

THE Jewish *72* OBSERVER

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*Germany,
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*The Last
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A Purim Essay

YAAKOV SHLOMO WEINBERG



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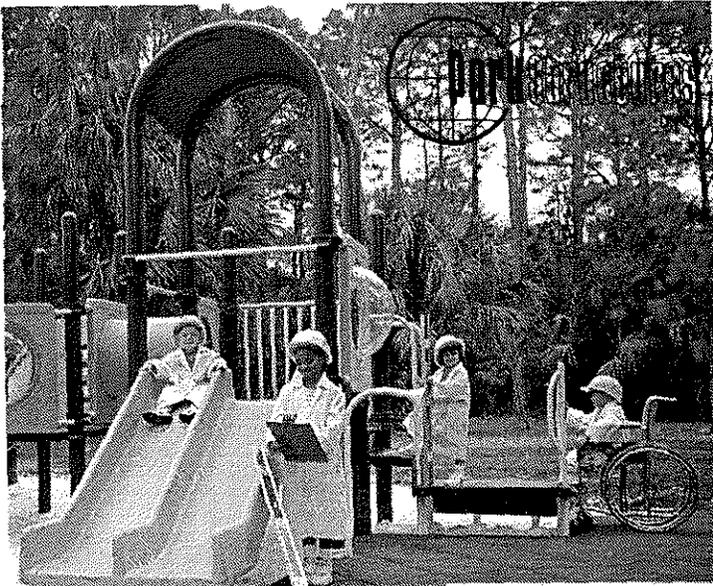
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Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Shabbos		
July 1 יד תמוז Departure From New York	July 2 טו תמוז Arrival In Israel Orientation	July 3 טז תמוז Gilo, Abu Tour Nachalat Shiva Machane Yehuda Meah Shearim	July 4 יז תמוז Touring 4 Shuls in Old City Museum of תולדות מינחה כותל	July 5 יח תמוז Regular סדר Guest שיעור Swimming at Beach	July 6 יט תמוז IN SHABBOS מוצאי שבת Armon Hanatziv & Tayelet בית יום Swimming in Parshas פונט		
5 DAY TOUR TO THE NORTH							
July 7 כ תמוז Night Safari, קסידו Outlook from the Carmel Muchkara, Druzim Market מערות אילון	July 8 כא תמוז Rosh Hanukra Acko Horseback Riding	July 9 כב תמוז Night Boat Ride Miron, Arnuka, Tzfat Tiberias	July 10 כג תמוז Speed Boating, ירוק The Good Fence, Bonyas, Katzrin, Mitzpan Gadot, Kayaking in Jordan River	July 11 כד תמוז Mitzpa Hoshaya, Donkey Riding, Hamat Gader, Mitzpa Yarmuch, Crocodile Zoo, Beit Alfa Old Shul	July 12 כה תמוז Short סדר Day Off	July 13 לו תמוז OFF SHABBOS שבת מרובים מחם אב Parshas מטות-מסעי	
July 14 כז תמוז Return to Camp Regular סדר Swimming in בית יום	July 15 כח תמוז Sightseeing on Motor Bikes from Burma to Latrun	July 16 כט תמוז Mountain Rappelling Gush Dan Area, Beit HaItzot Shalom Tower, Wax Museum Old Jaffa, Swimming at Beach	July 17 א אב Tour of Old City, Carmel Hordwan Quarter ראש השני	July 18 ב אב Camping, Excavating מזבזי יהודה	July 19 ג אב Regular סדר Guest שיעור Sports	July 20 ד אב IN SHABBOS מוצאי שבת Pizza in Center One Parshas ויקרא	
July 21 ה אב 6 Day War Kotel Ammunition Hill Mt. Scopus Biblical Zoo	July 22 ו אב קבר דודל & מערות אילון Afternoon Learning	July 23 ז אב Southern Wall Excavations Yad V'shem	July 24 ח אב Land of the נביאים Museum Mincha at the כותל קטן & שיעור על חזו"ן	July 25 ט אב מושב מזורז Mincha at the כותל Fast Day תשעה באב	July 26 י אב Regular סדר Guest שיעור Sports	July 27 יא אב IN SHABBOS מוצאי שבת Bar-B-Que Parshas ואחרי	
5 DAY TOUR TO THE SOUTH							
July 28 יב אב Yad Mordechai Ashkelon Beach & Hotel	July 29 יג אב Chofetz Chaim Park Beit Jubrin Hotel in Arad	July 30 יד אב Masada With Sunrise נשר ודד & Ein Gedi Arbotavim Caves Hotel Eilat	July 31 טו אב Underwater Museum ודד וקודו Parasailing/Banana Boat Red Canyon	Aug 1 טז אב Tirna Park Mitzpa Ramon Ein Ovdot מערות הקמח	Aug 2 יז אב Short סדר Day Off	Aug 3 יח אב OFF SHABBOS שבת תלמוד Parshas עקב	
Aug 4 יט אב Return to Camp Regular סדר Swimming in בית יום	Aug 5 כ אב 2 DAY CAMPING ח.אחיל אכרוד ארץ בר אשית Camel Rides in Vady Ket		Aug 6 כא אב Gush Etzyon Stalagmite Cave Fire Scrolls טל עירום & סירום	Aug 7 כב אב Swimming in Hertzella Beach	Aug 8 כג אב Regular סדר Field Day	Aug 9 כד אב Regular סדר Guest שיעור Sports	Aug 10 כה אב IN SHABBOS שבת ס Parshas
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Rabbi Shlomo Lorencz, prepared for publication by Sorah Shapiro

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The changing Jewish scene, which features so much that is exciting and encouraging, also unfortunately offers many occasions for upset, shock and dismay. Just as every individual has a fully array of responses to each situation, so too does a journal of thought and opinion. Salutory events invite comments of encouragement, celebration, and invitation to emulate an inspiring model. And exposure to negative occurrences triggers correction, reprimand, caution, and at times rejection or outright ridicule.

While *leitzanus* (mockery) is generally frowned upon by Chazal (Rabbis of the Talmud), they do prescribe it as a tool for deflating the fraudulent self-importance of *avoda zora* (idolatry) and other unworthy contenders for our allegiance and belief.

Does that mean that mockery is a course to pursue whenever a seemingly suitable target rears its head? Are not, perhaps, different responses meant for different situations? Isn't it possible that at times, when our remarks are meant for ourselves, to correct or modify our own perspective on phenomena and events, one mode of conduct is prescribed; and when our words are aimed at communicating our point of view and our values to others, another type of expression would be in place?

In the pages that follow, **Rabbi Shlomo Lorencz**, who faithfully represented *Zeirei Agudath Israel* in the Israeli *Knesset* for many decades, shares with the readers of *The Jewish Observer* his thoughts and experiences on this ever-relevant issue. This article is a free translation by Sorah Shapiro, of Brooklyn, of an essay by Rabbi Lorencz, which appeared in the Kislev 5757 (Dec. '96) issue of *Zeirei Agudath Israel's* magazine, *Digleinu*. Rabbi Lorencz is objecting to the satirical rhetoric employed by a group of Orthodox Jews in condemning an anti-Torah Shabbos program on Israeli public broadcasting.

The Voice of Jacob

How to Articulate Our Interests Effectively, With Everything to Gain, Suffering No Loss to Our Dignity

WITH A PREFACE OF LOVE

By nature I am not—and with rare exception, have I ever wanted to be—one to criticize or to castigate. Even now, when I must address a serious problem facing Orthodox Jewry, I do so for the sole purpose of sharing what I have been privileged to acquire through many years of close association with *talmidei chachamim*, and to fulfill the dictum, "*Al timna tov mib'olov*—Do not withhold good from one who deserves it" (*Mishlei* 3,27).

The Ponevezher Rav, Rabbi Yoseif Kahaneman זצ"ל, noted a profound insight in the *pasuk* in *Vayaitzei* where Yaakov Avinu instructs Lavan's shepherds, "*Hein od hayom gadol...* It is yet high day. It is not time to gather the cattle. Go water and feed the sheep" (*Bereishis* 29,7):

An apparent wayfarer appears on the scene and presumes to give orders to people he has never before seen or met. Even more salient is their reply. They don't raise their voices in rebuke, as did the Sodomites, who said of Lot: "Ha'eched ba lagur vayishpote she-

This article was translated from Hebrew and prepared for publication by Sorah Shapiro, a free-lance writer who lives in Brooklyn, NY. Her article, "*Shalach Manos*, Thoughtful Giving," was featured in *JO* March '96.

fot.... *This one came to visit and now he wants to be a judge*" (Bereishis 19,9). Nor do they ask, "Mi samcha l'ish sar v'shofeit aleinu?—Who made you for a judge over us?" (Shemos 2,14), as was asked of Moshe Rabbeinu. The shepherds simply explain to Yaakov why they cannot heed his advice.

Yaakov's words do not elicit scorn, explained the *Ponevezher Rav* ל"א, because they are preceded by a warm "Achai, me'ayin attem? — My brothers, from where are you?" From Yaakov's tone of voice and sincerity, the shepherds perceived his infinite love of mankind.

May the foregoing serve as a preface to what follows, which also emanates from a heart brimming with love for my brethren.

RESPONDING TO BLASPHEMERS AND FOOLS

The soul-piercing anguish each of us experiences when our holy Torah and *mitzvos* are violated defies description. Nothing is more painful than attacks on our sacred heritage. Regrettably, the present perpetrators are Jewish disaffiliates, who have no regard for either our forefathers or our tradition, and remain indifferent to the suffering their evil creates in those whose life is woven in the tapestry of Torah.

As if the founder of the Meretz party had not done enough damage with her vociferous vilifications of Torah, the public blasphemy has become compounded through regular anti-Torah *Shabbos* programs on Israeli public broadcasting. I am at a loss to describe the gravity of the situation.

The Ponevezher Rav once remarked that he could never serve in the *Knesset*, because he did not own enough garments to rend for each sacrilegious statement made there.

Chazal say about the Jewish people: "This nation is compared to the earth and to the stars. When they fall, they sink to the earth; but when they rise, they soar to the stars" (Megilla 16).

But my purpose here is not to discuss the broadcasts or the broadcasters. As the wisest of all men, Shlomo Hamelech, said, "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, lest you become equal to him" (Mishlei 26,4). The *Vilna Gaon* com-

ments on this: "Lest you become equal to him, i.e. if you argue with him." The *Metzudas Dovid* says, "If you answer him in kind, listeners will equate you with him; i.e. since they will not be able to discern between what the two of you are saying, they will consider you equally foolish." (The *Gemora* advises one not to argue with an *apikores*, lest he become an even greater disbeliever; see *Sanhedrin* 38.) I therefore address my remarks to the response and the responders.

I can judge my religious brethren favorably because I understand what motivated them in their satirical counter-attack. It is the heartache we all endure when such unprecedented defamation is directed toward our *mesorah* (tradition). But, in my humble opinion, the words of the *Kuzari* to the king of the *Kuzrim*, "Your intentions are justified, but your actions are not," are quite applicable here.

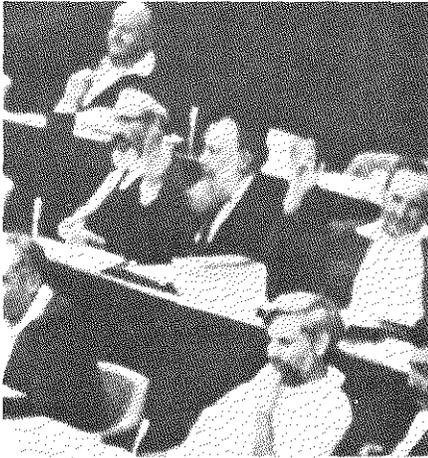
Chazal, as well as later *gedolim*, explain the next passage in *Mishlei*, "Anei kesil k'ivalto.... Answer the fool according to his folly" (Ibid., v. 5), as excluding the *apikores*; nevertheless, some Orthodox individuals misinterpreted this verse to justify their campaign against the broadcasters. These religious Jews, determined to defend the honor of our forefathers by denouncing and defaming the secularists, independently decided that nothing less than a measure-for-measure counter-attack would force the *apikorsim* to grasp the magnitude of their egregiousness, and to realize that we are capable of retaliating to an even greater degree. I was deeply troubled by the satirical language and mockery they used against our noncommitted brethren. [When we were young we were taught that the Creator caused a circumlocution of eight letters in the Torah* rather than utter an unrefined expression (Pesachim 3a).]

* A single word, "unclean," would save eight letters in the Hebrew text (Bereishis 7,2).

I can judge my religious brethren favorably because I understand what motivated them. It is the heartache we all endure when such unprecedented defamation is directed toward our *mesorah* (tradition). But, in my humble opinion, the words of the *Kuzari* to the king of the *Kuzrim*, "Your intentions are justified, but your actions are not," are quite applicable here.

When Yaakov Avinu deluded his father, *Yitzchak*, into believing that he is *Eisav*, *Yitzchak* said, "Hakol kol Yaakov v'hayodayim yedei Eisav—The voice is that of Yaakov, but the hands are those of Eisav" (Bereishis 27,22). The question is raised as to why Yaakov did not imitate *Eisav's* voice. The answer: Yaakov knew that donning *Eisav's* external trappings, the beautiful clothing and skins, posed no threat to his spirituality, but assimilating *Eisav's* crude speech would be internalizing his brother's quintessence—an act, however brief, Yaakov chose to avoid even at the risk of forfeiting his father's blessings.

Many years of pragmatic experience and contact with *gedolim* have taught me practical halachic guidelines for defending Torah. The only proper approach is one predicated on Torah—where unsullied speech, the *kol Yaakov*, is a bedrock basic. Confronting our heretical brethren in savage vernacular—or satire—not only fails to bring them closer to us, but, on the contrary, estranges



them even more. Only by adhering to the well-trodden path of our predecessors can we expect to achieve success. Failure results in a double debacle: our words fail, and we become poisoned by our own venom.

Chazal interpret "Ve'ohavta es Hashem..., She'yehei shem Shamayim misahev al yadcha..." (Yuma 86), which instructs us to express our love for G-d by inspiring others to love Him, implying that one should learn and re-learn Torah, minister to talmidei chachamim, and speak gently. How is person who does so regarded? "Fortunate is his father who taught him Torah. Fortunate is his teacher who taught him Torah. Woe to the person who doesn't learn Torah. How pleasant are the ways of one who learns Torah. How praiseworthy are his actions." (Ibid.) Of such a person the pasuk says, "You are my servant, through whom I am glorified" (Yishayahu 49,3).

But what is said of the one who learns Torah and serves talmidei chachamim, but does not deal honestly, and does not speak gently with others? "Woe to his father who taught him Torah. Woe to his teacher who taught him Torah...."

It would seem, then, that the cautionary words of our *Gedolim* about being mindful of our speech should be a guiding principle in life.

CALCULATING LOSS AGAINST GAIN

One cannot help but to stand in awe of the thousands—perhaps tens of thousands—of *baalei teshuva* emerging from all four corners of the earth in the last several

decades. Even before delving into Torah study, they willingly joined a society they believe to exemplify "Fortunate is his father...." What effect could the new unorthodox mode of speech have on these newcomers, and others waiting in the wings to follow in their wake, but to disenchant and alienate them?

Sarcasm, mockery, ridicule, satirical expression—to employ these in public discourse as a means of winning the hearts and minds of others is antithetical to Jewish tradition and anomalous to a Jew's *neshama*.

Allow me to share an anecdote: I joined the Knesset on the encouragement of the Chazon Ish, who acceded to my request that he review each of my speeches in advance. Once, before a debate on the re-election of Chaim Weitzmann for his second term, I was pressed for time and couldn't visit the tzaddik of Bnei Brak to show him my manuscript. I asked my friend, Reb Shimon Siroka, ש"ר, to go in my stead, and I headed for the Knesset, where I registered to speak.

When my name was called, and I was about to step up to the podium, someone handed me a telegram. It was from Reb Shimon. It read, "The Chazon Ish feels you should not deliver this talk." I immediately stepped down and returned to my seat.

The next day I went to the Chazon Ish and asked him what he had found objectionable about my speech (which I had thought was quite good). He replied that a representative of Agudas Yisroel must be able to anticipate the efficacy of his remarks. Since my words were somewhat caustic, he felt they would have accomplished little more than to humiliate the noncommitted Knesset members and arouse their animosity. We must always calculate loss against gain, reward against penalty, he cautioned.

It is indeed because Agudath Israel's years of civil service have been deeply rooted in the tenets of our religion that we have earned the respect and envy of the non-religious parties—even though they disagree with our views. In fact, about 15 years ago, in one of their meetings, the Liberal party leaders commented that if they could parallel the accomplishments of Agudath Israel, they would be more worthy of their

party's name. Other factions have expressed much the same sentiments.

Similarly, Rabbi Shmuel Wosner (may he have a speedy recovery) told me about an article he saw in a publication of the Mesaknei Hadaas, who were later called the Neologues—Reform Jews who sought to reconstruct Judaism. After the death of the *Chasam Sofer* (who was one of their major antagonists—s.s.), they eulogized him as the "heavenly Jew who fought against us in supernatural ways." Should we not project a similar image?

SPEAKING THE WISDOM OF OTHERS, FOR OTHERS

This essay was born of a burning obligation to convey what I have gleaned from the *gedolim* during the last 50 years of my public service—their perspectives, their peerless ways, their patience in guiding new appointees. I cannot be like a prophet who withholds his prophecy. From all that I have heard and seen, the fundamental principle is this: We need not—and must not—ever relinquish our traditional standard of speech, our *Kol Yaakov*. We must not emulate the secularists, for their way of life is not our way of life; their values are not our values.

