

THE Jewish OBSERVER

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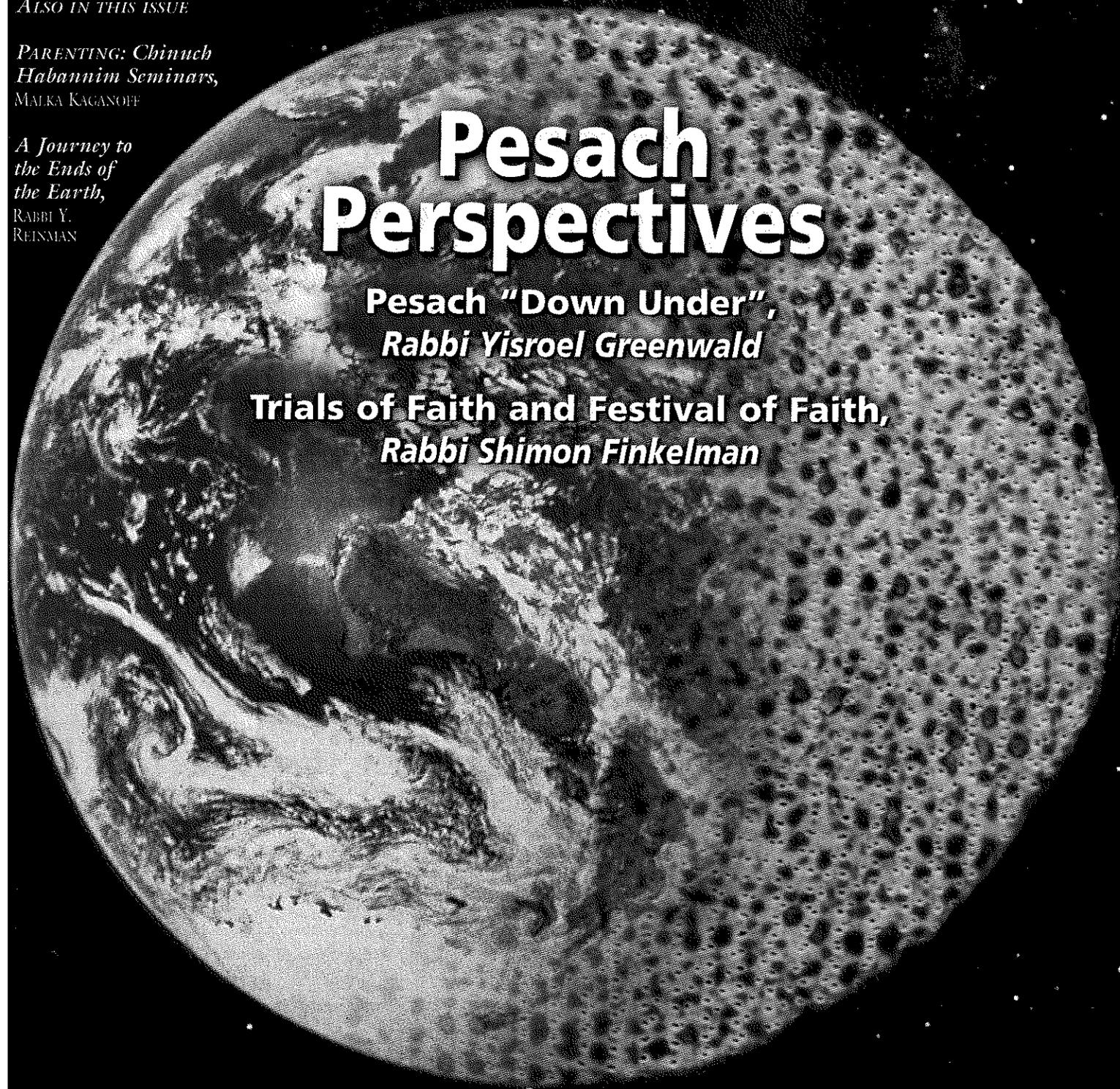
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*Trials of Faith and Festival of Faith,
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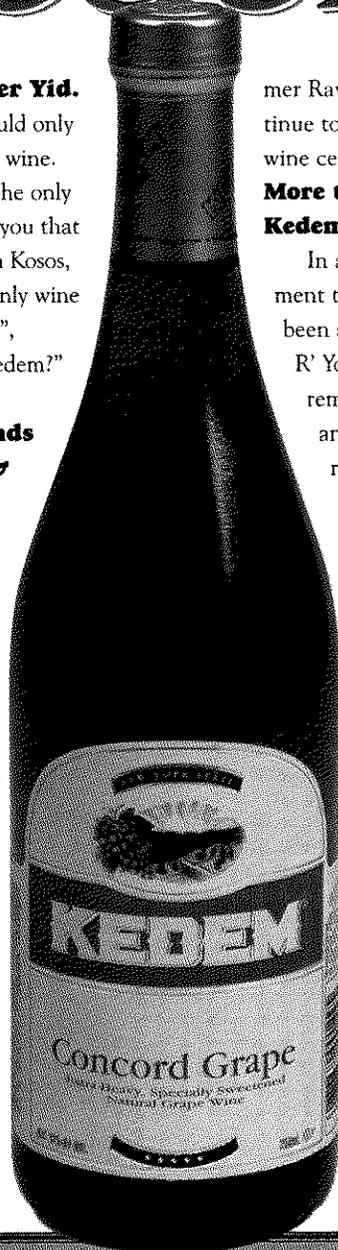
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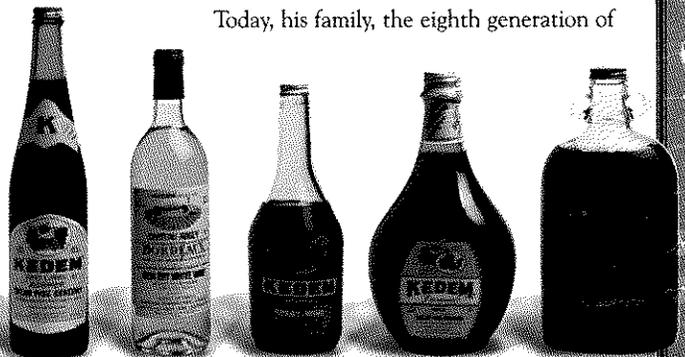
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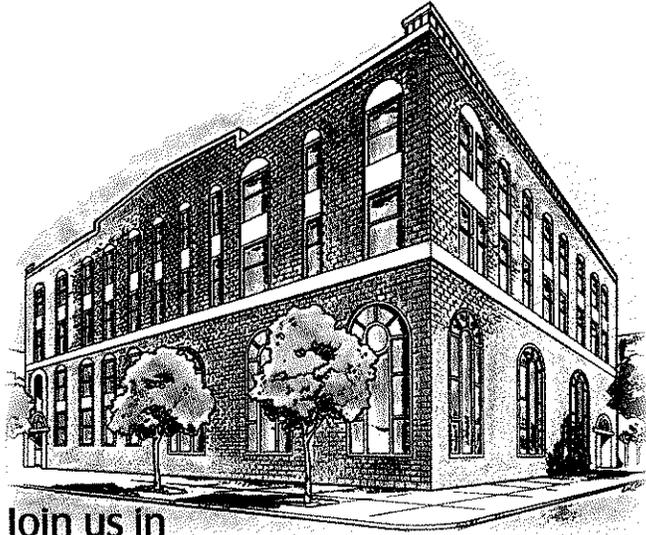
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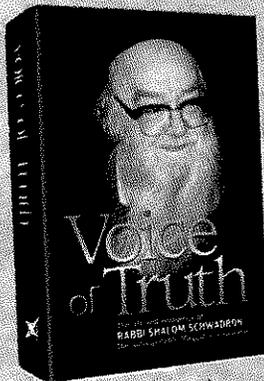


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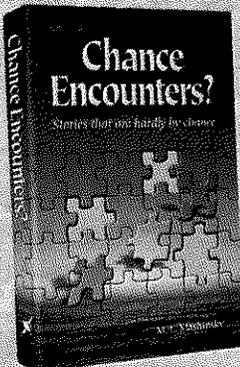
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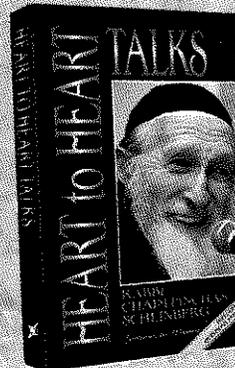
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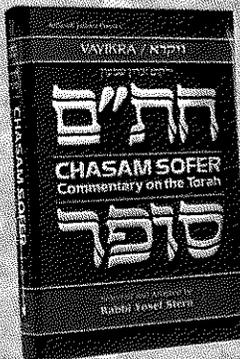
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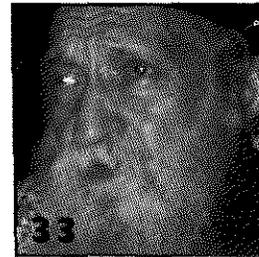
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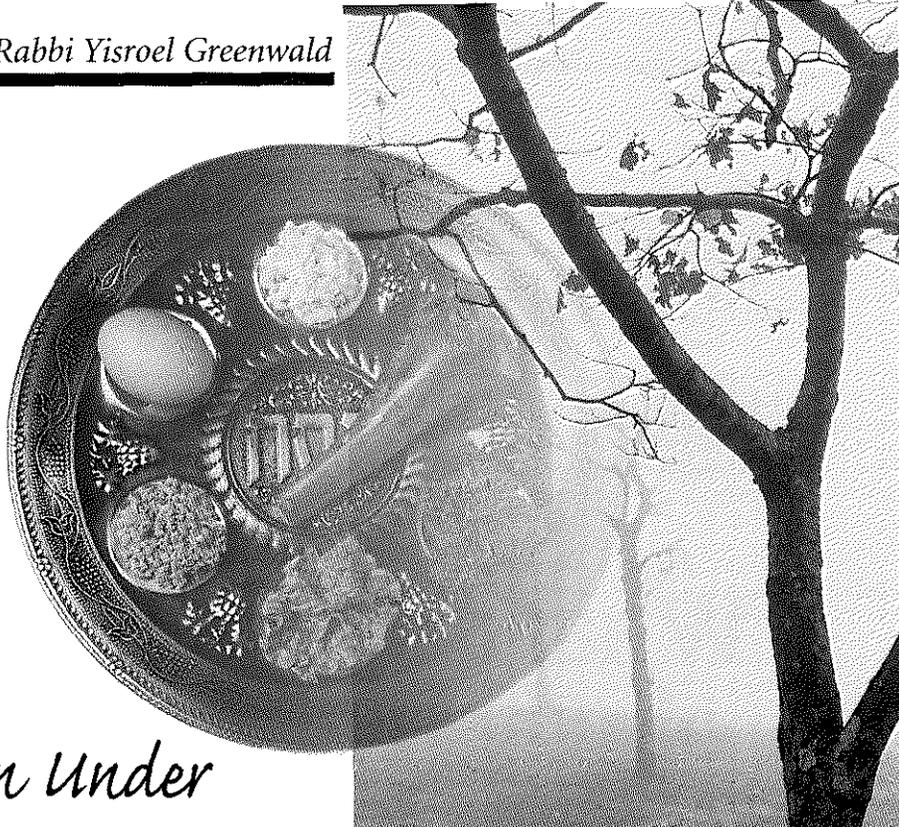
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Pesach in Autumn

A View From Down Under



Many commentators wax poetic when expounding on the link between the holiday of Pesach with the spring season in which it occurs. But as a born and bred New Yorker, I found the eloquent paeans quite superfluous as the spring fever naturally penetrated my bones. I would gaze in marvel at the freshly formed delicate buds that magically opened into soft, translucent, pale green leaves, on a tree that grew in my neighborhood in Brooklyn. Hachodesh hazeh lachem – this month of Nissan is the month of renewal, a fresh start, a new beginning. Wherever I turned, I saw living testimony to this creation. Squirrels awaken from their peaceful winter slumber to dash nimbly across telephone wires; newly born kittens frolic playfully in garbage bins, safely out of our reach; the message was clear – just as nature renews itself, so does the Jewish nation. Pesach is the springtime of the Jews.

This year our family moved to Australia, otherwise known as “the Land Down Under.” While I find it uplifting to be part of the vibrant and growing Torah community of Melbourne, I

Rabbi Greenwald, a member of the Kollel Bais Hatalmud in Melbourne, Australia, is author of *Reb Mendel* (ArtScroll), a biographical appreciation of Rabbi Mendel Kaplan זצ”ל.

must admit that my biological calendar has still to recover from Holiday jet lag. Due to the earth’s tilt on its axis, the residents of the Southern Hemisphere experience some peculiar phenomena, like having the water in the tub go down the drain in opposite direction I have become accustomed to my entire life, or observing that the fixed navigational star in the night sky is not the faithful Northern star but within the Southern Cross. However, most perturbing to me is the reversal of seasons. My childhood memories of Chanuka recall playing dreidel late into the long winter night, sitting in the *sukka* in overcoats to brace the chilly winds, and occasionally trudging in the snow in our Purim costumes. Now Shavuos night falls in the middle of winter (providing a marathon twelve hour learning *seder* instead of my accustomed six), Chanuka lamps are lit at 9:00 PM; and my children may come to confuse snowballs with matza balls. This disconcerting situation initially evoked a reaction similar to the *Amora* who briefly glimpsed the World-to-Come and exclaimed, “*olam hafuch ani ro’eh* – I see an upside down world!” But as the brave and bold pioneers of old, I too will come to pass these rites of passage, with the help of *Hashem* and a box of Kleenex at my side.

FORCE AND COUNTERFORCE

One aspect of the problem, however, continues to haunt me. The Torah requires that Pesach fall out in the spring (*Devarim* 16,1). Doesn’t Pesach in autumn clash with all the messages that Pesach is supposed to represent?

An intriguing insight in the writings of Rabbi Tzadok Hakohen may help solve this riddle. He writes that the word for holiday in Hebrew is *chag* which derives from the word “to dance” (see *Tehillim* 107,27), generally an expression of unrestrained joy. Yet the word also connotes an exact opposite meaning – “mourning” (see *Yeshaya* 19,17). He propounds that in the Divine tongue every word possesses a homonym of its opposite meaning. For example, *kedusha* means holiness, and *kedaisha*, a harlot.¹

Shoresh can mean to take root or uproot; *rosh* can mean poor, but it also means head. Just as in physics, there is matter and anti-matter, and actions cre-

¹ This may be explained in line with the statement of the sages that there is only a hairsbreadth between *Gan Eden* and *Gehinnom*, which is perhaps symbolized by the location of *Gehinnom*’s entrance at the outskirts of Yerushalayim (See *Sukka* 32b and *Rashi* there).

ate opposing reactions, so too does the spiritual world also have its counterpart, by G-d creating forces and opposing forces which often pivot around the very same point. Just like when looking in a mirror one's right hand is the mirror's left, so too, says Rav Tzodok, one person's joy may be another's source of unhappiness (*Dover Tzedek 42b*).

This principle can be extended to a deeper understanding of *Yom Tov*. Jewish holidays also convey dual and even

opposite messages. Yom Kippur is generally a time for weeping and repentance. Yet in the ArtScroll book, *Lt. Birnbaum*, the author describes the *Kol Nidrei* sermon of the Klauzenberger Rebbe to a group of Holocaust survivors in a D.P. camp shortly after the war.

The Rebbe stood there with his Machzor in his hand, flipping through its pages. Periodically, he would ask rhetorically, "Vehr haht dos geshribben - Who wrote this? Does this apply to us?"

Are we guilty of the sins enumerated here?" One by one, he went through each of the sins listed in the Ashamnu confessional, and then the Al Cheit, and concluded that those sins had little to do with those who survived the camps.

The Rebbe closed his Machzor, but then asked once again, "Who wrote this Machzor? I don't see anywhere the sins that do apply to us..."

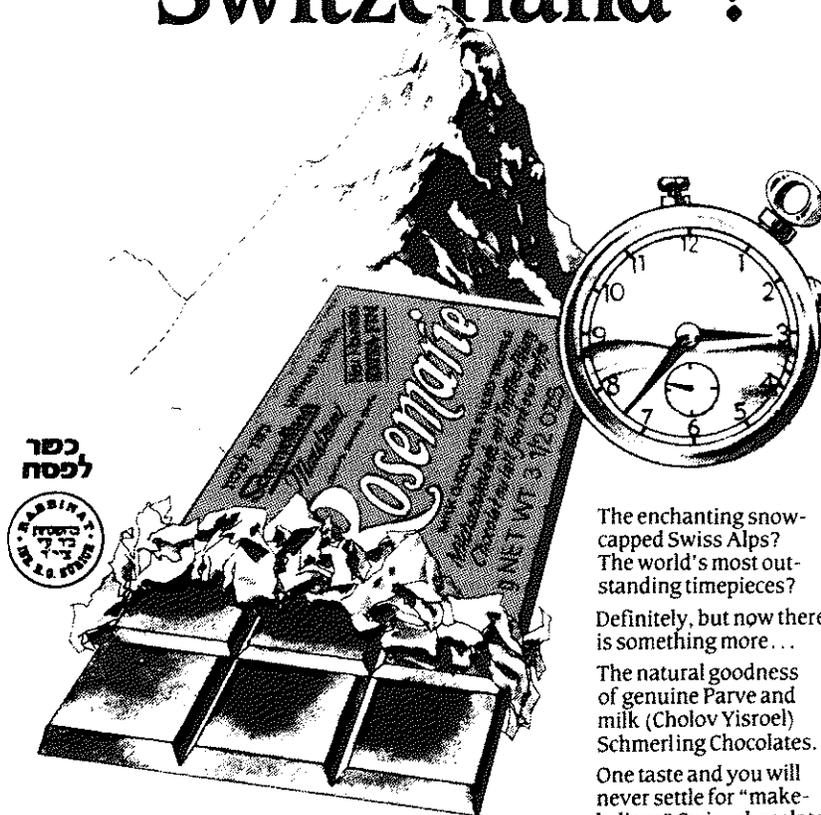
"How many times did we recite Krias Shema on our wood slates at night, and think to ourselves: 'Ribbono Shel Olam, let this be my last Hamapil. I can't carry on any longer. I'm so weak. Ribbono Shel Olam, please take my neshama.... I don't need my soul. You can keep it'...Every morning, we saw this one didn't move and that one didn't move, and as we carried the dead out, we looked upon them with envy..."

