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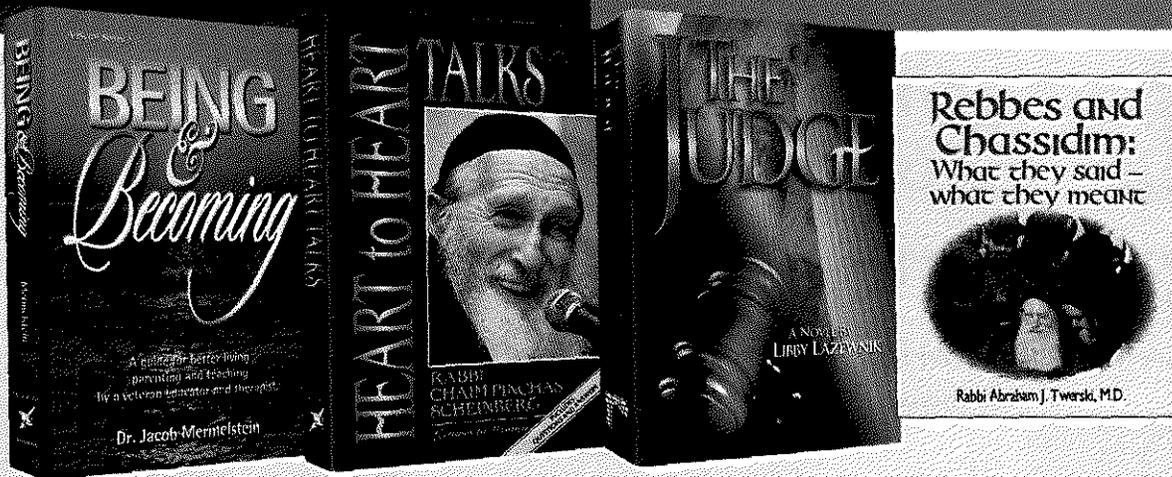
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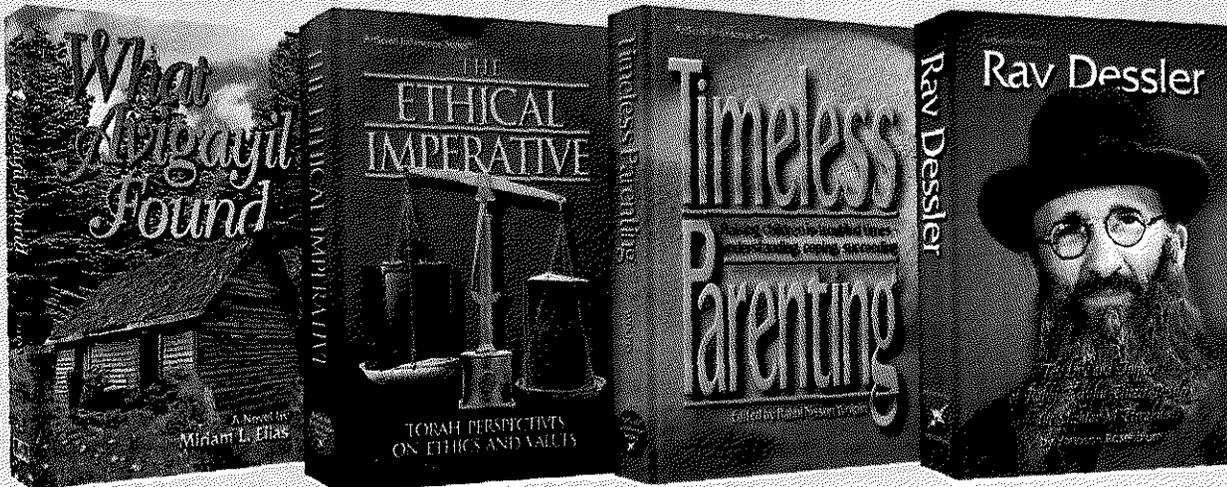
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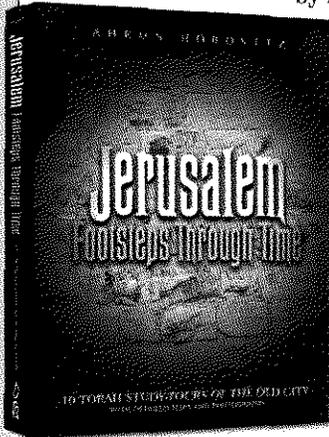
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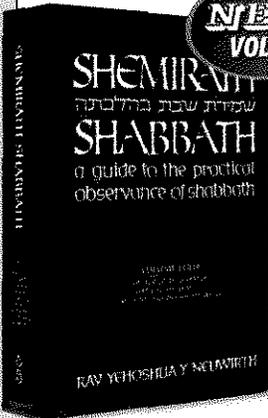
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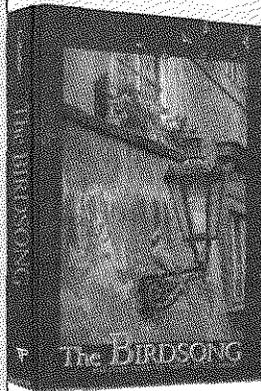
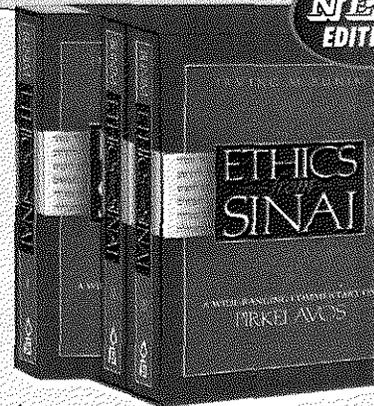
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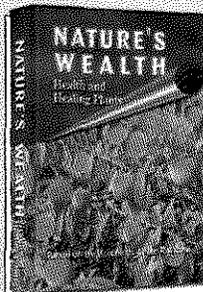
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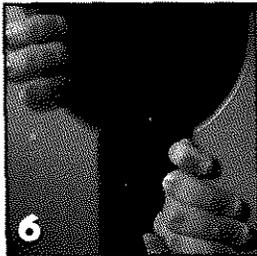
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Helping the Agunos -

Halachic Solutions: Myth and Reality

I. THREE CATEGORIES OF "AGUNA"

We should be greatly concerned about the issue of *agunos*. We should also be concerned about hypocrisy and dishonesty in general, and the hypocrisy and dishonesty with which the current international *aguna* campaign is riddled in particular.

Jewish law knows of only two ways to end a marriage, the death of either spouse or a *get* (Jewish religious divorce). Where neither has taken place, the marriage is deemed to continue. Any new relationship the wife may enter without a *get* is considered adulterous, and the children from such a relationship are *mamzeirim*. An *aguna* is a woman who is "chained" to a marriage which is all but over due to circumstances beyond her control.

It may be helpful to divide *agunos* into three types. Until about 200 years ago, almost all *aguna* cases concerned husbands who had disappeared, usually while travelling. More often than not they had been murdered or drowned. The absence of proof that their husbands were actually dead made their wives *agunos*.

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With the greater freedom of movement permitted Jews after the Emancipation, a second type of *aguna* started to occur. These were women whose husbands had traveled to some distant land (often the American Continent) and just disappeared.

The third type of *aguna* results from the epidemic of marital break-up since the middle of the 20th century. These are women whose husbands are alive and well, whose whereabouts are known, but who (for all sorts of reasons) refuse to give their wives a *get*. Since Jewish Law only recognizes divorce by mutual consent (as different from Western secular law, where the court grants the divorce, in Jewish Law the parties effect the divorce themselves under the *Beis Din's* supervision), if a husband withholds his consent, his wife becomes an *aguna* – "chained."

The first type of *aguna* is the subject of extensive discussions in the Talmud and *poskim* (codes). Indeed, *She'eilos Uteshuvos* (halachic responsa) are rich in questions and solutions concerning *aguna* problems of this type. The aftermath of the Holocaust gave rise to several significant decisions of this sort. This is an area where *halacha* has consistently enjoined and practiced exceptional leniency within the parameters

defined and taught by the sages of the Talmud so as to free women from being *agunos*.¹

Regarding the second type of *aguna*, the most obvious way of dealing with husbands who are probably alive is to find them and persuade them to agree to issue a *get*. Improvements in international communications and travel have made this much easier.²

Type Three Aguna: A Scandalous Situation

There is obviously the world of difference between the first type of *aguna* – the husband in an appar-

¹ Although *halacha* generally requires two independent witnesses to establish facts (*Devarim* 19, 15), in the case of an *aguna* the testimony of one witness alone, hearsay evidence, or the word of relatives and others normally disqualified can be acceptable as to the husband's death. Similarly, the *Shulchan Aruch* (*Even Ha'ezer* 17:21, *Rema*) quotes the *Rambam* in cautioning against examining the witnesses too rigorously in such cases where dishonesty is not suspected.

² In recent years, the Jerusalem *Beis Din* together with the Chief Rabbinate of Israel has employed a team of people trained in locating and persuading these absconding husbands to give their wives a religious divorce. The success of this initiative has been remarkable. A member of the team recently shared some of his experiences with me. They were as exciting as any detective thriller. This scheme deserves to be extended further.

ently harmonious marriage who disappears presumably because he is dead – and the third type – a husband who is alive and well, and unreasonably refuses to grant his wife a religious divorce. The first case is a tragedy where no-one (but the murderer) is at fault. The latter is a scandal. The husband is abusing the processes of Jewish law in the most outrageous way. The unjust situation in which the wife finds herself (she is in fact an artificial *aguna* created by her husband's recalcitrance) is not infrequently accompanied by demands which fall not far short of extortion. Thus she may be pressed to waive her financial claims, or even pay her husband, or concede her custody claims concerning the children in exchange for a religious divorce. These cases are rightly condemned and excoriated by *rabbanim* and the community at large.

It is not uncommon for women whose divorce negotiations are not going well to complain that they are *agunos*. It is indeed open to question to what extent a woman whose husband withholds a *get* until she grants reasonable access to their children or a woman whose husband declines her inflated financial demands and in the meantime withholds a *get* is to be regarded as an *aguna*. In Jewish Divorce Law, either side can withhold consent, thus impeding the other from remarriage and thereby keeping him or her "chained." Indeed, in the ebb and flow of divorce negotiations, the implicit (or not so implicit) threat to do so is used as frequently by women as by men to extract more advantageous terms. Thus there are husbands, *agunim*, who are unable to remarry because their wives refuse to consent to a *get*.

In the last resort, however, a man could (at least in theory) fall back on Biblical Law which permits polygamy, and take a second wife. *Cheirem* (the decree of) *Rabbeinu Gershom* (c 980-1028), the ban of polygamy, which became almost universally accepted, includes an exception. Where permission is granted by 100 rabbis in at least three different countries, a man may marry a second wife without first divorcing his existing wife. In

practice, this procedure is used only very rarely – for example, where the wife is suffering from prolonged irreversible mental illness.³ Theoretically, this procedure is available for the husband of a woman who unreasonably withholds her consent to a *get*. A small number of *rabbanim* have, over the last 25 years, earned considerable opprobrium by the speed and ease with which they arrange such "permissions." Thus, while the problem affects both men and women, the *agunos* are in a specially vulnerable position.

people manage to remain civilized and behave reasonably, in spite of the temptations. Nevertheless, there is certainly fertile ground here for bringing out the very worst in human behavior. Much of the acrimonious quarreling that occurs in divorce cases has less to do with the financial or property issues about which the couple is ostensibly arguing than about the anger and resentment raging below the surface. The abuse of the provisions of Jewish Divorce Law that require freely-given consent of both par-

Anyone who has ever met any of the senior halachic scholars who deal with these questions will confirm that they are invariably men of exceptional humanity.

TRAGEDY AND TRAUMA

The suffering of the modern-day *aguna* is only too real. The unhealthy interest of the press in such cases does great damage to the good name of the Jewish community and Jewish Law. How do these situations come about?

Every divorce is a tragedy. It is frequently a traumatic experience for either spouse. They are likely to be inundated and almost submerged by a deluge of pain, anger, disappointment, betrayal, revenge, love, hatred, confusion, depression and much more. Friends, family and lawyers sometimes help (and sometimes manifestly do not!). In the vast majority of divorces,

ties is a tempting stick with which to beat the other spouse.

The potential for misuse of Jewish Law in divorce cases has increased enormously since the Emancipation. Until then, Jews enjoyed autonomy. It was natural that a marriage might only be terminated by a *get*, and remarriage without a *get* was impossible. Problems in connection with consent to a *get* were almost unknown. Since the Emancipation, civil marriage and divorce have become widely available and common. Jews are at liberty to choose whether to have a *chupa* (Jewish religious marriage ceremony) or a civil ceremony – or both. If the marriage fails, the law of the land requires them to divorce in court. In the absence of a *get*, the couple remains married according to Jewish Law. This may (and often does) create the anomaly where a couple are divorced and thus free to remarry in the eyes of the law of the land while remaining married to one

³ The requirements for her care and protection, depositing of a *get* with the *Beis Din* (in case she recovers), as well as the completion of the civil divorce will normally be conditions of the "permission."

another in the eyes of the Jewish law. This situation is not rare. It is frequently misunderstood by lawyers and judges. It is also the source of a common opportunity for the couple to remain "chained." One spouse will simply ignore the necessity for a *get* at the time of the civil divorce.

II. IN SEARCH OF HALACHIC SOLUTIONS

Clearly the classic halachic approaches to resolving *aguna* problems cannot apply to these artificially created *agunos*. You cannot declare a live man dead! Rabbinic scholars, over the last 150 years, have considered a number of approaches to eradicating this outrage. Although the details are outside the scope of this arti-

cle, they fall broadly into two categories. The first approach is to apply pressure to the recalcitrant husband to persuade him to change his mind. The difficulty here is that the husband's freely given consent is a Biblical requirement. Thus a *get* given under pressure which crosses the line into coercion or compulsion is null and void. The *Beis Din* can do no more than urge the husband, applying pressure that stops well short of extracting his consent to the *get* against his will.⁴ There are indeed a few very rare exceptions where a *get* given under duress may be valid. For example, where a husband has contracted an incurable condition rendering him physically repulsive, or where he repeatedly forces his wife to violate *halacha*. Yet even in these cases, compulsion may not lead to the desired result. There are several husbands currently in jail in Israel who apparently prefer that to giving a *get*.

All other approaches involve some form of retroactive annulment. Classical *halacha* (Jewish Law) as formulated in the Talmud and Codes only recognizes an extremely narrow range of situations in which a *Beis Din* may declare a marriage retroactively null and void, and thus as never having taken place. There is hardly a halachic scholar of the first rank in the last hundred years who has not examined proposals along the lines of retroactive annulment to alle-

viate the plight of *agunos*. Classical *halacha* as formulated in the Talmud recognizes an extremely narrow range of situations in which a *Beis Din* may declare a marriage retroactively null and void, as never having taken place. In practice, this procedure is never used. The attraction of these approaches is that they obviate the need for a *get*, and thus no consent would be required from either side. It is worth noting that such proposals entail a weakening of the covenant of marriage entered into at the time of the *chupa*. It also seems that such proposals must lead to some weakening of the halachic foundations of marriage.

The overwhelming consensus of expert opinion is that these approaches simply do not work. It is, perhaps, worth adding that the problems of *agunos* created by the husband's refusal to agree to a *get* arise purely from human cussedness. There is thus every likelihood that were a way found to remove this weapon from the grasp of recalcitrant husbands, they would quite quickly find another, perhaps even more outrageous way to vent their feelings. There is thus no prospect of eradicating the tragedy of *agunos* by purely halachic solutions.

Naming and Shaming

Although there is no complete halachic solution to the problem of *aguna*, a great deal could be done to ameliorate and even prevent such situations in the hope that *aguna* cases will no longer arise, or at least become very rare. The most obvious area where progress can be made is naming and shaming. Where a recalcitrant husband is confronted by his name and photograph in the local press, on the internet, in his trade journal, or in his synagogue bulletin, he might think again. Similarly, withholding synagogue privileges may be effective.

⁴ Recently, Rabbi Zalman Nechemia Goldberg and other distinguished halachic scholars in Israel have succeeded in persuading some recalcitrant husbands to give a *get* by compelling them to choose between giving a *get* or appearing before a *beis din* for a *din Torah* to arbitrate the wife's claims.

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Nevertheless, there are two issues that should not be ignored. The responsibility for initiating this sort of pressure is very grave and should only be undertaken by competent *rabbanim*. It is essential that such pressure not begin prematurely or unfairly – not least, to avoid a libel action. The other difficulty is the risk that once a recalcitrant husband becomes the target of a naming-and-shaming campaign, he rather than his wife may be perceived as the victim. Nevertheless, with proper safeguards, naming and shaming can help.