I must admit that this once I departed from my custom of not criticizing, but I had to assert not only my protest, but that of *bonei Torah* and especially of the silent majority. I hope my words resonate with the love I feel for *Klal Yisroel*. It is indeed because of this love that I made the difficult decision to publicize these views. I purposely did not publish this message previously when the matter was in its prime, because I needed time to weigh and measure my words, and to avoid being caught in the web of a debate. I want to emphasize that it is not my intention to offend anyone, particularly since it is abundantly obvious that everyone acted *l'shem Shamayim*. But, as it says in *Tehillim*, "Shegiyos mi yavin ministaros nakeini—Who can discern errors? From unperceived faults cleanse me" (19,13). ■

How inclusive are our schools? Should the students of our Yeshivos, Bais Yaakov Schools and Hebrew Day Schools be more open and more welcoming to children of different backgrounds?

Rabbi Shneur Aisenstark, principal of the Bais Yaakov of Montreal, a respected mechanech (pedagogue) for several decades, reviews the situation, finds it wanting, and offers some challenging recommendations. His article, "Fire Drill," is followed by the responses of four other veteran leaders in chinuch habanos (girls' education) commenting on Rabbi Aisenstark's observations and his prescription for change, which they have written upon the invitation from The Jewish Observer.

FIRE DRILL

A Contemporary Chinuch Challenge: Preparing For Inevitable Encounters

THE WAY IT WAS ... AND HOW IT BECAME

About forty-five years ago, when a boy became Bar Mitzva in America, he could look forward to receiving a variety of gifts—a pen, a tie clip, a watch, or some kind of clothing. Today, a boy will prepare for his Bar Mitzva by buying a *sefarim shrank* (book shelves) in which all the anticipated *sefarim* will be arranged.... Forty-five years ago, a boy was hardly familiar with the names of the *mesechtos* in *Shas*, and certainly was not able to make a *siyum* at his Bar Mitzva. Now, ב"ה, the average boy makes a *siyum* on a *mesechta* in an impressive and competent manner.... In the yearbook photos of a *frum* school published forty years ago, one can find most girls wearing bobby socks with portions of the lower leg uncovered. Today this is highly improbable

Rabbi Aisenstark is principal of the Beth Jacob School of Montreal.

ב"ה.... The typical teenager of yesteryear was preoccupied with the choice of a future profession. If an average graduate from our modern yeshiva/day school system were asked about his or her goals for the future, the boy would most likely answer that he aspires to become the biggest *talmid chacham* he can be, while the girl would probably reply that she would like to marry the greatest Torah scholar available to her.

One could continue with examples of how, in America, Torah and *Yiras Shamayim* have grown by leaps and bounds. This incredible progress is due, in no small measure, to Torah Umesorah, which spearheaded the day school movement and improved professional standards in Jewish education through teacher-training programs, publication of resource materials and general promotion of the broad field of *chinuch*. Viewed from the perspective of the left, the right or the center of the Torah spectrum, the report card on progress in *chinuch* is quite good.

There is, however, one area in that same report card that shows a major failure—our ability to function as an *Am Echad B'Lev Echad*—one nation, of one heart in service of the Almighty. Despite all our growth in Torah knowledge and *Yiras Shamayim*, we have become increasingly factionalized and divided in many aspects of our lives. For example, we now have schools that cater only to *Shomer Shabbos* parents; we have schools that do not accept children from homes with TV; we have schools that do not accept students whose *tchup* is a bit too large, or whose mother does not cover her hair.

DIVERSITY OR FRAGMENTATION?

In some Jewish communities, within a radius of a few blocks, one can find a dozen *minyanim*, many of them competing for the "tenth." If this burgeoning of *minyanim* were due to *harbei d'rachim laMakom* (the multitude of paths in service of G-d), it would be

admirable; when it is due to a feeling that the other *minyán* is not only different, but less worthy, then the rapid growth is less than impressive. I know two brothers, belonging to two different Chassidic sects, who do not eat in each other's homes, since the *shochet* of one is unacceptable to the other. In a similar vein, when a *shul* moved from the old neighborhood to a new one, a former *mispallel* swore that he would not enter that *shtiebel* in its new location because it had moved "uptown." It seems that we have neither the time nor the inclination to teach tolerance of and respect for legitimate differences.

Another point: One of the aspects of the *mitzva* of *hochei'ach tochiyach es amisecha*—reproof—is being *mekarev* those less fortunate in *Yiddishkeit* than ourselves, reaching out to them; this responsibility devolves on those who are already *shomrei Torah umitzvos*. We "frum" Jews, however, often shirk this important obligation because we fear that our children, in engaging with others to strengthen their *emuna* and *ahavas Hashem*, will risk their own. We assume that their *yeitzer hara* will lead them to emulate our less fortunate Jewish brethren. Because of this fear, we take the easy way out and segregate ourselves, saying "This is *asur*, that is *asur*," and make *Shabbos far zich*.

If success is measured by the num-

Viewed from the perspective of the left, the right or the center of the Torah spectrum, the report card on progress in *chinuch* is quite good.

ber of *pesukim* and *parshiyos* our students cover, but we do not trust them to visit with someone whose hat is not the same color as ours, then we must re-evaluate our goals in *chinuch*. One can always rejoice when more kosher facilities are needed, more schools are established, and more *shteiblach* open. When the need for them develops only from a sense of superiority or lack of trust, however, one should feel considerably less happy. Our *achdus* seems to be disintegrating to the point that we will need forty religious parties in Israel instead of the four we now have.

SENSITIVITY OR INSULARITY?

Our increasing fragmentation has resulted in our inability to deal with anyone not exactly like ourselves with any sort of sensitivity. Several years ago, for example, we tried to organize a convention of all Beth Jacob Seminaries in Canada and Amer-

ica. One *menahel* told me very clearly that if a certain Seminary were invited, her students would not participate. Upon inquiring as to the reason, I was told that "those" seminary students are not of the same "type" as hers. I argued that the convention would last for only one *Shabbos*; what possible harm would they suffer? (We were talking about eighteen and nineteen-year-olds.) Her retort was that she feared one of "her" students befriending one of "theirs," resulting in a lifelong friendship.

Another incident: a class of girls was invited to a birthday party of a classmate of a different ethnic background. Because the students feared that the *Kashrus* standards in this home would not be the same as their own, they took their full plates and hid them under the sofa, to the horror of the mother who found the congealed food the next morning. My question is not what the girls should have done, but what we, as the school, should do to see that such a thing does not happen.

A final example: a teacher was asked by a student, "My mother bought me a blouse with sleeves that are a bit short. What should I do?" The teacher's reply was simple, "You don't have to listen to your mother."

My question is: why did the seminary not train the teacher to respond appropriately to such questions? Would we hire a teacher who is illiterate? Why engage one who is illiterate in sensitivity?

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING, NOT CAPITULATION

The *Ribbono Shel Olam* created us to be different from one another and to have distinct *kochos* and

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abilities, all of which merge into a mosaic glorifying Hashem. "K'Shem she'ein partzufei hem shavim kach ein de'osei hem shavim—As their facial features differ, so do their personalities."

Hashem fashioned us, a nation, into twelve different tribes, each with divergent and contrasting innate qualities. Chazal tell us that each *Sheivet* (tribe) had a unique *tzinor* (conduit) for their *tefillin* to *Shamayim*. The distinct individuality of each *Sheivet* was accentuated by each having its own specific flag, place of encampment, and parcel of the land in *Eretz Yisroel*.

Yet, "*tachas hahar*"—at the foot of Sinai—they were *K'ish echad b'lev echad*, like one man, with one heart. This is a call for understanding, not capitulating... tolerance and acceptance of legitimate views can be upheld without moving one inch from *minhag avoseinu beyadeinu*—our ancestral heritage.

THE ROAD TO MUTUAL RESPECT

How can we, as responsible *mechanchim*, train the next generation to respect instead of reject others, by being *mekarev* instead of alienating? When the academic year begins, the school posts fire drill instructions in every classroom, which the teachers read to each class. Yet after this, fire drills are still held. When an English teacher teaches letter-writing, she explains the format of the letter—its salutation, body and closing. Yet after this instruction, she still has her students practice letter-writing. For a month before his Bar Mitzva, a boy dons his *tefillin* and removes them. He has learned all of *Hilchos Tefillin*. Why month-long practice?

Similarly, we can teach children all about proper behavior, *middos*, and the *halachos* of honoring parents, and still fail dismally in the world of action. Apparently teaching about behavior, even by a teacher who is an excellent and enthusiastic pedagogue, is not enough. May I suggest that we must teach correct behavior by having the student practice his behavior in class, with simulated activities. We must

write a curriculum of all possible scenarios that we may encounter in our *bein adam l'chaveiro* (interpersonal) dealings. For example, we must have a practice birthday party showing students how to sensitively handle problems such as different standards of *kashrus*. Our seminars must offer classes and workshops on how teachers can create activities and situations that will promote the growth of social skills and sensitivity in our students.

Or for young men: when a man is

There is, however, one area in that same report card that shows a major failure—our ability to function as an *Am Echad B'Lev Echad*—one nation, of one heart in service of the Almighty.

confronted with a lady who extends her hand in greeting, one has two alternatives: either to ignore her gesture and busy his own hand with some other task, or to explain pleasantly, in a *safa rako*, *b'nachas*—softly, pleasantly—that an Orthodox Jew is not permitted to have such contact with the opposite sex and that no personal affront is intended. Let the young man learn to choose the response that combines sensitivity and *frumkeit*. The key thereafter is practice, practice and practice.

Torah Umesorah is actively promoting an excellent program called "Derech" (the brainchild of Dr. and Mrs. A. Aberbach of Toronto), which teaches "*Hilchos Derech Eretz*" on different levels with various materials. Knowledge of the material, however, is not enough. A fighter pilot is trained on a simulator for many, many hours before he is given his wings.

We, too, must train our students—not just theoretically, but practically—through simulated real-life scenarios. Students should voice their opinions of what *they* would do in various situations, and explore how these situations can possibly be ameliorated thereby improving themselves in the process.

A CURRICULUM OF EMPHASIS, DISCUSSION, AND PRACTICE

This article may give the impression of being a critique of the more right-wing type of educational system; my purpose is not at all to criticize, but to sensitize the educational community and heighten its awareness. I am certain that the examples of insensitivity I cite are equally true of all types of educational institutions, with only minor variations.

As a proud member of the Torah-true educational network, I wish to be neither apologetic nor critical. I *do* want to suggest an intensification of the precept that we practice with our students what we preach, and keep on drilling, recounting, relating, prepping and repeating, until our students have internalized a sure sense of themselves as *frum Yidden* who can model the *derech* of our *chachamim* and inspire others to follow.

With emphasis, discussions, and practice, we will succeed in producing a generation of people who know how to talk to each other, to be tolerant of one another, to respect legitimate differences, and, most importantly, who will feel strong enough in their *emuna* to tackle whatever challenges life puts in their path. Secluding oneself and hermetically sealing oneself can only lead to factionalism—the opposite of *achdus*. A pipeline through which water is turned on full strength, will not allow the entry of alien matter. Similarly, if our children become a *tzinor*—a conduit for transmitting every fine behavior, every deep expression of our *Yiddishkeit*—then no harmful outside material will gain entry. By training our students to promote our heritage among their peers, their own *emuna* and growth in *Yiddishkeit* will ultimately be strengthened. ■



The Lab and the Safety Yard— Two Views

There is an old analogy, that if you want to help someone see in the dark, you can either give him a candle or teach him the sensitivity to see in diminished light. The difference between the two emerges when dawn breaks. The candle has outlived its usefulness. The sensitivity to see in diminished light, however, remains integrated within the person and will serve him in future situations of challenged vision. In broad terms, this analogy translates into two hypothetical models of Jewish education. Both claim goals of limud haTorah and character development, but one is solution oriented, the other is generative or skill based.

We might call the first model the safety yard and the second the laboratory. It is important to distinguish between the models, their goals, the risks inherent to each, their definition of success and the types of mechanechim that distinguish them. These models rotate on different views of childhood, and differ in terms of parental expectations, as well.

THE SAFETY YARD: PROTECTION AGAINST HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

The safety yard has as its distinguishing feature a protection against the hostile outer environment. As such, it is distinguished by its emphasis on standards of behavior, contrasted with the unsavory behavior of others. A WE/THEY emphasis is common. The definition of “we” derives from Torah, of course, but takes its more

Rabbi Belsky is principal of Hanna Sacks Bais Yaakov High School in Chicago.

■

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■

immediate flavor from contrast. Thus it weaves back and forth between “we” and “they,” and acceptable is defined in part through the unacceptable. Success is measured by the ability to feed back in word and deed the formula that has been conveyed for avoidance of pitfalls.

In this model, the *mechanech* is a safety patrolman, one who guards the gates from unwelcome intrusion. In this day and age, there is so much to object to, the *mechanech* is occupied in keeping the gates, in presenting in well-defined

terms the contrast between good and evil. This *mechanech* takes charge, might soothe anxious parents with reassurances that he will safely conduct the children to the other side of the stormy sea of childhood, even onward into a “good *shidduch*.” But how? It’s a great challenge.

Could any *mechanech* have made this promise to my parents or yours when we were young? But many parents do not want to be reminded of their past; they fear the tendencies of youth. The *mechanech* puts much effort into discipline, appearances, normative behavior, conformity, and as stated, the careful rejection of negative behavior.

AUTHORITY, SECURITY... AND “PERFECTION”

An advantage of this model is the sense of security it imparts, the goal of the safety yard model. During the confusing years of adolescence, students may feel secure in the confident authoritative environment of their teachers. Parents may feel they can finally relax in their struggle to communicate the spirit of *Yisroel Sabba*. Unacceptable behavior is extinguished, everyone is clear about rules. On the other hand, this model suggests homogeneity, simplicity and a suggestion of perfection in a world in which none of these quite exists. A student may feel his individuality is compromised in the group effect. He may doubt both the reality of his own strength and the ability of the simplistic explanatory system to live up to the complexities and pres-

sure he is already aware of.

And now a word about perfection. Children know they are not perfect. They wonder how the imperfections of the children outside the safety yard are not okay. Some will deny their imperfections or become ashamed of them. Students learn to distance themselves from their weaknesses rather than making friends with or taming them. This model tends to stifle rather than encourage a student's questions or successive approximations of the teacher's lessons. Thus it promotes rote learning, which is faster and has more demonstrable results. Some children will learn to criticize those outside the circle, since in part their identity or esteem derives from the contrast. It is not that loving others is omitted, but that keeping negative definitions clear is more crucial. Here no one would denigrate *achdus*, but *achdus* is simply not emphasized. Clarity is desirable in confusing times, but in an attempt to maintain clarity, even variations in *minhagim* become a source of WE/THEY distinction, making it harder to promote *achdus*.

THE LAB AS AN ONGOING PROCESS

We call the second model the lab because it acknowledges that education is a process, a work in progress. No student is expected to be "finished" at ten or twelve or fifteen years of age. Rather, they are expected to understand their own patterns of strengths and weaknesses as a basis for lifelong commitment to learning and development. The *mechanech* is zealous to guard the gates from the awful corrosion in the secular culture, but his emphasis within the gates is on cultivating the individuality, expressiveness, talents, and yes, problems of each student. If each student is prized as an individual, then the emphasis is on mutuality, respect and *achdus* as a living example. In an atmosphere that is tolerant of strengths and weaknesses, students will learn to imitate their teachers, to empower each other's abilities and strive to channel weaknesses.

If the identity of the previous model

In the "lab" no student is expected to be "finished" at ten or twelve or fifteen years of age. Rather, they are expected to understand their own patterns of strengths and weaknesses as a basis for lifelong commitment to learning and development.

is exclusion, the WE/THEY, the identity of this model is inclusion, the WE/WE. Identity is not based on specific measures of behavior so much as it is based on effort to grow. The reality is that some students start off on a lower or higher level, some have more fortunate home backgrounds, some less so. No one is exempt. If parents want

an anesthetic to their anxiety, the *mechanech* in this model may not always oblige them. Rather, he attempts to help parents mature by encouraging them to acknowledge their children's past successes and exude positive hope, faith and trust in their continued ability to navigate the sea of adolescence.

In this model, as the student struggles with good and evil, we might not always like the stages they go through, the questions they ask, the way they weed out wrong from right, or even the students they identify with. There is no promise of immediate gratification here. The *mechanech* in this model is not a mechanic. (A good mechanic is expected to remove a malfunction or fix it.) He is a gardener. Some plants are hardier than others, some slower growing.

TOLERANCE, PATIENCE, AND GROWTH

Patience is needed in an impatient world. Poor behavior is met with demands for conformity (to *halacha*), but is accompanied by a series of interventions designed to help bring the student to a higher level of acceptance.

If the *mechanech* determines that it is appropriate to allow himself time to accomplish this process, the interim may look less successful to outside observers or even parents. In this model, adults are

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Two models have been presented. They are not by any means mutually exclusive. Every effort must be made to expand our ways of thinking for the benefit of our students, to incorporate the best features of each educational model.

expected to tolerate process, a work in progress. In this model, adults are expected to supply the reassurance to themselves and to the children; children not fully mature are not expected to supply the reassurances by looking good for

us. It is understood that children (people) learn from their mistakes.

Learning in this model is skill-based, designed for offering students both Torah answers and Torah means of inquiry. This learning takes longer than

rote learning, may at times be too complex to reduce to simpler forms of feedback (multiple choice test, for instance), but this learning has lasting effects and offers the patient adult much *nachas* for the high level of logic, understanding and *ruchnius* gained. (I am reminded here of the late Rabbi Godlevsky זצ"ל, revered teacher in the Bais Yaakov movement, who used to ask his students only one "test" question: what is the *tachlis* of a person?) The student's *ruach* is never left behind in this model.