The only "sin" the Rebbe found in the pure, cleansed souls of the Holocaust survivors was losing their will to survive and to have faith and trust in Hashem for a brighter tomorrow. The Rebbe concluded by imploring his listeners to revive their strength and vitality by reclaiming the trust and confidence in Hashem that went to sleep these last few years in the camps.

I experienced a similar response when I brought a close friend to several *gedolim* for *chizuk*. My friend who had recently suffered a nervous breakdown, was feeling acute anxiety as the *Yamim Noraim* were approaching. When I brought him to Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky זצ"ל, he sat with us and in his warm fatherly manner told him that he lived through two world wars. What sustained him – and what every Jew must have to survive – is courage and hope. Next I took him to Rabbi Avigdor Miller שליט"א who told him, "Yom Kippur means different things to different people. Your particular service on Yom Kippur is to be happy and full of hope and trust in Hashem, and to be confident that you will be blessed with a happy and successful future."

The holiday of *Sukkos*, as well, has different lessons for different citizens of the nation. As Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains:

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And if you are poor, my fellow-Jew, if you are poor and in despair, move, I pray you, into the foliage topped booth! Depart from under your sheltering roof and of your own accord live the poorer life and learn the lesson:

G-d sustained your forefathers in the wilderness in booths. That same G-d still lives and He is your G-d, and as the twinkling of the stars shines through the roof of foliage so does He with His watchful eye embrace you in loving kindness, behold your suffering, behold your tears, hear your sighs and know your cares. He will not forsake you as He did not forsake your forefathers....

(HOREB VOL. 1 PP. 124-125)

SPRING TO LIFE... WITH AUTUMN CHILL

The holiday of Pesach falls in the springtime – a time where *Hashem* implanted into the natural world the mechanism that prods the human spirit to buoyancy, and aids for the festival to be celebrated with joy. But simultaneously, in an opposite part of the globe, the summer fades away as the days get darker and chillier. There, the festival of Pesach is unaccompanied by the external assistance of spring, and therefore requires more internal effort to compensate for the absence of vernal renewal.

For many, even those living in the

Northern Hemisphere, the aura of springtime is sometimes overshadowed by other autumns in their lives. Someone who recently lost a loved one, one whose home is lacking domestic tranquility, an older single person, or an infertile couple may all feel out of place during this ostensibly family-oriented holiday. The festival verses enjoins us to rejoice with one's family (*Devarim* 16,11). But for some, it must take Herculean efforts just to dampen the pain during the festivals, let alone to rejoice. What is the Pesach lesson of autumn for them?

In a general sense the Torah coincides with the natural cycles of the world. Even as the Torah proclaims, "*Hachodesh hazeh lochem*" – as Rabbi S.R. Hirsch explains – the Jewish people are not bound by the limiting rules of nature. Yet the Torah eases the lesson by having Pesach occur at a time when a person naturally feels uplifted. For on one fundamental level, the Torah coincides with the natural world, and its *mitzvos* fulfill the physical, emotional and psychological needs of a person. The sages of the Talmud immediately dismiss the possibility that the species to be used to fulfil the *mitzva* of *lulav* is to be taken from plants whose thorny edges prick the hand. Although the species in question fulfill all the halachic requirements for *lulav*, the sages knew that the Torah could not have pos-

sibly commanded us with a *mitzva* that causes pain, based on the dictum "*d'racheha darkei noam* – all [the Torah's] ways are sweet" (*Sukka* 32).

This principle was first taught to me by Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky ז"ל. I once asked him regarding the law that dictates that if two people are stranded alone in a wilderness and one of them has only enough water to sustain one life, he should use the water for himself and not give it away to his travelling companion. One of the reasons the *Gemora* gives is, "Who said your friend's blood is redder (more worth saving) than yours? Perhaps your blood is redder than his."

I asked the *Rosh Yeshiva*, "Suppose you know your friend's blood is redder. If I am a simple person and my friend is a great Torah scholar, isn't his life more worth saving than my own? Shouldn't I then give him the water to save his life?"

Reb Yaakov gave me two answers, one of them as follows: "Self preservation is an intrinsic part of human nature. And *teva* (nature) is also *halacha*."

A SMALL BUT DISTINCT UNDERCURRENT

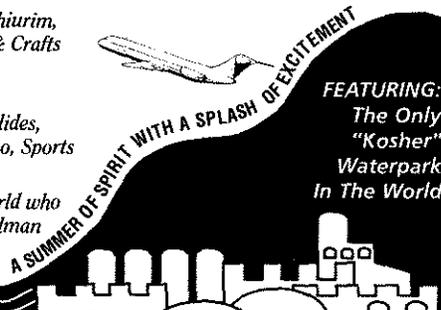
Running counter to this general flow, runs a small but distinct undercurrent which seems to defy the system. While the Torah promises worldly reward to those who

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fulfill its precepts; the righteous sometimes suffer. *Yamim Tovim*, which the *Sefer HaChinuch* says were given to express the innate human urge of joy and celebration, force others to muster their last reserves of spiritual energy in order to observe adequately. Those who fulfill the Torah under these trying conditions, without the natural assistance of the physical world but in defiance of it, are not utilizing the world as a vessel to rise in spirituality, but rather are turning the world-vessel over and rising above it. Such people who turn the

world upside down from its natural order in their *mitzva* observance may very well be the subject of the following tale mentioned in the Talmud (*Babba Basra* 10b):

Yosef the son of Reb Yehoshua took ill, and his soul temporary left his body and ascended to heaven. When he regained consciousness, his father asked him, "What did you see in the next world?" He replied, "I saw an upside-down world. The uppermost in this world are below in the World-to-Come. And the lowly in this world

are supreme in the World-to-Come." When I was younger, my dream of success was predicated on the simple standing world view. I hoped to learn well, do *mitzvos*, and either land a *choshuva shtelleh* (distinguished position in *chinuch* or the rabbinate), gain prominence by communal activity, or become a generous philanthropist. It was those people who were my models of success, and it was usually the "haves" rather than the "have nots" whose company I sought. But as the script of life which *Hashem* handed to me landed me in destinations far from where I had originally anticipated, my worldview also began gradually inverting. Eventually, my highest respect and admiration were reserved not for those whose efforts were wreathed in success, but to those who celebrate Pesach in Autumn: those who persevere despite the challenges and obstacles they face in life.

David N. epitomizes such a person. A *baal teshuva* from his mid-twenties, he gave up a glamorous career as a performing artist and rooted himself in a *baal teshuva* yeshiva. Unfortunately, his learning skills didn't quite match his strength of character, and he never climbed the levels of Talmudic acuity with his peers. Compounding his frustration with scholastic achievement, his subsequent efforts in *parnasa* and *shidduchim* were also not blessed with success. Over a decade later he was still struggling in all these areas, but amazingly, his unwavering commitment to *Yiddishkeit* was as solid as ever.

As a close friend to David, I once took him to the world renowned *Mashgiach*, Rabbi Dan Segal, to receive a blessing for him for *shidduchim* and success. As David didn't know Yiddish, I accompanied him to serve as an interpreter. When we came to the *Mashgiach*, I pointed out that David, an extraordinarily muscular and handsome young man, was formerly enjoying an extremely successful and pleasurable life in his secular lifestyle. He had a successful career, money, and an unending stream of female admirers. Since he had become religious, he had found neither prestige, *parnasa*, nor a *shidduch*.

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I expected Rabbi Dan Segal to give him a warm blessing, as I always have seen him do, but instead the *Mashgiach* clasped David's hand in his own, humbly lowered his head and in an emotional voice said, "I envy your portion in the World-to-Come. If only I should merit the place in *olam habba* which you have!" For the two decades I have known the *Mashgiach*, I have never heard him give exaggerated praise nor did I ever hear him making even a remotely similar statement to anyone.

The *Mashgiach's* statement reflected an "*olam hafuch*" worldview, which was aligned with the one Rabbi Yehuda's son described. The prophet *Yeshaya* (66,1-2) reveals that this perspective is also *Hashem's*, one which He beckons us to share:

"*Hashamayim kisi – the heavens are My throne.*"

Just as when gazing out the window of an airplane, the difference between a mansion and a hovel, a Chevy and a Lexus, shrinks to trivial insignificance, so too does *Hashem* say to the man who comes to pride himself of his wealth and success: The heavens are My throne – From My vantage point in heaven, your palaces are but specks in the vast expanses of space, your physical prowess pales before the powerful angels, which fill my heavens. Yet, "*Ha'aretz hadom ragli – the earth is my footstool*"

The Divine spirit rests and is upheld specifically in the small earth where man serves My will. But although the earth – the natural world, which facilitates the service of *Hashem* – is in the general sense the source of My comfort and satisfaction...

"*Ei zeh vayis asher tivnu li v'eizeh makom menuchasi. V'es kol eileh yadi assassa vayifyu chol eileh, ne'um Hashem* – What house could you build for Me, and what place could be My resting place? My hand created all these things and thus all these things came into being, says *Hashem*."

There still remains a degree of incompleteness in man's service since I helped create the house which you built to serve me. I provide man the resources – the world with its wealth and happiness, as

the tools that facilitate My service.

"*V'el zeh abit – And to such a person I gaze.*"

There are those individuals who stand out and receive my special attention because they rise above the earth, by serving Me despite the adverse conditions the physical world presents to them. Who are these people who are the focus of my special love and affection?... "*el ani unechei ruach ve'chor-oid al devari – to the poor and broken spirit who fears My word.*"

The "poor" which in the Torah lexicon encompasses the entire gamut of

² Based on this "upside-down" G-d's-eye view, we can understand a statement of the *Gra* who says that the world stands in the merit of the poor people. As the prophet explains, they alone serve *Hashem* unaided by G-d-given blessings and gifts. The perfection of the wealthy can only be achieved by connecting with the poor person and thus sharing the ultimate reward that is the poor man's destiny. This is accomplished by their assisting the less fortunate in life. As Rabbi Akiva told Turanus Rufus, who asked, "If your G-d loves the poor, why does he not sustain them?" – to

every difficulty, challenge, and disability – who, despite their broken spirit, still perform My will; such people are the delight of My eye.²

THE GLORY OF THE STRUGGLING YESHIVA BACHUR

See page from the hellinistic influenced society in which we live may have engendered in us an over-affinity towards tangible perfection and achievement. While secular schools tend to grade results and award top honors to their highest scorers, our *chinuch* sys-

which Rabbi Akiva replied, "In order that through them [by our sustaining the poor] we may be saved from the judgment of *Gehinnom*" (*Babba Basra* 10a). The statement implies that the wealthy need to "ride the coattails of the pauper" in order to gain access to Gan Eden. Were there no paupers in the world to give charity to, the wealthy man's position in the World-to-Come would not be secure, notwithstanding their strict adherence to all the other precepts of the Torah. See also *Shemos Rabba* 31:3.

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tem should more closely reflect *Hashem's* marking system, as expressed in *Berachos* 17a, "Both the one who accomplishes much and the one who does little are equally rewarded, provided that each directs his heart towards Heaven." While it is a natural tendency for the bright and the blessed to attract our attention and affection, it is very often the weaker, struggling, and less-respected students who, in the *olam hafuch* world, are deemed the great ones.

These sentiments were clearly expressed by Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz, the *Mashgiach* of the Mirrer yeshiva in prewar Europe:

"A yeshiva *bachur* today who toils while trying to understand the Torah of the *gedolim* from earlier genera-

tions, and despite all his efforts is still unable to comprehend their words, is quite possible – no, undoubtedly – greater than the *gadol* himself whose words he attempts to understand....

"Is it a small matter – all the honor and esteem that surrounded the *Gaonim* of earlier generations? The power of honor is no small matter. It is told that in the days of the *Gra*, there lived in Vilna a man who fasted from *Shabbos* to *Shabbos*. And it was a wonder in everyone's eyes how he was able to sustain such a regimen. When word of this ascetic feat was reported to the *Gra*, the *Gra* inquired after the man's behavior. He was told that on every Friday afternoon, the man left the *mikva* and was surrounded by many children

from the vicinity who came to behold his great feat, and would express their astonishment and reverence towards him. The Vilna Goan commanded that the children be chased away and not be allowed to approach the man as he left the *mikva*. From that time onward, the man's strength left him, and he never fasted again.

"The honor that this man received from all these children, this honor was able to sustain him and give him the strength and fortitude to bear all his torturous fasting!

"The honor which Rabbi Akiva Eiger (the great sage of Posen) received did not come from small children, rather from *geonim* and *gedolim*! Every footstep of Rabbi Akiva Eiger was surrounded with the greatest honor! And a Torah student today who, instead of receiving honor, suffers a great deal of humiliation and embarrassment, and nevertheless finds the strength to stand firmly in place – it is certain that this yeshiva *bachur* is quite possibly greater than the giants of earlier times!"

(DA'AS TORAH, BAMIDBAR PP. 147-8)

Many schools label the class for brighter students as the "*Alef*" class and the weaker students the "*Beis*" class, using the same grading terminology the USDA uses on its egg cartons.³ While it may be easy to grade eggs, it is impossible to grade the value of a Jewish soul.

Which brings us to the second answer that Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky told me concerning why one must keep for himself the jug of life-sustaining water, though he knows he is just a simple person and his companion a great personage. On this, Reb Yaakov said, "Because one never really knows who is more precious in the eyes of *Hashem*."

We should respect those who observe Pesach in the lushness of spring. But let us revere those who must celebrate it in the chill of autumn. ■

³ Were it just an arbitrary number for identification purposes only, why not call the weaker class the *Alef* class, or still better, not assign any numbers, but simply call the class by the name of the teacher giving it?

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Trials of Faith and the Festival of Faith

Based on the thoughts of Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, זצ"ל in
Lev Eliyahu and the Slonimer Rebbe, in *Nesivos Shalom*

Pesach is a festival most opportune for strengthening ourselves in Jewish faith, for it is the time when *Hashem* demonstrated His exacting Providence in this world. The Slonimer Rebbe¹ writes: Pesach is the Festival of Faith, and the *seder* night, when the *Shechina* (Divine Presence) revealed itself during the slaying of the firstborn, is the New Year of Faith. Through the clarity of faith on this night, one merits to live a life of faith throughout the year.

The late Lakewood *Mashgiach*, Rabbi Nosson Wachtfogel זצ"ל, related that as a young student in Kelm who was moving to North America, he asked his rebbe, Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, "How is it possible for a *yeshiva bachur* to emerge intact from the *galus* of America?"

Rabbi Lopian replied: "With two *Ramban's*." He was referring to two comments of *Ramban* in his commentary on the Torah: The first comment deals with the Exodus and the many *mitzvos* which are a remembrance of it. The great miracles of the Exodus, says *Ramban*, are eternal testimony to *Hashem's* existence and to His involvement in the hap-

penings of this world. Moreover...

"From the great and well-known miracles, one comes to recognize the hidden miracles, which are the foundation of the entire Torah. For a man has no share in the Torah of *Moshe Rabbeinu* until he believes that all our happenings and occurrences are miraculous – there is nothing natural in them at all."²

The second comment to which Rabbi Lopian referred is regarding the Torah's command, "You shall be holy" (*Vayikra* 19,2). *Ramban* interprets this to mean, Sanctify yourself in that which is permitted to you." When satisfying his physical desires in a way that *halacha* permits, a Jew must exercise self-control and make moderation the rule. Otherwise, says *Ramban*, he may fall under the category of a degenerate within the framework of Torah.

As we shall demonstrate, *emuna* and *kedusha*, faith and sanctity, are firmly intertwined with one another; one's level of faith in *Hashem* is profoundly related to the level of *kedusha* that he achieves and with which he conducts his life.

LEVELS OF FAITH

After relating how the Jews crossed the Sea of Reeds, the Torah states: Israel saw the great hand

that *Hashem* inflicted upon Egypt; and the people revered *Hashem*, and they had faith in *Hashem* and in Moshe, His servant (*Shemos* 14,31).

Why does the Torah state here, at the Exodus's conclusion, that the Jews had faith? Did they not have faith in *Hashem* during the period of the Ten Plagues? In fact, the Torah testifies to their faith even before the Ten Plagues had begun. After returning to Egypt from *Midyan*, Moshe related to *Bnei Yisroel* that *Hashem* had spoken to him, and he also performed certain Divinely ordained signs. There, the Torah states, "and the people believed" (*Shemos* 4,31).

Furthermore, faith by definition is belief in something that is not clearly visible for all to see. What need was there for faith after Israel saw the great Hand that *Hashem* inflicted upon Egypt? At the Splitting of the Sea, Israel became a nation of prophets and witnessed revelations greater than the esoteric visions of the prophet Yechezkel.

Could belief at such a time be called "faith"?

The answer to this, says the Slonimer Rebbe³, is that there are infinite levels of *emuna*, which fall within three general categories. There is intellectual faith; faith of the heart; and faith which encompasses one's entire being. The distance between intellectual faith and faith of the heart is greater than the distance

¹ Vol. II, p. 235

Rabbi Shimon Finkelman, a rebbe in Yeshiva Darchei Torah, Far Rockaway, NY, is a frequent contributor to these pages, including "Immorality and Violence," in Feb. '00. He is the author of several biographies published by Artscroll Mesorah Publications, as well as a recent book on the significance and celebration of *Lag B'Omer*.

² *Ramban* to *Shemos* 13:16. *Nesivos Shalom*, Vol. II, p. 281-282.

³ *Nesivos Shalom*, Vol. II, p. 281-282.

between heaven and earth.⁴

Faith that encompasses one's entire being was the faith of *David Hamelech*, who proclaimed, "All my bones shall say: 'Hashem, who is like You?'" (*Tehillim* 35,10). It is a faith that allows for no fear, save for the fear of *Hashem*, a faith that proclaims, "There is none besides Him" (*Devarim* 4,35) even in the most terrifying and seemingly hopeless situations.