Legislative Initiatives

The gap between the law of the land and Jewish Law undoubtedly contributes to the problems of *agunos*. In spite of the complications of gaining parliamentary approval and the understandable reluctance to “take our problems outside,” a change in the law of the land to delay the conclusion of civil divorces until the religious divorce is completed would make it hard for either side to mis-

use the gap between Jewish Law and the Law of the land. This is the background to the First (1983) New York Get Law, which is designed to make it difficult to conclude a civil divorce if the religious divorce is still pending. Obviously, the greatest care is required to avoid legislation creating a source of undue compulsion, thus rendering the *get* null and void. Consultation with a wide range of senior halachic scholars is thus essential. It would appear that the success of the First Get Law owes much to the consultation process which preceded its enactment.

By the same token, serious concerns have been voiced about the second (1992) New York Get Law. The economic sanctions it poses for withholding a *get* may indeed cross the line into coercion, which would invalidate any subsequent *get*.

The ease with which an halachically acceptable sort of legislative change can be achieved will vary from place to place. Nevertheless, where possible, it can offer substantial help in alleviating the plight of *agunos*.

Pre-Nuptial Agreements

It is probably too early to judge whether Pre-Nuptial Agreements (PNA) are effective in reducing *aguna* problems. These agreements vary from a general undertaking to resolve marital disputes according to *halacha* and thus submit them to a *beis din*, to much more specific agreements including financial penalties for breach or non-compliance. Some halachic scholars, including the *Gaon* Rabbi Yosef Shalom

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Elyashiv, have questioned whether such agreements do not impinge on the requirement that a *get* be given (and received) without duress. Others, including most recently part of the faculty of Yeshivas Rabbi Isaac Elchonon (in a public message dated December 1999), seek to promote their use as "a critical step in purging our community of the distressful problem of the modern-day *aguna*."

This debate seems to revolve around a conundrum. The more teeth a PNA has, the better the chances of the signatories complying, but the greater the risk that such compliance might amount to compulsion, thus threatening the validity of a *get*. On the other hand, a PNA phrased so generally as to be certain of offering no risk to the *get* is unlikely to be of much real influence on the couple's behavior. So long as there

is no consensus about the value of PNA's nor about any specific text, it is unlikely that many communities or *rabbanim* will insist upon couples signing one, particularly bearing in mind the reservations of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל regarding the impact signing a PNA might have on some couples (*Igros Moshe, Evven HaEzer* IV, 107).

At best, it seems that the PNA's may be of some educational benefit in directing the couple's attention to some of the risks and responsibilities of entering a Jewish marriage. Traditionally, *rabbanim* preparing couples for marriages normally explain both the text of the *kesuba* (the original PNA) as well as other relevant halachic information to them. The value of this pre-nuptial counseling and education cannot be exaggerated.

It cannot be emphasized enough that the most important area where the community can contribute to preventing the occurrence of *aguna* cases is the provision of every possible means of support and encouragement for those experiencing marital difficulties at whatever stage. No one marries intending to divorce. Although much is being done, far more is needed so that couples can turn for help before the situation is hopeless, or is made hopeless by lawyers.

III. OF NON-SOLUTIONS AND HIDDEN AGENDAS

It is important to recognize non-solutions. Recently, Dr. John D. Rayner, the spiritual leader of the radical wing of British Reform Jewry (*Jewish Chronicle*, Oct. 22, '99), wrote, "The problem (of *agunos*) is not rectifiable as such, as distinct from preventable." He followed this commendably honest observation by the statement that "the Progressive Movement regards its 'Rabbinic Court' as entitled to declare a marriage dissolved (without a *get*) where a civil divorce has taken place." What he omitted to mention was that such a "dissolution" is halachically meaningless. Where a marriage was conducted according to *halacha*, even after such a "dissolution," the couple remain mar-

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ried. Any subsequent relationship would be adulterous and the children *mamzeirim*. Thus a solution based on declaring the traditional rules of marriage, divorce, *aguna* or *mamzer* out of date or no longer applicable, etc., is about as helpful as comforting an orphan by formally declaring his parents alive.

Nevertheless, the frankness of that statement is in striking contrast to the pseudo-*halacha* emanating from both Conservative and allegedly Orthodox bodies such as the "*bet din*" of Rabbi Emanuel Rackman or Moshe Morgenstern. The latter recently told the *Jewish Chronicle* (March 10, 2000): "Every marriage the (British) Reform performs is valid. Every *get* from the (British) Reform movement is in accordance with Jewish Law and is valid. I would urge every woman in a dead marriage to go to the Reform. They are acting in accordance with the *halacha*." At a seminar organized by the International Jewish Woman's Human Rights Watch (of which more later) entitled "Halachic Solutions to the Problems of *Agunos*," the chairman of the "Joint *Bet Din* of the Conservative Movement in New York" stated that "the Conservative Movement is bound by halachic arguments and not by halachic authorities," whatever that may mean. He continued by explaining that the "Conservative Movement has two approaches: (1) preventive measures, such as a special clause added to the *ketuba* or Conditional Marriage, and (2) curative measures such as annulment retroactively by their *Bet Din*." The Morgenstern and Rackman approach is also based on retroactive annulment. Since every halachic scholar of any standing has condemned these approaches as deeply flawed, it is only right to state clearly that those who preach them are engaging in pseudo-*halacha*, devoid of intellectual honesty. This charlatany serves only to exacerbate the problem because the annulments, etc., so issued are null and void. The women thus "helped" remain married as before, with all the consequences thereof.

Protecting Women's Rights?

Over the past year, there has been an orchestrated international campaign by the International Council of Jewish Women (ICJW), based in London, and the International Jewish Woman's Human Right Watch (IJWHRW), based in Jerusalem, to draw attention to the plight of *agnos*. Seminars and meetings have been held world-wide dedicated to "solving the problem of the *agnos*." Unfortunately, it is difficult to avoid the impression that this campaign is frequently deeply misguided.

At a seminar organized by the IJWHRW in Jerusalem in July 1998, Professor Eliav Schochetman of the Law Faculty of the Hebrew University said: "Instead of looking for halachic solutions, which do not exist, we ought to concentrate on solutions which do exist." His point, like that of Dr. Rayner, was that in all honesty, we must recognize that there is no complete halachic solution. Instead, one should concentrate on ameliorating and preventing *aguna* cases. In spite of this and similar statements from every informed corner, the campaign continues acting as if a halachic solution were just

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around the corner, if only the rabbis would search a little harder.

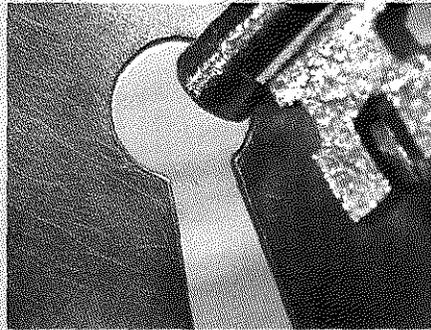
Helping... or Hindering?

This touching confidence in the rabbis is but one short step to calls for pressure on the rabbis to solve the problem, and just one more to outrageous and insulting behavior when (of course) they do not deliver. This is the background to the recent unedifying spectacle of a street demonstration outside the offices of the London *Beis Din* led by several leaders of the ICJW. Quite apart from the obvious question as to whether arm-twisting generally leads to good decision making, one is entitled to wonder about the calls for dialogue emanating from this campaign. Street demonstrations are the opposite of dialogue. The most important prerequisite to dialogue is some willingness to listen. Yet the instigators of this campaign seem unwilling or unable to hear the simple fact that rabbinic scholars have long concluded that there just is no complete solution. Nevertheless, anyone calling himself Rabbi, however inept his scholarship, who claims to have a solution, can expect a warm welcome and prolonged applause from the campaigners. In the meantime, the public is being misled, and the *agunos* gain nothing.

The campaigners have a simple explanation for this. Since the rabbis

could solve this problem if they wished, their inability to do so proves that they are cruel, hard-hearted, uncaring men. The problem of *agunos* is thus the "fault" of the rabbis. This is not merely absurd. It is very revealing. Everyone knows that *agunos* are caused by recalcitrant husbands, not by rabbis who plead in vain for civilized behavior.

Similarly, anyone who has ever met any of the senior halachic scholars



who deal with these questions will confirm that they are invariably men of exceptional humanity. This is well illustrated by Chief Rabbi Yitzchok Elchonon Spektor זצ"ל of Kovno (1817-1896) whose published work includes more than 150 responsa permitting *agunos* to remarry. He used his final moments as he lay dying to dictate a *teshuvah* solving an *aguna* case. Even without their exceptional humanity, the intellectual rigor and pure integrity of these *rabbanim* would lead them to solutions if there were any. The implication, borrowed from feminist extremism,

that the *rabbanim's* gender impedes them from truly appreciating the issues, is as unworthy of consideration as any piece of racist lunacy. These attacks are not merely impertinent. They are false. It is thus hard to avoid the impression that they reflect ambivalent or even hostile predetermined attitudes to rabbinic scholarship and ultimately to traditional Judaism itself.

Judging The Torah

A number of the *aguna* activists – including, I understand, Ms. Sharon Shenhav, the director of IJWHRW – are themselves religious. They would, one hopes, vehemently deny any suggestion that they seek to dismantle Jewish Marriage Law as such. All they want is the rabbis to improve it by removing or rectifying some inadequacies or faults. Sadly, this is all too reminiscent of the language of Classical Reform, whose leaders, 150 years ago, sought to "improve" Judaism in tune with the values and styles of 19th Century Germany, without, perish the thought, dismantling Judaism as such. It is hard to imagine anyone evincing much patience for reviving this old debate. Nevertheless, it bears repeating that the Torah, and thus *halacha* which flows directly from it, is the revealed word of G-d. It contains neither faults nor inadequacies. On the contrary, adherence to *halacha* offers the means

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of remedying our inadequacies and faults. The Torah is the vantage point from which the mores and values of any epoch or culture can be judged. To reverse this by judging the Torah from the perspective of the values of our time or place is, at best, senseless, at worse, blasphemous.

The *aguna* campaign offers a timely illustration of this. As we have noted, modern *aguna* problems come about not as a result of *halacha*, but through its misuse. The fault lies with human cussedness, not with *halacha*, whose requirement of freely-given consent reflects a perception of the autonomy and responsibility of the parties far more sophisticated than the somewhat patronizing idea that an outsider – the judge – rather than the couple themselves should determine the end of their marriage. Jewish marriage has nothing to fear from comparison with the sordid hedonism which too often passes for contemporary lifestyles. Indeed, there is nothing specially contemporary here. It is immediately recognizable from the generation of the Flood or from Sodom and Amora. What is so deeply disturbing is the pressure to distort *halacha* to make room for behavior which is its antithesis, such as Morgenstern's assertion to *The New York Times* (August 13, 1998) that a "woman has the right to say, 'I loved you yesterday and if I change my mind today, the man must go.'" *Chas mil'hazkir!*

It is thus worrying that the IJWHRW's publications do not restrict their outrage to cases of *agunos* (which might be justifiable), but also attack instances of normative *halacha*, such as the prohibition upon an adulteress marrying her paramour subsequent to her divorce. This suggests that this campaign has another agenda entirely, namely "improving" Jewish Marriage Law by bringing it "up to date," etc. No Orthodox scholar is likely to want anything to do with this. The campaigners cannot be unaware that by broadening their agenda to attack aspects of normative Jewish Law they find unpalatable, they risk the co-operation and support of the only people who can in fact assist

the *agunos* – namely, the Orthodox Rabbinate. One must therefore conclude that for some of the campaigners, the plight of the *agunos* is not that important. The *agunos* are no more than the means. They are not the end.

This startling conclusion goes some way to explain the fact that Ms. June Jacobs, the World President of the ICJW, recently went on record opposing attempts to ameliorate the plight of *agunos* by a change in the law of the land (including the New York Get Law). Some years ago, her organization organized a petition to the Chief Rabbinate of Israel with 25,000 signatures. The result, as she admits herself, was nil. The reason is simple and certainly known to her; namely, that there is no halachic solution. Nevertheless, she is currently busy mailing invitations all around the world to senior rabbinic personalities inviting them to a conference with the remarkably original title, "Halachic Solutions to the *Aguna* Problem." She cannot imagine that anyone serious is

going to come. Her purpose must be to score points. Certainly the *agunos* are not helped in any way by these antics. Once again, this has little or nothing to do with helping the *agunos*, and much to do with a generalized attack on traditional Judaism. The hypocrisy lies in pretending otherwise.

The plight of the *agunos* is profoundly disturbing. So is the hypocrisy and dishonesty of some of those claiming to campaign on their behalf. Let us have an end to it, so that we can get down to helping the *agunos* and seeing to it that, as far as humanly possible, such cases cease to occur. ■

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The *Megilla of Rus* presents us with both a dilemma and a lesson in sensitivity through its description of the return of Naomi – accompanied by her daughter-in-law, Rus – to *Eretz Yisroel*. The *passuk* (1,19) states that the entire city of Beis Lechem was astonished to see Naomi. The Midrash (*Rus Rabba* 3:6) asks how it is possible that all of the city's inhabitants (or even the majority of them) should happen to see Naomi's ignominious return.

The Midrash offers three answers:

- Naomi returned on the second night of Pesach, when the barley for the *Omer* sacrifice is harvested with great fanfare.
- Boaz was marrying off one of his daughters.
- Boaz's first wife had passed away and the multitudes were paying their last respects. As his first wife was being escorted out, his future wife, Rus, was entering the city.

While some of the answers are mutually exclusive, they each can relate in one way or another to Naomi and Rus's arrival in Beis Lechem. The third answer, for example, is certainly a prime example of *Hashgacha perattis* (Divine Providence): *Hashem* timed Naomi's return to coincide exactly with an occurrence that could endow her ill-fated trip to Moav with some justification. Now the daughter-in-law, who is accompanying her, can fulfill her destiny with Boaz as progenitors of royalty. But why does the Midrash add the other two reasons (even stating them first)? What significance could possibly be invested in the fact that it was the night of harvesting barley for the *Omer*, or that on that very day Boaz was marrying off a daughter?

THE WEDDINGS OF BOAZ'S CHILDREN

Let us begin with Boaz's weddings: The *Gemora* (*Bava Basra* 91a) describes the invitation list to the various *simchos* that Boaz celebrated. He had thirty sons and thirty daughters, and

Rabbi Abba Zvi Naiman, a senior writer for the Schottenstein Talmud project, serves as *Mara D'Asra* of the *Bais Medrash* of Ranchleigh in Baltimore. This article is based on a segment of his soon-to-be published *Edrei Tzon* on *Rus*.

he made two parties in honor of the marriage of each. As a leader, he naturally used these opportunities to provide a festive meal for his community. But there was one person whom he did not invite – a man by the name of Manoach. Manoach had no children, and Boaz reasoned that he should not invite Manoach since Manoach would never be able to reciprocate. The *Gemora* concludes that Boaz's first marriage – with

Naomi's Return: A Challenge to our Sensitivity



all of the children it produced, all of whom died in his lifetime – was not as worthy in *Hashem's* eyes as his future marriage, which would bear only one child – Oved, who would go on to create the Davidic monarchy.

We certainly cannot take the *Gemora* at its simple face value: Boaz was a *tzaddik*, a true leader of the Jewish people. How are we to understand that he would withhold an invitation because there would be no reciprocation? Furthermore, when he arrived at the fortieth and fiftieth weddings, did he expect to receive an equal number of reciprocations from any of the invitees?

cations from any of the invitees?

We must therefore understand that his motives were impeccable. According to one explanation (*Midrash Talpilos*), he was intentionally trying to embarrass Manoach so that he would be granted a child as compensation for his discomfort. Alternatively (*Ben Yehoyada*), Boaz was acting out of sensitivity to Manoach's predicament; he did not want to cause Manoach the painful realization that he would not be able to reciprocate by inviting Boaz to a *simcha* of his own. In either case, Boaz was altruistic in his motives, not at all callused and insensitive.

But that leads us to a new question. Why then was Boaz punished in such a terrible way for withholding the invitation? In addition to whatever Divine reckoning with Boaz's children brought them an early death, why did his own efforts at raising his children end in tragedy?

The answer might well lie in the fact that causing another person emotional pain, even when it can be rationalized, can never pass without some kind of retribution. Indeed, life is full of ambiguous situations for all of us, where we must often choose between conflicting courses of action, such as helping or intruding: *Should we start a conversation with the person sitting next to us on the train, or should we assume that he wants his privacy and does not want to talk to a stranger? Should we say "Good Shabbos" to a neighbor mowing his lawn, or should we spare him the embarrassment of being caught violating the Shabbos? Should we visit an ill friend, or should we assume that he probably would appreci-*



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ate his rest? Should we slowly abandon our single friends to spare them the pain of seeing our growing families?

