

THE Jewish OBSERVER

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Also in this issue:

*"From You to You"
- The Road to
Meaningful Prayer*
RABBI MATIS ROBERTS

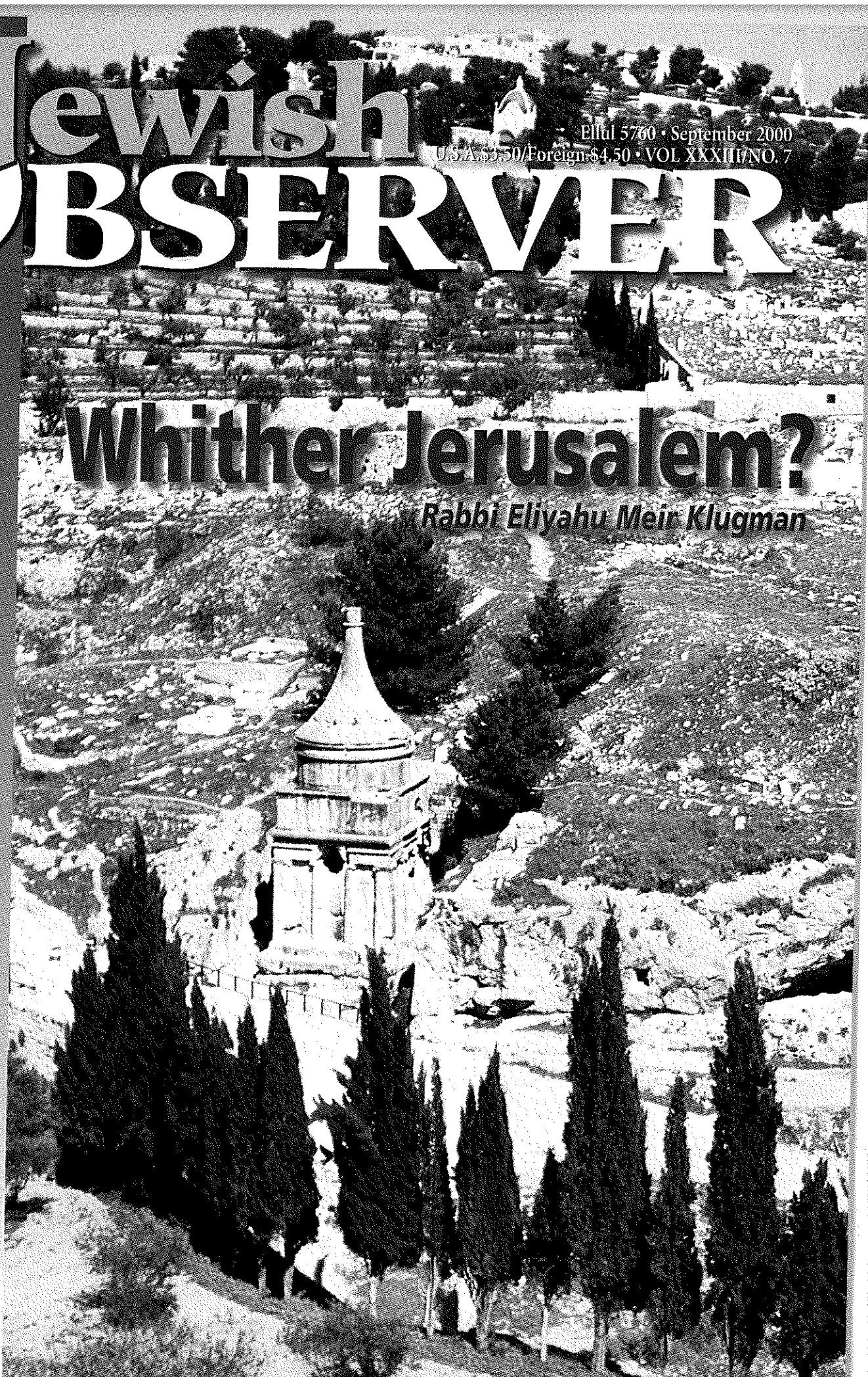
*Reminiscences of a
Former "Kid on the
Edge"*
RABBI SHNEUR AISENSTARK

*Kashrus in the
Year 2000*
JUDITH LEFF

*The Lieberman
Phenomenon:
Opportunities and
Challenges*
RABBI YA'AKOV FEITMAN

Whither Jerusalem?

Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Klugman



This Rosh Hashana, B

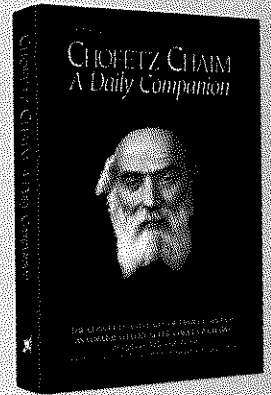
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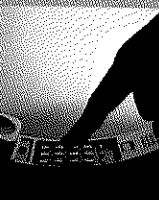
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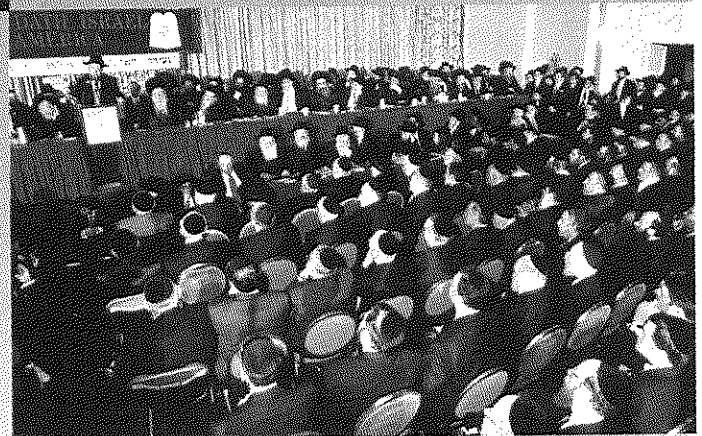
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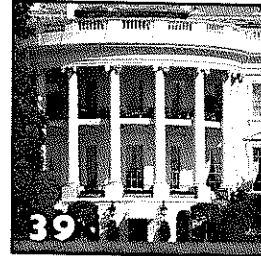
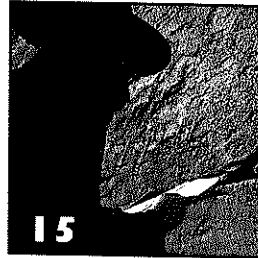
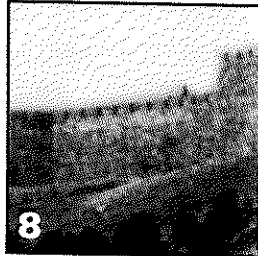
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NOTED WITH SORROW & GRIEF

"The passing of a tzaddik is equal to the [calamity of the] burning of the Beis Hamikdash" (Rosh Hashana 18b). During the first week of the month of Av, when our mourning for the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple is most intense, Klal Yisroel suffered the loss of three towering leaders of a stature associated with the vibrant era of pre-war Europe. Each made his imprint on Klal Yisroel in his own unique manner. With their passing, we have become impoverished in a most profound measure.