When the Jews demonstrated faith when Moshe first introduced himself as

⁴ *Nesivos Shalom*, citing R' Leib Madokar, a disciple of the *Maggid* of Mezritch

their prophet and leader, it was an intellectual faith, which had not yet penetrated their hearts. As the Ten Plagues progressed and the various stages of redemption unfolded, the Jews' faith grew. By the time they departed Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nissan, their hearts were permeated with faith. And it was at the Splitting of the Sea, when led by Nachshon ben Aminadav (Prince of the Tribe of Yehuda), they entered the sea fearlessly,⁵ that *Bnei Yisroel* attained the highest level of faith.

⁵ *Sota* 37a

DEATH OF A DESTRUCTIVE FORCE

If we examine another verse which precedes the Song at the Sea, we find another difficulty. "...and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great Hand that *Hashem* inflicted upon Egypt..."

In fact, the Jews witnessed the "great Hand of *Hashem*" before they saw the Egyptians dead at the seashore. The previous verses relate how *Hashem* caused the split sea to return to its original state, so that the water drowned the horsemen and chariots of Egypt. Only afterwards did the sea toss the bodies out so that *Bnei Yisroel* could see that their pursuers had died.

Nesivos Shalom explains that the dead bodies of the Egyptians alluded to the complete destruction of the forces of impurity that Egypt embodied and that had caused the Jews to sink to the forty-ninth level of impurity just short of the point of no return. For generations, Egypt was known as a land steeped in immorality. *Avraham Avinu*, well-aware of Egypt's reputation, was concerned that the land's immoral inhabitants would set their eyes upon his wife and abduct her – a fear that materialized when Sarah was forcibly taken to Pharaoh's palace.⁶

Egypt was also a land of heresy, as is obvious from Pharaoh's recalcitrance throughout the period of the Ten Plagues.⁷ In fact, the very first time that Moshe came before Pharaoh in *Hashem's* Name to request that the Jews be permitted to offer sacrifices in the wilderness, Pharaoh brazenly replied, "Who is *Hashem* that I should heed His voice to send out Israel? I do not know *Hashem*, nor will I send out Israel!" (*Shemos* 5,2)

⁶ See *Sforno* to *Bereishis* 12:11. The Chassidic masters write that various parts of the world correspond to parts of the human anatomy. The prophet states: "Speak to the heart of Jerusalem" (*Yeshayahu* 40,2), alluding to the fact that Jerusalem is the heart of the earth. In his conversations with his brothers, Yosef, as viceroy of Egypt, twice accused them of coming to spy out the land, saying that they had come to see "the nakedness of the land." This term alludes to Egypt's status as the world's seat of immorality.

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It was precisely because the Egyptians were so morally depraved that they had such difficulty recognizing the truth of their Creator's existence.

Immortality erects a spiritual barrier between man and his Creator and clouds his spiritual vision. The polluted spiritual air of Egypt, suffused with the people's moral corruption, had its effect on *Bnei Yisroel*, so that their level of faith was lessened to some degree. As the plagues progressed, however, and Egypt's stranglehold over the Jews steadily weakened, the Jews' faith in *Hashem* took on greater clarity.

The Midrash relates that the Sea split when it "saw" the coffin of Yosef, which Moshe had brought up from the Nile River prior to their exodus. All alone in a land permeated with sin, Yosef had withstood the great trials of Egypt, especially the episode with Potiphar's wife.⁸

Because of his great moral fortitude, Yosef earned the appellation *HaTzaddik* (The Righteous One).⁹ Moreover, it was in Yosef's merit that the Jewish people remained morally pure in Egypt.¹⁰

The presence of Yosef's coffin at the Sea of Reeds invoked the merit of his incomparable *kedusha*, and it was this that completed the destruction of the negative spiritual forces of Egypt.

Free at last of the remaining vestiges of Egypt's spiritual influence, *Bnei Yisroel* attained the very pinnacle of *emuna* *tehora*, pure faith. Then "they could see [i.e. clearly perceive] the great Hand that *Hashem*... and they believed in *Hashem*..." with a faith that encompassed their entire being.

7 During the first five plagues, *Hashem* did not tamper with Pharaoh's free choice; rather, He let him make his own decisions to resist his Creator's will. According to *Sefero* (*Shemos* 7:3), even during the last five plagues, when the Torah states, "And *Hashem* strengthened the heart of Pharaoh," *Hashem* did not force Pharaoh to sin. Strengthening Pharaoh's heart merely enabled him to endure the pain and suffering of the Plagues; then it was up to him to make a rational, uncoerced decision as to whether or not he would free the Jewish people.

8 See *Bereishis* Ch. 39.

9 Zohar, Vol. I, p. 45a. 10. *Vayikra Rabba* Ch. 32.

11. *Makkos* 24a; see *Ritva* ad loc.

10 *Vayikra Rabba* Ch. 32

SPIRITUAL OXYGEN

The *Gemora* relates¹¹ that as the generations grew progressively weaker, the prophets found it necessary to formulate a brief list of ethical requirements that, when followed with proper intent and devotion, could serve as a foundation for fulfillment of the entire Torah.

David established eleven such requirements, the prophet Yeshayahu reduced the number to six, the prophet Micha (a younger contemporary of Yeshayahu) reduced it to three, and then Yeshayahu further reduced the number to two. Finally, the prophet Chavakuk taught that there is a single *mitzva* that serves as the foundation for proper Torah observance: "And a *tzaddik* lives by his faith" (*Chavakuk* 2,4).

In the words of Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian:

One's *emuna* needs to be clear, with an unobscured and tangible recognition – like life itself [and this is what is meant by] "and a *tzaddik* lives by his faith." But for this, one needs a soul that is pure.

Just as a person perceives the absolute truth that his father is his father and that he is his son, so too, it is possible for any Jew to perceive with a clarity that he has a Father in Heaven, Who serves as his Benefactor.¹² Elsewhere, *Lev Eliyahu* draws a parallel between the physical and spiritual worlds¹³. In His kindness, *Hashem* has made most accessible that which is most necessary for our survival in the physical world. Man can survive for only a very short time without oxygen; therefore, air is in abundance anywhere on land. Water is vital, but man can survive without it for at least a day or two; therefore, water is generally available, but at times, it is necessary to carry one's own water supply.

Emuna is the "oxygen" of the soul, for it is absolutely necessary for man's spiritual survival. Therefore, *Hashem* has implanted in every Jewish soul a natural

11 *Makkos* 24a; see *Ritva* ad loc.

12 *Lev Eliyahu*, first edition, p. 175; three-volume edition, *Parashas V'eschanan*, p. 199.

13 First edition, pp. 2-3; three-volume edition, *Ma'arachos HaTeshuva*, pp. 288-289

faith in his Creator. It is only personal sin (or that of his forbears) or a corrupted environment that can taint one's *emuna* and steadily weaken it.

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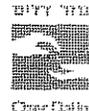
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LESSONS OF THE MABUL

In yet another discourse,¹⁴ Rabbi Lopian related a story that occurred during his days in Lomza:

There was a hospital in Lomza where something strange and frightening was happening with regularity: during their hospital stay, patients would contract a variety of diseases – totally

unrelated to their original condition. The doctors could not explain this phenomenon.

In desperation, officials summoned a team of well-known professors from Warsaw. They concluded that the problem lay in the old, cracked walls of the hospital building, which had absorbed the germs of countless illnesses and which could not be disinfected. Their solution, which the local government accepted, was to destroy the building and burn the debris outside the city limits.

Again, Reb Elya drew a parallel between the physical and spiritual worlds. "Germs" of sin pollute one's spiritual environment and can affect anyone and anything that finds itself in that environment. This explains why prior to the *Mabul* (Deluge), animals of different species mixed and even plant life became corrupted, as grain was planted and inedible grain-like seeds sprouted instead.¹⁵ "Germs of *tuma* (impurity) of a sick, sinful soul have the power to pollute the environment to a devastating degree." The rampant immorality and breakdown of social mores prior to the *Mabul* had reached a point where even animal life and vegetation were affected.

Nesivos Shalom expounds upon this:

The *Mabul* should not be viewed as a punishment; rather, the world could not longer exist as it was, because the sins of the generation had corrupted all of creation to a point where the very air and soil had been ruined. The world had been created to be a place of spiritual accomplishment, but instead it had been transformed into a place of spiritual destruction.

No longer did it merit its existence.¹⁶

With the destruction of all living things (except for what was permitted to enter the Ark) and the washing away of the top levels of soil, it was as if a new world had been created. Mankind, in the person of Noah and his fami-

14 *Lev Eliyahu*, three-volume edition, *Parashas Noach*, pp. 34-35. See also *Reb Elyah: The Life and Accomplishments of Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian* (Mesorah Publications), pp. 39-40.

15 *Bereishis Rabba* 28:8.

16 *Nesivos Shalom, Parashas Noach*, p. 37.

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ly, was granted another chance.

A LESSON FROM NOACH

The Torah writes at great length concerning the *Mabul* because of the timeless lessons to be learned from it. On the one hand, we see how low mankind can sink when it follows a path of life that is diametrically opposite that which *Ramban* sees as the message. Unbridled pleasure-seeking can literally destroy the person, and the world, as well. On the other hand, we see that it is possible for one individual to live a life of righteousness and remain holy and pure in a world polluted with sin. When the Torah informs us that "Noach walked with G-d" (*Bereishis* 6,9), it does so not merely to praise Noach, but to teach us how and why he survived. Noach did more than behave righteously; he immersed himself in the Torah that he had learned,¹⁷ and in this way attached himself to *Hashem*. Noach had the ability to create for himself an oasis of *kedusha* in a world devoid of it.

The message, says *Nesivos Shalom*, is clear:

This is a lesson for all generations and for all situations in which an individual may find himself. Even in the most difficult situations and generations, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* provides us with ways and remedies through which we can be saved. In today's world, which is like the world was at the time of the *Mabul*, when the *tuma* is powerful and widespread... one must constantly be immersed in an atmosphere of Torah, for only by surrounding himself with Torah, *kedusha* and G-dliness, can one be saved from the world's filth. Total immersion in the ocean of Torah is the antidote to the external *tuma* that has permeated the world's atmosphere.

A LESSON FROM YOSEF

Yosef withstood the most trying tests in Egypt. His situation was similar to Noach's in that he was one *tzaddik* surrounded by a society mired in decadence. But Yosef's predica-

¹⁷ See *Rashi* to *Bereishis* 7,2.

ment was much worse. Noach had the support of his family, which included the righteous Shem, while Yosef had no one but himself. He was a slave in a home of immorality¹⁸ and idolatry, and was subjected to the daily enticements of Potiphar's wife. How, indeed, did Yosef muster the spiritual strength to overcome every test and temptation?

The Midrash relates:¹⁹

Rav Huna said in the name of Rav Acha: He would whisper [words of Torah] as he entered, he would whisper [words of Torah] as he exited. He [Potiphar] would command: "Pour [for me] hot water!" and the water [which Yosef held in his hand] would turn hot. "[Pour for me] lukewarm water!" and the water would turn lukewarm. He [Potiphar] said to him: "You are bringing straw into Afarayim, pots to Kfar Chananya, sheerings of wool to Damascus [i.e. you are bringing into our land something that we already have in abundance]? You are bringing sorcery into Egypt, a place where sorcerers do sorcery!"

Until what point [did Potiphar continue to suspect Yosef of sorcery]? Until he perceived that the *Shechina* was hovering above him.

This was the level that Yosef attained. Not for a moment did he fail to perceive *Hashem's* omnipresence. He was a "ladder set upon the earth whose tip reached the heavens."²⁰ His feet were planted in the decadent land of Egypt, while his mind was soaring in the Heavenly spheres. He was rewarded with miraculous *siyata DiShmaya*, so that even mundane tasks like pouring his master a cup of water became revelations of *Hashem's* involvement in his affairs.

Our Sages teach: "If a person sanctifies himself a little, he is sanctified a great deal; if he sanctifies himself down below, he is sanctified Above; if he sanc-

18 See *Sota* 13b

19 *Bereishis Rabba* 86:5. *Ramban* explains that it was in Yosef's merit that Potiphar was granted this vision, either in a dream or by perceiving a cloud of sorts above Yosef. In this way, Potiphar recognized that it was *Hashem* who granted Yosef his great success.

20 See *Bereishis* 28:12

tifies himself in this world, he is sanctified in the World to Come."²¹ Yosef sanctified himself by focusing his thoughts on nothing but *Hashem* and the teachings that he had learned from his father Yaakov. Therefore, he was sanctified to the degree that the Divine Presence hovered over him.

It is no wonder, then, that the Midrash sees Yosef as the man of faith par excellence: "Praise to the man who made *Hashem* his trust (*Tehillim* 40,5) – this refers to Yosef."²² For as we have seen, *kedusha* and *emuna* (sanctity and faith) – of which *bitachon* (trust) is an offshoot²³ – are firmly intertwined.

Our generation, more than ever before, must expend every effort to saturate itself with *kedusha* and *emuna*. Let us strive to follow in the ways of Noach and Yosef, by filling our minds with Torah and by closing our eyes and minds to the negative influences of society at large – especially its media, which has polluted the spiritual environment to an astonishing degree.

The *Yom Tov* of Pesach, the Festival of Faith, which commences with the awesome *Seder* night, is an ideal time to fortify ourselves and our families in these crucial areas. ■

²¹ *Yoma* 39a.

²² *Bereishis Rabba* 89:3. The same Midrash faults Yosef for placing his trust in the cupbearer by asking that he mention him before Pharaoh. *Beis HaLevi* explains that precisely because Yosef's level of *bitachon* was so great, was he faulted for placing his trust in the cupbearer.

²³ To quote *Rabbeinu Bachya*: "It is obvious that anyone with *bitachon* is a *maamin* (man of faith), for one can trust only in Someone Whom he believes to have the power to fulfill his request" (*Kad HaKemach, Bitachon*)

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Dealing With “The Wicked Son”



The *Haggada* tells us how to deal with that wicked son: “*Hakhai es shinav* – Blunt his teeth!” Is that good Torah pedagogy, a good *zetz*? Is it effective?

We can, perhaps, understand this teaching in light of another Talmudic teaching. The Talmud (*Bava Kamma*) elaborates on the Torah’s directives in *Parshas Mishpatim* regarding a person’s responsibility for damage committed by his property upon another’s body or property. The Torah describes, among others, three types of damage that can be committed by one’s animal: *keren* [lit., horn], *shein* [lit., tooth], *regel* [lit., foot]. These different category names are not descriptive in the sense of being exhaustive or exclusive; rather, the categories named are representative, and provide examples of damage typical for that category. Thus, the Talmudic name for damage caused by an animal in the unbridled pursuit of fulfillment of its passions and desires – “*shein*” [lit., tooth] – is significant, and gives us insight into how the Tannaitic literature relates to that word and what it represents.

Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman ז"ל wrote that were it not for the interference caused by our human biases, we would have direct and immediate recognition of G-d’s existence. (In contemporary psychology, this concept is known as “cognitive dissonance,” mean-

ing that we don’t perceive ideas that are a threat to what we have “invested” in.)

In *Ma’amar al Emuna* (Koveitz *Ma’amarim*, p. 15), Reb Elchanan wrote:

“And the commandment to believe in G-d? It is a commandment not to allow one’s desires to overcome his intellect so that he will automatically come to believe. In other words, there is no need to struggle to believe. One must simply remove the obstacles that stand in the way of believing. It will then come naturally, of itself”

What are these “obstacles that stand in the way of our believing” of which Reb Elchanan wrote? What are those “desires [that] overcome one’s intellect”? More often than not, a person prefers not to believe because it is easier not to believe. You can eat a whole lot more, whenever you want, if you don’t believe in the authority of the Torah; the fanciest restaurants are ready and waiting.

Observing the rules of *kashrus* imposes restraints on what and when a person can eat; it requires great discipline. The regimen of *Taharas Hamishpacha* (*mikva*) is another area of Jewish law that makes demands and requires self-control. It seems that the time for prayer in the morning gets earlier and earlier. (Wait until next week!) Keeping the Torah requires sacrifice and work and heroism and discipline. None of these is easy. And to the casual outside observer, it might not look very pleasant. Those who observe a Torah way of life, of course, know that nothing can compare to the beauty, meaning, and sanctity of Torah living, but one must experience it first-hand to know that. And some people would rather not know.

Aldous Huxley, the world renowned scientist and philosopher, wrote in his *Ends and Means* [1937, page 270]:

“We do not know the purpose of creation for we do not wish to know. Those who attribute no meaning to the world, do so, generally speaking, because this or some other reason fits their designs that the world lacks meaning.”

In another essay [“Confessions of a Professional Free-Thinker”], published in 1966, near the end of his life, Huxley wrote:

“I had reasons not to want the world to have meaning, and as a result I assumed the world had no meaning, and I was readily able to find satisfactory grounds for this assumption For me, as it undoubtedly was for most of my generation, the phi-

Rabbi Avraham Peretz Friedman is the Rabbi of Congregation Anshe Chesed in Linden, New Jersey. He is the author of *Table for Two* (Targum, 1992) and *Marital Intimacy* (Aronson, 1996).

osophy of meaninglessness was an instrument of liberation from a certain moral system. We were opposed to morality because it interfered with our freedom.”

The *Haggada* is counseling sympathy and understanding. Don't answer the "wicked" son's challenge head-on; you – and he – will only lose. Recognize what stands behind the challenge, behind the barbed comments. It's not an intellectual battle. Respond on that plane and you'll accomplish nothing. This child – as are we all – is influenced heavily by the pull of his desires, desires for ease and comfort and unrestricted access to unlimited, unregulated pleasure. These desires – called the *shein* [tooth] instincts in Talmudic parlance – prevent him from experiencing and appreciating the beauty of Torah living (which he dismisses as "work").

