

# THE JEWISH OBSERVER

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## **Jewish Cemeteries in Poland**

*Who will protect them  
from desecration?*

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## **VOLUME XI**

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# THE JEWISH OBSERVER

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# The Struggle to Protect Jewish Cemeteries in Poland

by Dr. Isaac Lewin as told to Chaim Feinberg

## 1965: A Marketplace in the Lancut Cemetery

IN THE SUMMER OF 1965, a piece of alarming news filtered out of Poland. In a small Galician town near Lodz, Lancut, local authorities were busy measuring and marking tombstones; the ancient Jewish cemetery, where among others lies Rabbi Naftali Horowitz, נצ"ל, was about to be converted into a local marketplace. Alerted by the small remaining fragments of the Polish Jewish community, a number of New York rabbinical leaders, including the Novominsker Rebbe, נצ"ל, and יבדלו לחיים the Bobover Rebbe and the Bluzhover Rebbe, contacted the World Agudath Israel office in New York, where we have maintained long-standing contacts with Polish authorities in the U.N. Protest had to be registered - but on what basis? The once mighty voice of Poland - 3½ million Jews was now a scant echo, utterly powerless and unable by itself to influence Polish policy. The protest had to be tacitful, yet forceful, appealing in the end to purely Polish interests, for there are no living Jewish interests left today in Poland.

## "A Strictly Legal Issue"

PAINFULLY SLOW NEGOTIATIONS BEGAN, with no result. Finally, in a letter dated June 20, 1966, we filed an official letter of protest with the Polish People's Embassy in Washington, D.C. It was not, however, until over one year later that the Polish Embassy responded: *The issue was strictly a legal one. Polish law provided that disused land, such as defunct Jewish cemeteries, shall be used as local authorities see fit . . . . Yes, the overall state of Jewish cemeteries was deplorable . . . . True, the Nazis' war against world Jewry was also waged against the dead: They had simply eradicated the cemeteries in*

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Dr. Lewin, son of the sainted Reisher Rav, Rabbi Aaron Lewin נצ"ל, has made use of his associations with the pre-war Polish government to help solve many extremely pressing problems, one of which is the subject of this article.

CHAIM FEINBERG, a native of Detroit, studies in the Bais Medrash Yeshurun of the Yeshivah Rabbi S. R. Hirsch in New York City. One of his poems appeared in the October '76 JO.

many cases, paved roads with the markers from other cemeteries. Regrettable . . . . But what could be done? Of the 527 cemeteries that still remain, only 18 were being used for burial. The space in the unused cemeteries is sorely needed, and, again, abandoned land is by law a local matter.

## "Save the Polish Heritage of Jewish Cemeteries"

THIS DISHEARTENING LETTER triggered a persuasive argument: *Such a step would involve far more than transforming disused land into active use. It would bring about the final eradication of a remarkable piece of 1000 year-old Polish history. The razing of this and other ancient Jewish cemeteries would leave a shameful hollowness in the substance of Polish history itself. Could the Polish people possibly be insensitive to its own irreplaceable historical landmarks?* Striking a spark of interest here, negotiations then continued.

Finally, early in 1973, the Embassy unofficially invited us to visit Poland. This was a strong positive signal, but it was understood that the Jewish position would be strengthened if the invitation were official; public recognition of these negotiations would lay a far stronger groundwork for eventual success. Discouraging and tedious negotiations dragged on. At last, in the summer of 1973, an official invitation was issued, inviting us to Warsaw as guests of the Polish People's government.

## "Welcome to Poland"

WHEN WE LANDED IN WARSAW, an official government reception was waiting, with a government car at our disposal. We were given free access to all areas, to assess for ourselves the condition of the cemeteries. The findings were deeply shocking. Fenceless cemeteries lay untended, in ruins; markers were upended, shattered, defaced, wild fields were invading, with trees, tall grasses growing freely, splitting open markers, graves. And no sign of upkeep anywhere.

Ancient synagogues were in a state of utter desecration . . . . The Bais Medrash of the Gerer Rebbe was a grain-house. In Cracow, one synagogue was being used as a workshop for the manufacture of Catholic religious articles. Others were converted into commercial houses,

for storage of archives, or to sell wheat. Everywhere decay, indifference, ruin. One synagogue somehow survived the Warsaw fires, standing as a stubborn and silent witness . . . Of 3½ million Jews, only 5,000 remain. No breath of Jewish life in Poland. 1000 years uprooted, swept away overnight.

Immediately discussions were launched with high-level officials. From the shocking state of the cemeteries — protesting the desecrations, the topic shifted to the preservation of the 600 and 700 year-old synagogues as national historical shrines. Polish officials listened politely but were unmoved. After ten days, we left Poland empty-handed: the cemeteries would retain their legal status as abandoned communal land.

#### *1974: A Road Across the Warsaw Cemetery*

BACK IN NEW YORK AND WASHINGTON, negotiations continued. The Polish government seemed unwilling to place history above practicality. Then, in the summer of 1974, a new and more distressing development: the tiny Warsaw Jewish community reported that one-third of the ancient Warsaw cemetery was marked and ready for levelling; a Warsaw road needed expansion, and the cemetery stood directly in its path. Once again, we contacted the Polish Embassy in Washington and we were invited to Warsaw — this time for discussion with Polish engineers. Upon arrival, we found 2,000 markers tagged with red numbers, ready for demolition. The engineers were told: *this cemetery was all that remained of Warsaw's 300,000 Jews; it would be a callous blow to Polish tradition itself if the needs and pressures of the moment usurped the nation's historic past.*

The engineers responded by unrolling city maps: *the road needs widening, and from an engineering standpoint, only the Jewish cemetery could provide the needed space. Also, had not the former president of the Warsaw Jewish community, Mr. Frenkel, agreed to the plan?*

The new president of the community, Mr. Finkelshtein, was contacted and together we persuaded Mr. Frenkel to immediately withdraw his approval.

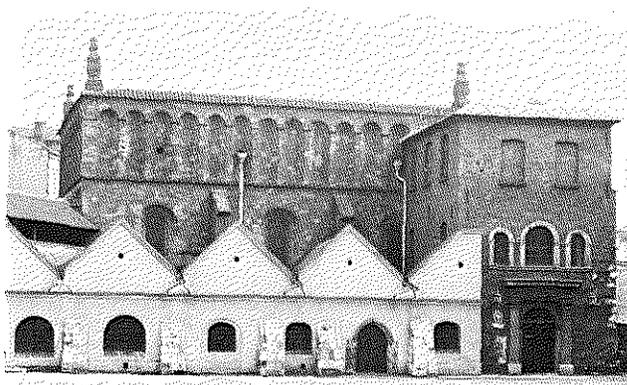
The engineers were challenged further: *Were they absolutely certain that a portion of the cemetery had to be sacrificed? Would they at least wait until American engineers could be consulted?* The engineers agreed. The Warsaw city maps would be forwarded to World Agudah offices in New York for further consultation.

#### *No Maps From Warsaw*

THE MAPS NEVER ARRIVED. Instead, in the winter of 1974, the Polish Embassy announced a sudden and unprecedented concession: the Warsaw cemetery would not be paved over. The Embassy further asked the World Agudath Israel Organization to relay this assurance to all concerned American rabbinical organizations.

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*The Alte Shul in Cracow has been declared a museum . . .*



*The Alte Shul in Cracow*

Again, as with the case of the first unofficial invitation to visit Warsaw, it was felt that a public statement by a Polish spokesman would be more appropriate. The Embassy agreed. At the end of 1974, a meeting of the representatives of American rabbinical organizations gathered at the Statler Hilton Hotel in New York. The First Secretary of the Polish People's Embassy spoke: *Not only would the Warsaw cemetery be spared, but no existing Jewish cemetery in Poland would in any way be desecrated — some to be officially protected as historic shrines, others to be left in their present status.* Although only an oral promise, a decade of struggle for respect for the ancient graves seemed to have borne fruit.

After this meeting, further contacts were made with the Polish Embassy throughout 1975. Rabbinical organizations wanted more solid assurance for the remaining cemeteries. Those not qualifying as historic shrines had as yet no legal protection; only the negative assurance that they would not be demolished. To this, a new voice of protest was added: William Perry, a New York City longshoreman's union official from Lodz, had been unable to locate the markers of his parents' graves in the Lodz cemetery. Mr. Perry immediately contacted Polish authorities, vehemently demanding an end to this disgrace.

Finally, as a result of tactful negotiations, the unified support of the rabbinical organizations, and the strong private pressure of individuals such as William Perry, the Polish Embassy issued yet another invitation: if the American delegation would come to Warsaw, a written declaration would be presented, safeguarding all Jewish cemeteries from further harm. In September, 1976, a seven-man delegation composed of representatives of the World Agudath Organization, the Agudath HoRabbonim of the U.S. and Canada, the Hisachdus HoRab-

The old Hoiche Shul



...The Old Hoiche Shul is no longer used to produce Catholic religious articles...

bonim, the Rabbinical Alliance of America, the Rabbinical Council of America, and William Perry were received in Warsaw by the Minister of Religious Affairs, Kazimierz Kakol. The following written statement was presented to the delegation:

(Translation from Polish)  
The Minister in Charge of Religious Affairs  
Warsaw, September 13, 1976

Rabbinical Committee  
For Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries

In reply to the questions raised during the visit of the Rabbinical Group from the United States of America in the Office for Religious Affairs, I am pleased to inform you that the State Authorities are accepting the principle of preservation of all existing Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

Some cemeteries will be declared historical shrines; the others will be preserved without such recognition.

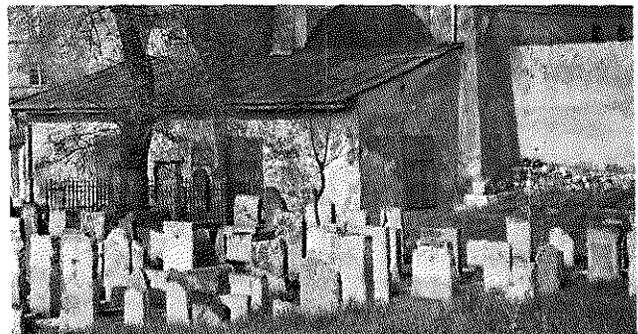
(signed) — Kazimierz Kakol

### Postscript

THIS TRIUMPH IS BUILT on bitter ashes. There is no Jewish life left in Poland, only the fight to save the dead from further dishonor. Yes, there is a Yiddish paper — a Communist publication. There is a Yiddish theatre — a quaint fragment of folk history, playing for a Polish audience. In all Poland, where hundreds of *Gedolim* once flourished, no rabbi remains; a handful of aging *shochtim* meet the scant demand for *kashrus*. True, there is a daily *minyan* in Wroclaw — but in no other place in all of Poland. This year two *chazanim* were flown into Cracow and Warsaw for *Rosh Hashana* and *Yom Kippur* — the first such services in thirty years. And these last, the saddest of statistics: As of August 1976 there were 120 people making use of *kashrus* in Poland. 120 Jews of Szczecin, Wroclaw, Lodz, Legnica, Warsaw, Bielsko, Cracow. Of 3½ million, these few remain. Yet, the struggle to prevent the final desecration continues.

Here and there, there are sparks of hope. The Nozyk Synagogue in Warsaw is being restored; the Alte Synagogue in Cracow has been declared a museum; the Old Hoiche Synagogue is no longer used to produce Catholic religious articles. The ancient cemeteries are now officially off-limits to vandals and local officials. The Warsaw and Lancut cemeteries were saved. And, though the active work of restoration and upkeep has yet to begin, organizational structures are now being built, to be run by American funds. The preservation of these, the remnants, the pieces of the broken vessel, is a matter of honor. For us, unlike the Polish government, their preservation is far more than a matter of history. It is a matter of the honor of Torah. In the midst of a blindly materialistic world, let the holy dust and ashes be preserved. Let them be honored at all costs.

...And ancient cemeteries are now officially off-limits to vandals and local officials.



The cemetery behind the Ramma Shul in Cracow

DATELINE 1976:

# In Search for Polish Jewry

*text and photographs*

*by Elkanah Schwartz*

## The Week of Mourning

EREV SHABBOS CHAZON, 5736, we were on the way from Cracow to Auschwitz. We were a group of American youths, visiting the sites we had previously heard about but wished to know first hand, seeking "to remember the days of old." What time more fitting was there than the days preceding Tisha B'Av!

Less than forty years ago Polish Jewry sparkled as the crown of the Jewish people. Not only cities, but towns and villages, whose names and spirit live on in Brooklyn and Bnei Brak — and now are but empty echoes. *Where was my rebbe's Warsaw? my mother's Cracow? the Katowice where the Chofetz Chaim and Reb Chaim Ozer led a mass gathering of Torah Jewry? the Lublin of Rabbi Meir Shapiro?* As Rabbi Yishmael kohein gadol is quoted as saying upon the murder of Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel: "Where is the tongue so quick to teach words of Torah? By our sins, how it now licks the dust."

## No Side Trip to Bendin

BEFORE THE TRIP, someone of Polish origin has asked if, while in Katowice, we could visit nearby in Bendin at her grandfather's grave. He is buried among leading figures of the Gerer chassidic dynasty. We arrived late at night in Katowice and there was no time the next morning. On the way, our Polish guide pointed to a side road, indicating that Bendin is nearby. A road like all roads . . . the same road fifty years ago heavily traveled by religious Jews on the way to their *Rebbe*, to hear *Divrei Torah* we now study in print, the melodies we now listen to on cassettes. Now, only the cemetery lives in Bendin.

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ELKANAH SCHWARTZ is rabbi of Congregation Kol Israel in Brooklyn. He led a youth group on "a Holocaust study tour" this past summer, which is basis for this article. Rabbi Schwartz is a frequent contributor to these pages, as well as to other Jewish journals.

Warsaw: three of our group are not with us. One, whose parents came from Pabianitz, had gone with the others on a private excursion. Armed with a handdrawn sketch of birthplaces, shuls and schools attended, relatives' graves, recalled from memory — for these people a name came alive, however briefly.

How many Jews are there in Poland today? How do you identify a Jew who hides his identity from others as surely as he could never hide it from himself? In Cracow, we were told: In a distant village live three Jewish families. Once a month, they bring in chickens for kosher slaughter. *What do they do for Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur? — come to Cracow? No.* Those Jews go to a nearby town, where others like them come and have a *minyán* . . . Were they included in the official figures?

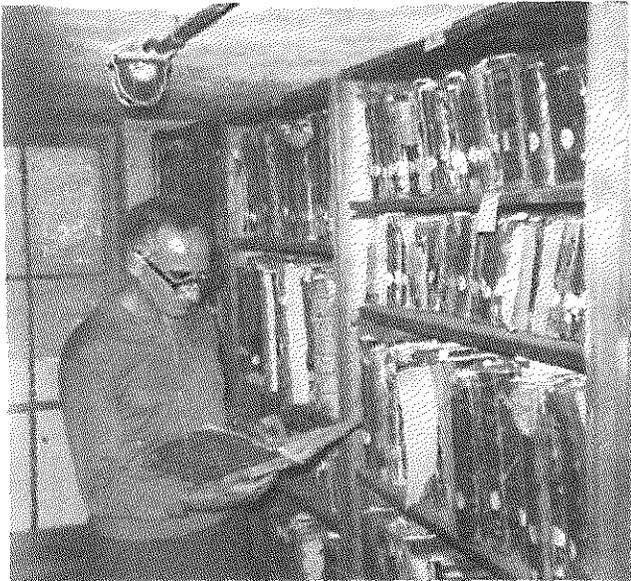
## Warsaw: A Beautiful Monument

WARSAW IS A BEAUTIFUL CITY. Leveled in the war, it was rebuilt to simulate what was destroyed. The resemblance to the days of the monarchies is impressive. Walking at night through the centers of town is an aesthetic delight, with nothing to fear. (Except perhaps the black market money changers. The vender just might be a plant.) But as one strolls through the streets of Warsaw, takes those steps, one can't help but think of years ago. One is constantly confronted with smoldering remains of Jewish life, reflecting the varieties of pre-war Jewry.