I

Rabbi Shlomo Halberstam זכר צדיק לברכה, direct descendant of the saintly Sanzer Rav, *Divrei Chaim*, beloved and revered as the Bobover

edly to save others. He lost all of his family to the Nazi destruction, except for his son, Reb Naftali, who will now succeed his father as Rebbe.

After the liberation, the Rebbe came to America in 1947, where he remarried,

of harmony and peace that characterizes Bobov are being perpetuated by his successor, the *Admor Rav Naftali* and the *Rav Hatzair*, Rav Benzion.

זכרתו יגן עלינו אמן.



Photo Credits: Bobover Rebbe, Slonimer Rebbe – Michael Mordechai Dorf
Rav Paler – Tsemach Glenn

Rebbe, was *niftar* on *Rosh Chodesh Av* – the *yahrzeit* of *Aharon Hakohen*, the classic *rodeif shalom*, pursuer of peace. Son of Rabbi Benzion Halberstam, who led Bobov *Chassidus* from 1905, at the age of 31, until his martyrdom in World War II (in 1941), he was brought up in an atmosphere of *avodas Hashem*, communal responsibility, dissemination of Torah on a large scale, and compassion and concern for every individual.

A *moreh hora'a* at age 21, the Rebbe was a highly regarded *talmid chacham*. After a series of miraculous escapes, the Rebbe endured unusual suffering during the War and risked his life repeat-

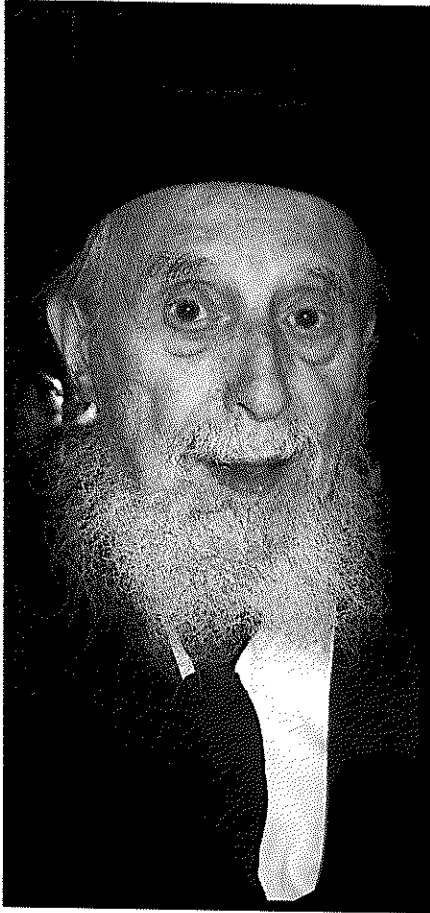
and became the leader of Bobover *Chassidus*. He assumed the role of father to the orphaned members of his group, established thriving institutions of Torah study (*Yeshiva Eitz Chaim*) and girls' education, ranging from nursery through *Kollelim* of advanced study, impressive houses of worship, and flourishing communal institutions serving tens of thousands of families, with headquarters in the Boro Park section of Brooklyn, and branches in cities around the globe – including Jerusalem, Antwerp, London, and Toronto.

The intensity and joy in *tefilla* and *avoda*, as well as the determined pursuit

II.

On the fifth of *Av*, the world lost an outstanding *Rosh Yeshiva* whose life spanned the precincts of Brisk as it flourished in Europe to its rebirth in the New World. Foremost among those who were responsible for transplating Torah's purity to these shores was Rabbi Binyomin Paler זכר צדיק לברכה

He was born in Brisk, some 92 years ago, to a family of Torah nobility – Rabbi Yitzchok Paler זצ"ל, an outstanding *talmid chacham*, and his Rebbetzin Devora ע"ה whose lineage was traced to



the *Ramo*. Reb Binyamin, who finished *Shas* at 16, enjoyed a close *rebbe-talmid* relationship with the *Gaon* Rabbi Yitzchok Zev Soleveitchik, the Brisker Rav זצ"ל, from 1931 until the outbreak of World War II in 1939, absorbing both his *Rebbe's derech halimud* – his unique analytical methodology of Talmudic study – and the meticulous *derech avoda* (approach to *mitzva* observance) associated with Brisk. Rabbi Paler spent the war years in Shanghai with the Mirrer Yeshiva contingent, where he distinguished himself with exceptional *hasmada* (diligence in study), and earned the admiration of his colleagues for his extraordinary abilities in all aspects of *limud haTorah*, including phenomenal recall of the texts of Talmud and its commentaries. This was especially important in those years when the *sefarim* themselves were not available.

Arriving in America in 1947, Rabbi Paler married the daughter of the late Matersdorfer Rav, Rabbi Shmuel Ehrenfeld זצ"ל, and began saying *shiurim* in

Yeshivas Chasam Sofer. In 1964, he established Yeshiva M'kor Chaim in Brooklyn – the name referring to the analytical Talmudic approach introduced by Rabbi Chaim Soleveitchik זצ"ל, which the *Rosh Yeshiva* perpetuated through his own learning and teaching.

During his half century of *harbotzas haTorah*, Rabbi Paler molded the thinking of hundreds of young men who were inspired by his example, as they were challenged by his *shiurim*, and guided by his involvement in their growth as exemplary *talmidei chachamim*.

זכורנו יגן עלינו אמן.

was Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Beis Avrohom, which he founded in Yerushalayim, for over 60 years. His great stature as a *mechanech* is evident in his *sefer Nesivos Shalom*. He eventually succeeded his father-in-law, Rabbi Avraham Weinberg זצ"ל, the *Birkas Avraham*, as Slonimer Rebbe in 1981.

The Rebbe was revered for his classic collection of discussions from a Chassidic perspective on the weekly *Sidros*, *Shabbos* and *Moadim*, published in the aforementioned multi-volumed *Nesivos Shalom*, as well as his *Toras Avos*, a collection of Chassidic essays.



III.

A great loss was suffered on the 7th of Av with the passing of the Slonimer Rebbe, Rabbi Shalom Noach Barazovsky זכר צדיק לברכה in Jerusalem, at age 89.