This child is not unique, or particularly bad, really; as Aldous Huxley testified, this mechanism operates within every person, to a lesser or greater degree. Indeed, as Reb Elchanan wrote, were it not for this blinding, deluding influence, all people would recognize G-d clearly and immediately, and most of us never do. So what's the *Haggada* advocating? Find a way to "blunt" – to lessen in intensity – the unremitting tug and influence of these *shein* [tooth] instinctive desires, to wean the child away from them – and *then* we can talk.

The *Haggada* is not offering a good retort to an obnoxious comment; rather, it is offering a life-long course for effective Jewish child-rearing. ■

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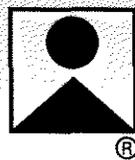
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Chinuch Habannim WORKSHOPS

An Idea Whose Time Has Come

Yossie is a bright 10-year-old. Maybe a bit too bright for his own good. Whenever he is asked to do an errand by one of his parents, he responds with a wise-crack. Exasperated, Yossie's parents raise their voices and snap at him day after day. How many times will this pattern repeat itself? Does Yossie realize that his parents really love him when they seem to be constantly berating him?

Shani Levi arrived home from nursery school wearing a cute beaded necklace. When her mother inquired about the trinket, Shani explained that it belonged to her classroom, but she wanted it so she had taken it. Mrs. Levi was horrified. Her daughter a thief? Where had she gone wrong as a parent? What should she do?

Purim was approaching, and costumes were the talk of the day. Four-year-old Mendy wanted to be a policeman with a real gun. His older brother bluntly informed him that he would not be getting a real gun. "But I need a real gun," Mendy stubbornly insisted.

Rebbitzten Kaganoff, author of *Dear Kallah* (Feldheim '91), lives with her family in Yerushalayim, where she teaches in seminaries and writes. Prior to her *aliya* two years ago, she resided in Baltimore, teaching in Bais Yaakov of Baltimore and giving *shiurim* to women. Rebbitzten Kaganoff has been involved in many community projects and organizations, including Congregation Darchei Tzedek of Baltimore, where her husband, Rabbi Yirmiyohu Kaganoff, served as *Rav*.

"Why do you need a real gun?" everyone asked Mendy, quite amused by the prospect of a four-year-old with a gun.

Their amusement changed to horror as he answered, "I want to kill people."

A COMMON PHENOMENON

Children are our greatest treasure, and we are entrusted with the awesome responsibility of raising them to be productive members of *Klal Yisroel*. At times, the job seems overwhelming. Can we rely on our intuition, instinctively reacting properly to the challenges we face? Will we make mistakes that might have severe consequences? We read wonderful books on childrearing, but they do not address our unique children and our specific situations. What can parents today do to fortify themselves to fill their *tafkid* (life-mission) as primary educators of their children?

As a relative newcomer to *Eretz Yisroel*, I became aware of a fascinating development that can be found in English-speaking Torah communities here — ongoing *chinuch habannim* workshops and *shiurim*. In many *frum* neighborhoods in Israel, it is common to have several such workshops or *shiurim* available for women. Men too are encouraged to attend *shiurim* and reinforce their parenting skills. The lecturers are well-known *mechanchim* and *mechanchos* or licensed workshop leaders¹, and parents of children young and old flock to these courses.

"Since I have been going to my *chin-*

uch classes, I truly feel that my life has changed. It isn't that I wanted to make mistakes in childrearing, but my eyes were not open. To become a doctor, one goes through years of training, but people usually become parents with very little prior preparation, thinking that it all comes naturally. I had to face the fact that I had much to learn. I now realize that I am not doomed to experience difficulties. I have been able to incorporate the lessons I've learned into my life, and I see the fruits. My life and my children's lives have become more pleasant," says M.E., Neve Yaakov resident and participant in a *chinuch habannim* workshop of Rebbitzten Sima Spetner.

Attending a *chinuch habannim* course is seen as an indication of an interest in being the best parent possible, and not a confession of weakness or incompetence. Mrs. Yehudis Salinger, who has an MA in Special Education, is a proud student of Rebbitzten Spetner and is involved in guiding parents, both in workshops and via a hotline. An acquaintance once told her, "You don't seem the type to go to a parenting workshop," insinuating that she did not seem to need training as a parent.

Mrs. Salinger responded, "I *daven* every day, but I would eagerly go to a *shiur* that could help me improve my *davening*. Why wouldn't I want to go to a *shiur* that helps me master parenting?"

VARIATIONS IN FORMAT

The exact format of the classes varies, but there are common threads. Participants make a

¹ More about this license later

commitment to attend a series of classes on *chinuch habannim*. (Some of these last for ten sessions, while others are once a week for a year or more.) Most classes seem to be organized for mothers, but there are courses for fathers or couples as well. Principles of *chinuch* are presented and discussed, with an emphasis placed on real-life situations and problem-solving techniques. The participants bring up practical questions and feel that they can contact their teachers with more personal situations.

Rabbi Zecharya Greenwald, principal of Me'ohr Bais Yaakov Seminary in Yerushalayim, has presented a number of ten-session *chinuch habannim* classes to couples in a separate-seating format.² "When there is a problem, everyone comes running," says Rabbi Greenwald, "but here we have parents who come because they are interested in learning the skills of the *chinuch* profession. These couples experience a positive change in the home environment and *chinuch* becomes more of a focus. In general, parents are so busy that they don't discuss *chinuch* strategies; but once they invest time in a series of *shiurim*, they begin to discuss childrearing more."

Rabbi Noach Orlowek is another

² Rabbi Greenwald has recently prepared a series of ten tapes titled "Preparing Your Child for Success," available through Feldheim Publishers.

Yerushalayim resident who has long been in the foreground of education for parents. He is the author of *My Child, My Disciple*, among other works, and serves as a consultant and guide for many parents. He conducts an eighteen-session parenting class for men, requiring their wives to hear the tapes of all the sessions and come to every fourth class in place of their husbands to discuss what they learned from the tapes. Rabbi Orlowek's sessions are run like workshops, involving role-playing and problem solving. He believes that these workshops "encourage parents to believe in their own capabilities to handle most situations." Rabbi Orlowek is also in the process of organizing a new project to promulgate these workshops.

Rebbitzen Fruma Altusky and Rebbitzen Sima Spetner each give many workshops weekly for women. They are both education professionals and experienced mothers. (Rebbitzen Altusky is a grandmother and great-grandmother, as well.) Although they have different styles, they both present *hashkofos* and also practical situations, stressing that solutions do exist and guiding their participants to finding these solutions based on the principles they have learned. The need to strengthen *bitachon* and to *daven* for *siyata diShmaya* are underlying themes of all the sessions, and the participants value these classes

and their teachers, viewing them as role models and resources available for questions. Rebbitzen Spetner has also created an organization called *Toras Emecha* that has several experienced *mechanchim* available to answer questions by telephone on many topics.

A SUCCESSFUL WORKSHOP

Rebbitzen Altusky has a loyal following who attend her *shiurim* year after year. Rabbi Orlowek fills his sessions quickly, and Rebbitzen Spetner has a long waiting list to join her workshops. Wherein lies the success of these workshops?

Word spreads that these *chinuch habannim* classes bring success, giving parents proper focus, instilling confidence, presenting concrete principles that they can integrate into their lives, and creating a support system. Parents see that their problems are not unique. After attending a workshop, either they can find solutions to their problems on their own or they have access to resource people who can help.

* Focus

People often react automatically without focusing on the consequence of their actions. Parenting is a responsibility that warrants much thought and deliberation, not just automatic reactions. Rabbi Wolbe (in the introduction to his *sefer, Building and Planting*) calls education a science that "cannot be mastered after a bit of casual consideration or by depending on one's hunches."

If wiseguy Yossie's parents had been to a chinuch habannim workshop, they might have realized that they were responding to Yossie with annoyance instead of working to improve the situation. Hopefully, they would take the time to discuss Yossie's behavior. How long had this been going on? What would motivate Yossie to comply with his parents' wishes? Was his behavior a ploy to attract attention? Focusing on Yossie and their reactions to his behavior will bring his parents to more productive interactions with their son.

* Confidence

Rebbitzen Altusky feels that many

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women lack confidence in themselves as mothers. The overwhelming task of child-rearing becomes less frightening when tools are presented and situations are openly discussed. Rebbitzin Spetner prefers to begin with parents of small children, to help them start off right, but she stresses that it is never too late to learn new patterns.

If acquisitive Shani's mother had been to a parenting class, she would have not felt threatened as a parent just because her three year old had not yet learned the concept of property. She would calmly return the necklace the next day with an apology to the teacher, with her confidence as a parent intact. No one's child is perfect!

* Principles

Hearing principles of proper *chinuch* enunciated week after week and seeing how to integrate them into daily situations is beneficial to any parent.

Policeman Mendy's mother was able to cope with her son's alarming pronouncement. She remembered Rebbitzin Spetner saying again and again, "Talk to your children. Find out what they mean, and why they are acting in this fashion." When Mendy expressed a desire to kill, she asked, "Mendy, why do you want to kill people? Do you know what 'kill' means?"

Mendy very innocently admitted that he had no idea what the concept of murder meant. He just knew it was something that policemen did, and he wanted to be a policeman. Mendy's mother allowed herself a smile as she sighed in relief and thankfulness that she had the tools to deal with the situation.

* Support system

We live in an age of isolation. Gone for many are the multigenerational family networks with grandparents and extended relatives as Torah role models sharing their experiences. People tend to struggle alone with the challenges that come their way, involved in their own lives, and not sharing with others. The workshop leaders become sources of encouragement and advice, but in addition to that, the members of the group become a support system for each other.

Sharing situations and hearing that others have dealt with similar struggles and survived to tell the tale is a comfort. The give-and-take of the group setting allows parents to benefit from the experience of their peers, and enables them to give advice to others as well.

Toby had come to dread Shabbos. She knew intellectually that Shabbos was meant to be the day of rest, but she could not look forward to much rest with four lively preschool-aged children. Shabbos mornings in the wintertime were particularly difficult since her husband was in shul and the children grew restless in their small apartment.

She shared her problem at a chinuch habannim workshop, and she soon found that she was not alone. She was tipped off with a few plans of action - all provided by group members and not the group leader. Toby herself came up with a few ideas once she began to see that she was not trapped in the current situation.

In addition to new strategies on how to entertain her children, Toby picked up a new attitude. Her friend Miriam, whose children were a bit older, assured her that things would improve, and her oldest would begin entertaining the younger children before she knew it. Every Shabbos morning Toby woke up and said to herself, "Miriam said this stage will pass." This comforting thought, along with a few ideas to structure activities for the children, helped lift her mood and made the time pass more quickly.

THE TEACHERS

While the concept of a *chinuch habannim* workshop is new, the concept of turning to *chachamim* for guidance and advice is integral to our heritage. The source of the success of these workshops is in the personality and knowledge of the educators who have systematically worked through the Torah concepts in the topic of *chinuch habannim*, and all their teachings are solidly rooted in *mesores avoseinu*. They turn to *gedolim* for clarification and the participants know that they are hearing proper *hashkafos*. The educators are seen as experts in the field of *chinuch habannim* and satisfied parents spread their name. The enthusiasm of parents is their best *haskama* (endorsement).

The Ministry of Education in Israel has recognized the benefits of workshops and has even created a license called "*mancha horim*." "*Manchot*," parenting workshop leaders, are trained in special institutes. They go through a structured course of four years of study, five hours a week, which focuses on the concepts of parenting as well as in workshop leadership. In addition to the secular Israeli institutes, there is one institute that trains *frum* women to be *manchot* - *Machon Hachareidi L'hachsharat Manchot Horim* (The Chareidi Institute for Training of Parenting Group Leaders).

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ate of the Institute and current workshop leader, attributes her ability to successfully lead workshops to the training she received in the Institute and its unique series of courses. They taught her to help foster in a mother "a responsible confidence in her own motherly strengths." In Mrs. Speyer's words, the workshops help a woman "look inside herself and develop her own unique pattern, as she simultaneously finds the strength and understanding needed to carry it through."

Other workshop leaders, such as Rebbitzen Spetner, have not gone through training at the Institute. She perceived a need to begin giving workshops when neighbors came to her and pleaded with her to share from her expertise in *chinuch habannim*. Since she had many years experience in *chinuch*, as well as professional educational training, she was able to glean from her experience and knowledge and formulate a course in a workshop format.

Rebbitzen Altusky is herself one of the earliest graduates of the Institute, and she has continued training in various areas of specialization with the Institute over the past twenty years, even as she employs her own unique style of presenting a *shiur* on the *parsha* with emphasis on *hashkafos* which relate to parenting.

THE PARTICIPANTS

Participants in workshops come from a variety of backgrounds. Many of them are graduates of our finest Bais Yaakovs and *yeshivos*. They are parents of children age two to twenty, learning techniques for dealing with every age child.

In addition to his other workshops, Rabbi Greenwald has organized a *chinuch habannim* class for the students of his seminary, believing that it is not too early to give young women the basic tools necessary to be a parent. "Believe in your children, show them that you love them, pay attention to your children, find a balance between structure and freedom, never discipline through anger...." These and other concepts are

covered throughout the year, with the hope that these students will integrate these principles into daily life when they become parents.

THE TEENAGE YEARS

Even experienced, confident parents are often taken by surprise when their pleasant child becomes a teenager. They need to hear that their challenges are not unique. How do you deal with *chutzpa*? When should you come down with a strong hand, and when should you ignore an infraction? What is your child really trying to convey with his behavior? Is he or she only testing and how do I deal with it?

Most of workshops are for parents of small children, but often parents of teenagers need guidance, too. At this stage, hopefully parents have already internalized the basic tools of parenting and have confidence in their abilities. They know to listen to their children and can help them through their teenage years. Still, parents should feel they have someone they can turn to for clarification.

Rebbitzin Cohen thought that it was more than a coincidence that she was asked about the same topic twice in one week. The women who approached her were very different indeed, but they had one thing in common – they were both parents of daughters. Mrs. Aronoff was a divorced baalas teshuva, while Mrs. Schwartz was happily married and of a well-established rabbinic family. Their question – How should I deal with my daughter and tzenius? Where do I put my foot down and where do I let her be like her friends? Mrs. Schwartz had an 11-year-old and wanted to be a proactive mom, and Mrs. Aronoff was facing some real challenges with her 14-year-old. Rebbitzin Cohen, after davening for siyata diSh-maya that her advice would be beneficial, gladly gave of her time to discuss teenagers and tzenius with each of these women, stressing the importance of instilling pride as a Bas Yisroel, recommending that the mothers help their daughters realize that they were

up against a difficult test, and encouraging the mothers to be their daughter's ally and support and not to jeopardize her relationship with their daughter.

Rebbitzin Cohen was truly gratified to hear, over a year later, that Mrs. Aronoff's daughter was "doing beautifully." Mrs. Schwartz, too, expressed appreciation for the guidance and guidelines.

NEW TOOLS

Why is there such a concerted effort to educate parents in current age? Our grandparents were never encouraged to sit through parenting classes.

Rabbi Greenwald points out that modern life is full of challenges that did not exist years ago. Families are larger, with less multi-generational support systems. The school systems have become more competitive and demanding, and the pressure to succeed is intense. Stresses of modern life, economic and otherwise, and negative influences from the outside world are overpowering. Is it any wonder that parents need more tools to raise their children when the external society is totally contrary to our value system?

Rebbitzin Spetner, quoting Rabbi Wolbe, explains that the situation today is different than in previous gen-

erations. People have less ability to tolerate a strong approach than they used to, and more focus must be given to building a relationship between parents and children.

There is a need to educate parents in the use of new, productive tools, and give them the confidence to raise the next generation of *Klal Yisroel*.

The *chinuch* of our children is our privilege and our responsibility. In Torah communities in Israel, parents who perceived the need to learn more about their crucial *tafkid* asked *mechanchim* for *shiurim* on *chinuch habannim*. These *chinuch shiurim* and workshops are now attended by hundreds of parents who wish to properly equip them to raise the next generation of *Klal Yisroel*. What about Jewish parents in the rest of the world? There are qualified resource people and *mechanchim* in every Torah community who can offer the same types of *shiurim, shiurim* which will benefit all those who care about their children's futures. ■

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12:45 pm — Rabbi Mordechai Becher

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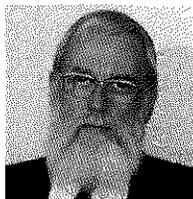
1:45 pm — Rabbi David Gottlieb

JUDAISM AND PSYCHOLOGY

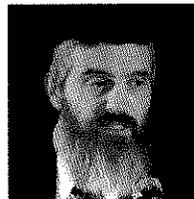
2:45 pm — Rabbi Ahiva Tatz

ORDEALS — A DEEPER LOOK AT LIFE'S CHALLENGES

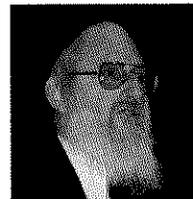
3:30 pm — Panel Discussion



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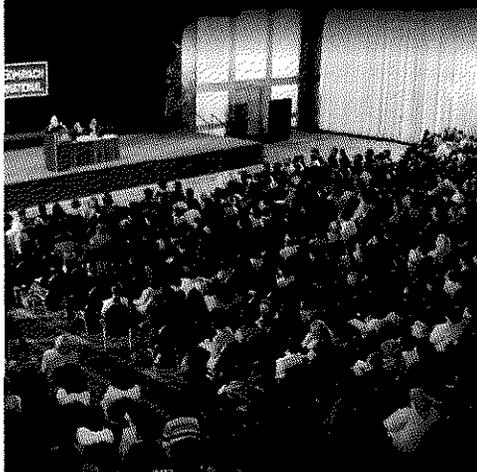
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A Journey to the Ends of the Earth



Delegation at the ground-breaking of the Mikva building in Baku. In the Center, a boy after his bris

In retrospect, a short side trip to Bratislava, Slovakia, was the perfect starting point for a journey to the Jewish communities of the former Soviet Union, although at the time it was only a matter of convenience.