The risk in a WE/WE model is that if students do not reach their potential, they may absorb weaknesses of others. Therefore the *mechanech's* emphasis must always be keenly directed toward making sure that each student is focused on his potential. This system may flounder if the teachers themselves lack maturity or dedication. It is not that the *mechanchim* in this model are fearless, it is that they regard fearfulness as detrimental to growth. When the gardener sows seeds, he tills the ground, weeds, sweats, prays, then waits in faith. Trust is certainly a great risk; but when well-handled, offers students trust in their own readiness for adult responsibilities, trust in *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* who helps us achieve our efforts, and the key to himself, *gam ki yazkin lo yasur mimenu*.

TWO MODELS

Two models have been presented. They are not by any means mutually exclusive. Every effort must be made to expand our ways of thinking for the benefit of our students, to incorporate the best features of each educational model.

Chazal tell us the Yaakov *Avinu* was punished for withholding Dina from Eisav, for she might have inspired him to do *teshuva*. Although Yaakov did what he must do, the *baalei mussar* indicate that he did not experience sufficient anguish (on the *chut hasa'ara*, hair-breadth's level) for this lost opportunity. Every *mechanech* I have admired demonstrated a great share of pain. May this Jewish pain always lead us to helpful formulations for our students. ■

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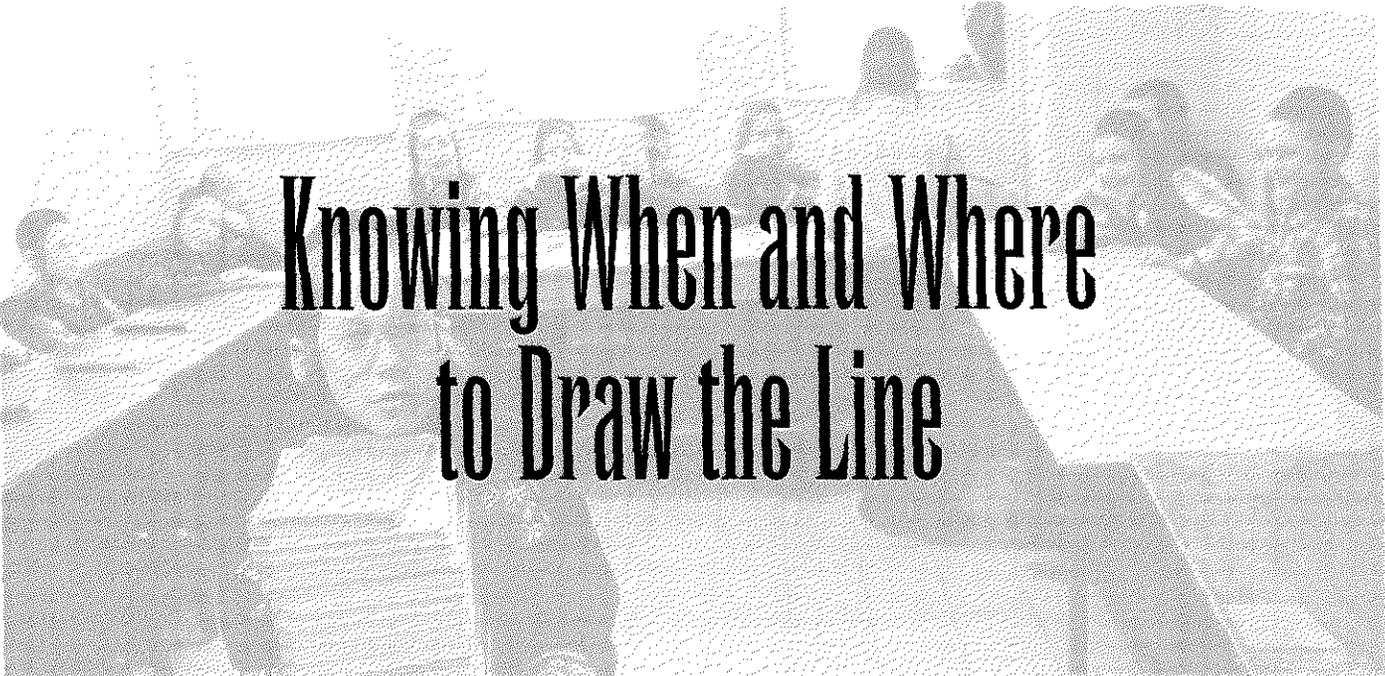
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Knowing When and Where to Draw the Line

Whenever dealing with an issue, the deeper you delve, the more it becomes obvious that there is more than meets the eye. One must not be simplistic in his thinking... *chinuch* is very complex; setting rules cannot be the only source of guidelines. Decisions may vary between elementary schools and high schools, between *chinuch* for *banim* (boys) and for *banos* (girls), between “in-town” schools and “out of town” schools, etc. Therefore, any response to Rabbi Aisenstark’s statement is *למלפלא בעלמא*—purely academic—and not be relied upon for *halacha lemeisa*—as a practical guide.

Ahavas Yisroel can be a misguided slogan when inappropriately applied. Just as one would not be deemed as lacking *ahavas Yisroel* for not considering an unsuitable person as a candidate for marriage, so too may denying acceptance to a student be the correct thing to do. For example, admitting a student with a “*tchup*” (example cited by Rabbi Aisenstark) into a *Chassidische cheder* may cause this particular student to feel out of place, thereby affecting his learning, his social standing, and his overall confidence, and it may also cause others to do the same. The Gerer *Rebbe* זצ”ל

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once said, “There are Jews in Germany who are as fine as we are, who dress modern; but should one of us in Poland dress that way, he would be an outcast.”

Ideally, there should be no criteria for acceptance into a Torah institution other than “Will this child benefit from being enrolled here?” and “Is this child at least not a detriment to the school?” This would require quite a bit of research on the part of the *hanhala*. It also would create confrontations. Many schools have therefore instituted guidelines such as “no TV homes” because—just as *Shabbos*, *kashrus*, and *taharas hamishpacha* differentiate between a *frum* home and a non-*frum*—TV has become the touchstone for differentiating between a Torah home and a non-Torah home.

Although *Kiruv Rechokim*—outreach to less committed Jews—is a very noble activity for our schools, most of our institutions were founded to be *mekarev kerovim*—enhance the knowledge and status of the religious children—and that should not be compromised. If, however, *kiruv* could be accomplished without lowering standards, by all means *rechokim* are to be accepted with open arms.

My dear *chaver*, Rabbi Yisroel Shneur Aisenstark, isn’t it true that you your-

self have standards, and you would not send your students to certain conventions, even if they were run by *frum* Jews, because you may feel that the participants don’t quite live up to your standards? In the same vein, why should we—you and I—be so upset if schools who have different sensitivities don’t want to send their students to our convention? We all draw lines somewhere—are we only to be tolerant of people who have standards lower than ours? Let’s think about it.

It’s almost eighteen years now that I live 3,000 miles away from the center of *Yiddishkeit* in the United States. Everytime I go back to the East Coast, I am overwhelmed by the beauty of having so many *batei knessios* and *batei midrashim* on each and every block. Most *shuls* exist not because “I would not *daven* in the other *shul*,” but rather because the person feels more comfortable with people his type. Some *shuls* exist because the *Rav* or *Rebbe* needs a position. In the first case, we all benefit by it. In the latter case, it is also an asset, as long as it does not cause undue hardship to other *shuls*.

Who says that by being separate means *pirud*—divisiveness?

May we all in our individual *mosdos* be united in being *marbeh k’vod Shamayim* and be *zocheh* to *יעשו כולם אגודה אחת לעשות רצונך בלבב שלם*. ■



Contemporary Chinuch: A Balancing Act

MEETING ALL OBLIGATIONS

It is true, as Rabbi Aisenstark states, that our generation has made great strides in certain areas of *Yid-dishkeit*, mainly *bein adam laMakom* (between man and the Creator), yet we need to re-examine and re-evaluate our growth and accomplishments in the area of *bein adam lechaveiro* (between man and his fellow).

I would like to address Rabbi Aisenstark's point that we religious Jews lack the tolerance of and respect for legitimate differences among individuals who are all part of *Klal Yisroel*. First of all, I am proud to say that I am associated with a school whose *menahel* is sensitive to and aware of the calling of this generation, to educate and be *mekarev* the children of the families emigrating from Russia, Iran, etc. In fact, my father, Rabbi Menachem Manis Mandel שליט"א tells these children: *We waited for you so for so many years; we davened so much that you be allowed to come and join us!*

Many of these children, who need

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It is time to retrain parents as to the responsibilities that *Hashem Yisborach* has placed upon them by blessing them with children. Who is supposed to teach our children tolerance and respect? Shouldn't this sort of training come from the home? Has parenting become obsolete?

special attention, have been registered in our regular classes. (Unfortunately, we have no empty rooms or funds for special classes.) Even though the number of children with special needs is limited in each class, some parents are questioning if the ratio between these children who are not yet fully committed to Torah and their own children, who are, is unbalanced. They have a point; we did have the experience of a class where those that needed *kiruv* had a negative influence on some of the other students. To avoid the danger of negative influence (albeit unintentional), perhaps we should deal with this issue as we deal

with our incomes. Just as we give ten percent to charity, so too should we allow up to ten percent of the student body in any one class to come from homes that do not conform to the expected standards of the yeshiva (i.e. they own a TV, the mother does not cover her hair, or they are generally not fully observant).

THE ESCALATION PROCESS

Another problem in accepting students newly arrived from Russia or Iran is that our level of learning is totally out of reach for these

newcomers. They would do better in a school that specializes in meeting their needs, such as Be'er Hagolah, Nefesh Academy, or Sinai Academy. When the principal of a transitional *yeshivos* assesses that a student is ready to be mainstreamed, he/she should approach the various schools in the child's neighborhood. Each school should be given an equal opportunity for this *mitzva* and challenge. For the benefit of all involved, these new students should be equally divided among our neighborhood schools.

Many of these students progress, and give tremendous *nachas* to the *Ribbono Shel Olam*. One girl who comes to mind, was born in Russia and came to America at age twelve. She spent six months in Be'er Hagolah, four months in a special class containing only seven students in Sara Schneirer, and was then enrolled in Yeshiva of Brooklyn. She was placed initially in a class with children three years her junior, caught up, was able to graduate with students her own age, and was selected to speak at the commencement. After a year of study in *Eretz Yisroel*, she returned to America with her *chassan* (her seminary principal introduced them to each other). Today he is studying in a *Kollel* and she is teaching in our pre-school department. Clearly, the extra effort expended on this girl was worthwhile. So, too, in ways we cannot always see or measure, is the effort we put into all our students we are *mekarev*.

YESHIVOS: NOT ALWAYS AT FAULT

A second point of Rabbi Aisenstark's article that deserves comment: Are all problems to be laid at the door of our *yeshivos*? A yeshiva is not a foster home. As it is, parents expect way too much (for way too little) from a most overworked staff. It is time to retrain parents as to the responsibilities that *Hashem Yisborach* has placed upon them by blessing them with children. Who is supposed to teach our children tolerance and respect? Shouldn't this sort of training come from the home? Has parenting become obsolete? Shouldn't parents pre-

pare the child to deal with situations such as how a woman should react to the male who offers her a handshake?

Also worthy of comment is that when married siblings eat different *shechitas* in their respective households, it is not indicative of dissent. When tolerance and understanding coupled with a large dose of respect are present, the difference does not spell disaster.

Also, when *shtieblach* sprout like mushrooms and stores dot the avenue in a continuing string, it is not bred out of insensitivity to others. Let us be optimistic (is our glass half full?) instead of

allowing pessimism to set in (thereby making our glass half empty). Namely, our numbers have \uparrow increased, and so have our needs. *Am Yisroel kedoshim heim*. We need not assume that expanding facilities is done to gouge the competitors' eyes out, *chas v'shalom*.

In short, although we must try to strive for more, I feel many *yeshivos* are coping as well as can be expected with the difficult balancing act of reaching out to those who need *kiruv* and bringing out the best in children who were brought up in uncompromising observance of the Torah. ■

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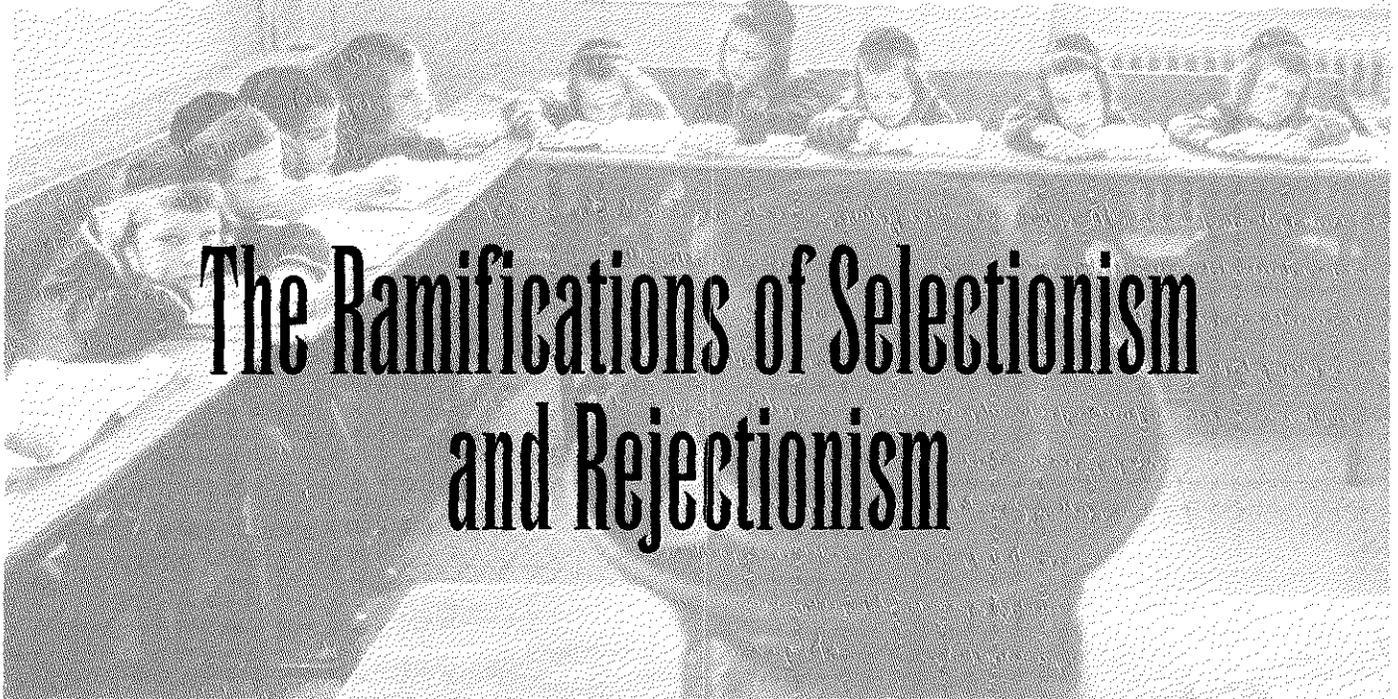
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The Ramifications of Selectionism and Rejectionism

While the question of balancing the dangers of exposure to a harmful atmosphere against the potential gains of *ichud ha'am*, the oneness and unification of the *klal*, is certainly not new, perhaps it is timely for us to take a fresh look at the issues.

Those who would separate and insulate children hailing from homes whose standards reflect an uncompromised stance in all areas of *Yahadus* from "lesser" homes are addressing legitimate concerns—and often responding to real dangers and risks. Does the *Rambam* not teach us (*Hilchos De'os* Ch. 6) that it is inherent in human nature for man to be affected by his environment, and does this not dictate that a Jew should choose for himself and his family an environment that will exert a positive *hashpa'a* rather than one whose influences may be detrimental to growth and flourishing? Can we easily ignore insights from *Chazal* that teach us of the dangers of exposure to an environment deficient in *ruchnius*? (See *Michtav Me'Eliyahu I*, "*Hashpa'as Haseviva*" for a fuller discussion on this topic.)

While the claim of "*Eilu ve'eilu divrei Elokim chayim*"—These and those are words of the living G-d," can be sub-

mitted as a sound basis to insist on tolerance and respect among *Sefardim*, *Ashkenazim*, *Misnagdim*, and *Chasidim*..., is it in any way legitimate to apply this premise when considering ideas, movements, or groups that are not guided and endorsed by *Manhigei Yisroel*? Certainly not.

On the other hand, the equation is not so cut and dried—we do not live in a world of absolutes. Yes, on a practical level it is feasible for those who so desire to exclude from schools those who hail from homes with televisions... whose mothers fail to cover their hair... who frequent movies and the theater... or whose beliefs may not always be consistent with established Jewish custom. But does doing so constitute a definitive separation of good from bad... pure from impure... and *kadosh* from *chol*? In short, are we certain that the atmosphere—which permeates our schools, once one excludes those considered to have deviated from an ideal—is more "rarified," and will lead to greater growth and flourishing for those left after the "selktion"? This is questionable... for there are many other considerations:

- Does *ahavas Yisroel* really remain unaffected once schools have excluded those considered deficient in their commitment to pristine *ruchnius* goals? *Real-*

ity. In most cases, real levels of *ahavas Yisroel* are lessened (deadened?), and many children too easily dismiss from their attention and concerns those considered to be inferior in their pursuits of *ruchnius*. In short, "out of sight, out of mind."