Born in Baranovitch to Rabbi Moshe Avraham Barazovski, he was strongly influenced by the Bais Avrohom of Slonim as well as the *Mashgiach* of Yeshiva Toras Chesed, Rabbi Moshe Midner.

He emerged as an outstanding *talmid chacham* and Chassidic leader. He

The Rebbe, a respected leader of Torah Jewry, served as a member of the *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah* (Council of Torah Sages) of Agudath Israel, a member of the leadership of the *Vaad Hayeshivos*, and a member of the directorship of Chinuch Atzmai – Torah Schools for Israel.

He leaves a void that cannot be filled.

זכורנו יגן עלינו אמן.

The *Jewish Observer* plans to publish biographical essays regarding each of these leading personalities in future issues. ■

WHITHER JERUSALEM?

I. POST-ZIONIST DIVISION OF JERUSALEM

The recent willingness by Prime Minister Ehud Barak to cede Arab neighborhoods within the Jerusalem municipal boundaries to the Palestinians constitutes a watershed for the State of Israel. There is no telling at this point what the outcome of the negotiations will be. It is clear, however, that the present government, and – with the principle of continuity in international negotiations – presumably any future government, will agree to relinquish parts of Jerusalem including the Old City to the Palestinians.

The indivisibility of Jerusalem, always the mantra of every Israeli politician, exists no longer. Whereas until today the division of Jerusalem has been a taboo subject in Israel, it is now an open question, subject to fierce debate. The polls purporting to gauge public opinion are inconclusive and depend on how the question is phrased. A large segment of the Israeli public is tired of war and has lost its will to fight, especially for something which will not help it in its search for an unencumbered, Western lifestyle, which today is characterized by a post-Zionist drive to shed the trappings of nationalistic yearnings. If it can be convinced that a deal, any deal, may possibly grant it

Rabbi Klugman lives in Jerusalem where he is a *maggid shiur* in a *yeshiva gedola*. Author of several books, including a biography of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch (ArtScroll), he is a frequent contributor to these pages.

some peace and quiet, it will vote for it.

While it is far from clear that Arab neighborhoods annexed to Jerusalem after the Six Day War have its status and holiness, that is hardly the point. As far as the secular Israeli politicians are concerned, those neighborhoods *were* part of Jerusalem, and their willingness to cede them means that in the minds of the current leadership of the State, Jerusalem has become expendable.

But whereas the willingness to relinquish Arab neighborhoods can at least be rationalized by the post-facto justification that the city limits are arbitrary and do not really determine the boundaries of Jerusalem proper, the apparent inclination to cede or share sovereignty on *Har HaBayis* and parts of the Old City puts the lie to that claim, and makes this trend all the more painful. This willingness can mean only that either the State of Israel is willing to sever the three-millennia-old ties of the Jewish People to Jerusalem, or that essentially it views itself as a Jewish State in name only. Jerusalem, then, becomes just one more “piece of real estate,” as Yitzhak Rabin called the West Bank.

Only a blind man can ignore the anomaly in the fact that to even the most secular Arab leaders Jerusalem is non-negotiable, while Israeli leaders are constrained only by public opinion, or what they perceive as such. Barak used daily polls of the Israeli public mood to determine how much he could concede at Camp David. And his actions indicate that he would agree to transfer sovereignty to Arafat over any part of the

Old City the moment he is convinced that the Israeli public will put up with it. One gets the impression that as far as he is concerned nothing is sacrosanct if it but yield an agreement, which, he hopes, will be his ticket to victory in the next election. These are the bitter fruits of post-Zionism, now the leading force in Israeli political and social ideology.

When There is No Spiritual Claim

The trend of Ehud Barak’s thinking, then, is painfully clear. For the secular Israeli that he represents, any Jewish spirituality is anathema, and there really *is* no difference between Jericho and Ramallah, or Hebron and East Jerusalem. The willingness to cede 90% of the West Bank is of a piece with everything else.

But if that is the case, then logically, Israel has no greater right to Tel Aviv or Haifa than it does to Shechem or Bethlehem. If we really have no spiritual claim to the Land, then what difference *is* there between Shechem and Ramallah, or Netanya and Haifa?

The Palestinians understand this only too well. That is why Arafat is unyielding in his demand for the “right of return” for Palestinians to their homes *in Israel*. And it also accounts for the fact that the Barak government is hard pressed to explain why morally they shouldn’t give in on this as well. Here, too, one can discern the first cracks in the Israeli position, disguised as humanitarian gestures for the “unification of families.”

The Only Basis for Concessions

The practical approach of the Torah Jew to Barak's concessions is clear. Despite the secular character of the State, we reject and we grieve every time any piece of the Land of our Fathers is given to non-Jews. The only way we could painfully agree, by Knesset vote or national referendum, to concessions in the West Bank or Jerusalem is if such measures will save Jewish lives. *Pikuach nefesh* is the paramount consideration in our possession of the Land until the advent of *Moshiach*.

It is difficult for any reasonable person to understand how giving land to the Palestinians, who make no secret of their ultimate goal of the obliteration of Israel, will somehow make them and neighboring Arab countries accept the existence of the Jewish State. If we were able to trust the arguments of the present government that it will bring international recognition and Arab acquiescence to our existence, it may be worth considering. But the Left's *raison d'être* of becoming a "nation like all others" at almost all costs makes their arguments and motives suspect.

The Likud and its right wing allies' claim that giving it back is dangerous is not appreciably more credible. Their knee-jerk nationalism, and the recent Likud Knesset vote against the recommendations of the Tal Commission's exemption of yeshiva students from the draft, hardly give assurance that the fundamentals of Judaism motivate their concern.

Which will save more Jewish lives: keeping it or giving it back? There is no conclusive answer to that question.

The Religious Jew's Reaction

The instinctive reaction of any religious Jew to the possibility of an Israeli government ceding parts of Jerusalem to the Arabs and sharing sovereignty with the Palestinians in the Old City and on the Temple Mount is one of horror, disbelief and – yes – fear. And it is accompanied by a sinking feeling that we have

not yet reached the limits of Barak's concessions.

So how are we to view this tragedy? Will our generation witness the "fall of Jerusalem"? Did we regain Jerusalem after 1900 years only to lose it again?

World history and the ongoing direction of human events are major instruments in the Divine education of man. It is, therefore, incumbent upon us to seek that Divine lesson not only in the ebb and flow of the fortunes of the Jewish People, but in every detail therein. (See Dubna Maggid, *Kol Bochim*, *Eicha* 1,5, based on the *Midrash*.) The Torah and *Chazal* are replete with unambiguous references to the consequences of our actions, and the Jew is required to the best of his ability to translate those exhortations into actions and attitudes. It is a rejection of the principle of Divine reward and punishment to be aware of the action, be cognizant of the outcome, and yet deny the Divine message in the connection between the two.

