. Nevertheless, they were

Rabbi Keller, Rosh Hayeshiva of Telshe-Chicago, is a frequent contributor to *The Jewish Observer*.

on to something important. Studies and statistics and our own observations tell us that American families are increasingly fragile and unstable, and we fear that, as a result, many children are being seriously damaged."

In fact, this topic deserves serious discussion even (or perhaps more so) in our circles. We sometimes make the mistake of thinking that we are immune to the ills of contemporary

¹ As the reader will remember, former Vice-President Dan Quayle carried the banner of Family Values in his campaign.

² Editor's note: A wide-ranging article on the damaging effects that single-parent upbringing can have on children and on society in general was featured in *Atlantic Monthly*, April '93: "Dan Quayle Was Right," by Barbara Dufoe Whitehead.

society: *Tzu unz hott es nisht*. (This has nothing to do with us.) But this is not so.

When I was a kid attending the N.Y.C public schools, I knew many people, both Jews and non-Jews, but I did not know of one divorced family—not among the Jews and not among the non-Jews. Today, I know quite a few—even among "*unzere Yidden*." In addition, there are many other problems that I never heard about when I went to public high-school, which I hear about now—not only among the general populace, but among *frum* Jews.

It is obviously true that, *Baruch Hashem*, there is a great gulf between

"us" and "them." The *New York Times* reported (October 20, '92):

"The traditional American Family has declined so far in New York City, that married couples with their own children now constitute only one sixth of households. The trend is neither new nor peculiar to New York. But a new analysis of the 1990 census has found that the typical family has been radically redefined. The share of married couples living with their own children in the city declined from 19.2% of all households in 1980 to less than 17% in 1990. Among the nation's major cities, it appears that the percentage of so-called 'traditional families' was lower only in San Francisco."

This is what is happening out there. *אשרים מה טוב חלקיו*. How fortunate we are that, indeed, for the most part, we *do* have families, and what beautiful families! We *do* have children, and our children live normal lives; they get married and generally stay married and have their own children.

But we cannot act as if there are no other Jews but those of our immediate circle. There are millions of Jews out there, hard to distinguish from their non-Jewish compatriots; those families are an endangered species. Moreover, we must realize that our families, the families of Torah Jews, are also being affected. Whether we are conscious of it or not, the gulf between us and "them" is slowly, insidiously, narrowing.

But even if this were not so, we should not fall into the trap of thinking, "Look at how bad they are and how great we are!" There is a danger in this "Holier than they" syndrome. We are in danger of forgetting that *our* family values are not the same as *theirs*. The mere existence of "traditional families" among us is not something to crow about. Torah standards of "*mishpacha*" are on an infinitely higher spiritual plane than those of *The New York Times*. Ours is a world of *Taharas Hamishpacha*. We talk of Family Purity—ours is a world of *מעלה עשו ביוחסין*. Our *chachamim* made protective barriers to ensure the *yichus* of our families. At *Sheva Berachos* celebrating our marriages we say, *שהכל ברא לכבודו*—He created everything for His glory." When we rejoice in a *simcha* of *chassan v'kalla*, we say, *שהשמחה במענו*—There is joy



We sometimes make the mistake of thinking that we are immune to the ills of contemporary society: *Tzu unz hott es nisht*. (This has nothing to do with us.) But this is not so.

in His dwelling." When we sit around the *Shabbos* table with our families, we sing in the *zemiros Shabbos*, "*Hashomer Shabbos, habein im habas*—When a person keeps *Shabbos* together with his sons and daughters they are accepted with favor by the Almighty, like a *korban mincha* brought in a sanctified vessel in the *Beis Hamikdash*... *Rocheiv ba'arovos*—He who straddles the heavens, the King of all worlds, gave over with pleasantness the *mitzva* to rest on *Shabbos* in our finest clothes... and to enjoy delicious food with all sorts of delicacies. This is all a *zevach mishpacha*"—as if the entire family brought a sacred offering to the *Ribbono Shel Olam* in the *Beis Hamikdash*!

One can say that one of the prime factors in the historic growth of the *teshuva* movement in our days, almost on a par with *limud HaTorah* itself, has been the exposure of young people to the homes of *ertiche Yidden*.

They come from the spiritual wasteland outside, into homes where there is respect and communication between husband and wife and between parents and children. They see families sitting about the table on *Shabbos* enjoying each other's company, and speaking of higher things in life. When people searching for some meaning to life are exposed to a *family*, let alone a family in the context of *Shabbos*, they become aware of a whole, new, and beautiful world. And this has brought them closer to Torah. It hasn't been lectures on philosophy or religion, in many cases, but the very fact that they saw that there is a different dimension to family life, that there is a *zevach mishpacha*, that has changed their lives. We dare not confuse the world's definition of family with ours and be satisfied with their definition.

**"LIKE A ROSE AMONG
THE THORNS":
THE POWER TO RESIST
• SOCIETY'S PRESSURES**

The very contrast between our higher world of *mishpacha* and the breakup of the family on the most elementary level, which we are witnessing in society, is so great that we may tend to close our eyes to the real and present dangers presented by the milieu in which we live.

Parshas Arayos—the section in the Torah concerning illicit relationships, is introduced in the Torah by the admonition:

במעשה ארץ מצרים אשר ישבתם בה לא תעשו ובמעשה ארץ כנען אשר אי מביא אתכם שמה לא תעשו
"—Do not do like the actions of the Land of Egypt in which you dwelt; and do not do like the actions of the Land of Canaan to which I will bring you; and do not go in their ways" (*Vayikra* 18,3).

This section of the Torah is read in the afternoon of Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year. There are reasons given for this by the *poskim* (see *B'et Hetteiv, Orach Chaim* 622:2). I would like to advance another reason.

The *Midrash Rabba* (23:4) on this *pasuk*, *במעשה ארץ מצרים*—Like the actions of the Land of Egypt you shall not do," quotes the verse in *Shir Hashirim*: *כשעשה בין החוזים כן רעיתי בין הבנות*—Like

a rose among the thornbush, so is my beloved among the maiden daughters." Rabbi Yitzchak interpreted the verse as referring to Rivka, as it says: "And Yitzchak was forty years old when he took Rivka, the daughter of Besuel the Aramean from Padan Aram, the sister of Lavan the Aramean, to himself for a wife" (*Bereishis* 25,20). Why does the Torah have to say, "the Aramean from Padan Aram," if the purpose is just to inform us that he was from Padan Aram? Why must it describe her as "the sister of Lavan the Aramean"? This teaches us that her father and her brother were deceitful people (a play on the word ארמי, "Aramean," to suggest רמאי, "a deceiver"); and the people of her city were deceitful people. And yet this righteous woman emerged from among them. To what can this be compared? "To a rose growing among thornbushes."

Imagine yourself on a walk in the countryside. You come to some thick underbrush, a tangle of weeds overgrown with briars, thorns and thistles. And as you hack your way through this thicket, you suddenly see a rose—a beautiful, fragrant rosebush growing among all those thorns and thistles. Such was Rivka *Imeinu* among her family and her countrymen in Padan Aram: "כשענה בין החוזים—Like a rose among the thorns."

The *Midrash* also applies this simile of כשענה בין החוזים to the Jewish people in Egypt.

Rabbi Berachya said, "The Holy One, Blessed-Be-He, said to Moshe, 'So say to the Jewish people: When you were in Egypt you were like a rose among thorns. Now that you are entering the Land of Canaan, be like a rose among the thorns and make up your minds that you will not do like the actions of those [of Egypt] nor like the actions of those [of Canaan].'"

Thus the Torah introduces the *parsha* of *Arayos* (illicit relations) with the admonition, "Like the actions of the Land of Egypt do not do." There is more than a casual connection between these two applications of the metaphor of the rose among the thorns.

At the same time that Egypt was the pinnacle of civilization, it was the nadir of immorality. *Mitzrayim* is referred to as *ervas ha'aretz*—a place

sunken to the lowest levels of degradation and debauchery. Even there, the Jewish people had the ability to withstand the blandishments and the enticements of a decadent society, and to remain pure. Where did this strength come from? They inherited it from our Mother Rivka who had the power to withstand the pressures of the corrupt society in which she lived. *Klal Yisroel* in later generations used that *koach*, that power which they had inherited from Rivka *Imeinu*, to live a life of morality amidst the degradation of *Mitzrayim*.

It was not an accident that the *Ribbono Shel Olam* caused the Jewish people to be enslaved and then

equally infamous for its immorality. Having acquired the moral courage to live through *Mitzrayim*, they were ready to confront the challenge of Canaan. This is what the *Midrash* means: "In *Mitzrayim* you were like a rose among thorns. Now, when you come to Canaan, you should also be like a rose among thorns." The only way you will survive as a people in your own homeland is with the same moral integrity and courage you displayed in *Mitzrayim*, to withstand the influence of the alien society.

When one studies the history of the various periods of *Golus* and redemption that the Jewish people lived through, one discovers a fascinating

We are in danger of forgetting that our family values are not the same as theirs. The mere existence of "traditional families" among us is not something to crow about. Torah standards of "mishpacha" are on an infinitely higher spiritual plane than those of *The New York Times*.

brought out precisely from *Mitzrayim*. The very creation of the Jewish people—their emergence as a nation—was in *Mitzrayim*. That was the *kur habarzel*—the iron smelting furnace, from which they were drawn.

The power of the Jewish people to exist in every *Golus* situation comes from the fact that they were created in *Golus*, that they emerged as a nation from a bitter, searing *Golus*. As a result, we are able to survive any subsequent *Golus*. And the *Golus* chosen as the birthplace of the Jewish people was not just a place of physical enslavement, but a *Golus* in *ervas ha'aretz*—a place where the prophet tells us: "בשר חמורים בשדם וזרמת סוסים זרמתם" (*Yechezkel* 23,20). The level of the immorality was like that of animals. We were forced to develop not only physical survival skills, but the spiritual stamina to overcome the pressures of that environment. We therefore have the ability to survive in *any* society.

From Egypt the Jewish people were to go to the Land of Canaan,

pattern: In every period of *Golus* there was a threat to the Jewish family, and in the subsequent redemption there was a strengthening of the family. In Egypt there was a great threat to the moral foundation of the family—there was the danger that they would be drawn into the quagmire of Egyptian immorality. When the Almighty redeemed them, He commanded them, "ויקחו להם שיה לבית אבות שה לבית"—They should take one sheep for a paternal house, one sheep for each house" (*Shemos* 12,3)... "יקחו לכם צאן להשפוחים"—Take a sheep for your families" (*ibid*, 21). There had to be a strengthening and rededication to the principles of *mishpacha*—the *Korban Pesach* was a *zevach mishpacha*.

We also find that when the Jews were exiled from *Eretz Yisroel*, and went into the Babylonian Exile, the families suffered stress. They married *nashim nachriyos*—gentile women. And when they came back from *Golus Bavel*, *Ezra Hasofer* had them divorce their wives, and put into effect a his-

torical *takana* in the *yichus* of the Jewish Family. (See *Mishna, Kiddushin* 69a.) To merit a return to *Eretz Yisroel*, they had to strengthen the *mishpacha* and free themselves from alien influences.

THE PATRIARCHAL PRECEDENT

The *Ramban* tells us in his well-known commentary to *Bereishis* (*Parshas Lech Lecha*), *Ma'aseh avos siman le'vanim*—that whatever happened to the patriarchs, Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov, in their lives, was a sign of what would happen to their descendants. This pattern of threat and strengthening of the *mishpacha* can also be seen in their lives.

When Avraham *Avinu* went down to Egypt, which was the portent of *Golus Mitzrayim*, Pharaoh took Avraham's wife, Sarah: the threat. Pharaoh was forced by Divine intervention to return her to Avraham: the *chizuk*. When Avraham returned to *Eretz Yisroel*, Sarah was taken by Avimelech, again to be returned—perhaps a portent of the later threats in the Land of Canaan.

In *Parshas Toldos* we find the people of G'rar making inquiries about Yitzchak's wife, Rivka. For fear of being killed, he must say that she is his sister. Avimelech invades Yitzchak's privacy by peering through the window of his home—he has designs on Rivka (see *Rashi, Bereishis* 26,10). Again, the danger is averted. Yitzchak's sojourn in G'rar was the forerunner of *Golus Bavel*.

We also find that when Yaakov *Avinu* leaves the house of Lavan, he is pursued by his father-in-law. When they meet, Lavan reveals his real intention: "I have it within my power to do evil to you" (*Bereishis* 31,29). לבן ביקש לעקוד את הכל Lavan wanted to destroy Yaakov and his whole family. Even though *Hashem* had appeared to him and warned him not to harm Yaakov, he still spouts out, "The daughters are my daughters, the sons are my sons!" Lavan wants nothing less than to take Yaakov's wives and children from him. But Yaakov's family remains whole. Yaakov's life in the home of Lavan was the portent of our present

Golus—Golus Edom. This confrontation between Lavan and Yaakov, as Yaakov seeks to return home to *Eretz Yisroel*, foreshadows the events of the final period of *Golus Edom*: There would be a threat of annihilation followed by a threat to the stability of the family and the prospect of our children being taken from us.

Gedolim have called our days "*Ikvesa deMeshicha*"—when the footsteps of *Moshiach* can be heard. After the threat of complete annihilation of the Jewish People, during World War II, there now looms the reflection of Lavan's second threat—the threat to the stability of the Jewish family. The rate of intermarriage has reached catastrophic levels. Divorce, *Shalom Bayis* problems, and all of the other ills of contemporary society are threatening our *mishpachos*. It's not only *them*, it's *us*. Our families are suffering tremendous stress. Before

himself from evil people so that he not learn from their actions. The *Ramban* supports this with two quotes—one from *Mishlei* and one from *Tehillim*. In *Mishlei* (13,20) King Solomon tells us: "הלך את חכמים יחכם ודעה כסלים יזע" He who goes together with *chachamim* will become a *chacham*, and he who befriends fools will be broken." He, too, will become a fool and suffer the fate of fools. The beginning of *Tehillim* is "אשרי האיש אשר לא הלך בעצת רשעים" — ובודד חטאים לא עמד ובמושב לצים לא ישב — Fortunate is the man who doesn't go in the counsel of the wicked, and doesn't stand in the way of the sinners, and doesn't sit in the company of scoffers." This all refers to the company a person should keep or avoid. What if he lives in a country whose whole lifestyle is evil, and whose people do not act in an upright manner? He should retreat to a place where the inhabitants are righteous

Divorce, *Shalom Bayis* problems, and all of the other ills of contemporary society are threatening our *mishpachos*. It's not only *them*, it's *us*. Our families are suffering tremendous stress. Before the advent of *Moshiach*, there has to be a strengthening of the *mishpacha*, and we must learn how to achieve that *chizuk*.

the advent of *Moshiach*, there has to be a strengthening of the *mishpacha*, and we must learn how to achieve that *chizuk*.

DEALING WITH A THREATENING ENVIRONMENT

The *Ramban* says in Chapter Six of *Hilchos Dei'os*, that the way of a human being is to be drawn in his *middos*—in his character traits and his behavior—after his friends and his companions, and to act according to the custom of the people of his country. Therefore, a person should always associate with *tzaddikim* and *chachamim* so as to learn from their actions. He should distance

and conduct themselves properly. If he lives in a country where the people of the country are *resha'im*, the *Ramban* teaches us, leave! Move to another country!

But suppose that all of the countries that he knows of and hears of are all acting in a *derech lo tova*—in an evil way—"like in our times" (the *Ramban* was talking about *his* times...what should *we* say?), or suppose he is unable, for whatever reason, to move to a better country—ישוב לבדו יחידי—"he should live by himself—alone."

The Torah requires a person at times to isolate himself from the people of his country: If you can't leave a decadent society, at least don't become a part of it.

Suppose the people among whom he lives are so evil that they do not permit him to stay in the country unless he mingles with them and acts as they do. The ultimate step, says the *Rambam*, is "אלא לעשות לו חורים ולחמורים"—Let him go out and live in caves or clefts in rocks or in the desert, and let him not conduct himself in the way of sinners."

We see that the *Rambam* says, very simply, that a person should not fool himself and think that he can live in a society without being affected by it.

CHARACTERIZING OUR SOCIETY

How should our society be characterized? We live in a society where pursuing "the good life" does not mean: *How can I be good?* but: *How can I get what I want?* We live in a society where paper plates, plastic spoons, marriages and unborn babies are all disposable. We live in a society in which what yesterday was murder, is today the right to privacy, freedom of choice. What was considered perversion and abomination yesterday, is an acceptable "alternative lifestyle" today. A deviant liaison has become another type of family! *דומם לצל*. These people have made a community of themselves—a *community!*—with rights and privileges, and pride. We live in a society where the President, the day after he was elected, before he had even announced the head of his transition team, released to the press a statement that he was going to issue an executive order allowing avowed deviants in the military, and re-institute abortion counseling in federally-funded clinics. And, wonder of wonders, on his first day in the Oval Office, he proceeded to put these items at the top of his agenda!

Do we think that this is not going to have an effect on us? One does not have to be a prophet to predict where society is headed. Several days after President-elect Clinton had announced his intentions regarding the military, the Australian government announced its intention to pass similar legislation.

It is very nice to argue that morality cannot be legislated, but legislation, court decisions and executive orders do have a profound effect on

public standards of morality. Government may not have been successful in legislating morality, but it *has* legislated immorality.³

Before the bill legalizing abortions was passed in the New York State Legislature, every one of the states of the Union had a law against abortion. Every country in the civilized world had a law against abortion, with two exceptions: East Germany, and, unfortunately, the State of Israel. Abortion was a despicable crime. That was until the New York State Legislature passed a law allowing abortion, which breached the legislative wall and ultimately led to the infamous *Roe vs. Wade* Supreme Court decision, which in effect nullified all state laws outlawing abortion. This has resulted in the destruction of millions of human beings before they were brought into this world. Today there are some 1.6 million abortions in the USA annually. All of this was begun with that New York State law, in July, 1970.

If the previous administration made an effort to check the proliferation of abortions on demand, the new administration seems determined to establish once and for all that abortion is not only not a crime, but is an inalienable right.

There are those among us who say, "Who cares? Let them do what they want." In the first place, *בן נח נהרג על הערבים*. *B'nei Noach* have obligations, among which is the prohibition against killing a fetus. Can we stand by and see a whole civilization fall into decay? But we are not only concerned about *B'nei Noach*. There are untold thousands of Jewish children that are being thrown into the garbage, as well. And even among our own observant Jews there are those who come to *rabbonim* with *she'eilos* that in previous generations were never asked.

This is the society we live in. We can sit in our homes and sing our *Shabbos zemiros*. But we cannot make the mistake of thinking "*Tzu unz hott es nisht.*"

³ In the words of an activist, quoted in *Newsweek*, Feb. 1 '93: "When Bill Clinton lifts the ban [on deviants in the military], he is going to push national acceptance of [their way of life...]. It's not just going to push people out of the closet in the military—it's going to push people out of the closet all over the country. It's going to be OK to be a...[deviant]."

"SUBJUGATION TO THE NATIONS"—A NEW TWIST

At the recent national convention of Agudath Israel, the Novominsker *Rebbe* quoted the *Chazal* that *Klal Yisroel* wants to do the will of *Hashem*, but *ג' מעכב שאור שבמיסה ושעבוד מלכות*. What prevents us? The *yetzer hora*—the Evil Inclination—and our subjugation to the nations of the world. We know very well what the *yetzer hora* is, but *shibud malchios*? Being subjugated by the kingdoms of the world? *Shibud malchios* is a *limud zechus*—an excuse for those who live in the former Soviet Union. *Shibud malchios* is a *limud zechus* for those who are, unfortunately, in the Arab countries. (May *Hashem* protect them and redeem them!) But *shibud malchios* is no excuse for people living in the United States of America in

The Torah requires a person at times to isolate himself from the people of his country: If you can't leave a decadent society, at least don't become a part of it.

1993. Is the government forcing us to do something against our conscience? *Baruch Hashem*, we are free to do as we see fit. If there is *shibud malchios*, it is *self*-subjugation. We have decided that we are part of this society, and consciously or subconsciously have decided to accept its *morés* and allow its influence to seep into our homes.

Let me tell you the story of a certain fine Jewish family. The husband had a non-Jewish business associate in the company where he worked. Nice fellow—very friendly, well-groomed, well-mannered. This co-worker lost his lease and didn't have a place to stay. The Jew had an extra room and the fellow became a

boarder in his house. At first he acted very respectably. He was a personable fellow with a nice sense of humor, and enjoyed telling jokes, which amused the whole family.