We were traveling under the auspices of the Vaad l'Hatzolas Nidchei Yisroel, whose founder and chairman, Rabbi Mordechai Neustadt, had made all the arrangements. Our flight from New York via Amsterdam connected at Vienna with the flight to Tbilisi, Georgia. Apparently, flights to Tbilisi are not in great demand, and in order to make the connection, we had to spend six hours in Vienna. Avraham Rieder, one of our group, arranged for a bus to come from Budapest and take us to Bratislava, otherwise known as Pressburg, where the *Chasam Sofer*¹ is buried. Bratislava is only thirty miles from Vienna, but narrow roads and two border crossings extend the trip to about an hour and a half.

A gentle rain was falling when our bus pulled up near the *Chasam Sofer's*

gravesite in the fading afternoon light. There was no cemetery in sight, only a small glass-enclosed booth alongside a set of railroad tracks. A stocky old man wearing a *yarmulke* with sharp creases was waiting for us at the door. He had the key.

The *Chasam Sofer's* grave, he explained, was underground. After the War, the government built a railroad over the small cemetery in which the *Chasam Sofer* and about fifteen other people were interred. After much persuasion, they agreed to accommodate an underground cemetery with enough head clearance for a person of average height to stand without taking off his hat.

We followed him down a long flight of stairs to the dank cavern below. A trench had been dug around the graves, which were now at waist level under a very low ceiling. The graves were identified by flat stones and a numbered chart on a stand. The headstones had been removed and placed at the back of the trench. There was no room for them atop the graves.

We stood in the trench between the headstones and the graves, and we paid our respects to this great *gaon* and *tzaddik* who established the world's largest yeshiva in this city nearly two centuries ago, whose *teshuvos*, *chiddushim* and *drashos* are as vital today as ever, whose thousands of illustrious

talmidim illuminated the Jewish world, who lies buried in ignominious obscurity under the railroad tracks in Bratislava.

Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon שליט"א, *Mashgiach* of the Lakewood Yeshiva and the leader of our group, led us in saying a few *kappitlach Tehillim, pasuk by pasuk*. There was not a dry eye in the place.

As we were leaving, the caretaker told us interesting news. Government officials had agreed to divert the railroad tracks, allowing the cemetery to be restored. It doesn't really matter that their motivation is to bring more tourist dollars to Slovakia rather than to honor the memory of the *Chasam Sofer*. What does matter is that this sacred place, buried for decades by Communist decree, will finally be seeing the light of day once again.

Five days later, when we were returning to the United States, I thought about all we had seen in Tbilisi, Baku and Petersburg, and it struck me that the fate of the *Chasam Sofer's* gravesite was a fitting metaphor for the story of the Jewish people under Soviet rule.

Communist oppression had buried Jewish life in the Soviet Union for seventy years. Torah study was outlawed. Torah life was outlawed. Belief in the Almighty was ridiculed. Children grew up ignorant of the hallowed traditions, values and ideals of the Jewish people.

¹ Rabbi Moshe Schreiber (1762-1839), popularly known by the name of his published *teshuvos* and *chiddushim* (halachic responsa and original interpretations on the Talmud and *Chumash*) *Chiddushei Toras Moshe* – the initials spell *Chatam. Sofer* is the Hebrew translation for Schreiber, which means "scribe."

Yaakov Yosef Reinman is a well-known *mechaber* and author. His articles have appeared in *JO* in the past.



Chanukas Habayis, St. Petersburg

Jewishness disappeared from the Soviet landscape, but it did not perish. In some deep figurative grotto, the indomitable Jewish spirit endured, and today, it is once again seeing the light of day. Today, it is flourishing. We saw it with our very own eyes.

We arrived at the hotel in Tbilisi at four o'clock in the morning local time, but there was really no time to sleep for more than an hour or two at the most. We had only one day to spend in Georgia; by evening we would be on our way to Baku in Azerbaijan.

The Jewish communities of Georgia and Azerbaijan, in the temperate southern Caucasus between the Black and Caspian Seas, are mostly Sephardic in origin; Baku is forty miles from the Iranian border. There have been Jews in Tbilisi for over twenty-six hundred years, in Azerbaijan for not much less.

Before the Russian Revolution, Moscow and Petersburg were hotbeds of Jewish secularism and Zionism, but Tbilisi and Baku were steadfast in their loyalty to the Torah. There was no spiritual deterioration in these lands, no compromises with modernity, no sup-

posedly progressive revisions of the religion, no socialist agitation. Communism was spawned in the heart of the Russian Empire, not in these outlying satellites. But when the Bolsheviks wrested power from the czar in 1917, these lands also came under their control. Russian commissars took over and imposed the Communist system on an unwilling people. Judaism was buried alive.

But for many people, something remained to keep the spirit from perishing—a family custom, a cherished religious article, a memory, or perhaps just that ardent attachment to the Almighty that is so deeply ingrained in virtually all Sephardic Jews. The decades wreaked their havoc. The Torah was forgotten. *Shabbos*, kosher food, family purity and all the other facets of Jewish life disappeared. Inter-marriage reached alarming percentages. Still, people viewed their Jewish origins with a vague pride; they knew they were special but were not quite sure why.

In 1986, the Vaad l'Hatzolas Nidchei Yisroel began to send *shalichim* (emissaries) to Tbilisi where there was a slight stirring of interest in the Torah. Three years later, a Vaad *shliach* was sought out by a brilliant young college student named Ariel Levine. He belonged to the minority of Ashkenazic Jews in Tbilisi, most of whom are descended from refugees who fled there during the Second World War. One thing led to another, and Ariel Levine blossomed into a *tzaddik* and a *talmid chacham* who is today the Chief Rabbi of Georgia.

Rabbi Levine was our host in Tbilisi. He is an extremely likeable man with a dry, self-deprecating wit and a passionate dedication to his work. He runs a yeshiva high school and a Bais Yaakov high school, as well as a full elementary school, a *mikva* and numerous community services. He also has a part-time *kollel*, which he wryly calls "the only *kollel* in the world established for *mechallelei Shabbos*." Over time, of course, the *kollel* runs out of *mechallelei Shabbos* and must seek new recruits. Some of these former *mechallelei Shabbos* have gone on to *yeshivos* in Eretz Yisroel and have returned to teach in Tbilisi.

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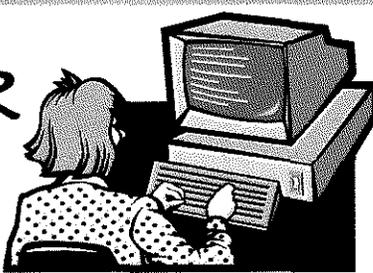
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The anomaly of a *kollel* for *mechal-lelei Shabbos* aptly illustrates the situation in Tbilisi as well as elsewhere in the former Soviet Union. A young man can spend a good part of the day studying *Gemora* intensively yet go home to a non-Jewish wife and children. A child can spend the day learning *Chumash*, *Siddur* and holiday songs, yet come home to a non-kosher dinner. A teenaged girl can enumerate all the conditions of *melechtes machsheves* (classical Sabbath violations), as we ourselves witnessed in utter amazement, yet there is no way of knowing if *Shabbos* is observed in her home. These are the vicissitudes of the rebirth of Torah in all these lands. The tender shoots are pushing tentatively through the avalanche that buried them. It is a disjointed, paradoxical, yet incredibly beautiful phenomenon, and it never ceases to move visitors from abroad.



We spent the day with these people, an intense fourteen hours that began at *Shacharis* in the yeshiva with the *bar mitzva* of a boy named Yitzchak Meir Banikashvili, the son of a *chacham* from Kutaisi, the second largest city in Georgia. The *Mashgiach* helped the boy put on his *tefillin* for the first time as his father looked on. I could not discern exactly what defines the boy's father as a *chacham* nor the level of observance in his home, but I could discern the intense joy and pride of the parents on that momentous occasion.

Afterwards, there was a *bris*. On the plane, Rabbi Neustadt had told me there would be a *bris* in Tbilisi and three more in Baku. Somewhat naively, I asked him, "How did they manage to schedule them so perfectly?" It did not immediately occur to me that the ages of the *baalei simcha* were fifteen, sixteen, nineteen and forty. In Tbilisi, the boy, whose

father is an Armenian, was a cousin of Rabbi Levine.

Most of us were not present at the actual *bris*, which was performed in private because of the boy's age. We all danced and celebrated with him afterward. The first time I experienced what had transpired in that room was at a preview showing of the video at a special Vaad conference held in conjunction with the last Agudah Convention. The

camera captures the expressive face of the boy as we hear the *mohel* make the *beracha* in the background. There is not even a wince on his face, just a look of intense determination. The *Mashgiach*, who was his *sandek*, bends over and kisses him. The images are extremely powerful; I, for one, was very moved.

"Why did you want to do this?" the *Mashgiach* asked him later.

The boy clenched his fists. "Because I want to be a Jew!"

Before we left, we were served a meal in the yeshiva, and the *Mashgiach* spoke words of inspiration to the assembled crowd, as he did wonderfully and often throughout the journey. Rabbi Levine then told us his life story in his own inimitable fashion. He told us about his challenges, his wife's gallantry, his dream of expanding the school if he could only acquire a building. After him, the irrepressible Raphael Zucker of Lakewood took the floor and made a spontaneous appeal to the members of the group. We cannot allow the inspiration to fade, he insisted. We must do something right away. Within minutes, members of the group pledged to contribute or raise all the money needed to pay for the building.

The next day, we had a similar experience in Baku, where we were hosted by the Vaad *shaliach*, Rabbi Moshe Kishone. No mountain is too high for this extraordinary man to climb. He is

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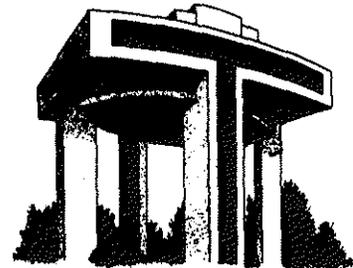


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a man of great intellect and charisma, resourceful, dynamic and supremely dedicated; he has a wife and eight children in *Eretz Yisroel* but spends at least two weeks out of every month in Azerbaijan. He has established an elementary school in Baku whose enrollment has grown to over 200 children, and he has galvanized all aspects of Jewish life throughout Azerbaijan. The success of the Vaad, I thought to myself, is clearly due in large part to the quality of its *shalichim*. Two days later, when we visited the new Yeshivas Pri Yitzhak in Petersburg and met Rabbi Eliezer Nezdachny, the *rosh yeshiva*, this impression was reinforced.

In Azerbaijan, we were once again moved and inspired by all we saw, the eagerness of the young children, the immense pride of parents and teachers. That night, over a late supper in the hotel, the *Mashgiach* spoke to us about commitment, and he proposed that we all reconvene at midnight and sign a paper pledging to work for the Vaad

together as a group to the best of our abilities. We all signed gladly, and the paper came to be known as the Baku Document.

What had we seen that so inspired us, that so inspires everyone who travels to these lands? Had we really seen anything different from a Jewish community being transformed somewhere in middle America, a not uncommon phenomenon in our times? Why were we so ready to sign on the dotted line?

I think it is because the Torah renaissance we are witnessing in the former Soviet Union is so incongruous with the American model. People are instinctively inclined to strive more for material goals than for spiritual goals. The quest for spirituality, for most people, requires intellectual conditioning, but the quest for material rewards is reflexive. After a while, however, people discover that material goals are illusory, that they do not provide satisfaction for our inner

yearnings. "Whoever has one hundred," our Sages tell us, "wants two hundred." Only when material acquisitions leave them unsatisfied do they seek out the enduring rewards of spirituality.

The early immigrants to the United States faced the material challenges of the new world without the moral support of the families and communities they left behind overseas, and all too many of them neglected the spiritual in favor of the material. And even as they encountered success, they still found satisfaction in their material pursuits. Why? Because putting a roof over the heads of their families and food on the table, sending the children to good schools and all the other accoutrements of a decent standard of living are a spiritual endeavor called *chessed*. And so millions of American Jews drifted further and further away from the Torah. But for the new generations, the material goals have been ratcheted up to a second or third luxury car, a vacation home in the Caribbean, a world cruise. There is nothing spiritual about any of these things, and their acquisition is not fundamentally rewarding. Therefore, more and more people are returning to the spiritual rewards of the Torah.

But this is not the case in the former Soviet Union. Communism has collapsed, and with it the straitjacket of institutionalized poverty. The economic opportunities are boundless, and numerous Jews are amassing tremendous wealth. And yet, large numbers of ordinary people with no religious background, who live in cramped apartments and ride on public transportation, are seeking out the Torah.

Why are they so interested in the Torah when there is so much economic opportunity out there? Why are they drawn to the spiritual when they have not yet been disillusioned by the material?

There is only one answer, even if they do not recognize it themselves. Neither they nor their forbears turned their backs on the Torah. Rather, it was taken away from them. And now that the barriers are gone, the impulse for reunion is strong. There is no need to reconstruct

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a relationship, as with American Jews. The relationship has never been deconstructed, only buried deep underground. Today, we are seeing its revival. This is the wonder of what we are seeing in the former Soviet Union. This is what touches each of us who has been there and seen what is happening.

Before this journey, I had never been to Tbilisi, Baku or Petersburg, but I did visit Moscow and Kishinev in 1987 and Moscow again in 1989. On my first night in Moscow, I went to the home of Aryeh Levitan, a twenty-two-year-old young man who had become a *baal teshuva* three years earlier and had started learning *Gemora* only two years earlier. We learned *Mesechte Gittin* together in secret, and he had a list of questions prepared for me. We argued over a *Rashba* and a Rav Akiva Eiger, and I was amazed by the level of sophistication he had acquired in such a short time. Today, this young man is still learning in *kollel* in *Eretz Yisroel*, well on his way to becoming a *gadol b'Yisroel*. Back then, there was no real *chinuch* for young Jewish children, but there were young, intellectually mature adults like Aryeh Levitan studying Torah on a high level.

That night, I walked back myself at two o'clock in the morning to the Hotel Rossiya on Red Square, a distance of about two miles. For a good part of the way, I had the Moskva River on my right and the endless brick wall of the Kremlin on my left. I was all alone. A fine mist hung in the air, and my footsteps echoed in the silence. I remember being struck by a sense of foreboding in my alien surroundings, and I asked myself, *Where am I? What am I doing here?* But in truth, I was in no danger. There was no street crime under the Communists.

Things have changed over the last ten years. Today, if I would walk that same route I would be lucky to reach the hotel with my life; forget about the wallet. Today, there are not many Aryeh Levitans in these lands, but there is a great blossoming of *chinuch* for young Jewish children. Back then, the Aryeh Levitans would discover the Torah and emi-

grate to *Eretz Yisroel* at the first opportunity; the cream was continually skimmed off. Educate the adult, and he leaves. Educate the child, and you transform the community. Today, we are seeing the development of a Torah infrastructure that bodes well for the future.

The political future in these lands, as indeed anywhere else, is uncertain. In the last decade, the map of Eurasia has been redrawn, and it will most likely be redrawn once or twice more in the decades to come. But the Torah future of the former Soviet Union seems to be on a strong and stable upward curve, assuming there will be continued financial and instructive support from abroad.

People in the United States often ask, *Why should we support the former Soviet Union when there is so much to be done right here in our own backyard? Why should we feel a particular sense of obligation to the Jews in these lands?*

The *Mashgiach* addressed this question on that fateful night in Baku. In every generation of this long *galus*, he explained, there is one segment of *Klal Yisroel* that suffers the brunt of the oppression for all the rest. During the Crusades, it was the Jews of Germany. During the Inquisition, it was the Jews of Iberia. During these last seventy years, it was the Jews of the Soviet Union. They bore the full intensity of the exile for all

of us, and now that they are free, we are obliged to help them recover.

Traveling back home, I could not help but compare the world I had just visited with the world in which I live, and a thought occurred to me. We say in *Mus-*



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saf of Shalosh Regalim, "Unefutzoseinu kaneis miyarkesei haaretz. Gather in our scattered people from the ends of the earth." Where are the ends of this round earth? These ends are clearly at

the extremities of the spirit rather than of space. The ends of the earth are not in New York or London or even Melbourne. The ends of the earth are where the light of Torah has been obscured for

nearly a century, where millions of Jewish people have forgotten the meaning of being Jewish, where the mentalities and the perspectives are still skewed by the aftereffects of ideological distortion. The ends of the earth are in places like Tbilisi and Baku, and the people who live there are the ones for whose redemption we pray. ■

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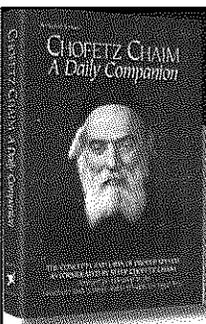
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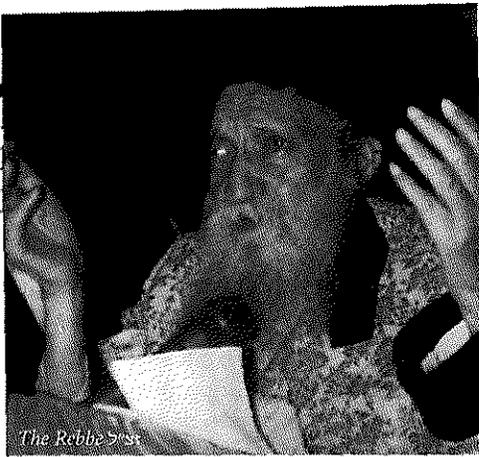
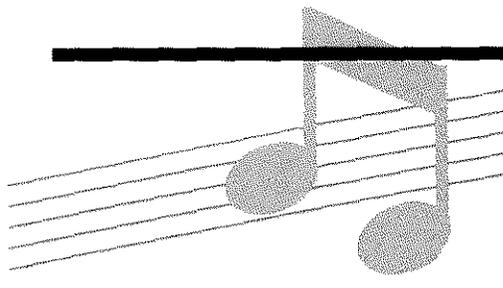
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The Rebbe שליט"א

Chazal state that "the sound of Sinai never ceased."¹ It may seem ever so faint to most of us; but the tzaddikim still hear it in its might, resonating within all the sounds of the universe. Sometimes they even tell us a bit of what they hear. Similarly, the Skulener Rebbe שליט"א used to say that he never composed a melody; he just heard the music they "shined" to him from Above. Sometimes we were privileged to hear him sing it.