But when attempting to determine the Divine intent regarding Jerusalem it is almost impossible to disentangle the emotional from the rational. By the same token, however, the centrality of Jerusalem to Jewish life makes understanding that lesson all that more significant and critical.

II. TRULY POSSESSING JERUSALEM

Jerusalem is the focal point of all Jewish hopes and aspirations. For close to a millennium it was the site of the *Beis Hamikdash*, and for three millennia, since the time that *Avraham Avinu* was ready to sacrifice his son *Yitzchak* on Mount Moriah, it is the resting place of the *Shechina*. The longing for Zion for two thousand years is an expression of the yearning of the Jew for *K'vod Shamayim*, for the ability of every Jew and every human being to become close to Him, to witness His direction and His providence in every detail of this world (see *Mesillas Yesharim*, *Midas HaChassidus*).

Yerushalayim for the Jew, then, does not mean sports stadiums, universities, restaurants, and not even museums.

Yerushalayim to the Jew is *Yeru-shalem* the place where *yeira'eh* – man's ability to perceive the Divine Presence, is *shalem* – whole and unimpaired¹. That, and nothing else, constitutes the essence of Jerusalem.

When Jerusalem fell, *Chazal* (*Sanhedrin* 96b) tells us, it was made clear to its conquerors that they had vanquished an already fallen city. Because once Jerusalem could no longer fill its role as the resting place of the *Shechina*, it could last no longer. Possession of Jerusalem, then, has always been only a physical manifestation of an underlying spiritual state. It is hard to imagine that it will be returned to us for any considerable length of time under the same circumstances as when it was destroyed.

Alas, no amount of *limud zechus*, no attempt at defense, can conceal the fact that we have a long way to go to make the Jerusalem of today a resting place for the *Shechina*. Jerusalem has so much *kedusha*, so much Torah, *yiras Shamayim* and limitless amounts of *gemillus chassadim*, and yet, not a little of the antithesis of everything authentically Jewish. Alongside the sixty percent of the Jewish population that is Torah observant, alongside the tens of thousands of *yerei'im u'shleimim*, Jerusalem has become a bustling metropolis which has spawned every form of activity that the *nevi'im* described as the cause of the *churban*.

If Jerusalem was destroyed because of the profusion of *Shabbos* desecration (*Shabbos* 119b), it is absurd to imagine it being returned to us when even that age-old sea of tranquillity, the palpable *menuchas Shabbos* for which Jerusalem was renowned, has now become a polluted lake with the steep rise of commercial *Shabbos* desecration.

When the Supreme Court of Israel mandates blasphemous Reform, Conservative and mixed services at the one place from where the *Shechina* has not departed (*Shir Hashirim Rabba*), when the walls – yes, those massive walls of *Har Habayis* – are used, with official sanction, as the backdrop for

¹ *Bereishis Rabba* 56, 10

indecent theatrical productions, is it surprising that the Director of human affairs will hint to us that under the circumstances He may not be pleased with our custodianship?

What Unites Jerusalem?

A word here about the “united Jerusalem” mantra, a central theme of Israeli public pronouncements since the Six Day War. It would be instructive to see how David, the first King of Jerusalem, defines his capital (*Tehillim* 122:3) as an *ir shechubra lo yachdav* – a united city. *Rashi*, citing the *Midrash*, explains that the unity referred to here is a symbiosis between our earthly Jerusalem and its celestial counterpart. Jerusalem, says *David Hamelech*, is whole and united only when it is at one with the *Shechina*, the Divine Presence, as symbolized by *Yerushalayim shel ma’ala* – the ethereal Jerusalem. And that will be the case only when it has realized the previous

condition of King David regarding his city. It must be filled with *she’arayach Yerushalayim*, (*ibid.* v. 2) defined by *Chazal* (*Makkos* 10a) as *shearim shehayu oskim beTorah*, where Torah is studied and observed. Then, and only then, can Jerusalem be a united city. And so long as this is not the reality, it is not, it was not, and it will not be united, despite its miraculous capture in 1967.

There is another point to consider. We see the Oslo process as responsible for Jerusalem being taken away from us. But is that really the case? How can East Jerusalem, filled with *avoda zara* – huge mosques and every variety of church – be considered Jewish? Can the current drive by the Moslem Waqf, with Barak’s explicit agreement, to methodically bulldoze and remove countless truckloads of any remaining vestige of a Jewish presence on *Har Habayis* be anything other than the vivid and tragic fulfillment of the prophesy of Micha (3,12) “*Tzion sadeh techaresh* – Zion will be plowed over like a field”? In Rabbi

Akiva’s days (see *Makkos* 24), these two phenomena represented to the Sages the ultimate proof of the destruction of Jerusalem. And which Jew who values his life would enter the Temple Mount or most East Jerusalem neighborhoods these days without protection? Authentic Jewish sovereignty on *Har Habayis* and East Jerusalem, then, is more declarative than real.

Is Jerusalem falling? No.

Because we never really regained it all in 1967.

Does that make the series of current events hurt any less? Of course not.

III. DIVINE ORCHESTRATION OF EVENTS

So how did we get here? Anyone with a minimum of intellectual honesty cannot but see how the unfolding of events in the Oslo Process is *shelo kederech ha’teva*. The world watches with incredulity as the most powerful country in the Middle East, for whom the Palestinians are no match, gives away piece after piece of an ancestral homeland to a group of people whose claim to a national identity did not exist until thirty years ago.

One watches with mounting horror as Jerusalem, mentioned countless times in *Tanach* and (*lehavdil elef alfei havdalos*) not once in the Koran, is being given by the People of the *Tanach* to the People of the Koran.

The method *Hashem* employs to ensure that we learn the results of our actions is *midda keneged midda*, a measure for a measure. That technique applies in the public sphere as well.

A look at the history of *Eretz Yisroel* over the last century yields a fascinating observation. The Zionist approach to *Eretz Yisroel* was not to use it for the fulfillment of the Divine command, but rather as a vehicle for the fulfillment of their dream of a Jewish national home. They cited the Prophets primarily to get the religious Zionists on board and the international community to agree. Palestine, as it was known in those days (another irony), was intended to make the Jewish people “normal,” a nation like

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all others with a land of its own.

What do we see as the Divine response? Taking the non-Jewish inhabitants of that land, who were *never* considered a nation and *never* possessed any national identity or land for that matter, and have them gain acceptance as a people and a nation by the international community and given the rights to a national homeland. Because when the Jew comes with the attitude that his right to His Land is based on a secular nationalism, Hashem will create *ex nihilo* a nationalism which will undercut that claim to the land.