After a while, he started to act differently. He would come into the living room and sit down in an easy chair, take off his shoes, and after drinking a six-pack of beer, he would become quite effusive, and begin to tell different kinds of stories. The kids would gather around and listen. Then he began to bring in certain literature, certain pictorial magazines, which he would show the kids. The pictures were not so nice. Things began to get worse, one thing led to another.... The story does not have such a pretty ending.

But let me set you at ease. This is not a true story. It is a *mashal*. But I want to tell you: *Whoever has that box in his home has that boarder!* The *mashal* is also a very exact *mashal*. When TV began, it was ostensibly innocuous—sports, some family comedy, children's puppet shows—very harmless. Nothing terrible. If TV were then what it is today, no self-respecting person, let alone an Orthodox Jew, would have taken the thing into his home. But it *did* come in. And slowly but surely it began to reflect society's moral deterioration, acting at the same time as a catalyst for it. We now have this ugly boarder whom we cannot control and do not seem willing to evict.

If America is the land of the free, where freedom has been carried to sickening extremes, it must also become the home of the brave—those brave enough to stand up and let their voices of protest be heard, or at least brave enough to distance themselves and their families from this filth.

At the previous year's convention of Agudath Israel, *HaRav* Schwab announced a declaration of war against TV. After that, an appeal signed by tens of *Rabbonim*, *Roshei Yeshivos* and *Gedolei Torah* was issued, to rid our homes of this pernicious influence. But one *Kol Korei* does not win a war. You cannot win a war by blowing a bugle. The troops must respond.

THE "KRIAS SHEMA" IMPERATIVE

Let us not even discuss the numerous scientific studies of the harmful effects of television on our children—let us set them aside. There's a *pasuk* in the Torah that we say twice a day in *Krias Shema*, "ולא תתודו אחרי לבבכם ואחרי עיניכם"—Do not turn astray after your hearts and after your eyes." The *chachamim* explain this to mean: "ולא תתודו אחרי לבבכם"—Do not turn astray after your hearts—this is heresy; "ואחרי עיניכם"—this is heresy; "and after your eyes"—this is *z'nus*, immorality (*Sifri*, *Parshas Sh'lach*). The *Rambam* includes it in the 613 *mitzvos* (*Sefer Hamitzvos* Negative Command 47), and quotes it as definitive *halacha* in *Hilchos Avoda Zora* (2:3): "One is not permitted to turn his thoughts or his eyes to literature or sights that will draw him after heresy or immoral tendencies."

Without discussing all of the scientific reports that tell us that the Torah is right (they are not necessary), this is the *din HaTorah*.

I am not a halachic authority. If I were to tell you, however, that a certain brand of tuna fish is of questionable *Kashrus*, would you not at least go to a *Rav* and ask a *she'eila*? I am telling you that there is a *she'eila* on TV! And it is not a *safeik d'Rabbonon*—it is a *vadai D'Oraisa*! It does not involve a doubt in a rabbinic ordinance. It is a matter of a definite prohibition of the Torah. But I do not ask you to rely on me. See if you can find one recognized halachic authority who will be *matir* to leave that box in the house. Please: ask your *Rav*.

When will we finally come to our senses and realize that we can no longer delude ourselves into believing that it is possible for Torah and world culture to be "synthesized" or even to peacefully co-exist? Those times (if they ever existed) are gone forever. This is quite obvious when we see manifestations of decadence that have been seen only in the *Dor Hamabul*. The *Midrash* (*Acharei Mos*) tells us that the Generation of the Flood was wiped out only because they wrote marriage contracts between males just as they did for conventional couples. Can we afford not

If America is the land of the free, where freedom has been carried to sickening extremes, it must also become the home of the brave—those brave enough to stand up and let their voices of protest be heard, or at least brave enough to distance themselves and their families from this filth.

to isolate ourselves from such a society? Can there be any defense of allowing it into our homes?

The *Shulchan Aruch* (*Orach Chaim* 307:16, see *Mishna Berurah*, *ad loc*) states clearly that any literature that arouses a person's baser instincts is forbidden to read, not only on *Shabbos*, but during the rest of the week as well; and that whoever writes such books, or prints them and distributes them is guilty of causing many to sin. Is there any justification for bringing the depravity of *Dor Hamabul* into our homes, putting it on our shelves and magazine racks? Do we really think that it has no influence on us as *adults* as well as on our children?

There is a penetrating insight⁴ quoted in the name of the great *Rosh Hayeshiva*, Rabbi Shimon Shkop, זצ"ל. He was addressing one of the pressing problems of his day, the influence of *Haskala* literature on *B'nei Torah*. He told his students:

When Yaakov left Lavan's house and Lavan pursued and overtook him, demanding to know what had happened to his idols (which had been stolen by Rachel so that her father would no longer serve them). He said, ועתה הלך והלכת כי נכסף נכספת לביה—אביך למה גבת את אלהי? And now you went away because you had a strong desire to return to your father's house. Why did you steal my idols?

Reb Shimon explains: Lavan told Yaakov Avinu, "You wanted to go back

⁴See *Prinim Leshulchan Govoha*, *Vayeitzei*.

to your father's house. Don't you know how your fathers, Avraham and Yitzchak, fought against Avoda Zora? If you want to go back to your father's house, why take my Avoda Zora back with you?"

Said Reb Shimon to the bachurim, "You want to come to the yeshiva to become Gedolei Torah. You know what the yeshiva stands for. The yeshiva is against alien culture. The purpose of this literature is assimilation. If you're coming back to the yeshiva, why must you bring the haskala literature along with you?"

We're living in the period before *Moshiach*. We are headed back to our Father's house. We see a tremendous upsurge in learning Torah, in *shmiras hamitzvos*. People are getting better; they have a genuine desire to return to "our father's house." If that is so, if we're going back, why must we *schlep* all this trash along with us?

On Yom Kippur at *Muncha* when the sun begins to set, we read the *Parsha* of *Arayos*. "כמושה איך מצרים לאתער" — Do not do like the actions of *Mitzrayim*." Perhaps one of the reasons why the *chachamim* instituted this Torah reading was to bring out the *zechus*—the merit—of *Klal Yisroel*. They had the courage to stand out in Egypt *כשוענה בין הדוחים*—like a rose among the thorns. It also serves to remind us on that sacred day dedicated to *teshuva*, that we have that inner strength inherited from our forebears. We have the ability to be different in any environment.

Let us proudly proclaim: Washington does not legislate our morals; Paris does not dictate how we dress; Madison Avenue, Hollywood and Broadway do not tell us what to watch and listen to.

We will set our own agenda.

We will return to our Father's house *without* Lavan's idols. And in that *zechus* may we merit the fulfillment of the ultimate comparison of the people of Israel to the rose.

In the words of the *Midrash*: "מה שוענה זו מתוקנת לשבתות וימים טובים" — כן ישראל מתקנים לאילנות מוד — Just as the rose is set aside for *Shabbosos* and *Yomim Tovim*, so is *Yisroel* set aside and prepared for the Redemption of Tomorrow "... with the coming of *Moshiach Tzidkeinu* speedily in our days. ■

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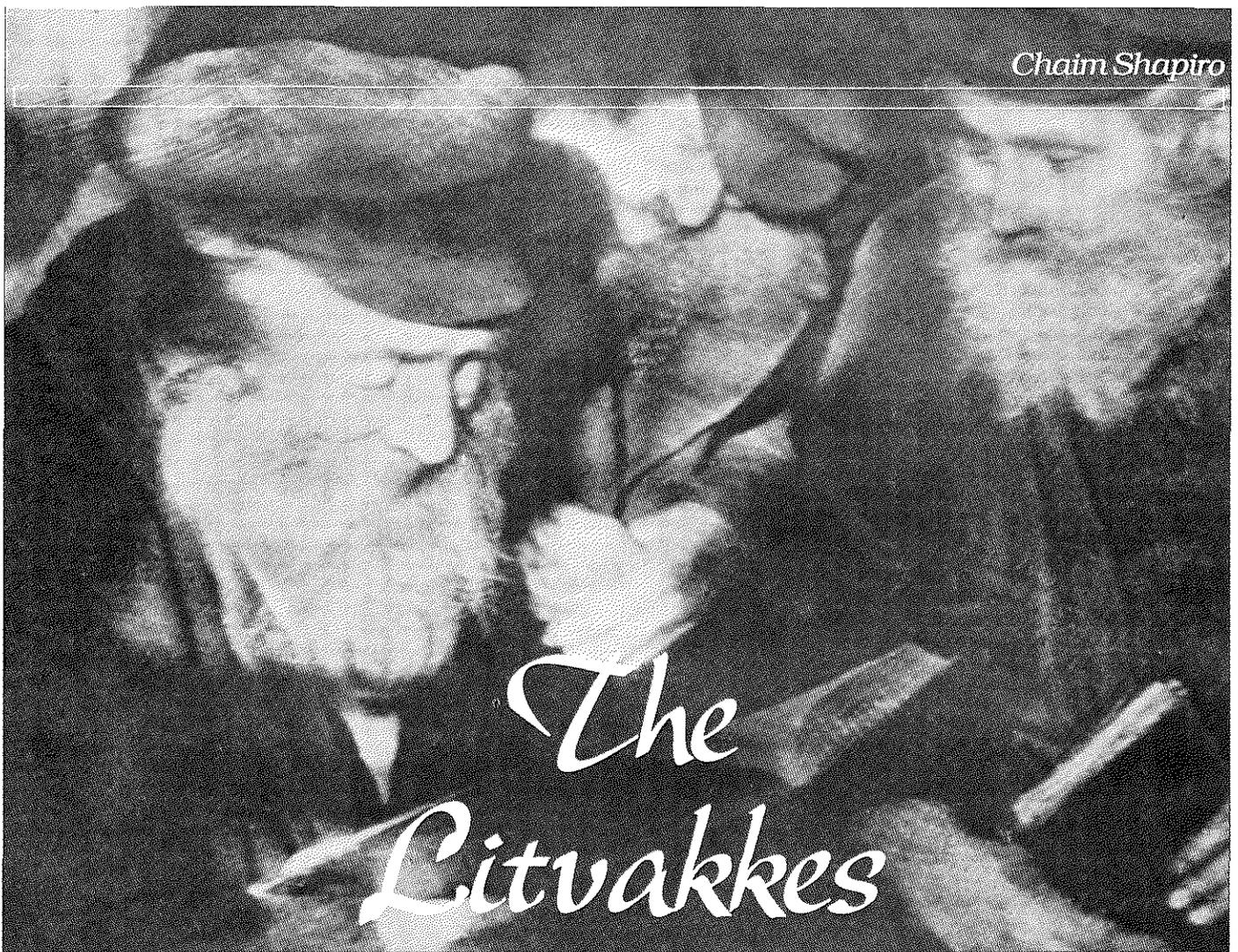
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The Lithuanian layman and his legendary love for Torah study

WHO IS A LITVAK?

Every group within *Klal Yisroel* is distinguished by its particular approach to *Avodas Hashem*; in this article, we will discuss the *Litvakkes* (that is, the Jews who lived in Litta/Lithuania) and their unusual devotion to Torah study.

Obviously, when we are talking about Lithuanian Jews, we are not referring to the one-time inhabitants of present-day Lithuania, in contrast to when we speak of "Russian Jews," "Polish Jews," "German Jews," or "Galitzyaner Jews," who are associated with identifiable geographic places on today's map—Germany, Russia, Poland.... My two hometowns, Lomza (J.O., Apr. 1980) and

Rabbi Shapiro, currently of Baltimore, is a frequent contributor to these pages. His personal memoir, *Go, My Son*, was published by Feldheim.

Tiktin (J.O., Dec. 1978), were located in Poland, yet we were called *Litvakkes*! Besides, how could this tiny country on the Baltic Sea produce so many scholars, *Geonim* and *talmidei chachamim*?

The geography and demography of our people is quite different from contemporary non-Jewish geography. In the 13th and 14th centuries, Lithuania was the biggest country in Eastern Europe (and also the last pagan state on the continent). Gedimin (1316-1341) united the pagan "Lietuvos" tribes into one nation. His two sons, Algrid and Keistutis, extended their territory all the way to the Black Sea. The inhabitants of that huge territory from the Baltic to the Black Sea were included in Lithuania. The Jews of that region were in fact one religious community and kept the same *minhagim* (cus-

toms). Hence when Jews speak of a "Litvak" they refer to all Jews who *davened Nusach Litta*!¹

With the passing of time, the Russians, Poles, Ukrainians and Germans each took away chunks of Lithuania until it was shrunk to its present borders, a tiny state on the Baltic. But the Jewish demography remained intact; from the Baltic to the Black Sea, they were all *Litvakkes*, and all *davened Nusach Litta*.²

¹ When the founder of *Chabad* (the *Baal Hatanya*), whom the *Lubavitcher Chassidim* call the "Alter Rebbe," arrived as a young man in Mezeritch to learn *Chassidus* from the *Rebbe Reb Ber* (the "Maggid," who succeeded the *Beshv*), he was called the "Litvak" for he came from Rasein in the Mogilev district of White Russia.

² When the Bolsheviks took over Russia, in 1917, no country would recognize them. (The U.S. did not grant diplomatic recognition to the Soviet regime until 1933.) The Soviets were so eager to gain recognition, that they even courted tiny countries like Lithuania. To establish borders between the two

In the beginning, *Chassidim* and *Misnagdim* alike *davened* in the same *shul* or *Bets Hamidrash*, and all *davened Nusach Litta*. With the passage of time, the small minority of *Chassidim* could no longer *daven* with the *Misnagdim*: they liked to sing parts of the *tefilla*, and many changed their *nusach* to what is popularly known as *Nusach Sfarad*. So they separated themselves into a small room to *daven*. As their numbers increased, they rented a small house to *daven* separately (hence the name *shtiebel*—a small house).

In spite of the spread of *Chassidus*, sweeping through country after country, it could not conquer Lithuania proper, which remained the bastion of the *Misnagdim*. (After all, its capital city, Vilna, was the home of the Gaon.) There were some exceptions. For example, Lubavitch managed to convert the tiny town of Rokishok into an island of *Chassidus* in the heart of Litta. Even the *Raw*, Reb Betzalel who was recognized as a *Gadol baTorah*, was a Lubavitcher *Chassid*.³

countries, the Soviets assigned their Vice Commissar for External Affairs, Vladimir Yaffe. The head of the Lithuanian delegation was Vice Minister for External Affairs, Dr. Shimshon Rosenbaum.

The two delegations sat down, with the two Jews facing one another. Said Yaffe, "Dr. Rosenbaum, how far do you propose the borders of your great state should extend?"

Replied Dr. Rosenbaum, with tongue in cheek, "As far as the Jews *daven Nusach Litta*."

An elderly member of Yaffe's delegation, not having the slightest idea of what Rosenbaum meant, assumed that they were talking about a few villages, and commented, "This could be a basis for negotiations."

Both Jews burst out laughing. "Comrade," said Yaffe to the Russian, "he wants Minsk, and Moscow, too!"

Incidentally, Yaffe was later the Soviet Ambassador to Berlin. When he was suddenly recalled by Stalin to Moscow, he knew the implications of the summons, and committed suicide. Interestingly, several years ago, his 90-year-old widow arrived in Israel. Mother Zion even opens her arms for her rebellious children! (J.O. Nov. 1971)

³ Reb Meir Ruch of Tel Aviv, the son of the Lomzer *Rosh Hayeshiva*, Rabbi Yehoshua Boruch Ruch, tells how his father, a native of Rokishok, applied as a teenager for admission in the Slabodka Yeshiva. He acquired a letter of recommendation from the *Raw*, the Gaon Reb Betzalel, addressed to the *Mashgiach* of Slabodka. While the *Chassidim* of Litta did respect their *Rabbanim* and *Roshei Yeshiva*, they reserved the titles of respect for their *Rebbe*. All others were referred to simply as Yankel the Tailor, Shmerl the Baker—and Tzali the *Raw*!

This was the first time in his life that the young

"GUTTE YIDDEN" AND "SHEINE YIDDEN"

In Litta, the *Chassidim* used the title "Gutter Yid" (literally, Good Jew) to refer to the *Rebbe*. To the *Misnagdim*, the title a "Sheiner Yid" (a beautiful Jew, in the spiritual sense) connotes anyone who studies Torah and is a *talmid chacham*.

Every *Litvak* carried in his heart a gallery of portraits of *Sheine Yidden*:

To the *Litvakkes*, the Vilna Gaon was the ultimate example of knowledge of Torah. The *Netziv* and the *Yeshiva of Volozhin* symbolized *Ahavah HaTorah*. Reb Yisroel Salanter represented perfection of *middos*. They were the personalities a *Litvak* admired and tried to emulate.

Torah greatness also came in various forms: *Litvakkes* were impressed by both *bekius* (vast knowledge of Talmud) and *charifus* (brilliance of mind). Yet they did not refer their *she'eilos* to just anyone of intellectual prowess whose flashes of brilliance could be awe-inspiring. They knew that not every giant in Torah was expert in *psak*. The *yeshivos* also did not accord the highest accolades to *bekius*, which after all is more the result of a good memory than of intellectual accomplishment. Most inspiring was the *masmid*—the diligent scholar who toiled in Torah. One doesn't read a *blatt Gemora*, one works hard in trying to master a *blatt Gemora* (see *Rashi* on the first *pasuk* of *Bechukosai*).

BAALEI BATTIM, GEDOLIM IN TORAH

There was a trend among the *talmidei chachamim* of Litta to avoid using the Torah as a "kardom lachpor bo—an axe for digging," employing the Torah as a means for earning a living (*Pirkei Avos*

fellow left his small town Rokishok. When he presented the letter to the "Alter of Slabodka," the old *Mashgiach* asked him, "From whom is the letter?"

The young boy, not knowing any better, replied, "From Tzali the *Raw*." The Alter repeated the question: "From whom?" Again came the reply: "From Tzali the *Raw*." The Alter, to whom *k'vod HaTorah*—respect for Torah and those who represented it—was supreme, said, "Ribboine shel Olam! Tzali is a *Raw*! Yet, if boys from his town still come to learn Torah, things are not so bad, after all!"

4:7).

• For example, the Gaon Reb Yitzchak Blazer, one of the outstanding *talmidim* of Reb Yisroel Salanter (the founder of the Mussar Movement—see J.O. Mar. '84) once approached his *Rebbe* with a plan; for the purpose of *parnasa*, he would become a house painter. The investment was minimal—a matter of buying two buckets, two brushes, some white paint and a ladder, and he is in the trade! Reb Yisroel's reply is not known but shortly thereafter he arranged for Reb Yitzchok to become

There was a trend among the *talmidei chachamim* of Litta to avoid using the Torah as a "kardom lachpor bo—an axe for digging," employing the Torah as a means for earning a living.

Raw of St. Petersburg, the capital of Czarist Russia. Hence his name "Reb Itzele Petersburger."

• My father was a Rosh Yeshiva-type businessman. He had been a *chavrusa* (study partner) with Reb Reuvein Grozovsky, later *Rosh Hayeshiva* in Kamenitz, and then in Mesivta Torah Vodaath (J.O. Oct. '80). He was known as one of the ten *Kozakn* (literally, Cossacks) that the Alter of Slabodka sent to Mir to save the Yeshiva (J.O. June '77). The Rosh Yeshiva of Mir, Reb Elya Boruch Kamai, would not say the *shur* in Yeshiva, unless he had first reviewed it in private with Alter Tiktiner (my father). My father wrote a *sefer* on *Mesechta Nazir*, and in the process, formulated the *Piskei Tosefos* on *Nazir*. When he married in Lomza, he became a businessman, selling hardware supplies and building materials. He had a daily *seder* with the *Rosh Hayeshiva* Reb Yechiel Mordechai Gordon (J.O. Jan. '76). When the

Rosh Yeshiva would leave town, my father would substitute for him, saying the highest *shmur*.⁴

• I remember Reb Zalman Melczerski, a grain dealer; he always had a straw in his mouth (in the manner that some sport a cigarette, or a toothpick). He would come into my father's store on a market day, the busiest day of the week: "Reb Alter, a Rambam in *Hilchos Geirushin* bothers me. I couldn't sleep all night!" The two would get into a corner of the store to discuss the Rambam, and Mother would be furious: "Reb Zalman, come in the evening and discuss the Rambam over a *glezele tay* (a glass of tea). The Rambam can wait, he is not going anywhere. The customer won't wait!" (Zalman's son Velvel learned with me in Kamenitz, and died later in Siberia.)