There is the Teatre Zydowski, where today the cast includes non-Jews, and the seats have earphones to provide translations.

In the same building, the Redakcja Folks Sztyme publishes a Yiddish-language newspaper.

In a public square, the Zydowski Instytut Historyczny has two divisions: an exhibit on the



Examining some of 20,000 volumes of seforim in the Zydowski library.

Warsaw Ghetto, and a library which includes over 20,000 *sifrei kodesh*.

In a decaying building near the theater, the Vaad Hakehillos Hakedoshos d'Polin stocks records that give a meager representation to vanished communities in Warsaw, Cracow, Lublin, and Lodz.

Behind it, at Twarda 6, is the Nojzik shul, the sole surviving Jewish house of worship in Warsaw. Obviously once a beautiful synagogue, it is undergoing renovations — as it has been for a number of years. A *minyán* meets there once a week, on *Shabbos* morning, with fifteen — twenty local Jews attending. And there are always tourists, Jewish and otherwise. Some local Jews come to the synagogue to meet other Jews and solicit contributions, or to offer to purchase dollars at high rates, or both. Some, like Reb Moshe Shapiro, come to do what is proper.

Reb Moshe is *shochet* (ritual slaughterer), *ba'al koreh* (reader of the Torah), and *melamed* (teacher) for the few children in town. There is no rabbi in Warsaw. There is no rabbi in all Poland. The last one left Lodz three years ago to settle in Brooklyn.

#### Meet Reb Nochum

IN THE BUILDING OCCUPIED BY THE VAAD, live Reb Nochum, his wife, and two young daughters. I brought him regards from his brother in Boro Park. He had no advance notice of our coming — there were fourteen of us — yet, within five minutes, he had vodka, egg advokat, Coke, seltzer, and home-made pickles on the table. Within another five minutes, given the nature of Polish vodka, we were singing . . . Abraham's tent, giving food and comfort to wayfarers . . . Soon we were dancing, finding our visit just cause for a *farbreng*

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on an otherwise ordinary Monday afternoon. His wife entered and turned, ran out, to bring back some people we knew:

The previous year, our group had spent *Shabbos* in Warsaw. In the morning, a group of five young Dutch gentiles came into shul. They had volunteered their vacations to help the Jewish people by restoring dignity to the Jewish cemetery in Warsaw, which was in disrepair. After *davening* all twenty-seven of our group went to Reb Nochum for *kiddush*. He took along Reb Moshe, and we took along the five Dutchmen.

Now that Reb Nochum's wife saw us, she went to bring the Dutch contingent who were back in Warsaw. The attitude of this group was consistent with what we had seen in Amsterdam: the Anne Frank House, a tribute to attempts by non-Jews to hide Jews from the Nazis; and the Dockworkers' Statue, in the park next to the Portuguese Synagogue, in tribute to the only instance in all of Europe of organized resistance by non-Jewish workers to Nazi deportation of Jews. It was also consistent with the Dutch defiance of the oil embargo that followed the Yom Kippur War.

In the midst of our singing, the organizer of the Dutch group stood up, and with tear-filled eyes, said: "Friends, did we ever imagine that we would hear Jewish youth singing Jewish songs in Warsaw?"

In our visit to Reb Nochum, we learned two unforgettable things: the value of a Jew, as the bearer of his heritage even in isolation; and our own value, seeing what our presence meant to him and the others.

#### "A Small Flame Burns"

ONE WARSAW JEW, not attached to any building, is an institution unto himself: Dr. Szymon Datner. He is a recognized authority on the Holocaust. The YIVO library in New York has a bibliography of his writings, and the Library of Congress also has a lengthy list of entries under his name. Dr. Datner had been head of the Zydowski Instytut, and still prepares articles for their publications. He was once an avowed Communist, but somehow in the Holocaust he found the validity of faith, and he became religious. He is in *shul* every *Shabbos*, and spends *Pesach sederim* with Reb Nochum.

We lunched together on a park bench. He spoke to us in a classical, almost prophetic Hebrew: "As long as there is a *minyán* in Warsaw, I will not abandon it . . . A small candle is aflame here. I make no predictions that Jewry will once again flourish in Poland, but I caution you against predictions that it will not."

#### The Cemetery Lives

IRONICALLY, JEWISH LIFE STILL LIVES in the vast Jewish cemetery. It is a massive legacy, mostly neglected. An old Jew sits inside the gate, waiting for the many



*"In our meanderings, the old Jew showed us the remains of Reb Chaim Brisker's grave."*

tourists. To the extent there is anyone who knows where anything is, it is he — and he doesn't know much. During the war, partisans had hidden there. Overgrowth abounds, but every visitor, seeking his ancestors, cleans up a bit more . . . . We came across the Dutchmen, and invited them to our hotel for dinner . . . . In our meanderings over the messy terrain, the old Jew showed us the remains of the grave of Reb Chaim Brisker.

From the gate, Mordechai Anielewicz Street (named after the leader of the Ghetto uprising) leads to Mila 18, where a monument marks the site of the bunker where the uprising was planned. Across the street, in a little park, is a two-sided monument to those who died there. These are surrounded by modern apartment buildings.

Our local guide, Swadek, walked us to show us the remaining section of the Ghetto wall. Suddenly he stopped. He stared at a mound of rubble. "Only last week I was here," he said, "and it was standing." Not any more.

### Lublin

REB NOCHUM ACCOMPANIED , US TO LUBLIN. Approaching the city, we caught sight of the medieval castle in whose protective shadow Jews lived for centuries. Once this road had been crowded with pilgrims slowly making their way to the *Chozeh*. Now Lublin's main attraction is Majdanek concentration camp, within walking distance of the center of this thriving metropolis.

Lublin has one "*shul*" — in a rented apartment, with a *minyán* once a week, Friday evenings. A *shochet* comes in from a nearby town for *Shabbos*. Reb

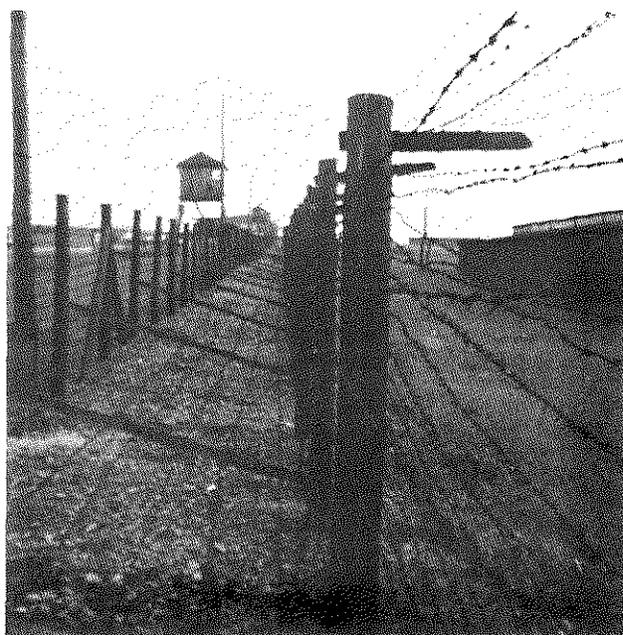
Nochum keeps close touch with these people, maintaining a loose network of communication among the remnants.

In our hotel that evening, we read aloud from the first story of Moshe Prager's *Sparks of Glory* — "The Dance of Death": In Lublin, the Nazi leader Globochnik rounded up the Jews, and forced them to sing. They sang "*Lumir zich iberbeten*," and as they faltered in their singing, they were beaten. Then someone changed the words to "*Mir velen zey iberleben* — we will outlive them" and they so picked up in song that they were beaten to stop. Only they didn't. Globochnik was licked.

The familiar story suddenly cast our surroundings into another dimension. This lovely city — where road signs pointed to Chelm, where tourists come and go in large numbers — was the city of The Dance. And we saw Globochnik's picture on display in Majdanek. The people of the People's Socialist Republic of Poland view the Fascists as enemies, which is why Majdanek, like Auschwitz and Birkenau, are maintained as museums to defame the Fascists. We were sitting comfortably where the evil had taken place — less than forty years earlier.

### Welcome to Majdanek

MAJDANEK, BUILT AS AN "IMPROVEMENT" over Dachau, set the stage for the "grand achievement," Auschwitz. Yet, in certain respects, it is more incisive to view than are the others. Entering the camp along marked pathways, one can grasp the entire process: the four boundaries are seen, the sections identified, the scope of



*"Majdanek was built as an 'improvement' over Dachau."*

the system complete in one look — the remaining barracks now housing exhibits, the “bath and disinfection” buildings with their shower heads and gas chambers, the tall silent chimney at the distant end. It was a superb example of technological efficiency in service of the barbarianism of human extermination.

The people who conceived it, designed it, built it, and ran it too well were not drunkards. Nor were they stupid, or ignorant peasants. They did it because they believed in it — which is where the ghastly perversion lies.

Being surrounded by the barbed wire fences we had known of, walking through gas chambers we had read about, touching crematoria ovens we had heard about all converted the indescribable into an unbearable reality. Our presence testified that *Die Endlosung Der Judenfrage*, the Final Solution to the Jewish Question, was not achieved, just as we know it never will be. We hoped that our demonstration of a Jewry and a Judaism that is alive was a comfort to those who had agonized there, whose ashes lie heaped in a giant stone urn.

### The Madjanek Exhibit

AMONG THE EXHIBITS, A SHOWCASE contains a *tallis*, a pair of *tefillin*, a *yarmulka*. In a collection of flags representing the nationalities of the victims, hangs one with the Star of David. Prisoners' uniforms and hats are displayed, to convey a sense of individuals rather than just numbers. Two of the barracks — long, low wooden buildings where inmates steamed in the summers and froze in the winters — contain shoes. Not placed carefully side by side, but piled, one over the



In a giant stone urn, human ashes piled 17 feet deep, 50 feet wide.

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Forty years ago, *Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin* ... today the College of Medicine

other, like so many warehouse items. In one area cans of Zyklon B pellets are stacked. A sign tells their source: I.G. Farben factories. A sign in the building housing the gas chambers informs us: “Here the prisoners' hair was cut to be sold at the German firm, P. Reimann. The total of 780 kilograms of hair was sent out of Majdanek.” Reciting a “*Molay*” (memorial prayer) was not an easy task.

Before leaving Lublin, we visited the Collegium Maius, the College of Medicine on Lubartovska Street. The building was not put up by the college, but was built almost fifty years ago by Rabbi Meir Shapiro as the *Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin*. A splendid structure. How many schools of Torah still function around the world on the merit of what was begun there?

Reb Nochum bid us goodbye, returning to Warsaw, while we moved on to Cracow.

### Cracow

THE CITY'S MAJESTIC CASTLE looms as a reminder of bygone days of royalty; Cracow's Holiday Inn, the only one in Eastern Europe, reflects the city's present day commercial role. To Jews, however, Cracow is the home of the Ramma (Rabbi Moshe Isserlish), *rebbe of Klal Yisroel* for the past four hundred years. His burial place lies behind the synagogue bearing his name. A minyan still meets here every Friday evening and *Shabbos* morning. Visitors from all over the world flock to the *shul* to pray and to be inspired, recalling Cracow's distinctive role over the centuries as a major center of Torah study for life.

Within a few blocks, near the center of the town, is the old ghetto, containing the few remaining Jewish



On the facade of an ordinary building: "Set aside time for Torah study."

installations. The Alte Shul, dating from the fourteenth century, built like a fortress, was the seat of the chief rabbi. It still has an *aron kodesh*, a platform *bimah* surrounded by a high gate, a ladies section, and a slot in the wall marked "tzedakah." It serves as a museum by day, and, because of its fine acoustics, as a concert hall in the evening. On the face of a building around the corner one sees engraved: "Ch'K' Kovayah Itim L'Torah. Set aside time for Torah study." This building is no longer used for Jewish purposes.

A block away, in a courtyard behind a high wall, is the Ramma Shul. Here visitors receive their first "Sholom Aleichem" from Jews maintaining the traditional practice of *shnorring*. These Jews also maintain the *minyanim*.

Cracow is blessed with two functioning synagogues. Around the corner is the large Templul, once a Neologue (Reform) congregation with an organ, now



The inner synagogue of the Ramma Shul.

modified to conform to halachic requirements. Services are also held here Friday evening and *Shabbos* morning. Beyond its courtyard is the *mikvah*, put to extensive use by visiting Chassidim.

Traditions die hard, even bad ones. Neither *shul* has a *minyan* on *Shabbos* afternoon. There are only enough people for one *minyan*, and they cannot agree on which *shul* to use. The same is true regarding daily services.

Mr. Meir Jakobovitz, who heads the community, is approached by people the world over who send in money to have graves repaired, cemeteries maintained. Mr. Jakobovitz takes care of the requests. Visitors like us, whose parents come from this region, inquire about all sorts of places, and this gentleman answers, much as a museum guide directs tourists to dead exhibits. Two of our group ask about the building where Sarah Schenirer opened the first Bais Yaakov seminary . . . . He directs them there.

I offered Mr. Jakobovitz some *Siddurim* and other religious paraphernalia. He placed his arm around me and said: "We have *Siddurim*, we have *Chumashim*. Only people we don't have . . . like the ones with you."

Friday evening we attended the Templul, and one of our young men led the services as *ba'al tefilla*. Later, Mr. Jakobovitz asked him if he could serve as *ba'al tefilla* on the *Yomim Noraim* (the High Holy Days).

*Shabbos* morning we attended the Ramma synagogue, and another of our young men was *ba'al tefilla*. Later, Mr. Jakobovitz asked him if he could serve as *ba'al tefilla* on the *Yomim Noraim*.

Because of us, the people arranged a *minyan* for the afternoon in the Templul. The *ba'al koreh* from the Ramma Shul was there, then disappeared. He refuses to *daven* there, but wanted to make sure that there was a *minyan*.

In a location where but recently our fathers could feast on a spiritual banquet, we were nibbling crumbs. It was *Shabbos Chazon*. The seventh verse of the *haftorah* read: "Your country desolate, your cities burned with fire" (*Yishayahu* I) . . . . At *seudah shlishis*, I had to find words of comfort and assurance to the few people there. I quoted from verse 24: "I will console Myself from My oppressors, and will avenge Myself from My enemies." I described what Cracow had meant to us, from all we had heard from our teachers and relatives; how we and our generation are carrying on this tradition.

The *shochet* cried. The *ba'al tokayah* kept repeating: "Poilen lebt in America — Poland lives in America."

### The Auschwitz Experience

ON FRIDAY MORNING, WE WENT TO AUSCHWITZ. We stood in the bright sun under the sign "Arbeit Macht Frei," tourists of many nations passing by, listening to



Signposts to Auschwitz

the guide tell us that "in this camp and in Birkenau nearby, between three-and-a-half to four million people were killed." How is one to picture the faultless precision of trains, evacuating villages, towns, and cities on perfect timetables for "resettlement in the east"? How is one to believe that here, more than anywhere else, sheer madness made the ultimate in brutality a way of life?

Statistics are easy to quote. Absorbing the reality is something else. We do not speak. We walk quietly with the guide, feet scraping the pebbles, our faces pale. Barracks buildings have been turned into exhibit areas, marked by numbers to lead the visitors in their sequence. The enormity of it envelops us. "Numerous other calamities befell our ancestors throughout the generations." These were "the days of old" we have to remember. "Where is the tongue so quick to teach words of Torah? — By our sins, how it now licks the dust."

Polish school children in the area are required to visit the camp, to see what Fascism did. A group of them look at our *yarmulkas*, smile, and say nothing. Did they also think that there were no more of us?

In the communities where we live, we are nothing out of the ordinary. We take our religious way of life for granted.

No more. We gained an appreciation for what we are. The Jewish people is guaranteed to live; we learned that we are not merely isolated individuals, but an integral part of a continuum. We did not cry at the "Molay" at Birkenau. Instead, we stood erect — exhausted, but assured.