The *Gemora* teaches us that Boaz was confronted with a delicate situation, and chose incorrectly, hurting Manoach's feelings even when his reasoning was sound: True, Manoach would probably have spent some uncomfortable moments at the weddings, realizing that he could never reciprocate, but at least he would not have been "shunned." And Manoach's pain did lead to his being granted a son – Shimshon the *Nazir*, who became the *Shofeit* (Judge) over Israel. Nonetheless, causing pain cannot be justified. Certainly, one must be very wary about hurting feelings, even when rationalizations are in place. And a man of Boaz's stature is held accountable for even such subtle situations.

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Here too, we might suggest, exquisite *Hashgacha perattis* comes into view: Because Boaz made his tragic miscalculation, he lost, at least temporarily, the ability to build the Royal House of David, for a lasting monarchy cannot be built upon a wedding where a single member of the nation was slighted. This house was doomed to failure, and on the very day that one of Boaz's mistakes (perhaps his last, according to the second explanation) was being made, the opportunity for a new start presented itself with the arrival of Rus from Moav. After suffering through all his tragedies, one could suggest, Boaz came to realize his mistake and started his marriage with Rus knowing how sensitive he must be to all, under all circumstances.

BOAZ AND MANOACH

Let us digress to explore the dissonance between Boaz and Manoach. We have seen that by failing to be sufficiently sensitive to Manoach's needs, Boaz lost the right to propagate the royal line. It is interesting to note that according to the Midrash (*Bereishis Rabba* 98:14), *Yaakov Avinu* had thought that Shimshon was to be the *Moshiach*. Apparently, Boaz lost his role in history to the very person whom he slighted, and Manoach became the prospective progenitor of the royal line of the *Moshiach*.

Shimshon failed in his mission, however, by marrying unworthy converts who swayed him from his brilliant future. By contrast, Boaz avoided this mistake by marrying Rus, the righteous convert from Moav, and thus began the royal line.

Boaz's *teshuva* is alluded to later in the *Megilla* when Naomi tells Rus to meet Boaz in the middle of the night in his granary. In that *passuk* (3,1), Naomi describes the future husband of Rus as *manoach*, a comfort. Why should Naomi use this unusual term for a husband? Perhaps she was alluding to Boaz's need to correct his mistake with Manoach and become a person who is always willing to com-

fort another person in pain without regard to any rationalization. Only through responding to this calling would his union with Rus be successful, enabling him to regain his ability – to reclaim his destiny – to create the royal lineage.

HARVESTING THE OMER

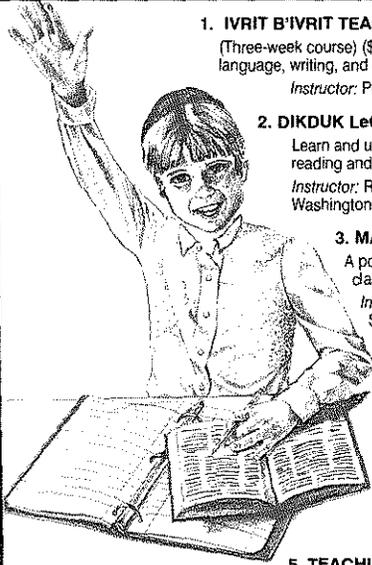
The first reason the Midrash mentions for the large crowd witnessing Naomi's return is that the people had gathered to cut the barley for the *Omer* sacrifice. This approach also can support the line of reasoning that we have suggested so far.

The harvest for the *Omer* begins the 49-day period when we examine each of our characteristics to prepare ourselves for the acceptance of the Torah. It is said that certain great *tzaddikim* were more concerned about Shavuot than Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, because on Shavuot their specific share of Torah was at stake. But *derech eretz* – perfecting our character traits – must precede the Torah. It was this process that was begun when Naomi returned with Rus to *Eretz Yisroel*.

Thus, the Midrash delineates the method for establishing the Jewish monarchy in three ways: The monarchy must begin with careful examination of one's character. When Boaz erred in determining how to treat Manoach, his married children all died – temporarily giving Manoach the opportunity to become the progenitor of the *Moshiach*. To regain his ability to build the monarchy, Boaz began a new line with Rus, who entered *Eretz Yisroel* on the very day that his first marriage came to an end.

Common wisdom grants royalty license to act with sweeping disregard for details of hurt feelings or wounded egos, as long as they focus on the larger picture. Not so the Royal House of David. No slight to a fellow Jew is insignificant, as the experiences of Boaz, Manoach, and Rus demonstrate. And we, the loyal subjects of this magnificent kingdom can be no less exacting in emulating their noble conduct. ■

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1:30-3:50	4. DISCIPLINE THROUGH COMMUNICATION	10. TEACHING AT ITS BEST 11. YOUTH AT RISK	16. DISCIPLINE WITH DIGNITY 17. MAKING DINIM AND TEFILA MEANINGFUL
3:50-4:05	מנוחה	מנוחה	מנוחה
4:05-6:25	5. TEACHING NAVI 6. FUNDAMENTALS OF TEACHING 7. PRINCIPALS'/ADMINISTRATORS' SEMINAR	12. TEACHING GEMORAH 13. THE ART OF MOTIVATION	18. TEACHING THE WHOLE CLASS 19. COMPUTER AND THE CLASSROOM

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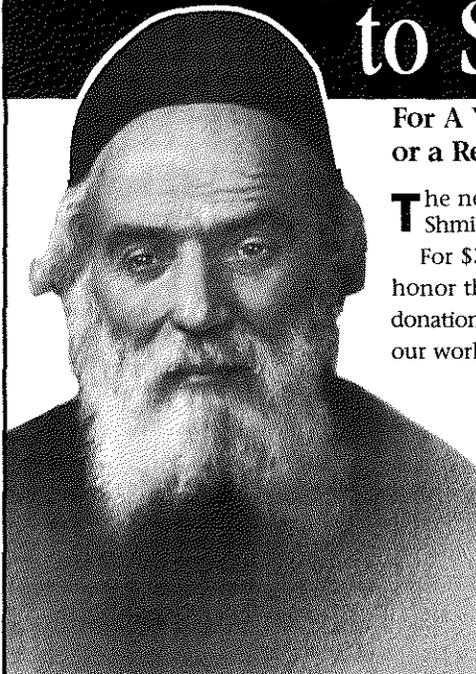
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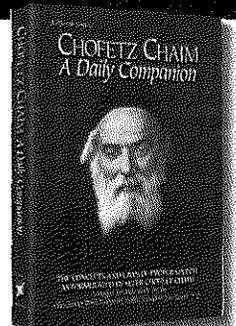


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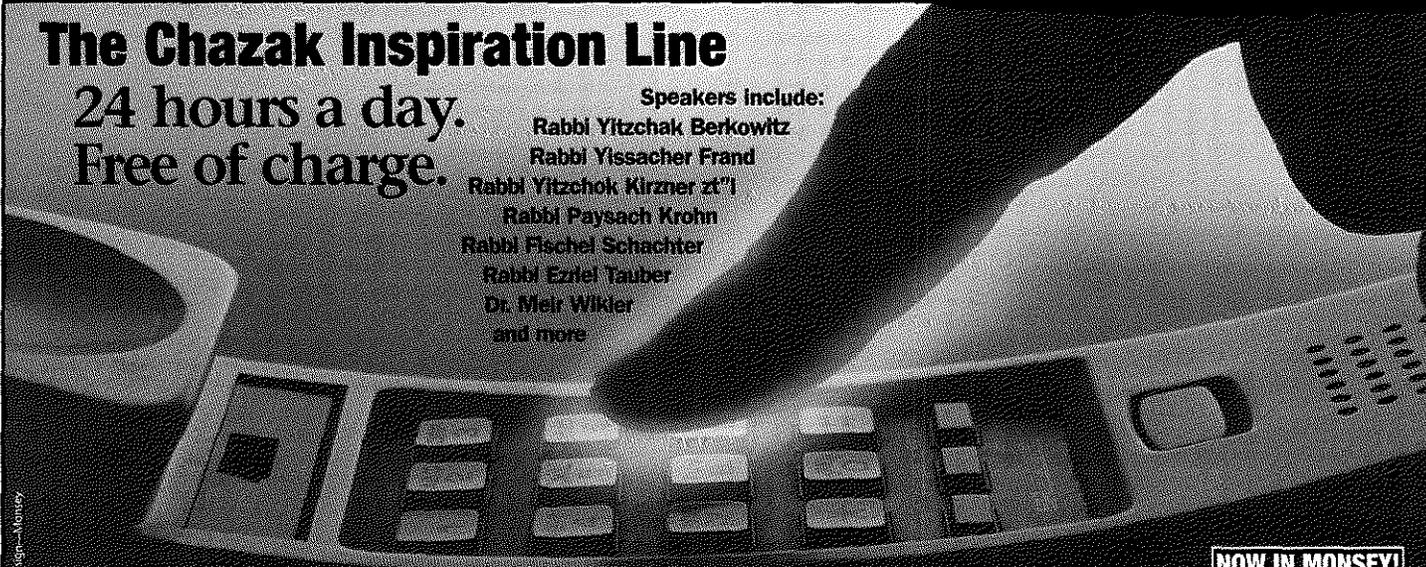
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Torah Wasn't Given to the Angels



The Gemora records the famous exchange between the Heavenly angels and Hakadosh Baruch Hu when the Torah was about to be given to the Jewish nation. The Malachim said, "Ribbono Shel Olam, what is a mortal doing amongst us?" Hashem responded, "He has come to accept the Torah." They countered, "The precious treasure that has been hidden for 974 generation before the world was created – You want to give to human beings? ... Keep Your glory in the heavens!"

At this point, Hashem instructed Moshe to respond to them, "Grab onto My heavenly throne and return a rebuttal."

Moshe then explained that the Torah is totally irrelevant to angels in heaven. Did angels leave Mitzrayim? Do they have parents to honor? Do they have a yeitzer hara that requires warning them not to steal and murder?

Finally, the angels acquiesced and showed admiration for Moshe, as every Malach gave Moshe a gift. (Shabbos 88b)

While this exchange is best understood on an esoteric level, it also bears a message relating to our actual fulfillment of Torah and mitzvos.

THE DESIGNER KNOWS HIS PRODUCT

The Torah introduces the section dealing with *arayos* (illicit relationships) with the words "Ani

Rabbi Henoah Plotnik serves as Rav of K'hal Adas Bnei Yisroel in Chicago. He was represented in these pages by "Why Tim Stood For Aleinu" (Dec. '98).

Hashem Elokaychem – I am Hashem your G-d" (Vayikra 18,2). The Meshech Chachma (Reb Meir Simcha of Dvinsk) explains the connection, pointing out that the Torah includes no commandments that would be too difficult for a human being, mere flesh and blood, to carry out. Hashem gave us only mitzvos that are within our grasp, and complement our mortal make-up, rather than oppose it. This is one of the understandings of the Zohar's comment that the 248 limbs and 365 veins of the human body correspond to the number of positive and negative commandments in the Torah: Hashem created us precisely to be able to carry out the laws and demands of the Torah. The Torah never commands us to fast for an unreasonable amount of time or to remain celibate. Therefore, before a person can protest that the restrictions of *arayos* are too demanding and surpass the expectations of human nature and desire, the Torah says, "I am Hashem your G-d." I am the engineer. I designed the machine called mankind, and I know its limitations. I can tell you not to copy the ways of Mitzrayim and Canaan. Guard my mitzvos and live by them. This will not only be a source of reward in the next world, but will give you satisfaction in this one as well.

This, the Meshech Chachma concludes, is the proper understanding of the words of Toras Kohanim 137 – that Hashem told Moshe: "Tell them... just as I told you and you accepted, so tell

them... so that they should accept."

Moshe had indeed been given a unique mission, to separate from his wife so as to be in constant readiness to receive Hashem's word. Nobody else received such a mitzva because it could not be expected of anyone else. Only Moshe could, and only Moshe would. So, too, was Moshe to encourage B'nei Yisroel: their acceptance of restrictions of *arayos* was not counter to their nature. It would only enhance their stature as people and perfect them in being Am Hashem.

HUMAN ATTITUDE, HUMAN FEELINGS

Taking this concept one step further, the late Telshe Rosh Hayeshiva, Rabbi Elya Meir Bloch זצ"ל (P'ninei Da'as Emor 21,17), offers an insight into one of the Torah's seemingly inexplicable restrictions – the *kohein ba'al mum*. The Torah is very exacting regarding the qualifications of the *kohein* for performing the *avoda* (Divine service) in the Beis Hamikdash. His physical appearance had to be as perfect as his spiritual level. On the surface, this would seem contrary to the value system reflected in the rest of the Torah. Does the *kohein's* impressive physical appearance enhance his ability to achieve atonement and grace for Klal Yisroel? Even the Melech Hamashiach is described as "sitting among the destitute and ill"!

Reb Elya Meir suggests that the issue

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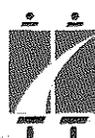
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here is not Hashem's dissatisfaction with the *kohein ba'al mum*; rather, the Torah is showing insight and sensitivity into human nature. If we were called upon to select someone to represent us before nobility or a government official, we would certainly favor someone whose impressive stature in character, wisdom and achievement is matched by a physical appearance that would, at first glance, serve to command respect in the eyes of his audience. To inform the *kohein* that his mission is no less important than that of an emissary beseeching a human king, the Torah gave us the same standard: a perfect specimen, in every dimension – even the superficial.

One might ask, shouldn't the Torah teach the opposite – that physical appearance is indeed meaningless and trivial, and that only purity of the soul really counts? But the Torah was not given to angels, it was given to humans with human attitudes and human feelings. "*Lo bashamayim hi* – it is no longer in the Heavens." It is here, and it is ours. If we delegate a *kohein ba'al mum*, whom we might pass over as an emissary to a king of flesh-and-blood, to perform *avodas Hashem*, it would minimize the value of what he was doing in his eyes and ours.

"NA'ASEH V'NISHMA" – ARE WE NOT ANGELS, AFTER ALL?

This human factor must be understood in light of the narrative in *Mesechta Shabbos* 88a: "When the Jewish nation declared, '*Na'aseh v'nishma* (We will do and we will listen),' a Heavenly voice called out, 'Who revealed to My children this secret known only to the Heavenly Angels? First they do, then they listen.'"¹ For a fleeting moment, we did indeed respond like angels by declaring "*Na'aseh v'nishma*."²

Lest we are to think that this was a

¹ See *Maharal – Tifferes Yisroel* ch. 29, who interprets this to mean that they were indeed adopting a level hitherto attainable only by angels.

² See *Meshech Chachma* in his introduction to *Sefer Shemos*, for an elaboration on why we needed to achieve this level, if indeed it was not going to last.

one-time event, one need only read the words of *Rabbeinu Yona*, when he discusses the power and importance of being a *mekabel* (one who makes sincere resolutions) and a *shome'a* (one who is open to listening to what others have to say). *Rabbeinu Yona* (*Sha'arei Teshuva*, 2:3) quotes the *Avos D' Rav Nassan*: "When one's deeds exceed his wisdom, his wisdom will endure, as it says 'Na'aseh v'nishma.'" Can someone actually do more than he knows? When *Klal Yisroel* declared "Na'aseh v'nishma," however, they were making a sincere, absolute resolution to do whatever *Hashem* would ask of them. When one makes such a commitment, *Hashem* rewards him as if the resolution were actually fulfilled. Such is the power of a *kabbala*. Thus, in a sense, one's deeds have actually surpassed his wisdom, for the reward for the actions comes for things he does not yet even know he will do! This was achieved at *Har Sinai*.

Perhaps this is how every Jew at *Har Sinai* was able to experience *nevu'a* (prophecy), hearing *Hashem's* voice.³ Surely, they did not all prepare for prophecy as one normally would⁴. Did they not have but three days' notice to achieve a level that the greatest *tzaddikim* achieve only after years and years of preparation? The answer may be that not only did the *kabbala* (commitment) of *Na'aseh V'nishma* bring them the rewards for their anticipated deeds, but even the levels of *ruchniyus* (spiritual attainment) they had resolved to strive for also became theirs. The *kabbala* to be a *navi*, the sincere resolve to reach all those *madreigos* (levels of greatness) was

³ See *Oznayim L'Torah*, *Parshas Yisro* for another approach to this question.

⁴ This regimen is detailed by the *Rambam* in *Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*, Ch. 7: "Nevua (prophecy) can only be experienced by someone great in wisdom who has total control over his *yeitzer hara*, someone with a great breadth of knowledge; one who incorporates all these traits... and separates himself from the ways of the general populace... never engages in idle pursuits... and whose mind is totally bound to the Heavenly throne... receives *Ruach Hakodesh* and his soul is bound with the angels..."

⁵ See *P'ninim Mishulchan Govoha*, *Parshas Yisro*, who quotes a similar thought in the name of Rabbi Aharon Kotler זצ"ל.