• Reb Mendel Goldberg owned the biggest liquor store in Baranowitz; he was a *talmid* of the Chofetz Chaim, and he knew the *Mishna Berurah* (the

⁴ *Matza Shemura* was very expensive in Europe. Most people would eat *Shemura* only for the two *Sedorim*. My father, on the other hand, would eat *Shemura* the entire *Pesach*. The boys in Yeshiva asked him why he went to such a great expense. He replied, "I'm in business. In the business world, all kinds of 'Dreidlach' (fast ones) exist. Some are Kosher, and some are not so Kosher. When I come to face such a *nisayon* (challenge), I say to myself: 'A Yid who is so fastidious that he eats *Matza Shemura* the entire *Pesach* should do such a thing? *Feeeeh!* Shame on you!' And that holds me back from a *nisht glatte dray*—an unjustifiable loophole."

Chofetz Chaim's magnum opus on *Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim*) by heart.

• Reb Sholem Derchiner, another *talmid* of the Chofetz Chaim, owned a large haberdashery in Baranowitz. He practiced *Shmiras Halashon* (speech control) to its fullest: when he talked to his customers—Jew and non-Jew

In every town there were many *baalei battim* with *semicha*, who would never call themselves "Rabbi" (except when they were called up to the Torah), and who would never *pasken* a *she'eila* for themselves or others.

alike—he used his hands more than his mouth.

• Yerucham Barash was the wine maker in Tiktin, but no one knew when he made his wine, for most of the time he was in the *Beis Hamidrash*. He always had two fingers stuck into his ears, not to be dis-

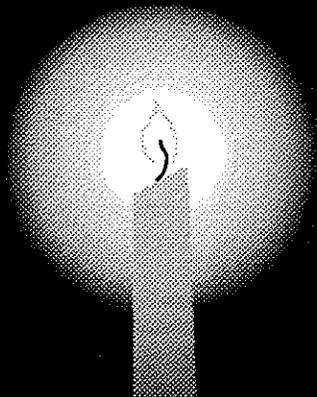
turbed from his studies. When the government declared a monopoly on all alcoholic beverages, he was arrested and sentenced to one year in prison. In jail, Reb Yerucham went through *Shas* twice. After his release, he declared, "Every Jew must serve in jail once in his life. But one year is just not enough; at least two, preferably three."

• My uncle Reb Mordechai Pines, a grain dealer in Tiktin, had a *sefer* (set time) for learning in the *Beis Hamidrash*. Once the Poretz (land owner) Jaruzelski, in a coach pulled by four horses, appeared in front of his house—he was impatient, anxious to close a business deal with Uncle Mordechai. My aunt dispatched their granddaughter to call Reb Mordechai, but he refused to leave the *Beis Hamidrash*. "Not until I finish all my *shurim*," he protested. He later explained to his wife, "With the *poretz* I might make a profit, but I may not. With Torah, the gain is guaranteed! *Bori veshemo bori odif*—a sure argument outweighs a questionable one." Reb Mordechai turned out to be right. The price of grain dropped, and any possible profit on buying the futures was lost. He later described what he had left as in the category of "*eilu devarim she'ein lohem shmur*—these are things that have no measure."

• When the *Hachnosas Orchim* (hostel for itinerants) in Tiktin burned down, Reb Yerucham Barash, the poor wine maker, bought a house and remodeled it to serve as a new *Hachnosas Orchim*. No one knew how the poor man could afford such an expensive undertaking. When Reb Mordechai Pines died, it all became clear: It had been done with Reb Mordechai's money. When his two sons were to be reviewed for possible draft into the Czar's army, he made a *neder*; if the boys would be rejected, he'd build a new *Hachnosas Orchim*.

• Reb Yankele Levinson, a *tzaddik* and a big *talmid chacham*, took upon himself to take care of the yeshiva boys staying in Lomza. He found sleeping quarters for them, he arranged "*days*" (*teg*) for them to eat in private homes, and saw to it that they had sufficient clothing and footwear. Why? Because "from the poor will

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come forth Torah." Known as a miracle worker, Reb Yankele once approached two well-to-do couples that were childless. He told them each: "I dreamed of a baby in a crib. Give me a large contribution [of a specific amount] for my Yeshiva boys and I guarantee you a baby!"

One of the couples refused. Of the other, the woman did not hesitate a minute, and paid out the entire huge sum in cash. One year later, she gave birth to a baby boy.

Reb Yankele's son Rabbi Pinchas Levinson was one of the *chashuvim* of Mir, and *Rav* of Czyzevo (Chizeve). He lived his final years in Monsey, N.Y.

• Rabbi Avraham Kalmanowitz, the *Rav* of Tiktin (and founder of the *Mirrer Yeshiva* in Brooklyn—see J.O., Mar. '72) writes: "When I arrived in Tiktin, I met *baalei battim* who knew a number of *Mesechtos* in *Shas* literally by heart. Just to mention a few: Reb Shmuel Leib Shapiro [my *Zeide*], his son Alter [my father] and all his sons-in-law, Reb Berl Glickman, a relative of the *Sfas Emes*, and Reb Naftoli Linczewski, my father-in-law."

"With the poretz I might make a profit, but I may not. With Torah, the gain is guaranteed! *Bori veshemo bori odif*—a sure argument outweighs a questionable one."

• Reb Boruch Suravitz was a tanner by trade. While his men were busy with the hides, he spent the major portion of his time in the *Beis Hamidrash Chevra Shas*. He eventually became a great *lamdan*, known for his vast knowledge of *Shas* and *Poskim* (Talmud and Codes). He gave a daily *shiur* between *Mincha* and *Maariv* in *Mishna Berurah*. He had a long-standing *chazokeh* (claim based on previous purchase) for *Chassan Torah*. He would then give a *kiddush* serving the entire town with his wife's

kreplach, which justly earned the appellation "*ketzapichis bidvash*" (the Torah's description of the *manna*; literally, a delectable honey pastry).

• Reb Hirsh Falks never learned in a Yeshiva, and never accepted a *Rabbonus*. He studied by himself in *Chevra Mishnayos* or in the *Chassidim Shul*. Separated from the world entirely, he eventually became known as a "*lamdan par excellence*" and served as the *Rebbe* of the *Chevra Mishnayos*, the very same *Chevra* within whose walls he grew in Torah. The *Ohr Some'ach* passed through Tiktin, met him there as a youngster and predicted "that someday that young boy will be a *Gadol*!"

His *talmidim*, the *baalei battim* of *Chevra Mishnayos*, were carpenters, tailors, shoe makers and *baalagolos* (wagon drivers). It was nothing unusual to hear the tailor repeating a *Perek Mishnayos* by heart while making a suit, or the *baalagoleh* repeating a *Perek Mishnayos* while feeding his horse.

When Reb Hirsh was *nifter* (died), his son Reb Alter took over his father's *shrender* and continued the tradition of leading the *Chevra Mishnayos*.

• Reb Yisroel Chaim Shoskes was a progressive miller by trade. While all the mills in the country were run by the wind (wind mills called *Wiatrak*), his operated on steam. But the man was thirsty for only one thing—studying Torah! He was up at 4 a.m. every day, to learn until *davening*. He would then travel to *Stelmachove*, near Tiktin, where his mill was located, soon hurrying back to the *Beis Hamidrash* where he would learn until late in the night. Thursday nights he conducted a *mishmar*, studying the entire night. Friday night he would come to the *Beis Hamidrash* at 12 midnight to learn 'til *davenen*. He would dedicate the entire *Shabbos* day to studying the *She'eilos Uteshuvos* of *Rebbe Akiva Eiger*. He had a driver for his travels, so he could sit in the wagon and study Torah enroute.

• Reb Simcha Shmuel Shulman, a *musmach* of the *Aruch Hashulchan* (J.O. March '86), was a manufacturer. His son Reb Mordechai married the daughter of Rabbi Isaac Sher of

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Slabodka, and later served as *Rosh Hayeshiva* of Slabodka in Bnei Brak.

Indeed, in every town there were many *baalei battim* with *semicha*, who would never call themselves "Rabbi" (except when they were called up to the Torah), and who would never *pasken* a *she'eila* for themselves or others.

(These sketches are drawn from either personal encounters or *Yizkor* books.)

TELSHE BAALEBATTIM

Over 50 years ago, the chief *Rav* of Baltimore, Rabbi Nachman Schwartz, sent three local boys to the Telshe Yeshiva in Lithuania, his Alma Mater. They are now known as Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, *Rosh Hayeshiva* of Telshe in Wickliffe, Ohio, Rabbi Aaron Paperman of Jerusalem, and Rabbi Mendel Poliakoff of Baltimore.

They tell of *baalei battim* in the Telshe of old:

- Reb Leib Gershowitz would ap-

pear in the Yeshiva every day at one o'clock to learn an entire *seder bechavrusa* with the *Rosh Hayeshiva* and *Rav* of Telshe, the *Gaon* Reb Avrohom Yitzchok Bloch. Some people claimed that he was greater in Torah than the *Rav*. His business?—a shoe store.

- Reb Yaakov Dovid Maisel was called the "little *Chofetz Chaim*." Yes, he was small physically, but a giant in Torah, and a *tzaddik*. He was always learning between customers in his business establishment—a grocery.

- Reb Itche Hotz, a giant in Torah, ran a lumber yard.

- Reb Sholom Talpis, a *Gaon* in Torah, was the son-in-law of Rabbi Meir Atlas, the *Rav* of Shavl, making him a brother-in-law to Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzenski (J.O. June '76) and Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman (J.O. Oct. '73). His source of income—a hardware store.

- Reb Ely Chaim Helfant (his son was the fundraiser for Telshe Yeshiva here in America) would say the daily *blatt Gemora* for *baalei battim*. He went through *Shas* with his *baalei battim* seven times—a businessman.

RABBONIM FOR WORLD-CLASS BAALEBATTIM

The level of devotion and accomplishment in Torah of the *Litvishe baalebattim* certainly set a high level for their rabbinical leadership. In the words of Rabbi Gifter, "If Rabbi Reuven Zelig Bengis would not have been the *Gadol* he was, he could never have been the *Rav* of Kalvarie." (See J.O., May '91.)

In an article on *Maggidim* (J.O. Apr. '81), I stated that a *Rav* would only speak twice a year, *Shabbos Teshuva* and *Shabbos Hagadol*. During the year, who would give the people *Tochacha* and *Mussar*? Who would inspire the people to raise their level of *Yiddishkeit*, *tzeddaka*, *middos*, and *Limud HaTorah*? The *Maggid*!

People then asked me, what did the *Rav* do all the time? They were shocked when I told them that rarely would a *Rav* attend a funeral. Moreover, the deceased had to be an outstanding *talmid chacham*, a big *tzaddik*, or a big *baal tzeddaka* for the *Rav* to deliver a *hesped* (eulogy). (The

Jews of America have come to copy their Christian neighbors, who would not dream of burying their dead without benefit of the clergy—but perhaps that helps avoid excesses and violation of *halacha* and *minhag*!) What then did a *Rav* do with his time? He studied Torah constantly!

This phenomenon was not exclusive to Lithuania. Reb Yaakov Steinharter relates that the *Rav* in his hometown, Ansbach, Germany, was Rabbi Dr. Pinchas Kohn (one of the

In jail, Reb Yerucham went through *Shas* twice. After his release, he declared, "Every Jew must serve in jail once in his life. But one year is just not enough; at least two, preferably three."

founders of Agudath Israel). Whenever he and his father would pass by the *Rav's* house—even when returning from business trips very late at night—they would see the light in the *Rav's* window; he was learning! "What kind of a *Rav* is he if he doesn't learn late in the night?" asked the senior Mr. Steinharter.

The smaller the town, the saying went, the greater the *Rav*, for he had less intrusions on his time. Most of these *Gedolim* refused to leave the small towns, to advance to larger cities⁵. Only when a delegation convinced a *Rav* of the improvements he could bring to a larger city, the new *takanos* he could introduce in *chinuch* (Torah education), *Kashrus*, or *tzeddaka*, would he move on. Another factor could be pressure from the *Rebbetzin*, for she could more easily make ends meet in a larger city. It is said in the name of Rabbi Chaim Brisker that of all the *seforim* that the *Shaagas Arye* wrote, the best one was

⁵ Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetsky was *Rav* in the tiny village of Tzitevyan, where he fondly recalled experiencing his greatest growth in Torah.



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the first one, for it was written in poverty in a small town (Volozhin).

CHESED AND TZEDDAKA

As involved as the *Litvakkes* were with the study of Torah, their lives were further enriched with *chesed* and *tzeddaka*. And as great as the poverty was, the *tzeddaka* was much greater (and the term "tax deductible" was never heard of). The poorest would consider it a privilege to invite a *Ben Torah* to eat a "tog" (one day a week) with them. There were no hotels in the towns, and the houses were small, yet an *orach* (out-of-town traveler) would always be welcome. Every house had four chairs and a straw mattress converted into a bed. Most towns had a *Hachnosas Orchim* for that purpose, where a traveler would get a clean bed and a cup of tea in the morning free of charge. During the week, one had to manage by buying some food in the local store, but with the arrival of *Shabbos Kodesh*, all the stanger had

to do was come to *shul*. There the *Gabbaï*, recognizing a new face, would assign the person to a family to eat all three *Shabbos* meals. People would fight over an *orach*, everyone wished to have one.

The *Rav* of *Ponevezh*, Rabbi Yoseif Kahaneman (founder of the *Ponevezh Yeshiva* in *Bnei Brak*) was born in a small town called *Kull*. His father, a merchant, was the *Gabbaï* in the *shul*. Being in charge of the placement of *orchim*, he would always pick two for himself. If there was a third one, he would assign him to his mother-in-law. If there were more, he would assign them to others. Naturally there was jealousy on the part of the rest of the *baalei battim*, for they all wanted to be *zocheh* (merit) to have an *orach*.

Once, a few people talked in the *Beis Hamidrash* during *davenen*⁶. Enraged, the *Gabbaï*, Mr. Kahaneman, jumped on the *bima* and announced: "In protest to the talkers, I resign from the position of *Gabbaï*" The "Shtot *Meshugener*"⁷ (town idiot) then

jumped onto the *bima* and with his crazy laughter imitated the *Gabbaï*, saying, "Who will get the *orchim* now?" Mr. Kahaneman turned white, mounted the *bima* again and announced, "I take back my resignation!"

Such was the *chesed* of a *Litvak*
• Reb Avrohom Dvorkes had a

⁶No *Beis Midrash* or *shul* would have the entrance into the main room directly from the street. There was always a lobby to enter first, called "the *polush*." It was designed for those who wanted to engage in non-sacred talk. A door was always open from the *shul* to the *polush*, so the talkers would not miss a "*Borchu*" or "*Kedusha*." In addition, the *polush* accommodated traveling *mochrei seforim*, since there were no book stores, especially in the small towns. The traveling salesman would lay out his merchandise in the *polush*. When the *Chofetz Chaim* was travelling incognito to sell his *seforim*, would he lay them out in *shul*, making it into a market place? *Challilat*—in the *polush*! Apparently the people of *Kull* did not retreat to the *polush* for talking. Hence the anger!

⁷Every city had a "*Shtot Meshugener*." A town could be temporarily without a *Rav*, without a *Dayan*, without a *Chazan*, but never without its *Meshugener*. He would tell the most powerful figure in town his opinions. The target could laugh off the *Meshugener*—after all, he's crazy. But he couldn't ignore him, for he knew the *Meshugener* had picked up the message somewhere.

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The "Yiddis" Language

Litvakkes spoke perfect, grammatically correct Yiddish, even though there were regional colloquialisms in various parts of Litta. For instance, the Jews of Bobroisk and vicinity, in White Russia, could not properly pronounce the letter "Reish." They would say it like an English "R," rather than the appropriate guttural sound. In my hometown, Lomza, people could not pronounce the letter "Lamed"; they pronounced it like a "W" (as did the people of Wodz—that is, Lodz, Poland)®.

In Lithuania proper, there were people who could not pronounce the letter "Shin." They would substitute a "Sin" for it. Amazingly, there were those who could pronounce the "Shin," but they would—for some inexplicable reason—interchange the two.

There is an apocryphal story of a printer who presented the Rabbonim with a suggestion for solving the whole problem by merely switching the dot on the "Shin" from the right to the left, and vice-versa. The Rabbonim refused to go along with his innovation.

®I worked on losing my "Lamed" and finally conquered it. But when my son Eliezer as a young child heard me say "Wazer" instead of "Lazer" he knew that he'd better run.

store of "galanterie" on the main street in Lomza. His clientele were mostly women of the Russian and Polish aristocracy. Once, the wife of the General Commanding Officer of the local garrison died. On *Shabbos* a large group of officers' wives came to his house, insisting that they needed some finery for the funeral. He declared, "I don't do business on *Shabbos*. Here are the keys. Go to the store and take whatever you need." The following week, they came to pay their bills. He refused the money: "I don't do business on *Shabbos*, and I'm not taking the money. If you wish, you can donate the money to the Jewish community charity fund."

They did.

• Reb Levi Bilitski, one of the wealthiest Jews in Poland, owned five huge factories, employing hundreds of workers. His father was *Rav* in Yashinovke near Grodno, *mechaber* (author) of the *seforim Ginas Baisan* and *Ginas Chemed*. His mother was the daughter of Reb Chaim Avrohom Shapiro, *Rav* in Smargon and brother of Reb Raphoel Shapiro, *Rosh Hayeshiva* in Volozhin.

Reb Levi had learned in Lomza Yeshiva, then in Volozhin. Reb Levi gave large sums to *tzeddaka*. A *talmid chacham*, he said the daily *Blatt*

Gemora in the *Beis Hamidrash* in Semyatitz, where one of his factories was located and where he lived. His son Raphoel learned with me in Kamenitz, where Reb Sholem Leibovitz, one of the best *talmidim* of Kamenitz and a nephew of Reb Boruch Ber, was his private *Rebbe*.

When Reb Boruch Ber would arrive in Semyatitz to raise funds for the Yeshiva, the factory would close, and 300 workers, both Jews and non-Jews, would welcome the *Rosh Hayeshiva*—an impressive *Kiddush Hashem!* Reb Levi would invite all the wealthy and powerful members of the community to a reception in his home. Reb Boruch Ber once noticed a secular Yiddish newspaper on the table, and directed the paper off the table with his elbow. (He didn't want to touch it with his hand.) Reb Levi explained to the guests that it was *beshogeg ki'l'achar yad* (inadvertent). "No!" corrected Reb Boruch Ber, "it was *bemeizid* (deliberate)." Whatever funds were raised were doubled by a matching contribution by Reb Levi.

Considering his extreme devotion to Torah, his generosity was not surprising. Considering the vast *Kavod* he gave to Torah, his high level of accomplishment in its study was a matter of course. ■

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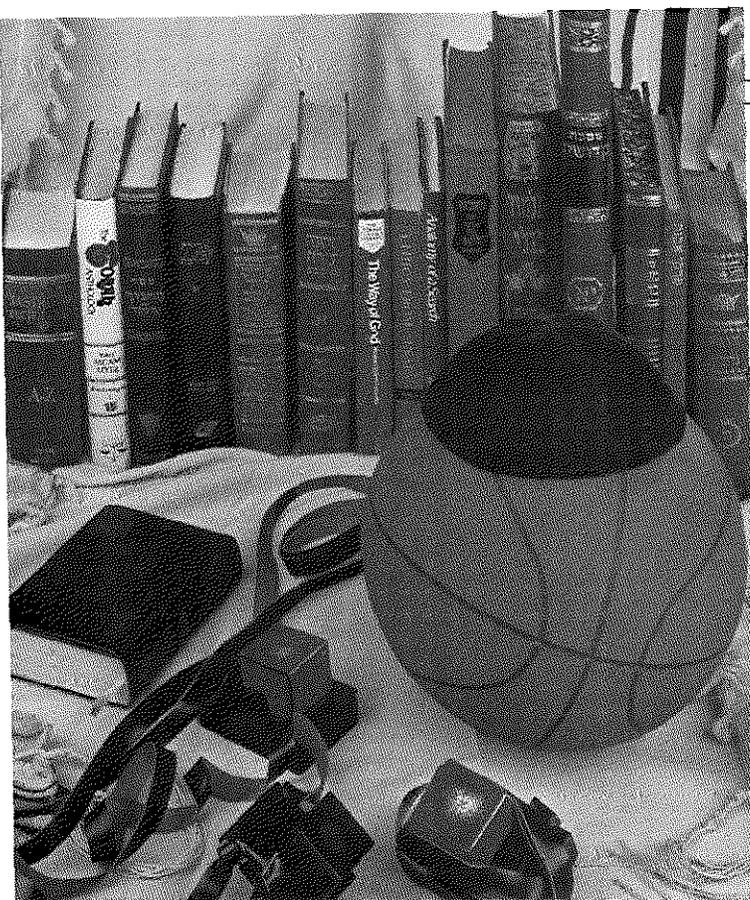
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Bridging the Communication Gap in the Teshuva Process

Exploring the Differences in Mindset of the Baal Teshuva and That of the Jew Brought Up in Torah

A SENSE OF "BEING JEWISH"

Even though there have always been *ba'alei teshuva* (to be rendered in this essay as BT) as far back as Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrkonus, the last twenty years has seen a groundswell of BTs. This brings new challenges to everyone involved in the *teshuva* scene, and all will benefit from exploring these areas and seeing how to deal with them. In this essay, we will focus on the difference between the sense of "being Jewish" enjoyed by the *frum* from birth (FFB) and the sensation of "becoming Jewish" experienced by the newly impassioned BT seeking to join the world of the long-*frum*, and the difficulties this gap can create.