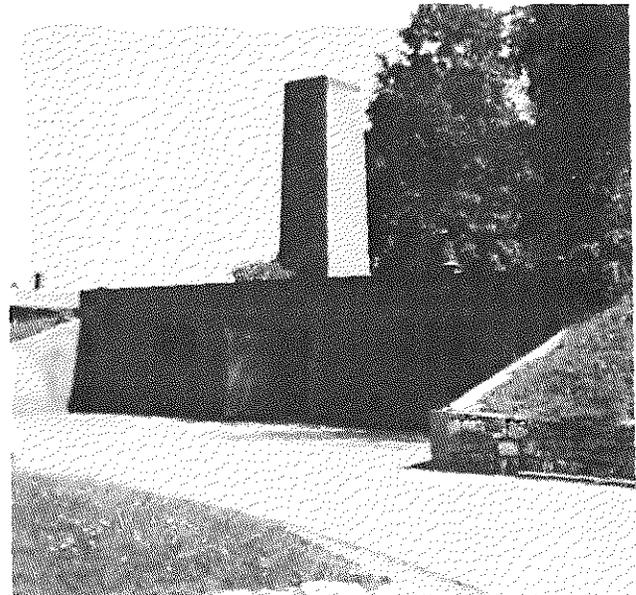
The most massive effort at the Final Solution had



"The place of anguish and death of Four Million martyrs, murdered by Hitler's genocide: 1940-1945"

been mounted. It devoured Six Million of us. But ultimately it had failed.

"For not only one enemy has risen against us to destroy us, but in every generation they rise against us to destroy us — and the Holy One, blessed be He, saves us from their hand." ✠



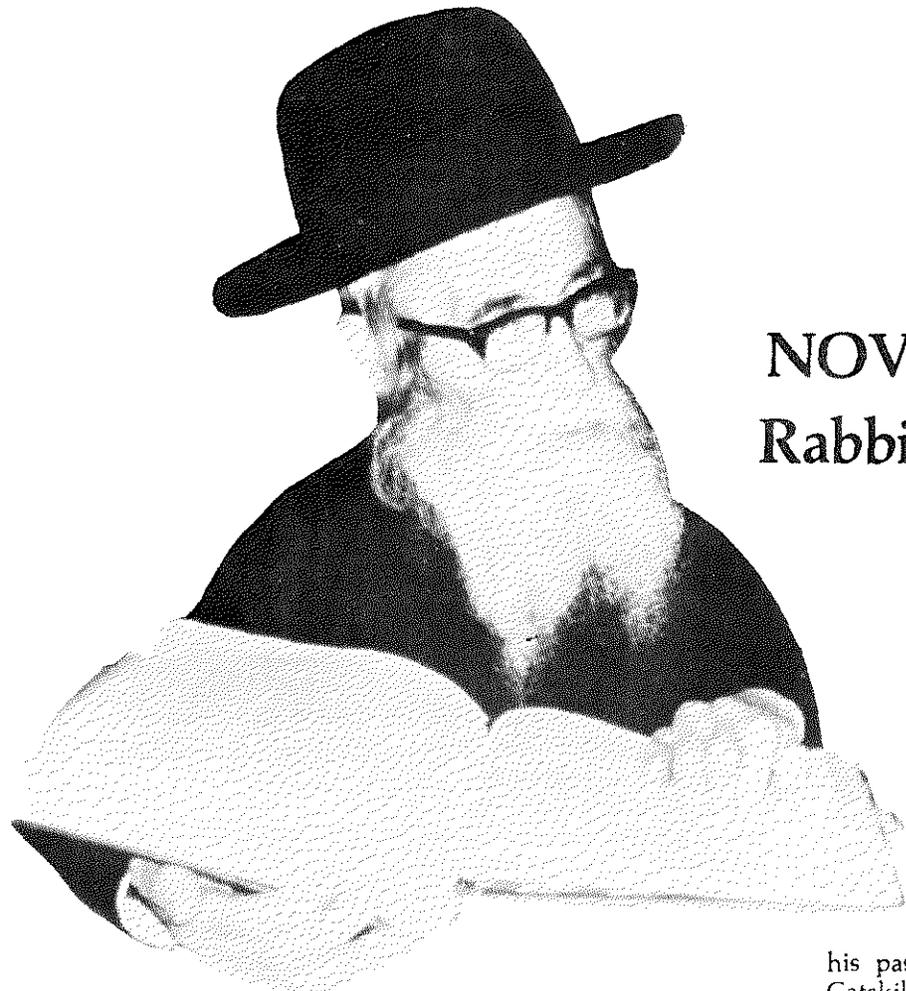
The infamous smokestacks of Auschwitz

Beinish Rosenbaum

# THE NOVOMINSKER REBBE Rabbi Nochum Mordechai Perlow

זכר צדיק לברכה

— as seen through the eyes  
of a talmid



I'm sure that there were others who knew the Novominsker Rebbe זצ"ל better than I did. But, then again, we learned together on a regular basis for the past few years. The three of us — the Rebbe, Yitzchok, and I — spent thousands of hours together, and I had the privilege of knowing him, his unwavering *hasmoda* (diligence), and his love for Torah as few others did.

To be sure, we also caught glimpses of his unusual *midos* — his face would light up with joy whenever he learned of the success of someone else's undertaking: a Rebbe attracted a host of new followers — marvelous! A Rosh Yeshiva expanded his institution — wonderful! Another's triumph was the most precious of occurrences. As for himself, he would shrug: "Me a Rebbe? Never! I'm at best a Chassidishe Yid. But I'm nowhere near the achievements of my father."

We, however, did know him as a Chassidishe Rebbe . . . . The last time I saw him alive — just a day before

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BEINISH ROSENBAUM, who lives in Brooklyn, studied in Mesifita Torah Vodaath and Beth Medrash Elyon. While his business interests occupy much of his day, his early morning hours during the past four years had been dedicated to a regular study session with the Novominsker Rebbe, זצ"ל. He has recorded some of his impressions of the Rebbe on these pages.

his passing — I had traveled to Brooklyn from the Catskills to consult him on a *chinuch* (educational) matter regarding one of my children.

Actually, his circle of followers was far wider than one might have supposed:

*As far as we members of the Bais Medrash were concerned, "Sidney" was a mechalel Shabbos befarhesya — a public violator of the Sabbath, who deserved no place in our Bais Medrash. He had Yahrzeit one Shabbos, and the Rebbe went out of his way to wish him "Lechayim" after davening.*

*We had misgivings: Sidney's hair had been well groomed and combed, and his smooth cheek reeked of after-shave lotion — pungent reminders of fresh chilul Shabbos. After havdala, we respectfully approached the Rebbe: "Was it really necessary to give Sidney such kavod? He so obviously had violated the Shabbos!"*

*Said the Rebbe: "Shouldn't somebody tell him?"*

Yet the Rebbe's concept of *Klal Yisroel* had its very strict demands:

*A distant cousin who taught in Jewish Theological Seminary boasted to him that he influenced his students toward Chassidus. Why, he even had them over for a Friday night tisch!!*

*Commented the Rebbe: "...Like trees that blossom profusely, but never bear fruit."*

Others also knew his total suspension of self, his involvement in the situation of others. Our advantage was that we "learned with him."

### The Kvius

When we would arrive at the Bais Medrash early for our *kvius*, we could hear the Rebbe struggling with breakfast in the kitchen, one floor above. And it was a struggle. Since radical stomach surgery nine years earlier, it was very painful for him to swallow any food; yet he had to eat to survive.

A few minutes later he would enter the Bais Medrash, fall into his chair, with barely enough strength to open the *Gemora* and turn the pages. But once we began our studies, he would argue heatedly, shouting, jumping to his feet, running to fetch a reference *sefer* to prove a point.

"Shas on his fingertips" meant just that. He would unfailingly refer to the exact page of a *Gemora*, flip open the pages, with finger ready at the position, pointing to a *Tosfos* . . . all the while citing in advance *Tosfos's* three, four or five *tirutzim* (answers) to a particular question.

More than once, the Rebetzin entered, interrupting a spirited argument: "What are you doing to him? Stop!" she would plead. Whereupon, the Rebbe would protest: "Do you want to rob me of my life?"

Torah, indeed, was his food, his life-stuff, his very breath. Times he would enter the Bais Medrash gasping for air, coughing, "I don't think we can learn today but we'll make an attempt."

In a matter of minutes, he was totally involved — voice raised, emphasizing a point with his fist on the *shtender*.

The margins of his *Gemora* were crowded with annotations in his script. Yet, in our experience, whatever we learned together, he approached with a freshness, unencumbered with previous judgments, taking one word, one line at a time.

### His Concept of Klal Yisroel

Although the Novominsker Rebbe נ"צ"ק represented a very particular type of Polish Chassidus, his concept of *Klal Yisroel* was far from parochial. His deeper differences with the Satmar approach toward Israel are well known, yet a copy of the Satmar Rav's definitive "*Va'Yoel Moshe*" was seen at his bedside . . . If a *sefer* expressed the opinion of a legitimate group within *Klal Yisroel* or of a Torah leader, he wanted to know it.

The underpinnings of his understanding of *Klal Yisroel*, however, were Torah. For this reason, it seems, he took special delight in Daf Yomi as a binding ele-

ment of Jews the world over. In fact, quite apart from our regular sessions together, which were usually devoted to *Tur-Shulchan Aruch*, he made Daf Yomi his *kvius*, the focal point of his Torah study, which he would study standing, giving it his greatest concentration. He glowed with appreciation when I told him, how on one particular day, I saw different Jews — in Bnei Brak, on a TWA plane, and then in the airport in London — all studying the same page of *Gemora*, following the Daf Yomi schedule. He always had the *Gemora* — the volume containing the current Daf Yomi tractate — at his side. Friday afternoons before Mincha, on *Shabbos*, and *Motzoei Shabbos* after *havdala* . . . Yom Kippur eve, as well as right after the fast . . . on Purim . . . On his bedside table on the *Shabbos* that he passed away, lay the Daf Yomi volume of *Pesachim*.

*We were in the middle of our regular seder, when the Rebbe made reference to a particular commentary, jumped out of his seat and quickly scaled the ladder to reach the sefer to underscore his point. (He never asked anyone else to do his legwork for him.) On the way down, he tripped, and fell on a wooden box lying at the foot of the ladder. He suffered a terrible flesh wound and he gasped in pain. We attempted to pick him up, but he lifted his hand. "Please . . . we need a doctor . . . Leave me where I am."*

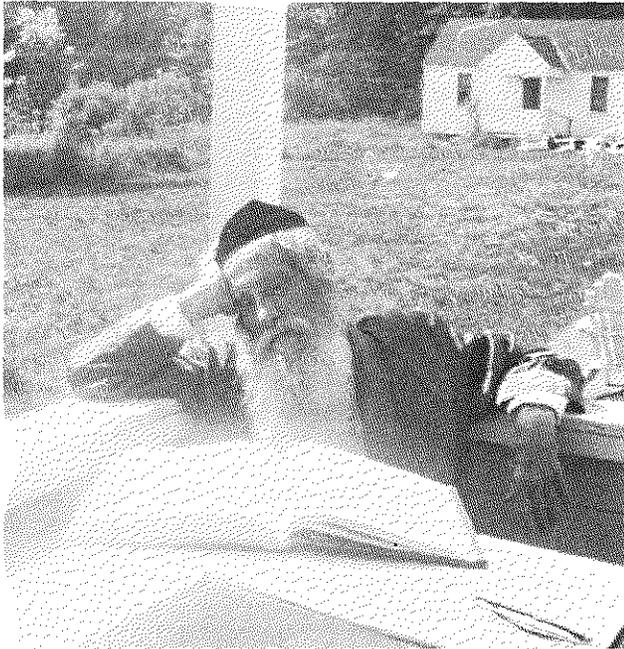
*No sooner had Yitzchok run for the doctor, then the Rebbe turned to me and whispered, "Beinish, gib mir a Gemora Zevochim" . . . the current Daf Yomi Mesechta. When the doctor entered a few minutes later, the Rebbe was on the floor, his position unaltered, except for his two hands stretched over his head, holding open like a canopy the Gemora Zevochim.*

*Before a trip to Miami last year — incidentally, the first time he ever went South for his health — he was packing his belongings: I found him squatting in his library with a flashlight, searching for meforshim (commentaries) on the next Daf Yomi tractate, Eruvin. He collected eleven different volumes, satisfied that he was prepared for the trip.*

### Meeting The Needs of Klal

The Novominsker Rebbe may not have been a very well-known public figure, but his deep concern and insights made him highly appreciated behind the scenes. It may seem contradictory, but he was active both as a member of Agudath Israel's Presidium, which concerns itself with day-to-day organizational matters, and as a member of its Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah, which is a policy-making body.

During the Yom Kippur War, we had the opportunity to observe him from close: the anguish and loss



"He would enter with barely enough strength to open the Gemora ... but in minutes would argue heatedly, finding new strength."

of sleep that further creased his face, the numerous calls from outstanding Torah leaders and Knesset members in Israel, the conference calls. And his calm demeanor and total immersion in Torah and tefilla, when their time had arrived.

On Shemini Atzeres, as was the custom of the Rebbes of Novominsk, he would hold a small Sefer Torah and spend as much as an hour expounding on Midrashic interpretations on the Chapter 30 of Mishlei: Eishes Chayil (Woman of Valor), which is an allegoric tribute to Torah. On this particular Shemini Atzeres, just ten days after the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, he said, "One is commanded: *אוהב את אשתו כגופו ומכבודו* — to love his Eishes Chayil as much as his own person, and to honor her even more. Klal Yisroel is threatened. Who can think of his body? What standard does it offer us for loving the Eishes Chayil, Torah? But the honor we must give is on a greater scale. Let us give kavod to the Torah."

He was like a sturdy tree: with roots sunk deeply into the old world, its branches stretched out into contemporary society.

He often said: *Problems repeat themselves. So, we must assume, do their solutions. What would Reb Chaim Ozer say to this . . . What did the Gerer Rebbe do? — or the Chidushei HaRim?*

Another of his frequent comments: *Yaakov Avinu was the "Rebbe" of our conduct in Golus. When he came to Shechem, he performed two services for the community: He minted coins and constructed bath-houses. The message is obvious. We must establish the means to carry on exchanges with other groups, but we must have the ability to wash off from ourselves the effects of each Golus exchange.*

One might say that this was the life pattern — involvement and, yet, isolation.

He would frequently say, "What can I do for this situation? What can I do . . . ?"

Discussing the plight of South American Jewry, and the founding of the Kolel in Argentina, he said, yearningly, "If I thought I could be of help there, I would go there, sick as I am — perhaps I would see some *Poilshe Yidden* and influence them to say *Shema Yisroel* again or to send their children to a Talmud Torah."

Two years ago, he told us that he would be interrupting his regular sessions during *Aseres Yemei Teshuva* (between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur) because he was traveling to Toronto on behalf of the Russian Immigrant Rescue Fund. I felt close enough to the Rebbe to protest: "If you will allow me, this is the kvittel season, when people come to you. They need you and . . ." I intimated that he was somewhat dependent on them.

Replied the Rebbe: "If they need me now in Toronto, I must go now. The Yid with the kvittel, if he really needs me, will come back later."

### If He Had Known . . .

When the Rebbe was born, his paternal grandfather, Reb Yaakov Novominsker, was so ecstatic over the birth of his first grandson — a direct descendant of the Besht (Ba'al Shem Tov) — that he recited the *bracha* "*Shehechiyonu*" in full. It seems as if his saintly grandfather had visualized that this descendant of the Besht would spend half a century in the United States, giving so much to Klal Yisroel, yet suffering not at all from exposure to the corrosive elements of American society.