⁶ See *Pachad Yitzchak*, *Shavuos*, *Ma'amar* 4.

perhaps enough to vault them to that *madreiga* immediately.⁵

But the question remains. Are we expected to be *malachim*? Is the *Avos D' Rav Nassan* speaking to us and encouraging us to be what our forefathers were? If so, does the *Gemora* not call this the level of angels? On the other hand, does the *Gemora* not say, "Torah wasn't given to the angels" (*Berachos* 25b)? Are we meant to be *malachim*, or not?

DEFINING A MALACH, DEFINING A MENTCH

One approach to this compelling question involves understanding⁶ that a *malach*, by definition, is no more than a manifestation of *Hashem's* will. "One *malach* cannot perform two missions," because every single will of *Hashem* is, in essence, expressed through the creation of another *malach*. In fact, *Chazal* tell us there are some angels who, upon concluding their *shira* – the song that celebrates the completion of their mission – they cease to exist. Certainly there is no concept of death in *Shamayim*, but their mission of carrying out the will of *Hashem* has been consummated, thereby ending their existence. The message a *malach* is meant to "hear" creates the power and the purpose of its existence. The "Nishma" of a *malach* defines its purpose in life, and the *Na'aseh* follows as a matter of course.

At *Sinai*, human beings learned that they – and we, as well – can elevate their souls to the level where their entire ambition in life is to fulfill *ratzon Hashem* – G-d's will. Yes, we are mortal, and yes, we have human *yitzrei hara*, evil impulses, but for a fleeting moment we assumed a capacity to make ourselves angelic, to become one great vehicle of expressing *Hashem's* will.

BETTER THAN A MALACH?

The angels wanted to keep Torah in the Heaven. To send it down to those who have the choice to defy it can be cause for *Chillul Hashem*.

⁷ Quoted in *Sifsei Chaim* vol 3, p. 130.

"Leave your glory in the heavens," they argued. To that, *Hashem* ordered Moshe to grab onto His holy throne and respond. Human beings, fickle though they may be, can also attain lofty heights, as long as they remain attached to *Hashem*. We were placed here to struggle with temptation, to ultimately choose what is right, to conquer our evil inclination to succumb. Should we achieve that, we would rise beyond that which even the *malachim* can reach, and create an even greater *Kiddush Hashem*. As the *Maharal* writes on the *pasuk* in *Yechezkel*, "Above the image of the throne was the image of man," a man can reach levels beyond his angelic counterpart.⁷ The *malachim's* purpose is now to serve us.

This is borne out by the end of the narrative in *Shabbos* – that the *Malachim* actually presented *Moshe* with gifts when they parted company. They, too, were taught that the aspiring human could now rise to loftier heights than even they could, and now they shall serve him as well.

WHERE IS OUR MODEL?

We can now perhaps get a deeper appreciation for an oft-quoted *Ma'amar Chazal*: "If a *rebbe* resembles an angel of *Hashem*, seek Torah from his mouth, and if he does not, do not seek Torah from him." Our right to the Torah was based on one thing only, that we could surpass the *Malachim* and create a greater *Kiddush Hashem* through our level of *kiyum HaTorah* (fulfillment of Torah's demands) than the angels can on theirs. If one does not seek out a *rebbe* who exemplifies the ideal of fully reflecting *ratzon Hashem*, the Torah is not our rightful portion. It is not just a *ma'aloh*, a fine advantage, but rather a prerequisite – "...if not, do not seek Torah from him.;" it is imperative.

The paradigm *rebbe* is closest to what we can fathom in our limited scope to being a total manifestation of *ratzon Hashem*. (Indeed, Rabbi Elazar Shach שליט"א once remarked, "My *hasagos* – the furthest reaches of my concept of

greatness – end with the Chofetz Chaim. More than that is beyond me.”) He has no self-interest nor self-serving desires. He belongs to Hashem; he belongs to his *talmidim*.

A CASE IN POINT

A striking illustration of this point took place a few years ago. One *Shabbos* morning, I was relating a story to my *kehilla*:

Rabbi Yitzchak Orlansky זצ”ל was one of the outstanding disciples of the

Alter of Novaradok – the mussar giant, Rabbi Yosef Yoizel Hurwitz זצ”ל. An accomplished *talmid chacham* and a great *tzaddik*, Reb Yitzchak embodied everything one could conjure up in terms of selflessness and living for others. His son writes in his biography of Reb Yitzchak, Lapid Eish Novardikoi, that the incident that changed his father’s life forever was a remark made to him by the Alter.

As was the norm in Novaradok, new clothing was not a common item in anybody’s wardrobe. One year, before

Pesach, the Alter presented his *talmid*, Reb Yitzchak, a new suit in honor of the upcoming *Yom Tov*, which was a once-in-a-lifetime dream for a Novaradoker *bachur*. *Shavuos* time, the Alter approached his *talmid* and asked him to return the suit, as it was needed by a *talmid* who had need to travel to another city to establish a Novaradoker outpost. The young Reb Yitzchak, surprised at the request, half protested, half inquired, “But it is mine!” The Alter lashed out at his prized disciple, “How does someone not feel embarrassed to say the word mine!”

This episode, related Reb Yitzchak, changed him forever. Nothing in this world should ever be construed as “mine.”

Upon hearing this story, a *misparallel* who had studied under Rabbi Orlansky in the United States, came charging over after *davening* and disputed the accuracy of the story. “It has got to be a *bobbeh ma’aseh!* You didn’t know Reb Yitzchak. He could never have said the word *mine* during his entire life – before the Alter or after.”

It was of no use to even attempt to persuade him of the veracity of the incident, which is recorded by Reb Yitzchak’s son, as well as by Rabbi Chaim Zaitchik זצ”ל in *Hameoros Hagedolim*. The *talmid* would never be convinced that his *rebbe* was ever anything else but “similar to a *malach*.” Why should I bother convincing him otherwise?

The Ponovezher Rav זצ”ל once commented on the *Mishna* in *Avos* (VI, 1), “Whoever learns *Torah lishma*, merits many things...,” that the “many things” are intangibles, not the list subsequently delineated in the *Mishna*. He explained, “If you would look at the face of the Chazon Ish, you would catch a glimpse of those many things.”

We may have never actually seen *malachim*, but whatever we have seen in our holy *rabbei'im* is at least a starting point. Incorporating those images into our understanding of human potential for greatness will in turn spur us to raise our own stature and recapture that special *madreiga* we all truly achieved so many years ago, in the shadow of Sinai. ■

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Rabbi Tzvi Lampel, a former *talmid* of Rabbi Davis, lives in Passaic, New Jersey, where he and his wife are involved in *chinuch* and *kiruv*. Rabbi Lampel is author of *Dynamics of Talmudical Dispute* and translated the *Rambam's* introduction to *Seder Zera'im* into English.

Mrs. Faygala Safran, wife of Reb Nesanel Safran – a former *talmid* of Rabbi Davis – lives in *Eretz Yisroel*. She is an author and frequent contributor to Jewish magazines.

The material in this biography was compiled by Mrs. Leeba (Davis) Banash, granddaughter of Rabbi Y. Davis. She lives in *Eretz Yisroel* with her husband Reb Tzvi Aryeh Banash who is studying there.

born *gedolim* to study in the great European *yeshivos*. The *talmid muvhak* (prime disciple) of Rabbi Isaac Sher of Slabodka, he perpetuated the Slabodka *derech* when he returned to America, and developed a unique methodology of learning and teaching that brought American youth to Torah, and Torah to American youth. Rabbi Aharon Kotler זצ"ל called him "The *Gadol* in *chinuch*," and it takes little effort to summarize his message to the world: You are here to use and develop your heart and your *seichel* (intelligence) to see the *emmes*. It took little effort because heart and *seichel* and *emmes* were the constant, incessant words whenever he spoke, to whatever audience.

Rabbi Davis was at once fiercely loyal to *da'as Torah*, nonconformist in his activities, and insistent that "normalcy" was the proper demeanor of a *talmid chacham*. It was his uncompromising loyalty to *emmes* that put him at odds with the Jewish establishment and that convinced him to create what were then

revolutionary ideas of *kiruv rechokim*. Indeed, in his thirst for knowledge, he had attended top universities, only to become a formidable challenger to his professors' views, decline invitations to a department chairmanship, and leave the institution after just one year.

GROWING UP IN BALTIMORE AND NEW YORK

Rabbi Davis was born in Baltimore in 1907. As a young boy, he was inspired to become great in Torah by his grandmother's stories of European *gedolim*. Those who grew up in America in that generation did not have the benefit of *yeshivos ketanos* or *chadorim*, and attended public elementary schools, with afternoon schools or Talmud Torahs. Yet even as such an elementary school child, Yehudah Davis would endeavor to complete his homework quickly, to allow time to study *Chumash*.

After graduating high school, Rabbi

Davis attended Johns Hopkins University. Possessing a brilliant mind, he requested permission to take the graduating exam only six weeks into the third year, and did superbly. He then moved to New York City at twenty years old, where he studied at America's only post-high-school-level yeshiva, Yeshivas Eitz Chaim. He also continued his secular studies at Columbia University, only to quit after one year, disappointed to find no evidence to support the institution's claims of honest pursuit of knowledge.

Wherever he was, Rabbi Yehudah Davis formed youth groups dedicated to Torah study. In New York, he formed a study group of ten, including Rabbi Avigdor Miller, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, Rabbi Ber Elya Gordon, and Rabbi Nosson Wachtfogel. Another one of those whom Rabbi Davis influenced to go to Europe was Rabbi Mordecai Yoffe, who later became his *mechutan*. Rabbi Yoffe founded several *yeshivos* in different parts of the United States. Rabbi Davis would arrange for leading personalities to address the boys – people like Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Herman (of *All For the Boss* fame), and great European figures such as Rabbi Isaac Sher (*Mashgiach* of Slabodka), who came to America to raise funds for their institutions.

EUROPEAN ASPIRATIONS

A fascinating turn of events brought these American youths, destined to become the *Gedolim* and founders of America's leading Torah institutions of our generation, to the European *yeshivos* in which they grew great. Rabbi Yehudah Davis met Rabbi Nosson Wachtfogel, even then admired as a Talmudic genius, and plied him with numerous *kushyos* (internal contradictions in the Talmud). Unable to answer the questions, Reb Nosson declared that "for answers, you'd have to go to [the great] Europe[an *yeshivos*]." Rabbi Davis, always a man of action, insisted that they follow through with that route. Rabbi Davis, speaking from his heart, indeed persuaded Rabbi Wachtfogel – and his parents! – that he should make the move to Europe. In



Rabbi Davis with Rabbi Nosson Wachtfogel

later years, Rabbi Wachtfogel was to repeatedly refer, in his Yom Kippur *shmuess*, to that encounter with Rabbi Davis as part of "The *Sholom Aleichem* that saved America," and he declared that "50% of the Torah in American *yeshivos* is due to Rabbi Davis!" This was the first step in what Rabbi Davis was to develop, shortly afterwards, into a significant movement of American youths traveling to Europe to study in its great *yeshivos*.

In 1931, the two came to *Mir*, in Poland, where Rabbi Davis remained for a year-and-a-half. One of his *chavrusos* (study partners) there was Rabbi

Yosef Begun, who shared with Rabbi Davis his many innovative designs to further Torah study and practice. One project was printing *Yalkut Yedios HaEmmes*, a collection of the *Ramchal's* writings (including *Derech Hashem*) with original marginal notes summarizing each paragraph. Another was authoring *Eina Pekicha*, which he dictated to Rabbi Davis. This work stressed how all matters must be approached through a Torah outlook, and included a plea to resolve the plight of the Russian Jews, underscoring their need for money and encouragement. This so riveted Rabbi Davis's soul that he was determined to undertake that mission.

This was in the 1930's, not in the 1970's. Clandestine missions to help the Jews of the Soviet Union were unheard of. (Indeed, Rabbi Davis was later skeptical of the motives of the 1970's "activists," and critical of their headline-grabbing activities.) Yet Rabbi Davis risked his life to help. As a holder of prestigious university credentials, he could enter Russia, in spite of government restrictions. With money tucked into the sole of his shoes, and the KGB following him, he made his way to the yeshiva of Rabbi Yehoshua Minsk. (*Yeshivos* were illegal, of course, in the Soviet Union, a situation which Rabbi Minsk overcame by masquerading the building as a sewing shop.) Rabbi Davis

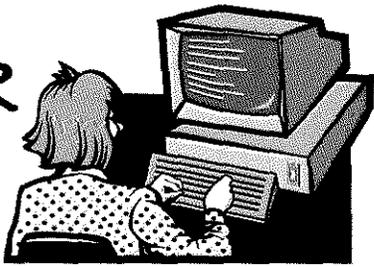
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exchanged shoes with one of the *bachurim*, thus transferring the money. The mission was a success, and he set off to return to Poland and the Mir Yeshiva. Because of the short duration of his visit, however, the border guards suspected him of illegal activity and confiscated his visa, preventing him from remaining in Poland.

MEETING THE CHOFETZ CHAIM

Through the efforts of Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzensky, Rabbi Davis received permission to stay in Poland for a precious three more weeks, during which he visited the Chofetz Chaim, in Radun. Entering the humble home (he would often mention his need to bend over to fit under the doorway), he saw three people – two whom he could tell were *talmidei chachamim*, and one who was dressed as a simple Jew. Of course, that “simple Jew” was the Chofetz Chaim, whom Rabbi Davis would thenceforth describe

as a “*gaon in pashtus* (simplicity).”

The Chofetz Chaim impressed Rabbi Davis with his emotional involvement with worldwide Jewry, and imparted a lesson that was to stay with him for years. On hearing that Rabbi Davis came from New York, the Chofetz Chaim quoted the *Gemora* in *Megilla* that defines a “great city” as one which contains at least ten people who learn Torah full-time. Radun was a very small town. But “on the map in *Shamayim*,” the Chofetz Chaim emphasized, “Radun is a great city.” One of Rabbi Davis’s final accomplishments was his taking a small group of people to found a yeshiva community in Mountandale, a tiny hamlet in the Catskills, thereby transforming it into a “great city.”

Initially, the Chofetz Chaim advised Rabbi Davis not to return to America. No matter how advanced the learning was there, it was incomparable to that of the European *yeshivos*. But when Rabbi Davis assured him that he intended to bring more Americans to study in

Europe, the Chofetz Chaim gave him his blessings.

Immediately upon returning to America in 1932, Reb Yehudah resumed his New York study group, continuing to arrange lectures by European Torah-giants who were visiting America. Within a year, he influenced each of the members of the group to make the move to Europe, and convinced any reluctant parents to agree. Thus, Reb Mordechai Gifter went to Telshe, Reb Elya Gordon attended the Mir in Poland, and Reb Avigdor Miller joined Rabbi Davis in his return to Slabodka.

ENTER REBBETZIN DAVIS

During his year in America, Rabbi Davis conveyed his friend Yitzchok Chions’ regards to his father, Rabbi Tzvi Aryeh Chions, זצ”ל. The father was so impressed with the young scholar that he arranged Rabbi Davis’s *tannaim* (engagement) with his daughter, Fraida Basha גי”ר, although she was only in her early teens. The future *rebbetzin*, a well-versed young lady, apparently impressed Rabbi Davis with her learning and *middos*.

The Chions family and Rebbetzin Davis deserve their own full-length article. For purposes of brevity, suffice it to say that Rabbi Chions was a paragon of *bitachon* (trust in *Hashem*), *hachnosas orchim* (hospitality), *tzeddaka* (charity), *chessed* (helpfulness) and extensive learning. The *rebbetzin* was a true match for her *chassan*, a fighter for truth, teacher of Torah and its values, and practitioner of kindness.

SLABODKA YEARS

In the interim, Rabbi Davis returned to Europe in 1933. His learning in Slabodka was interrupted in 1936, when his mother became deathly ill, and he decided to marry in America while near his mother. She expressed concern about her younger son, Chuni, עי”ש, for she felt that her husband would not be able to care for him. Rabbi Davis assured her that he would take his teenage brother under his wings.

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Indeed, Rabbi Davis took his new wife and brother back with him to Slabodka, and fashioned games for young Chuni to play after his scheduled learning. (Even the *Mashgiach*, Rabbi Zalman Kobriner, volunteered to play ball with the boy, when it was time for Rabbi Davis's *seder* to begin. "Just teach me the rules," the *Mashgiach* called from the window.)

During this period, Rabbi Davis joined a *chabura* (study group) that completed the entire *Shas* in one year. (This was not his first time; he had already done so even before arriving in Europe.) Rabbi Yisroel Bergstein ז"ל, one of the *chabura's* members, described Rabbi Davis as a "tremendous force, the *ari she'b'chabura* (the lion of the pack)."

The war clouds forming over Europe in 1938 marked Rabbi Davis's final days on that continent. Before leaving, he sought a formal *semicha*, knowing how this would please his father. Presiding over the "examination" were three great Lithuanian *rabbanim*: Rabbi Reuvein Zelig Bengus (the Kalverier *Rav*, later to become the *Av Beis Din* of the *Eida Hachareidis* in Jerusalem), the Kaidaner *Rav*, and the Kovner *Rav* (the *D'var Avraham*).