The person involved in the *teshuva* process will not see or experience things in the same manner as the person seeped in a Torah society, and this brings to difficulty in communi-

Mr. Wolfson, a *talmid* of some of Israel's finest *yeshivos* for *ba'alei teshuva*, lives in Baltimore.

cation. Some suggestions as to how to deal with this confusion will be made in this essay, but first some basic concepts must be considered.

Being Jewish today, as at all times, certainly means bearing the yoke of *mitzvos*. It entails acting in certain ways and refraining from specific acts or foods. For the newly arrived BT, as well as for the FFB, that is the easy part. But there is another aspect of being Jewish that is not the same for both of them. This is *feeling* Jewish. Feeling Jewish is hard to describe and even harder to define. Some would deny that this "feeling" is an obstacle in the *teshuva* process. But it is clear that the BT has never felt like a Jew and now wishes to. For one to feel like a Jew, he must first think like a Jew. This takes a lot of time and great effort. This process of change from "non-Jewish thinking" to "Jewish thinking" is a key obstacle in the *teshuva* process. It is precisely here, at the beginning of this process, where unfortunate results may ensue

as a result of decisions rendered during this change of perspective.

(Undoubtedly, some would-be BTs are puzzled or turned off by rituals, religious protocol or specific *mitzvos* that strike them as bizarre—swaying during *davening*, eating the prescribed amount of *matza* within the required time limit, etc. But their difficulties involve another type of challenge, and different solutions, outside of this discussion.)

ONE WORD, TWO MEANINGS... ONE EVENT, TWO VIEWS

We can gain an understanding of the BT's confusion upon his initial entry into Torah by referring to the difficulties encountered by the autistic person struggling to incorporate messages from commonly shared words or concepts.

An autistic person does not receive or transmit messages in a universally understood fashion, due to a neurological disorder. If, for instance, you

were to tell him that the pastry is too rich, he would think that the pastry has a lot of money in the bank. Eventually you would show him that the word "rich" can be used in two different ways. In other words, terms can be used equivocally. Such use of terms is not readily understandable to an autistic person.¹

This is analogous to the BT when that initial passion for Torah is sparked in him. He walks in with a worldview based on Western/secular perspectives. These perspectives include: beliefs, values, and logical thought processes. When this person hears of miraculous events, he either rejects their authenticity immediately, rationalizes them so they can fit his presently perceived world view (the Red Sea split due to unusually high winds), or—worst of all possibilities—he tries to convince himself of their authenticity without basis in rational belief.

This author's view is that, like the autistic person who simply cannot incorporate equivocation into his thought processes, so too the BT, at least in the initial stages of his *teshuva* process, cannot honestly incorporate Torah beliefs, values or thought processes into his worldview. If he rationalizes them, he is not being honest, but he is at least trying to accept them. If he tries to convince himself of their authenticity without basis, in terms of his present worldview, then he is also not being honest. It is worthwhile to consider why the BT would want to convince himself in the first place.

SIDESTEPPING WESTERN, SECULAR VIEWS

Most people came to Torah because they felt, somewhere deep inside, that their lives were not dedicated to anything of worth. Worse, that their lives were dedicated to *shekker*—falsehood. Then, one day, they were introduced to Torah. Suddenly the proverbial light flashed and they realized: *This is it!* This "it" was putting Judaism into the proper perspective. The feeling of *shekker* they had before was a lack of

¹ Without Reason, Charles Hart. Signet Books, April, 1991

Jewish identification, of "being Jewish." They never had the problem of "searching for truth" as opposed to dedicating their lives to *shekker*. Rather, if any kind of search was involved, it was a search for their identities, and they came to the simple truth that in Judaism, identity is truth. One is a Jew. But "being" a Jew is something they had never given a moment's thought to before.

For this reason, the person is willing to put his Western/secular views in abeyance. Every day in learning, he will hear more and more of what is, for him, a Western-educated person, impossible to believe. The Western-rationalist simply cannot take at face value that donkeys talk, or that

Feeling Jewish is hard to describe and even harder to define. Some would deny that this "feeling" is an obstacle in the *teshuva* process. But it is clear that the BT has never felt like a Jew and now wishes to.

oceans split, or that a three-year-old could possibly have watered all those camels. What is the Western rationalist in a process of *teshuva* to do?

The *Gemora* points out that there is no such thing as blind faith or irrationality in the Torah. The *Kuzari* proclaims this message, as does the *Rambam*. So if the Torah is rational and true, but the person with his "spiritual autism" cannot accept its authenticity, how can he hope to progress?

The BT will not simply throw up his hands and say, "C'mon, you really expect me to believe that?" He knows, he intuitively, that this is, in fact, the *emes*. He sees the Torah world as compared to the world he came from, and it is obvious to him which works and which does not. He sees the *frum*

world untouched by many of the social evils of Western society and unsullied by all the rationalizations it offers to justify its corruption. Rather than a generation gap, he sees a deep respect for elders. He sees *chessed*, *Shabbos*, *Yom Tov*, and he begins to feel a part of a continuity: *This is what he is. This is what he should always have been.* And yet, at this point, he is simply unable to accept the miraculous. But he will not throw out the baby with the bath water.

The logical process begins now in earnest. He will not accept claims out of hand, but will probe: *Could there be a G-d? If so, how can we know it?* Once convinced, at least enough to admit of the possibility, then it follows that if there is a G-d, He can certainly split oceans and put words into the mouths of donkeys, etc.

At this point, a difference between the BT and the FFB comes to light. In keeping with a comment of the *Chofetz Chaim*, ל"צ, We say "*Etn Kelokeinu* (There is nothing like our G-d)" before we say "*Mi Kelokeinu* (Who is like our G-d?)"—that is, the declaration of certainty comes before the question, because the Jew must know in his heart that there is a Creator before he can ask, "Who is like Him?" For the FFB, this has been a given since *Kita Aleph*. For the BT, it is a rational decision (to want to believe) that he must incorporate into his thinking; he must be convinced. The FFB was brought up with it as a living part of his life. Yes, Jews are *ma'aminim bnei ma'aminim*; but the BT has been torn away from his roots for so long that *emuna* is as foreign to him as the taste of a cheeseburger is to an FFB.

MATTERS OF CHOICE, AND THE CHOOSERS

Before the BT dedicates himself to Torah study, before he decides that there is value in pursuing his identity, he must make choices. The concept of choice in spiritual matters is different for BTs and FFBs.

The secular Jew comes from a world where "choice" is something one exercises to better his position. He does not perceive any conse-

quences from these choices in a moral sense, only in an existential sense. A "good" choice was one in which the person gained materially, socially, or emotionally. Even his education was set up on this model. A *gadol* once said, "The difference between Jewish *chinuch* and secular education is that for the Torah Jew, who makes choices in a moral/spiritual realm, his *chinuch* is based on 'Na'aseh ve'nishma (the commitment to act in accordance with Torah and then to understand)' whereas secular education is based on 'nishma (I understand)'...and maybe 'na'aseh (I'll do what is correct)', or maybe not." The student chooses, based on his particular desire. The statement in the book *Let Us Make Man*, "The moral rightness or wrongness of an act must be judged by what preceded it, not by what follows it," may have very little meaning to a person who makes all his choices based upon ends and means².

Once again, we see a phenomenon akin to autism come into play, for clearly the concepts of choice for the secular Jew and for the authentic Jew are based upon different worldviews. The beginning BT simply will not refrain from certain acts, or indulge in others just because "it says so in the *Shulchan Aruch*." First he will hear, then he will decide—*nishma*, and then *na'aseh*...maybe.

MAKING CHOICES —THREE APPROACHES

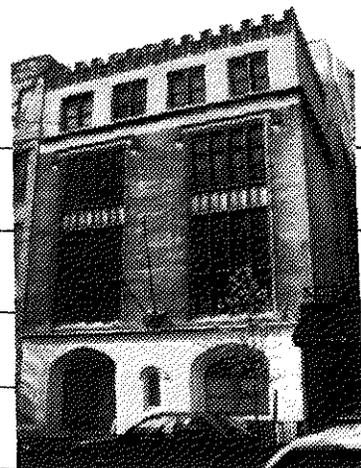
We must look a little deeper into the concept of choice to see how choosing affects the BT and how his choosing process can be, and unfortunately often is, detrimental to him or her.

When a person is confronted with what he ought to do or be, he is presented with a few possibilities. The "oughts" are (1) *Moral Ought*: you ought to be kinder; (2) *Prescriptive Ought*: You ought to exercise; and (3) *Spiritual Ought*: You ought to keep *Shabbos*. (The Torah Jew will actually view all three as spiritual, to some degree.)

The BT comes from a world wherein most, if not all, choices that

² *Let Us Make Man*, Abraham J. Twerski, CIS Publishers, 1987.

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he makes in regard to what he ought to do are prescriptive choices. "You ought to go into the army" is prescriptive in peace time, for there you will get training in a desirable skill. In times of war, it could be a moral choice. Even how one behaves in private matters today is not viewed as being in the moral realm but the prescriptive. There are very few moral choices in the Western world, but there are many "hang-ups."

When this Jew comes to the Torah

chooses to spend his nights at the movies, he is choosing "not to be." Every choice now has spiritual ramifications. This changing of choices in an attempt "to be" is epitomized by the *Akeida*. Avraham Avinu struggled with his "Jewish self" when asked to take his son for a sacrifice. *Rashi* points out the struggle there. And yet, he said, "Hineini," for Avram had become Avraham. His identity changed and the choices he had to face in life changed with his identity.

He sees chessed, Shabbos, Yom Tov, and he begins to feel a part of a continuity: *This is what he is. This is what he should always have been.* And yet, at this point, he is simply unable to accept the miraculous. But he will not throw out the baby with the bath water.

world, he is entering a world wherein every choice he makes has cosmic implications. To eat or not eat the beef, or to drink milk with it, is no longer a prescriptive choice but a spiritual one. Now his choice is not solely selfishly oriented. Now he must consider the laws of *Hashem* as well. It will be a long, hard process to arrive at such a state wherein such a choice no longer remains. On this, Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, זצ"ל, has said in *Michtav Me'elياهو*, that you have truly mastered a particular challenge when you have incorporated the positive response into your routine to the extent that it is no longer a battle within you. The *frum* Jew will not turn on the oven on *Shabbos*. This is not a struggle; he has mastered that particular level of observance.

The secular Jew has no such internal conflict in regards to *Shabbos* prohibitions. Neither does the *FFB*. But the BT will walk a tightrope for a long time, not only with *Shabbos mitzvos*, but with all the others. And *hashkafa* imperatives could torment him for a lifetime.

The BT is now making choices not only in regard to beliefs; he is making a choice "to be": to be an authentic Jew. When he chooses to study Torah, he chooses "to be." When he

AN EAGERNESS TO SWALLOW IT ALL

It is here, at the initial stages of *teshuva*, that some very serious considerations must be examined, both by the *Rabbe'im* of BT *yeshivos* and by the BTs themselves as to the different perspectives the BT brings to begin his journey. After the person has had his/her "This is it!" elation, after he has fully realized that he came from a world of *shekker* and "chasing after wind," he is like one who has come in from a week in the desert and walked into a smorgasbord. He wants it all.

He wants to emulate people that just a few short months ago he had never heard of. Like the young man who just won the lottery, he simply does not know how to invest and so he looks to the people who do. The *Rabbe'im* at these *yeshivos* put in long, hard hours to help the young men and women, and get precious little pay for it. It is real *mesiras nefesh* to keep these places running. One immediately sees the Torah in these men and knows that they are "men of truth." The young (or not so young) beginners are drawn to the *Rabbe'im* as they were never drawn to their college professors.

Here is the first mistake that the BT makes. The BT often assumes that anything one of the *Rabbe'im* has to say—whether in a *halacha* issue, a *hashkafa* issue, or a personal one—is the final word on the subject. That is to say, that if the BT is to disagree on any particular point, then he feels that he is going against the Torah, which the *Rav*, in his eyes, represents. He wants to be a good soldier and do exactly as the captain says. The *Rabbe'im* do not mean to instill such extreme loyalty in him, but it is prevalent nonetheless.... The *Mishna* in *Avos* describes four kinds of students, the first of which is "the sponge." The sponge does not know how to analyze the information he absorbs, and does not know when or how to apply what to himself. Such is the beginner.

A DAY IN LIFE OF A SPONGE

The following scenarios are cases that are drawn from actual experiences, repeated too often:

- One day, it is suggested to "Bruce," a BT who has been learning for a while and is now keeping *Shabbos*, that he should seriously consider getting married. The young man immediately begins to think prescriptively: "Should I get married now? What about money? What about a career? Where would I live? Here in Israel or in America? Am I ready as a Torah Jew to marry?" This particular *Rav* may then answer these prescriptive considerations with spiritual advice. The *Rav* may, for instance, show the young man what the *Shulchan Aruch* has to say about someone who is not pursuing *shidduchim*. Bruce would not consider marriage, at this time, as being in his best interest. He is, of course, not guilty of deliberately defying halachic guidelines; he is simply thinking prescriptively.

- "Randy" has graduated college, and before going to medical school (or law school), decides to spend some time in Israel, and ends up in a BT *yeshiva*. After he has been there for a while and has had his "This is it!" experience, he begins taking on *mitzvos*. When summer is over Randy de-

cides (with heavy parental influence) that the time has arrived to go to medical school (or law school). At this point it is suggested to him that the Jewish people need "learners," not another lawyer. Now Bruce is torn between two desires: the prescriptive versus the spiritual. Must they be mutually exclusive? Absolutely not. But the "sponge" has a hard time making the difference.

After the person has had his/her "This is it!" elation, after he has fully realized that he came from a world of *shekker* and "chasing after wind," he is like one who has come in from a week in the desert and walked into a smorgasbord. He wants it all.

ARE THERE SOLUTIONS?

There are ways of dealing with this conundrum.... To begin with, mutual understanding and respect should be established between those who teach and those who learn; understanding what a Jew's *tachlis* in this world is, in general, and of what this particular Jew's *tachlis* is. At this critical point, the considerations of the BT's needs, long-range potential, and personal dynamics must be given a lot of weight, for he is vulnerable and may not be able to make life decisions in a balanced way. We must remember that he still thinks prescriptively, while trying to incorporate spirituality into his life.

The next step should be taken by the BT, based on the passage in Avos: "Asei lecha Rav." Each person must find a Rav who can come to know him

intimately, for only such a person can know what is best for him in a spiritual realm, in a prescriptive realm, in an emotional realm, and in a physical realm. When *Shlomo Hamelech* said, "*Marbeh eitzei marbeh chachma*—With more counsel comes more wisdom," he did not mean that one should totally surrender his better judgment or ignore his own feelings on a particular matter. Rather, he meant that one should seek the advice from one *qualified* to give it, and one of the qualifications must be that he knows the individual intimately.

Another suggestion: The *Rabbe'im* should convene a session for all beginners after they have been in their institutions for a while, and explain to them that here they are learning Torah, and that Torah touches all aspects of a person's mind, body, emotions, familial ties, etc. As the person learns and incorporates Torah knowledge and values into his thinking, he will be changing, just like a small-town kid evolves and develops in bootcamp.

Without such a session, this internal process will not be readily apparent to the novice, and he will make mistakes in his relations with friends and family, which often end up in a *chillul Hashem*. Further, the person needs to be advised at this early critical and vulnerable stage, not to make *any* decisions without first considering the long-range consequences of any such action, for definitions are changing and so are the emphases on what is important in his life. He must be advised not to write that letter home about the wonders of Torah, for he is not yet a competent spokesman, and in doing so, he may alienate his family.

No, a "sponge" is neither a mindless robot nor a born-again fanatic. He is excited, however; and in his exuberance, he is liable to make some rash decisions that will have long-term effects in his life, for better or for worse.

One last bit of advice: the person should *daven* that *Hashem* send him competent people who will care enough to become intimate with him and lead him on a road to being a good Jew. ■



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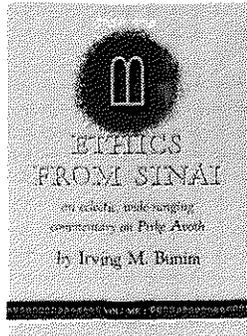
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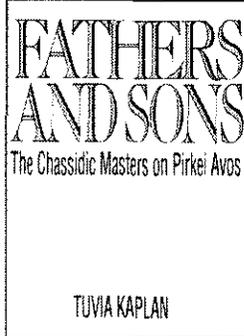


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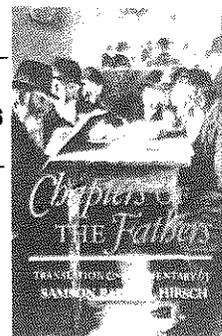


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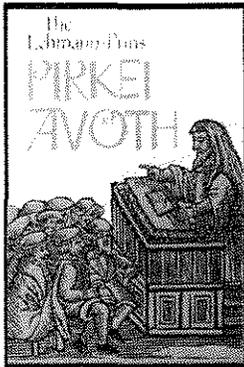
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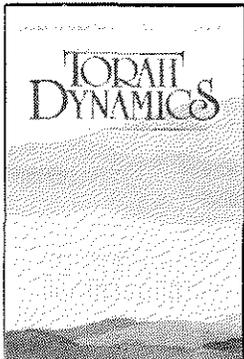


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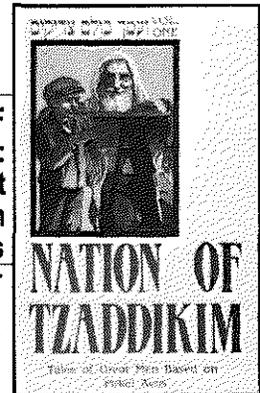
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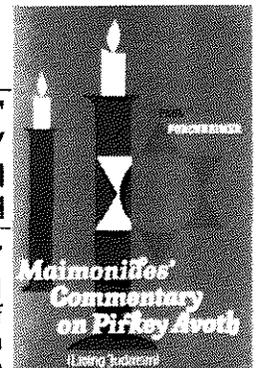
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To Jews all over the world the land of Israel is known as the Holy Land. Every rock, every tree, every stream is endowed with a sacred quality by G-d who has chosen this soil as a home for His People. Moreover, the geography of the country is filled with the names of cities, rivers, and mountains that are found in the *Tanach* (Bible) and have gained everlasting significance in the history of the Jewish nation. Mention a site in Galil, Samaria, or Judeah,



and the echoes of the past come rumbling down through the ages, with tales of Israel's fierce devotion to G-d and the heroism of its people in the face of enemy hosts.

It is described in the Torah as "the land upon which the Heavenly eyes rest constantly, from year's beginning to year's end" (Deuteronomy 1:11). As the holy Ramban (Nachmanides) explains: While all lands and all people are Divinely controlled through intermediaries, the people of Israel are under the direct supervision of Almighty G-d. For this reason, prayers and supplication offered in *Eretz Yisrael* have a special power to them.

Yet even in the Holy Land one may single out cities and sites which have been especially hallowed. In bygone centuries, almost from the beginning of time, certain places have gained renown as spiritual wellsprings, as sources of self-renewal, as passageways to the gates of heaven. Over a time span that covers thousands of years, it was to these centers that Jews streamed to celebrate their joys or lament their grief. Above all, these places were made holy by the countless prayers that were uttered in their presence, by the rain of tears that were shed as Jews sought to commune with G-d and find solace in their time of affliction.

Modern-day travel conditions and the easy access available have resulted in a newfound movement among Jews to visit the graves and holy sites to pray for personal and national salvation.

These pages will serve as a guide to the Jewish tourist or settler who wishes to visit these ancient reservoirs of faith whence Jews draw new strength and find miraculous cures for the languishing spirit.

JERUSALEM

Like a brilliant jewel in a splendid setting, the Old City of Jerusalem lies on two hills surrounded by a ring of mountains. Its narrow streets and high walls, penetrated by eight broad gates, recall the ancient past of this city. As far back as the time of Abraham, Jerusalem, then known as Salem, was a center for the worship of G-d. When the Israelites invaded the Holy Land, Jerusalem remained in the hands of the Jebusites until it was conquered by King David. After capturing this stronghold, King David made it his capital, whereupon the city became the political and spiritual center of Israel. There it was that King Solomon built the Temple which contained the Holy of Holies where the *Sh'chinah*—the Divine Presence—rested between the outspread wings of the *Cherubim*.