- What happens to the character development and *middos* of our children when we exclude those whose *Yiddishkeit* does not "measure up"? *Reality*: All too easily, our students may turn smug, having (unconsciously) judged themselves to be better than those "others." Too easily overlooked is that our own service of *Hashem* is often no more than *mitzvos anashim me'lumada*—more reflexive than inspired. In fact the *S'forno* (*Nitzavim* 30,2) expresses the notion that this will be the nature of much of our *mitzva* performance before the final *ge'ula*!

- What is the whole truth about the *discomfort* we and our children feel in the proximity of those whose adherence to high levels of *tzenius* and *ahavas v'yiras Hashem* seem to be less than ours? We tend to assume that these feelings are *in-and-of-themselves* an expression of *yiras Shamayim tehora*. But is it not possible that they may also reflect a subtle level of self-centeredness, an *unwillingness* to function in an atmosphere that lacks "*heimishkeit*"? If the feelings of dis-

Rabbi Zweig is *menahel* of the High School of Bais Yaakov of Baltimore.

Are we certain that the atmosphere — which permeates our schools once one excludes those considered to have deviated from an ideal — is more “rarified,” and will lead to greater growth and flourishing for those left after the “selktion”

comfort would be born solely of *yiras Shamayim*, how is it that “villians” abruptly turn into heroes when, if they have “made it,” and we need them for our *mosdos*, we suddenly set aside our discomfort when we honor (!) and fete the self-same individuals at our dinners and programs? If our anxiety stems exclusively from *yiras Shamayim*, why does the same “fear of Heaven” not create discomfort within us when exposed to individuals (sometimes ourselves) who miss time at the workplace by arriving late, shmuezing on the phone... and the multitude of other forms of *Choshen Mishpat* trespass?

• Is it perhaps the case that in defining differences between ourselves and others, we are mired in a set of *mental labels* that describe a *mitzva* performance score-card, while overlooking other qualitative personality aspects that in fact might be cherished by the *Ribbono Shel Olam*—and exposure to which our children might grow from? In considering whom to “exclude,” are considerations of personality traits such as compassion, sensitivity, generosity, *ehrlkicheit*, etc... also given their due? Might we consider that the young man or woman who frequents hang-outs or whose appearance may at times be inappropriate (not that improper *conduct* or *appearance* should be accepted) may in fact possess character traits that, if properly cultivated, can serve as a *beracha* for both the individual and the *kla!* Indeed, Rabbi E.E. Dessler זצ”ל, in quoting from the Talmud Yerushalmi, presents the profound story of a Jew who earned his livelihood in an unseemly manner, but whose unknown personal worth rendered him more suitable to supplicate *Hashem* for desper-

ately needed rains than all other members of the community! (*Michtav Me’Eliyahu I*, “*Hatzne’a Lechess...*”)

A HIGHER LEVEL OF SPIRITUALITY: GENEROSITY OF THE SPIRIT

Talmidim of the late *Rosh Hayeshiva* of Ner Israel, Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchok Ruderman זצ”ל carry a thought that he imparted, which characterized an important dimension of his approach to *avodas Hashem*. Chazal tell us that Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai entered a cave with his son, Rabbi Elazar, to escape Roman persecution. He emerged after thirteen years, but was unable to countenance a world given over to mundane pursuits. The piercing stare of his uncompromising eyes brought about destruction wherever he looked, so that he was admonished by a *bas kol*, “Did you leave [the cave] to destroy the world?” He returned to the cave and emerged after an additional year, when he was able to live in peace with the reality of a spiritually feeble and mortal world.

Should not the additional year of intense Torah study have brought these two Torah giants to even greater levels of uncompromising heights? The *Rosh Hayeshiva* explains that herein lies an important lesson: At very high levels of dedicated service to *Hashem*, we may become uncompromising and unable to countenance that which is imperfect. However, the yet *higher* level is that which enables one to function at supreme levels of *kedusha* side by side with those who come up short in their *madreigos* (levels) and aspirations. Indeed, the most supreme levels of *avodas Hashem* may enable us to develop a generosity of the spirit that allows us to see the strengths in others—and perhaps be more honest about our own shortcomings.

Parents may sometimes find themselves liking certain characteristics in one child more than those of another. But the *love* that parents naturally feel for their children is so pervasive that likes and preferences barely register. True, abiding love far overshadows all else. No, we cannot declare as wrong those who wish to create an environment free of tangible dangers to one’s spiritual growth. On the other hand, in a very imperfect world, perhaps *our* abiding love might allow us to humbly note and acknowledge our own weaknesses while seeing the potential within each member of *Klal Yisroel* to rise to the *gedula* (greatness) that is possible for all *Bnei Avraham, Yitzchak and Yaakov*. ■

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The April '96 issue of The Jewish Observer featured an article on *Bechira and Free Choice* by Dr. Benzion Sorotzkin, a respected Orthodox psychotherapist. The article, which addressed the degree of accountability an individual has in the context of environment and personality, drew heavily from Rabbi Elyahu Eliezer Dessler זצ"ל's discussion in *Michtav Me'Eliyahu* of *nekudas habechira* — the area wherein a person faces his primary challenge and greatest opportunity for growth. The article inspired a number of letters to the editor challenging the author's presentation on some of the issues and raising certain additional questions.

The entire discussion was submitted by the author of the article and the editor of The Jewish Observer to a recognized authority on the subject, **Rabbi Elyahu Dessler** (a cousin of the author of *Michtav Me'Eliyahu*), who has published several mussar sefarim, and serves as mashgiach in a prominent yeshiva in Bnei Brak. Due to the importance he attaches to having Rabbi Dessler זצ"ל understood correctly, he gave over the material to **Rabbi Naftoli Elzas**, a Rosh Yeshiva who is fluent in English, who prepared a detailed response in conjunction with him. Their response was carefully reviewed by the Mashgiach, Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, שליט"א, author of *Alei Shur*, and Rabbi Yisroel Elyahu Weintraub, שליט"א, of Bnei Brak, a highly regarded baal machshava. Each wrote a letter of approbation for the article, concurring that (in Rabbi Weintraub's words) this work represents "a clear articulation of the Torah hashkafa on this sensitive, important topic." The Jewish Observer has extracted those parts of the response that it considers to be the points of major importance.

"Nekudas Habechira and Free Will" Revisited—A Clarification

IMPLICATIONS OF NEKUDAS HABECHIRA

N*ekudas habechira* is a very deep and complicated concept, which can be easily misconstrued and misapplied in ways that were never intended by the author. It is almost impossible to do justice to such a sensitive issue in the framework of an article, but the importance of clarifying the subject, as expressed by *Gedolei Yisroel*, leaves no choice but to make an attempt to elucidate some major points.

The essence of *nekudas habechira* is clear: people perform many acts, both positive and negative, without actually exercising *bechira*. That does not mean, however, that areas above or below this point are beyond their capacity to choose, or that they are a product of compulsion. The parameters of *nekudas habechira* are defined by Rabbi Dessler as all issues that a man perceives as good and bad, and it is within this range that his decision-making process comes in contact with active *bechira*. Only actions that he cannot recognize as good or evil are outside the range of

his *nekudas habechira*; he will do them without inhibition. He has not encountered *bechira*.

That, however, does not mean that in areas beyond the *nekudas habechira* he is compelled to act as he does; rather, his decision has not taken into account the issue of right or wrong. Rabbi Dessler illustrates this with the example of a criminal who will rob without any pangs of conscience, yet will hesitate to murder. He does not perceive theft as evil, so he does not think about it; it is therefore outside his *nekudas habechira*, while murder is still within its spectrum.¹ The implications of this example are often misapplied.

It should be obvious that the example

¹ The function of examples in *sifrei mussar* are different from those cited in *maamarei Chazal*. Whereas in the latter, the *mashal* (allegory) can often be a subject of deep analysis, according to the principles transmitted by Chazal (see *Maimar al Haagados* by the *Ramachal*), examples in *sifrei mussar* are often merely pictures to illustrate the subject, and are therefore not intended to be analyzed, since they are not the subject but rather a case picked incidentally to clarify the issue that is being discussed. The authors did not expect their examples to be a subject of study. Even when this is not the case, one needs great care in extracting from an example.

does not relate to the majority of criminals, who are aware that their actions are evil. It addresses a most unusual case — that of a criminal who has had such a perverted education that he honestly believes that he has the right to the property of others (the Robin Hood syndrome). Rabbi Dessler gave such an extreme and unusual case to illustrate that even such a corrupt person perceives murder as evil. Even in this very extreme case, however, Rabbi Dessler never suggested that the man was "compelled" to steal, but rather that he will not experience active *bechira* in regard to stealing. Good and bad are simply not functions in his decision-making process.

Understanding the *mashal* correctly would eliminate the spurious conclusion that psychic determinism has a place in Torah *hashkafa*. Mentally healthy people, even if steeped in evil, are not compelled to do evil at any stage. This is similar to the other example that Rabbi Dessler presents—that of a conscientious Jew who speaks *lashon hara* (slander) because of lack of awareness of its *issur* (prohibition). He speaks *lashon hara* without going through the process

of making the conscious decision to do evil, but on no account does Rabbi Dessler consider him compelled to speak *lashon hara*.

THE RAMIFICATIONS OF CHOOSING EVIL

In his essay on *bechira*, Rabbi Dessler devotes a special chapter (3) to the responsibility incurred by a person who chooses to do evil. Repeating such choices can erode the current setting of his *nekudas habechira*. Since a person's actions can cause matters that were originally within the spectrum of his *nekudas habechira* to slip below it, Rabbi Dessler sets out to clarify the responsibility for the negative behavior that follows. He describes the difference between the *nekudas habechira* preset by Heaven, such as family and education, and the *nekudas habechira* that has been changed by man's own actions. He clearly states that when, as a result of detrimental *bechira*, an *aveira* has become habitual to the extent that it is out of the realm of *nekudas habechira*, the person still remains totally responsible for all the consequential actions he now does without awareness, as if he had done them with conscious *bechira*, because he himself is responsible for his current situation.

By contrast, evil actions that he does not perceive as such, due to his education and past experiences, would fall under the category of acts of a *tinok shenishba* (a child reared in captivity—i.e., exempt from punishment for his acts). Yet even the *tinok shenishba* is not considered to be acting under compulsion—he is *chayav a korban* (to atone for inadvertent transgressions) because he should have investigated and become aware of what he had not yet learned.

CULPABILITY BEYOND THE REACH OF AWARENESS

It is untenable to posit that no reward or punishment is due unless *bechira* has been actively exercised. This would lead to an absurd conclusion that it is futile to strive to elevate one's

nekudas habechira, for one would get no more *s'char* on a higher realm than he does in his current status.

Rabbi Dessler's *yesod* (basic premise) originates in a letter by Rabbi Yisroel Salanter (*Ohr Yisroel* 8), wherein he clearly explains that there is tremendous responsibility attached to every action that causes loss of sensitivity to evil. This accountability incorporates all the resultant actions which, although they are now performed without awareness, are judged as if they were performed with complete cognizance. Although certain quotations from *Michtav Me'Eliyahu* might be misleading when taken out of context, when Rabbi Dessler's essay is studied in full it becomes clear that every time a person elevates or depresses his *nekudas habechira*, all resultant actions—even those done without conscious *bechira*—are subject to *s'char* or *onesh* (reward or punishment), as if they were performed with conscious *bechira*.

It is important to stress that there is widespread consensus amongst Torah leaders and teachers throughout the generations against the practice of psychology of searching into a person's past experiences and environment to determine the decisive cause of his errant behavior. Attributing deficiencies in a person's behavior to external factors serves to negate the principle of free will and can provide a person with a rationale to

justify his succumbing to his *yeitzer hara*.

Of course, one must exercise caution against being exposed to negative influences of environment and friends. This is no contradiction to the rejection of psychological determinism. There is a basic difference between a cause and an igniter. We are fully aware of the inordinate influence yielded by environment in igniting the *yeitzer hara*. Chazal say "*ayin ro'eh veleiv chomeid...*" A person might not have contemplated many *aveiros* had he not seen others doing them. Thus exposure poses a serious danger of arousing *teiva* (desire). But exposure *per se* will not compel a person to commit an *aveira*, nor is he incapable of subduing his *yeitzer hara*.

We bear a responsibility to avoid struggles with the *yeitzer hara* to the best of our capacity. Even when one manages to overcome his *yeitzer*, he can suffer great damage from the very exposure, and for this we *daven* every morning: "*Ve'al tevi einu lidei nisayon*—Do not bring us to challenges." It would be mistaken to deduce from this, however, that exposure *per se* compels.

WHEN OTHER APPROACHES ARE MANDATED

A clarification is necessary at this point. *Mechanchim* and *Rabbonim* do at times refer people who are in need of professional help to consult

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selected psychologists, even if their treatment involves fixing blame on external factors, thereby relieving the patient of his sense of responsibility. In the long term, he will be spared a loss in his *ruchnius* standing, and become equipped to actually grow. Thus, someone not answerable for his actions may be referred to therapists who will employ methods that would not be permissible to a person who can exercise control over himself.

For almost twenty years, I have been guiding people in their struggles with their *yeitzer*, and am therefore familiar with accepted Torah-guided procedures. I am also aware that there are exceptional cases where the diagnosis indicates an incapacity to respond to normal guidelines, which can sometimes be damaging for such people. For such individuals, professional treatment is the unavoidable solution. I have worked in conjunction with leading specialists in this field out of mutual respect, and mutual agreement that the mandate of the therapist terminates when the person is capable of returning to the *derech* of Torah and *mussar*—the approach that has been transmitted to us *midor dor*, since time immemorial.

Sifrei mussar are written for the general cross section of *Klal Yisroel* who, as healthy human beings, undergo difficulties and are struggling with their *yeitzer hara*. People who cannot manage the stresses that they are undergoing are referred to psychologists. Guide-

lines that are suitable for one group are unsuitable for the other. One thus *cannot* approach the delicate issue of *bechira* for the general *tzibbur* from the vantage point of what a therapist might justifiably find suitable for his client.

A basic difference separates *mussar* and psychology, *lehavdil*. The Torah defines a clear set of values, and delineates what is permissible and what is forbidden. By contrast, the foundations of modern psychology were established by people who do not subscribe to a system of right or wrong, nor recognize binding Divine obligations. Psychology has no absolute values. It has but one principle aim: to produce a balanced person. And in many cases, this end justifies any means.

The Torah includes precise definitions of what constitutes *ones* (duress). These are halachic principles, not subject to theories of psychology. (It is worth mentioning that a *baal teshuva*, who is an international authority on psychology, told me that the deep psychological insights he finds in *Chazal* and the *sifrei mussar* far surpass all the knowledge he had accumulated in his academic research.)

EVERY PERSON: IN CONTROL OF HIS BECHIRA

The Torah expects everybody—from *gedolei olam* to the most simple Jew—to carry out the *mitzvas aseï* of “*uvacharta bachayim*” (the positive command to choose life) without the assistance of specialists to analyze his past. Nor is a Jew expected to attempt to analyze his past on his own. His mandate is to focus on the future and how to change for the good. It is simply fallacious to assert that when a person is unaware of the experiences that cause his actions, his free will is inhibited, since he is unable to act upon factors he is unaware of.

Torah *hashkafa* does not acknowledge that past experiences limit *bechira*, and that psychology can define a person’s *nekudas habechira*—thus attempting to reconcile *bechira* and psychological determinism. Torah *hashkafa* does rec-

ognize that one’s *nekudas habechira* is formed from many factors, including past experiences and one’s environment, but by no means are they the exclusive—or the determining—ingredients thereof. Recognition of right and wrong, will power, and *yiras Shamayim*—these are also some of the integral factors in determining one’s *nekudas habechira*. Beyond this, in the actual struggle with the *yeitzer hara*, there is a predominant ingredient: “*Imalei Hakadosh Baruch Hu ozro eino yachol lo*—Without Divine assistance, one could never overcome his evil inclination” (*Kiddushin* 30). That assistance enables one to overcome even the most (seemingly) insurmountable odds. The stream of *baalei teshuva* in our generation is eloquent testimony to this. If one’s past experience were so inhibiting, how could we explain the radical turn around by masses of Jews raised without any knowledge of Torah and whose prior actions could hardly be further removed from a Torah life? Similarly, within the *Chareidi* world there are many who have experienced dramatic spiritual growth far beyond their original settings. It is inarguable, then, that past experience does not limit or inhibit the capacity for choice. As a corollary, it is incorrect to assume that psychological factors determine one’s *nekudas habechira*.

PERScription FOR CHANGE: FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

How does one embark on change? There is a risk that acknowledging psychological causes for behavior (psychic determinism) can provide people with a convenient excuse to maintain unacceptable behavior. To focus on psychological causes does not help most people to change their behavior. Self-improvement is facilitated by contemplating the seriousness of one’s responsibility, studying *mussar*, pursuing *yiras Shamayim*, and a host of other prescriptions found in the *sifrei mussar*. Through a positive, forward looking orientation, one increases his will power and strengthens his determination

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to overcome his *yeitzer hara* and to move ahead in *avodas Hashem*.

Ein davar omeid bifnei haratzon (nothing stands in the way of one's will)—whether folk saying or sacred insight—expresses a powerful truth: developing a positive *ratzon* is a major cornerstone of Jewish *chinuch*, for strong *ratzon* can overcome a plethora of negative drives. Indeed, *ratzon* is a major ingredient in elevating the *nekudas habechira*, and is a determining factor in fighting the *yeitzer* successfully.

THE PLACE FOR GRADUALISM

It has been argued that dramatic and sudden changes are often beyond a person's capacity because of roots in a person's past and his current environment. According to this theory, the approach to be advocated involves recognizing these obstacles and then changing gradually. In such a situation, they maintain (incorrectly), a person may continue some aspects of his negative behavior until he has included all positive choices within his *nekudas habechira*.