Reliable Chassidic sources relate that the Chozeh of Lublin זצ"ל, during the sixteen years of his life that he was privileged to live contemporaneously with the Rebbe of Berditchev זצ"ל, would devote an hour a day to give thanks to *Hashem Yisborach* for this *zechus*, and to praise Him for having planted such lofty *neshomos* in our midst. (See *Tiferes Shlomo*). Perhaps we too should sing praise for having had the *zechus* to share our life on earth with such a lofty *tzaddik*, whose very existence was so inspiring to those that knew him. זכותו יגן עלינו. ❧

Aryeh Kaplan

# A "Get" in Monsey

ברביעי בשבת בארבעה ועשרים יום לירח מרחשון שנת תשס"ג  
 ושלשים ושש לכריאת עולם למנוח שאון מנוח כאן במאנסי מתא דיתבא על צדדי  
 ליק סוזען ועל מי בארת אנה המכונה והמכונה והמכונה והמכונה  
 המכונה והמכונה העומד היום במאנסי מתא דיתבא על צדדי ליק סוזען ועל  
 מי בארת עבית ברעות נפשי בדלא אנוסא ושביקת ופטרית ותרובידי יתכי  
 לכו את אנתתו ד י י דמתקריא דמתקריא דמתקריא דמתקריא  
 העומדת היום במאנסי מתא דיתבא על צדדי ליק סוזען ועל מי בארת דהית אנדמי  
 מן קדמת דנא וכדן פטרית ושביקת ותרובידי יתכי לכו דיתיהוויין רשאדי  
 ועלמאא בנפשיכי למקדן להתנסבא לכל צדדי דיתצביין ואנש לא ימחא  
 בידוכי מן יומא דנן ולעולם והרי את מותרת לך בכל אדם  
 דן די יהוי לכו מנא ספר תרוביך ואנרדת שבוקין וגט פטון  
 כד ד משר מן משר וישר אנ

עד  
 עד

## WHAT IS A GET?

THERE ARE FEW JEWISH PRACTICES that require as much precision as the issuing of a *get*. In concise words, the Torah prescribes the procedure: "He shall write for her a bill of divorce (*sefer krisus*), and give it into her hand" (*Devarim* 24:1). The *Targum Onkeles* translates "bill of divorce" into Aramaic "*get peturin*" (which is usually shortened to "*get*"). The detailed procedures emanating from this passage are all part of the Oral Law, spoken at Sinai.

Although the Torah permits divorce, it is certainly not a matter to be taken lightly; according to the Midrash, when a divorce takes place the very stones of the *mizbe'ach* (altar) weep for the tragedy. In addition to the human element, divorce is a grave matter because it deals with the sanctity of family life, which plays so supreme a role in Judaism, from premarital restrictions, through details of marriage law, and the regulatory requirements of *Taharas Hamishpacha* (Laws of Family Purity). In Jewish life there is no such thing as "an innocent affair."

In halachic (legal) terms, breaking the bond between man and wife represents a most radical change of status. Until the *get* is given, the marriage bond retains its full force — in terms of both the sanctity of the union and its proscriptive ramifications; a breach of marriage fidelity is nothing less than adultery, subject to the most severe penalties. Once the *get* takes effect, however, the former "*eishes ish*" (wife) is totally released from restrictive laws of marriage.

RABBI KAPLAN is a writer and lecturer on numerous Judaic topics. A number of his books have been published, including *Rabbi Nachman's Wisdom*, a translation of *Sichos HaRan*. He is a frequent contributor to these pages.

Everyone involved in preparing a *get* must be fully aware of the vast responsibility of producing such a powerful legal instrument. Reflecting the serious nature of a *get*, Jewish law requires that it be written with the utmost precision. Even the letters must be shaped in exact accordance with the laws of Torah script. . . . Not unlike a radio, where even a single misconnected wire results in a failure of reception, even a single "misconnected" letter will prevent a *get* from dissolving the marriage bond.

The entire Talmudic tract of *Gittin* is devoted to the laws governing the *get*. These laws are codified in 150 plus pages (*amudim*) in the standard printing of the *Shulchan Aruch* with literally thousands of responsa (*teshuvos*) devoted to the topic. The Rabbi supervising a *get* must be an expert in the major areas of these laws of *gittin*.

Special attention is given to the precise spelling and designation of all names in a *get*, not only of the principal parties, but also of the places referred to in the *get*; for these are crucial to the exact identification of the people involved, and to those responsible for the writing of the *get*. There is an extensive body of halachic literature governing this particularly difficult field. It could be said that through these laws, in a sense, every city in the world can become part of Torah.

The body of *halacha* governing the *get* can thus serve as an example of how the Torah includes and elevates all aspects of life — including the relationships between men and women, even touching the places where they dwell.



"So you wrote a *get* in Monsey. What's so impressive about that?"

I was overhearing what sounded like typical pre-Mincha banter. The other fellow, a bearded young man who seemed in his early thirties, was very excited. Even though there had been a Jewish community in the Monsey area (in suburban Rockland County, about 40 miles northwest of New York City) for some seventy five years, this was the first time that a *get* (Jewish Bill of Divorce) had ever been written there. Drawn into the conversation, I became fascinated, and invited the young man to my home, where the conversation continued until late in the night. My reward was some unexpected insight into an area of Jewish Law regarding which very little is generally known.

### The Time Has Come...

IT HAD BEGUN ABOUT THREE YEARS AGO, when the Kolel HoRabbonim, a Monsey-based institute devoted to the study of religious laws governing marriage and divorce, was going through the laws regarding the writing of the names of cities in *gittin* (*Even HaEzer* 128). Some students inquired as to how the city of Monsey would be treated in a *get*, and were surprised to learn that no *get* had ever been written there. This led to a theoretical investigation, attempting to apply the principles that they had been learning to the actual case of Monsey.

A host of unanswered questions brought Rabbi Leib Landesman (who was telling me this story) along with other Kolel members to the door of Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, who also lives in Monsey. In the course of the discussion, it emerged that some people hesitate to give a necessary *get* because they do not want to bother traveling to New York City. A case was discussed where a somewhat religious woman was divorcing a non-religious man, and he would only give her a *get* in Rockland County.

Only after many hours of persuasion would he consent to go to New York City. Upon hearing this, Reb Yaakov said that the time had come to set up the means for writing *gittin* in Monsey. "Besides," he said, "Monsey has already become a major Orthodox Jewish community and must be prepared to service other communities. It is only fitting that Monsey should be equipped to write *gittin*."

### No Trivial Task

ARRANGING FOR *GITTIN* TO BE WRITTEN in a city is no trivial task. The precise pronunciation and Hebrew spelling of the city must be determined, along with two identifying marks, such as adjacent bodies of water and the source of the community's water supply. Normally, the *Rav* of the city would make a preliminary investigation and then on that basis submit his opinion to leading authorities (*gedolim*) for approval. A *Rav* would only rely on his own judgment in a dire

emergency, and even in such a case, he would later subject his opinion to the scrutiny of leading rabbinical authorities, for the writing of an approved *get* establishes a binding precedent, with grave implications: If a woman should remarry without a proper *get*, her children subsequently born are *mamzeirim*, and this in turn can have tragic effects for many generations afterwards. It is therefore forbidden to alter such things as the spelling of a city or its identifying marks from *get* to *get*, since this would cast aspersions on earlier *gittin*, as well as on the status of children later born to the women divorced with the previously written *gittin*. Thus, the first *get* written in a city is all important, since its precedent may be binding forever.

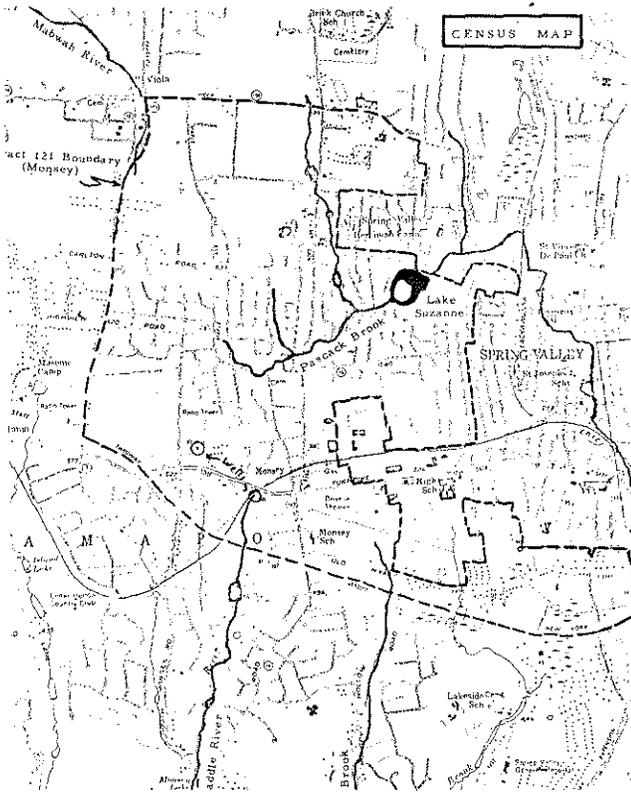
Even a *Rav* of the stature of Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky would not take the responsibility of determining these rulings on his own. He suggested that all the pertinent facts be investigated, and that they be presented to Rabbi Moshe Feinstein for approval.

### A Search for the Boundaries of Monsey

FIRST TO BE INVESTIGATED were the precise boundaries of Monsey. When writing a *get* there, one had to be certain that he was inside the city proper. One problem was that Monsey is not incorporated, and therefore does not have a corporate boundary. Rabbi Leib Landesman, dean of Kolel HoRabbonim, discussed this problem in *shul* one morning, and one of the congregants volunteered that he went hiking every Sunday with the Planning Director of Rockland County.

A meeting was set up in March, 1975, and the Planning Director agreed to investigate the matter. A week later, he sent Rabbi Landesman a census map, which provided the most official definition of the boundaries of Monsey available. A visit to the postal authorities, however, produced a second map, where the boundaries were defined somewhat differently. The first question: Which of these two maps should be accepted as authoritative?

Careful study revealed an inconsistency in the postal map. According to this map, several apartment buildings would be in Monsey proper. This, however, was impossible, since Monsey was unincorporated, and county zoning prohibited apartment buildings in unincorporated areas. By contrast, the census map showed these buildings to be in the adjacent incorporated village of Spring Valley. The corporate limits of Spring Valley were investigated, and these were found to conform to the census map. It was therefore decided to accept the census map as more authoritative. Reb Yaakov, however, suggested that they only use areas that were unquestionably in Monsey according to *both* maps. One does not take any chances in *gittin*.



### How Do You Spell "Monsey"?

ANOTHER QUESTION INVOLVED the precise pronunciation of the city. Some people pronounced it "Monsey," with the "o" corresponding to the "o" in "monster," while others pronounced it "Munsey," as in "Monday." If it were pronounced *Monsey*, it would have to be spelled (מונסײ), without an *Alef*; while if it were pronounced *Munsey*, the Hebrew spelling would be (מאנסײ), with an *Alef*. (As a general rule in *gittin*, an *Alef* denotes a *Kametz*.) Since residents used both pronunciations, this presented a problem.

The need for such precise determination is not at all far fetched. Over two hundred years ago, there was a question as to whether a certain city should have its name spelled Piltz (פילץ) or Piltz (פילטץ), with an extra *Tes*. A leading halachic authority of the time concluded that even such a minor variation in the spelling of the name can render a *get* invalid (*Nodeh BeYehudah* 88). As stated, the precise reference to place must be unequivocal, to avoid any doubt as to the exact location and the principals involved in the *get*.

Careful investigation revealed that most of the older residents pronounced the name of the city "Munsey." This was supported by a search through the records of the Rockland County Historical Society, which revealed that the city had been named after the Munsee Indians, a tribe of the Delaware family. . . . Even an Indian tribe had influence on how a *get* should be written!

Most important, however, was the fact that in Yiddish, the pronunciation was invariably "Munsey." There is a rule that whenever a slight variation exists between the Jewish and non-Jewish version of a city's name, the Jewish pronunciation be used (*Even HaEzer* 128:4, in *Hagah*). Hence, it was finally decided to use the pronunciation *Munsey*, and to spell it (מאנסײ), with an *Alef*.

### The Geographic Features

BEFORE A GET CAN BE WRITTEN in a city, certain identifying marks must be determined. These normally consist of adjacent bodies of water and the source of the local water supply. In the case of Monsey, such identification was particularly important, since there are two other cities with the same name: Muncie, Indiana, and Muncy, Pennsylvania. Even though these are spelled differently in English, in Hebrew they would be spelled the same as Monsey. Incidentally, both of these cities were also named after the Munsee Indians.

It would seem to be easiest to simply write "Monsey, New York." However, political divisions such as states and countries are never used in *gittin*, because they are arbitrary and subject to change. The usual practice is to use an adjacent river or lake as a distinguishing mark, for such natural features are considered permanent.

There are no prominent bodies of water near Monsey, and therefore, further investigation was necessary. If an identifying landmark could not be found, *gittin* could not be written in Monsey. A visit to the Rockland County Drainage Agency revealed several minor streams in the area, as well as a large pond, known as Lake Suzanne.

Initially, it seemed best to explore the small rivers that appeared to be close to Monsey. One young man making an on-site inspection of one of these streams, inadvertently trespassed on posted property and was stopped by the police. Imagine trying to explain to an Irish cop that he was surveying the stream in order to write a Jewish bill of divorce!

In the end, however, it was learned that the larger streams stop short of Monsey proper, while the smaller ones that do enter Monsey do not have well defined names. It was therefore decided to concentrate on Lake Suzanne.

This lake had only come into existence some thirty years earlier. It had originally been a swamp, fed by a small stream and springs on its north side. The owner of the property, Mr. Norman Elish, had dammed one end of the swamp, making it into a lake. Since it was situated on Suzanne Drive, it came to be called Lake Suzanne.

There was some question, however, as to whether this lake was permanent enough to be used as an identifying landmark. Since it was the only possible body of water that could be used, this was a crucial question. A

call to the Army Corps of Engineers confirmed that this lake could not be drained or filled in without government permission, since it was part of a major watershed. Further investigation revealed that property owners bordering the lake had water rights written into their deeds. When the owner of an island in the lake once wanted to drain it temporarily to facilitate the installation of sewer pipes to the island, a number of property owners sued to prevent even such a temporary draining. All this was enough to give the lake sufficient permanent status.

### From Whence the Water?

THE FINAL FEATURE TO BE DETERMINED was the source of Monsey's water supply. This necessitated a visit to the Spring Valley Water Company, which maintains some fifty artesian wells in Rockland County. It was learned that the company maintains a grid system, where water can be shunted from one place to another as needed. Normally, however, most of the water used in the Monsey area came from local artesian wells. An examination of the large system map indicated that at least one of these wells was located in Monsey proper.

Armed with all this information, three Kolel members made an appointment with Rabbi Moshe Feinstein. The major points were briefly discussed, but Reb Moshe announced that he would not even begin without consulting Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky. He immediately placed a call to Reb Yaakov, and they agreed to discuss the question fully after a forthcoming meeting of the Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah — the Council of Torah Sages of Agudath Israel of America (where the question of a special Martyrs Day for the Six Million was to be discussed).

After the meeting, Reb Moshe and Reb Yaakov were joined by the three Kolel members and Reb Moshe's secretaries. Another question immediately arose regarding Lake Suzanne. The lake is fed by a stream, and the water then flows out through the opposite end of the lake. Since the water is constantly flowing, according to *halacha*, the lake is nothing more than a wide spot in the stream. Still, it could not be called the "Suzanne River," since its official name is "Lake Suzanne." After an involved discussion of all pertinent precedents, Reb Moshe suggested that it be referred to as "Lake Suzanne River" (נהר ליק סוזן). After more than a year's background digging, the two Torah giants could agree on the initial wording: "Monsey, a city situated on the Lake Suzanne River . . ."

### "Waters of a Well" or "of Wells"?

ANOTHER QUESTION AROSE: Was there just one well in Monsey proper, or was there more than one? If there was only one, the proper wording would be "situated on the waters of a well (*mei be'er*)," while if there was more than one, it would be "waters of wells (*mei be'eros*)." Reb Moshe instructed the young men to

determine this precisely, and then to bring in all pertinent maps for his inspection.