Three times a year vast pilgrimages from all

parts of the country streamed to the Temple to celebrate the Festivals of Pesach, Shavuoth and Succoth. In later years, great prophets proclaimed their inspired utterances to crowds gathered in the streets of the city. After the decline of the Jewish kingdom, Jerusalem with its Temple fell to Babylonia, to be rebuilt by Ezra and Nehemiah after their return from exile. In 70 C.E. the city was again wrested from Jewish hands, this time by the Romans who razed its buildings and destroyed the Second Temple.

In the year 673, Jerusalem fell into the hands of the Moslems who made it their second most important shrine, but their outrages against Christians led to the invasion and capture of the city by the Crusaders in 1099. The City was retaken by the Moslem sultan, Saladin, in 1187 and remained almost continuously under Moslem control until it was captured by the British during World War I and became a British Mandate. Upon the termination of the Mandate in 1948, Jews and Arabs fought for possession of the city. Finally the Jews were forced to surrender the Old City but held the New City until the Six Day War when both parts of the city were reunited.



Kotel Ha-ma'aravi - The Western Wall For centuries it has been a tradition that the Jew who comes to Jerusalem goes directly to the *Kotel Ha-ma'aravi*. "Never did the *Sh'chinah* part from the Western Wall"—so do our Sages depict the most sanctified of all Jewish holy places, the portion of the wall that once surrounded the Temple Court, which is the sole remnant of our destroyed sanctuary. While the Temple stood, the *Kotel Ha-ma'aravi* was part of the massive enclosure which protected the place of worship within.

Our Sages relate that the Almighty made an oath that the Western Wall would never be destroyed. When the *Kotel Ha-ma'aravi* survived the devastation wrought by Titus' armies, the Wall itself became the focus of Jewish prayer and aspiration. During almost two thousand years of dispersion, when Jews were haunted by oppression and despair, the Wall was there to signify that G-d had not forsaken His people and that the ultimate redemption for which they yearned would still come.

Synagogues in the Old City Prior to 1948, the Old City of Jerusalem displayed a number of impressive synagogues which were built many years ago. The most famous was the *Churvah* of Rabbi Judah He-chosid. This pious leader came from Poland, together with hundreds of his disciples, to settle in the Holy Land in the beginning of the eighteenth century. Next to the ruins of a syna-



gogue which was founded by the Ramban, his followers built a new synagogue which they named after their spiritual guide. After a hundred and fifty years the synagogue was still unfinished; therefore it was given the name *Churvah*—ruins. For many years the *Churvah* synagogue served as a center of the Ashkenazic community in the Old City. During the 1948 war the Old City was occupied by the Jordanians and the *Churvah*, together with many other holy places, was completely demolished by the Arabs.

Fortunately, the Ohr Ha-chayim Synagogue, named after Rabbi Chaim Ben Atar who came to the Holy Land in the eighteenth century, did not suffer the same fate as the other houses of worship because of its proximity to the Armenian quarter of the city.

Har Ha-Zethim—The Mount of Olives

To the east of Jerusalem, rising 2,700 feet above sea level and overlooking the Temple site, stand the Mount of Olives, most eminent among the mountains which encircle the Holy City. Since earliest times, *Har Ha-zethim*, also known as *Har Hamishchah*, occupies a unique place in the winding course of history.

According to the Aggadah, the olive branch which the dove bore in its beak when it returned to Noah in the ark was taken from the Mount of Olives which was left untouched by the ravages of the Flood. During the First and Second Temple, the ashes of the red heifer, which were used to purify unclean persons, were prepared on the summit of this mountain. When beacons were used during the Second Temple to proclaim the new month and to fix the time for the holy days, it was from the *Har Ha-zethim* that the first message was flashed. There, too, were found the stalls, known to be kept by pure hands, which provided the oil and fowl which were used for sacrifices in the Temple.



Even when the Temple lay in ruins, the Mount of Olives continued to occupy a central position in Jewish national life. The custom of proclaiming the new month and fixing the time of the holy days, now performed by the elders of the Jerusalem Beth Din instead of the Sanhedrin, was not interrupted. On festivals, particularly during Succoth, a multitude consisting of Jerusalem Jews who had





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been joined by their brethren from other parts of the land and from the Diaspora would ascend the mountain and celebrate the occasion with fervent chanting and prayer. An opposite mood prevailed when Jews would congregate on the mountain, facing the Temple ruins, and utter their sorrowful lament on the national day of mourning, the Ninth of Av. These observances continued until the end of the Gaonic times.



Pillar of Absalom

Since the early days of Jewish settlement in the Holy Land, the Mount of Olives has been known as the final resting place for Jews who achieved glory during their lifetime. Many of these graves consist of caves tunneled into the mountainside, some of them surmounted by imposing monuments of stone. Perhaps the best known landmark among these early tombs is the Pillar of Absalom, made familiar to Jews the world over by the many sketches and drawings which have appeared in print. While there is some question whether the Pillar of Absalom is the truly the burial place of King David's son, Absalom, there is a general agreement that this is the structure that is signified in the passage which states (*Samuel II*, 18: 18): "And Absalom betook himself and erected during his lifetime a monument after his name, and called it the Pillar of Absalom, until the present day."

Cave of Jehosaphat A little behind the Pillar of Absalom and to its right, in the hollow scooped out for the monument, stands a decorated entrance which leads to an ancient cave. According to tradition, large processions with musical accompaniment would come to this cave every few years to bring quantities of shemos-worn leaves of sacred scrolls and books—for burial in the mountainside.



Another famous monument which marks the grave of one of the illustrious figures on the Mount of Olives is the one erected over the tomb of the prophet Zachariah. Carved in one piece out of the solid mountain rock, the structure stands at the descent leading to the Kidron and the Valley of Jehosaphat. At the base stands the entrance to the burial cave with steps leading downwards.

Caves of the Prophets Not only the prophet Zachariah but also other great seers of olden times are allegedly interred on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, including Hulda, the prophetess. One cave, in particular, has gained repute as the final abode of several Jewish prophets. The cave itself is entered by a very old stone staircase leading downwards. Inside there are three other subterranean chambers branching off from the main cave. Fifty burial vaults, dating back to the first centuries after the Second Temple, are found in the walls of these chambers.

From its biblical beginnings as the burial place of the most princely figures in Israel, Har Ha-zethim became known as the last resting place of the most pious and learned Jews through the centuries. Among the oldest tombs are the tens of caves that are found scattered along its slopes and foothills. The names and origins of the

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esteemed persons buried there have been mostly forgotten; still, throngs of Jews visit these graves and pray there fervently, often shedding tears unexpectedly as the sanctity of their surroundings touches the innermost recesses of their hearts. It is known that in one particular cave Rabbi Obadiah of Barturo, author of the brilliant commentary on the Mishnah, lies interred.

As a result of the powerful yearning which Jews in all ages have felt for burial on the Mount of Olives, nearly 100,000 graves cover the mountainsides. From 1948 to 1967, while the Mount of Olives was in Arab hands, tens of thousands of graves were desecrated. Ancient burial grounds were recklessly dug up, buildings and monuments destroyed, and gravestones shattered everywhere.

The Holy Ohr Hachaim The Mt. of Olives is also the location of the grave of Rabbeinu Chaim ben Atar, known by the name of his great kabbalistic commentary, the holy *Ohr Hachaim*.

The community of Jerusalem would gather at this site whenever difficult questions arose. It was here that they felt that they could plead their case with the Almighty as the merit of the *Ohr Hachaim* would be beneficial.

Even today thousands arrive here on the anniversary of his death (15 *Tamuz*). The sight of so many Jews engrossed in supplication is truly inspiring.

The Pool of Siloam By following the dry bed of the Kidron, one is able to visit another famed historical landmark. In Biblical times, the city of Jerusalem originally received its water supply from the spring Gihon, which lay outside the walls. About 700 B.C.E. King Hezekiah, fearful that his enemies might besiege the city and cut off the water supply, called for a remarkable engineering feat. A tunnel approximately 1,700 feet long was bored through the hillside, which brought the waters of this Gihon to the Pool of Siloam, which was located inside the city. In *Tanach*, Hezekiah is highly praised for this accomplishment. An inscription on the wall of the tunnel was accidentally discovered in 1880, which describes the scene which took place when the tunnel was finally completed.

To protect the Siloam from the foe, two parallel walls with a gate-tower were constructed around the section where the pool stood. Through this gate Zedkiah, the last king of Judah, fled when Jerusalem was beleaguered by the Babylonians, only to be captured at Jericho as he attempted to reach the Jordan.

Tomb of the Prophet Samuel High up in the Judean hills, atop the tallest mountain that stands close to Jerusalem, a large stone building may be seen with two domed towers reaching to the sky. "Nebi Samuel" the Arabs call this landmark, for the point where it stands is the biblical Ramah, the burial place of the revered prophet Samuel. Depicted by our Sages as the equal of Moses and Aaron, Samuel is the only one among the seers of

Israel whose place of interment is mentioned in the *Tanach*. "Master of the prophets," as he is called, it is no wonder that the location of his tomb has been guarded by an unbroken tradition that spans many, many ages.

Visitors to this famed site must climb a peak almost 2,9000 feet above sea level. Some believe that Hannah, the mother of Samuel, is also buried on this ground. Still others claim that Samuel's father, Elkanah, and his two sons are likewise buried here. A pool of water near the tomb is alleged to have been used as a *mikvah*. Some 800 years ago, a synagogue stood near the grave where Jews would come to pray. In time, however, the synagogue gave way to a Moslem house of worship. Notwithstanding foreign intrusions, thousands of Jews from Middle Eastern communities made the arduous journey to the cave, making a special effort to arrive by the 28th day of *Iyar*, believed to be the day of the prophet's passing.

The Caves of the Great Sanhedrin At the northern perimeter of Jerusalem stands a cave,

dating back to antiquity, with a double layer of burial vaults within. An iron gate has been erected across the large entrance as a protective measure.



According to a tradition handed down by word of mouth from one generation to the next, this cave houses the graves of the seventy members of the Great Sanhedrin which presided during the Second

Temple. Over seven hundred years ago, an emissary to the Holy Land wrote of the existence of this cave. Other writers in later years corroborated this opinion. Of the many burial caves that are found along the edges of the Holy City containing the sepulchers of pious and learned Jerusalemites of long ago, the cave of the Great Sanhedrin is one of the few whose occupants are known today.

Tombs of the Kings In 1160, a scholarly traveler, Benjamin the son of Jonah, set out from Tudela, Spain, on a journey which lasted thirteen years. He visited cities and communities in Southern



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AN UPDATE...

A few months ago a plea to אחינו בני ישראל was articulated through an "Open Letter to Klal Yisroel" in The Jewish Observer. The open letter described in some detail the opportunity of a lifetime—the opportunity to change the course of Jewish history. Our responsibility to save every Jewish life that can be saved, is a responsibility that takes precedence over our everyday needs, and even over our everyday patterns of צדקה וחסד.

A fierce war is now raging in Eretz Yisroel! SHUVU/RETURN is locked in battle with the forces that want to finish the spiritual annihilation of Russian Jewry. Of the more than 150,000 Russian Jewish children in Eretz Yisroel, dedicated עסקנים have succeeded in enrolling approximately 3,500 students in full time Torah study. אשרי להם ואשרי חלקם. They know that ultimately their work will be crowned with success, because ברוך הוא בעצמו הקדוש guarantees that eventually every member of כלל ישראל will return to ה' יתברך.

The cry of each individual neshama begging to be re-united with השם יתברך is a cry we must hear, a cry which must generate a response of unrestrained commitment to the principle of כל ישראל ערבים זה לזה.

We must try to do for someone else's child what we would want for our own children. In peacetime, people are occupied with a livelihood; in wartime the vital issue is saving lives!

In response to that "Open Letter to Klal Yisroel," a melamed pledged \$7,200 payable over three years. A computer programmer dipped into his savings and gave \$5,000 previously earmarked for his children's weddings. A kollel member pledged to raise \$1,000 over the course of one year. More than fifty others gave or pledged \$1,000 or more.

We can be sure that their heroic deeds were inscribed בשמים ממעל as testimony to the heights Yidden can reach. As a result of these new donors four new programs were initiated: two new parents' programs were launched and two school expansions were begun.

Make no mistake! The war for these precious Jewish souls is not taking place in Eretz Yisroel. This war is being fought in Jewish homes and businesses in America! When one of you wonderful readers is moved to pledge \$1,000, we know כמד that one more precious נשמה has been saved. The facts speak for themselves.

SHUVU/RETURN has added almost 70 new classrooms to existing schools, thereby accomodating thousands of new Russian students. SHUVU/RETURN has hired trained Kiruv workers to show Russian parents the beauty of a Torah-true chinuch. SHUVU/

...FROM THE BATTLEFIELD

RETURN has located unused buildings and refurbished them to create new schools in areas that were a virtual wilderness. SHUVU/RETURN has provided after-school programs, summer camps and special Yom Tov programs to help create an overall Torah true environment. SHUVU/RETURN has coordinated the efforts of Russian Kiruv workers in Eretz Yisroel to achieve a nationwide network of cooperation and unity. Amazingly, SHUVU/RETURN has placed 3,500 children into Yiddishe chinuch for approximately \$1,000 per child.

Past performance is a clear indication of the ability of SHUVU/RETURN's selfless personnel to save lives for Torah and Yiddishkeit. More such programs are ready to be put into action. The outcome of the battle is now in your hands. When a relative is battling a life-threatening illness, we know we must spend tens of thousands of dollars to save a life. Through SHUVU/RETURN, we have the rare opportunity to save a Yiddishe neshama from almost certain destruction with the affordable sum of \$1,000 payable over 12 months.

SHUVU/RETURN has launched a national campaign to enroll 500 new associates in their work. A pledge of \$1,000 will make you a full partner in the rescue of an entire שבט מישראל. Please rise to the challenge and together let us merit the indescribable נחת of כל המקיים נפש אחת מישראל כאילו קיים עולם מלא.

Please call Avrohom Biderman (718) 236-3124 or Mordechai Mehlman (718) 692-3434 or Michoel Gutterman in Yerushalayim (02) 518-855. Contact the SHUVU/RETURN office at Suite 3300, 39 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10038; (212) 425-3500. Let them tell you the great things that your generous contribution will accomplish.

If you are going to Eretz Yisroel, let Michoel Gutterman show you first hand what SHUVU is doing and how much more it would do if it had the funds. One eye-witness visit will convince you to become a full member of the SHUVU team effort.

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Hope to see you soon. *Love, Israel*

Europe, Asia, and Africa, keeping a record of facts and statistics which were of interest not only for Jewish history but for world history as well. His "Travels" recounts that in 1171 he was in the holy city of Jerusalem which, he observes, is surrounded by tall hills. "And on Mount Zion," he remarks, "are the graves of the House of David and graves of the kings who reigned after him." Other travelers in the centuries that followed gave similar testimony in their writings. Thus there is sound documentation for the traditional belief that on this mountain, to the southwest of Jerusalem, were buried the royal descendants of David.

The Tomb of Simon the Just

Among the last of the Anshai'nesseth Ha-g'dolah—the Great Assembly, which was first convoked by Ezra—was Simon the Just, so named because of his deep piety, his devotion to Torah and the Temple worship, and deeds of kindness. Early in the thirteenth century it was already recorded that the tomb of this illustrious tzaddik is found in a cave dug out of the side of a mountain to the northeast of Jerusalem. Almost a century ago, Jews from the Holy City acquired this hallowed grave and the land surrounding it by paying a large sum of money to the Arabs who had taken possession of the site.



Like other burial caves found in the mountains, the walls of the interior contain a large number of burial vaults. It is believed that in these vaults lie eminent Jews renowned in their time for their righteousness and learning, among them many disciples of Rabbi Simon. His wife, too, is said to be buried there. In the corner of one of the rooms a vaulted chamber has been carved out of the rock. In this grave, we are told, Simon the Just lies buried.

Caves of the Small Sanhedrin and Calba Sovu'a

In the proximity of Simon the Just's cave are found two other caves which Jews have regarded as sacred since the time of the Second Temple. On the side of the road to Mount Scopus, a short distance before the grave of Rabbi Simon, stands another cave with burial vaults inside. According to tradition, this is the tomb of the small Sanhedrin, twenty-three in number, which also presided during the Second Temple.

Another important cave in this region is one which supposedly is the tomb of Calba Sovu'a, father-in-law of Rabbi Akiva who is listed among the three Jerusalemites of the Second Temple famed for their great affluence. Another of these wealthy personages, Nakdimon the son of Gurion, is also believed to be buried here. During his lifetime, Nakdimon was renowned for his charitable acts and marvelous deeds.

Tower of David At the entrance to the Old City, by the Jaffa Gate, stands one of the most familiar landmarks, the Tower of David. This structure, often used as a symbol of the Old City, was one of the three towers built by King Herod during the Second Temple.

Rachel's Tomb On the road leading southwards from Jerusalem, close to the town of

Bethlehem, a solitary monument may be seen. As the traveler approaches this lonely grave, he strangely fancies that he is a long lost son returning to his mother's house. And it is truly so, for in this tomb lies the mother of Israel who weeps for her children throughout the long night of the Diaspora. This is the grave of the eternally beloved Mother Rachel.

Our sages tell us why Rachel was buried on the roadside and not brought to rest in nearby Bethlehem. With prophetic vision our father Jacob foresaw that there would come a time when his descendants, as they were being driven by Nebuzaradan to exile in Babylonia, would pass this spot as they bent under the oppressor's yoke. Rachel's tomb was placed there so that her children, as they plodded by, would invoke their

mother to plead to G-d for mercy in their dire misery. Down through the ages this scene has repeated itself countless times. Jews troubled in spirit, sick at heart, bowed by tragedy come to the tomb of Rachel, to this memorial of everlasting motherhood, to seek comfort and solace.

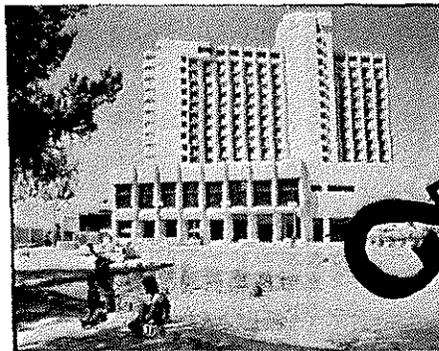
HEBRON

The Cave of Machpelah Second only to the Kotel Ha-ma'aravi is the Cave of Machpelah with its grounds which our father Abraham bought from the children of Heth, a sacred treasure cherished by Jews since earliest times. A visitor to this hallowed plot finds himself transported back to the very beginnings of our people, for in this sanctified corner lie our ancestral forbears, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and at their side our first mothers, Sarah, Rebecca, and Leah. But the memories regress to an even earlier age of history, to the time when Adam and Chava, the first man and woman, G-d's



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own creation, were put to rest in the Cave of Machpelah.

The buildings which surround the Cave of Machpelah today are not the work of Jewish hands. Various edifices were erected on the spot by non-Jews, the later buildings constructed on the ruins of the earlier struc-

tures. The original foundation and bottommost layers of the wall, however, are presumed to have been laid during the First or Second Temple.



The Hebron Cemetery

Our Sages have indicated that even in early times the city of Hebron was particularly suited to serve as a burial site. Since Jews first settled in the Holy Land, great men who bought glory to Israel were taken to Hebron after their passing. Of the judges who ruled over the country before the monarchy was established, the very first, Othniel the son of Kenaz, is believed to lie in the ancient cemetery of the city, together with his disciples. Likewise Jesse, the father of David, and Ruth the Moabite are presumed buried atop one of the Hebron hills where a Moslem mosque now stands. The tomb of Abner ben Ner, commander of the Jewish armies, lies close by the Cave of Machpelah. Hebron is also one of the

several cities where the Rambam is allegedly buried.

Hebron belonged to the dim past until 1929, when the city became the scene of a brutal Arab attack against Jewish residents. Among those who suffered martyrdom during the outbreak were students of the Hebron Yeshiva. A special section of the Hebron cemetery, called the "Brothers Grave," was set aside for the victims of this ruthless massacre.

Tombs of Nathan and Gad It should be noted that in traveling from Jerusalem to Hebron, one passes a place named Halhol. There lie buried two divinely inspired personages mentioned in the Tanach, Nathan the Prophet and Gad the Seer.