REACHING OUT TO OTHERS

Music has been called the "universal language." Certainly for the Skulener Rebbe, it served as an effective way to reach out to others, despite all religious or emotional barriers. Once a Chassid came to the Rebbe lamenting that his brother had strayed from the path. The Rebbe suggested that he bring his non-religious brother to share his troubles with him, but the Chassid was certain that his brother would refuse. "In that case," said the Rebbe, "ask him if he wouldn't mind joining us for the Havdala ceremony." (In Skulen, this *avoda*, interspersed with many stirring melodies, may take as long as half an hour.) The Chassid managed to prevail upon his brother, who upon hearing the Rebbe's invocation of the "One Who separates the

The Skulener Rebbe's insights on *Sefer Tehillim* have been published in Hebrew as *Tehillim Noam Eliezer*, edited and with a biographical introduction by Rabbi Shlomo Weiss.

Dovid Sears has contributed several articles to *The Jewish Observer*, including "Putting the 'Jewish' Back Into Jewish Music" (Jan. 1997). His most recent book is *The Flame of the Heart: Prayers of a Chassidic Mystic* (Breslov Research Institute, 1999), selected translations from the *Likutei Tefillos* of Reb Noson Sternhartz.

Listening to the Music of the Angels

A Tribute to Admor HaRav Eliezer Zusya Portugal of Skulen שליט"א (Niftar Erev Rosh Chodesh Elul, 5742/1982)



The Rebbe שליט"א

sacred from the profane," suddenly found himself overcome with tears. From then on, he turned over a new leaf and became an *ehrlicher Yid*, eventually building a fine Jewish home.

After the Holocaust, many survivors were spiritually and emotionally broken. Some abandoned religious observance altogether; others still clung to the ways of their fathers, but their *shemiras Shabbos*, too, needed strengthening. Many of these marginally observant Jews instinctively found their way to the Skulener Rebbe's *tisch* (table); and like a shepherd calling his flock back home, the Skulener Rebbe would sing them his famous "*Shabbos Liede*." Through this composition's homespun Yiddish lyrics and stirring melody, countless Jewish souls were lifted from the depths of despair, to receive new hope.

In his desire to give solace and inspiration to all, the Rebbe instructed his Chassidim to disseminate his *niggunim* as widely as possible. After his passing, responsibility for this sacred mission was assumed by the present Skulener Rebbe, שליט"א (who also directs the Israel-based network of Chessed L'Avraham schools and *kiruv* /outreach programs initiated by his late father). Each generation has its own *nisyonos*, its own challenges; and despite the many strides the Orthodox community has made in fifty years, we need *chizuk* (strength) as much as ever. A holy melody can awaken the soul from its spiritual slumber, inspiring even the most alienated Jew to return to the ways of Torah, and even the most accomplished Jew to attain higher levels of Divine service.

SPARKS IN THE NIGHT

Just as the birth of a child must be preceded by the mother's labor pains, a holy melody is often born

of suffering and travail. Some of the Skulener *Rebbe's* most powerful *niggunim* came to him while he was imprisoned by the Communist regime in his native Roumania, with no *Siddur*, *tefillin*, or even food. His interrogations were carried out by vicious Jew-haters, who didn't hesitate to torture their captives. During one of these hellish interviews, the *Rebbe* was stricken in the face. At that moment, he "heard" a melody corresponding to the verse from *Tehillim*, "He'ira pane'cha al avde'cha, hoshi'eini b'chasdecha – Shine Your countenance upon Your servant; deliver me in Your kindness" (*Tehillim* 31, 17). The *Rebbe* immediately understood that a "holy spark" had been trapped within the body of his cruel oppressor, and by enduring his savage blow, the holy spark had been set free.

Once during those dark years, the *Rebbe* was tried for another heinous crime. During the cross-examination, the prosecutor asked why he had continued to organize rescue activities of Jewish children after repeated warnings to desist from doing so. Instead of answering his inquisitor, the *Rebbe* began to sing the melody he had just "heard" corresponding to the verse from *Tehillim*, "Odeh Hashem m'od befi – I will thank G-d greatly with my mouth..." The entire court was utterly taken aback by the *Rebbe's* unexpected response, and by the haunting beauty of the melody. Then he sang the next verse, "Ki yamod l'yamin evyon l'hoshiya mishoftei nafsho – For He stands to the right hand of the destitute, to save him from those who judge his soul."



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(*Tehillim* 109,31). At this, the judge dismissed the case.²

TEHILLIM

The Skulener *Rebbe's* fervent recitation of *Tehillim* was an act of intercession on behalf of the storm-tossed souls who, day and night, streamed to his door. He took this to be his perennial task, thus to nullify all harsh judgments against the Jewish people. His eyes filled with tears, the *Rebbe* prepared himself for each prayer service with *Tehillim*, preceded each meal with *Tehillim*; and between one matter and the next, there was always a moment for a few more chapters of *Tehillim*. However, Psalm 51 had a special place in his heart. The *Rebbe* called it the "Teshuva Kapitel," the "Chapter of Return to G-d." Thus, he recited it with intense yearning before performing any religious precept.

His Torah teachings, especially those given at his *Shabbos tisch* (table), also reflected this deep attachment to *Sefer Tehillim*. His insights and reflections were best communicated through original interpretations of its verses; indeed, there is hardly a chapter of *Tehillim* to which he didn't offer a *p'shat*, or compose a melody. The *Damesek Eliezer* of Vizhnitz once aptly commented, "The Skulener *Rebbe's* melodies themselves are a commentary on *Sefer Tehillim*."

MELODY AND MA'ASEH MERKAVA

Given all the various forms of Divine service, why was the Skulener *Rebbe*, like many other *Chassidic* luminaries, so intensely devoted to *negina*? Perhaps because, as *Rebbe Nachman* of Breslov states, "Deveykus (cleaving to Hashem) is primarily attained through melody."³

This assertion is supported by a profound teaching of *Chazal*. The *Gemora* in *Chagiga* (14a) describes how Rabbi Elazar Ben Arach and his master, Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai, were traveling together on the outskirts of Jerusalem. When Rabbi Elazar asked a question concerning the mysteries of the

Merkava (Divine Chariot), Rabbi Yochanan cited the tradition that it is forbidden to discuss these lofty matters except with a student who already has grasped the gist of the subject on his own. Thereupon, the two dismounted from their donkeys, sat down under the branches of an olive tree, and Rabbi Elazar began to demonstrate his qualifications by expounding upon the *Merkava*. Suddenly a ring of fire appeared around them, and the trees broke into song: "Halleluya Praise Hashem from the earth, the sea monsters and all the deep; fire and hail, snow and vapor, storm wind that fulfills His word; mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars ... Halleluya" (*Tehillim* 148).

One of the first questions one might ask is: Why did the trees sing this psalm? According to the *Gemora* in *Pesachim* (117a), *Sefer Tehillim* is the very essence of song. Moreover, just as the land of Israel possesses ten levels of *kedusha* (holiness), *Sefer Tehillim* possesses ten types of *negina* (melody), the loftiest of which is "Halleluya." Perhaps the trees sang this psalm because holy melody is the *Ma'aseh Merkava* – the vehicle for the soul's ascent into the Divine Oneness. (Thus, the *Rambam* explains that music was used by the prophets as a method for attaining a higher spiritual state).⁴

The Skulener *Rebbe* זצ"ל was devoted to *negina* because his entire life was an unending quest to know and reveal the Divine Oneness. And that's why his music remains such a potent medium for instilling the love and fear of Hashem in every Jewish heart. *Z'chuso yagein aleinu* – may his merits protect us and all Israel, *amen*. ■

1 Rashi on *Devarim* 5,19.

2 *Chassidic* works state that a holy melody can "sweeten" the Heavenly forces of severity (*dinim*); cf. *Likutei Moharan* (Breslov) II:42; *She'aris Yisrael* (Vilednik), *Simchas Beis HaSho'eva*; *Tzemach Tzaddik* (Vizhnitz), *Noach*, 18a; *Ateres Zvi* (Ziditchov), *Vayechi*, 103b. Thus, the *Rebbe's* actions were not due to a moment's whim but reflected a deep spiritual strategy.

3 *Likutei Moharan* I:3

4 *Mishneh Torah*, *Yesodei HaTorah* 7,4.

Discovering the Essence of the Jewish Self

A Review Article

The Jewish Self: Recovering Spirituality in the Modern World by Rabbi Jeremy Kagan (Feldheim Publ.), 197 pp.

The last decade has witnessed an outpouring in English of original works of Jewish thought thoroughly grounded in the greatest modern Jewish thinkers – the *Maharal*, the *Ramchal*, the *Vilna Gaon* to Reb Tzadok HaKohen of Lublin. Not since the days of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch has the general Jewish public had such access to works that are both – as Rabbi Nachman Bulman writes of *The Jewish Self* – “profoundly faithful to Torah tradition and startlingly original in exposition and style.”

The flowering of contemporary *hashkafa* works represents the continuation of a project begun in our day by Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler and Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner: to translate the deepest insights of Torah into a modern idiom. That project is continued today in large part by *talmidim* of Rabbi Moshe Shapiro, who himself learned with both Rabbi Dessler and Rabbi Hutner, and whose profound influence is immediately recognizable in many of these recent works.¹

The Jewish Self addresses the challenge to faith in the modern world. Those challenges affect both those who

were raised in environments hostile to Torah and those who, though *mitzva*-observant, experience a lack of inner connection to *mitzvos* or a deep relationship with *Hashem*.

Decline of Faith – Not By Accident

The decline of religious faith in the modern world, Rabbi Kagan argues, is not accidental, but rooted in our objective historical situation. He chronicles a three thousand year decline in Man’s awareness of the spiritual center of existence, and with it, the loss of a natural sense of connection to transcendent Spirit.

All societies until roughly the time of Alexander the Great were worshipping societies. Until then, men naturally experienced themselves as expressions and consequences of G-d’s Will, and located the root of their being in the realm of the Spirit. Modern man, by contrast, denies reality to all that is not subject to sensory observation, leading to a constricted sense of both the external world and the self.

Those changes in the way we experience the world and in our existential self-awareness reflect an objective change in *Hashem’s* relationship to the world. When the Men of the Great Assembly slew the *yeitzer hara* for idol

worship, they destroyed the capacity for worship as a natural act as well. (The *yeitzer hara* for idol worship “departed” specifically from the Holy of Holies). Prophecy, direct communication with G-d, ended at the same time.

By showing that modern man’s lack of faith is not the result of a considered decision, but rather “a necessary consequence of our historical placement and culture experience,” Rabbi Kagan seeks to once again open up modern man for the possibility of faith.

But where is that faith to come from once it is severed from our natural experience? The obvious answer is from the Torah. But the Torah too has been severely compromised by our lost awareness of G-d’s intimate presence. “Since the source of Torah is Spirit,” writes Rabbi Kagan, “the Torah is as if out of place in a physically defined world. As the nature of the world became more physical, our connection to the Torah became weaker.”

Having lost our connection with the realm of the Spirit, we have lost awareness of our essential selves, the breath of the Divine within. In the absence of a solid self, we have come to confuse our inclinations with our identity and being.

Part of the Divine Plan

Yet this dramatic change in the way in which man experiences himself and the world around him, too, is part of the Divine plan. One of Rabbi Kagan’s signal achievements is to show the place of G-d’s hiddenness in the Divine plan. He demonstrates how our diminished sense of *Hashem’s* presence allows for the discovery of our essential selves in a way that was impossible so long as our awareness of His presence was so overwhelming.

Rabbi Kagan’s central metaphor for elucidating the change in the way in which *Hashem* relates to us is the bond between mother and child. Never is that bond so strong as during infancy. Yet if the child is to grow into a mature adult, the mother must sever that relationship to some extent. Similarly, *Hashem* had to partially sever our bond

Yonason Rosenblum who lives in Jerusalem is a contributing editor to *The Jewish Observer*. He is also director of the Israeli division of *Am Ehad*, the Agudath Israel-inspired educational outreach effort and media source.

¹ In addition to *The Jewish Self*, other important recent works by *talmidim* of Rabbi Shapiro include Rabbi Aharon Lopiansky’s *Timepieces* and Rabbi Akiva Tatz’s *Living Inspired* and *Worldmask*.

to Him for us to fulfill our role in Creation.

Hashem created beings outside Himself in order to give and relate to another. A true relationship, however, requires an independent being capable of choosing a relationship with the Creator. A relationship thrust upon us destroys our individuality.

In the Desert, our ancestors lived with a constant awareness of *Hashem's* presence. The Fear of G-d engendered by that closeness led to the nullification of any sense of an independent self. They neither had the need nor the possibi-

ty of creating a faith connection to *Hashem*.

His presence was too manifest. Our ancestors experienced faith; for us, it must be the result of a positive act.

Our diminished sense of *Hashem's* presence in the external world allows us to rediscover Him through the echo, or image, of Him within ourselves. With the disappearance of an unearned intimacy, we are now capable of a truly experienced selfhood and a freely chosen relationship with *Hashem* – from self-negating fear we move to self-creating love.

We are in the same position as *Avraham Avinu*, who looked around and saw a world filled with only death and decline – a burning castle. But when he looked within, Avraham sensed something meaningful and infinite. He discovered at that moment both himself and G-d. As our Sages put it, "Avraham learned Torah from Himself."

An Expanded Capacity for Free Will

We discover *Hashem* within by emulating Him. And that we can now do to an extent previously impossible. Our sense of distance from Him allows us to exercise our free will in a way that was impossible when His presence was unmistakable. Just as He is a Creator, so we become creators of ourselves through the choices we make. Those choices define us. We acquire ourselves by freely chosen acts. Since Torah is the bridge across which man forms his relationships with G-d, the evolution in human consciousness of G-d was inevitably accompanied by a parallel change in the nature of Torah. Nowhere is Rabbi Kagan's account more subtle than in his description of the emerging dominance of the Oral Torah from the time of the Men of the Great Assembly.

Though the Written and Oral Torah were both given at Sinai, they are very different in nature. The former is prophetic; the latter interpretive. With the end of prophecy, we can only know the Torah through the interpretation of prophetic texts we already possess.

The Written Torah comes from a source outside ourselves and does not depend on the nature of the recipient. The Oral Torah, on the other hand, is intrinsically tied to our experience and subject to our limitations, including our declining sensitivity to the spiritual basis of reality. From the time of the *zigos* (pairs) at the beginning of *Pirkei Avos*, no one individual possesses a complete vision of Torah. Each member of the pair expresses one perspective, to which the other serves as a complement.

And yet – and here is the great paradox – for all the limitations of its human recipients, the Oral Torah is even dear-



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er to *Hashem* than the Written, and ultimately leads to a closer relationship between man and G-d. In the words of the Midrash, "The words of the scholars are more beloved than the Torah itself, for it says, 'Your love is better than wine' (*Shir HaShirim* 1,2)." The Written Torah is likened to wine, an external stimulant to love; the Oral Torah is the love itself.

As the *Beis HaLevi* puts it: Man is at most a vessel for the guarding of the Written Torah; but he is the parchment upon which the Oral Torah is written. One who recites words of the Written Torah without understanding has still performed a *mitzva*, for its very existence does not depend on human understanding. Not so, the Oral Torah.

Still, we must ask, how can anything that depends on an individual's interpretation – and in the absence of prophecy some degree of interpretation is inevitable – be designated Torah at all, much less a greater form of Torah? The answer lies in the process of discovery of our essential, true self – the *Tzellel Elokim* within.

The Oral Torah only exists, say the Sages, for one who "kills" himself in the tents of Torah. Killing oneself does not mean destroying one's individuality, but rather removing all external drives, which are foreign to the elemental self. When that elemental self is laid bare, man discovers his essential unity, a unity deriving from that of His Creator. "Through striving in Torah, our self emerges and we come to know both ourselves and the Torah," writes Rabbi Kagan.

The Torah of one who has killed himself in this manner is true and real. Indeed, it determines the nature of reality itself. That is what the *Zohar* means when it proclaims "the Holy One, the Torah, and Israel one." *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* expresses Himself in an external dimension through Torah and its interpreters, Israel.

Sentences Hewn of Excess

No account of the major lines of argument in *The Jewish Self* can do the work justice. Each sen-

tence is carefully hewn of any excess, and yet so richly packed that one is forced to stop constantly to absorb what he has just read¹. Along the way are exciting insights into *Lashon HaKodesh*, wise observations about the nature of our humanity and how it is discovered/created, and an extensive description of the differences between the Four Kingdoms among whom we have been exiled and the purpose of each Exile in the Divine plan.

The argument is carried forward through a close reading of difficult *Aggadatos*. By demonstrating clearly the depth of meaning inherent to every word of *Chazal*, Rabbi Kagan has rendered one of his greatest contri-

¹ Indeed, in a few places, one wishes that Rabbi Kagan had been more expansive and had anticipated instances in which readers uninitiated in the depths of thought of the Maharal and Reb Tzadok HaKohen might be misled by the author's choice of expression. An instance would be his discussion of Shimon HaTzaddik as "developing" the Oral Law, which was given at Sinai. It is hoped that he will do so in subsequent editions.