A call to the Spring Valley Water Company produced a detailed map indicating all the wells in the Monsey area. The map showed two wells that appeared to be within the boundaries designated for Monsey, but this could not be determined for sure without a personal inspection. The first well, on Grove Street, was easy to find, and was clearly within the designated area. The second one, however, was more difficult to locate. It was off the highway at the end of a little-used dirt road. But was it actually within the halachic boundaries of Monsey? If it was, on one map, but not on the other, serious problems would remain unresolved. It was possible that after all this work, it would still be impossible to write *gittin* in Monsey.

The distance of this well from recognized land marks was carefully measured, and it was located on both the census and postal maps. Sure enough, according to both maps, it was within the borders of Monsey. It was thus established that there were two wells in Monsey proper.

When this information was brought to Reb Moshe, he wrote the following:

מאידך יתבאר כי אין זה מקום מושב / אין זה מקום מושב

("In Monsey, a city situated on the Lake Suzanne River, and on the waters of wells.") He said, however, that he would not render a decisive opinion until other major authorities (*gedolim*) formally agreed with him. He was especially concerned that such agreement come from Chassidic authorities, for he did not want to establish a precedent that would be binding on them without their consent. For this purpose, Reb Moshe wrote the text again on a piece of his official stationery.

### Winning Approval

OBTAINING SUCH AGREEMENT was not all that easy. Some rabbis simply did not want to presume to be the first to give consent. One deferred, saying that he was not sufficiently versed in American geography and the English language. Another indicated that he would like to formally agree, but limitations imposed by advancing age made it impossible for him to assume the responsibility of doing the necessary research. All felt the tremendous weight of responsibility that goes with setting up a city for *gittin*. As one sage noted, even Brooklyn had not been set up for *gittin* until some forty years ago.

The first one to grant consent was Rabbi Yechezkiel Roth, the Satmar Dayan (Rabbinical Judge). But even he did not do so easily. He was bothered by the reference to Monsey as "*mossa*" — which some authorities explain as meaning "city." For hundreds of years, *gittin* have described the place of the writing of

the document as a *mossa*, and the description would, of necessity, have to be an apt one. In emergency circumstances, a *get* could be written on an *ad hoc* basis in a village, and the setting would then be listed accordingly as a *k'far*. Otherwise, the *get* could not be written. True, a town with a population of over one hundred has the halachic status of a "city," and would not be called a "*k'far*" — a village. There is a major opinion however, that if people usually call a place a town or village, one cannot refer to it as a "city" in a *get* (*Divrei Chaim, Shemos Gittin, Shaar Shinuy Mekomos #10*). Monsey's status as one or the other had to be determined. Rabbi Roth requested two weeks to research the question. . . .

When the Kolel members returned to the Satmar Dayan, they discovered that he had actually written a *teshuva* (responsum) on the subject. Careful research had indicated that the opinion stating that an entity usually called a village could not be referred to as a city, was only referring to a village in a totally rural area. Without question, a suburban area, even if unincorporated, has the halachic status of a city (*mossa*). Thus, not only was a decision rendered for Monsey, but a precedent was established for all suburban areas.

To these names were added those of Rabbi Moshe Stern, the Debretziner Rav; Rabbi Moshe Neuschloss,

Rav of New Square; and Rabbi Nathan Horowitz, a leading Monsey Rav. The first *get* was written in Monsey on 24 Cheshvan, 5736, (October 29, 1975). In the following year, over fifteen additional *gittin* were written there, with people coming from as far as Connecticut and Pennsylvania.

### Seven Short Words . . . And 30,000 Divorces

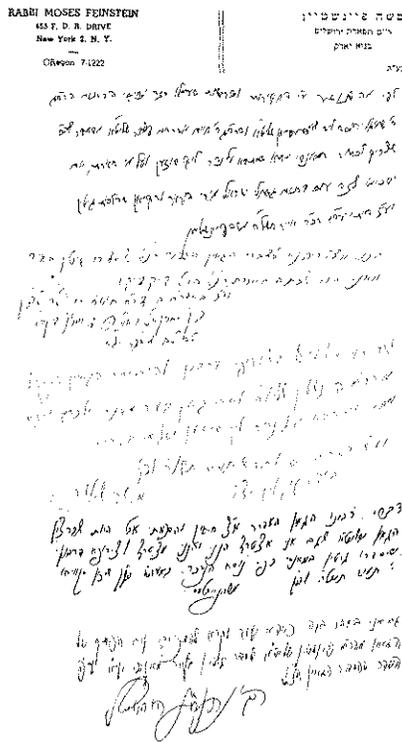
THIS EXTENSIVE INVESTIGATION involved nothing more than seven short words in the *get*. All this effort had been necessary merely to establish exactly how Monsey should be written and identified. But there are numerous other difficult points in a *get*. The names of both the man and woman must be spelled precisely; this includes both the Hebrew names and transliteration into Hebrew of all English names and nicknames by which they are known. A *get* must be written by a competent *sofer* (scribe), since many of the same laws apply in the same manner as they do in the case of *tefillin* and *mezuzos* (see JO Sept., 1975). The laws governing *gittin* are among the most complex in the entire *Shulchan Aruch*, and a *get* must therefore be prepared only under the supervision of the most proficient experts; which brings to mind an extremely critical problem:

If the overall divorce rate in America can be applied to the Jewish community, there are some 30,000 Jewish couples getting divorced every year. Assuming that intermarriages are shorter-lived than intra-Jewish marriages, and that they assume a large proportion of the figure, at least 10,000 Jewish couples divorce each year. How many of them are not aware of the requirements for the writing and delivering of a *get*? And that without one, the woman is still married to her first husband, and any children she bears by another man will be *mamzeirim*?

An awesome responsibility to avert the mushrooming of this type of tragedy falls on the shoulders of the Jewish community:

- The broad public must be made aware of the need for a *get* when a divorce is contemplated.
- Scribes and qualified rabbis must be prepared for the task. Is it conceivable that there are enough people sufficiently learned and well-trained to supervise and write 10,000 *gittin* every year?
- Efforts should be made to make the writing of *gittin* accessible to all who may require it. The precedent of writing *gittin* has already been set generations ago in most American cities — San Francisco, New Orleans, Kansas City, Omaha. Today, however, we are short of qualified personnel to carry on the precedent, when the need arises.

The stones of the *mizbe'ach* still weep when a *get* is delivered, but the very foundations of the *Mikdash* — the sanctuary of Klal Yisroel — shake when the family breaks up without the benefit of a *get*. ☐



Rabbi Feinstein's decision was signed by the Satmar Dayan, Debretziner Rav, Rav of New Square, and Rabbi Horowitz of Monsey.

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Nehama Consuelo Rezac

## The Ben Ish Chai

*A glimpse at the life and accomplishments of Chacham Yoseif Chaim of Baghdad, an outstanding Sephardic leader of the past century.*

IT IS PERHAPS to our benefit that many of Chacham Yoseif Chaim's works contain a photograph, taken in his twenty-sixth year. This was the year following the death of his father, Rav Eliyahu, the year Rabbi Yoseif Chaim took his father's place as Rav of Baghdad. Even those unfamiliar with the art of reading human features cannot fail to be struck by the inner power, yet calmness, nobility, and depth that his countenance reveals — truly reflecting him as a *tzaddik* and *gadol ba'Torah*.

Today Chacham Yoseif Chaim, known also as the Ben Ish Chai, is one of the great lights of the international Sephardic community, alongside the Chacham Yoseif David Azulai (the *Chida*), the *Ari*, and *Sar Shalom Shar'abi*. His place in the lives and hearts of Sephardim throughout the world is analogous to that of the Vilna Gaon or the Ba'al Shem Tov in those of Ashkenazim — and the number of his followers is continually growing.

The *shita* — the approach in halachic decisions and customs — of the Ben Ish Chai is followed by thousands from all communities — Persians, Ladino-speaking Sephardim, Moroccans, Kurdistanis. Although it is one of the most *machmir* (stringent) in the Sephardic world, its followers only sense its beauty, seemingly unaware of its strictness.

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NEHAMA CONSUELO REZAC was born in the United States, educated in Portugal and France, and now resides in Kiryat Matersdorf, Jerusalem. She has had several articles published on Sephardic Jewry. This is her first appearance in these pages.

*The Jewish Observer* / December 1976



### A Family of Chachamim

CHACHAM YOSEIF CHAIM was born in 1832 to a line of great *chachamim* who influenced the moral and spiritual development of Baghdad, proving himself another link in that chain at an early age.

As a boy he could always be found studying contentedly in his father's vast library. It is told that when he was fourteen he answered one of the questions sent to his father by the sages of Jerusalem. His father, busy at the time, could not tend to it until a day or so later. By the time Rabbi Eliyahu managed to send his reply, young Yoseif's answer had already reached Jerusalem and was found most acceptable. Rabbi Eliyahu received a message from Jerusalem, which included the words: "Your son, dear to your soul, has already preceded you and decided this case. May his father rejoice in him. . . ."

Rabbi Yoseif Chaim set aside a special room for seclusion where day and night he studied all aspects of Torah — *Shas* . . . *halacha*, *aggada* and *kabbala*. He

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Questions great and small, ranging from: "May one name one's child after a letter of the aleph-bet?"

to: "Should one say Tikun Chatzot in mourning for the Temple if one does not feel the sorrow?"

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worked tirelessly at his own spiritual perfection, aiming to purify and elevate his body to be attuned to his soul in the service of Hashem. He rose every midnight to recite the *Tikun Chatzot* and would say the morning prayers at sunrise. He continued this practice even after his appointment as Rav of Baghdad. He fasted the entire day for six consecutive years, only tasting food at night, to dull his sensual drives . . . He had a well dug in his home so that he could have a *Mikvah* available for ablutions whenever he so desired . . . The dean of Kabbalists of Jerusalem, Rabbi Chaim Shaul Dowek, testified: "All the Ben Ish Chai's words were ultimately based on inferences from the writings of the *Ari Za'l*..." and that "the pathways of the heavens were clear to him."

*Every Saturday night immediately following havdala, the Ben Ish Chai would ascend to the attic of his house to study, permitting no one to disturb him. It was rumored that on these occasions, Eliyahu HaNavi would appear to him to teach him Torah. The young men of his Bais Midrash, Bais Midrash Zilcha, wanted to test the veracity of this report. So they dispatched one of their ranks, Rabbi Yehoshua Sarboni, to . . . "rush up the steps and enter the Ben Ish Chai's attic room without knocking, on the pretext of posing a specific question to him. Then you will see for us whether or not Eliyahu is there."*

*No sooner was Shabbos over than Rabbi Yehoshua did as he was told. Half-way up the stairs, he met Rabbi Yoseif Chaim descending, who stopped to say: "My wise Yehoshua, in the Bais Midrash are they debating this perplexing problem . . . ? Go down and tell them that the explanation is as follows . . ."*

*Rabbi Yoseif Chaim's nephew, Rabbi Binyomin Ben-Moshe, recounts once entering his uncle's home on a Friday afternoon, finding him sitting and weeping: "I asked him, 'Why are you crying? Are you in pain . . .?'"*

*"He replied, 'Nothing hurts me. But just a short while ago the caretaker, who cleans the trash from the yard, passed my door. Someone invited him in*

*to taste one of the Shabbos delicacies, and the man refused, saying that all his life he has been careful never to enjoy something belonging to others. I am full of envy: Here is a man so simple, and yet so much greater than me. Doesn't the Gemora tell us: Greater is he that sustains himself with his own efforts than one who fears heaven? — This is why I am crying.'"*

#### His Works

AFTER HIS FATHER, Rabbi Eliyahu, passed away and Rabbi Yoseif Chaim was only 25 years old, the Jews of Baghdad accepted him as their Rabbi. They followed his halachic decisions and general advice with such complete faith that his disciple, Rabbi Ben-Zion Chazon commented: "If the Jews of old would have followed the directives of the prophets in their day as the Jews of Baghdad listen to Rabbi Yoseif Chaim, the *Bais HaMikdash* would not have been destroyed."

While every *Shabbos* he would deliver his sermon in the *Tsallat L'ziri* (the Small Synagogue), on four *Shabbosos* during the year Rabbi Yoseif Chaim, as the sole preacher that week, would speak in the *Tsallat L'ch'biri* (the Large Synagogue) . . . according to Baghdadian tradition, this *shul* was built at the outset of the Babylonian exile by Yehoyachin, King of Judah, with earth carried from Eretz Yisroel.

The Ben Ish Chai delivered a *drasha* every morning for fifty years, from his appointment until his death. He also gave a *shiur* (lecture) in *halacha* and *aggada*. The latter became the basis of two of his works on the non-halachic portions of Talmud: the five-volume *Ben Yehoyada*, and *Mekabtzil*, a complementary version of *Ben Yehoyada*. In these works on *aggada*, the Ben Ish Chai always incorporated the thoughts of the *kabbala* according to the *Ari*, including many *gematriot* and an occasional story.

One of these stories concerns an Arab sheikh who, through his humility and awe before the *Sheim Hashem* (the Tetragramaton) merited a degree of *ruach hakodesh*. This demonstrates the idea expressed in the *Tana Devei Eliyahu* and the Talmud that "It matters not one's background or sex; the *Shechina* rests on everyone according to the level of his actions."

The four-volume responsa *Rav Pe'alim* and *Torah Lishma* are works on *halacha*, written under the nom de plume "Yechezkiel Kahali." Both include questions from great and small, ranging from the deepest queries on the *Shulchan Aruch* and requests for clarification of Kabbalistic concepts, to questions such as "May one name one's child after a letter of the alphabet, especially one which is in the name of Hashem?" (The answer is "yes," as we find in *Pirkei Avot*, ben H'H, as well as Rav Yud, an *Amora* mentioned in Tractate *Ta'anis*.)

The first question in *Rav Pe'alim* is particularly significant to our generation, where emotions assume

such a strong role. Rabbi Yoseif Chaim was asked if one should say the *Tikun Chatzot* prayers, in mourning for the destruction of the *Beis HaMikdash*, if one does not feel them in his heart. The answer is, emphatically, to say the prayers; and the Ben Ish Chai cites *Nefesh HaChaim* by Rabbi Chaim Volozhin, the disciple of the Vilna Gaon, to show why every level of prayer is necessary; even deep, heartfelt *kavana* cannot begin to ascend to heaven without the rock-bottom level of physical utterance of the prayers.

Due to the custom among even unlearned Oriental Jews to read works of *Kabbala*, the Ben Ish Chai edited a new, voweled edition of the *Zohar*. He added a short commentary of the *Chida* to enable laymen to learn basic teachings and gain inspiration. Before his edition of the *Zohar* had appeared, copies had to be ordered from Poland.

In addition, Rabbi Yoseif Chaim composed many *pizmonim* and *piutim* (religious poetry) for various occasions, one of the most widely known being "Va'amartem Kol Chai" in honor of the Tanna bar Yochai and Lag b'Omer.

### Approach to Halacha

DESPITE HIS GREATNESS in tracing halachic problems directly to Talmudic sources (as shown in his *Teshuvos Torah Lishma*), the Ben Ish Chai always took into account the opinions of Oriental, Sephardic and North European *Acharonim* (later commentaries, from the 16th Century onward). The *Sha'ul Umeishiv*, the Gaon of Vilna, Rabbi Akiva Eiger, the *Shulchan Aruch Horav*, *Chaye Adam* and *Divre Chayim* are among those often mentioned in his works.

In his introduction to *Rav Pe'alim*, Chacham Yoseif Chaim decries the tendency among some to ignore or even spurn contemporaries or *Acharonim*. He also felt that every *posek*, regardless of stature, should take care to write with respect regarding others even when disproving their thinking, for failure to do so in the past had resulted in some classic *gedolim* of *halacha* to be ignored and even forgotten.