Without some clarification, this assertion is wrong. There is a basic difference between dealing with a situation of *sur meirah* ("Turn away from evil") and one of *asei tov* ("Do that which is good"). A normal person from a conventional background who becomes aware that he is doing *aveiros* has no right or justification to embark on a gradual process of improvement. No responsible *mechanech* would condone a step-by-step process in *sur meira*. Such counsel is reserved exclusively for *asei tov*.

When it becomes clear to a person that he is doing an *aveira*, he cannot avoid responsibility with claims that he is a captive of psychological determinism, or even his *nekudas habechira*. He is obliged to make all effort to refrain immediately, and indeed, the Torah considers him capable of this. Even if it could be assumed in a particular case that a person is so deeply steeped in *chet* (iniquity) that he feels incapable of curtailing his negative drives, he always has

The essence of *nekudas habechira* is clear: people perform many acts, both positive and negative, without actually exercising *bechira*. That does not mean, however, that areas above or below this point are beyond their capacity to choose, or that they are a product of compulsion.

the capacity to affect a change in his *hashkafa*. Recognizing the seriousness of his behavior—that *chet* is like a consuming fire—is the antidote. Acknowledging the inevitable consequences of one's actions can dampen any drive. The entire concept of gradual change applies only to growth in *madreigos* (rising from one level to another)—a fundamental principle in *chinuch*. Again, the *baal teshuva* world is the indisputable proof that this is possible. Most of these people—from the moment they come to the recognition of *Torah min haShamayim*—immediately refrain from the grave *aveiros* to which they have become accustomed throughout their life, in such areas as *tarfus*, *arayos* and *chillul Shabbos*. Of course, some people are so bound to their past that they cannot but move slowly, even in disengaging themselves from unacceptable practices, but they are in a special category (similar to *cholim*) and do not fit under the general rule. For this reason, it is often advisable to reveal the *issurim* (prohibitions) to them slowly, at a pace that they can handle. For normal people who live in the

Chareidi world in accordance with the principles of the *Shulchan Aruch*, however, there is absolutely no *hetter* to drop *aveiros* gradually. (Although the *marshal* of the rehabilitation process after a stroke is apt for a case of *asei tov*, it does not apply to *sur meira*. There is no place for such an attitude in guidelines set by the *Shulchan Aruch*.)

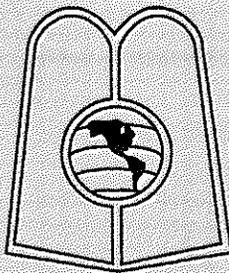
THE RISKS OF MISAPPLIED INSIGHTS

In conclusion, there is a decided risk in analyzing the works of the *gedolei baalei hamachshova* (great thinkers), that one might deduce from their words conclusions that are totally contrary to their intentions and to the whole purpose of their writings—which is to motivate and guide people in *avodas habechira*. There are certain principles that apply when studying *sifrei mussar* of our great teachers, and these guide us in how to draw deductions from their works.

One such axiom is that *sifrei mussar* are writings that have been written for one explicit and clearly defined purpose: to motivate and encourage *avodas Hashem*, to promote general growth in all areas where the Torah expects a person to strive, and to overcome his or her *yeitzer hara*. In the process, descriptions of human nature are often cited so as to project human fallacies that must be dealt with; such is the essence of *mussar*.

It is a grave mistake, however, to assume that these descriptions were intended to serve as precise definitions of the *nefesh* from a theoretical point of view. When one learns *sifrei mussar* with the intended attitude, he will discern between an objective definition of a phenomenon and an illustration intended to motivate *avoda*.² Without heeding this principle, there is a danger of accurately quoting sections of *sifrei mussar* while totally misrepresenting their intent.

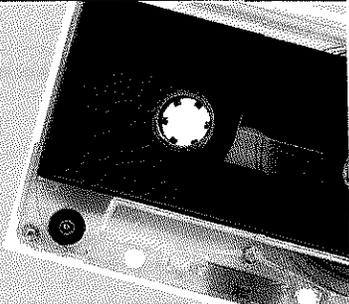
² In the author's letter to J.O. September '96, he relates that Rabbi Wolbe pointed out to him that "in his own writings" he has mostly "focused on *bechira* as a part of a person's *avoda*, rather than on the philosophical issues involved." The identical discipline should be applied to the *Michtav MeEliyahu*, as well.



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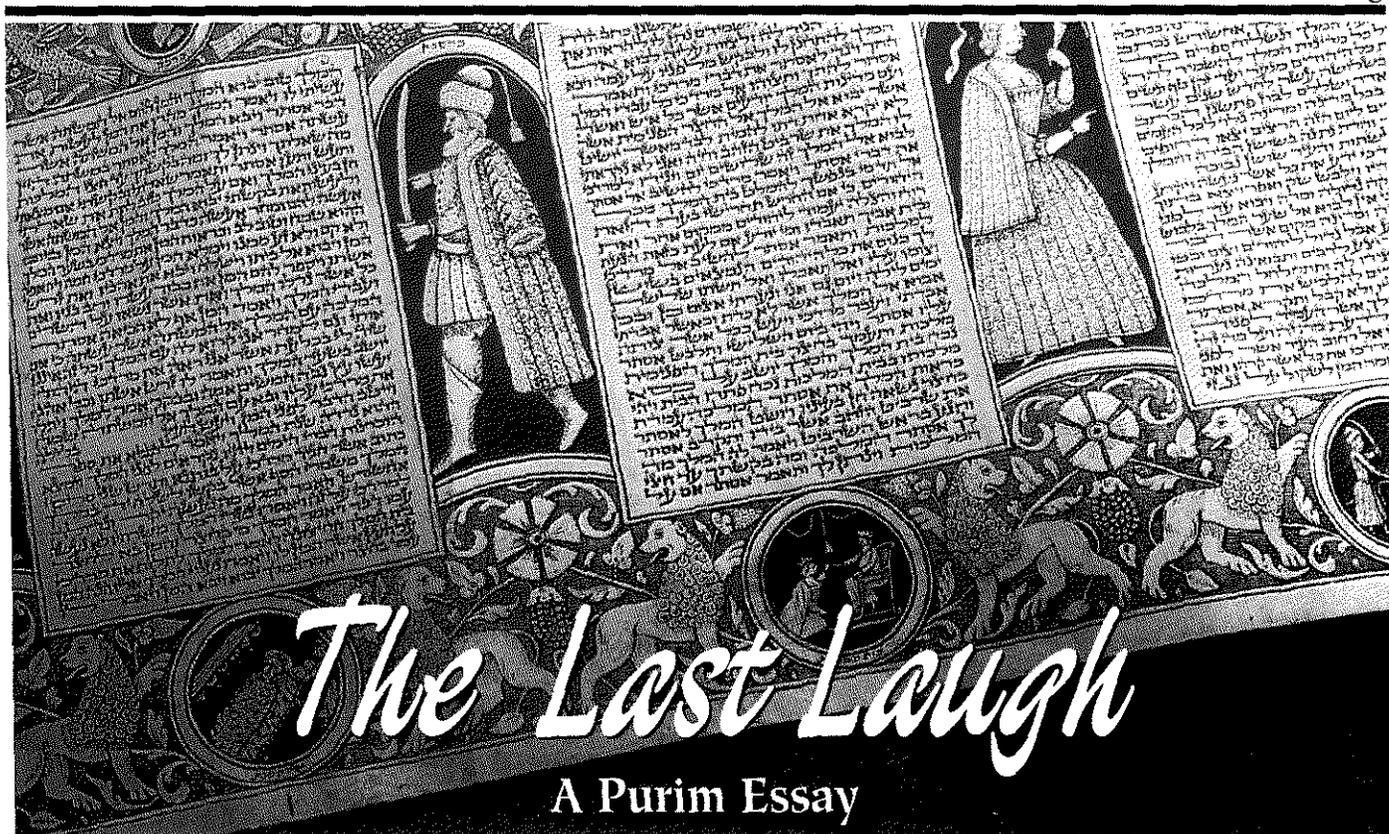
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THE LAUGHING FAMILY

If someone were to ask you which of the *Avos* (Patriarchs) is associated with laughter, you would probably respond: "I'm not sure, but it certainly isn't *Yitzchak Avinu*. The *Av* who represents *midas hadin* (the attribute of justice), the *Av* who asked G-d to bring *yesurim* (afflictions) to the world—for sure he would not be connected with laughing." But then you remember, as *Rashi* says, he was named *Yitzchak* "*al shem hatzchok*," because of the laughter.

Yitzchak Avinu doesn't laugh now—his name is not "*Tzchok*," but "*Yitzchak*"—he will laugh—in the future. Not only will *Yitzchak* laugh, but his father, *Avraham*, also laughs.¹ And his mother, *Sarah Imeinu*, laughed as well.² Others laughed³, as did his half brother, *Yishmael*.⁴ And, interestingly, the Torah describes the marital relationship between *Yitzchak* and *Rivka* as "*metzachek*"—to cause laughter.⁵

Rabbi Weinberg, a *musmach* of Yeshiva Ner Israel, lives in Baltimore. He writes a weekly Torah column (Hebrew) for the "Chizuk Torah" publication. He and his wife are the originators of the *Dov Dov* series.

■
Yitzchak Avinu doesn't laugh now—his name is not "*Tzchok*," but "*Yitzchak*"—he will laugh—in the future
 ■

THE OPPOSING LAUGHTERS

There lie in the word "*tzchok*" two opposing meanings.⁶ One type of laughter degrades, humiliates and mocks.⁷ It endeavors to nullify an entity, an existence (to be *mevatel a metzi'us*). One who engages in this type of laughter is called a "*letz*." "*Shehoyu letzonei hador omrim me'Avimelech nisabra Sarah*."⁸ (The scoffers of the generation said that *Sarah* conceived from *Avimelech*.) The humor of the claim?—The scoffers assert, in effect: "You think you

have given birth to someone *kadosh* (holy)—a child of *Avraham* to carry on *Avraham's* relationship with G-d in this world. But you have really nothing but a *mamzer*." It was a nullification of an entity. The ultimate *letz*, *Chazal* tell us, was *Amaleik* who wanted to nullify completely the relationship of *Hashem* and *Yisroel*.⁹

In contrast, we also find that laughter represents *shleimus hametzi'us*—complete and perfect actuality. *Kol* (voice or sound) represents existence, whereas silence testifies to a lack of existence.¹⁰ (*Maharal* explains that the reason fish do not require *shechita*—ritual slaughter—is because they are not on as high a level of existence as animals because they have no *kol*.¹¹ This would give us another reason—besides not being seen—as to why *ayin hara* does not effect fish. Only something of significance is vulnerable to *ayin hara*.) Again, *simcha* also represents existence, mourning, *ליל*, lack of existence.¹² If we combine *kol*—sound—with *simcha*—happiness, both being forms of existence and actuality, we have, as one of its expressions, laughter, the happy sound, the sound of *metzi'us*.

THE LAUGHING FUTURE

Chazal tell us that it is forbidden for a person to fill his mouth with laughter in this world because the *pasuk* says, "Az yemalei s'chok pinu"¹³—Then, in the future, laughter will fill our mouths." (Here also, "yemalei—will fill" connotes a complete expression of laughter not possible until the future.) In the same vein, "ein s'chok lifnei Hakadosh Baruch Hu elah oso hayom bilvaad"¹⁴—There is no laughter before G-d except on that day (in the future)," and again, "You created this Leviathan 'letzachek' bo."¹⁵ Also a future concept.

THE LAUGHING YOM TOV

"Minhag kadmonim la'asos baPurim kol minei s'chok"¹⁶ It has been the custom since earlier generations to promote all sorts of laughter (*shtick*) on Purim." Why? Because Purim symbolizes, and is of the essence of, *techiyas hameisim*—the resurrection of the dead.¹⁷ This is alluded to in the Midrash that states that all *Yamim Tovim* will be nullified in the future except for Purim.¹⁸ Perhaps a corollary of this is the statement of Chazal that all *Nevi'im* and *Kesuvim* (Prophets and Writings) will be nullified in the future except for *Megillas Esther*.¹⁹ Thus Purim is in the last month of the year, Adar (and if, as in this year, it is a *shana me'uberes*—a leap year—Purim comes out in Adar Sheini), for if Pesach is the beginning of the journey, Purim is where it ends. Purim is, therefore, a time of laughter, a time of the future, a time of "az yemalei," of complete existence. It is also the time of the destruction of the *letz* who epitomizes the laughter of degradation, *Amaleik*. In the future of completeness, there can only be one kind of laughter.

YITZCHAK AND TECHIYAS HAMEISIM

Yitzchak symbolizes *techiyas hameisim*—the resurrection of the dead. (See the *Da'as Zekeinim Miba'alei HaTosafos*, *Bereishis* 15,1.) At the *akeida* (binding of Yitzchak), Yitzchak

Sarah was different from other *akaros* (barren women) such as Rivka and Rochel. They only needed a *refu'a* to be cured of their condition to be able to bear children; Sarah, however, needed more, since she was also past child-bearing age. Avraham was also older than the conventional age to be a father. Hashem restored their youthfulness—which is a form of *techiyas hameisim*. They, therefore, did not conceive Yitzchak earlier, since he is the symbol of *techiyas hameisim*.

actually succumbed, but subsequently experienced *techiyas hameisim*.²⁰ See also *Pesikta D'R' Kahana* 32 that in the *zechus* of Yitzchak, who submitted himself to sacrifice at the *akeida*, Hashem will be *mechayeh meisim* in the end of days.

The first three *berachos* of *Shemoneh Esrei* represent the three *Avos*. The second *beracha*, representing Yitzchak, is the *beracha* of *techiyas hameisim*.²¹ One might add that Yitzchak was not permitted to leave *Eretz Yisroel*, because *techiyas hameisim* will only take place in *Eretz Yisroel* (*Kesubos* 111a). (The dead from other lands will first be moved to *Eretz Yisroel*.) From the *Ari* we learn that Yitzchak will be "*rosh hahanhaga*" in the future, meaning that the world will be governed according to the *mid-dos* (character traits) of Yitzchak.²² Chazal relate that in the future, the Jews will proclaim to Yitzchak: "*Avinu atta*—you are our father," as opposed to Avraham and Yaakov.²³ We can now understand the future tense in the name Yitzchak—he will laugh—because at that time, in the future, there will be complete and lasting existence.

We can now also appreciate the laughter of Avraham and Sarah. Sarah was different from other *akaros* (barren women) such as Rivka and Rochel. They only needed a *refu'a* to be cured of their condition to be able to bear children; Sarah, however, needed more, since she was also past child-bearing age. Avraham was also older than the conven-

tional age to be a father. The *Yalkut* (*Vayeira* 18) states that Hashem restored their youthfulness—which is a form of *techiyas hameisim*. They, therefore, did not conceive Yitzchak earlier, since he is the symbol of *techiyas hameisim*. Thus Avraham and Sarah "laughed." However, the "*metzachek*" of Yishmael was one of *aveira* (sin) (*Rashi*, *Bereishis* 21,9). Since he now realized that he would no longer be the continuation of Avraham, he revolted with mockery, the opposing laughter.

PURIM AND TECHIYAS HAMEISIM

On Chanuka, we were saved from spiritual destruction—so we say *Hallel*, a spiritual exultation. On Purim, we were saved physically—and so we have the *mitzva* of *se'udas* (feast) Purim, a celebration in the physical sense. The physical *yeshu'a* (redemption), however, was not just from our enemies, but also includes the ultimate physical *yeshua*—*techiyas hameisim*.

The *Midrash Tanchuma*, *Parshas Noach*, addresses the question as to why there was a need at *Mattan Torah* (the revelation at Sinai) to hold the mountain over *Klal Yisroel* in order that they accept the Torah, when they had already said: "*Na'aseh v'nishma*—we will do and we will hear." The Midrash explains that what they had accepted was *Torah Shebichsav* (the Written Torah), but *Torah Shebe'al Peh* (the Oral Torah), where



there is a regimen of self-deprivation, much toil and little sleep in its study, they had not accepted; thus the need to coerce them to accept it at *Mattan Torah*. Yet they willingly and gratefully accepted the toil and deprivation of learning *Torah Shebe'al Peh* after the *nes* (miracle) of Purim. "Kimu ma shekiblu kvar—They upheld that which they had previously accepted."²⁴

If so, the main acceptance of *ameilus baTorah*, toiling in Torah, was on Purim.

In *Kesuvos* (111b) we find: "When one is 'mishtamesh' with (makes use of) the light of Torah, the light of Torah will bring him to life at *tehiyas hameisim*." To be "mishtamesh" perforce means toil, diligence, and hard work.²⁵ Therefore, Purim, which was the acceptance of the toil of Torah, is the *Yom Tov* that brings one to *tehiyas hameisim*. This is as it should be, given that Purim symbolizes *tehiyas hameisim*.

YITZCHAK AND PURIM

Sefarim tell us that each of the *Shalosh Regalim*—the three Pilgrimage Festivals of Torah origin—has another, future *Yom Tov* associated with it. Pesach, the *Yom Tov* of *ge'ula* (redemption), will have its additional *yom tov* at the time of the future *ge'ula*. Shavuos is connected to Purim, as was mentioned before. Sukkos is connected to Chanuka. Space does not permit delv-

ing into this point at the present, more than to say that they each have eight days (which gives us one clue).²⁶

Again, *sefarim* tell us that each of the *Avos* is represented by one of the *Shalosh Regalim*.²⁷ Yitzchak is the *Av* affiliated with Shavuos. Given that Shavuos is connected to Purim, we see an intrinsic connection of Yitzchak Avinu to Purim, which by now should not surprise us. Yitzchak Avinu, who will laugh in the future, is indeed associated with the *yom tov* of the future. "Az yimalei s'chok pinu." There is a common thread connecting Yitzchak, Purim, laughter, *ameilus baTorah*, and *tehiyas hameisim*.