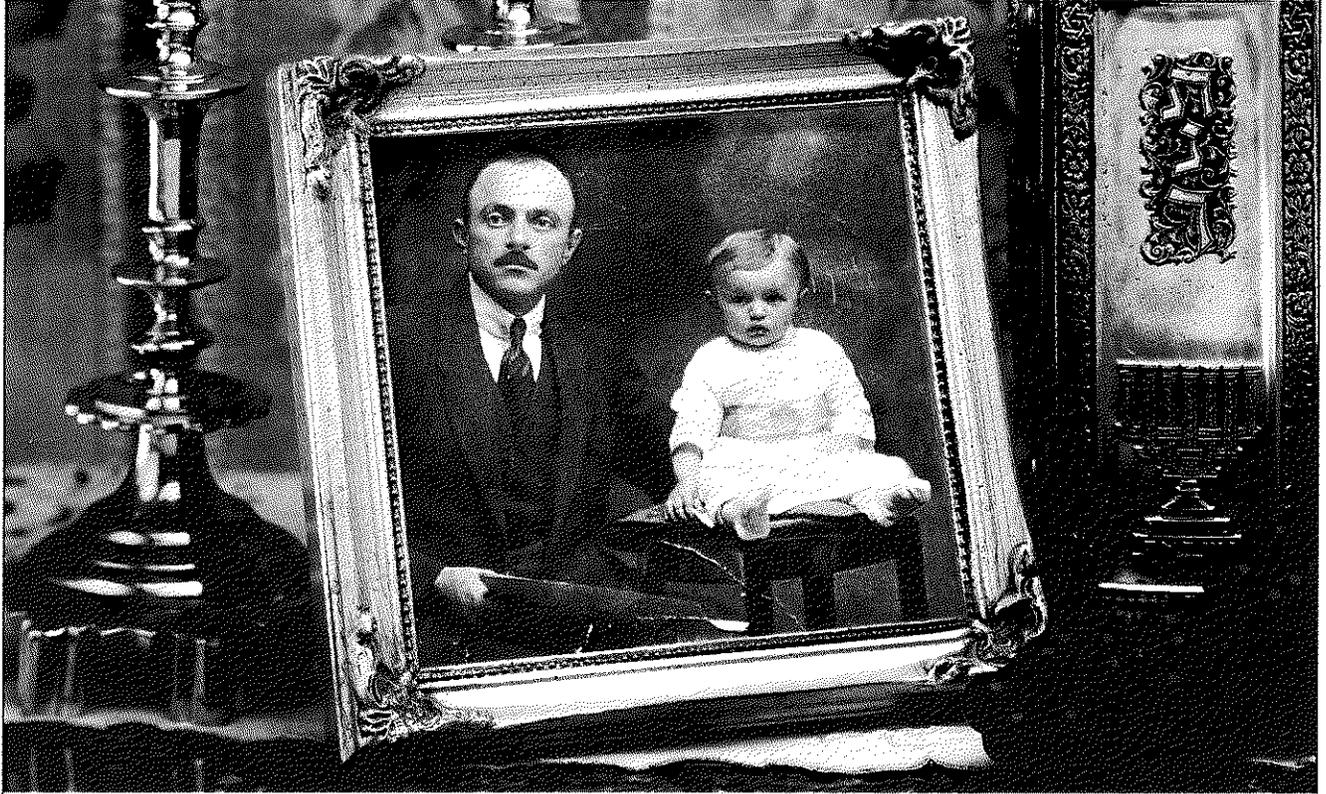
butions. Indeed I can think of no better introduction to the depth of the thought of *Chazal*.

The Jewish Self is not an easy work, but it will amply reward all those prepared to make the effort. Rabbi Aharon Feldman did not exaggerate when he described *The Jewish Self* as a book that "should be read by everyone – whether Torah-observant or not. [It] is both a remarkable Torah perspective on Jewish history and a deeply philosophical work." ■

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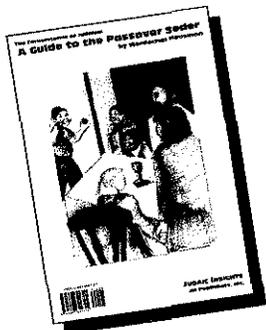
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BOOKS IN REVIEW



A Guide to the Passover Seder, by Rabbi Mordechai Housman, JM Publishers Inc, Brooklyn

Entering a *sefarim* store before Pesach can be a daunting experience. Arranged before one are dozens of *Haggados*, each with a different angle or *derech*. So, in classical *Seder* style, one might ask about Rabbi Mordechai Housman's *A Guide to the Passover Seder*: "With so many *Haggados* being published each year, how is this *Haggada* different from all other *Haggados*?" The *Haggada's* author answers this question clearly and cogently:

This *Haggada* is written: For those who have not had the benefit and education that reveals the true richness of our heritage and thus lost touch with their roots. It is important that each person at the *Seder* personally feel the pain the Israelites went through and the joy of being personally rescued from Egypt. This *Guide* is my small attempt to help others understand at least some of the great drama and deep spiritual detail the story of Passover holds for us all.

In short, this *Haggada* is perfect as a gift for one who is newly, or not yet, observant and is thus not sufficiently familiar with the rich tapestry of cus-

Rabbi Becker is Associate Executive Director of Agudath Israel of America.

tom, practice and wisdom that makes the Pesach *seder* so unique. An important feature of this section is a guide for guests that covers topics such as what type of gift is appropriate, how to be helpful to one's host without fear of doing something inappropriate, and an explanation of the various customs of the Pesach holiday (e.g., *gebrochts*).

The actual text of the *Haggada* is supplemented by such useful additions as a detailed history of the miraculous events of the first Pesach, a guide to cleaning and preparing for Pesach, and an explanation of the key elements of the *Seder*.

All of this is done with the assumption that this is going to be *Seder* 101, and no previous knowledge is necessary. The *Haggada* itself is peppered with visual symbols, such as a picture of wine being poured which lets the participant know when to refill the wine cup, hands holding a *kos* to know when to raise it, and a tipped *kos* to know when to drink it. This adds up to a very usable *Haggada* for both the uninitiated and those

who are privileged to have them as guests.

Rabbi Housman has written this guide to the Passover *Seder* in a warm, engaging, and non-threatening style that assumes no prior knowledge of the Pesach holiday on the reader's part. Hopefully, it will serve the important dual purpose of making many more people comfortable at the *Seder* table and encouraging newcomers to join a *Seder* for the first time. ■

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The Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon – Rabbi Aharon ben Meir Controversy

Rabbi Yochanan said: From where do we learn that it is a *mitzva* for a person to calculate seasons and constellations? Because it is said: “And you shall guard and you shall do, for it is your knowledge and understanding before the eyes of the Nations” (*Devarim* 4,6). Which knowledge and understanding is before the eyes of the Nations? You must say, this is the calculation of seasons and constellations.

(*SHABBOS* 75A; SEE THE *RITVA* AND *MAHARSHA* THERE AND THE *YEREI'IM* *SIMAN* 104).

WHAT YOU MIGHT HAVE THOUGHT

There was a time a little more than one millennium ago, when we faced a severe calendar problem. True, there were, then, no computers to facilitate the calculations and yet cause the unique grief only they can provide. Nevertheless, the Jewish calendar is subject to computation.

You probably presumed that a fixed Jewish calendar has been in place since Hillel II (“*Ha'Sheini*”) established it in the

¹ *Sefer ha-Ibbur* (3.7) by Rabbi Avraham Bar Chiya *Ha'Nasi* of Barcelona, Spain, written circa 1123 CE; cited in *Otzar Ha'Geonim, Rosh Hashana* 10b, p. 16.

² The fixed calendar is not mentioned in the *Mish-*

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4th century CE. At first glance, this premise seems borne out by a *teshuva* in which Rabbi Hai Gaon writes that a fixed Jewish calendar has been in effect since the time of Hillel the Second, the son of Rabbi Yehuda *Nesi'ah* (grandson of Rabbi Yehuda *Ha'Nasi*) in approximately 4119 (358-9 CE).¹ The *Rambam* dates the fixed calendar to a similar period:

When did all the Jews begin to go by these calculations [of the calendar]? From the end of the time of the Sages of the *Gemora*, when the land of Israel was destroyed and there was no longer a regular court sitting there ... but until the days of Abaye and Rava they relied on what was determined in the land of Israel.

(*HILCHOS KIDDUSH HA'CHODESH* 5.2)

Since Abaye and Rava lived around the middle of the fourth century, the two views are very similar.

WHAT IS MORE PROBABLY THE CASE

Nevertheless, it is not clear what, precisely, Hillel II fixed. It was not the final version of the calendar we use today and it did not ensure

na or *Gemora*. Rabbi Hai Gaon is our earliest source for the *Mesora* that Hillel II fixed a calendar cycle. There are many places in *Shas* that indicate the absence of a completely fixed calendar – for example, Abaye's discussion in *Ta'anis* 29b of the *halachos* of a *Tisha B'Av* that falls on a Friday.

³ It is possible that Hillel II only established the rule that the seven out of nineteen years be leap years. Thus, for several more centuries there was some variability regarding which years should be the leap years. One argument in favor of this relates

that there were no future debates over various details of the calendar.² There are several problems (other than the one that will preoccupy us here) that preclude the possibility that Hillel II firmly set in place the precisely fixed calendar we use today.³

Eventually, one of the last *Ge'onim*, Rabbi Nachshon Gaon, formalized a 247 year (thirteen nineteen-year cycles) cycle. A perpetual *luach* based on that cycle (*Iggul d'Rabbi Nachshon Gaon*) is reproduced in the *Tur Orach Chaim*, at the end of *siman* 428. All modern *luachos*, such as the ubiquitous *Ezras Torah luach* and others, are based on that table. But that only occurred in the 11th century CE.

WHICH LEADS US TO OUR PROBLEM

So, we now know, the calendar was not completely fixed in the tenth century. There was, therefore, an annual ceremony in which the *Rosh Yeshiva* of the *yeshivos* in *Eretz Yisroel* would formally announce – on *Hoshana Rabba*, from atop *Har Ha'Zeisim* – the calendar for the coming year. In 920 CE the leader of *Eretz Yisroel* Jewry, Rabbi Aharon *ben Meir*, proclaimed that the

to the four “*dechiyos*” – rules for postponing *Rosh Hashana* that exist within the calendar rules. As we shall see, only two of the four are mentioned in the Talmud. *Tosafos, Arachin* 9a *d.h. Mai*, clarifies that the other two *dechiyos* were later developments. A wealth of material concerning the *luach* comprises the entire thirteenth volume of Rabbi Menachem M. Kasher's *Torah Sheleima*. See the discussion of this and other proofs in *Torah Sheleima* there pp. 166-167 and 176-179.

In a recent essay, published by Bar Ilan Uni-

following *Marcheshvan* and *Kislev* (4681 according to our count) would both have only twenty-nine days. *Pesach* 921 CE would, then, fall on Sunday, instead of Tuesday as everyone had anticipated.⁴ This would also move up *Rosh Hashana* of 4682 two days earlier. This led to a great debate regarding the calendar between two preeminent *Gedolei Torah* of the time (and former friends), Rabbi *ben Meir* and the leader of Babylonian Jewry, Rabbi *Sa'adia Gaon* (882-942 CE).

Rabbi *Sa'adia Gaon* vigorously opposed this change. Records suggest that part of the Jewish world, mostly in *Eretz Yisroel* and Egypt, followed Rabbi *ben Meir's* ruling, and actually observed the holidays two days earlier than their

co-religionists that year.⁵ The rest of the Jewish world, however, followed Rabbi *Sa'adia Gaon's psak*.

The dispute centered on a calendar rule well known to those who recently studied *Rosh Hashana* 20b in *Daf Yomi*: The rule of "*Molad Zakein*."

MOLAD ZAKEIN

The rule of *Molad Zakein* appears in *Rosh Hashana* 20b. This rule states that if the *Molad* of *Tishrei* (or any other month⁶) occurs at noon or later (according to "Jerusalem Standard Time") then we postpone *Rosh Hashana* to the next allowable day. Rabbi *ben Meir* proposed relaxing that rule by

642 *chalakim* (= thirty-five minutes and forty seconds). His opinion caused the two-day postponements that would otherwise have occurred in 4682 and 4683 to be canceled, and all *Yamim Tovim* in those two years to occur two days earlier.

ISSUE NO. 1:

THE CENTRALITY OF ERETZ YISROEL

In the records we possess, Rabbi *ben Meir* never explains the actual basis for his position - an assertion that flies, it seems, in the face of an explicit *Gemora*. His primary public defense of his position was that *Eretz Yisroel* held supremacy in matters of the calendar.

versity, Engineer Yaakov Lewinger provides astronomical information that reflects the accuracy of our *Mesorah* that Hillel II took the initial steps to set up the *luach*:

Our calendar is based on the *molad* - the time each month when the moon begins its cycle around the Earth anew. Our *Mesorah* teaches us that the mean length of a lunar month is twenty-nine days, twelve hours and 793 *chalakim* ("parts" - a *chelek* is 1/1080 of an hour or 3 seconds) - known by the Hebrew acronym **ד"מ"ג**. Lunar months, therefore, vary between twenty-nine and thirty days. Were we, however, to make our years of twelve lunar months, then our lunar years would be approximately 354 days, 8.8 hours long. In short order, *Pesach* would begin to fall in the middle of the winter. The Spring equinox (the day that night and day have precisely the same length, the first day of Spring) determines whether a leap month must be added so that *Pesach* will continue to occur in the Spring. Ideally, as *Nissan* is "*Chodesh he'Aviv*," the month should begin with Spring, on the equinox (March 21). Since we lose about eleven days every year, to keep pace with the solar calendar, we add an extra month every three years or so. Our calendar is therefore based on a 19-year cycle, consisting of 12 twelve-month years, and seven thirteen-month leap years, which approximate nineteen solar years.

It is reasonable to assume that those who set our calendar cycle in place began counting these nineteen-year cycles from a year in which the Spring equinox coincided closely with the *molad* of *Nissan*. Because nineteen solar years are actually a trifle shorter than the 235 lunar months in one nineteen-year lunar cycle of the calendar, as the years go by since the founding of the calendar, the spring equinox will no longer coincide with the *molad* in the first year of each cycle, but will move up about one day every 216 years (average Jewish solar year = 365.2468 days; Gregorian year = 365.2425 days; actual mean tropical

solar year = 365.2422 days). If we find that the Spring equinox and the *molad* of *Nissan* coincide around the year 359, this would suggest a link between this year and the introduction of a fixed calendar.

Counting backwards, 359 CE, which is 4119 by our calendar, falls in the 217th lunar month of a cycle. In the first year of this cycle, 4105, both the actual spring equinox and the *molad* of *Nissan* fell on 29 *Adar*, March 20, 345, with only about a six-hour difference. Engineer Lewinger concludes:

Therefore, in terms of astronomy, the tradition that our calendar was founded near this time appears quite reasonable. In contrast, in 839 [the date that secular scholars have proposed] - the first year of the 243rd lunar cycle, 4599 by the Jewish calendar, and close to the later date claimed for the establishment of the calendar—the actual equinox had already shifted about two days earlier than the new moon of *Nissan*. Therefore, it is not reasonable to assume that the 19-year cycle of our calendar was established close to this time. For reasons of astronomy, a more suitable year than 4599 would have been chosen to be the first year of the 19-year cycle...

⁴ Thirty days hath *Nissan/ Av*, *Tishrei*, *Shevat*, *Sivan/ All* the rest twenty-nine days they keep/ Except *Adar* in a year that's leap/ *Adar Rishon* then comes with thirty/ *Cheshvan* and *Kislev* - they always vary.

⁵ A website with comprehensive material on the Jewish calendar is: <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/1584>. Mr. Remy Landau, who compiled the website, has calculated all the years in which the 642 *chalakim* difference would generate discrepancies. The difference generated a discrepancy in both 4682 and 4683 (921-922 CE and 922-923 CE). After 922-923 CE, the next relevant year for this debate was 927 CE (4688), in which it would have made a one day difference. It would not have been germane again until 1108 CE and then 1330 CE, 1334 CE, and 1335 CE. There are no records of a split again occur-

ring in 927, and perhaps by then things had been settled. Mr. Landau also has calculated that before 922 CE, the last time the difference would have generated a discrepancy was in 783 CE. The large gap between occurrences probably explains why the controversy was "new" in 922 CE. Our controversy was recorded by Rabbi *Sa'adia Gaon* in "*Sefer Ha'Mo'adim*" (a work that was mostly lost). It was also chronicled by the Karaites, gleeful over the machlokes among adherents of *Torah she'be'al Peh*. The correspondence of Rabbi *ben Meir* and Rabbi *Sa'adia Gaon* that was found in the Cairo Geniza is collected in the *Otzar Ha-Geonim* on Sanhedrin. Some of it was translated in a 1921 CE work by Prof. Henry Malter: *Life and Works of [Rabbi] Sa'adia Gaon* (Philadelphia) pp. 69-88 and pp. 409-419. Much of the historical information here is culled from Prof. Malter's work.

⁶ This is one of the two *dechiyos* - reasons to delay *Rosh Hashana* - mentioned in Talmudic sources. The other is the familiar **למחרת** - we do not allow *Rosh Hashana* to fall on Sunday, Wednesday or Friday, so that *Yom Kippur* should not fall on Friday or Sunday, nor *Hoshana Rabba* on a Friday - see *Yerushalmi Sukkah* 1:1 and *Yerushalmi Megillah* 1:2. There are two additional *dechiyos* that are intended to ensure that no *molad* ever occurs past noon on any *Rosh Chodesh*. For simplicity's sake, they are based on *Rosh Hashana*, even though they are not directly relevant to the *molad* of *Tishrei*. These are:

1) **ד"ש**: If the *molad* of *Tishrei* for a non-leap year is on a Tuesday (ד) nine hours (ט) (3:00 a.m.) and 204 *chalakim* (סד) or later, *Rosh Hashana* is delayed. Since *Rosh Hashana* cannot take place on a Wednesday, it is delayed until Thursday. The controversy of 920 actually concerned this *dechiya*, as the *molad* of *Tishrei* that year was on a Tuesday at nine hours and 441 *chalakim*.

2) **פ"י**, **כ"ה**: If the *molad* of *Tishrei* following a leap year is on Monday (ב), fifteen hours (טו) and 589 *chalakim* (פ"ט) or later, *Rosh Hashana* is delayed until Tuesday.

This position is codified *l'halacha* in the *Rambam, Hilchos Kiddush Ha'Chodesh* 5:1. The *Gemora Rosh Hashana* 25a cites the *halacha* that the ruling of a *Beis Din* on matters of the *luach* is binding – even if they are mistaken in their reckoning, and even if they intentionally manipulate the *luach*. This *halacha* also seems to back up Rabbi *ben Meir*.