### Halacha and Oriental Minhag

RABBI YOSEIF CHAIM'S three-hour *Shabbos drashos* were the basis for his most famous work, the *Ben Ish Chai*. His talks opened with an explanation of the week's *Parsha* (Torah reading) in the light of the *Kabbala*, followed by practical *halacha* on a given subject.

This book is considered to be the "Sephardic *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*" — the standard reference book in all religious Sephardic homes — and is used in Sephardic *yeshivos* and religious schools in Israel to teach *halacha*.

The *Ben Ish Chai* gives a vivid insight into the environment and circumstances in which Rabbi Yoseif Chaim and his flock lived:

¶ The time for *havdala* is given as "twenty minutes after the Muslim call to prayer" (*Ben Ish Chai Toldos* Paragraph 2).

Moslem law provides for five prayer periods during a 24-hour day. These prayer periods are very strictly regulated as to time, calculated by the position of the sun, and each prayer period is announced by a *muezzin* singing from atop the minaret of the mosque.

¶ Formerly in all Moslem countries, as in Saudi Arabia today, both men and women observed the extreme in modesty in dress, wearing robes to their ankles, with high necks and long sleeves. Moslem women wore veils on their heads and covered their faces, at least the lower part, with a second veil. However, they were accustomed to wearing sandals with no stockings, or went barefoot. Jewish women in those countries wore the same clothes as their Moslem neighbors. Rabbi Yoseif Chaim thus has this to say on *tznius* (personal modesty):

"In European cities, women customarily wear shoes, so that their feet are not visible. A guest from a place where women are accustomed to going barefoot, must take care to act according to the custom of the place he is visiting, and consider it forbidden to pray before the sight of bare feet" (Chapter 21,2).

### The Chacham's Family

CHACHAM YOSEIF CHAIM married Rachel, the daughter of Rabbi Yehuda Someich, a relative of his teacher Rabbi Abd-Allah Someich. Rabbi Yoseif Chaim endowed his family life with the same brightness and creativity that he brought to all his endeavors. He frequently took time to discuss Torah and life in general with his wife and children, despite his heavy schedule. He even composed riddles and puzzles for his family, some of which are recorded in the book *Imre Bina*. The following is a typical teaser from this collection:

*There were two rabbis, one in a small city and one in a large city. A great Gaon wrote letters to each one of them addressing both with the title "Gaon," despite the fact that neither merited this title. His disciples said, regarding each of the rabbis, 'Rabbeinu, so-and-so is not worthy of this.' Regarding both, the Gaon said, 'Hamakom\* shall make up for his shortcomings.' What did he mean?"*

*Answer: "In each case, the title is in proportion to the place. In the small town, even though the rabbi seems unworthy of the title, he is worthy because there was no one else like him in the town. In proportion to the Torah-poverty of the place in which he lived, he is a Gaon.*

*"In the larger community, the city's size gives the rabbi stature and thus he too merits the title.*

\**Hamakom*, usually a reference to the Deity, literally means "the place."

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Therefore, in each case it can be said that 'hamakom' makes up for each person's shortcomings."

#### Eretz Yisroel

THE BEN ISH CHAI'S strong attachment to Eretz Yisroel was evident in many ways. He personally brought a large stone from the Holy Land to be placed at the entrance of the main synagogue (which had soil from Eretz Yisroel on its floor) where he gave his *drashos*. All his books were printed only in the Holy Land to help support the *yishuv* there. Under his influence, one of Baghdad's wealthy Jews donated his entire estate to the building of Yeshivat Porat Yoseif in the Old City of Jerusalem.

During Rabbi Yoseif Chaim's trip to Eretz HaKodesh in 1869, he visited various *Yishuvim*, stopped at the graves of *tzaddikim*, and met with a number of Kabbalists then in Jerusalem. He was offered the position of Rishon LeZion (Sephardic Chief Rabbi), but, for reasons unknown to us, he did not accept.

#### Rabbi Yoseif Chaim and the Community

A JEWISH CAB DRIVER from Baghdad gave what is probably the most eloquent testimony regarding the Ben Ish Chai's influence on his *kehilla*: even years after Rabbi Yoseif Chaim's death, the average working Jew in Baghdad spent four hours of his day at work, the rest of the time studying Torah.

Rabbi Yoseif Chaim's *takanot* (ordinances) had included the excommunication of any violator of the *Shabbos*, however slight his offense. . . . Even those who came late for prayer never repeated their error.

Throughout his life no man dared defy the Ben Ish Chai, with one well-known exception. In 1876, a Viennese teacher, Jacob Obermeyer, came to Baghdad and attempted to introduce a number of leniencies in Jewish law. Rabbi Yoseif Chaim forcefully condemned these innovations, but Mr. Obermeyer was not fazed. He sent letters to Hamagid (a weekly organ of the *Maskilim*) at-

tacking the position of the Chacham. When copies of the newspaper reached Baghdad, the communal leaders were shocked, and united in putting Mr. Obermeyer into *cheirem* (excommunication). The book *Toldos Yehudei Bavel* (History of Iraqi Jewry) records that a sharp *rebuttal*, signed by twenty seven leading rabbis and scholars, was sent to Hamagid, and that the *cheirem-proclamation* was read aloud in all synagogues in Baghdad. It was even sent to Jerusalem, where it was published in a special edition of the Orthodox journal *Halevanon* (5636).

A short time later, Mr. Obermeyer was informed by telegram that his mother died — which local rabbis interpreted as a result of his defiance of the Ben Ish Chai. When he sought to have a *minyan* meet in his home during the week of mourning, no Baghdadian Jew would cross his threshold — until he retracted his criticisms of the Ben Ish Chai, and begged for his forgiveness.

#### His Legacy

RABBI YOSEIF CHAIM died in 1909. He left a daughter and a son, Rabbi Yaakov, a *gadol* whose opinions and explanations the Ben Ish Chai incorporated into many of his works. Rabbi Yaakov Chaim later took his father's place as *Rav* and *Maggid* of the community of Baghdad and wrote works of his own.

The aura of Rabbi Yoseif Chaim shines far beyond the borders of Iraq. His spirit and warmth and inspiration are everywhere, conspicuous in hundreds of ways. One can see families gathered around the holiday table, lovingly and joyously following the order of the *se'uda* (festival meals) recommended in *Tefilat Yesharim*, the Ben Ish Chai's *Machzor*. His books are "religious best-sellers," not only to the Sephardic public. In Jerusalem alone one can see several small *yeshivos* and Talmud Torahs that bear his name, as well as others that follow his *shita*. During the last three years, two new Sephardic schools that teach Rabbi Yoseif Chaim's *shita* have been established in Jerusalem, one of which was founded by Rabbi Menachem Basri, one of his descendants.

An appropriate ending to a biographical sketch of Rabbi Yoseif Chaim might be the title of one of his books: עוד יוסף חי "Yoseif Still Lives."

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# second looks at the jewish scene

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Yaakov Feitman

## Of Nobel Prizes and Symbolic Jews

I DO NOT BEGRUDGE Saul Bellow his recently won Nobel prize. Nor, indeed, would I deny him the \$160,000 it brings. When one considers the literary figures whose writings reeked of anti-Semitism, yet whose mantels became crowded with awards and laurels, Bellow seems a choice reflecting a rather surprisingly pro-Jewish sentiment. Dreiser, Pound, Sherwood Anderson, T.S. Eliot, Hemingway and Fitzgerald all lent their names, talents — and yes, even genius — to promulgating Goebbel's "big lie," adding the almost religious aura of literature to sordid and cheap attacks, different from their predecessors only in that they flowed majestically in iambic pentameter.

Yet, perhaps we have moved somewhat away from veneration of one such as T.S. Eliot who could write "and now the Jew squats on the window sill, the owner . . ." The attempt to award Ezra Pound the Emerson-Thoreau award of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences was thwarted through the courageous efforts of Professor Daniel Bell and a few others. The fact that the virulently anti-Semitic

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Pound was finally recognized to be morally equal to the Nazi poet Gottfried Benn is surely a belated, but hopefully auspicious sign that the intellectual community is beginning to recognize at least some aspects of its moral as well as aesthetic obligations.

If the academic and intellectual community has finally begun to examine one bit of its immense moral responsibility and power, literature as a weapon has long been felt by the Jewish people. Shylock was not Shakespeare's invention alone and *The Jew of Malta* did not spring fully grown from Christopher Marlowe's brain.

Yet we have always been able to deal with anti-Semitism.

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We expect it and we study *Parshas Vayishlach* and we attempt to deal with it.

What is relatively new and subtly — and therefore profoundly — dangerous is the phenomenon of American Jewish literature. What are we to make of Philip Roth and Bernard Malamud, Norman Mailer and Arthur Miller, Chaim Potok and I.B. Singer, and our Nobel Laureate, Saul Bellow?

Critics, columnists and would-be proud parents tell us to take pride in

these, our achievers, our accomplishments, our "famous ones." They are ranked not merely among the Einsteins and Salks, but higher because they seem to proclaim their "Jewishness." Salk *could have been* a gentile working in his lab and Einstein used no special Jewish formulae at his Princeton blackboard. But Saul Bellow is proclaimed everywhere as the "Jewish author." The New York Times enshrines him as the writer who tells "the story of the Jewish romance with America,"<sup>1</sup> and indeed without the Jewish matrix of his stories, Bellow would not be the same.

Yet, here we must stop and take careful stock of our ostensible literary agents. Are *we* being represented to the world? Is *Judaism* being portrayed, or has a fictional world, unrelated to reality or viewed through a distorting mirror been created for the millions who thrive on these works?

In even considering these authors and works, we are taking a great liberty, which we perhaps have no right to do. Unfortunately, the passport for any author entering the land of "modern literature" is printed on a press replete with obscenities and must be stamped with the seal of vulgarity.

Yet, even ignoring this intrinsic denial of Jewish sensitivity to the written word throughout the ages and overlooking — for the sake of argument — the necessity for what was once openly acknowledged as pornography, we must examine the so-called "Jewishness" of these works. For *bnei Torah*, perhaps, the problem is irrelevant. For knowledgeable Jews, the question may be inconsequential, for they know better. But, let us consider for a moment, that for the vast majority of English speaking Jews the question is a crucial one. For today, perhaps the last truly venerated figures are the literary giants. Once they have been critically and academically accepted, their words are sought, scrutinized and studied

like ... yes in some circles like those of the Torah itself (*lehavdil*). Thus, how they portray Judaism to the world is more important than what professors and academics write in their journals and say in their lecture halls.

### Perfidious Metaphors

WHAT, FOR INSTANCE, makes Bellow a Jewish writer? Is there a real difference between a Jewish and a gentile Moses Herzog or Augie March — even assuming that a character who is truly representatively Jewish would use the language they do? Critics seem to agree that Bellow's protagonists are intrinsically, not coincidentally, Jewish. But they cannot agree on why.

Charles Eisinger, for one, echoing one of the grand mistakes of quick-course Judaism, asserts that the "enthusiastic but orderly spirit of *The Adventures of Augie March* is a Hasidic one. Rather than being confined by the law of the Torah, the Hasidim rejoiced in it, affirming life with song and dance, releasing their emotionality."<sup>2</sup>

Here we encounter one of these powerful perfidious metaphors in modern literature, which have done so much irreparable harm. Chasidim are pictured and described as sacrificing the laws of the Torah and *halacha* for the less rigorous joys of drinking, singing and generally enjoying life — like so many Cossacks on the eve of battle.

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### Suffering Similes

YET, EVEN UPON THIS spurious point the critics cannot agree. Another claims the Bellow's characters are essentially Jewish because they suffer. "Their distinctive dimension arises," he asserts, "from the fact that they wear their heart on the sleeve as if it were the Star of David."<sup>3</sup>

Well, do they jump for joy or tremble in agony?

The answer is of course: neither. The salient parts of their personalities are not Jewish, because they themselves are not Jewish. Bellow, like his literary colleague Bernard Malamud, does not present Jews as Jews, for themselves, being themselves. The Jew is divested of all concrete reality and uniqueness and becomes a mere shell, a symbol, a metaphor — something to be used, to be distilled into something uni-

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versal, but above all, not to be left alone.

The process of abstracting the Jew into something "definable" in universal terms often leaves nothing more substantial than moonbeams. One critic, agonizing over Bellow's definition of "Jewishness" comes up with the ultimately meaningless "a family-feeling or heartfelt truth."<sup>4</sup>

Another critic unwittingly performs a *reductio ad absurdum* in seeking a "Jewish meaning" in *The Adventurers of Augie March*: "To sit at the feet of a sage is very much the act of a Jew. The succession of men who counsel Augie, generally at the metaphysical level, are rabbis,

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if we take the word at its true meaning, teacher."<sup>5</sup>

This is desperate stuff, but of course there is no truly Jewish content or character, so critics resort to the most convoluted of sophistry to find some.

### Nowhere A Real Jew

WE MAY THEREFORE allow ourselves more than a touch of cynicism when we read in the *Times* of Bellow's theme, "the Jewish Romance With America."<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Bellow, like so many of his American-Jewish contemporaries, deals more with the American Romance with the Jew as a symbol.

Nowhere is a real Jew, loyal to his faith, traditional in his outlook, allowed to surface and develop as an independent human being. One so-called traditionalist, Grandma Lausch, "never attends the synagogue, eats bread on Passover, loves canned lobster, etc., yet lights the Yor Zeit candle." Bellow talks eloquently of her "kitchen religion." Another symbol. Grandma Lausch is reminiscent of Morris Bober, protagonist of Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant*, who also eats ham and is eulogized by the rabbi in the book as one "who lived in the Jewish experience."<sup>7</sup>

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Clearly, Bellow has fallen prey to Malamud's famous epigram that "all men are Jews", solving forever the problems of anti-Semitism and "who is a Jew?". Bellow, like Malamud, strips his Jewish characters of every last vestige of uniqueness and forever inters them as mankind's Cain-like wandering symbols, to be used as metaphors and similes, but never ever viewed as themselves.

Thus, let us not be so quick to be grateful that some alienated Jew can point with pride at "our" Nobel Laureate, "our" writer. We have yet to produce writers who will deal boldly with real Jews, who take their religion seriously and struggle to *maintain* their faith midst those who would turn them into symbolic nothingness and metaphoric oblivion. Until we do, the least — and perhaps all — we can do, is to make clear to our circles of influence that "Nobelity" is not necessarily nobility and the world of fiction is just what Funk and Wagnall's Dictionary says it is: "... that which is feigned or imagined, as opposed to that which is actual." As to heroes, let us remind ourselves once more: We have given to the world the greatest literature of all. Our heroes are the masters of that extraordinary body of work — those who have mastered its contents — but most important, those who live by its teachings. 

### FOOTNOTES

1. John Leonard, October 22, 1976, p.1.
2. Bernard Sherman, *The Invention of the Jew* (New York, 1969), p.141 and Allen Guttman, *The Jewish Writer In America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.183.
3. Abraham Bezanker, "The Odyssey of Saul Bellow," *Yale Review* LVII (Spring, 1969), p.360.
4. Irving Malin, *Saul Bellow's Fiction* (Carbondale, Ill., 1969), p.148.
5. Sherman, op. cit., p.142.
6. Leonard, Ibid.
7. See my article in *The Jewish Parent*, April, 1976, p.18.

# Time To Protest

WOMEN ARE NOW being admitted to the Military Academy at West Point, and this is a move that each of us should strongly protest.

— Protest? Don't we Jews have enough genuinely *Jewish* concerns to lobby for, threats to genuinely *Jewish* interests to protest against, without raising our voices against an already established policy that only seems to reflect current moral standards? After all, the Jewish male enrollment at West Point is small as is; and it is highly unlikely that many a Jewish American Princess will be attracted to apply for entry there. And, in the final analysis, enrollment in this officer's school is voluntary, not compulsory. Moreover, no other groups have protested this move, and we Jews form a very small minority of the total American population, and would have very little bearing on this latest step toward authorized promiscuity. So why protest?