EPILOGUE: THE PICTURE AND THE LAST LAUGH

And then there is the picture. When I first saw it, I was stunned. It was one of those rare photographs that has the incredible power to symbolize an entire sequence of events, the ability to define, the emotional force to rivet one's thoughts and feelings, through depicting one memorable scene. The raising of the flag on Iwo Jima is one such scene. *Lehavdil*, who can forget the picture of the Israeli soldier carrying the *Sefer Torah* into Egyptian captivity during the Yom Kippur War? The above picture, because of its strong and powerful contrast has, perhaps, even more meaning. But until

now, almost no one had seen it. I first saw it hanging on the wall in the house of Rabbi Manuel Poliakoff, one of the senior *rabbanim* in Baltimore today, who is the chaplain in the picture. I asked him permission to have it copied, and he graciously consented. But what in the world is going on in the picture?

It was during the final days of World War II in the European theater. Rabbi Poliakoff needed a place for his *minyan* (prayer service), and he was told that he could use a building which the allies had just taken—the castle of Josef Goebbels, *yemach sh'mo* (may his name be obliterated). The picture says it all. Who won this titanic war between Yisroel and (*lehavdil*) Amalek? Hitler, װ" stated as follows: "The war for domination of the world is waged only between the two of us, between these two camps alone—the Germans and the Jews. Everything else is but deception."²⁸

Yes, *leda'avoneinu*—to our great sorrow—6,000,000 Jewish lives were lost, and countless others were maimed physically, emotionally and spiritually. Yet here was this symbol of Nazi cruelty, the representation of modern-day Amaleik, hanging there on the wall, quite helplessly, and being forced to testify that *Netzach Yisroel lo yeshaker* (the Eternal One of Israel does not speak falsely). Jews are still *davening*, still saying "Shema Yisroel," and still holding the Torah. "We know the victor to be the one who emerges with his weapons in hand."²⁹ In the end, that's how it is. Yitzchak does not laugh now, in the present; but in the future, in the end of the days, he will laugh.

Oh, yes, one more point. Two days before the picture was taken, probably at the time the castle was captured, it was—Purim. ■

¹ Bereishis 17,17

² Bereishis 18,12.

³ Bereishis 21,6

⁴ Bereishis 21,9

⁵ Bereishis 26,8

⁶ R' Tzaddak HaKohein ז"ל, *Machshovos Chorutz* 34b.

⁷ *Yirmiyahu* 20, 7; *Divrei Hayamim II* 30,10; *Megilla* 25b; *Hamaharal* ז"ל *Gur Aryeh* to Bereishis 21,9.

⁸ *Bava Metzia* 87b.

⁹ *Bereishis Rabba* 27,5; *Yalkut* 268

- ¹⁰ *Maharal Tiferes Yisroel* ch.30.
¹¹ *Maharal Chiddushei Aggados, Sanhedrin* 98a.
¹² *Maharal Tiferes Yisroel* ch.30; *Chiddushei Aggados Shabbos* 30b.
¹³ *Berachos* 31a.
¹⁴ *Avoda Zara* 3b; see also *Maharal Derech Chaim* end of *mishna* "all of Israel have a share..."
¹⁵ *Tehillim* 104,26.
¹⁶ *R' Tzaddak Machshavos Charutz* beginning of ch. 13.
¹⁷ *Maharal Tiferes Yisroel* beginning ch. 53; *R' Tzaddok Machshovos Chorutz* ch. 19, p. 87ab. For a more detailed discussion of the role of Purim during the epoch of *techiyas hameisim*, see *Pachad Yitzchak Purim, Inyan* 34.
¹⁸ *Midrash Shochar Tov, Mishlei* 9.
¹⁹ *Yerushalmi Megilla* Ch.1, *Halacha* 5.
²⁰ See also *Yalkut Vayeira* 22; *Pirkei D'R' Eliezer* ch. 31.
²¹ *Maharal Chiddushei Agados Shabbos* 118a.
²² *R' Tzaddok Divrei Sofrim* 23a.
²³ *Shabbos* 89b. The *Gemora* relates that in the future *Hashem* will say to Avraham and Yaakov, "Your children have sinned to Me," to which they will answer, "Let them be eradicated for the sanctity of Your Name." He will then go to Yitzchak, who will answer "Are they then my sons and not Your sons?... And also how much could they have already sinned?... Half of one's life is nighttime, another half is spent on *davening*, eating, etc... I will accept half of their sins upon myself if You accept the remainder..." The Jews will then say to Yitzchak: "You are our true father, because Avraham does not know us and Yisroel (Yaakov) does

not recognize us."

This *Gemora* seems to defy what we know of the *middos* (attributes) of the *Avos*. That is, that Avraham is the epitome of *chessed*—kindness; Yitzchak represents *din*— judgment and retribution; Yaakov personifies *rachamim*—mercy. Yet here the *Gemora* tells us that Avraham and Yaakov say, "Let them be eradicated," and it is Yitzchak who pleads for them. (R' Tzaddak in *Divrei Sofrim* 22b cites, however, earlier sources that "let them be eradicated" refers to their sins. See there how he interprets the *Gemora*. See also his *Komeitz Hamincha* 23b and *Yisroel Kedoshim* 43a.)

The *Maharal* in *Netzach Yisroel* ch. 13, comments on this *Gemora*: "It is impossible for there to be a separation or removal of Yisroel from *Hashem* because of the attribute of Yitzchak. Rather they have a complete attachment and connection... and sin cannot separate *Yisroel's* existence from *Hashem's*... from the depth of *din* there is *zechus* (merit)... through the exactness of the depth of *din* there is *zechus*..."

Sefarim state (see for example the *Ramchal* in *Derech Hashem* and *Horav Yitzchak Hutner* in *Pachad Yitzchak, Rosh Hashana, Ma'amar* 4 ch.1-2) that the underlying purpose of creation was to do *chessed* with those created. Due to the concept of *nahama dichasufa* (shamed bread—the shame experienced by one who receives charity), however, *chessed* decreed that there be *din* in the world whereby people can, so to speak, "earn their keep." The concept behind this is that man can only be *davak* (attached) to *Hashem* if he is *kaveyachol*, as it were, "like" *Hashem*. *Hashem* is a giver not a taker. Man must therefore also be a giver. (See *Michtav Me'Eliyahu I* pp.32-33)

Chessed, then, is the driving force (the *av*). *Din* serves *chessed* (the *tolda*) to make the receiver "unashamed." If due to *din*, at its ultimate depth, how-

ever, the initial driving force of *chessed* is negated, then, at least for the *Klal* (nation), *din* gives way to *chessed*. With this, the *Maharal's* maxim, "In the depth of *din* there is *zechus*," can be understood. See also *Pachad Yitzchak* (ibid).

Therefore, Avraham and Yaakov, representing *chessed* and *rachamim*, have no defense, in the future, to the charge of "Your children have sinned," because it is a time of *din*, and *din* must be served. However, once *din* is engaged, as it descends to its ultimate depth of possibly eradicating the purpose of creation, it must of itself (the *tolda*) yield to the *av* of *chessed*, which was the purpose of creation. As a *mashal* to the above, it has been said that only Menachem Begin could have made a treaty with Egypt, and only Nixon, a staunch anti-communist, could have made overtures to Red China *lehavdil*; similarly, it is only Yitzchak who can plead for the Jews against the accusation of "Your children have sinned." The *mashal* is not precise, but it will serve.

Yet to be answered on this *Gemora* is the question of how could Yitzchak have argued "How much could they have already sinned?" Isn't there a list—this and that on Monday, that and this on Tuesday, etc? But for lack of space one might attempt an answer.

²⁴ *Shevuos* 39a.

²⁵ *Sichos Chachma Umussar, lemori v'rebbi Horav Dovid Kronglass זצ"ל, Chelek* 2 p.39, as to why the "performer."

²⁶ See the author's "Mai Chanuka" (in Hebrew) in the "Chizuk Torah" of *Shabbos Chanuka*, 1995.

²⁷ *R' Tzaddak, Doveir Tzedek* 39b.

²⁸ *Secret Conversations With Hitler*.

²⁹ *Vayikra Rabba, Emor* 30,2.

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A Pit Full of Emptiness

Rabbi Moshe Eisemann, a frequent visitor to the former USSR, where he is engaged in teaching and outreach, describes the spiritual landscape that greeted him during a recent trip to the region.

Take a stroll in downtown Minsk, capital of Belarus, and you will see the hustle and bustle—particularly the hustle—of a large city trying its hardest to shoulder its way into the twentieth century. Recent flirtations with capitalism have generated competition in the tax business with a concomitant discovery by formerly surly dispatchers of the virtues of politeness and punctuality, gas stations have sprung up along the highways nurtured by and in turn nurturing a burgeoning automotive ethos, buildings are being refurbished, banks opened, and in general, it may be said that a very thin veneer of modernity has, with a degree of success, been superimposed upon a dark and dank past creeping with horrors, which everyone hopes to forget.

As you walk along, you may happen upon a small, unobtrusive patch of greenery, deferent to other inner city parks only by virtue of a large shallow pit scooped out in one of the corners. It provides play space for the local children, and an ideal snow slide during Minsk's vicious winters. A pretty little place really, a bit of respite from the urban ugliness that surrounds it.

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Final resting place for many of the *kedoshim* of the Minsk Ghetto.

An empty pit full to the very top—
with emptiness.

Rabbi Eisemann, a *rebbe* in Yeshiva Ner Israel of Baltimore, is author of the translation and commentary of the ArtScroll-Mesorah *Yechezkel*, *Divrei Hayamim*, and *Iyov*. He is a frequent contributor to these pages, including "A *Bas Melech* in the Public Arena: Some Reflections on Reading the Biography of Rebbetzin Grunfeld" (Mar. '96).

Reb Abish Brodt sings of a glass which the *Ribbono Shel Olam* has standing before Him, brimming with Jewish tears. Many, many of those tears come from Minsk and its environs.

Place a compass point in Minsk, draw a circle allowing for a couple of hours in the car, and you have embraced Mir, Slutsk, Kletzk, Baranowitz, Slonim, Radin, and countless townlets and villages, which were hearth and home to those we loved and love. Close your eyes. Allow your mind to dwell on the bountiful life of Jewish *chein* and Jewish learning. Twenty percent, thirty percent, forty, fifty, sixty percent of the populace, occasionally entire villages, were Jewish. *Temimus* and *gadlus*, joys and sorrows, fish and *chrain*, *kugel* and *Kaddish*, fights and slurs and reconciliations, *tzeddaka* and *chessed*, *Rabbonim* and *Maggidim*. Life teeming with Jewish energy, succumbing sometimes to despair, revitalizing always with Jewish hope.

And now—only emptiness.

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in the community is a joy to behold.

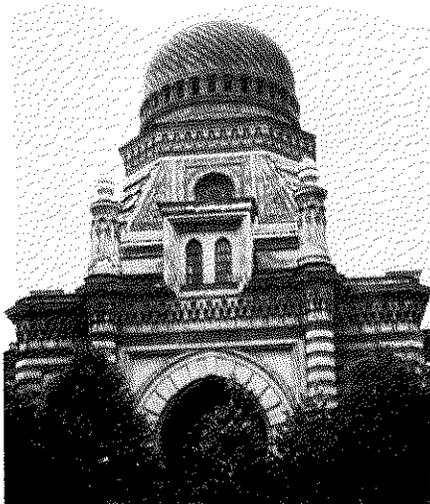
A youth group called Lech Lechah provides the framework for fun-filled but serious questing. It seethes with the energy of challenged youngsters who have found the courage to grapple with life's large questions. Like so many wild bok sniffing the air for danger signals as they gingerly approach their watering holes, these youngsters are attracted, scared silly, but attracted still by the *be'er mayim chayim* which teases them and draws them, and ultimately engulfs them with the sheer exhilaration of its purity.

A group of youngsters comes with a long list of prepared questions: They have heard that observant Jews hate *Eretz Yisroel*. Is it true? Why should we have a *bris mila*? What is the religious significance of such an operation? Is it OK for boys to wear earrings? What does a *kippa* do for you?

Sheer unadulterated *nachas*.

But Minsk is not a place in which *nachas* is a natural state. Not now. The past is too much present. It lurks in the eyes, in the hearts, in the memories of the old people. It is there in the shuffling feet, the furtive glances, the bent backs. Its tangible mode is in the rows of campaign ribbons worn proudly on the lapels of men to whom pride in the present has become well nigh impossible; whose reality is an all-pervasive cloying poverty which sucks the color out of sunshine, the music out of living.

And yet—that isn't quite true either.



The synagogue in St. Petersburg, completed in 1893.

Make your way to Stolpci, a little town a few miles down the road from Mir. It used to be a *Yiddishe Shtetl*, Stais, in the vernacular, no different than any other of the thousands of *shtetlach* that dot the countryside and contour the map of our memories.

Today it is a bastion of Jewish pride.

That—to anyone who knows the place—sounds like a sick joke. Completely *vargoyisht*, one of the few places where Lenin still stands, secure and confident, in the town square; where the main street still carries the name of Dzerzhinsky, the father of the KGB; a smug, frightening little town, throwback to a smug past—and a bastion of Jewish pride?

Yes. Gloriously and defiantly. Yes!

In a little side street there is a little house. Not much to look at. Needy repairs neglected for lack of needed food. Nothing that anyone would notice.

Inside, live an elderly lady and her two middle-aged daughters. The one intact Jewish family in town.

And so what?

Because that is the whole story. Just the three of them. No husbands for the daughters to lend strength and warm and confidence. No children to act as harbingers of a better future.

Just the three lonely women, living Jewish pride on a heroic scale. Over the years there was no lack of suitors. Some, no doubt, good and decent men. And

Close your eyes. Allow your mind to dwell on the bountiful life of Jewish *chein* and Jewish learning. Twenty percent, thirty percent, forty, fifty, sixty percent of the populace, occasionally entire villages, were Jewish. Life teeming with Jewish energy, succumbing sometimes to despair, revitalizing always with Jewish hope. And now—only emptiness.

goyish. And two unsung, unknown *giborot* said no. No, to all that human nature craves. No, to the healthy longings for emotional well being. No, to the siren song that old age need not be borne alone, unhelped, uncared for, unloved and anonymous. No, to any anticipation of normal lives lived normally.

We shrink back in shame in the face of such moral grandeur.

Meanwhile back in *shul*.

Twenty five elderly *Yidden* come to *daven* here every day. Of them, three can read Hebrew. Why do they come? They come because they get paid a few pennies a day for attendance—which is marked by one of their number. Fridays are a couple of pennies more—so that they can buy bread for *Shabbos*. One of

the bones of contention: It's enough for one loaf but not for two. *Shabbos* without *lechem mishneh*?

That's the *shul* politics so beloved by all of us. Only there it's different. It centers on the extra loaf. It's boiling around the fact that recently for lack of funds the daily hot kasha and tea, which the *shul* had served after *Shacharis*, has been discontinued.

These people are hungry, and that is the central all-pervading reality of their lives. There was a *drasha*. Time was left for questions. Are there any questions? Would anyone like to say something? Yes. Will you give us money? Will you leave over some dollars when you leave? Why have people forgotten us? Is it right that we should not get kasha? Where is the kasha? Should we poor Jews, poor remnant of a poor remnant, be deprived of a hot meal?

Those are the questions,

I am not sure what the answer is.

There was one elderly *Yid* there, a man of eighty-eight who delighted in showing off his learning. He remembered something from his past.

Here's the scoop: Yankel, Berel and Nota are going along the road. They come to a gate. Who gets to open it? Answer: Nota. Why?... *Nota besocheinu hu yiphtach!*

Do you get the joke?

Here is my version: *Vechayei olam nota besocheinu*. We have within us a sense of timelessness. I believe firmly that our eyes must be to the future, our efforts, our resources, should be invested in the youth. It stands to reason, it must be so.

But twenty-five old Jews should not have to go without their kasha.

Hu yiphtach libeinu. Let our sense of a past that is no more open our hearts. Purim is coming up. Don't pass up on your local obligations. They are many and they are pressing. But those who send *matanos l'evyonim* money to me¹, I'll see to it that it gets where it needs to go, on time.

Some warm kasha. It doesn't take much. ■

¹Rabbi Eisemann lives at 401 Yeshiva Lane in Baltimore MD 21208.

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The Shul in Tiktin

Texture of the Thick Walls... and of the Memories Within

There are no Jews left in Tiktin ((Tykocin in Polish). The Germans, with enthusiastic help from the Poles, wiped them out, but the *shul* is still standing... empty. The Polish government declared the building an "historic monument" to attract tourists.

The *shul*, close to 500 years old, is one of the oldest in Europe. A massive building in the shape of a fortress, it has a lookout turret on the roof, from which to spot the enemy in time of war.

The walls are two meters thick, five meters deep in the ground (in keeping with the *pasuk*: "Shir hama'alos mima'amakim krasicha Hashem—A song of ascents, from the depths I cry out to You, Hashem"... five words, hence five meters), rising 12 meters above the ground. The floor is made of shining red bricks, the walls all decorated with chapters of *Tehillim*.

The building had no ovens, no stoves, or any other heating elements, for it would be impossible to heat up such a huge building. A number of smaller rooms off the *polush* (vestibule) housed a variety of study groups: *Chevra Shas*, *Chevra Mishnayos*, *Chevra Tehillim*, *Chevra Mishna Berura*, *Chevra Ein Yaakov*, *Chevra Chumash*. Inside the main entrance to the *shul*, a slot in the wall served as the opening to the *tzeddaka pushke*, in front of which was engraved a poem from the Ibn Ezra:

A man worries over the loss of his money,

But does not worry over the loss of his days.