BACK TO AMERICA

Returning home to Baltimore with his wife and year-old daughter (destined to become the *rebbeztzin* of Rabbi Yosef Rosenblum, שליט"א), Rabbi Davis was offered a prestigious, well-paying rabbinical position in Manhattan's Upper West Side. However, he was advised by Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman ז"ל to remain in Baltimore, where the income would be considerably less, but he would wield more influence. "There are times when one must put aside personal needs," he declared.

As rabbi of Adas B'nay Yisroel, Rabbi Davis was ever vigilant against becoming beholden to others – he adamantly refused a raise in salary or gifts from the sisterhood. This served him well in maintaining his independence. When he heard that a social dance was scheduled to be held the coming night, he

walked up to the *bima* with *Shulchan Aruch* and *Rambam* in hand, taught the congregation that mixed dancing is an *issur* of *gilui arayos* (prohibited act of immorality) for which one can be condemned to *Gehinnom*, and concluded, "Of course, there will be no dancing." The dancing was canceled.

Recognizing that mixed dancing was common in even the most respectable *shuls* ("How else will *frum* boys and girls meet each other?"), Rabbi Davis appealed to Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman (who frequented the *shul* while in

America) to issue a *kol korei* against it. This was done, and the proclamation was signed by many of Baltimore's great *rabbanim*.

Rabbi Davis dedicated his efforts to repairing breaches and erecting strongholds of Torah. He began Baltimore's Bais Yaakov for girls, knocking on doors and recruiting students to absorb the teachings of Rebbetzin Davis around her kitchen table. He took over Baltimore's network of Talmud Torahs from the Conservative rabbi who ran it. And he formed groups of young men,

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some of whom he sent to Brooklyn to learn in the new Yeshivas Chofetz Chaim under Rabbi Dovid Leibowitz זצ"ל, to become *b'nei Torah* of the highest caliber. Rabbi Davis innovated the now-common idea of summer camps on the outskirts of the city, where the *bachurim* would swim, play ball, and study Torah undistracted. He favored a "hands-on" approach to learning, having the boys make their own *tsitsis* after learning the relevant *halachos*, and helping them build their own *succos* after studying that subject.

Rabbi Elya Meir Bloch, of the Telshe Yeshiva in Europe, expressed surprise upon seeing Rabbi Davis's American *bachurim* learning with diligence. Rabbi Davis suggested that Rabbi Bloch start a yeshiva in America. Rabbi Bloch demurred, saying that he had no *bachurim* with whom to do so. Rabbi Davis thereupon encouraged some of his own *bachurim* to join Rabbi Bloch. Rabbi Bloch later referred to Rabbi Davis as the founder of the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland.

THE MOVE TO BRIGHTON BEACH

The summer of 1944 marked a new chapter in the life of Rabbi Yehudah Davis. At a hotel in Woodridge, New York, Rabbi Shmuel Machlis entreated Rabbi Davis to relocate to Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, where there was a *yeshiva ketana*. Reluctant to leave Baltimore, Rabbi Davis consulted Rabbi Aharon Kotler, who advised him to go. His mastery of secular subjects, plus his greatness in Torah, made him the perfect choice to serve as principal of general studies. His independent, fierce loyalty to Torah values, however, brought him at odds with lesser people.

One of Rabbi Davis's first moves as principal was to inspect the books in the school library and remove those that had *apikorsus* (heretical content). The rest of the staff tolerated this – until he rejected a Jewish history book, which they insisted should stay. This was the last straw for them, and they declared that rejecting this book proved that his objections against the others were also

unfounded. They decided to bring the case to a *din Torah*, presided over by Rabbi Aharon Kotler. This book referred to the *Chashmonaim* as a "mighty band." "What is so terrible about that?" asked Rabbi Kotler.

Rabbi Davis explained that it implied the victory of the *Chashmonaim* could be attributed to their military strength, whereas it is fundamental to the Chanuka episode that the victory was a miraculous delivery of the "strong into the hands of the weak," as underscored in *Al Hanissim*. Rabbi Kotler advised that this page be torn out of the book, since otherwise the work seemed to be of value. To this Rabbi Davis countered, "If the *gadol hador* overlooked this bit of *apikorsus* (denial of miracles), how will others detect other such elements that may be hidden in the work?" Rabbi Davis's reasoning won the case. From then on, Rabbi Kotler would refer questions of *hashkafa* (ideology) to Rabbi Davis, saying, "He has a special *chush* (sensitivity) for detecting objectionable material."

During those pivotal times, Socialists and Zionists were aggressively imposing their agendas on *yeshivos*, and Rabbi Davis saw it as his duty not to fall in line and surrender, as other institutions were doing. In fact, he dismissed many unsuitable members of the yeshiva's staff. At the first *Torah Umesorah* convention, Rabbi Aharon Kotler asked Rabbi Davis to deliver a keynote address. "But you are the *gadol hador*," Rabbi Davis demurred. "It is you who should speak."

"But *you*," Rabbi Kotler responded, "you are the *gadol* in *chinuch*."

It has been said that Rabbi Kotler would not make a move in *chinuch* without consulting Rabbi Davis.

"THE BOYS' CHABURA" OF BRIGHTON

Within four years (1948), Rabbi Davis was no longer principal of the school, but remained as a *rebbe*. Yet it was now that he began to have his greatest influence in Brighton Beach, reaching the youth of another generation and fashioning them into

Torah scholars and leaders. He began "The Boys' *Chabura* of Brighton," and took under his wings future leaders such as Rabbi Shaya Jacobson, who was to head Yeshiva Tiferes Torah; Rabbi Dovid Weiner, now of Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim; his brother Rabbi Binyamin Weiner; and Rabbi Aharon Zuckerman, now *Rav* of Agudath Yisroel of Midwood and faculty member of the Mirrer Mesivta in Brooklyn.

Rabbi Zuckerman describes this period as one of intense learning. "Rabbi Davis devoted all his time – his days and nights – to his *chabura* in Brighton. He told us to come to his house whenever we had a problem. And whenever we'd come, the *Rebbetzin* would honor us as if we were the most *choshuva* guests. A *menahel* of a yeshiva usually has off on *Shabbos*, but Rabbi Davis would spend part of every *Shabbos* telling us stories of *gedolim*. He would do so in such detail that we felt we were seeing them ourselves, such as when he described how Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman would stand with such humility before his *rebbe*, the Chofetz Chaim, that despite the way he physically towered over his *rebbe*, they appeared the same size. After teaching us, he gave us prizes and a place to play. As we grew older, he began to teach us on Friday night, *Shabbos* afternoon, and *Motza'ei Shabbos*. His fiery presentation

was so enthralling that despite the summer heat, we didn't even think of the beach a few blocks away. He fashioned us into *bnei Torah*, starting with nothing, *yeish me'ayin, ex nihilo*. If not for Rabbi Davis, who knows where we would be today!"

Talmidim, some even from the *chabura* days, felt such attachment and indebtedness to their *rebbe* that they tore *keriya* at his *kevura* (burial).

BRANCHING OUT

Techniques in Learning

During this period, Rabbi Davis, in search for ways to clarify and simplify learning, created original methodologies based upon rules of language, syntax, and logic. When he discovered that the *Ramchal* had actually advocated such methods long ago in his *sefarim*, *Derech Higayon* and *Derech Tevunos*, he immediately began to master and use these works as texts from which to teach his disciples.

The Lakewood Yeshiva in Boston

In the mid-1950's, Rabbi Aharon Kotler sent Rabbi Davis to be Rosh Yeshiva of a Boston branch of the Lakewood Yeshiva for a year-and-a-half. (During the *Ellul* that he was there, he delivered twen-

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ty-five memorable *shmuessen*.) Rabbi Davis then returned to Brooklyn for a period that was to become one of personal tragedy. After a long bout with pneumonia, Rabbi Davis was finally able to resume teaching. Then, quite suddenly, two days later, his 19-year-old son, Mayir – a tireless *masmid* and exemplary *baal middos* – died from a brain tumor

Yeshiva Zichron Mayir

Despite the tragic loss of this budding scholar, Rabbi Davis continued to devote himself to disseminating Torah learning and ideals. He assumed the position of *maggid shiur* in the Mir Yeshiva in Brooklyn. One evening, two boys attending nearby Lincoln High School knocked on Rabbi Davis's door and asked him to teach them. Rabbi Davis assented, and thus began a new yeshiva, to

be joined by members of the Mirrer Yeshiva class. The boys themselves raised the funds to buy a building in Brighton Beach, and the name Yeshiva Zichron Mayir was chosen, in memory of Rabbi Davis's son. The boys who formed it eventually emerged as Torah leaders, teachers, *mechabrei sefarim* (authors of scholarly works), *maggidei shiur*, *roshei yeshivos* and *roshei kollelim*. Continuing with his way, Rabbi Davis took the boys to the Catskills in the summers. In Parksville, Rabbi Shlomo Diamond, his son-in-law, recalls, "There was no heat, no running water. We were comfortable American boys. What made us go there? He was our *rebbe*, he was our father in everything in life – in marriage, in *chinuch*, in *ruchnius*, in *gashmius*."

In 1965, the yeshiva property was purchased in Mountaindale, New York, where it eventually relocated year-round. The decaying hotel building that originally had housed the married couples was soon replaced by an innovation – mobile homes that turned far-from-wealthy idealists into instant homeowners.

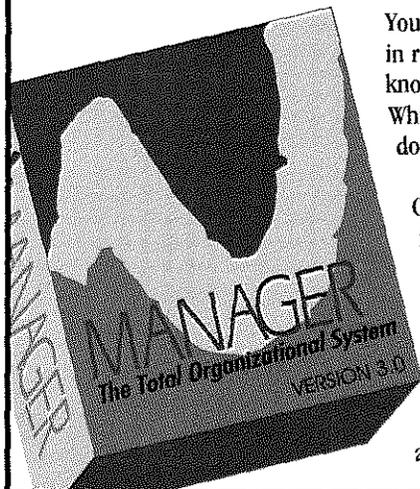
Soon afterwards, an independent *cheder* was formed, educating the children of both Mountaindale and neighboring South Fallsburg (location of Yeshiva Zichron Moshe) in the pure spirit of Torah. Rebbetzin Davis continued to teach and inspire the women and girls of the community, until her tragic death in an auto accident on *Erev Succos* 5747

(1986), involving a drunken driver. Rabbi Davis maintained his unique role of teacher and mold of dedicated students until his passing on 23 Adar I 5757 (1997). Yeshiva Zichron Mayir continues to instill its *talmidim* with Rabbi Davis's *derech of seichel, lev, and emmes* – intelligence, heart and adherence to truth. This approach – perceiving the *emmes* and internalizing it until it becomes part of the person – was Rabbi Davis's formula for success with all of his *talmidim* and his *kiruv rechokim* programs over four generations.

Kollel Ohr Yehuda in Brooklyn, established in Brooklyn after the *petira* (passing) of Rabbi Davis זצ"ל, under the leadership of his son Rabbi Moshe Davis שליט"א, serves as a continuation of Rabbi Davis's *derech* of perceiving *emmes* and internalizing it – as is written in the Torah: "Veyadata hayom vehashevosa el levavecha – And you shall know and take to heart..." The *kollel* also utilizes Rabbi Davis's approach that he saw written in *Sefer Michtavei Chofetz Chaim*. The Chofetz Chaim's son writes how he learned with his father, starting from the *pasuk* in the Torah, tracing the concept all the way to contemporary *halacha*. It is Reb Moshe Davis's hope that using his father's methodology will instill his *Yungeleit* with the tools they will need to continue spreading the true light of Torah to *Klal Yisroel*. ■

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דף ב.
הכל חייבין בראייה

- The posuk (Sh'mos 23:17, Devarim 16:16) teaches that there is a מצות עשה (positive mitzvah) to appear before Hashem in the Bais Hamikdash three times a year, on Pesach, Shavuos and Succos בשנה יריאה (כל אורח ורג - ראייה). This mitzvah is called ראייה - appearance [before Hashem].
- In addition, there is a מצות לא תעשה (negative commandment) of לא יראה פני ריקסם (do not appear before Me empty handed - by which one is obligated to offer korban עולת upon appearing in the Bais Hamikdash on the festivals.

The Mishna states that women and children are exempt from the mitzvah of ראייה. The Yerushalmi (cited by Tosfos הכלל ד"ה) explains that women and children are only exempt from that women and children are only exempt from bringing a **korbon** re'iyah. However, they are obligated in the other aspect of the mitzvas re'iyah, namely, they must appear in the Bais Hamikdash on the festivals.

Rabbeinu Tam (ibid.) documents that the Bavli disagrees with the Yerushalmi and exempts women and children from all aspects of re'iyah; they need not offer a korbon re'iyah, nor must they appear in the Bais Hamikdash.¹

The Rambam² writes that a man who appears on the first day of the festival in the Bais Hamikdash without a korbon re'iyah has not only failed to fulfill the positive mitzvah to appear before Hashem but has also violated a negative mitzvah, i.e., not to appear empty handed (לא יראה פני ריקסם). The Rambam thus

indicates that the positive mitzvah to appear in the Bais Hamikdash on the festivals is linked to the obligation to bring a korbon; appearing in the Bais Hamikdash without a korbon is not a mitzvah.

The Turei Even points out that the Rambam is incompatible with the above mentioned Yerushalmi. It is apparent in the Yerushalmi that the positive mitzvah to appear in the Bais Hamikdash is independent of the obligation to bring a korbon, for the Yerushalmi obligates women and children to appear in the Bais Hamikdash even though they are exempt from bringing a korbon. Evidently, the positive mitzvah to appear in the Bais Hamikdash is fulfilled merely by entering the Bais Hamikdash. If a man appears in the Bais Hamikdash without a korbon, according to the Yerushalmi he has fulfilled the positive mitzvah of re'iyah (even though he is in violation of the negative mitzvah which forbids appearing empty handed).

The reason the Rambam links the positive mitzvah of re'iyah to bringing a korbon is that he rules in accordance with the Bavli which exempts women and children from all aspects of re'iyah. The Bavli holds that one cannot fulfill the mitzvah of re'iyah without offering a korbon and since women and children are exempt from bringing a korbon they are also exempt from appearing in the Bais Hamikdash.³

The Minchas Chinuch⁴ writes that even if the two aspects of the mitzvah are independent (as the Yerushalmi indicates), if a man were to enter the Bais Hamikdash without a korbon it would be deemed a **מאן בעבירה** and

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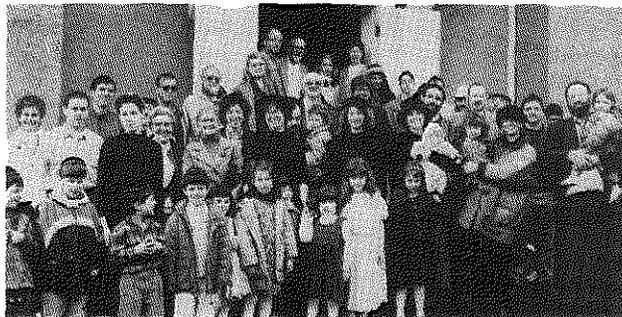
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Congregation Members. At extreme right, Rabbi Oppenheimer, holding child.

NOT JUST FOR PROFESSIONALS

“Another article on *Kiruv*,” you are probably saying.... “That’s not for me. After all, one would have to have spent years developing sophisticated arguments about deep issues in Jewish philosophy, or be capable of giving *shiurim* on all sorts of topics that one may *not* be expert on... *right?*”

“Furthermore, one has to be willing to be *moser nefesh* – or more likely, *meshuga* – to live in some ‘out-of-town’ place like, say, Portland, Oregon... a beautiful place to visit, but so far from family and friends, and *Rabbanim*, very few *Shomrei Shabbos*, no *yeshivos gedolos*, no Bais Yaakovs, a spotty weekday *minyán*, and last but not least, no kosher restaurants or pizza shops!”

I am here to tell you that not only is it possible – it can be a life-changing experience that can bring a sense of joy, fulfillment and *kedusha*, which in its own way, is difficult to feel in the centers of Torah life. It can bring about tremendous growth in one’s Torah learning and *avodas Hashem*. And most of all, it is something that can be done very successfully by people who are not necessarily *kiruv* professionals or rabbis.