Yet this announcement of the acceptance of young women into the Military Academy should have triggered an instant recoiling of horror within each one of us. Horror at the graduation of promiscuity as a way of life from side-street status, to

condoning at the private school level, where colleges have permitted co-ed dormitories, to sanction by the government of our republic.

So we, indeed, should have protested. But not against the government for allowing the concept of Pursuit of Happiness to deteriorate from a spiritual goal to one of self-pandering. Government policy only reflects the prevalent attitude in our country. So no sense in protesting against the American government. We should have waved a flag of protest against ourselves for simply strugging our shoulders at this newest milestone in moral degeneration, rather than responding with a preconditioned repugnance.

Yes, protest we must — against our own waning sense of rectitude, personal modesty, and morality — before there is nothing left to protest for. ✠

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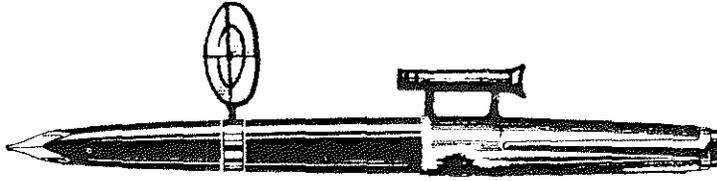
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## Letters to the Editor



### Dr. Kaminetsky Comments on "The Hebrew Day School in '76"

To the Editor:

THE JEWISH OBSERVER presentation of The Day School in '76 was a fair and understanding delineation of the problems and challenges we face in the movement. There were several slight inaccuracies in fact and attitude in the article, but rather than react to them point by point, I would prefer to state my view on the over-all matters brought up.

Indeed, the major challenge to existing day schools — mostly in isolated communities and suburban areas — is the attempts to infiltrate into the school's ideology, to water down its Orthodox orientation. Dr. Irving Fried, in his study, did not "discover America." For years, the emissaries of Torah Umesorah have been fighting these attempts at infiltration. They have been discussed repeatedly at Rabbinical Board meetings, principals' regional conferences, and National Conventions. Dr. Fried scientifically tabulated that which we fear.

#### Unity for Proliferation

THERE IS ANOTHER SIDE of the coin, the problem as it affects *the new schools* we still want to build. And here I must digress for a moment and deal, however briefly, with *The Jewish Observer's* concern vis-a-vis the proliferation of schools.

The unforgettable founder of Torah Umesorah, Reb Feivel Mendlowitz, ל"צ had as his basic purpose the *founding of new schools*, as the adage on Torah Umesorah stationery says: "Dedicated to the establishment of a day school in every Jewish com-

munity." Rabbi Mendlowitz had urged us to put on the Torah lights, *bedavke*, in the small out-of-the-way communities, patterned after the yeshivos of Eastern Europe — most of which were in the small towns. Never have we forgotten that mandate.

Are close to 100,000 pupils in our day schools enough? Are close to 500 schools adequate for all of America? Following the ratio of 5000-7500 people to a school — are there not communities today which should have at least 10 day schools? Where do the *talmidim* of higher yeshivos come from today, if not from our day schools in all parts of the country? Need I remind you: "Im ein gedayim — teyashim minayin?" (If there are no lambs, from whence the ewes?)

The principle question which confronts us, then, is: How can we build day schools today in these small communities, or in the suburbs which need them so desperately, when there are *no Orthodox Synagogues in them, no Orthodox leaders?* — even when the local day school pioneers want only Torah Umesorah to come in?

The only answer to this burning question is a strategy to unify *all* factions within the Orthodox camp, doing away with the fragmentization of our resources. For *kibbush hakehillos* for Torah — to conquer communities — we need *all* Orthodox groups working together — not only Torah Umesorah, but *all* Synagogue groups and *all* Rabbinical groups . . . . Can we achieve such unity?

## The Personnel Problem

MY SECOND POINT concerns personnel — the paratroopers who man the outposts of Torah in our endeavor to be *kovaish kehillos* for Torah. Reb Feivel Mendlowitz's plan was *first* to build Aish Dos — to organize the army for the conquest. This objective is still germane today.

*The Jewish Observer* article delineated most of the reasons for our *bnei yeshiva* not going into *Chinuch*, but an essential point was omitted.

Our yeshivos must make a concerted, serious effort to urge their best *talmidim* to go into the battle. The clarion call of Reb Yozei Hurwitz, ל"צ the Novardoker, in the accents of his fiery essay in "Madraigos Ha'Adam" — "Mezakeh es Horabbim (To Turn the Many to Righteousness)" — speaks to our current-day *bnei yeshiva* as to *their responsibility to work for the Klal*. I am convinced that the burning words of this essay prodded Reb Feivel into organizing Torah Umesorah, for Reb Feivel's favorite quotations are exactly those found in "Mezakeh es Horabbim."

We both pointed out what a corps of *bnei yeshiva* could do in bringing Torah to a community. SEED proved it most dramatically. So long as so many of our yeshiva graduates leave their active participation in Torah life, not entering the field of *Chinuch* — so long will our day schools be mere preparatory schools for all kinds of Jews, except the ones we need so desperately.

In some yeshivos that sponsor *mechonim*, our "Machon'niks" seem to enjoy some degree of second-class status. We must find a way for yeshivos to encourage a small portion of their *best talmidim* to enter *Chinuch bedavke* on the elementary level — in line with the beautiful quotation from Reb Aaron Kotler, ל"צ: When leaving his company, he would charge us,

"Go out and do *chessed* with Jewish children."

Devoting a few years to *Chinuch* must become part and parcel of the yeshiva *bachur's* learning and training, even if he does not remain in *Chinuch* all his life. Until then, he should not be permitted to leave the yeshiva. The greatest influences in Eretz Yisroel for *kibbush kehillos* for Torah come from the *yeshiva-leit* organized in various groups that visit kibbutzim, moshavim and outlying communities on a regular basis.

In response to this need, the Roshei Yeshiva are now issuing a *Kol Korei* (proclamation) urging their graduates to enter the field of *Chinuch*. More, they are urging them to enter the rabbinate, also, to make *kibbush kehillos* that much more meaningful. Of course, a *Kol Korei* does not in of itself make things happen; the *bnei yeshiva* must recognize the urgency of the situation and realize their crucial role in this endeavor.

#### Breaking Down the "Kreisel" Complex

MY THIRD POINT follows closely on the former one: A need on the part of all Torah workers — Roshei Yeshivos, educators, graduates of yeshivos, and all who occupy leading roles in yeshiva work — for selflessness, for support of *all* yeshivos, for loyalty to the *yeshiva concept per se*.

I believe, of course, that Torah Umesorah is permeated by loyalty to this concept. Through his life and work, Reb Feivel, *ב"צ*, emphasized it — and bequeathed it to us. So far as I know, the Chazon Ish lived by this rule as well. In essence, this means that all of those delineated above must allocate a part of their time — and their resources as well — to *all* Torah institutions, above and beyond their concern for and loyalty to their own institutions. The growth of Torah in America is suffering from a "Kreisel" complex: Each is con-

cerned only with his own yeshiva — and is reluctant to go out of his way to help another.

Of course, I feel this most strongly through my work in Torah Umesorah. While I value the work done by former yeshiva men for local yeshivos, I am appalled by their lack of support of Torah Umesorah — which is concerned with the spread of the yeshiva concept *per se*.

This is not an appeal for Torah Umesorah through the pages of *The Jewish Observer*. But Aish Dos faded away not for lack of interest, but for lack of funds. SEED did a terrific job; it received innumerable plaudits — but Torah Umesorah is stuck with the unpaid bills.

In concise summary: all of Orthodoxy, working together, with the *bnei yeshiva* as the captains and generals, under the flag of loyalty to the yeshiva concept *per se* — all of this put together will spell out more and better yeshiva education in the years to come, *b'syata d'shmayah*.

DR. JOSEPH KAMINETSKY  
Director, Torah Umesorah  
New York City

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#### Rabbi Wolpin Comments:

##### In Reply to Dr. Kaminetsky

DR. KAMINETSKY, as head of the Day School Movement for over thirty years, has succeeded in eloquently articulating the long-range goals toward which it has been striving since its very inception.

There are, however, certain qualifications for these goals that are not mentioned in his presentation, and perhaps a clearer understanding of the status of the day school can result from pointing them out and addressing ourselves to these points.

##### What Kind of "Day School in Every Community"?

REB FEIVEL MENDLOWITZ, *ב"צ*, surely wanted "a day school in every Jewish community," but it went without saying that if the

choice in a particular community were between a Conservative-controlled day school and *no* day school at all, the unhappy decision would of necessity be one less day school. "*Kibbush kehillos*" — the conquest of new outposts for Torah — is an exciting motto, but abortive attempts at establishing beachheads — but never going beyond the beachhead stage, surrendering to anti-Torah forces instead — would be a tragic squandering of limited irreplaceable human resources.

Day schools do not operate in a vacuum, but are to a great extent subject to local pressures. This should dictate more caution, avoiding "spreading ourselves out too thin." In line with the *Kol Korei* mentioned by Dr. Kaminetsky, the prospect of more yeshiva graduates working effectively in the rabbinate certainly would offer day schools a more firm foothold in contested *kehillos*.

##### Unity For "Kibbush Kehillos"

THE CONCEPT of a united Orthodoxy working together for spreading day schools is a worthy goal — as is a united orthodoxy for *any* purpose. Agudath Israel would be ready for such union — with the understanding that the ultimate authority is vested in our *Gedolei Torah*. Otherwise, with "every man doing as is correct in his eyes," the results would be predictable: thinly-veiled self-service vying with misguided good-intentions with anarchy as the prime result. Especially in Torah education must the dominant decision-making powers and the determination of policy be in the hands of leading Torah scholars ... Are other groups willing to accept this stipulation?

Furthermore, unity would of necessity be more than tactical in nature. It would have to be ideological as well, with clear guidelines as to what type of outside cooperation is welcome and which is not. For the imprecise definition of Judaism that permits



## LETTERS CONTINUED

religious association with deviationist groups is the very type of ideological imprecision that has allowed some day schools to drift away from an uncompromising Torah allegiance. No question about it — the sanctioned nibbling away of basics in one school — or one organizational format — destroys definitions and weakens the defenses in countless other fronts ... Beachheads may be

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gained, but without adhering to a precise standard, incorporating a Torah-and-emunah based curriculum, *kehillos* can ultimately be lost.

### The Personnel Crunch

ONE CANNOT AGREE more with Dr. Kaminetsky's hope that yeshiva graduates will respond to the call of the *Roshei Yeshiva* and enter the field of yeshiva education in ever greater numbers. To be sure, when young men are still in the midst of their yeshiva years, and entertain no career plans whatsoever, *Chinuch* also would occupy no place among their immediate concerns. Yeshiva education is geared for but one goal: *gadlus* — greatness in Torah. But once *bnei yeshiva* contemplate leaving, obligation to *Klal* should assume first priority in their plans; yet too often it does not.

I do not pretend to have the answers to the personnel problems of yeshiva day schools. I would, however, reiterate a point only referred to obliquely in the article: We are living in a highly materialistic, pragmatic society, where even education is goal-oriented — toward careers. For this reason, our communities at large — and even our yeshiva population, to some extent — view an "Alef-Bais Rebbe" as on a much lower rung in the social ladder than they do a lawyer, doctor, CPA, or civil servant; for in the common view, the Rebbe position does not seem to justify the years of education spent "in preparation." The brain drain

that must be plugged should be that which permits the flow of our better young men to the college campuses instead of toward professions in *Chinuch*. Then, someone who does not achieve the ultimate goal of *gadlus* should feel much more fulfilled as a Rebbe in any grade in a day school anywhere in the country than as an independently wealthy layman.

With this type of viewpoint setting the pace in our Orthodox society, with even the yeshiva-graduated laity looking up to anybody in the *Chinuch* world, at least part of the battle of *kibbush kehillos* would be won.

### The "Kreisel Complex"?

I AM SOMEWHAT CONFUSED by Dr. Kaminetsky's reference to the "Kreisel Complex" of Torah institutions. Our major Torah institutions work closely together at the very highest levels and come to the aid of one another's undertakings far beyond the norm in any other kind of endeavor. The senior *Roshei Yeshiva* have set striking examples of extreme involvement in countless national and international causes — Torah Umesorah, *Chinuch Atzmai*, Agudath Israel, RIRF, among others.

Perhaps Dr. Kaminetsky is bemoaning a lack of recognition for Torah Umesorah's major work in the spreading of Torah across the American countryside. Unfortunately, many of the Torah community's most ardent supporters often fail to see the forest for the trees — they do not recognize the significance of any national organizations for their involvement in local projects. Here, the job of educating the public is the media's as much as it is the organization's.

Beyond doubt, the ability to spawn innovative programs while adhering to the principles of the organization's founders will ultimately win the admiration and support of the community at large.

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**Correction**

A news item in the May 1976 JEWISH OBSERVER regarding Agudath Israel's accomplishments in Latin America incorrectly reported the kosher meat situation in Argentina. The following is offered as a correction:

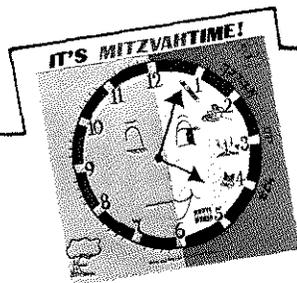
Twenty five years ago, Rabbi Issur Mazel, acting on behalf of Agudath Israel, established kosher *shechita* and meat processing. Responsibility for this enterprise passed on to others, and is currently under the supervision of Rabbi Yoseif Oppenheimer, a leading Buenos Aires rabbi.

Rabbi Yirmiya Kohen, who as of one year ago became rabbi of the Agudath Israel kehilla in Buenos Aires, has undertaken to supervise a specific volume of the same *shechita*, incorporating certain *chumros* (extra stringencies and cautionary procedures) in the processing.

The meat and poultry under Agudath Israel is distributed at appreciable discount. Previously, the difference between kosher and non-kosher meats were as much as 80%, while differences between Agudath Israel meats and non-kosher meats have now been reduced to 10-15%.

In the same way, Agudath Israel has made available existing Passover products at discount prices, to the great benefit of needy families and those of marginal commitment.

Any unworthy reflection on other Argentine Jewish communities or their leaders was unintentional and is deeply regretted.



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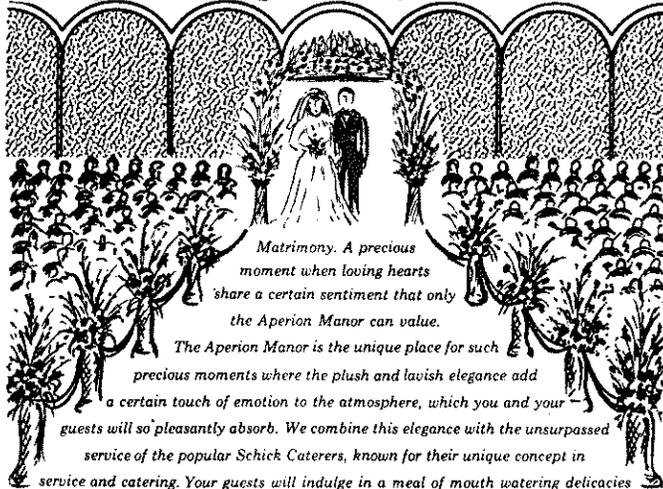
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**Ruderman, Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchek** Postscripts, Dec. '75.

**Saperstein, Yisroel** "—Like Sheep?", June '76.

**Schiller, Mordechai** Postscripts, Dec. '75.

**Shapiro, Avrum P.** In Praise of Repetition and Small Town Joys, May '76; "How Are You Today, Rebbe?", Oct. '76.

**Shapiro, Chaim** Dr. Leo Deutschlander, June '75; Rabbi Yechiel M. Gordon (The Prince of Roshei HaYeshiva), Jan.-Feb. '76; Reb Chaim Ozer Grodzensky, June '76.

**Singer, Rabbi Shmuel** The Colonial Chacham From Hebron, Dec. '75; Rabbi of the Rebels: Rabbi Yissachar Dov Illowy, May '76.