His money does not help him

And his days never return to him.

There was a particular room in the

shul that was locked. To me, as a youngster, this represented a challenge. In addition, the mere name of the room, "The *kuneh*," was intriguing. I was part of a group of five boys, and no lock ever stood in our way.

It turned out to be "the *Malkes* Room." In earlier times, the *beis din* would sentence sinners to *malkes* (lashes). The room was furnished with a low bench over which the penitent would bend himself, a table on which lay a *kanchik* (whip) with three leather straps, and two chairs in the corner to accommodate witnesses.

In our days, the practice of giving *malkes* had long been abolished, but every year on Erev Yom Kippur, the door to this room was opened, and people would inflict each other with symbolic *malkes* as an atonement for their sins.

The backyard of the *shul* bordered the backyard of my Zeide's house. Sitting out there, or by merely looking out of the window of the house, I could see the outside of the *Mizrach* wall of the *shul*, which was riddled with holes. These holes were never fixed, as a means of *pirsume nisse*, publicizing the miracle. During war time (which would occur every twenty years or so), the Jews would take shelter in the *shul*. They felt protected from the enemies' artillery fire by the grace of *Shamayim*, through the medium of the thickness of the massive walls and the *kameos* (amulets) implanted in them by the *Maharsha* while he was *Rav* in Tiktin (1615)!

ECHOES OF THE BOBBEH'S AMEINS

My Bobbeh Faigel, known as a *tzaddeikes* and a *chachameh* (a righteous, wise woman), was engaged in business and succeeded in becoming a millionaire. How is that? She would ask us *eineklach* (grandchildren),

"If you would find a 5 Zloty note in the street, would you pick it up? Of course you would," she would say with conviction. "And if you'd see a ten Zloty bill in the street, wouldn't you run to grab it before someone else picks it up? Yet, there's money to be picked up every day, and you are simply lazy to do it!" And then came the price list: An "*Amein*" = 5 Zlotys, a "*Y'hei Shmei rabba*" = 10, a "*Barchu*" = 15, a "*Kedusha*" = 20!

By city ordinance, the stores could not be opened before 8 am and had to be closed at 6 or 7 pm. Bobbeh Faigel would get up at 6 every morning. She knew that exactly at 6:15, she'd catch a "*Kaddish*" in the *Chevra Tehillim minyan*; at 6:30, a "*Kedusha*" in *Chevra Shas*; at 7 a.m., a "*Borchu*" in *Chevra Mishnayos*; and so on. By the time she would open the store at 8 (the *Zeideh* maintained his *seder halimud*—his daily Torah study session—until 12 noon), she was loaded with "*Ameins*," "*Borchus*" and "*Kedushos*"; hence her sobriquet, "Faigel the millionaires."

I was astonished when a few years later I heard the same price list in the Yeshiva of Baranovitch. The *Mashgiach*, Rabbi Yisroel Yaakov Lubchansky' זצ"ל, would criticize us for neglecting to answer properly with the requisite *Ameins* and *Y'hei Shmei Rabbos*. His admonishments worked. Whoever learned in Baranovitch would get into the incurable habit of raising his voice when responding with "*Y'hei Shmei rabba*." In fact, it so became second nature that if one would hear someone saying *Kaddish* in the middle of the night, he would shout his response *bechol kocho, bechol kavanaso*—with all his might and total concentration.

Before Rabbi Meir Shapiro opened famed Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin, he visited all the leading Lithuanian *yeshivos* to see how they function. He arrived in

Rabbi Shapiro, currently of Baltimore, is a frequent contributor to these pages, most recently (Dec. '96) with "The Measure of a Jew." His book of reminiscences, *Once Upon a Shtetl*, was published last year by ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications.

Baranovitch during *Mincha*, and as he opened the door to the *beis midrash*, he was greeted by a thundering "Y'hei Shmei Rabba," which virtually shook the walls. He ran up to the *Rosh Hayeshiva*, Reb Elchonon Wasserman זצ"ל, and proclaimed, "This is G-d's army!"

REVERBERATIONS OF BARANOVITCH

After I had arrived in America, I was traveling by bus on Sutter Avenue in the Brownsville section of Brooklyn. I realized suddenly that it was getting late for *Mincha*, so when the bus stopped near a *shul*, I

hopped off the bus and entered the *shul*. Hearing the *chazzan* say the *Kaddish* triggered my old habit, and I screamed out "Y'hei Shmei Rabba," with all my might. I then overheard an old man remarking to his neighbor, "Vos shryt er, der meshuggener? Why is that idiot screaming?"

After *davening*, I asked the man if he had ever received a traffic ticket. (In those days a parking ticket was \$3, which no one paid. Every precinct had a local politician who served his constituency by taking care of their tickets.) The *Yid* replied, "One ticket? Twenty tickets!"

I asked, "Did you ever pay them?"

"You think I'm out of my mind? Of course not. My councilman fixed them for me!"

I then declared to the entire *minyán*: "I just got my ticket fixed."

"You have a car?"

"No. But the *Gemora* tells us that if someone has a bad ticket up in Heaven, it can be fixed:

"When someone responds 'Amein Y'hei Shmei rabba mevorach' with all his might [e.g., his full concentration], they rip up his evil decree" (*Shabbos* 119b). ■

¹See *JO*, May '70.

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The Chevra Kaddisha

The workings of the *Chevra Kaddisha* are generally shrouded, if you will, in mystery. Even when one participates in a *tahara* (the ritual preparation and purification of the Jewish deceased for burial), the customs understandably evoke an aura of other-worldliness, explained most fully, perhaps, by the *Kabbalists*¹. One *Shabbos* lunch, a friend spoke briefly about her role as a member of the *Chevra Kaddisha*. I was impressed and a bit in awe, finding it hard to imagine preparing *meisim*—the deceased—for their final home.

I had forgotten that at that *Shabbos* lunch I'd expressed interest in observing a *tahara*, so when I got the call it was a bit of a shock. I decided, however, that since this was such an important *mitzva*, I would explore it. From the sidelines. The friend who had originally piqued my interest about the *Chevra Kaddisha* picked me up a few hours after I'd received the invitation. She told me that, really, nothing was expected of me. I could participate if I wanted, or not.

When we got to the Memorial Chapel, I retreated a bit into myself—my father had passed away only a few months earlier. We did not walk into the chapel as I had expected, but downstairs where apparently the *tahara* would be performed. There, in a little corridor, I was told to don two aprons, a pair of rubber boots, and two pairs of rubber gloves. Four other women and I, reading from a faded sheet attached to the wall, *davened* that *Hashem* help us per-

¹Each *Chevra*, as a rule, incorporates many of its own *minhagim*.

Andrea Sommerstein lives in Passaic, NJ. This is her first appearance in these pages.

Preparing Sarah bas Avraham for her final journey

Somewhat nervous and certainly somber, I walked into a large tiled, open, well-lit room. There lay a stilled Jewess, completely swaddled in sheets. This was Sarah bas Avraham.

form this deed with the right intentions.

Somewhat nervous and certainly somber, I walked into a large tiled, open, well-lit room. There lay a stilled Jewess, completely swaddled in sheets. This was Sarah bas Avraham. Sarah's bed was a spotless white metal gurney, waist high, the foot of which was slightly angled over a porcelain trough built into the floor.

The leader of our "team" began by uttering the only conversation I was to hear for the next hour and a half. "Sarah bas Avraham, please for-

give us if anything we do as part of the work of the *Chevra* offends your *kavod*." She then carefully cut away Sarah's wrappings in silence. Two others mutely inspected the body as her swaddling fell away... the only sounds were the clip of scissors, and the whispered prayers of the fourth *Chevra* volunteer.

I was afraid to look at Sarah's face, but my eyes were drawn to her. I never saw her fully, as care was taken to keep her face covered with a white cloth. Later I learned that although the eyes of the dead cannot see, exposure of the face (the most revealing part of a person) is a source of great embarrassment to the *neshama*. The *neshama* itself is said to hover about the body in confusion and pain until burial is completed. The silence, now broken only by splashes of water as the women gently and methodically cleansed Sarah, was in deference to her *neshama*, and a tribute to the holiness of the task at hand.

The leader then asked me, through sign language, if I would care to remove Sarah's nailpolish. (The *meis* must return to its source with as few obstructions—*mechitzos*—as possible.) "No way!" I thought as my head independently nodded yes. My throat had gone dry. This would be the first time I'd ever touched someone who was not living. But I was distracted from panic as I walked to the end of the table to accept the acetate-saturated cloth. Why had the leader not passed it to me directly across the gurney instead of having me walk out of my way? I did not know then that it is an insult to hand articles over the *meis* as if the *meis* were just a "thing." Therefore any exchange of objects is conducted beyond the *niftar*.

I took Sarah's right hand gingerly into my left hand, surprised at the strength and the cool. Small, they were locked in a graceful curve. My timorousness was replaced with what I can describe only as a caring wonder. What had she done with these hands? Had she cooked for her husband and children? Played with grandchildren? Written letters? Books? Played piano? Had she erred with these hands? With my own right hand I daubed the pink away, feeling a warmth for this stranger whose face I could only glimpse. I also felt a deep sense of privilege that would recur each time I would prepare a Jew-

ish woman for her final journey.

The cleansing of Sarah's body was performed piecemeal. Only the section being washed was exposed; all else was kept covered by a white sheet. Care was taken to save for inclusion in the casket any cloth that had absorbed even a hint of blood. The final *tahara*—an immersion in water—was performed quickly. One of the women immediately shook out a fresh sheet and covered Sarah with it.

The dressing process was very beautiful. Sarah was shrouded in an immaculate white bonnet, pants, undershirt and overshirt, secured

The leader then asked me, through sign language, if I would care to remove Sarah's nailpolish. (The *meis* must return to its source with as few obstructions—*mechitzos*—as possible.) "No way!" I thought as my head independently nodded yes.

at the knees, waist and collar with three loop bows. The loops represent the tines of the Hebrew letter *Shin*—the first letter of one Name of *Hashem*. One team member saw to it that the bows lay flat and pretty, while the others offered a poignant supplication in Yiddish that Sarah *bas Avraham* remember her status as a *Yiddishe tochter* (Jewish daughter), and that she recall her Hebrew name while on her final course.

When Sarah was placed in the *aron* (casket), she looked clean, warm and cared for. After the *aron* was closed and a candle lit, we gathered around and asked for pardon had any of the preparations been performed without the respect due her as a *bas Yisroel*. We offered our hopes that any debt of pain or suffering had been paid in the world of the living, and that her journey to the Next World be only one of reward. Moved, I felt at that moment tremendous pride and love of being Jewish, a bond with these women of the *Chevra Kaddisha*, and less afraid, somehow, of the passage of death.

To learn more about the meaning and simple beauty of a Jewish burial, its customs and laws, you may write for information from the Jewish Burial Society at 85-18 117th Street, Richmond Hill, NY 11418.

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BOOKS IN REVIEW

Of Evolution and Belief

NOT BY CHANCE, The Fall of Neo-Darwinian Theory, by Lee M. Spetner (Jewish Heritage and Roots Library, Jerusalem, 1996)

It can plausibly be argued that no other scholarly concept has had as drastic an impact on modern man's outlook as Darwinism. The belief that all living things are the product of natural evolution, through a combination of random events and the survival of the

Rabbi Elias, *menahel* of the Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch Beth Jacob High School for Girls and the Rivka Breuer Teachers Seminary, is a member of the editorial board of *The Jewish Observer*. He is the author of a number of published works, including *The Haggadah* (ArtScroll/Mesorah) and a new translation and commentary on Rabbi S.R. Hirsch's *The Nineteen Letters* (Feldheim).



fittest, made it unnecessary to accept that a Divine Creator fashioned this world. It did away with the need to explore the will of such a Creator and to abide by a moral law set by Him. Ultimately it confirmed to man that his survival and success in life depended on his own efforts, and that those weaker than he were inferior to him.

Being able to explain the existence of

our world and its development in a purely natural, scientific way was so tempting that it swept away the questions raised by the doubters. Questions, legitimate doubts, there were indeed aplenty. But the theory of evolution, from a secular viewpoint, was "the only game in town." Thus it was enshrined in the school textbooks, in the popular media, and in the mind of the masses. The problems posed by genetics, by the inadequacy of the fossil record, and many more, were explained away by means of unsubstantiated theories — until recently.

What happened? As scientists have probed deeper and deeper into the mysteries of life, and discovered the extraordinary complexities of the most basic components of living organisms, and the processes that make them function, it has become clear that there is no way to account for them as having arisen randomly, by chance. In October '91, *The*

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Jewish Observer, in a review, mentioned two books that highlighted the problems of evolutionary theory (*Darwin on Trial*, by Philip E. Johnson, and *Evolution in Crisis*, by M. Denton). Now Dr. L. M. Spetner's book brilliantly demonstrates that "the discoveries in biology during the past 30 or 40 years, together with elementary principles of information theory, have made the [neo-Darwinian] view untenable."

The Inevitability of Conscious Design

About 40 years ago, biologists began to learn how information plays its role in living organisms. How does a chicken egg know it has to grow into a chicken and not into a duck? And how does it know *how* to grow into a chicken? The required information is in the egg as well as in the chicken, being passed on from one to the other. Evolutionary theory requires heritable

changes in the chain of information; yet it cannot account for the necessary build-up of information. Scientists have discovered a great deal about how life's information is stored and used — and they have found that random variations cannot produce large-scale evolutionary changes. Random mutations can produce minor changes. But mostly such mutations cause information to be lost. A process that cannot add heritable information into the organism cannot lead to the grand evolutionary advances envisioned by the neo-Darwinians.

Dr. Spetner has an extraordinary ability to present complex mathematical, statistical and biological issues in a comprehensible manner. The lay reader may skip some scientific data, but he will be fascinated by the overall issues (Dr. Spetner wisely concentrated on presenting the main points, and provided a comprehensive bibliography for the more inquisitive reader). Of course, if random happenings cannot produce meaningful changes, we are forced to see our world as a product of conscious design. Indeed, the more science discovers about the way our world functions, and about its extraordinary complexity, the more compelling the argument for a Divine Creator. "Lift up your eyes on high and behold who created these!" It is impossible, for instance, to read the books by Rabbi Avrohom Katz (Tuvia Cohen) — his earlier work, *Designer World*, and his new one, *Our Amazing World* — and not be profoundly impressed by the Divine wisdom revealed in every facet of the universe. (See review on adjoining page.)

The NREH Process

If randomness in evolution is out of the question, does this mean that the world was created exactly the way it is now? Dr. Spetner suggests an alternative, which he calls NREH — "non-random evolutionary hypothesis." According to it, when the original major species were created, they were endowed with alternative developmental pathways that could be triggered

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by appropriate environmental signals. Dr. Spetner provides much scientific evidence in support of his thesis. The NREH process is inherently much faster than what would be possible under the neo-Darwinian theory; it could theoretically produce large changes in a single generation, without the need for any selection. However, the author avoided entering into any discussion of the time frame. As he explained in a personal communication, he wanted his main thesis to be evaluated and accepted on its own merits, without getting sidetracked into a discussion of the time frame.

There are many scientists who share Dr. Spetner's objections to blind random evolution. Thus, in a recent article in *The New York Times*, "Darwin Under the Microscope," Professor Michael Behe discusses the extraordinary complexity of our cellular system. He concludes that "whenever we see interactive systems (such as a mouse-trap) in the everyday world, we assume that they are the products of intelligent activity. We should extend the reasoning to cellular systems. We know of no other mechanism, including Darwin's, which produces such complexity. Only intelligence does."

Actually we do not have to be scientists to arrive at this conclusion. The books by Rabbi Katz bring home to every reader miracles hidden under the surface of our world. I remember the deep impressions made upon me in my teens by a biology teacher who emphasized this point in his classes. It should be an essential element of the science instruction in our schools. ■

OUR AMAZING WORLD, Rabbi Avrohom Katz/Tuvia Cohen (Mesorah Publications, Brooklyn, NY, 1996, 282 pages, \$16.99)

Rabbi Avrohom Katz is more familiar to many of us as Tuvia Cohen, because of his articles penned in the *Yated Ne'eman* under that name. Rabbi Katz has collated these articles, resulting in this most stimulating and entertaining book. Accepting as a truism that most of us "look but fail to see," the author takes us on an exciting adventure to the world of creation revealed by science.

In the forty-four chapters, we are introduced to the biological clock and sleep, the special "engineering" found in the giraffe, the multitude of uses of the humble onion, the wonders of milk, skin, wool, etc. Did you ever wonder how the 120 million rods and 7 million cones of the human retina link up with less than one million nerve fibers in the optic nerve? The answer revealed by the author has only recently been discovered (see p. 262).

Acknowledging that his interest in the wisdom of creation manifest in the world we live in, is a result of absorbing countless lessons demonstrated by Rabbi Avigdor Miller שליט"א, the author has proven himself a worthy *talmid*. This recurring theme, found in Rabbi Miller's books and lectures, permeates every story of this fascinating work. Rabbi Katz ingeniously weaves the lesson of creation while keeping the reader's interest peaked.

Rabbi Katz has been able to blend humor and science in a unique and interesting way that even the least motivated student of sciences will find fascinating. Rabbi Katz has presented a most powerful argument for a master plan of creation. The irony of using science, which will not acknowledge "creationism," to buttress the argument for a Creator, should not escape the reader's attention.

Actually, this book should have a caveat to the reader on the title page — "WARNING: This book can't be put down once you've begun to read it!" ■

Rabbi Hisiger is the principal of the General Studies Department of Yeshiva and Mesivta Torah Temimah in Brooklyn.