Permit me to explain. While I do not claim to be any kind of expert in *Kiruv Rechokim*, I can tell you that despite all that you may read about programs and seminars and retreats, they are not the

Rabbi Oppenheimer worked for many years as an engineer at Bell Laboratories until he was inspired by Rabbi Berel Wein who implored his audience to do what they could to help other Jews reconnect. For the past five years, his family has lived in Portland, Oregon, with a wonderful community of Jews who are seeking to reconnect with their heritage.

primary vehicles for reintroducing our lost brothers and sisters to their heritage. Notwithstanding the importance of the former, the most compelling way to help other Jews reconnect with their heritage is by developing an ongoing, personal relationship with them. A relationship marked by love, caring, and true kinship, in which trust is built, over a period of time, that a Torah lifestyle is not only spiritually deep and rewarding, but a real option to consider. And this is done, most effectively, not by rabbis or by charismatic speakers, but by the powerful effect of seeing people who are just like them, but who are living and loving a Torah lifestyle.

This is not to dismiss rabbis, *kiruv* professionals, seminars, and outreach centers. They all play an important and vital role. Recognizing their importance, Torah Umesorah has taken the lead amongst several organizations to invest major sums and to place Rabbis, including myself, in a growing number of communities, in an effort to jumpstart Orthodox life in those communities.

Seminars can generate an incredible energy that can touch *neshamos* very deeply, helping people make a major reevaluation of their relationship with *Hashem* and His Torah.

But as any *kiruv* staff member will tell you, the Achilles heel of any of these programs is “The Real World.” What happens after the seminar? What happens when people return home and get back to business-as-usual? What happens a few weeks later?

We all know the answer. It’s akin to the Post-*Ne’ilah* syndrome, which follows Yom Kippur. We had a tremendous *hisorerus*, a glimpse of who we might be at our most essential spiritu-

al core . . . a sense of yearning to be at one with The One, full of resolve to change and grow.... And yet, months later, we wishfully hope to still have a chance to realize at least some of those visions. That’s “The Real World,” quotation marks firmly in place. While it may be the *Alma D’Shikra* — the false world — it is nonetheless the reality that occupies most of our energy and time, making it hard to retain our connection with the real “Real World” and our ideals at one-and-the-same time.

OVERCOMING THE COST OF COMPLACENCY

What is the secret to overcoming the pervasive problem of complacency? The answer, as any *kiruv* professional will tell you, is “Follow-Up” — the effort to maintain a connection, once the seminar is over and participants are back in the cold “Real World.” Many dedicated professionals try to stay in touch with seminar participants, but while those calls and invitations are wonderful, they are usually impractical, given the difficulty of doing so with so many people. Life is a marathon, not a sprint, and to be successful at life, one must be able to keep up the inspiration over the long run, not just in short effusive bursts. For most people, the most powerful, real chance that a lasting effect will be had from a seminar, would depend on finding a local presence that will maintain a relationship with the person, developing an ongoing, deep bond that will lead to a true, lasting change.

In a fascinating conversation, Rabbi Dr. Dovid Gottlieb, one of the most sought-after speakers in the world of

kiruv, remarked in effect, "You might think that people are most impressed by what I can present, as an expert in Analytical Philosophy and Logic, and how I can talk very impressively about Cross-Cultural Critiques, the Adolescence of Science, and other fancy topics, and that this is what attracts people to Torah. That is all gobbledygook! There is really only one question that our fellow Jews have. And that question is — 'Do I want to be like those People?' That is the only thing that truly interests the vast majority of them.

"The participants are saying to themselves, 'They' seem to be experiencing true joy in life — I want the same joy. 'They' seem to have stable families and values — why not me? 'They' seem to be intelligent and well thought-out — I want to be intelligent and well thought-out. That is why it is important for me to be able to give intellectually stimulating lectures; not because, at the end of the day, the lectures themselves will matter. What will matter is whether they, in fact, can relate to me as a real person whom they would like to emulate. And in order to present an example they will want to emulate, the material must all be accurate and logically sound."

FOSTERING A SEA-CHANGE IN THE JEWISH WORLD

What, then, am I suggesting? That there is a tremendous, relatively untapped opportunity for us to affect a sea-change in the Jewish world. Moreover, this can be done far less expensively and with much less effort than many existing outreach efforts. The program? Encouraging young couples, or retired couples, to move to outlying communities.

Imagine the effect on a community of one or two couples moving in; couples who have had the benefit of a yeshiva or even *kollel* background, who are now at a point where they have decided to enter the working world, and are joining the community as *baalei-battim*. They perhaps are working at a corporation, pursuing professional or vocational training, or getting their feet wet

in the world of business.

In addition, however, they bring a new model of Torah observance and scholarship to places that have really never experienced the lifestyle that we so take for granted. People will note that he comes to a learning *seder* at night in the *shul* a few times a week, which is now energized by a new level of Torah study. The couple hosts a home-study group, and just by being herself, she does more to destroy preconceptions about Orthodox women than a thousand lectures could. They often have *Shabbos* guests in their home. The *ruach* in the *shul* is greatly enhanced by the presence of people who are intimately familiar with the *tefillos* and perhaps can lead them. They become one of the mainstays of the effort to create a daily *minyan*. The local store is made aware that there are a growing number of people in town who will patronize them if they carry more kosher products. The rabbi can make a more convincing argument to the local deli owner to consider "going kosher," given the burgeoning community interest. The local Jewish community school realizes that if it wants to service this segment of the community, it will need to change its attitude toward the teaching of Torah and Judaism, and provide an acceptable option for those families who require an intensively Jewish education for their children. The larger community will begin

to sense that the Orthodox presence in town is vibrant and growing, and people will begin to come and "check out" the new community that is developing.

Most of all, relationships between *frum* Jews and their non-*frum* brothers and sisters will be formed — relationships based not on being preached at by rabbis, but on shared experience and mutual respect from people that they can relate to as friends and neighbors, who are real role models. In short, an enormous amount of good can be accomplished by people who are just going about their business as lay members of a growing community.

This idea might seem similar to the Community Mini-Kollel, found in quite a few cities around the country, which have succeeded in energizing the community, first and foremost, with the inestimable *zechus* of hosting a center for high-level Torah scholarship. Additionally, great energy has come from the enormous collateral and side benefits, similar to those I have described above, and are, frankly, often the main reason that philanthropists choose to invest the very large sums that it takes to support these wonderful institutions.

But, back in the "Real World," supporting a mini-*kollel* requires hundreds of thousands of dollars annually, a remote dream for a community struggling to maintain a *shul*, a *mikva*, a rabbi

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and a small school – barring the special interest of a visionary philanthropist.

In contrast, the addition of working couples to a community not only does not cost the community anything, it enhances the community's fund-raising abilities to the point of perhaps actually funding that eventual *kollel* and *yeshiva* that it dreams of having some day.

You may ask, "Is it not asking an enormous amount from someone to live in such a community? Are there any benefits besides the tremendous *mitzva* involved?"

WAKING UP AS A VALUED "ISH"

Without being overly dramatic, it is fair to say that this could be one of the most rewarding and exhilarating steps that one could take, enriching one's life with purpose, meaning, and deep fulfillment. It is a chance to wake up every day knowing that one is making a major difference in an entire community, ennobling the lives of its families, and quite possibly growing on a personal level to heights never dreamed of before.

Why is this so? First and foremost,

especially for a young couple, there is a great sense of community and of being valued that accrues to a family that moves into a smaller community. I know of what I speak – as a former denizen of Flatbush and Monsey, as one of the thousands that frequented their countless *shuls* and innumerable kosher establishments, I have seen and experienced how easy it is to feel alone and irrelevant in the large community. One often wonders whether anyone really cares if he came to *shul*, participated in community affairs; whether, in the faceless thousands around, there is any way that any individual, other than the rare few, can feel truly needed. Whether, in places where one *davens* here *Shabbos* morning, there for *Mincha*, a third place for *Maariv* and in various "minyan factories" during the week, one can feel truly bonded to the great enterprise of building something special to increase *Hashem's* honor in the world. Perhaps it is partially due to this existential loneliness in the large *frum* areas that sometimes *Shabbos*, *Kashrus*, and observance in general are taken for granted. It is all too easy, unless one consciously chooses not to, to fall into a *mitzvas anashim melumada*-spiritual rut of going through the ritual motions, rarely grappling with what *Hashem* wants of us, or what our *neshama* is supposed to accomplish, during its fleeting sojourn in this world.

By contrast, in a small community, every person feels greatly valued and treasured. Their very presence in *shul*, their participation in the community's efforts, the effect that they have just by showing up at an event or at a learning session, the difference that their *Shabbos* table makes – these are very real and tangible to everyone in the community. There is an enormous opportunity to be special by simply being a *yorei Shamayim*, going about their day-to-day business. All the more so, then, if one feels that it is a *makom she'ein ish* – a place where there is no one else to fill that role – one gets a special impetus to make oneself into that *ish*, that special person who can give something very special to the community.

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BLUEPRINT FOR GROWTH IN THE WILDERNESS

We have had the experience, several times, of having people join us for a time from as short as one week to as long as a few years, for professional reasons. In virtually every case, the person has truly felt valued because of the contribution he or she was able to make, just by being another *frum* Jew in town. In many cases, these people have confided that although they were initially concerned about the effect that living in such a Jewishly remote place would have on their lives, they were in fact greatly enriched by the experience. In many cases they learned and observed far more here, because of the more public role that they had, than they were doing back in the centers of Orthodoxy from whence they came.

And yes, we in the *frum* community have a lot that we can learn from them. Getting to know people who walk six or seven miles to *shul* every *Shabbos*, or who have started from a non-existent knowledge of Hebrew and are now learning *Mishna* and *Daf Yomi*, folks who while continuing successful secular careers have turned over their lives to embrace *kashrus*, *Shabbos*, and *taharas hamishpacha*. Learning to appreciate the fellow who is moving towards observance and thus will not turn on the radio or heat in his car as he drives to *shul* on *Shabbos*, having turned down a contract worth hundreds of thousands of dollars because it was incompatible with sensitive Jewish values. The February edition of *The Jewish Observer* had a wonderful article, "Of Coats and Fires," that beautifully captured the struggle and search of our fellow Jews "out there." Imagine getting to know these people, not as a curiosity at your *Shabbos* table (a situation that many *baalei teshuva* detest being in), but as your neighbor, learning partner and friend. While they would so appreciate your sharing your Jewish "wealth" with them, they would in fact pay you back ten-fold in the inspiration that they would give to you!

Furthermore, this pioneering has an extraordinary effect on one's children. On a recent trip to *Eretz Yisroel*, I discussed the *chinuch* of my children with a very well-known *Rav* to whom I look for advice. I laid out the dilemma my wife and I are facing between continuing our work in Portland, and the sense that as they grow older, our children are not learning as much quantitatively as their cousins in New York and Yerushalayim. He assured me not to worry about this. "First of all," he said, "there is a well-known *beracha* that Rabbi Aharon Kotler זצ"ל gave to families who go out to be *marbitz* (disseminate) Torah, that their children will turn out well, that has come true countless times. But even on a purely rational level, it is evident that the terrible problems that many *frum* communities are now facing with 'dropout children' are almost nonexistent among families who spread Torah in smaller communities. The children get infused with an *esprit de corps*, a feeling that their parents, and

they themselves, are accomplishing something special, and they are proud to be models of *Yiddishkeit*. Constantly aware of the beauty of *Shabbos* and *Kashrus*, they never take it for granted. They learn to relate to other Jews with openness, love, and respect. So if they know a few less *Rashi's* or *Mishnayos* at this point, do not worry – that can be made up easily in time. But the life lessons they learn every day in Portland are priceless."

BROADENING ONE'S PERSPECTIVE

Which brings me to another benefit, which is crucially important in my view – the opportunity to get to know the "real world" of Jewish life, outside the cloistered world of New York and other large communities. The famous cliché of the narrow perspective of the "New Yorker," looking out at the rest of the country, is unfortunately all too real in a Jewish sense as well. When one lives outside

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that cocoon, and gets to know other Jews, one has a new appreciation for many of the great issues such as assimilation, intermarriage, apathy, continuity, and all of the other burning problems of Jewish society, and the people behind these otherwise faceless statistics. As stated earlier, real change can be brought about only by building relationships, not by pronouncements from on high, no matter how eloquent.

Readers of *The Jewish Observer* are no doubt aware of the obligation that each of us has to do something in this special time when the *nevu'a* (prophecy) has come true, when there is "a hunger in the land, not for bread or for water, but to hear the words of Hashem." According to a famous *psak* of Rabbi Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל, one is required to give *ma'aser*, 10% of one's time, to reaching out to others. May I quote one of the Torah giants of our generation, Rabbi Aharon Leib Shteinman, at a Lev L'Achim rally a few months ago, as appeared in the *Yated Ne'eman*:

"We have accomplished much, but there is still a tremendous amount of work ahead of us, and we need great *Siyata DiShmaya*. Know that he who participates in this effort will earn indescribable reward in the world to come.

"Rav Yisroel Salanter used to say that there are two ways to have a positive effect on others. When a person

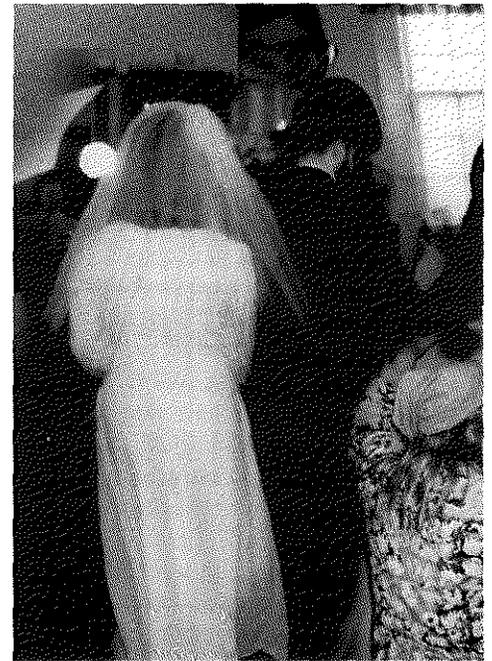
would sit down to learn Torah in Vilna, a Jew would be saved from committing a sin in Paris. Torah study affects *Am Yisroel* as a whole. Yet we see that this alone is not enough, for Rav Yisroel Salanter himself moved to Paris [in the late 1870's] to disseminate Torah knowledge among his fellow Jews in person. I am certain that it was not easy for him to live there, but this did not dissuade him. He did it purely for the sake of Heaven.

"We must follow Rav Yisroel Salanter's example. On the one hand, we should immerse ourselves in Torah study and cause the hearts of our wayward brothers to become more receptive to the beauty of Torah. On the other hand, we must also reach out to our brothers in the manner of the early prophets, who would travel from one city to another and spread knowledge of Hashem among the people."

To be sure, "moving to Paris" is not for everyone, and such decisions must be made in consultation with *Rabbe'im* and *chaveirim*. But much that is not being done can be accomplished if there is a will to do so. As follows:

THE OPPORTUNITIES ARE BECKONING

For those that have the aptitude or inclination, there is a great need for *rabbanim* and *kiruv* professionals



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in small communities. "Aptitude" refers to the capacity to function effectively as representatives of Torah in a non-observant milieu. Whatever degree of *hatzlacha* I have had here in Portland had less to do with my paltry abilities of *lomdus* and knowledge of Torah; more to do with my willingness to meet my fellow Jews where they were at, with love, tolerance and acceptance; and everything to do with *Siyata DiShmaya*. I would deeply encourage young couples to consider this way of life as immensely fulfilling. For an eye-opening account of what it is like, I highly recommend the wonderful book *Tales Out of Shul*, by Rabbi Emanuel Feldman.

For those who can do so, coming to live in a community can do wonders, as described above. Certain problems might be insurmountable, such as the need to provide a proper *chinuch* for one's children. But for young couples with kids younger than 8 or so, or for retired couples, this is not so much of an issue. In today's job market, where people often change employers every few years, a small community is as good a place as any to gain early experience later to be parlayed into a longer term career. And the heavenly benefits that accrue in the meantime are priceless.



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For those who cannot or do not want to leave the larger communities, one can participate in Torah Umesorah's "Partners in Torah," in which one can develop learning relationships, which have been enormous catalysts for changing lives. Whether doing this in person, or by phone through "TelePartners in Torah," one can do a world of good in one hour a week. We have several people in Portland who look forward eagerly to learning regularly with their "chavrusos" across the country, and I am sure that those feelings are reciprocal.

There are other programs, like SHARE - Shabbat Holiness and Recreational Experience - that bring together lay couples from larger communities with counterparts in smaller communities. We had the wonderful privilege of hosting such a program over four years ago, when a group of JEP volunteers (Zeirei Agudath Israel's outreach arm) visited us for a *Shabbos*. The effect was electrifying - it was an opportunity for people in Portland to meet business people like themselves who were friendly and successful, and who cared enough to travel here just to spend *Shabbos* with us. Bonds that were created that *Shabbos* are still strong to this very day.

"Sister Communities" is another

program that can bring great dividends in which a *shul* in a large community forms a "sibling" relationship with a small community, visiting each other, hosting each other, keeping in touch and sharing ideas and hopes and aspirations. This has been done effectively in Austin, Texas, among other places, and has great potential for further success.