Thus, the Divine divestiture, disguised as the Middle East peace process, would seem to show the hollowness of a claim to *Eretz Yisroel*, which is based solely on Jewish national rights. Who ever heard of a country willingly surrendering parts of its capital?

And it is the most compelling testimony that the century old delusion that even a secular Jewish State signals the beginning of the *Geulah* is no more than that – a delusion.

Manifestations of Divine Sovereignty

There is another irony here. When Bill Clinton ran for president eight years ago against George Bush, the choice was widely viewed by Jews as one between an unsympathetic, if not hostile, president who would wring concessions from Israel, and a challenger who genuinely professed only goodwill towards Jews and the State of Israel.

On Election Day I visited Rabbi Shimon Schwab זצ"ל, the late, revered Rav of K'hal Adath Jeschurun of Washington Heights. The phone rang and the caller asked who he should vote for. "You must vote for Bush," the Rav replied, "because Clinton will pollute the moral climate of America."

"But isn't Clinton better for Israel?" the caller asked.

"Only Hashem will determine what will happen in *Eretz Yisroel*, and as far as that is concerned, it doesn't matter who is president. But the moral climate in America will degenerate with Clin-

ton as president."

The events of the last eight years have proven the words of the wise old *Rav* only too prophetic in both areas. Conventional wisdom notwithstanding, the president deemed most friendly to Israel since its founding was the one whom Hashem employed to force it to give the Arabs the most without any tangible return. *Lev melachim vesarim beyad Hashem* (G-d controls the hearts of kings and ministers) without commentary.

One thing is clear. When Hashem will "redeem [us] from among the nations and will gather [us] in from the lands where [we] were dispersed, *im lo beyad chazaka uv'zro'a netuya u'vechaima shefucha emloch aleichem*" (*Yechezkel* 20,33-34). Whether He rules over us with a powerful Hand and an outstretched Arm, with obvious miracles, as when we regained the Old City and *Har Habayis* during the Six Day War, or when He pours out His anger on us when He takes them away, it is an unmistakable

manifestation of His sovereignty.

So how can Barak give it back?

He can't.

Hashem can.

IV. WHERE THE SHECHINA DWELLS

Chazal (*Berachos* 8a) tell us that since the destruction of the *Beis Hamikdash*, all Hashem has in this world are the four "amos of *halacha*." One may interpret this to mean that when the *Beis Hamikdash* stood, it alone was the resting place of the Divine *Shechina*, and upon the destruction of the Temple the *Beis Hamidrash* takes its place.

Not so, explained the *Ponevezher Rav*, Rabbi Yoseph Kahaneman, זצ"ל. The words employed "*ein lo ella* – he has only," mean that when we merited the *Beis Hamikdash*, there were two places where the Divine Presence rested: the *Beis Hamikdash* and the *Beis Hamidrash*.² Now there is only one: the

² See *Maharsha* there for another view.

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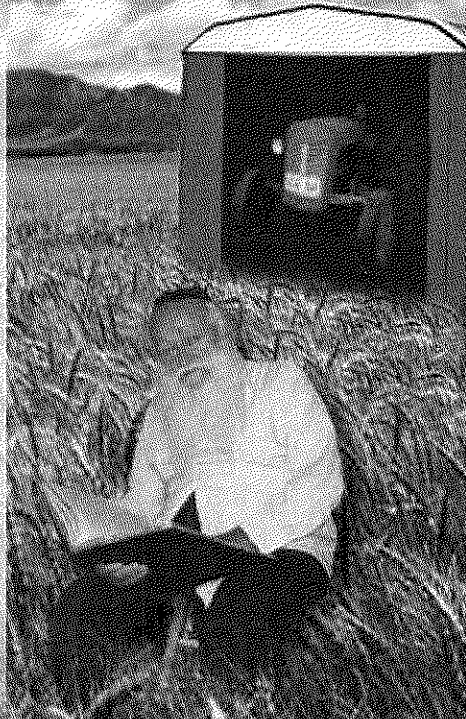
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Beis Hamidrash. How can this be?

The open connection between the Almighty and His world, the revelation of His presence to humanity and their clear perception of His Providence is called *hashraas haShechina*, the resting of the Divine Presence. The purpose of the *Beis Hamikdash* was not primarily for the sacrifices that were brought there, but rather to serve as a conduit for the Divine Providence and Presence. By means of the Divine Service conducted in the *Beis Hamikdash*, the *Shechina* rested on *Eretz Yisroel* and through it on the entire world. (See *Ramchal, Daas Tvuos*, pp. 175-176.) In the *Beis Hamikdash* one learned to behold in a tangible way the revelation of His Providence and Honor. With the destruction of the Temple, that place where *Hashem's* Presence was palpably experienced no longer existed.

Now this does not mean that there was any reduction, Heaven forbid, in the Divine direction and providence. It is only that we, its recipients, can grasp that *hashpaa*, that abundance, only commensurate with our *keilim*, our instruments of reception. Those are directly proportional to our actions. (*Ramchal, Kalach Pis'chei Chachma, Pesach 27*, p. 74)

That in no way indicates a limitation on His *hashpaa*. As Rabbi Dessler explains (*Michtav M'Eliahu I*, p. 103), this apparent lack of *hashraas HaShechina* is only apparent. It is comparable to a person sitting in a house with dirty windows, with the sun shining outside in all its strength and glory. That person won't benefit from the sun's light and warmth because of his handicap, the dirty windows of his house. The sun, however, continues to give light and warmth without restriction, regardless of the state of the house or its windows.

When one learns Torah with total subjugation, and toils in it with the sole purpose of understanding and absorbing His word, His will, and in effect, His essence, (*Hu uretzono chad hu*, see *Nefesh Hachaim, Shaar 4*), that itself is the cause, now, and ever since Sinai, of Divine Revelation in this world. Then, as the *Bach* (*Orach Chaim 47*) explains, the truly serious student of Torah becomes the *Merkava* and the

Heichal, the vehicle and the sanctuary of the *Shechina* (like the *Beis Hamikdash* itself). The false prophets, declares the Prophet *Yirmiyahu* (Yirmiyahu 7,4), continually speak of *Heichal Hashem* – the Divine Sanctuary, but “*Heichal Hashem heima*,” they, lowly man himself, has the opportunity to become *Heichal Hashem*, the Divine sanctuary.

How?

Through serious, sustained *limud HaTorah*.

The Six Day War ended on Friday morning. The return of the *Kosel* and the *makom Hamikdash* to Jewish hands for the first time since the destruction of the Temple sparked indescribable feelings of euphoria, and even the most sober person imagined that he could hear the footsteps of *Moshiach*.