My Backyard Talks Back

*Picked up a wilted flower,
Found in the backyard.
It had a lot to tell me.
Guess I was listening hard.*

*Said something separated,
Plucked from its life source,
Just as soon as that is done,
Decay will run its course.*

*Next there were the fallen,
Dried up leaves that had collected,
Making cracks about how it does not
take long,
Once something live gets disconnected.*

*Weeds were quickly growing,
Surrounding each healthy shoot,
Warning that things destructive
Take great effort to uproot.*

*We get disconnected quickly.
Weeds race to choke us too.
But through the dirt, and toward the light
A tiny sprout cracks through.*

*I feel no need to travel now.
Enough running away.
Right here in my own backyard
Life has so much to say.*

Mrs. Goetz, a published author and poet, lives in Baltimore. A frequent contributor to these pages, she was most recently represented by "Perspectives," in JO Feb. '97.

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MORE ON PREVENTING TEEN-AGE DROPOUTS

To the Editor:

Your magazine is a *semel* of *kiddush shem Shamayim*. I would like to comment on the articles written by Rabbi Yakov Horowitz (teenage dropouts — May and Oct. '96). Thinking about a situation can lead to finding some roots of the problem and hopefully some solutions.

I, as a 4th grade *rebbe* with 24 *talmidim*, feel a large part of effectiveness is due to class sizes. There are many schools with 30-plus students in a class, *Chumash*, *Mishnayos*, or *Gemora* that lasts an hour. Even if the *rebbe* gets the information, *sevaros* and thoughts out of his *talmidim*, how long is the spotlight on an individual *talmid* per *shiur*? 1-1/2 minutes. In a 15-minute recess, how many *talmidim* can just talk to *Rebbi*? We all know all our *mosdos* work very hard to cover the budget, and *ashrei lahem*; but the lack of personal attention can be a major factor in not reaching every *talmid*.

There are means to maximize the time for reaching or touching every *talmid*, every *shiur*, but not everyone can always do it effectively. A remedial program can help students, but it must be instituted and run with *sechel* and effectiveness.

When *talmidim* leave elementary school and go on to yeshiva high school, they should also have access to remedial programs, for *talmidim* that need a little extra help. In the more "popular" *yeshivos*, many 9th and 10th graders can still use extra help to understand and enjoy learning *Gemora*, *Rashi*, and *Tosafos*.

RABBI SHMUEL TZVI BERKOWITZ
Cleveland

ADULTS ARE ALSO "WHAT THEY SEE"

To the Editor:

We were discussing the lessons from your recent article (*JO* Dec. '96) "Children Are What They See," and one of our *talmidim* pointed out the following *Mishna* (*Avos* 4, 19):

"One who learns as a child is compared to ink written on new paper,

whereas an older person is compared to erased paper."

This proves the premise that children are affected much more by what they see than adults. Their impressions are clear and longer lasting. "Remember your Creator in the days of your youth," *Kohelles* (12,1) proclaims.

It seems that this issue deserves more attention: "More than anything one guards, guard your mind/heart; for from it comes all the results of life" (*Mishlei* 4, 23 with *Metzudos*).

The *Sefer Hachinuch* teaches that there are six *mitzvos* of the 613 that apply continuously. The first five of these we would all expect, namely, belief in *Hashem*, His oneness, to love and fear Him. But number six of this unique category of *mitzvos* is not to stray after one's heart and eyes. (See the second *Biur Halacha* in *Mishna Berura*, *siman* 1.) This highlights how essential it is to protect ourselves from our vulnerability to error and temptation. Our minds and those of our children are most precious and require vigilant protection.

Perhaps this lesson is also intended in our juxtaposition of the blessing thanking *Hashem* for our eyes, with the one following it in which we thank for clothing. The blessing for clothing seems out of place. We begin with thanking for a mind, for our identity, for eyesight, and then continue with the body's ability to move, stand up, walk, etc. Why do we interrupt the sequence of appreciating the actual organs that *Hashem* has created, with clothing that is man-made and merely an external covering to the body?

The answer may be that the ability to see entails risks and thus it must be followed with *Hashem's* gift of clothing to cover that which should not be seen! The power of one's eyes is hazardous without proper controls. We must learn the prayer of Dovid *Hamelech* (*Tehillim* 119,37):

"Avert my eyes from viewing futility," and to train ourselves to "look" ahead—"Who is wise? He who 'forseen' the future" (*Tamid* 32a).

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**AUTHOR'S CLARIFICATION: FACING UP
TO INVALID RATIONALIZATIONS**

To the Editor:

My article in the December '96 issue of *JO* ("But I Only Want to Be a Macabee") evoked some critical responses. The issue raised was more-or-less as follows: "The propensity toward self-delusion is described in very concrete terms, but the solution offered is somewhat vague. Okay, so I need to marshal my moral strength and valor to overcome all these tendencies, but aren't there any strategies that can help me in my efforts?" It seems to me that this point is valid, and needs to be addressed.

Perhaps the most effective tool for this effort is our own imagination. Take the spectre of overwhelming difficulty, which tends to convince us that the obstacles to the task at hand—whether it be action or inaction—are insurmountable. Imagine defending that position before an objective judge. Better yet, envision yourself standing before the Heavenly Tribunal to whom we must ultimately answer for all our deeds. Can you picture them agreeing to your line of reasoning? Or is it clear that they would reject it out of hand?

Alternatively, stop for a moment and imagine how you would deal with these hurdles if tangible goals were at stake. Would you sleep in and be late for work, thereby endangering your position, for the same degree of exhaustion that "compels" you to oversleep and miss your morning *k'vius* (Torah study session)? Would you succumb to the same anger, agitation, etc. that overwhelms you in private if there were people around and

your reputation hung in the balance?

Another method is to imagine yourself responding to someone else who has come to you with the same dilemma. Since you would not be emotionally involved, your thinking would be very different than it is now. If the emotions involved are unusually intense, take this idea one step further. Picture yourself on the other side of the issue, with another person taking the position that is really your own. In this way, you will better appreciate the opposite side of the question.

Somewhat more formidable are

those difficulties that we encounter on an ongoing basis. Nevertheless, with a bit of creativity, these, too, can be overcome. When you say "*Modeh Ani*" in the morning, picture that which our Sages teach us: As you arise, you accept your soul from the Almighty for a single day to carry out that day's responsibilities. In the evening, when you go to sleep, your *neshama* will return to its Maker and report on the day's activities. Meanwhile, your body refreshes itself in preparation for another day's work (see *Tanchuma to Mishpatim; Tanna*

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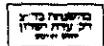
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D'vei Eliyahu, Ch. 2). This focus enables us to take life one day at a time, avoiding thereby the overwhelming specter of endless, ongoing hardship.

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Obviously, all these ideas have merit only if one is willing to invest time and energy in implementing them. A fleeting acknowledgment of any of the above realities will do little—if anything—to strengthen a person's will. When used properly, however, these ideas can be very effective in warding off many invalid rationalizations.

MATIS ROBERTS
 Monsey, NY

**A NON-ADVERSIAL APPROACH
 TO DIVORCE**

To the Editor:

I read with great delight "The Jewish Family—In its Glory and in Crisis" from the May '96 edition of *The Jewish Observer*. It is significant to see a renown leader such as Rabbi Avraham Pam *shlita* address an issue that we all know exists, as we see it all around us, yet are hesitant to talk about it or deal with it in a public forum. The issue to which I refer is divorce, and the bitter, hostile and all too often destructive consequences resulting from two people separating and ending their marriage.

Calling for a civilized approach to *Gittin*, Rabbi Pam (in the words of Rabbi Hollander) asks, "Why cannot the task of dissolving the marriage be approached with respect and humanity—with *menschlichkeit*?"

As a practicing family attorney, I am plagued by this very question. Why do friends of a spouse who is contemplating divorce encourage their friend to seek a "shark" for an attorney so that she can soak the other spouse for all he is worth? Why must one spouse be compelled to prove that the other is an

"unfit" parent so that he does not "lose" the children? Why do the secular courts refer to one parent as Plaintiff and the other as Defendant? This nomenclature accurately demonstrates that in our surrounding secular society the adversarial nature of divorce (plaintiff *versus* defendant) is inherent to the process.

There is no doubt that this is not the Jewish approach. From a Torah perspective, an ex-spouse is not a categorical exception to the Biblical commandment of loving thy neighbor. In fact, love and the pursuit of peace is still mandated even for those in the midst of conflict. Our Sages teach us that truth (*Yevamos* 65b; *Bava Metzia* 87a), justice (*Sanhedrin* 6b), and even G-d's Name (*Makkos* 11a) are compromised for the purpose of establishing *shalom*. Indeed, for a Jewish family, just because there is no one *bayis*, does not mean there should be no *shalom*.

The Mediation Option

As a practicing family mediator, I feel responsible to inform *Jewish Observer* readers and others in our community about a better alternative, one fitting for those of us committed to the values and goals of a Torah *hashkafa*. This alternative is mediation. Mediation is a personal process guided by a trained neutral third party who enables divorcing couples to work through the issues and decisions of a divorce within a collaborative framework. Divorce mediation is not marital counseling. Rather, it is only for those who have concluded that divorce is inevitable (hopefully, with the guidance of therapists and/or rabbis). Once that decision is reached, mediation helps them and their children avoid unnecessary scars and move on with their lives.

If parties can agree to the terms of their own divorce—that is the ideal. If not, mediation is the next best thing. Mediation is not only a private and confidential process, but is a process where the parties themselves decide on the rules and make their own decisions in a safe and neutral setting. A mediator does not make any decisions, but mere-

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ly facilitates the couple to work out decisions regarding custody and support, property distribution or maintenance. The mediator facilitates communication, negotiation and often resolution of even seemingly intractable disputes. Informed of, but unrestricted by, the narrow parameters imposed by statutes and case law, the parties in mediation can use the flexibility of the process to forge a creative agreement, tailored to the unique circumstances, needs and priorities of their own family. Not surprisingly, statistics demonstrate that the rate of compliance for divorce agreements through mediation is greater for parties abiding according to terms of a judge's decision in which they had little to no say.

The Advantages of Mediation

In contrast to the conventional method of divorce, more and more people are finding that mediation costs less, is faster, and most importantly, prevents a separation from turning into an ugly battle that leaves everyone victimized. Considering that litigated divorces can cost more than yeshiva or college tuition and can last longer than a presidential term, these advantages are not to be minimized. However, there are much more subtle advantages as well. With this cooperative approach, working towards a future and not getting stuck casting blame for the past, mediation helps each party to define their needs, values, and priorities. Parents can take all the time they need to work out the best custody and parenting schedule, focusing on their own needs as well as the children's.

This is a task which no judge and few attorneys have the time or the patience to work out. Indeed, the parents themselves are the best authorities in determining their own parenting arrangement.

Mediation offers a fresh opportunity to alleviate the unfortunate Agunah situation by its orientation towards cooperation and communication. I am not suggesting that mediation will solve the Agunah problem. It can, however, alleviate the number of problems by working with divorcing couples before the problems begin, by directing them away from an adversarial and hostile process. Consider the reaction of a husband upon receiving a summons and complaint by an unknown process server in which the husband learns that he is now a defendant in an action for divorce against his wife who has already sought and retained an attorney who will protect and defend her rights against him. Hurt, pain and frustration tend to generate more hurt, pain and frustration.

Now consider the alternative scenario where a couple works together despite their differences, to reach a better life and future for each other and their children. Cooperation generates cooperation. It is this second scenario the potential recalcitrant husband will be less likely to take a hard-line and unreasonable posture against his wife. Rather, he is more likely to be influenced by the interdependent process of mediation, oriented towards mutual collaboration and consideration.

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THE PRIMARY GEMACH EXPERIENCE

To the Editor:

The article "Confessions of a Gemach'nik" (Jan '97) is a laudable variation on a theme, an exposition of the myriad, unique gemachim—from clothing and dishes for simchas to pacifiers—that have proliferated in the Torah communities in Eretz Yisroel, and on a smaller scale in this country.

However, *ikar chaseir min hasefer*—the main example is missing. The primary gemach mandated in Chumash and halacha is one that extends cash

loans to Jews in financial need or crisis. This phenomenon is much more prevalent in Eretz Yisroel than elsewhere. Interest rates there are exorbitant, and currency devaluations and other financial facts of life make gemach the only viable avenue of borrowing for a large segment of the general public and, of course, the Kolleleit.

Baruch Hashem, lo almon Yisroel in this vital mitzva. There are many gemachim providing this service. Representative of the genre is Ozer Dalim, operating from fourteen all-volunteer

staffed branches in Yerushalayim, Bnai Brak, Kiryat Sefer and other locations.

For Klal Yisroel whose generosity fuels the gemachim, the reward may not be obvious, but it is sublime. To paraphrase the Sefer Hachinuch (mitzva 66), the quality of benevolence exemplified by lending to others prepares one to receive Divine blessing and goodness. "We have been made His messengers for our own benefit."

RABBI CHAYIM LEVIN
EXECUTIVE PRESIDENT, OZER DALIM
New York City

AUTHOR OF MALE AND FEMALE HE CREATED THEM DEFENDS WORK

To the Editor:

It seems to me that Rabbi Yisroel Miller's difficulty with the third section of *Male and Female He Created Them* (as outlined in his book review, JO, Oct. '96) stemmed from a misunderstanding of its intent. He writes favorably of the first two sections, saying about the first that "for a ben Torah seeking insight, there is much to gain" there, and describing the second and its discussion of the exemption of women from positive time-bound commandments as being possibly the "most extensive such study ever published in English" and one for which "anyone who studies or teaches this specific subject owes the author a debt of gratitude."

But the reviewer was uncomfortable with the third section and its focus on popular misconceptions on the exemption and on the spiritual natures of men and women in general. This section argues passionately against the popular misteaching that women are more spiritual than men and argues as well that such a misteaching is harmful to the Jewish community. But the reviewer

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seems to take this approach as a put down of women. He says, for example, that the third section harps on the argument against the spiritual superiority of women and seems unable to abide with the idea "that women possess certain spiritual strengths."

As writer of the book, I feared that the third section might provoke such a response. But I was faced with a dilemma. How does one explain the falsity of the misteaching unless he puts forth a strong argument? When secular ideologies infiltrate Jewish culture, they tend to grab hold rather stubbornly. I felt that I had to tackle each manifestation of the misteaching and show its logical fallacies. While such an approach may give the appearance of harping on an issue, or, to quote the reviewer, "hammer[ing it] home, again and again," it is really, in my view, a manner of offering a comprehensive argument.

Accordingly, I raised questions on the major subject matter most commonly used as support for the misteaching, for

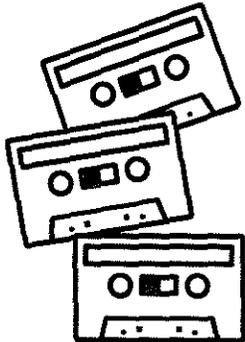
example, the causes of the redemption from Egypt and Sarah's prophecy. When I bring Midrashim to show the numerous causes of the redemption from Egypt, I do not do it to minimize the contribution of the merit of the righteous women (as the reviewer suggests), Heaven forbid. Rather, I am trying to show that the presence of numerous other causes, such as repentance and the Jews' not changing their names, means that we cannot simplistically draw philosophical generalizations about the spiritual levels of each gender from the event. When I bring the point of the *Netziv* that Sarah was higher than Avraham in *ruach hakodesh*, not in prophecy (where he was higher), I do not do it to question the greatness of Sarah (a most disturbing thought), but again to indicate the complexity of the material from which many of us today take liberties in drawing easy conclusions.

Male and Female He Created Them strives to be an intellectual book. It is not a *kiruv* primer. It is a book which brings

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classical Torah sources to raise philosophical questions about complex and timely issues. It seems to me that the reviewer perceived statements where the book asks questions. For example, I do not say, as the reviewer claims, that the refusal of the women to sin by the Golden Calf is indicative of their lower level. I propose only that the sin of men does not prove their level to be lower since oftentimes big sins come from big people. There is a world of difference between the two ideas. I am asking a question, again, to show the complexity of the dynamics of the event. *Male and Female He Created Them* poses questions to show the over-simplicity of many common assumptions. As we see throughout Torah literature, such an approach is not always gentle and politically expedient.

I recognize, and in the book worked

desperately to recognize, the sensitivity of these issues for many people. And I worked very hard to show (as the reviewer notes about the first sections of the book, though I sustained this effort throughout the book) the merits of both genders. The book is replete with dozens of references and often lengthy descriptions of praise of Jewish women. Indeed, some people, including women, have felt that the work is apologetic in this regard. If one goal of the book is to show also the merits of Jewish men, well, that is not a put down of women. It is an attempt to counter secular ideas which threaten the *shalom bayis* in our homes, our outreach to young men and women, and our Divine service in general.

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While we acknowledge the author's explanation, the review reflected the attitudes one would infer from a reading of the book. NW

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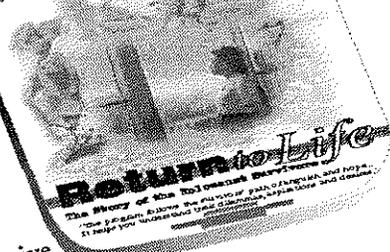
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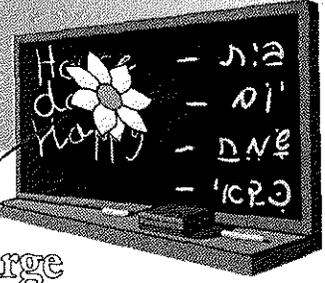
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