FROM JERUSALEM TO SHECHEM

The Ruins of Shiloh Turning northward from Jerusalem, on the road leading to Shechem, a small side road branches off to one of the early historic places of Israel, the site of Shiloh. There the *Mishkan* stood for more than three hundred and fifty years, until the First Temple was erected.

Jericho Tanach was the only source of information regarding ancient Jericho. When Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan, the first city which they marched against was the walled stronghold of Jericho.

In *Tanach*, Jericho is also denoted as the city whose inhabitants came to the prophet Elisha because the waters of the region were bad and the

ground barren. Elisha had a new cruse brought to him, filled with salt, and cast it into the spring, saying, "Thus saith G-d, I have healed these waters. There shall not be thence any more ... barren land." And we are told, "Thus the waters were healed unto this day."

This episode is commemorated in a spring which wells up at the edge of the city called the Spring of Elisha.

About half a mile from the spring are remains of a synagogue that was built in the fifth or sixth century. The mosaic floor which has been preserved has the picture of a menorah and both Hebrew and Hebrew-Aramaic inscriptions.

Joshua the Son of Nun, Nun, and Caleb the Son of Jephuneh

Further north, atop Mount Ephraim, lies the town of Hereth, identified in *Tanach* as the burial place of Joshua the son of Nun, successor to Moses. The location of Joshua's grave has been substantiated by a number of sources. The graves of Nun, the father of Joshua, and of Caleb the son Jephuneh, Joshua's contemporary, are also found in this area.

Joseph's Tomb Another sacred landmark that goes back to ancient times is the tomb of Joseph, which is located in Shechem, a city situated between the Biblical Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. In *Tanach* we are told that Joseph's moving plea,



"G-d shall remember you; and you shall bring up my bones from here," was heeded by the Israelites who carried his coffin with them for forty years in the desert. When they entered the Holy Land, Joseph was laid to rest on the plot of land that Jacob had purchased from Hamor, the father of Shechem. Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, are believed to be buried nearby.

GALIL

Tzefat (Safed) Since the sixteenth century, the city of Tzefat in the Upper Galil has been known as the center of Jewish mysticism. The Holy *Arizal*, Rabbi Isaac Luria, spent the last three years of his life in the holy city of Tzefat. Here he expounded on the mysteries of the *Zohar* and *Kabbalah*. It was here that he established his group of disciples, known as the lioncubs of the *Ari* (*Gurei Ha'Ari*) to whom he revealed his great teachings. His major disciple through whom he transmitted the authorized version of his teaching was the famed Rabbi Chaim Vital.

In the year 1572, a plague broke out in Tzefat, claiming the Holy *Arizal*. He was interred in the old cemetery in Tzefat. His son Moshe is buried next to him.

In close proximity is the *mikvah* that the Holy *Arizal* used while living in Tzefat. To this day people use that *mikvah* prior to praying at his grave.

Tzefat was also the home of Rabbi Joseph Karo, compiler of the *Shulchan Aruch*, and of Rabbi Jacob Beirav, who gained renown for his attempts to restore the *Sanhedrin*. Famed also for its numerous landmarks, the city includes among its historic places of worship two synagogues attended by the *Arizal*—one Sephardic, one Ashkenazic, and another dedicated to the early *Amora*, Rabbi Joseph Bannai,



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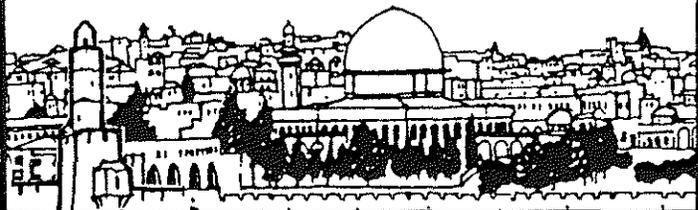
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who is buried in an adjoining chamber. There are also the Beth Yoseph Synagogue, the Abuhav Synagogue and the Avreicher Synagogue. In the southern part of the city is a cave which was allegedly the *Beth Hamidrash* of Shem and Eber where Torah was transmitted to the patriarch Jacob.



Other towering figures buried in Tzefat include the prophet Hosea ben Beari; the *Kohein Gadol* Jehoiadah, who served in the time of King Joash; Huzpith Hamturgman, one of the *Asarah Harugai Malchuth* (Ten Martyrs executed by the Romans); and the Yanuka, the wonder child of the *Zohar*.

It has been estimated that the number of pious, G-d-fearing Jews buried in Tzefat and its environs numbers in the hundreds of thousands. The prophets Obadiah and Joel are interred in this area, as are such Biblical figures as Barak ben Abinoam; Benaiah ben Jehoiadah, commander of King David's armies; and Adino the Ezrite, one of David's champions.

Scores of graves of *Tana'im* and *Amora'im* may be visited within this zone. *Chachmai Ha-Mishnah* of several generations are found here, including such familiar Sages as Rabbi Eliezer the Great, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah, Rabbi Judah bar Ilai, Nachum Ish Gamzu and Benyamin *Hatzadik*. Another of the *Asarah Harugai Malchuth*—the *Kohein Gadol* Rabbi Ismael ben Elisha—is also among those buried in the Tzefat section, as well as Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Chananya and Reb Pinchas ben Yair.

Amora'im, too, lie here in great number. On the gravestones one sees exalted names which have become part of the everyday vocabulary of the learned Jew. Resh Lakish, Rav Ashi—names which resound over and over again when Jews gather to study Torah.

Graves of eminent *chachamim* who lived in the Middle Ages also abound such as Rabbi Moses Cordoveiro, author of the Kabbalist work *Pardess Rimoni*; Rabbi Shlomo Alkabetz, composer of "L'cha Dodi"; and Rabbi Moshe Alsheich, author of an esteemed commentary on the Torah, and of later years the *Bas Ayn* Rabbi Avraham Meavrich, the *Be'er Mayim Chayim*.

It is believed that Hannah and her seven sons, all of whom suffered martyrdom at the hands of the Greeks shortly before the Maccabean uprising, are buried under the steep hill leading to the cemetery.

Amuka and Avnit: Rabbi Yonasan Ben Uziel The tradition regarding the grave of this holy Sage is very ancient indeed. Already in 1803, the *Me'galat Aveyeser* speaks of Kfar Amukah as the burial site of Rabbi Yonasan ben Uziel, the author of the *Targum* of Bible and the Prophets.

Reb Yonasan ben Uziel, who lived about sixty years prior to the destruction of the Temple, was the greatest of the disciples of Hillel the Elder.

Located on the outskirts of Tzefat, this picturesque place is called Amuka (lit. the depths) for it is located deep, almost in the bowels of the earth. Many visitors visit the grave of this great man. They see this as a place of blessing where their prayers for a life's helpmate (*shidduch*) will be answered.

Not far is a place called Avnit, the burial place of Abaye, Rava, Reb Yehuda Nesia and his *Beth Din* (Court); Rav Dimi M'Nehardoe; Rav Papa and his sons and Aba Shaul and his wife.

Meron: Tombs of Rabbi Simon Bar Yohai and Rabbi Elazar Northwest of Tzefat, built on a hill, stands the village of Meron, once the home of the saintly Rabbi Simon bar Yohai. When Rav Simon openly criticized the Romans who dominated the Holy Land, he was forced to take flight, and, together with his only son, Rabbi Elazar, he concealed himself in a cave. While in hiding he wrote the brilliant Kabbalistic work, the *Zohar*.

When the soul of Rabbi Simon passed into Gan Eden, his body was put to rest near the *Beth Hamidrash* where he had expounded his sacred teachings.

In all the centuries that followed the passing of Rabbi Simon, a ceaseless stream of worshipers from all parts of the Holy Land and from distant lands came to visit this sacred site. Even when the voyage to Meron was fraught with danger and hardships, Jews in the thousands would come to the holy tombs to pray, to entreat, to study, and to recite portions of the *Zohar*. At first, the graves of Rabbi Simon and his son were marked by simple stone structures; in the course of time, impressive monuments were erected in their place.

Tombs of Hillel and Shammai

Also buried in Meron are the two powerful sages of the early Talmudic period, Hillel the Elder and his ofttime opponent, Shammai. Both rabbis lie in caves surrounded by the burial vaults of their disciples. Near the tomb of Shammai lies another cave, quite large and lined with graves, which was reserved as the burial place for *Kohanim*. Other *Tana'im* and *Amora'im*, including Rabbi Yochanan Hansandlar and Rabbi Isaac Nafcha, Reb Ada Saba, Reb Yeba Saba and Reb Hamnuna Saba are also buried in the vicinity.



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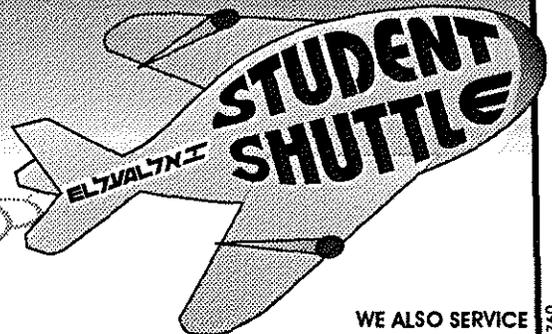
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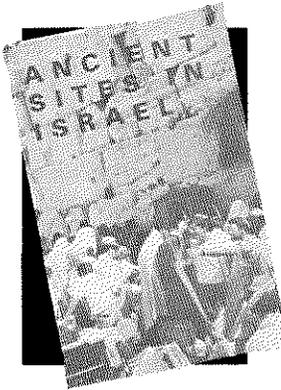
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Gush Chalav Near Meron in the village of Gush Chalav are the tombs of the great sages Shemaya and Avtalyon, Yochai the father of Rabbi Shimon, Yoel the prophet, and Rabbi Meir, author of Akdamoth.

Peki'in. according to the proud tradition of its inhabitants, has been settled by Jews virtually without interruption since earliest times. Only for a short period, after the Arab uprising in 1936, did the Jewish population flee the city. When the disturbances subsided, families returned to their homesteads to resume their ancient occupations of tilling the soil and breeding silkworms.

Near a spring in the center of town is a cave which is believed to have been the refuge of Rabbi



Simon bar Yohai and his son, Elazar, when they fled from the Romans in the second century.

The ruins of an ancient synagogue which dates back to the second or third century was restored in 1873. Within the synagogue are the remains of an even older synagogue.

Tiberias, founded about 2,000 years ago on the shores of Lake Kinnereth, is another center of hallowed territory which has figured largely in Jewish history since Talmudic times. When Jerusalem was destroyed and Judah ceased to be the focus of rabbinic learning, great academies were founded in Tiberias and the Galil. In this flourishing seat of higher learning the Mishnah was completed around the year 200 C.E. and the Palestinian Talmud about 200 years later.



Like Tzefat and Meron, Tiberias is renowned for its many ancient landmarks and graves, some of them dating back to Biblical times.

Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakai, founder of the Yavneh academy, lies here together with his closest disciples. Other *Tana'im*, including one of the greatest scholars of the second century, Rabbi Eliezer the Great, son of Hyrkanus, are buried nearby, as well as such illustrious *Amora'im* as Rav Ammi and Rav Assi. On this same plot of ground stands the tomb of the deeply cherished Rabbi Maimon, and his grandson Rabbi David Hanagid. Also on these grounds is the grave of a holy person who lived in the seventeenth century, Rabbi Isiah Hurwitz, known as the *Sheloh* because of his great work, *Sh'nai Luchoth Ha-brith*.

On the slope to the west of the city is the cave of the incomparable Rabbi Akiva, who fell as a martyr at the hands of the Romans. According to tradition, his twenty-four thousand disciples are buried on the surrounding hillside. His wife is also believed to be lying nearby. Rabbi Moshe Chaim Lutsato, author of the famous *Mesilat Yesharim* is also buried there.

By far the most impressive monument in the Tiberias area is that of Rabbi Meir Ba'al Ha'ness (Master of Miracles) which is situated among the hot



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springs for which the city is famous. Rabbi Meir, one of the most frequently quoted *Tana'im* of the *Mishnah*, is called *Ba'al Ha'ness* because it was through his divinely assisted intervention that his wife's sister was released from captivity by the Romans. Because of these miraculous powers, the grave of Rabbi Meir has been recognized as an especially important sanctuary for those who find themselves in distressing straits. The tombs of Sumchus and Reb Shimon Ben Elazar are also there.



The Graves of the Matriarchs In a cave located on the outskirts of Tiberias are the catacomb graves of Yocheved, mother of Moshe Rabeinu, her daughter Miriam, and her two daughters-in-law Zipporah wife of Moshe, and Elisheva wife of Aharon Hakohein.

Early sources (*Seder Hadoros*) refer to a "City of the Matriarchs" outside Tiberias wherein are buried these great women. Some are of the opinion that the wives of Yaakov, Bilha and Zilpa are also buried there.

The Old Cemetery in Tiberias, a veritable treasure trove for graves of the great Chasidic masters such as Reb Menachem Mendel of Vitebsk, the Holy Koheln of Kalisk, Reb Avrohom, the grandfather of R' Nachman of Breslov, Rabbi Nachman of Horodenka, Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Premishlan, Rabbi Yaakov Shimshon of Shpitovke, Rabbi Zev Wolf of Tchami and Rabbi Chaim Abulafia.

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All through the year, throngs of Jews come to visit the Cave of Elijah. There they recite the special prayers that were composed for this occasion. On the day after *Shabbath Nachamu*, when the promise of the redemption is read in all synagogues, the number swells into the thousands, a large proportion of them from the Near Eastern communities. With deep piety they pray for the day when Elijah will return to earth and escort us, together with *Moshiach Tzidkeinu*, *Birheiru V'Yomeinu*. Amen!

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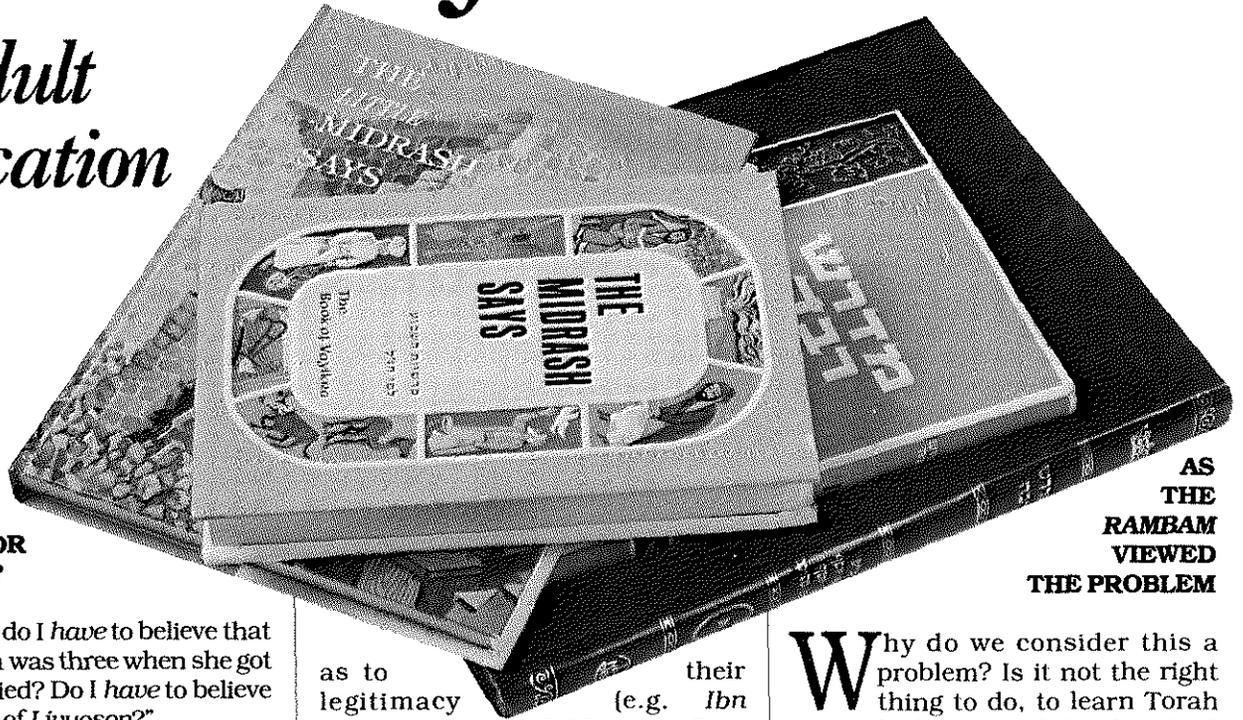
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The Use of Midrash

in Adult Education



IS EVERY MIDRASH FOR EVERYONE?

“Rabbi, do I have to believe that Rivka was three when she got married? Do I have to believe in the stories of *Livyoson*?”

So asked a Russian girl in her early twenties, a newcomer to the study of Torah.

The use of *Midrash* in adult education is constant and recurring. Many educators, however, are not aware that it can create problems.

There are many types of *Midrashim* in our literature. Some are called *Aggados* and are included in the *Gemora*, which endows them with total authority. Others are found in different books or collections, some of which are universally accepted, such as *Midrash Tanchuma*. Other books, also called “*Midrashim*,” are the subject of controversy. *Rishonim* disagree

Rabbi Hassan, a native of Gibraltar, studied in the Yeshiva of Gateshead as well as the *Kollel* in Johannesburg. He served as chaplain to the Jewish students of the University of Witwatersrand and the Universities of Manchester, and currently is the program director of Project SEED Europe—an adult outreach program.

Rabbi Kupetz was born in Manhattan’s Lower East Side and was educated in American *yeshivos* as well as the Gateshead *Kollel* and the Yeshiva of Manchester, where he was a *Maggid Shiur*. He is the director at *Reshet* Adult Torah Education Network of Greater Manchester.

This article originally appeared in the *London Tribune*, Agudath Israel of Great Britain’s weekly.

The Jewish Observer, May 1993

as to their legitimacy (e.g. *Ibn Ezra*, *Shemos* 2,22; see *Avi Ezer*, which rejects some that are quoted by *Yalkut Shimoni*). Their origin is questionable. Should we cite them?

Important educational questions arise even within those *Midrashim* that are certainly authoritative. Are we meant to—are we allowed to—take all *Midrashim* at face value?

Those of us who have had a Jewish education from childhood may not realize how ingrained *Midrashim* are in our psyche. We view the stories of *Tanach* so utterly through the eyes of the *Midrashim* that we often do not know where *p’shat* ends and *Midrash* starts. Unfortunately, our childhood perception remains with us as we grow up, and we do not think of the narratives of *Tanach* in any other form.

Those of us who have benefited from an advanced yeshiva or seminary education have heard *Midrashim* explained at deeper levels. Nevertheless, that does not always stop us from quoting the *Midrash kipshuto* (in the literal sense) when learning *Chumash* with an adult beginner, as if the beginner were a six-year-old *cheder yingel*.

AS THE RAMBAM VIEWED THE PROBLEM

Why do we consider this a problem? Is it not the right thing to do, to learn Torah through the eyes of the *Gedolim*? Take note of the words of the *Rambam*:

“There are three different types of people when it comes to understanding the *Midrashim* and *Aggados*. The majority of people take the words of *Chazal* at face value and do not attempt to explain them at all. In their eyes, the unreasonable and impossible becomes an article of faith.

Their reason for taking this approach is simple ignorance. Unfortunately, they have not come across anyone who could explain matters to them. They honestly think that their simple, superficial understanding of the *Midrashim* reflects the intention of the authors. Presenting these simplistic ideas which may contain some impossibilities to a public or to individuals would cause great astonishment: “...How on earth can anyone say such things and honestly believe them to be true, and find them appealing?”

Such people are extremely unfortunate. I pity their foolishness. They think they are elevating the status of *Chazal*, whereas in fact they are

degrading it to the lowest level...while remaining blissfully ignorant of what they are doing—destroying the honor of the Torah and blackening its reputation. In fact, they convert the Torah into the very opposite of what *Hashem* intended it to be!

Look at the Torah. How does *Hashem* describe it?

"...It is your knowledge and wisdom in the eyes of the nations who, when they hear of these statutes, will say, this great nation is surely a wise and understanding people" (*Devarim* 4,6).

The people we are referring to explain the words of *Chazal* in such a way that, if the nations were to hear them, they would say, "...This petty nation is surely a foolish and worthless people."

Much of this is achieved by those who try to teach what they themselves do not understand. Remaining silent would be the wisest thing they could do. Alternatively, they should state clearly that they do not understand what *Chazal* meant. Because they *think* they understand, however, they allow themselves to relate their ideas to others as they understand them, rather than telling them what *Chazal* actually meant. They quote the *Aggados*, such as those in the last chapter of *Sanhedrin* and other such sources, verbatim and in stark simplicity.