To conclude, there is a tremendous opportunity before us. Many things that might have seemed impossible a few years ago, are no longer so. With the

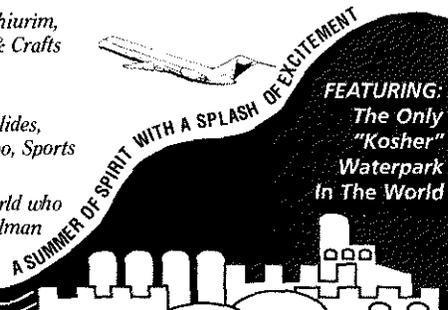
advent of technology, places are no longer so far away (it costs the same to call New York from Oregon as it does from Lakewood), and a new openness to Torah observance abounds. Let us see where each of us can make a difference in doing the tremendous *mitzva* of *pidyon shvuyim*, freeing captives: our brothers and sisters who are considered "Tinokos Shenishbu," captive souls, surely qualify. All of us can do our part, if only we have the will to do so! ■

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"What are you talking about?!" yelled a man in the far corner as he stared across the table at his study partner. "That's not what the *Gemora* is saying!"

"It's not?!" asked his partner, incredulous. "Of course it is!" his voice exploded. "Look at what Rashi says!"

Ignoring the challenge to consider Rashi, the first man began reciting the *Gemora*, insisting that the text was self-explanatory.

"Hello!" his partner yelled, trying to break in. "Rashi says!"

The man read louder, pounding the table with his fist.

The partner leaped to his feet. "Rashi says!"

I held my breath, expecting someone to step in and prevent an imminent fist-fight. Nobody looked up or budged. Someone broke into song and read the Talmud in a beautiful *Shabbos* melody.

An older man at my table nodded toward the fighting. "A few years ago my rabbi and I visited a yeshiva in Jerusalem," he told me. "As we entered, two *bachurim* were in the hall screaming at each other. I was horrified. 'Rabbi,' I said, 'What's going on? Doesn't the Torah enjoin us to love our neighbor as ourselves?' 'Of course!' he said, 'They are yelling and screaming *within* Torah!'"

Israel Goldman lives in Jerusalem. This is his first appearance in these pages.

I understood. Though a tumult, the room was not violent or chaotic but, with all of its energy, somehow driven. Torah (the whole of Scripture, Oral Law, and rabbinical exegesis) is not abstract. It propels and guides. Sometimes you go passionately, sometimes in song, but always with love for what is moving you and your fellow travelers.

A prospective convert to Judaism, I longed to read the Talmud, yell in Yiddish, and love words enough to fight over them, but with each visit to the yeshiva I grew more aware of how alien I was to Jewish learning.

The *kollel* men arrived for each day of study wearing black hats, black suits, white shirts, and ties, displaying a reverence for learning that I could not understand. They were also very disciplined. The products of a lifetime of yeshiva training, they sat and pored over complex texts for hours. The word yeshiva means, simply, "sitting." I could not sit for thirty minutes. Stranger still, they learned together, creating a kaleidoscopic core whose myriad voices and gestures churned toward and away from one another as if by a single, rotating hand. The *kollel* was different from the vast reading room of my university's library, where hundreds sat silently at desks or cubicles, each sealed within himself and his discipline, as though beneath his own sun, commanding his solitary destiny.

Learning Torah, I was discovering, was different from the very personal experience of reading literature. Torah means "teaching," but a literal root meaning can be "to shoot." If the joy of literature is being drawn into a story and knowing its hero, the challenge of Torah is grabbing hold of the lessons therein and "taking aim," ultimately to better know yourself. Interestingly, the Hebrew word for sin means literally "to

miss the mark."

Learning was no longer a solitary act of settling into a book and melding my intimate memories with its prose. It had become a very public-minded bid to meet my intimate memories and ask, "What sort of person have I been?"

YEARNING FOR BLACKNESS

Both of my parents were born in Boston in the late 1920's. After previous marriages, my father, a black from Cambridge, and my mother, a white from Dorchester, met in the racial and cultural freedom of the 1960's. In 1970, when I was three, they fled the city's nascent downward spiral into drugs and violence and moved to a suburb.

My mother's paternal grandfather was a sea captain, whose family had immigrated from England to Cape Cod in the 1600's. To remember that piece of myself I wore a shark's tooth scrimshawed with a whaling ship around my neck. My father's family descended from slaves in Florida and Georgia. I wore nothing to mark the Africans who begot us but cherished, instead, family stories that are echoes of slavery. My favorite is from 1947, when my father was twenty-two.

Like many returning veterans from the Second World War, my father was attending college on the GI Bill. He was in a public speaking class, and students were giving presentations on a subject of their choice. One spoke on the Negro's innate fear of whites.

After the speech, my father sat incredulous, glancing around the room. There were no comments or objections, even from the four other blacks. My father raised his hand.

"Yes?" called a voice from the rear.

"Sir, may I address the speaker?"

"Of course," returned the professor. My father stood. "Your major premise is that all Negroes fear white men."

"That is correct," said the serious, small man behind the lectern.

"A minor premise," My father suggested, "is that I am a Negro."

The man nodded.

"Another, that you are a white man."

"Obviously," he said.

"Then we must conclude that I fear you."

"Yes," he answered, unabashed.

Poised in the center of the class, my father was dressed exquisitely in a dark, woolen, shark skin suit, starched blue shirt, and tie. All sat turned in their chairs, staring up at him and scarcely breathing.

He tilted his head to one side and frowned. "Well, what if I took you outside and gave you a beating?!" his voice boomed. "What would your conclusion be then?!"

The room exploded with laughter. The professor was doubled over. My father was not laughing. His fists clenched at his sides, he stared for a long time at the man standing, mortified, at the front of the room.

Growing up, I had believed that my interracial identity gave me the best of both my parents' ancestries. As I matured, however, I chose one heritage over the other and claimed blackness as my eternal birthright. By college age, I had transformed my light complexion from the intriguing evidence of the union of two cultures into a sign of deep shame for not being as black on the outside as I strove to be within.

Like any boy, I longed to be my father and wove his life's stories into my unfolding life. The trials of one generation, however, achieve meaning through the next only if built upon, not exhumed. My father had fought to spare himself bitterness. Ironically, I was turning bitter. Preserving his dignity, he had confronted his enemies and had never needed to demonize them. Building a fantasy, I longed for enemies and created demons.

WORDS TOO ELEMENTAL FOR COMMENTARY

I entered the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in 1985 and was drawn into the black separatist culture strongly present on campus. The ideal that I and other blacks shared was to define ourselves spiritually through our skin color, a fantasy evoked through self-segregation.

It never seemed strange eating only with blacks in the campus dining halls or going only to black dances and parties at a place and time in our lives when we should have been most free. We believed that segregation was our one expression of freedom that white people had not already stolen.

"What do we want?!"

"Freedom!"

"When do we want it?!"

"Now!"

"What do we want?!"

"Freedom!"

"When do we want it?!"

"Now!"

During student demonstrations the word "Freedom!" filled my throat and reverberated in my ears. It was a powerful invocation. We screamed it with all of our being. Did we know, however, what freedom was or how to avail ourselves of it? Did we possess such an acute sense of its absence in our lives that we should scream for it? I did not, and searched in vain for such in the faces of my peers.

Julius Lester¹ emerged from years of civil rights activism, understanding the essence of freedom, and most blacks, students and colleagues alike, despised him for it. The victim of harassment from fellow professors within the African Studies Department, he relocated to Judaic and Near Eastern Studies at the end of my junior year.

Prior to his move, he said in a lecture

¹ Nearly twenty years ago, Julius Lester underwent a Conservative conversion. As lecturer and author, he inspired young people to seek genuinely spiritual lives. Many of those whom he taught were Jews, and some of them, like myself, were moved to later choose Torah observance, a decision for which each, I am sure, is grateful to Julius, yet because of which none, ironically, could legitimize his Jewishness.

one evening, "Freedom is a train on its tracks."

The one hundred students crammed into the old classroom silently stared up at him, unsure of his message. He stared back at us, his warm yet fiercely uncompromising gaze the only appropriate response to our incomprehension. His words were too elemental for commentary.

Watching this brown, very slender man with a knit yarmulke clipped atop his neatly parted hair, I could understand why so many resented his immense scholarship, authorship, and popularity as a lecturer. He was free and knew, as most did not, that a person's purpose in life could only be the discipline, toil, and sacrifice of laying tracks upon which the God-given vehicle that is himself could fly. He knew that true freedom lay beyond mere release from an unsavory thing, such as racism. Freedom was not life unrestrained, but bound and guided by devotion. He

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taught. We listened, uncomprehending. In turn, he silently gazed at us, knowing that he, as teacher, had done his job and hoping that we, someday, might do ours and lay long track across the vast earth of our souls.

GLASSES FOGGED WITH COFFEE

When I came home from college on semester breaks, my mother would exclaim, "Oh, Dear! How's my college boy? Tell me every little thing!"

I hated her queries and often answered as though on trial, with curt, colorless descriptions. Nothing she said was of value to me. I hung, however, on Dad's every word.

Unable to contain herself in the face of my coldness, she said one morning, "I know that you value nothing I say because I am white." We were standing in the kitchen, facing one another, the sink and counter between us.

I turned to the window behind the sink and held a cup of coffee to my lips. The aroma filled my nostrils. My glasses fogged as I breathed.

"Isn't that so?" she challenged.

I was silent.

"You always say that I don't understand," she said, her voice filling with emotion. "You say that I don't know." She moved closer, her head inches from my shoulder. "Well, what do you think I did all the years before you were born?!" she screamed.

I turned and glared at her.

"I'll tell you!" she cried, her eyes red and quivering as they searched mine. "I lived!"

**A NEW INTEGRALITY: NOT RACE
... BUT LOVE OF LEARNING**

I spent much of the years following college gathering the wayward arrows from the marks that I had missed and slowly washing myself of black separatism. The end of that process was the joy of becoming Jewish and joining a people whose integrality is not race but love of learning. Now, I am not sure what race to call myself. I am an Orthodox Jew and look much like a kollel man. Life is rich with the challenge of better knowing myself and giving freely of that intimate knowledge to my fellow Jews, my wife of one year and our new daughter. The sense of purpose that such a challenge inspires is not easily expressed in color. I think I shall call myself *yellow-white-silver-mahogany-brown-black-gray... and sky-blue, ringed with forest-green and severed cloud*, like the blur of a passing train on its tracks and the shrill stillness of the large world in its wake. ■

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“Kol Yisroel Areivim Zeh Lazeh”

A Stone's Throw From the Kosel

SHAVUOS, 5758

The aura of Shavuos entered our home early this year – even though it was still more than two weeks before Purim.

A busload of sixth graders, who attend different public or secular private schools but the same after-school Talmud Torah, were coming to New York for a JEP sponsored Shabbaton in Boro Park. The girls' two chaperons – the director of the Talmud Torah and one of her part-time teachers – were placed in our home.

The teacher, let's call her "Alyson," a graduate student in her early twenties, had been to Boro Park before, and was eager to introduce her not-yet-observant students to the joy and beauty of the Shabbos atmosphere in this Torah-true community.

During the conversation around our Shabbos table on Friday night, the topic of the anti-*chareidi* bias of the media in *Eretz Yisroel* came up. It was then that my family and I first learned that Alyson was not raised Orthodox.

Dr. Meir Wikler, a psychotherapist and family counselor in private practice, lives in Brooklyn, NY. He is a frequent contributor to these pages, most recently with, "The Casualties of Success: Why Some Successful People Fail as Parents," Nov. '98.

"Even though I really never knew or even met any religious Jews while I was growing up," Alyson shared with us, "I always had the highest respect for them... until I spent my junior year in Israel two years ago."

Alyson then went on to describe an episode that took place on Shavuos during her year of study at the Hebrew University. Her story left us stunned. And it reminded us how *Klal Yisroel* was only *zocheh* to receive the Torah by accepting responsibility for each other, the principle of *areivus*. (See *Shavuos* 39a for the principle of *areivus* and *Midrash Rabba* on *Shir Hashirim* 1,24 for the relevance of this principle to *Kabbalas HaTorah*.)

It was Shavuos, 5758. Alyson had heard that it was a not-to-be-missed experience to *daven* at the *Kosel* with the first *minyan* on Shavuos morning. She was planning to join an "egalitarian *minyan*" which was scheduled to meet at the back of the *Kosel* plaza.

Early Shavuos morning, while walking through the cool, dark Yerushalayim streets, Alyson experienced a rush of mixed emotions. On the one hand, she felt the thrill of excitement crescendo,

as the isolated pedestrians turned into trickles which grew into rushing streams, as they converged on the Old City. On the other hand, she was also somewhat apprehensive. A few of her friends had warned Alyson that the "egalitarian *minyan*," barely a stone's throw from the *Kosel*, would not only be unwelcome, but it might even be unsafe.

In spite of her misgivings, she continued as planned to join her group. Most of what took place that morning is now history, splashed across the front pages of every Jewish newspaper around the world.

Even though a band of police surrounded the group that Alyson joined, angry taunts and insults were hurled at them from some thoughtless, young *chareidim*. "Why are they so angry with us?" Alyson wondered, oblivious to the pain and anguish caused by her group's presence at the *Kosel*, totally unaware of the sacrilege in which she was participating.

Then objects replaced words, and Alyson was shocked to see people throwing food and plastic bags of chocolate milk, one of which landed and splattered dangerously close to the *sefer Torah*. Again, Alyson asked herself, "Why are they acting this way?"

As the crowd raised their voices, someone lifted a rock and threw it into the group, striking Alyson on the head! In her confusion, terror and anger, she burst into tears. "Why on earth are they treating us this way?" Alyson silently demanded.

Soon afterwards, Alyson's group dispersed and she waited at the entrance gate for a friend with whom to walk back to town. She was still very shaken, numb and very perplexed about the entire episode. "How could Jews, especially religious Jews, treat their fellow Jews that way?" Alyson wondered to herself. Her formerly positive attitudes toward Orthodoxy, in general, and *chareidim*, in particular, lurched in the opposite direction.

Just then, a young, unmistakably *chareidi* man, approached Alyson and asked, "Were you part of that group *davening* at the back of the plaza, this morning?"

Alyson, still traumatized, only nodded, affirmatively.

"Well, I would like to apologize to you on behalf of the Orthodox community for the treatment you received today. I truly hope you realize that we don't all advocate or even condone violence. And we certainly don't hate you. I believe that you were sincerely trying to practice Judaism as best as you know how. You were horribly mistreated. Please accept my apology for what happened."

Speechless, Alyson again could only nod, affirmatively.

On the way home, Alyson reflected to herself on the stranger's apology. "It was as if he reversed the entire incident!"

Two years later, recounting the episode at our *Shabbos* table, Alyson added, "The apology was so meaningful to me. I was deeply touched by it. That man had no idea that I had been hit by a rock. And then he came along and showed me another side of Orthodoxy. Had I left without hearing his apology, I know that I would not be *dav-*

ening in an Orthodox synagogue at home today. As a result of his kind words, I learned that while some Jews burn bridges, others build them.

One anonymous, religious Jew felt a sense of responsibility for another, not-yet-observant Jew. He couldn't leave the *Kosel* without expressing an apology, hoping that his words would offset the impact of others' thoughtlessness. Did he know his words would have so much impact? Did he realize that his sincerity and concern would eventually propel Alyson into the warm embrace of authentic *Yiddishkeit*? Could he possibly envision that his warmth and kindness would result, two years later, in Alyson's leading a bus-load of public-school-attending Jewish children on a JEP *Shabbaton* in Boro Park?

If he reads these pages, let him be gratified to learn how far his words traveled. "*Devarim hayotz'im min halev nichnasim el halev* – words that emanate from the heart penetrate the heart."

But even if that anonymous, sensitive and caring *Yid* never learns the rest of the story, we can learn from his example what it means to truly feel a sense of *achrayus* – that same feeling of *areivus* which merited us the glorious privilege of receiving the Torah on *Har Sinai*. ■

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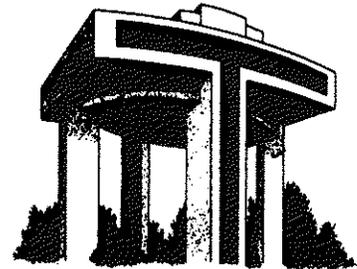
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Redeeming the First Born... and Then Came the Tears

Alex stood in the *Beis Hamidrash*; it was seven years since his Bar Mitzva and seven years since he had stood in a *Beis Hamidrash*. He seemed both self-conscious, and at a loss as to what to do with himself.

When he entered, his grandfather had given him a *Siddur* that he now held tentatively, and out of the corner of his eye he furtively glance at the swaying young men *davening* all around him. It was *Ma'ariv*, and Alex was, well, "trapped," or less aggressively, "stuck" in the Kollel.