In response, Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon⁷ argued that since Moshe and Aharon received the *mitzva* of *Kiddush Ha'Chodesh* from Hashem at *Har Sinai*, the *luach* has always been fixed based on reckoning, not on sightings of the new moon. The knowledge and principles of that reckoning was transmitted by the *shevet* of *Yisas'char*, who are called “*yod'ei bina*

⁷ His opinion is cited in many places, see *Torah Sheleima*, *ibid.*, chap. 5, and particularly in the commentary of *Rabbeinu Chananel* on the *Torah, Shemos* 12,2, and elsewhere.

la'ittim” – “knowers of understanding for times” (*Divrei Ha'Yamim* 1,12). This was the exclusive practice until the days of *Antigonus Ish Socho* and his infamous students, *Tzadok* and *Beitus*. The schools of heretical thought founded by these individuals cast aspersions on the accuracy of *Chazal's* knowledge of the methodology of reckoning. It was only to demonstrate that their reckoning was precise and accurate that *Chazal* instituted *Kiddush Ha'Chodesh* based on visual sightings by witnesses. Thus, *Eretz Yisroel* never had superior authority in fixing the calendar, only superior knowledge of the calculations. By the 10th century, however, *Bavel* and *Eretz Yisroel* held this knowledge equally. The calculation of Rabbi *ben Meir* – contradicting the principle of *molad zakein* as explicitly laid out in the *Gemora* – was, therefore, not definitive.

Still, this will not help sustain Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon's position according to the *Rambam*. The *Rambam* and *Ramban* (*Sefer Ha'Mitzvos, aseh* 153⁸) argue about how *Hillel II* could establish a fixed calendar, bypassing the requirement that *Beis Din* sanctify each *Rosh Chodesh*. The *Ramban* holds that *Hillel II* sanctified all future new moons in advance. This causes no problems for Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon, as he would say that those new moons were sanctified based on the proper reckoning.

The *Rambam*, however, holds that *Kiddush Ha'Chodesh* remains the prerogative of the residents of *Eretz Yisroel* – even in the absence of a *Sanhedrin*. The *Rambam* says that if we were to have experienced a time in history during which the *yishuv* in *Eretz Yisroel* would have ceased to exist, the calendar system would have collapsed! (He says that the fact that this never occurred is a clear manifestation of *Hashgacha*.) We do not require a formal monthly sanctification, explains the *Rambam*, because we assume that there is a tacit consent by the *yishuv* in *Eretz Yisroel* to follow the reckoning that *Chazal* have bequeathed

⁸ See the *Meshech Chochmo*, beginning of *Parashas Bo d.h. Ha'Chodesh* for a detailed explanation of the *Rambam's* approach based on the many places in which the *Rambam* discusses his opinion.

to us. The *Rambam* goes as far as to say that Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon's approach was not meant as a genuine perspective, but only as a debating tactic!

So, were the *Rambam* alive at the time of the *Molad* controversy, how would he have ruled? It is possible that were the *Rambam* extant, he would have held that although Rabbi *ben Meir's* position runs counter to an explicit *Gemora*, the principles of *Hilchos Kiddush Ha'Chodesh* nevertheless would require the Jewish world to follow his ruling.

I think we may say, however, that even the *Rambam* might have sided with Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon. Since, as the *Rambam* writes in his introduction to *Mishne Torah*, the *Talmud Bavli* is the final and universal arbiter of halachic standards, then even the *Chachmei Eretz Yisroel* are also bound by “*Rav Ashi v'Ravina sof hora'ah*” – Rabbi *Ashi* and *Ravina's* compilation of *Talmud Bavli* marks the end of the period that set universally binding halachic standards (*Bava Metzia* 86a).

When, therefore, a *poseik* subsequent to the end of the Talmudic period decides a halachic matter, he must do so based on the “benchmarks” set in the *Talmud*. Since Rabbi *ben Meir* attempted to introduce a mode of reckoning that varies (by 642 *chalakim*) from that authorized by the *Talmud*, his proposal is to be disregarded. Since the *Rambam* holds that the Jews of *Eretz Yisroel* perform their *Kiddush Ha'Chodesh* by tacit consent, we assume their consent to *Torah* true standards, i.e., those set by the *Talmud Bavli*.

ISSUE NO. 2: WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN RABBI BEN MEIR'S BASIS?

Rabbi *ben Meir* was a great *talmid chacham* and leader. While his ruling was subsequently rejected, we must seek to understand what his premise was. After all, as we know “the *hava amina* [rejected premise] is also *Torah*” – how much more so the *maskana* (conclusion) of a *Gadol b'Torah* of the Geonic period. Perhaps we may propose the following rational

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explanation:

Chazal adopted the *Molad Zakein* rule, according to the *Kuzari* and *Ba'al HaMa'or*, so that someone, somewhere in the world, would experience a full day of *Rosh Chodesh* after the *Molad*, and, therefore, might likely see the New Moon before that day elapsed.

This works as follows:

Since the Halachic International Dateline is 90° east (and 270° west) of *Yerushalayim*, the inhabitants of the area just over the Dateline are eighteen hours behind *Yerushalayim*. I.e., when in *Yerushalayim* it is high noon, say, on *Rosh Hashana* when it comes out around the autumnal equinox (Sept. 21), it is 6:00 p.m., i.e., sunset, at the beginning of *Rosh Hashana* on the other side of the Dateline. That place is the last place on Earth where *Rosh Hashana* will begin.

Generally, the New Moon may first be seen approximately twenty-four hours after the *Molad*. The moon is not visible at the very end and very beginning of the Jewish month because it is, then, perfectly aligned between the Sun and the Earth. All the Sun's light reflects, then, on the other side of the moon, and does not reach us. The *Molad* is the moment when the moon moves out of that perfect alignment. Even after the *Molad*, however, the moon's surface is too much face to face with the sun and too little opposite the Earth for its light to be discerned here on Earth's surface. The moon does not reflect enough light toward Earth to allow it to be spotted for at least six hours, and generally not for twenty-four hours after the *Molad* (all this is explained in the *Rambam Hilchos Kiddush Ha'Chodesh*).

So, if the *Molad* occurs before high noon in *Yerushalayim*, then at that "last place on Earth," the *Molad*, although in "real time" taking place simultaneously, is, on the clock, occurring eighteen hours earlier – before the 6:00 p.m. sunset – so, as the *Gemora* says in *Rosh Hashana*, there is, somewhere on Earth, a place where a complete night and day of *Rosh Chodesh* occur subsequently to the *Molad*, and it is likely that the New Moon will actually be seen in that place on that day.

If, however, the *Molad* occurs after high noon in *Yerushalayim*, then at that "last place on Earth," the *Molad*, is, on the clock, occurring eighteen hours earlier – after the 6:00 p.m. sunset – so, then, there is no place on Earth where a complete night and day of *Rosh Chodesh* occur subsequently to the *Molad*, and it is unlikely that the New Moon will actually be seen in that place on that day. Since people might find the setting of such a day as *Rosh Chodesh* somewhat dubious, Chazal decreed that in cases of *Molad Zakein*, *Rosh Chodesh* should be delayed.

Now, according to Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon these constructs are abstract - i.e., there need be no specific place 90° E/270° W of *Yerushalayim* to serve as the focal point to which we apply the *Molad Zakein* rule. It applies to a theoretical place, and is based on abstract astronomical calculations.⁹

It seems that Rabbi ben Meir held that these constructs are actual, i.e., we need to seek out the furthest easterly Jewish settlement – which may not be 90° E/270° W of *Yerushalayim*.¹⁰ After all, the *Molad Zakein* rule was designed around the possibility of individuals witnessing the New Moon! At that time, that settlement was in Kaifeng, China.¹¹ That settlement is actually not as far away as 90° from *Yerushalayim* – it is about eighty or so degrees away. In his generation, at least, Rabbi ben Meir placed the Halachic International Dateline further west than did Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon. The Dateline would have to run slightly to the east of Kaifeng - in a place they could reach within a day's journey, so they might be able to testify to having seen the New Moon on that day.

Since, therefore, the sunset which is

⁹ See the *Chazon Ish*, *Orach Chaim*, *Kuntres Yud Ches Sha'os* for an extensive discussion of this principle, applied to the celebrated case of *Yom Kippur* in Japan, 1941, and his dispute in this matter with Rabbi Yechiel Michel Tukachinski ז"ל. Perhaps we shall find an opportunity to discuss this issue in the future.

¹⁰ It seems, however, that this spot must be on the Asian continent.

¹¹ See the *Encyclopedia Judaica* entry on China. There were more than one thousand Jews in Kaifeng at the time.

the final "beginning" of the previous day takes place somewhat later (just as *Shabbos* begins later and later the more westerly you travel), that also gives the *Molad* some leeway after high noon "the next day" in *Yerushalayim*. This adjustment gives about 35-40 minutes leeway beyond high noon. This very closely approximates the 642 *chalakim* that Rabbi ben Meir proposed adding to the *Molad Zakein* rule!¹²

IS THIS RELEVANT TO MEVORCHIM CHODESH?

Every *Shabbos* preceding *Rosh Chodesh*, we recite *Birchas Ha'Chodesh*. The origin of this practice is somewhat unclear. It is not mentioned in *Shas*, *Rambam* or *Shulchan Aruch*. It is mentioned by the *Sefer Yere'im* (*siman* 103, quoted by the *Magen Avrohom* and *Mishna Berura* in *Orach Chaim* 417:1). The *Yerei'im* makes it clear that our practice is only meant to publicize the date of *Rosh Chodesh*, not to sanctify that date.¹³

But why, then, are we not *mevarech Chodesh Tishrei*? The *Mishna Berura* posits that since the purpose of *Birchas*

¹² The actual 642 number was probably chosen because it is a number that is close to precise and was well known, in other contexts, to those involved in calculating the *Luach* - see *Tosafos Rosh Hashana* 8a d.h. *Letekufos*. To be sure, many other explanations of Rabbi ben Meir's 642 *chalakim* are advanced by scholars that wrote concerning the controversy. Much material and many references may be found in the *Torah Sheleima*, *ibid.*, Chap. 9, and Prof. Malter's work cited above. To put it gingerly, however, most existing theories fall short of any standard of credibility. In a recent essay in *Kovetz Or Yisroel* (*Tishrei* 5760, Monsey, NY), Rabbi Yosef Y. Keller proves from a letter written by the *Reish Galusa* in 4596 (835 CE), printed in the *Otzar Ha'Geonim Sanhedrin* pp. 35-36, that at that time the *Roshei Yeshiva* in *Eretz Yisroel* were of the opinion that a *Molad Zakein* was permitted in *Tishrei* (if the preceding *Nissan* was not subject to a *Molad Zakein*). The community in *Bavel* at the time accepted that ruling issued in *Eretz Yisroel* as binding. Rabbi Keller notes that Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon states that it was around that time that the *Ge'onim* in *Bavel* mastered the reckoning of the calendar - perhaps because of this event. While they submitted to the ruling at the time, they might not have wanted it repeated. (We must note, however, that Rabbi Keller there writes that Rabbi ben Meir eventually capitulated to Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon. This would seem to be an error.)

Ha'Chodesh is to publicize the date of Rosh Chodesh, then it follows that a date for which we have (hopefully!) so much prepared, Rosh Hashana, needs no publicity. Others say that since Rosh Hashana is called "Ba'Keseh," the day of concealment, it is proper to diminish the publicity accorded the day.

Perhaps, in light of the Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon / Rabbi Aharon ben Meir controversy, we might propose a simple, pragmatic reason why Birchas Ha'Chodesh is omitted on the Shabbos before Rosh Hashana: Since Birchas Ha'Chodesh centers on the Molad, which has the potential to rouse a dormant controversy, in the spirit of "Chaveirim Kol Yisroel" it was decided, because of our topic of discussion, not to declare the molad of Tishrei in public ever again!

Let us end this essay on this note: The most remarkable aspect of this controversy is that it is the exception that proves the rule. Over the course of over sixteen hundred years of the administration of Hillel II's calendar, in far-flung, diverse and disparate Jewish communities, we find only one significant halachic dispute concerning its implementation! Even our brethren that have deviated from so much that is near, dear and holy to us, have never tampered with all that is connected to the phrase

"Mekadesh Yisroel Ve'ha'zemanim."

Perhaps the secret of this uniformity is the remarkable Mishna in Rosh Hashana 25a that relates the story of how Rabbi Yehoshua was compelled by the Nasi, Rabban Gamliel, to come visit him on the day that, according to Rabbi Yehoshua's reckoning, should have been Yom Kippur (but according to Rabban Gamliel was not) with his staff and purse. The Gemora there relates that Rabbi Akiva consoled the dejected Rabbi Yehoshua by reminding him of the derasha that is derived from the repetition of the word "atem" ("you") three times in the context of beis din's authority over the calendar. From this we derive that even if beis din - intentionally or unintentionally, correctly or incorrectly - manipulates the calendar, their ruling is binding and effective. No other area of halacha so dramatically demonstrates the kedusha that Ha'Kadosh Baruch Hu has granted his nation and its leaders. The Yerushalmi (Kesuvos 1:2) notes that Hashem changes the course of nature to accord with the Beis Din's determination of the calendar.

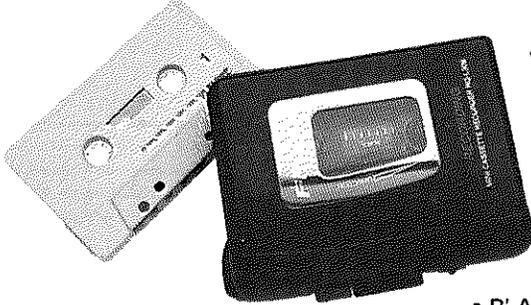
The calendar is the "chibbur" (connection) of all Jews, world over. Perhaps the Hashgacha, manifest in the wisdom of Gedolei Ha'Doros that orchestrated this uniformity through the generations and across the globe is also part of our "knowledge and understanding before the eyes of the Nations." ■

¹³ It is interesting, however, to note that an earlier source, the Siddur Rav Amram Gaon, has Birchas Ha'Chodesh taking place on Rosh Chodesh itself! The commentary Tikkun Tefilla in the Siddur Otzar Ha'Tefillos has a very long discussion of this position. He conjectures that perhaps Rabbi Amram Gaon did not agree with the Ramban that Hillel II was prospectively mekaddesh all chadashim from his time on. The Tikkun Tefilla, therefore, ventures that perhaps, since we have no Beis Din, it is the collective body of the Jewish people that is mekaddesh the chodesh every month (perhaps stressed by the phrase, in Birchas Ha'Chodesh, "Chaveirim Kol Yisroel"). This theory can be regarded as no more than mere speculation. Nevertheless, since Birchas Ha'Chodesh centers on the announcement of the molad, and since it is pronounced throughout the Jewish world, including the diaspora, it is tantalizing to muse on connection between the Tikkun Tefilla's interpretation of Rabbi Amram Gaon's position and Rabbi Sa'adia Gaon's position.

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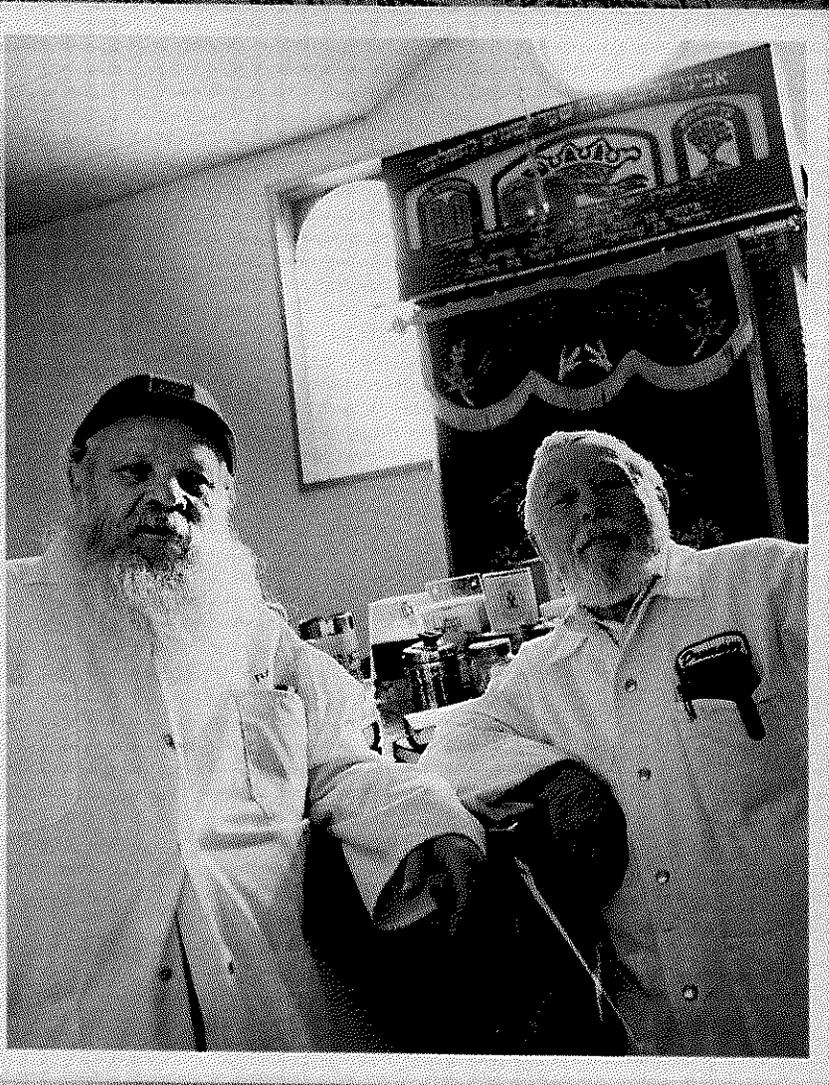
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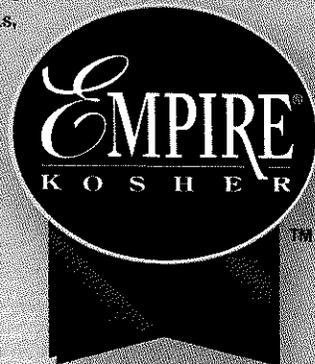
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