The Israeli Army cleared the area in front of the *Kosel* and announced that on *Shavuos* night, four days after the conclusion of the war, the general public would be allowed for the first time to come and *daven* there. The

rapture of any Jew lucky to be in Jerusalem for that *Yom Tov* defies description.

In the *Mirrer Yeshiva*, shelled by Jordanian artillery less than a week before, the entire yeshiva and its neighbors spent *Shavuos* night learning, in anticipation of the pre-dawn walk to the *Kosel*. In the middle of the learning Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz זצ"ל (who was later to *daven* at the *Kosel* at least once each week) delivered a *shmuess*, in which he described the miracles and defined the tumultuous events of the previous week. “*Rabboisai*,” he concluded, “*avadeh der Kosel iz heilig, ober der shtender, rabboisai, der shtender iz kodesh hako-doshim.*” (The *Kosel* is surely Holy,

but the *shtender* is the Holy of Holies.)

So the Holy of Holies is there for the asking. It is accessible to any serious student of Torah.

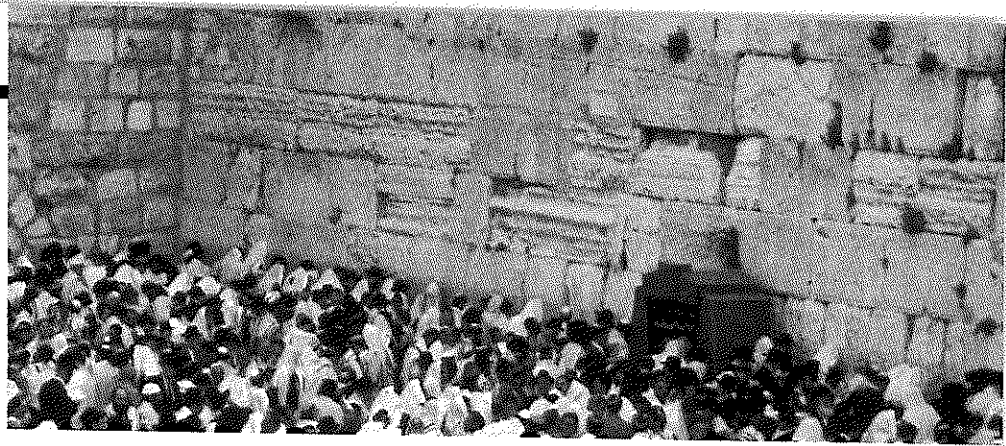
And how can we secure a united Jerusalem?

The prayer for Jerusalem we recite thrice daily in the *Shemoneh Esrei* says it most eloquently:

“May You return to *Your* Jerusalem with compassion,” and then, “may You reside there as You promised.” When the *Shechina* returns, then, and only then, *u’venei osah bekarov* – will You rebuild it, soon.

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Overcoming Internal Obstacles to Meaningful Prayer

When the Chofetz Chaim would pray, it seemed as though a love of the L-rd filled his entire being to the point of expiring from earthly life. It was as if he was then removed from this world. His back was bent, his head bowed down. On his face an expression of joy was spread, while within him hummed vibrations of trembling reverence. His shoulder shook slowly, as his body was aflame, shuddering and quaking. He was then utter simplicity, surrender and humility. Every word that left his mouth was spoken in holiness and purity, with an intensity of meaning. And for a long while after his prayer, it was apparent that he found it hard to turn his thoughts to other matters (from *The Hafetz Hayyim on the Siddur*, p 267, citing *Conversations of the Hafetz Hayyim*).

That was the Chofetz Chaim. What about us? What is our *tefilla* expected to look like? For that we need only turn to the words of the *Shulchan Aruch* - the Code of Jewish Law:

Someone who is praying must focus his heart on the meaning of the words that he utters with his lips. And he should consider it as if the Divine Presence were before him. He must eliminate all distracting thoughts until his thoughts and concentration are purely involved in his prayer....

This is what the truly pious would do: they would sit in solitude and con-

centrate on their prayers until they achieved transcendence of the physical and supremacy of intellect, reaching thereby a level close to prophecy (*Orach Chaim* 98:1).

The reason for this is not that difficult to understand. *Tefilla* is one of the activities that most defines

our relationship with *Hashem*. When we pray, in addition to fulfilling His will, we interact with Him on a personal level. We engage the Almighty in direct conversation, as between one person and another - *Blessed are You; You are eternally mighty; We thank You*. We also turn to Him for all of our needs and aspirations, acknowledging thereby that He is the ultimate source of all blessing. With so much at stake, it is no surprise that we are expected to pray with devotion.

FACING THE OBSTACLES

Like anything that offers so much growth, praying properly is not an easy task. It takes energy and determination to remove all other matters

from our minds and to focus entirely on the words and meaning of our *tefillas*. And it is especially difficult to relate emotionally to the essence of prayer - to experience the fact that, although we cannot see Him or perceive His presence, we are speaking to a living G-d who is listening to our every word. Much has been written about these difficulties, however, and many ideas have been presented for overcoming them¹. Ultimately, it is a matter of effort. If we are willing to take the trouble we can continuously increase the depth and intensity of our worship.

But there is another, more subtle, factor which tends to undermine our efforts in this area. Within our own hearts and minds, there is an element of resistance that actively opposes any attempt to focus properly on our *tefillas*. It is not experienced by everyone; nor do those who endure it do so all the time. But it is common enough that it needs to

be addressed. And it is complex enough that the way around it is not so clear - even to those who are willing to make the attempt.

That obstacle is the strong feeling of unworthiness that tends to overcome us when we feel ourselves standing before

¹ See, for example *Pathway to Prayer* by Rabbi Mayer Birnbaum (*Kuntras Avodas Hatefilla* in the Hebrew version) for a list of suggestions to this end.



Rabbi Roberts is the *Mashgiach Ruchani* of Yeshiva Shaar HaTorah of Queens. He is a frequent contributor to these pages.

the King of Kings. The more intensely we experience that reality, the more we are likely to shrink back in shame. Thus, for example, a person begins the *She-moneh Esrei*: "Blessed are You, Hashem" – and, immersed in his words, he realizes that he has engaged the Almighty Himself in conversation. When that reality hits home, the sense of awe and feelings of inadequacy can be quite overwhelming. "How do I, with all my flaws and frailties, approach this exalted and perfect Being?"

Shortly thereafter he declares to his

Maker: "You are holy; Your name is holy; and holy beings praise You constantly." One would have to be emotionally numb not to shudder with embarrassment. How dare I talk to Hashem about His holiness when I am so far from that level? What's more, there are so many things I do that impede the revelation of that very holiness.