So, what was 20-year-old Alex doing in a Kollel – trying to fit in with the *shokelling*, trying to make out the words printed on the *Siddur* page? Simple; he was waiting for his *pidyon haben* to take place. Obviously, he was embarrassed to be caught in this awkward place, and just as obviously bewildered.

From my vantage in the small kitchen off the Kollel *Beis Midrash*, I could see this tall, personable and discomfited young man, and tears of wonder and gratitude rose to my eyes. Around this obviously Russian, assimilated-into-Israeli-society immigrant were "Old World," young, Jewish Kollel men... the kind that the Inquisadors tried to burn out of Iberia, the kind that Stalin and the Bolsheviks tried to rid for Mother Russia, the kind that Hitler tried to erase altogether – and the kind that *Hashem* in His great overwhelming *chesed* saved.

It was *Shemoneh Esrei*, and Alex looked around at the swaying, silent men

Mrs. Dolinger lives in Ashdod, where her husband, Rabbi Shaul Dolinger, is *Rosh Yeshiva* of Kiryat Chinuch/Pri Etz Chaim. She is a frequent contributor to various Jewish publications.

– some about his age, and some older, some with short jackets, some long, some with long swinging *peyos*, nearly all bearded, all black-hatted and deep into their own thoughtful worlds.... Where was he, in some kind of time warp? Wasn't this the year 2000? *No, Alex; it's 5760, and the way of life denied to you, your parents and your grandparents is alive and well.*

Natasha, Alex's mother, and his grandmother stood beside me; his father wouldn't come; he didn't believe in this stuff. "Sasha," whispered his mother, referring to her eldest son by his pet name, "he almost didn't come. He was afraid to."

I glanced at her, surprised. What is there to be afraid of, at a *pidyon haben*? Then I realized how utterly nothing they knew of the wealth of which they were robbed.

To have and to have lost is, indeed, a tragedy. But to have had – and not to have *known* that one had, and to have lost – that is even worse. What a terrible trick to be cheated in that way! And here, in the world in which Alex was living – secular Israeli/Russian society – the stability and the inner peace of a Torah life was light years away. In Alex's world, no one was righting this wrong; they didn't see anything wrong. At the age of 20, twelve of which he had been in *Eretz Yisroel*, in university, one foot in the army, swimming well in the cyberseas, outreach programs were far, far away.

Even Natasha, who has been on the yeshiva's staff for so many years as a social worker, had little idea of what a *pidyon haben* was – except that it was an

important ceremony that needed to take place in the life of her first-born son. Even if he was already twenty. So I explained the basic idea, talked about the *kohanim*, mentioned the *avoda* in the *Beis Hamikdash*, and expressed a deep yearning to see it with my own eyes.

Natasha and her mother were spellbound – and saddened. Spellbound by the glory and the grandeur that once was ours, and saddened that it is gone – and they, never having known anything, are so bereft and torn away without even a collective memory. Natasha looked at her son who looked so out of place. There was an ache for him in her eyes; as if she wanted to shield the once-little boy from whatever pain he must be feeling, and clasp him to her heart.

This was the drama in the kitchen. In the Kollel, *Ma'ariv* was over and there was a hollow "knock" on a *shtender*. "Rabbosai," said a voice, "please bring your chairs into the *Ezras Nashim*. We will now celebrate Alex's *pidyon haben*." The rustling and scraping of chairs carried from a large room into a smaller one, and then settled into silence. Alex had been borne away by the Kollel *Yungeleit* and was momentarily lost from our anxious view. When he surfaced, he was sitting between the *Rosh Hayeshiva* and the *kohein*, and opposite his beaming grandfather.

Crowded around a long table laden with bread, cakes and cookies, as well as grape juice and soda, were the men of the Kollel, two and three deep. Normally, they would run off right after *Ma'ariv*, but a *pidyon haben* was a very special occasion. The *kohein* arose, came into our little enclave in the kitchen, and washed his hands for *Hamotzi*; the ceremony was underway.

Clearly and deliberately, the *kohein* guided Alex through the strange and uncharted waters of a ritual he knew nothing of. The *Yungeleit* were rapt, we three ladies held our breath, and when Alex brokenly said the *beracha* of "*She-hecheyanu*," the tears finally came. Yes, *Hashem*, I too, am grateful to You that I have witnessed the rebirth of us, Your people. ■

It's 4:30 P.M. DO YOU KNOW WHERE MY MOMMY IS?

To my dear friend "Super Mom,"

Whenever I meet you, you question me, "Aren't you going crazy? You mean you actually stay home with your kids? What do you do all day? Isn't it boring? Don't they drive you nuts? I could never do it," you tell me. "*Baruch Hashem*, I have to go to work."

Yes, my dear friend, I am no "Super Mom."

Yes, I know in "2000" a mother has no place if her place is at home.

But, yes, I do stay at home with my kids.

Yes, I do take them out of their cribs in the morning and say "*Modeh Ani*" with them.

Yes, I do wash their *negel vasser* in the morning.

Yes, I do feed them their Cheerios.

Yes, I clean up after them and get them dressed.

Yes, I diaper the baby.

Yes, I make lunch for my son, hug him, *bentch* him to be successful in his day's learning, and send him off to yeshiva.

Before my little daughter eats breakfast, we make a *beracha* together.

Yes, I read her a story while she is eating.

No, I am not in a rush to get out of the house.

Yes, we have time to color together



and listen to Uncle Moishy.

Yes, we peel the potatoes together for the vegetable soup. She puts the barley in the pot after we checked it for bugs.

No, she does not go to school yet. She is 4 years old.

Yes, I know she should be in school already and be one of thirty or more.

You're right, she should be learning. I know she needs the stimulation and friends. "It's boring at home."

But, she also stays home. She stays home with her mommy. She also "does nothing all day." She cleans the table with a *shpritzer*. She dries the silverware. She counts the potatoes for the *kugel*. She watches the yeast rise. She colors her own picture on ordinary white paper. She makes the sun green and the grass yellow. She is four, but she stays home. Mommy taught her the *Aleph-Beis*. She sings to her baby brother when Mommy is busy making beds in the morning.

Yes, I make the beds. I clean the toi-

let. I do the laundry.

Yes, "I" take my "kids" outside and "watch" them play.

Yes, we do chase birds and look for cats. We rake the leaves. It is quite "boring."

Yes, I do build Lego. The other day we made a snake. It crawled all around the room.

Yes, there are days that I get down. But, yes, I do stay home.

Yes, I am there to greet my son when he comes home. Yes, I am the one who gives him the kiss. Yes, I am the one who gives him cookies with milk.

Yes, I review the *Aleph-Beis* with him.

Yes, my dear friend, I stay home.

Yes, I try to read them a story at supertime. Last night it was about Choni Hamagol.

Yes, we *bentch* when we finish eating. I know I am strange. But I do stay at home.

Yes, I do lose my patience. I do get angry. I do yell at times. Sometimes I yell too much. I know I shouldn't. But, I still stay home.

My dear friend, I am no Super Mom. I am not a school teacher. I don't have a business. I am not a seamstress. I am neither a doctor nor a dentist. I am neither an office manager nor a speech therapist. I am neither a child psychologist nor a reading specialist. I am neither an artist nor a writer. Yet I do all of the above. I have no degree. I have no profession. I don't work full time or part time. No, I will not be able to attend the *Chessed Elyon* symposium tomorrow night, I have no time for speeches or teas. My kids need me. Sometimes my house gets to be a mess. The laundry isn't always folded on the spot. I have no dream dining room. What else should I tell you?

Yes, "I do nothing all day."

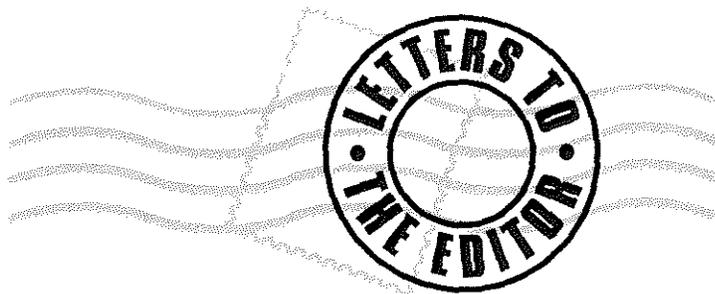
I stay home. I am a mother.

Yours truly,

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"BUYING TIME" WHEN THERE IS NONE

I read most of the November issue the week of the funeral of a teenager who overdosed on drugs. This is the second instance in less than a year of a death due to drug overdose that I am aware of in yeshiva circles.

Perhaps this is why the article, "Buying Time," didn't sit well with me. Years ago, a sports hero died of his first encounter with crack. There was "no time left to buy." The idea of holding one's breath for a few years until the child "comes to his senses," while doing what one can, not to aggravate the situation, and encouraging the child at the same time, is not practical and not enough! No, everyone does not settle down eventually. Some become pot-heads or heroin addicts. Some despair and attempt suicide. Some die.

A situation in which a child is expelled from one yeshiva after another, is a stranger to his parents, has to have it explained why he has to be home before 4 a.m., no *tefillin*, *tzitzis* etc. is an *emergency*. And no, it is highly unlikely that "something must have happened at some point that caused this," and that the child changed his mindset "dramatically." It is rarely the case. Almost inevitably, it was a *process* that took a long time in developing. The emphasis must be an awareness of a problem in the making, and learning how to stop it, although I realize that the article is addressed to those in a situation which got out of hand.

Three suggestions on how to buy time and what to do in that time were made: 1) having the child speak to someone, 2) structuring the child's life, 3) working on the relationship in as pleasant a manner as possible.

The suggestions in the article don't fit with the scenario presented in the beginning of the article. They sound more appropriate with a child not that far gone, because how can a parent "create some sort of schedule" with a child who responds to "the slightest comment or question you pose" with "an explosive and angry response," or get him to talk to anyone? And nowadays, a teenager who is a stranger to his parent is almost definitely involved in harmful and illegal activities.

I would have liked to have seen other points mentioned, such as the parents, independent of the problem child's issue, making improvements in their own lives. This could include absentee parents making home their priority, fathers going to *shiurim* and being seen learning at home, running a child-centered *Shabbos* table, getting rid of televisions, computers, and newspapers, playing games with one's children, going on a family trip, getting rid of any help other than cleaning help and avoiding having them around when the children are home, doing homework with younger children, shutting off the phone from when the kids come home from school until nine o'clock or later, etc. If a teen is still living at home, a change in the home environment will go a long way towards impacting on him, even when not directly affecting him.

MRS. Y. HOMNICK
Brooklyn

AUTHOR'S RESPONSE

I have read Mrs. Homnick's letter and find some of her assertions to be accurate. I would, however, question the

effectiveness of her approach in the circumstances described. I would like to review both her letter and the article "Buying Time" in order to clarify some of these issues.

The letter mentions the fact that two deaths due to drug overdose have occurred in yeshiva circles in less than a year. While these deaths were certainly tragic, we cannot allow our treatment of all "problem" children to be driven by a panicked fear that they will die of drug overdoses. It has unfortunately become common for rebellious youth to experiment with illegal drugs. Fortunately, only a small percentage will become hard core addicts or die of drug overdose. As I wrote in the article, every case must be treated differently. Some are involved in more harmful activities than others, and may need to be treated in a professional facility. Others may not. I have worked with many troubled youths, including many who have experimented with drugs, and have found the method of "buying time" to be an effective one, even in such cases. Many eventually returned to the Torah path.

Mrs. Homnick writes that holding one's breath until a child comes to his senses while trying not to aggravate the situation is "not enough." This is certainly true. It must be acknowledged, however, that the range of options available may be severely limited. There is rarely a magic formula to immediately remake the child in the image we'd prefer to see. In dealing with such situations, the focus cannot be on whether or not a given approach is "enough," but rather on whether or not it is the most effective one, given the actual circumstances, and whether it is likely to actually aggravate the problem and make it worse. I would not classify the different suggestions mentioned in the article as "holding your breath," but rather as realistic ways to deal with the problem, given the inherent limitations of these situations. We must accept that until the child does come to his senses, it will just accelerate his descent if we continue to try to forcefully change what the child has now become. Yes, a child

who comes home at 4 a.m., doesn't don *tefillin*, etc. is an emergency, but such a child still needs to be dealt with carefully. Encouraging the child, while maintaining a "hands off" approach, and all the while closely monitoring his course may not be "enough," but may be the only way to deal with an emergency of this nature.

Scheduling the Recalcitrant Youth

Mrs. Homnick asks, How can a parent create some sort of schedule with a child who responds to the slightest

comment with an angry or explosive response? The answer is that this is where "having the child speak with someone" comes in. This means anyone who can be an intermediary in the communication process. I have personally worked with, taught, and had living in my home kids who have been angrily and explosively opposed to their parents and home, but have been able to "create some sort of schedule" and bought for themselves and their parents not just months but years of time.

Mrs. Homnicks' final points about the need for parents to make improve-

ments in their own lives are valid ones. She correctly points out that the underlying causes of such situations are likely a process that took along time in developing. As she correctly noted, however, "the article is addressed to those in a situation which got out of hand. It is these situations that I refer to as representing a dramatic change in the child's mindset. This change can frequently be attributed to a specific time or event, and can actually take place relatively quickly. In light of the magnitude of this change in mindset, the approach implied by Mrs. Homnick is "not enough." Though "a change in the home environment" would have gone "a long way towards impacting on him" before that dramatic moment, it does not go nearly as far after the dramatic change has taken place. The method described in my article is geared towards coping with this dramatically changed situation.

In conclusion, the object of the article "Buying Time" was this: when the situation is out of hand, and you're at a loss and don't know what to do, don't panic. There is hope. And the way for parents to survive it is to correctly assess where the child is mentally and emotionally *right now* and to implement the different methods to buy this crucial time.

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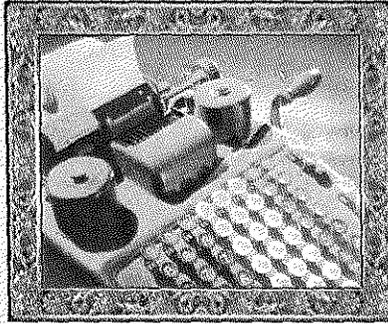
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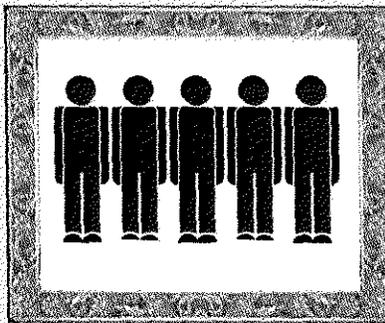
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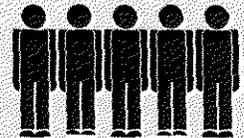
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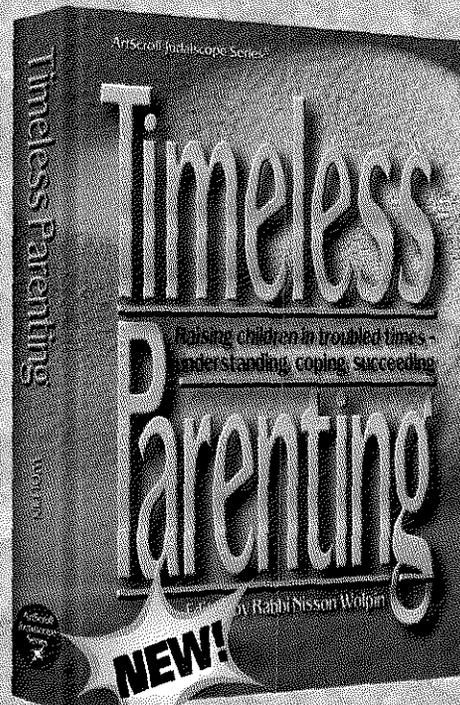
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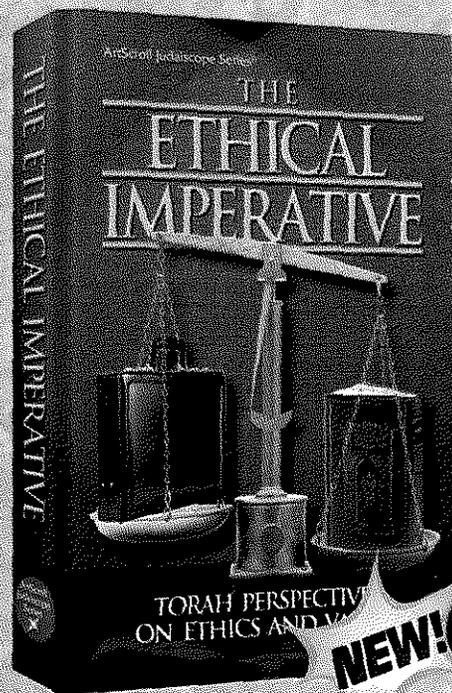
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