**Sondhelm, Rabbi Uri** "Why Not Wednesday?", Sept. '75.

**Susholtz, Baila** Autumn Flame, Spring Green (a poem), May '76.

**Susholtz, Rabbi Shimon** Who Needs Yiddish?, June '76.

**Svei, Rabbi Elyah** (adaptations) Ahavas Yisroel and Kovod Yisroel, Dec. '75; Waiting For ... Ge'ulah, June '76.

**Taschman, Dr. Gershon** The Elements of "Bitachon" (from writings of the Chazon Ish), June '75.

**Teitz, Rabbi Pinchas** The Abortion Bill in Israel, May '76.

**Waxman, Martin** Radio & T.V. Without the Orthodox Jewish Community, Sept. '75.

**Weinbach, Sheindel** Chicken a' la King (a poem), Sept. '76.

**Weinberg, Rabbi Yaakov** A Churban of Singular Dimensions, June '76.

**Weinberger, Rabbi Bernard** Wanted: A Sense of Shame, May '76.

**Weitman, Rabbi Moshe** Second Looks, Dec. '75.

**Wolpin, Rabbi Nisson** TV and the Jewish Home, Sept. '75; Seeding the American Countryside with Torah, Sept. '75; Zionism: A Dream and Its Failure, Jan.-Feb. '76; Russian Conversations, Jan.-Feb. '76; Leaving the Fold, Mar. '76; The American Hebrew Day School Movement Comes of Age, Oct. '76.

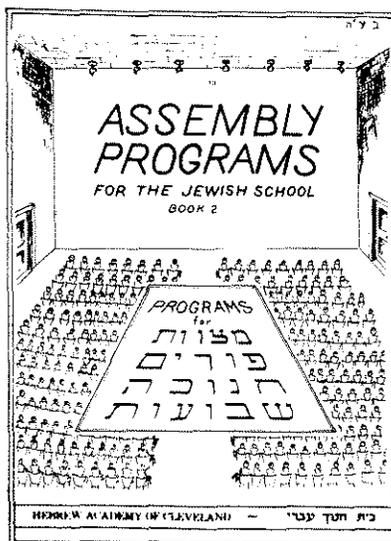
**Yisraeli, E.** Flight (a poem), March '76.

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## American Agudath Israel Convention Hears Rabbi Feinstein Call For Mass Adult Study Program



The Keynote Session of Agudath Israel's Convention: Front row of the dais at the Saturday night session of the 54th National Convention of Agudath Israel (l. to r.) Prof. Aaron Twerski, Rabbi L. I. Horowitz (Bostoner Rebbe, Boston), Rabbi Pincus Teitz, Rabbi

Moses Horowitz (Bostoner Rebbe) Rabbi Gedalya Schorr, Rabbi Chaskel Besser, Rabbi Moshe Sherer, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (speaking), Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, Rabbi Yaakov I. Ruderman, Rabbi Boruch Sorotzkin. (Photo by Trainer Studio)

### Addresses By Torah Scholars

UNDOUBTEDLY, a highlight of the 54th National Convention of Agudath Israel of America, which took place from Thursday, November 25 through Sunday, November 28, was the opportunity it gave to be close to leading Torah scholars of the American scene, to hear their Torah comments, as well as to share their insights, viewed from a Torah perspective, on some of the most pressing contemporary issues.

The following Roshei Yeshiva addressed major sessions of the convention:

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein called for an intensification of Torah study on all levels of the population. He also summoned the gathering to a strict adherence to halachic guidelines for fiscal integrity, as well as a response of gratitude to the graciousness of our host country, as basis for conformity with the letter of government law in all matters.

Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky urged the gathering to match rising costs of living with

a commensurate rise in tzedaka-giving. The Rosh Yeshiva pointed out how, in line with the patterns established by the Avos, the Torah community must have exemplary conduct in all its affairs.

Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman (Ner Israel, Baltimore) expounded on the need to appreciate the values of a commodity to be in command of all its potentials. He thus called on the conventioners to recognize the strength they derived from belonging to a broad-based Agudath Israel movement, which has commitment to Torah as its central, binding element.

Rabbi Boruch Sorotzkin (Telshe, Cleveland) pointed out that there is no rational explanation for the conduct of wars — citing the strife in Lebanon as an example — for, more than any other activity in the human realm, warfare is directly conducted by G-d.

Rabbi Gedalia Schorr (Mesifta Torah Vodaath) introduced a session on the

THE CONVENTION of Agudath Israel of America in Atlantic City was a study in contrasts, and a symphony of unexpected harmonies: the decay of the megalopolis and the spread of Yiddishkeit to far-flung corners of both American continents...hundreds of men, young and old, bent forward hanging on to every word uttered by a revered Rosh Yeshiva; fiery exchanges of opinions on hot political and ideological topics...the convention hall of the Sheraton-Deauville Hotel overflowing with close to 3,000 delegates and visitors, for the Motzoei Shabbos keynote session; lonely boardwalk vigils, as two yeshiva students spiritedly review a delicate point in a halachic presentation...a thousand

voices joining in a Kabbolas Shabbos nigun, two thousand hands linking in a Melave Malke rekida; a semi-circle of two hundred men following a Daf Yomi led by a young scholar, whose late father had filled the same assignment in similar gatherings, other years...a top view of felt hats of various colors and shapes, "shtreimels," yarmulkes...a cacophony of English of any number of accents, from British to Southern to Yiddish; of Yiddish in all sorts of intonations, from Spanish to Magyar — to Southern...A convention of Agudath Israel of America is invariably a colorful blend of the many rich streams within Torah Jewry.

American Jewish experience with a Midrash-based recounting of Abraham's sacrifice of a ram at the *akeida* as seminal for much of the glory of Jewish existence. Our strength today derives from our association with the purity of his actions.

### Fiery Forum Sessions

A NUMBER OF OPEN FORUM sessions dealing with issues confronting world Jewry began with scholarly presentations, but erupted into peppery debate, with opposing points of view aired by the delegates who crowded the SRO meeting hall:

At a symposium dedicated to "Jewish Life and a Free Society: Can They Coexist?," two noted rabbinical leaders, Rabbi Pinchas Teitz of Elizabeth, New Jersey, and Rabbi Emanuel Feldman of Atlanta, Georgia, presented an optimistic view. Rabbi Teitz pointed to the



Addressing the theme: (l. to r.) Rabbi P. Teitz, Rabbi E. Feldman, and (moderator) Rabbi M. Londinski.

need to utilize up-to-date means, without changing substance: using media, even taking over communal structure, to convey the centrality of Torah to Jewry. Rabbi Feldman expounded on basic philosophical conflicts between American life-style and a Torah commitment, but insisted that the obvious



(l. to r.) Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky and Rabbi Yaakov I. Ruderman.

bankruptcy of the "now" society is propelling disillusioned youth into a Torah commitment. We must be ready to at least meet them half-way, geographically, and not be reluctant to leave decaying urban centers, Rabbi Feldman maintained. Many convention delegates challenged their position. The moderator was Rabbi Moshe Londinski of Seattle, Washington.

Other symposia included: "Does Torah Jewry Belong in the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York?" An historic overview was presented by Rabbi Moshe Weitman dean of Torah Academy for Girls, Far Rockaway, N.Y. The discussants were Rabbi Joseph Elias, dean of Rika Breuers Teachers Seminary, Dr. Bernard Fryshman, chairman of Agudath Israel's Commission on Legislation, Joseph Friedenson, editor of *Dos Yiddish Vort*, and Menachem Shayovich.

The controversy centered around the fear that providing the New York City Jewish populace with a permanent representative voice on the Jewish Community Relations Council, of which the large percentage is non-Orthodox, the unique halachic position of the independent Orthodox Jewish community will be watered down and lose its independence.

The protagonists rejected this argument by pointing to the veto clause on religious issues in the Jewish Community Relations Council by-laws. The entire issue was transferred to the highest rabbinic authority of the Agudath Israel movement, the Council of Torah Sages, which after conducting hearings will render a ruling, binding the entire organization.

Also: "Soviet Immigrants to the U.S.A. — Heroic Refugees or Aliyah Dropouts?" The presentation, focusing on the right for Soviet immigrants to choose their own destination, was made by Rabbi Shlomo Oppenheimer; with follow-up discussions by Rabbis Nisson Wolpin (editor of *The Jewish Observer*), and Gavriel Beer (Jerusalem). Chairman was William K. Friedman.



At the Convention symposia: Questions from the floor.



Does Torah Jewry belong in JCRC?: (l. to r.) Rabbi Y. Elias, Rabbi D. Grossman, Dr. B. Fryshman, Rabbi Weitman, Mr. J. Friedenson.



Soviet Immigrants to the USA: (l. to r.) Rabbi Gavriel Beer and Rabbi S. Oppenheimer.



(l. to r.) Rabbi N. Scherman and Rabbi M. Lubinsky.

And: "What Place for Social Services on Agudath Israel's Agenda?" which opened with a presentation by Rabbi Nosson Scherman (Yeshiva Karlin-Stolin), who was backed up by Rabbi Mordechai Eissenberg, Barry Weiss, and Rabbi Yerachmiel Barash. This symposium was chaired by Rabbi Menachem Lubinsky, director of Project COPE. The contention of the speakers was that providing social services with a Torah flavor was an extension of Agudath Israel ideology.

Rabbi Moshe Sherer, executive president of Agudath Israel of America, called on Premier Yitzchak Rabin to oust Education Minister Aharon Yadlin because "Yadlin insists upon placing young Jewish Israeli exchange students in non-Jewish homes in the U.S., thus pouring oil in the fires of assimilation and intermarriage." The Agudath Israel leader denounced Yadlin for stating in the Knesset last month, in reply to a demand by an Agudist Knesset deputy that the Israeli students should be transferred to Jewish families, that "the Education Ministry had requested the gentile American families not to provide the youngsters with non-kosher food."

The different opinions expressed in the public discussions that followed served to demonstrate the broad-spectrum of views that come together under the aegis of Agudath Israel of America, in its role as a coalition of diverse Torah-loyal elements.



Daf Yomi session



Melave Malke celebration

### Resolutions

A NUMBER OF RESOLUTIONS were drawn up and passed at the Convention's final session. Among them was a demand that no financial pressure be applied by Jewish agencies against Russian emigrants who opt in Vienna for going to a country other than Israel. "Regardless of the negative aspects of Russian emigrants making use of Israeli visas to seek their haven in other countries, discriminating against these persons violates every Jewish tradition," the resolution declared.

- The government of Israel was urged to exert every effort to make the atmosphere in Israel more fulfilling to the spiritual aspirations of Russian olim. The Orthodox community in the U.S. was also urged to increase its efforts to meet the spiritual needs of Soviet immigrants to these shores.
- The Convention also issued a call to Jewish institutions in New York not to take advantage of the recently-approved law permitting the operation of Las Vegas Nites by non-profit organizations. "Such projects not only violate the Torah but they can bring disgrace upon the Jewish name," the proclamation states.
- The Convention underscored the support of Agudath Israel for the needs of South America by establishing a permanent "Commission on Latin American Jewry," which will operate out of the organization's central headquarters in New York City.
- The conclave also called upon President-elect Carter to fulfill his pledges to guarantee the security of Israel, especially since he had expressed his beliefs that Israel's rights are based upon Biblical covenants.
- The Convention demanded that the State of Israel cease all actions and policies that violate the sensibilities of the Torah community; specifically, to discontinue policies of public Sabbath desecration, draft of

women, unauthorized autopsies, and plans for construction of a huge sports and recreation complex in northern Jerusalem, which threatens to cause massive *chilul Shabbos*, violate the integrity of contiguous religious neighborhoods, and radically alter the character of the Holy City.

### Greetings and Addresses

WARM GREETINGS from Israel were conveyed to the convention by Rabbi Shrage Grossbard, director general of Chinuch Atzmaï-Torah Schools for Israel, and by Rabbi Moshe Ernster, son-in-law of the late Vishnitzer Rebbe. A special Latin American delegation, headed by Rabbi Zelig Privalsky, of Sao Paulo, Brazil, and Rabbi Shmuel Arye Levin, Rosh Hakolel of Buenos Aires, Argentina, reported on the great strides the Agudath Israel Torah institutions are making, thanks in great measure to support and cooperation from the North American Agudah. Rabbi Leibel Pinkusewicz brought greetings from Agudath Israel of Belgium.

Other dignitaries who addressed the convention (in order of their appearance) included: Rabbi Mendel Chodorow, Rabbi Leizer Levin (Detroit), Dr. Isaac Lewin (Agudath Israel World Organization), Rabbi Chaim Schmelzer (Telshe, Chicago).

Rabbi Levi Yitzchok Horowitz (the Bostoner Rebbe), greeted the Friday night session, which was chaired by Rabbi Simcha Eiberg (Agudath Harabonim), and featured an address by Rabbi Dovid Singer (Congregation Anshe Sfard, Brooklyn).

Also Rabbi Aaron Schechter (Rosh Yeshiva, Chaim Berlin), Rabbi Naftali Friedler (Rosh Yeshiva, Ner Israel of Toronto), Professor Aaron Twersky (Hofstra U.) who chaired the Convention, Rabbi Herschberg (Mexico City), Rabbi Tibor Stern (Miami), Rabbi Schlesinger (Geneva, Switzerland), Rabbi Feivelson (Tsfas, Israel), Rabbi Yehuda Oelbaum, who chaired the keynote session, Rabbi Isaac Small (Chicago), and Rabbi Yaakov Goldstein.



Greetings from Latin America: Rabbi S. A. Levin



### Avodas Hakodesh Awards

IN RECOGNITION of outstanding service to Jewish communities throughout the land, Rabbi Shmuel Bloom presented the Agudath Israel "Avodas Hakodesh" awards to the following Agudath Israel activists: Dr. S.I. Askovitz (Philadelphia, Pa.), Reuven D.

Dessler (Cleveland, Ohio), Ernst Gutman (Baltimore, Md.), Rabbi Mordecai Katz (Chicago, Ill.), and Kenneth Spetner (St. Louis, Mo.).

The Convention program was enhanced by *tefillos* and *zemiros* by Rabbis Aaron

Schwebel, David Fastag, and Ben-Zion Shenker. An audio-visual presentation, "Agudath Israel — People Helping People," prepared by Rabbis Nosson Scherman and Eli Teitelbaum, was also viewed by the Convention.

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### Same Location — Other Conventions

CONCURRENT with the Agudath Israel Convention in Atlantic City, the N'shei Agudath Israel (Agudah Women of America) held special sessions of their own. They heard reports on their philanthropic undertakings in Israel as well as a rich Torah program, featuring lectures by Rabbi Zelig Privalsky, Rabbi Moshe Weitman, Rebbitzin Rochel Sorotzkin, and Mrs. Chana Ordentlich.

Zeirei Agudath Israel, the Agudath Israel's youth organization, also held sessions devoted to the evaluation of activities during the past year, and to consultations with Torah authorities as how to most effectively further its work. Rabbi Naftoli Friedler addressed a special Zeirei session. Appearing on "Agudath Israel on the Firing Line" were Rabbis Boruch Borchardt and Nisson Wolpin.



THE SECOND ANNUAL CONFERENCE on Social Concerns sponsored by Agudath Israel of America and its career agency, Project COPE (Career Opportunities and Preparation for Employment) held at New York's Hilton on November 14, was dedicated to discussing "Meeting the Needs of the Urban Middle Class Family in the Next Decade," with close to 200 government officials, education and community leaders in attendance.

Shown above: Rabbi Moshe Sherer presenting Agudath Israel's 1976 New Horizons Award to New York City's Human Resources Administrator J. Henry Smith. Seated (L. to R.) are the conference speaker and panelists: Chancellor Irving Anker of New York City's Board of Education; Robert Goldmann, the Ford Foundation; Dr. Seymour Lachman, former president of New York City's Board of Education; Richard Ravitch, Chairman of New York's Urban Development Corporation; and Herbert Bienstock, Regional Director of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

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