"Return us, our Father, to Your Torah; bring us close, our King, to Your service... Forgive us, our Father, for we have sinned; Pardon us, our King, for

we have been lax (in Your service)." Am I really ready to live up to the full implications of those requests? If I have not made a serious decision to improve my ways and serve Him properly - with realistic plans for carrying it out – how do I dare to ask for His help in doing so?

"And may it be good in Your eyes to bless Your nation Yisroel in every time and in every hour with peace." What have I done lately for the sake of peace? Am I willing to compromise my dignity or my interests in order to avoid conflict? Am I careful in everything I say and do to be sure I don't provoke any strife?

And finally, as one prepares to end his "conversation", "May the words of my mouth and the reflections of my heart be pleasing before You." What a brazen request! Does my behavior warrant that my words should be pleasing to Hashem? Are the thoughts of my heart so pure that they deserve to be acceptable before Him?

Thus, the train of consciousness that intense *tefilla* generates can be very devastating. Before the Almighty there are no pretensions. All of our flaws and limitations are revealed before Him, and when we bask in His light, they become clear to us as well. The denial and self-deception that usually enables us to forget our failings cannot withstand the self-scrutiny that comes with presenting ourselves before His eyes.

True, this brutal self-awareness breeds the genuine humility that is appropriate for *tefilla*. Moreover, it can serve as the basis for general repentance and for reinvigorating our overall relationship with the Almighty. But it also carries in its wake the persistent call of a misdirected conscience: "Where do you find the gall to stand before Him sullied and defiled with sin, and to petition Him with your lowly needs and requests?" In the face of that withering indictment, we tend to withdraw in shame. Rather than suffer the anguish that our intensity brings, we shut down our emotions inside - and thereby lose the opportunity for an intimate encounter with the Divine.

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ANGRY AT WHOM?!

There is yet another emotion that derails proper *tefilla*, and that is anger. Logically, there is no room for anyone to be angry at G-d. He is all-powerful and all-knowing and has only our best interests at heart. Hence, whatever happens must be for the good. Anything that seems wrong or unfair is only because we do not have access to the big picture – the infinite realm of eternity.

Unfortunately, emotions are not always logical. In many instances, a child who is bitterly angry with his parents knows that what they did was just and for his benefit. But he can't help feeling angry and resentful for his pain and frustration. Adults are not really much different. No matter how many times we tell ourselves that we must accept the Will of *Hashem* with love, there is often a strong surge of anger and resentment when things do not seem to be as they should. We are, understandably, very uncomfortable with such feelings, and we try our best to still them. But in many cases they are too potent to be silenced.

A child who feels angry with his human father can convince himself that his father was wrong. But what does one do with such feelings towards his Father in Heaven? He has no way to rationally validate his feelings, yet, in many cases, he can not get them to relent. His options seem to be limited, none of them very appealing. He can allow himself to acknowledge his anger and let it run its course, but he is likely to undergo terrible guilt for the way he feels. He can deny his feelings and pretend they do not exist - a service the subconscious often provides free of charge. But at some level he recognizes the truth, and his deeper feelings are going to take their toll. Or, he can – G-d forbid – take the well-traveled route of escaping his dilemma by diluting or denying his faith.

None of these choices are likely to enhance the quality of his *tefillas*. The damage done by the third method is obvious; the others are a bit more complex. How does this person approach *Hashem* in *tefilla*? If he

acknowledges the ways he feels, the burden of guilt will surely undermine his *tefillas* in the manner described above. If he tries to ignore it, the shallowness of his emotions will prevent him from any meaningful connection. If he denies his anger even to himself, he can, for a while, pretend it isn't there. But the *passuk* says that *Hashem* is close to all who call to Him with truth. Expressing humble devotion while seething inside with resentment – no matter at what level of consciousness – is not truth. In any event, his feelings will eventually rise to the surface and he will be faced with the same dilemma.

So how does one confront truth and yet rise above anger? How does a young widow struggling to support her eight orphaned children say the words "the orphan and widow He encourages"?

With how much fervor does someone who is truly poverty-stricken recite the verse "You open up Your hand and satiate every living creature"? What about the parents of a child who succumbed to a long and painful illness? What do they feel when they praise *Hashem* for being "the Healer of the sick"? Or the aspiring scholar who is seriously handicapped in his studies – what should he think when he says to the Almighty "You grant wisdom to man"? In fact, this applies to any person who is overwhelmed by life's difficulties and feels incapable of meeting its challenges. How does he process his thanks to *Hashem* for our lives that are placed in Your hands? Yes, the basic elements of faith can resolve these questions in a person's mind. But how many people have faith that is strong enough to fully resolve them in their hearts?

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THE ULTIMATE HAVEN

The antidote to all this can be found in Rav Shlomo ibn Gabirol's liturgical masterpiece *Kesser Malchus*, which is recited by Sephardic Jews on Yom Kippur morning. There he writes: "If You seek out my sin I will flee from You to You; I will seek shelter from Your anger in Your shade." Mortal man does not have the wherewithal to approach Hashem, but with G-d's assistance he can do so.

Let us first deal with the unrelenting conscience. Shamed by the awareness of our misdeeds, confronted by the knowledge that we have incurred Divine wrath, where can we possibly flee? Who is there that can protect us from the Almighty Himself? From such deep shame and mortal terror there can be but one refuge, the boundless sanctuary of G-d's infinite love and mercy. Rather than withdraw, we need to turn to Him on a deeper

level. Our message to Hashem must be as follows:

"Hashem, open my lips and allow my mouth to recite Your praises. As I prepare to stand before You in prayer, I find it very difficult to open my mouth. I am a lowly, mortal being, and I feel totally unworthy of presenting myself before Your infinite eminence. What's more, I've transgressed Your Will and defiled my soul, and I'm overwhelmed with shame and regret for my misdeeds. Only You can provide me with the courage to face You - to express Your praises and appeal to You for my needs. Therefore, I flee from You to You: From the spectre of Your towering greatness and frightening judgment I turn to You and find refuge within Your loving arms. Please grant me the strength and support to be able to approach You properly."

Processed in this manner, one's full awareness of his feelings will enhance his prayers rather than weaken them. But there is a need for caution. Having mastered this approach, a person may start

feeling a perverse pride in his sins. After all, it is only through them that he faces Hashem with such honest humility. This can evolve into an unacceptable level of comfort with one's misdeeds. That, of course, is not the proper mindset with which to approach Hashem in tefilla. We may turn to Hashem for strength when the pain in our lives becomes intolerable - even if it comes from our own wrongdoing. But He is not there to make our offenses painless. Rather, we must steel ourselves to feel the full, humbling impact of those feelings of inadequacy, and only then turn to Hashem to help us deal with them.

A similar approach can be taken with irrational anger. If one feels anger or resentment that is directed Heavenward, he should not try to hide his feelings when he turns to Hashem. Rather, he should bring those feelings to Him for help, just like he does with everything else.