The second group is also very large and is comprised of those who see the words of *Chazal* in their simplicity, believe them to be as they are, and scoff and mock them. They then consider themselves wiser and more knowledgeable than *Chazal*. To them, the sages are fools

Teaching an adult in a *kiruv* situation is completely different from teaching a *frum* child in *cheder*. Unless we realize this, we could be guilty of pushing people away from *Yiddishkeit* and creating the impression that religious Jews, *chalilla*, believe in nonsense, fairy tales and ancient "legends."

and idiots, lacking in all wisdom and science. Most of these are people who are educated in secular sciences and consider themselves thinking people.

They are worse than the first group.

The third group is so small, it can hardly be called a group. These are the ones who really understand how great *Chazal* were and that their words reveal great and deep truths. They know what is the reasonable and possible and what is the unreasonable and impossible. They know that *Chazal* did not speak empty words, but words with a depth and a meaning that go beyond the superficial. Anything impossible said by *Chazal* is simply metaphor. When speaking of lofty ideas, *Chazal* couched them in allegorical terms. This is the style of the wise. *Shlomo Hamelech* opens *Mishlei* with the statement: "...to understand parables and allegories...the words of the wise and their *chiddos*." Those who understand the Hebrew language know that when saying "*chiddos*," he is referring to phrases in which the true meaning is deep, and not superficial. When the very wise speak of great and lofty principles, they speak about them only in allegorical form. We should not, therefore, be surprised to find that *Chazal* also couched their teachings of deep ideas, in allegories and clothed in common language. *Shlomo Hamelech* himself wrote the entire *Shir HaShirim*, *Mishlei* and parts of *Koheles* in such a style. Why, then, should it surprise us if we must seek deep explanations in the words of *Chazal*, deny their superficial meaning, and make their words conform with that which is sensible and true? They themselves often explained many of the words of *Tanach* as being allegorical, denying their superficial meaning in favor of the deeper meaning. 99

(These words are quoted in a loosely translated, adapted form from the *Rambam's* introduction to *Chetlek*, the last chapter of *Sanhedrin*.)

The *Rambam* is quite adamant: Many *Midrashim* were never meant to be taken at face value. Not only were they not meant to be taken at face value, it is *wrong* and *false* to take them at face value.

Others spoke in a similar manner. For example, Rabbi Yehuda HeChassid, in *Sefer Chassidim* (297) quotes the *Yerushalmi*, *Pesachim* 5,3 (there are different versions of the text of this *Yerushalmi*):



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Rebbe said that he had a tradition from his forefathers not to teach Aggada to people who have...little Torah...and not to tell astonishing Aggados to...[those] who might say, "There is nothing in it, and since there is nothing in this branch of Torah, there is nothing in other branches of Torah"...nor to the ignorant, and to all those who scoff at the Aggados.

SELECTING MIDRASHIM FOR THE WESTERNIZED ADULT

Returning to our situation, will our adult, Western-educated *talmid(ah)* who is (a) trained in science, (b) influenced by pseudo-science, and (c) swimming in a liberal sea of unbridled *kefira* (apostasy), be attracted by our presentation of *Midrash* or *Aggada*, or repulsed by it?

Teaching an adult in a *kiruv* situation is completely different from teaching a *frum* child in *cheder*. Unless we realize this, we could be guilty of pushing people away from *Yiddishkeit* and creating the impression that religious Jews, *chaililla*, believe in nonsense, fairy tales and ancient "legends." ("Legends!" That's the key word!)

We also have to be aware of the ex-

istence of alternative, even conflicting, opinions within the words of Chazal. Where there is conflicting opinion in *Midrash* and *Aggada*, one is not bound to decide in favor of the one opinion over another. Since no *halacha* is at stake, all opinions can retain equal status.

Our problem is compounded by our having *Rashi's* choice of *Midrash*, as quoted in his commentary on the Torah, fixed in our mind and interwoven with the *p'shat*. Often, *Rashi* differentiates between *peshuto* and *medrasho*. Just as often, he merely quotes the *Midrash* or explains the *Chumash* according to the *Midrash* without identifying his source. In any case, what happens to the "other opinions" in that same *Midrash*, which *Rashi* did not quote? Very often we are not even aware of their existence.

Should we quote to the adult student the first opinion within the *Midrash* that comes to mind? Might there not be another view in the *Midrash* on the same subject, a view which might be more "palatable," more "reasonable" and more understandable to the student?

Our first object in this discussion

"Anything impossible said by Chazal is simply metaphor. When speaking of lofty ideas, Chazal couched them in allegorical terms. This is the style of the wise."—
The Rambam

is to draw attention to how wrong it is to quote *Midrashim* in an unqualified way within an adult education framework. Similarly, it is wrong to quote an astonishing, "impossible" opinion where a more "feasible" opinion exists within the works of Chazal.

And, where an opinion is the only opinion, but is not palatable in its superficial presentation to the mind and taste of the "modern" beginner, why must it be quoted at all at this early stage of education?

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DEALING WITH SPECIFICS

In our original case, the teacher (who was responsible for the student posing these questions about Rivka and *Livyoson* to a rabbi) had chosen:

(a) To give more information than necessary. One could have taught the student just as well without including those quotations.

(b) To give information of a type that adult students find difficult to relate to, in a situation where:

(c) there is an alternative, more "acceptable" option. Rivka was fourteen at the time, according to the *Ba'alei Tosafos's* text of the *Seder Olam*;

(d) the subject is a highly esoteric one (*Livyoson*), but was presented in such a way that it was taken at face value.

It took the Rabbi quite some time and effort to remedy the situation.

THE IMPERATIVE TO TEACH THE MIDRASH

This does not mean that teaching *Aggados* and *Midrashim* are to be avoided. To the contrary, we should—but when, and only when, we know how to teach them. This includes knowing whom we are teaching. In such cases, we can actually create a *Kiddush Hashem* as realization dawns on the beginner that the Torah is so full of wisdom.

Aggada and *Midrash* will only achieve the desired end in the hands of a teacher who understands the pupil and understands the system employed by the authors of the text. *Chazal* used the vehicle of *Aggada* to transmit great and lofty principles of *Emuna*, or deep, mystical secrets. Much that was too precious to reveal indiscriminately was couched in the language of the *Aggada* and the *Midrash*.

In truth, there are few subjects that can prove as appealing to a beginner as a wise revelation of the deeper meaning of a *Midrash*. *Chazal* tell us that *Aggados* draw us towards *Hashem* and help us to recognize Him. But one has to have the right "key" to their understanding and presentation. One has to know how to

Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, זצ"ל, was a master at explaining *Chazal*, and his *talmidim* after him have educated generations of men and women, showing them time and again deep insights into *Chazal*.

select, what to leave out, and how to convincingly present and explain what one does teach. One also has to know whom one is teaching. Otherwise, one is better off avoiding *Midrash* (as the *Rambam* and Rabbi Yehuda HeChassid tell us).

"If so," you may ask, "how does one go about teaching *Aggada* to adults?"

There is no easy way or short-cut. One must devote time and effort to learning what and how to teach their subjects from a suitably qualified *Rebbe*. We are fortunate in this country [i.e. England] that the foundations of high-level Torah study were laid by Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler, זצ"ל. He was a master at explaining *Chazal*, and his *talmidim* after him have educated generations of men and women, showing them time and again deep insights into *Chazal*. Books, too, are available, which, depending on our level, can be used to guide us in this vital area of Talmud Torah.

Techniques may be learned by studying *Ramchal's Ma'amar on Aggados*, the introduction of Rabbi Avraham ben Harambam, found in the Vilna edition of the *Ein Yaakov*; the Introduction of the *Rambam* himself to *Petrek Cheilek*, which we quoted above; the works of the *Maharal*; and many other such *seforim*. A modern work in English is Rabbi Aaron Feldman's translation and adaptation of the Vilna Gaon's commentary on some obscure *Aggados*, published (by Feldheim) under the title *The Juggler and the King*.

SOME RULES OF THUMB

For the meantime, let us offer some guidelines for teaching *Midrash* and *Aggada* within an adult education situation:

1. Recognize the problem as detailed above.
2. Evaluate the student.

3. At the first encounter with *Aggada* or *Midrash*, and often after that, one should explain to the student that *Chazal* were speaking in metaphor, allegory and parable. This is a most important, basic foundation to emphasize. It would be useful to quote the *Rambam* brought above where he elaborates on the fact that the wise always conveyed deep ideas in this way.

4. Before starting a lesson, one should check through the *Midrashim* or *Aggados* that are going to be featured to see whether they contain "rational impossibilities." If they do, one should consider whether to exclude them or whether to try and find an explanation. Explanations are not necessarily deep or profound. For example, *Chazal* were not averse to using some types of exaggerations. Where today we would say "a million," *Chazal* would at times say, "three hundred." According to some commentaries, this figure was the equivalent of saying "a huge number."

5. If one cannot find an explanation, or one is not sure that one has understood the *Chazal* correctly, one should say so. Make it clear that their words are so deep that you are respectfully venturing an educated guess, or no guess at all.

6. One must consider the person one is teaching. It is not very gratifying to learn with someone who is always saying, "I do not understand." Try and find answers. Consult the experts.

7. One should introduce the intelligent student to English-language works that reveal the wisdom of *Chazal* (e.g. *The Juggler and the King*), or introduce them to a suitable *shiur* where *Chazal* are explained in depth. Many of these are available on tape, although they should be checked for suitability.

In this way one will, hopefully,

avoid finding oneself in the situation in which a young seminary graduate recently found herself. Someone to whom she was trying to teach the *Sidra* said to her, "It's all piffle!" after hearing a *Midrash* quoted by *Rashi*.

We can take a final idea from the *Rambam's* words at the end of *Hilchos Me'ila*:

"It is only right that a person should delve deeply into the laws of our Holy Torah and try to penetrate their depths as far as he is capable. Should he find no reason for any point, he should nevertheless not take it lightly. He should not think about the Torah as one thinks of secular matters. See how severely the Torah takes the concept of *Me'ila*, of inadvertent desecration of sacred items. By dedicating wood, stones, dust and ashes to the Sanctuary with simple words, one associates them with G-d's Name, and they become sanctified. Should they subsequently be treated as profane, even inadvertently, atonement is needed. How much more so that the words of G-d should not be profaned, simply because we do not understand them!" ■

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Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik

זכרונו לברכה

Several thousand *talmidim* and followers of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik gathered to pay their last respects to their 90 year-old teacher and mentor at his *levaya* on April 11, third day *Chol Hamoed Pesach*, in Boston. They were joined in their mourning by thousands of others the world over.

Rabbi Soloveitchik was born in the Polish town of Pruzhan to Rabbi Moshe Soloveitchik (of Brisk) and Rebbitzin Pesha (daughter of Rabbi Elya Feinstein). His primary teacher in Talmud was his father, while his mother provided him with a rigorous secular education. In 1925, at age 22, he enrolled in the University of Berlin, where he earned a doctorate of philosophy in 1931. That same year he married Tonya Lewitt, his lifemate until she passed away in 1967.

In 1932, they emigrated to Boston, where he served as *Rav* until his final illness. He founded the Maimonides School in 1937, the first Hebrew Day School in New England.

When his father, Reb Moshe, passed away in 1941, he succeeded him as *Rosh Yeshiva* in Yeshivas Rabbeinu Yitzchak Elchanan, where he had profound impact on the thousands of young men who passed through his classes. He also served as professor of philosophy in Yeshiva

University's Bernard Revel Graduate School. His weekly Talmud lectures in both New York and Boston were attended by hundreds of laymen. His annual *Yahrzeit* discourses in honor of his father and his wife attracted thousands.

While Rabbi Soloveitchik was affiliated with Agudath Israel in the 30's and he addressed its national conventions during those years, he later became the honorary head of the American Religious Zionists (Mizrachi). He also was Chairman of the Halacha Committee of the Rabbinical Council of America.

Rabbi Soloveitchik's legacy took many forms. Many of his works revealed a strong tension between the Brisk of his youth and the Berlin of his early adulthood. His *talmidim*, in their *hespeidim*, recalled his penetrating *shiurim*, his vast knowledge, and his dynamic, vibrant delivery. At the same time, exponents of *Torah Umadda* emphasized how he was alone in the path he took—especially in his published writings, *Ish Hahalakha* and *Lonely Man of Faith*—with regard to synthesizing Torah, classic literature and modern philosophy, in admitted departure from the Torah world from which he came. In effect, these works offered an eloquent portrayal of a turbulent inner struggle.

Rabbi Soloveitchik rarely spoke out publicly on major issues, and was frequently quoted in conflicting manner by different people (for example, in such matters as membership in religious organizations with Reform and Conservative groups). He has been cited as explaining himself: "I have many pupils, I have many disciples, but I never impose my views on anyone." Thus, "he allowed his students to issue highly divergent rabbinic rulings, with both camps able to claim... [him] as their legal source and mentor." (*Jewish Week*, April 16, 1993)

Nevertheless, he was unequivocal on several issues, such as rejection of theological dialogue with Christian groups; decrying attempts to tamper with halachic precedent in regard to innovations in the marriage contract, and the idea that changing morés of society and culture can justify change in principles set forth in the Talmud and *halacha*; and opposition to entering a Conservative synagogue or one without a *mechitza*, even to hear *shofar* on Rosh Hashana.

His passing leaves a vacuum in the specific role that he in effect created—a vacuum that cannot conceivably be filled by any other individual. ■

SECOND LOOKS

“Dear Mrs. Clinton”

THE PROMISE AND THE PERIL OF HEALTH CARE REFORM

[*Editor's Note:* One of President Bill Clinton's first official acts was to establish a task force on national health care reform, and to appoint his wife, Hillary Rodham Clinton, as its chairperson. The task force's agenda is both ambitious and challenging: finding a way to control the spiraling costs of health care, while at the same time assuring that all Americans will enjoy basic coverage. The task force is about to present its recommendations, which are sure to kindle a national debate over this important issue.

[The Torah community in the United States will have a major stake in the outcome of that debate. The following letter to Mrs. Clinton, written by Agudath Israel of America's director of government affairs and general counsel, **Chaim Dovid Zwiebel**, explains why.]

April 30, 1993

Mrs. Hillary Rodham Clinton, Chair
The President's Task Force on National Health Care Reform
Old Executive Office Building,
Room 287
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mrs. Clinton:

As the President's Task Force on National Health Care Reform readies

its recommendations to the nation, Agudath Israel of America takes this opportunity to congratulate you on your months of intensive work on this complex issue. You can be assured that our organization — the largest grassroots Orthodox Jewish movement in the United States, whose policies are determined by some of the most outstanding Orthodox rabbinic scholars of our time — appreciates the urgency with which the health care crisis needs to be addressed, recognizes that fundamental reform will not come without sacrifice, and looks forward to participating in the national debate sure to be generated by the Task Force's proposals.

Based on what we have heard from our constituents over the past several months, we are confident that Orthodox Jews throughout the United States will be prepared to do their part to make health care reform work. As consumers and providers of health care services, they are deeply concerned about issues of access, cost, quality and equitability — all issues that are central to the Task Force's deliberations. In this respect, Orthodox Jews are like all Americans; these fundamental issues transcend categories of race, ethnicity and creed.

Yet there are some issues on which the perspective our constituents will bring to the table is likely to reflect some of the unique concerns and views they have as Orthodox Jews. Following is a brief overview of two of those issues: one relating to pre-natal and pediatric care, which is of particular importance to us because of the demographic profile of the Orthodox Jewish community; and the other relating to the “rationing” of health care coverage, which could have a significant impact on the ability of Orthodox Jews to observe the tenets of their faith.

1. Pre-Natal and Pediatric Care:

One of the key objectives of health care reform, obviously, is a system that assures basic coverage for all Americans. It is entirely unacceptable that some 30-40 million Americans have no coverage whatsoever. Many others do have some coverage, but it is inadequate to meet some of their most basic health care needs.

This is particularly objectionable in light of the fact that so many of these uninsured and underinsured Americans are children and pregnant women. In its 1991 report to the nation, “Beyond Rhetoric: A New American Agenda for Children and Families,” the National Commission on Children (of which the undersigned was a member) indicates that approximately 13 percent of all children under 18 and nine percent of all pregnant women have no health care coverage. Their lack of access to appropriate basic care deprives millions of

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America's most vulnerable citizens a healthy start in life — perhaps the single most significant factor in health problems that recur throughout the life cycle.

As a community that tends to have large families, Orthodox Jews have an especially substantial stake in promoting policies that assure universal access to adequate pre-natal and pediatric care. Although we have no way of measuring precisely how many children and pregnant women in our community lack adequate coverage, anecdotal evidence suggests that the number is significant — and growing. In evaluating the Task Force's forthcoming recommendations, Agudath Israel will thus be especially interested in how the proposal addresses the needs of the millions of Americans without adequate health care coverage, and especially children and pregnant women.

2. "Rationing": Another issue to which Agudath Israel will pay close attention is the extent to which the Task Force's proposal will preserve the right of individuals to receive health care services even in circumstances where their "quality of life" may be severely diminished, or where a dispassionate "cost-benefit analysis" may lead some in the medical community or in the field of public policy to conclude that treatment should not be provided or covered. There has been a great deal of speculation that expanding health care coverage horizontally, to bring greater numbers of Americans into the system, may be achieved by contracting coverage vertically, so that fewer medical interventions would be covered. Oregon has already embraced a form of health care "rationing" as a means of controlling costs while bringing more people into the system. From Agudath Israel's perspective, this painful trade-off would raise extremely serious concerns.

The Oregon approach fundamentally alters one of the basic principles that has heretofore governed the delivery of health care services in this country: that each patient has the ultimate say in the course of his or her treatment. When coverage is withheld for treatments that government or other third-party insurers deem low on the list of critical interventions, the

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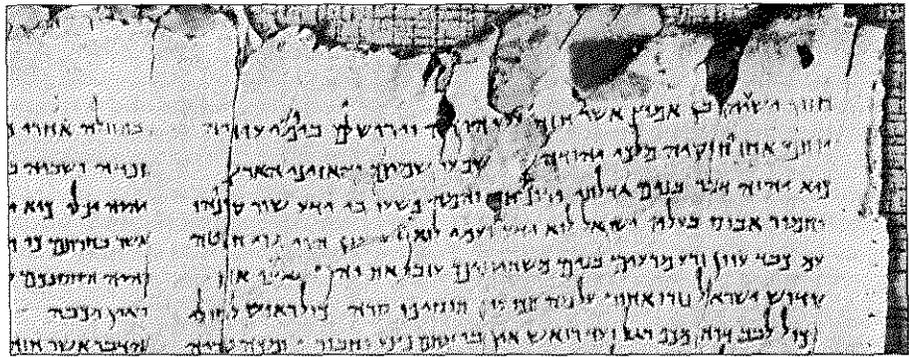
The Mishna, The Dead Sea Scrolls and the Authenticity of the Oral Law

Why are these Scrolls different...?

Presumably, most JO readers are like me in that they have little interest in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Whether the Qumran sect, which wrote the scrolls, were Essenes, as prevailing theory has it, or Sadducees (*Tzaddokim*), as New York University's Lawrence Schiffman believes makes no difference. The Qumran sect, whoever they were, denied the validity of the Oral Torah and the authority of the *mesorah*. In this respect, they were little different from Karaites of the Geonic period or the Conservative and Reform Jews of today.

The controversy surrounding the Scrolls can be amusing, however, and with this in mind, I began to read a *Jewish World* article (April 16, '93) on a recent court case involving a scroll called the MMT (for *Mikzas Ma'aseh Torah*). This scroll was reconstructed from fragments by Elisha Qimron, whose claim to a copyright was recently upheld by an Israeli court.

Levi Reisman, a practicing attorney and CPA in Manhattan, also finds time to contribute to *The Jewish Observer*, most recently with "What Makes an American Jewish Community?" (Nov. '92).



What makes the MMT interesting, according to reporter Jeff Helmreich, is that the MMT "is the single most compelling archeological proof of the authenticity of the *Mishna*." My first question was, why does the *Mishna* even need archeological proof of its authenticity? Let's start from the beginning.

The MMT scroll is a treatise, written at 100-200 years before the destruction of the Second Temple by the leader of the Qumran sect explaining why the sect separated from the mainstream of Jewish society. Helmreich states that unlike most of the scrolls, which are void of *halacha* and traditional references, "the document is rich with analogies and comparative arguments that draw exclu-

sively on *halacha* and descriptions of the Second Temple, later set down in the *Mishna*."

To us, this should not be exceptional. After all, the *Mishna* is a written transcription of *halachos* that were transmitted orally from the revelation at Sinai to the time of Rabbi Yehuda haNassi. This being the case, nearly everything contained in the *Mishna* should have been common knowledge during the time the Qumran sect was active. According to Helmreich, however, modern "scholarly" theory holds "that the Mishnaic authors forged accounts of the Temple and other aspects of earlier periods because these later rabbis could not have known about them in such detail."

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Further investigation reveals some nuances in the modern theory that we cannot ignore, much as we would like to. The modern scholar believes that the *Tannaim*, starting with Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai, "reconstructed" and "rebuilt" Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple. The *Churban* (as we all know) was a catastrophe of immense proportion, which (as they see it) destroyed the foundations of Jewish existence. In reaction to this, the *Tannaim* "created" a new form of Judaism, which they called "rabbinic Judaism," which enabled the Jewish people to survive.

On the strength of the Mishna...

We, of course, know that the Torah, both Oral and Written, was given to Moshe at Sinai, and handed down from generation to generation. It is only with the redaction of the *Mishna* by Rabbi Yehuda haNassi, however, that we have a direct historical and literary link that even non-believers can discern. When one denies the true origins of the *Mishna*, one denies the Divine Origin of the entire Oral Law, and—as a result—the authority of the *gedolei Torah* who uphold and trans-

mit that law in our generation. (For the secular Zionist, there is another "benefit." The destruction of the Second Temple began the *Galut*, which, in the Zionist view, ended with the founding of the State of Israel, in 1948. And just as the *Galut*, in this view, ended, so has the need for a religious system, which arose only to cope with the *Galut*.)

This is what makes the MMT scroll so interesting. The modern theory as to the origin of the *Mishna* is a direct challenge to the authority of the Oral Torah. Throughout our history, "reformers" have attacked the validity of the Oral Torah before anything else, for by denying the Oral Torah, they deny the foundations of rabbinical authority. So too the modern theories as to the origin of the *Mishna*.

The MMT scroll, by showing that the *halachos* of the *Mishna* predated the *Churban* by at least 100 years, has not only refuted a modern scholarly theory, but has reaffirmed the entire structure of Jewish law and belief.

The battle isn't over, however; until the coming of *Moshiach*, there will no doubt be other attacks in other forms. Still, it is nice to know that those who attacked us in the past have furnished us with a means of answering today's challengers. Ironic it is, that the Qumran sect, which denied the authority of the Oral Torah and those who transmitted and taught it, has given us the means to refute its ideological progeny. ■

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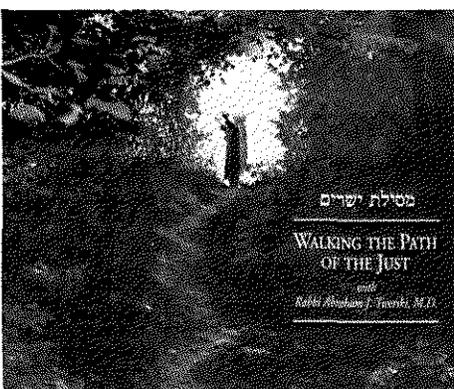







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“So, what happened?” I urged her on gently.

“I cried and cried,” Naomi continued with choked emotion, “and I raged at Hashem. Hashem, not only is my husband gone, but now my only source of spiritual solace is gone, too. Why are You doing this to me?” I

Nine-fifteen A.M.—the hands of the clock wave farewell to a helter-skelter morning of misplaced books, lost shoes, cries for snacks and *mitzva* notes—and ushers in that lazy cup of morning coffee. A chance to muse, a chance to mull over simply nothing. A chance to clear one's mind. At one such time last week, just as I was savoring the last drop of warm comfort, the telephone rudely interrupted with its shrill ring.

“Hello, Menucha, is that you? Menucha, you'll never believe what happened,” she exulted.

Finally, I recognized the voice. It was my friend, Naomi. Naomi is a young widow. So very young and vulnerable to battle the storms of life alone. Aloneness echoes heavily. It is an iron weight constantly pressing on her heart, threatening always to engulf her in yet one more wave of pain. Her nine children, bereft of one stronghold, now cling tenaciously to their only remaining anchor. Naomi never lets them down.

“Remember last week was my husband's *Yahrzeit*?” she continued, impatient to get the words out. “I don't have to tell you that this time every year is extremely difficult for me. The pain is overwhelmingly traumatizing.” She paused. I was silent. How could I even pretend to commiserate with her?

“Anyway, for several days before the *Yahrzeit*, I secluded myself totally. I refused to speak to anyone besides my children. I simply wanted to be left alone. Alone with my renewed grief.”

Her words hit me sharply.

“On one of those mornings, I desperately needed a balm for my

wounds, so I dialed a telephone *shuir* for some words to warm my soul. You probably recall that I enjoy Rabbi

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moaned as my anger subsided and slowly sank into depression. All I could do was sit there and weep until there were no more tears."

I swallowed hard. What a miserable predicament. *What did Hashem want from her?* I wondered. Naomi didn't leave me wondering for long.

"And then, Menucha, something just incredible happened.

"That evening, my fourteen-year-old son came home from yeshiva at his usual late hour. He ate a quick snack and retreated to the living room with a *Gemora*. I was tidying the kitchen, still licking my wounds of that morning, when suddenly I heard a familiar, soothing voice filling the room. A warm glow suffused my entire being.

"Dovid' I shouted over the din, 'what is that you're listening to?'"

"What, Ma? Oh—the tape? I'm learning this *Gemora* on my own with Rabbi Gold's tape."

"Rabbi Gold?' I nearly shrieked. I trembled as my eyes felt hot and my mouth went dry. 'Rabbi Shimon Gold?'"

"Yes, Ma. Have you ever heard of him? He's a *Rebbe* in a yeshiva. You know, Ma, he explains the *Gemora* so clearly, I can understand it without anyone else's help. He's just marvelous.' Menucha, I tell you, he was practically bubbling over with enthusiasm."

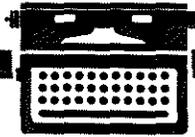
Naomi stopped to catch her breath and in a hushed, tear-filled murmur, she whispered, "You know, Menucha, *Hashem* really didn't take Rabbi Gold away from me as I had thought. He just sent Rabbi Gold to me in a different way—through my son."

"Oh, my goodness," I breathed, unable to utter another word.

"Don't you see, Menucha? I can't learn *Gemora* with my son. Look at *Hashem's* kindness. He enlisted my very own inspirational *Rebbe* to teach my orphaned son."

"Naomi," I finally recovered, "what unbelievable *Hashgacha!*"

"Yes," she replied. "My vision had been clouded. I couldn't see *Hashem's* loving hand through my veil of pain. But now, I bask in the warmth of *Hashem's* concern. He is truly our Father—and especially Dovid's." ■



Letters to the Editor

QUESTIONING REVEREND LEESER'S "EXTRAORDINARY YIRAS SHAMAYIM"

To the Editor,

I read with interest the article by Lynn Berkowitz about Reverend Isaac Leeser (J.O. Feb. '93), in which she states that Leeser had an "unshakable devotion to Torah, extraordinary *yiras Shamayim*" and was a "firm and faithful believer of *Torah min haShamayim*." Later, when describing his journal *The Occident*, she portrays it as a work of a "committed, traditional Jew."

Is Mrs. Berkowitz aware that in 1852, Leeser published his own English translation of Moses Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* as a supplement to *The Occident*? He called this book "the most important work bearing on religion which Mendelssohn ever wrote," (p. iv) and then proceeded to defend Mendelssohn and his criticisms against the *Rambam's ikkarim*! He refers to Mendelssohn as a "venerated sage" (p. vi), a "great man" (p. xix), and a "blessing to Israel... who reopened the gates of refined learning among his brethren" (p. vii) and whose memory should be honored. Leeser concedes that Mendelssohn may have appeared to be a dangerous man who was a "reformer of existing abuses" within Judaism (p. xix). Leeser does say that he doesn't always agree with Mendelssohn, but he nowhere condemns him, and instead enthusiastically offers *Jerusalem* to his readers as an important book for the times.

Given that *Jerusalem* represents ideas that are rejected by our *gedolim* and are at odds with Torah-true values, can we really regard Leeser with such veneration? Does Leeser's embrace of *Jerusalem* signify aspects of his true *hashkafa*? Was Leeser possibly more unorthodox in his think-

ing than Mrs. Berkowitz would allow? Have your readers been led to appreciate a man not worthy of respect by Torah-true Jews?

YOEL BAR-OR
Philadelphia, PA

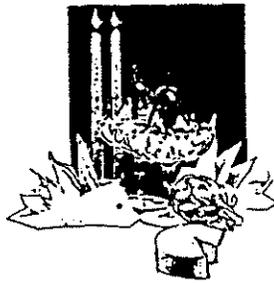
Editorial response:

Leeser's words of praise for Mendelssohn were written in 1852, when the latter was still widely admired in Orthodox circles. His true disdain for Chazal was not yet known. The writer's citation of Leeser's defense of Mendelssohn's rejection of Maimonides *ikkarim* is disingenuous, at the very best. Leeser says clearly:

Even the passage where he [i.e. Mendelssohn] combats the propriety of Matmonides fixing the creed of Israel, and establishing it in thirteen articles. Mendelssohn does not combat the truth

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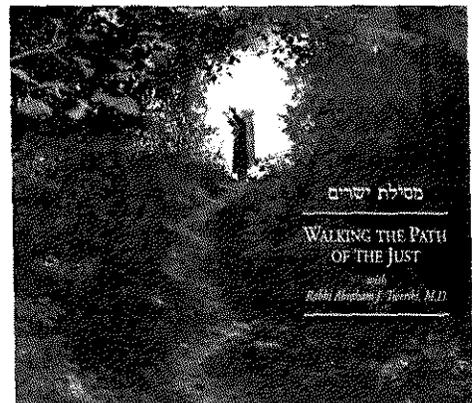
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of them, any more than did Albo, or Chisdai, or Loria; as he only wanted to advance the idea, which, for one at least, I also share, that the whole Bible is fundamental, and that, hence, it is not necessary to extract thirteen truths, and claim for them exclusively an affirmation, before conferring on any individual office or position in the Synagogue. It is easily understood that he does not recommend us to appoint men whom we either do not know at all, or know them to entertain opinions hostile to our religion, or who reject the "eternal truths of salvation," which it teaches. (Quotation courtesy of Agudath Israel Archives.)

Leeser's "rejection" of Rambam happens to be fully in line with the Radvaz's view.

NISSON WOLPIN

The author responds:

In response to Mr. Bar-Or's questioning Leeser's dedication to Torah-true values because of his enthusiastic praise for Moses Mendelssohn, I will confess that I too flinched when reading this in *The Occident*. However, taken within the context of Leeser's entire career which spanned

four decades, his untiring struggle against the tidal wave of Reform in the face of tremendous opposition, ridicule and personal attacks, his editorials in *The Occident* in defense of traditional Judaism and his other writings, such as *Jews and the Mosaic Law* and *Catechism For Jewish Children*, it is abundantly clear that Isaac Leeser in no way rejected or re-interpreted the Rambam's *ikkarim*. Mr. Bar-Or may consult p.133-134 of Leeser's *Catechism* to see for himself whether Leeser rejects the *ikkarim* of the Rambam or not.

Because of the tremendous paucity of Torah material in English at that time, Leeser published some material that he considered questionable, offering his criticism of the objectionable passages in footnotes, such as he did while editing Grace Aguilar's *The Spirit of Judaism*. He also based his *Catechism For Jewish Children* on a book originally written by a Dr. Edward Kley, a reform rabbi in Hamburg, whom Leeser refers to as "a pastor of a society of schismatics." However, he then goes on to say that he has revised the book so as to remove any improper and heretical material, and has added additional material that is in accordance with *halacha*.

If Isaac Leeser's endorsement of Mendelssohn's *Jerusalem* were in any way a promotion of *kefirah* or of reform tendencies, he would almost certainly have been chastised by his Orthodox colleagues, Rabbi Abraham Rice of Baltimore, or Rabbi Ber Illowy of New Orleans, the latter having received *semicha* from the *Chasam Sofer*. Instead, Rabbi Illowy says of Leeser's career and religious dedication: "He was the first to unfurl the banner of our religion in this country, and to fling its folds high into the breeze; and he taught the native Israelites, who scarcely knew any more of Judaism than that their fathers had been Jews, to know, adore, and reverence the G-d of Israel" (*The Occident*, vol XVI). Rabbi Illowy at no time criticized Leeser for praising Mendelssohn's work, although he did write fiery denunciations of Isaac Mayer Wise's *Minhag America* prayer book and Wise's *History of the Israelitish Nation* which he considered a far greater threat to the religiosity of American Jewry than the publication of

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Mendelssohn's Jerusalem.

Mr. Bar-Or gives as his return address the Annenberg Research Institute of Philadelphia, which holds the Isaac Leeser papers. I would most respectfully suggest that he spend more time reading Leeser's views, which he gives in *The Occident*, before condemning a truly righteous man because he once erred in praising an individual whose improper views had at that time not yet been fully discredited.

As a P.S.—I received a letter from a JO reader in Australia, from a gentleman who informs me that he is the great-grandson of Leah Leeser Elkus, the sister of Isaac Leeser. This branch of the family has not only survived to the present day, but is still strictly Orthodox. Leeser's legacy lives on....

LYNN M. BERKOWITZ



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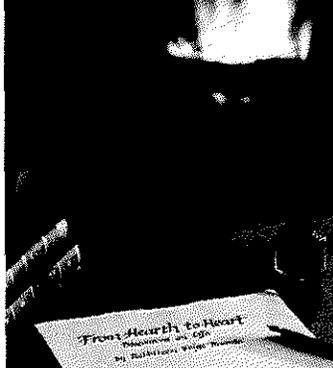
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Mrs. Laufer lives in Brooklyn. This is her first appearance in these pages.

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The tens of thousands of students of Daf Yomi across the world mark yet another milestone on their page-a-day march through Shas, with the completion of the 90-blatt-long *Meseches Nedorim* on Tuesday, May 17.

The next day, they commence the study of *Meseches Nozir*—65 blatt long—which will be completed in the Daf Yomi schedule in mid-summer. *Nozir* will be followed by *Sotah*, 49 blatt long, which will be completed on *Elul* 21 (September 7).

Agudath Israel is once again planning to publish a directory to Daf Yomi *shuirim* set up in summer vacation areas in the Catskills. Entries both for *shuirim* held daily and those held Friday through Sunday—including location, time, *maggid shuir*, and phone number of a contact person—should be mailed to Daf Yomi Commission, Agudath Israel, 84 William Street, New York, NY 10038.

INPUT SUBMITTED ON CLINTON EDUCATION POLICY

WASHINGTON—In response to a request by U.S. Secretary of Education Richard W. Riley, Agudath Israel of America has submitted its comments to the Clinton Administration on the proposed reauthorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), a measure of significant import to the approximately 600 yeshivos and day schools it represents in the nation's capital.

The original ESEA legislation, passed in 1965, was a landmark bill laying down unequivocally the principle that all children—including students at non-public schools—are entitled to an equitable share in the benefits of various government programs to aid education, notes Abba Cohen, director of the Agudath Israel Washington Office.

At the time, Rabbi Moshe Sherer, president of Agudath Israel of America, was cited by President Lyndon B. Johnson for his role in hammering out this principle of "educational equity", which, said Cohen, continued to be a guiding principle in subsequent incarnations of the act.

But several aspects of the policy need shoring up, according to Cohen, a point he and David Zwiebel, Agudath Israel's general counsel, made in their

organization's official response to the Administration's invitation to comment on the current proposal.

In the controversial *Felton* ruling of 1985, for instance, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that while federally-funded remedial education programs are required by statute to provide equitably for the instruction of students of religiously-sponsored schools, the teachers that the government pays for may not actually teach on-site in the religious school's classrooms. According to the Court, this would violate the constitutional boundaries between church and state, even though the subject matter in question—remedial math, for example—is religiously neutral.

Felton has thus made it very difficult for non-public school students to obtain the assistance that by law they are entitled to, say the Agudath Israel officials. Some alternative means of providing services developed in the aftermath of *Felton*—such as off-site instruction trailers parked adjacent to religious school campuses—have proven to be exorbitantly expensive and have drained desperately needed funds from actual instruction expenses.

Other alternatives—transporting students to more distant sites, or relying on computer-assisted education—have their own problems.

Agudath Israel is therefore urging the Administration to consider broader funding for capital expenses and the development of other constitutionally permissible means by which the assistance may be provided to non-public school students. It is also suggesting a voucher system by which the parents of children needing the services would be awarded "certificates" directly to pay for their children's instruction. It has already been determined by the courts, argue Zwiebel and Cohen, that for parents to spend such vouchers at religious schools is constitutionally acceptable.

Other points raised by Agudath Israel with the Administration are: the need for tighter control by federal authorities over local school systems dispensing the aid, to ensure that equitable services for non-public school students are in fact provided; the need for greater flexibility to allow schools to redirect funds from one program to another, according to their specific needs; and the need for assurances that aid not be contingent upon religious schools' adoption of policies at odds with their own religious tenets.

The Agudath Israel officials had earlier in April participated in a face to face

meeting of the nation's top private school officials with Secretary of Education Riley.

A LETTER TO MTA FROM AGUDATH ISRAEL

May 4, 1993

Mr. Peter E. Stangl
Chair and Chief Executive Officer
Metropolitan Transportation Authority
347 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr. Stangl:

Over the past few days, since *Newsday* ran its story about the explicit new advertising campaign on the City's buses and subways, our office has been deluged with phone calls and faxes complaining about this offensive public display. Indeed, those complaints had already started coming in before the *Newsday* report, because of other bus and subway ads that assault the sensibilities of our constituents and many other New Yorkers. The situation has become absolutely intolerable.

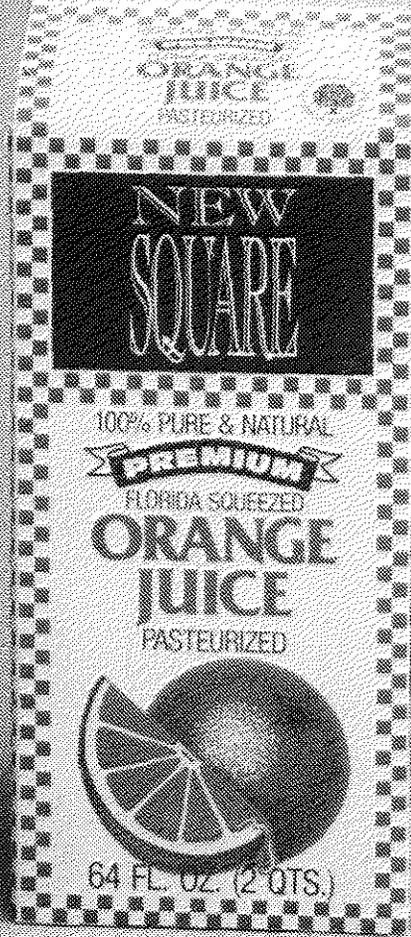
Agudath Israel of America is the nation's largest grassroots Orthodox Jewish movement. Our constituents go to great lengths to shield their children from the moral pollution that permeates so much of what passes today for "culture." By accepting advertising that borders on the pornographic, the MTA undermines those efforts considerably.

It is not just religious communities like ours whose interests are harmed by these ads. In many respects, society at large suffers even more. Surely a responsible public official such as yourself knows all too well the social devastation created by the terrible epidemics . . . and other serious problems attributable to unbridled promiscuity. People who understand that there is something at stake here which transcends the bottom line have a responsibility to protest these profit-driven exploitations.

Does the MTA employ any firm regulations or guidelines in evaluating the propriety of proposed ads? Is there some legal concern that compels the MTA to accept anything and everything?

I would appreciate hearing back from you as soon as possible on this serious matter. Many thanks and all good wishes.

Sincerely,
Rabbi Moshe Sherer
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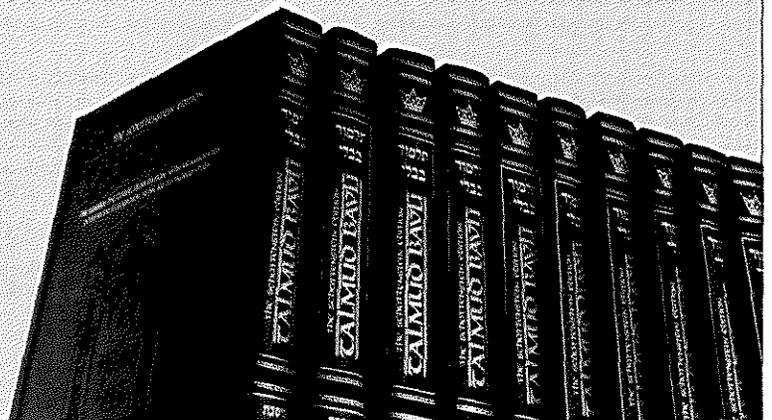
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