"Hashem, I know and acknowledge that everything You do is for the good. Whatever pain You bring upon me is for my ultimate benefit, whether in this world or the next. But the emotions You created me with do not always adhere to that recognition. And I find myself unable to stem the flow of anger and resentment for my suffering. I totally reject the viewpoint that these sentiments represent, but I just can't help feeling the way I do. Please accept my prayers in the spirit of pure and humble devotion with which I want to be expressing them. And grant me the strength to overcome those feelings inside and to renew within myself a full measure of love and fear for You."

These reflections reinforce our awareness that we do not face the world on our own. Even the gaps between us and our Maker that we ourselves create, Hashem is willing to help us bridge. But it is our responsibility to turn to Him and beseech Him to do so. With Him behind us, we can summon the strength to face ourselves unflinchingly. Sustained by His support, we can find the courage to approach Him with total honesty, and to experience our interaction with Him in all of its uplifting intensity. ■

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Reminiscences of a Former “Kid on the Fringe”

In the planning stages for a session at the recent National Convention of Torah Umesorah, Rabbi Joshua Fishman (executive vice-president of Torah Umesorah), wondered if it might not be beneficial to find a Yungerman who had been “on the fringe,” on the verge of becoming a dropout. Perhaps he could relate to us how, in his opinion, we could re-shape the educational process to help save him and others like him.

Without knowing it, by selecting me to speak, Reb Shia [Rabbi Fishman] did just that: he got himself a dropout. (But not a Yungerman; you can't have everything.)

Now that I have married off all my children בִּתּוֹת and am completing my 33rd year as Menahel of the Bais Yaakov of Montreal, I have no hesitations about relating my story to you – how I wavered and how I was saved. Perhaps those same elements that held me back from toppling over the edge can be applied to our own chinuch scene and be employed to redeem our own children on the fringe.

Rough Early Beginnings

Because of my parents' moves from country to country, and state to state, I was in eight different schools before twelfth grade... 12 schools, 8 years!

I am dyslexic, and have a hard time distinguishing between a “ג” and “ז”. When nervous, I have written my name as “איגשטרק”. Differentiating between *Shin* and *Sin* is also a problem for me, as is differentiating between left and right. In fact, I failed my driver's test at age 18 two times because of this problem. No one in any of my schools knew about my

dyslexia or even knew what dyslexia was. If I were in today's school system, I would certainly be diagnosed as ADD and probably be put on Ritalin for behavior control. There I was: the perfect candidate for “drop-out” status.

The question is: why, then, am I here?

To answer that, I must relate to you part of my yeshiva life.

“Knip in Bekala”

One of my many *yeshivos* was Torah Vodaath. I was ten years old and 1000 miles away from home, all by myself. I lasted from

Pesach to June. 53 years later, I still feel the warmth of Reb Moshe Rivlin's זצ"ל *knip in bekala*, calling me “tzaddikel.” I still see his huge smile – that was his way with all of us.

He showed us cowboy movies on Saturday night, with his hands ever ready near the lens of the projector to cover what we shouldn't see. He did this so that we wouldn't roam the streets, perhaps to watch movies other than the ones he selected for us.

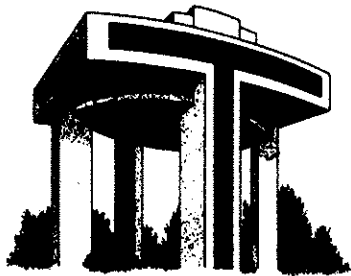
Rabbi Rivlin made time to take care of Shneur Aisenstark.

That affected me and stayed with me until now, and made yeshiva life very important.

Plucked out of the Theater

One afternoon as a young teenager, I went to the movies. (That's close to fifty years ago, and movies weren't too good then either.) The *Mashgiach* of my then-yeshiva knew where to look for me, and went up and down the aisles of the dark theater. When he found me, he put his arm around my shoulder and kept it there while he took me back to the yeshiva.

Once there, he sat with me in the *Beis Midrash* without uttering one word of criticism and simply learned with me. The



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Mashgiach lowered himself to my level, learned with me and gave me his time and, most of all, his warmth.

That affected me and stayed with me until now, and made yeshiva life very important.

Compound Interest

On Friday afternoons in one of my *yeshivos*, an old man (65 years old looked pretty old to us then), a *ba'al habayis*, asked me to sit next to him and be *ma'avir sedra* – I, from my *Beis Yehuda Chumash*, and he, from his *Beis Yehuda Chumash*.

He was interested in me and gave me his time and attention. I realized this and appreciated it very much.

That affected me and stayed with me until now, and made yeshiva life very important.

Snatched from the Party

At the age of 14, I, and some of my friends, went to a party on January 1st. The *Menahel* of my then-yeshiva decided that the way to tackle this problem was to send three older *bachurim*, who knew how to handle younger fellows, bring us back from the party with dignity and grace. I repeat: with dignity and grace.

And they accomplished this task with dignity and grace. And the entire issue was settled with dignity and grace. The *Menahel* invested much time and effort to keep Shneur Aisenstark on track with dignity and grace.

That affected me and stayed with me until

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now, and made yeshiva life very important.

Never Kicked Out

By the way, I was never kicked out of any of my eight schools ביה"ב (although I was definitely on the verge).

I was most certainly behind the eight-ball, and the only thing that saved me was the personal interest of

A Rabbi Rivlin.

A *Mashgiach*.

An old man with whom I was *ma'avir sedra*.

And a *Menahel* who treated me with dignity and grace.

I made it because I received the proper dosage of the "leffele of kavod (a spoonful of recognition)" that Rabbi Elya Lopian שליט"א prescribed for the *Mashgiach*, Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon שליט"א, when Rabbi Salomon took over the mantle of "Mashgiachdom."

In order to be successful, "you must give every student a *leffele of kavod* every day," was Reb Elya's cry.

With the proliferation of *yeshivos* and students ביה"ב, do our *Mashgichim* have the time to give that *leffele of kavod* to every student every day?

I had a *Rosh Yeshiva*, Rabbi Yechiel London שליט"א, who learned with me privately, every day, a half hour before *Shacharis*, over two solid years (the longest I ever stayed in one place).

Where, today, would you find a *Rosh Yeshiva* who has that kind of time?

I was not ashamed to make mistakes, because the *Rosh Yeshiva* made me feel important, confident and comfortable.

That affected me and stayed with me until now, and made yeshiva life very important.

Can we do the same?

How can we not?

Rabbi Aisenstark continued with an outline of practical applications of the factors that in his experience "affected him, stayed with him until now, and made yeshiva life very important to him." Since these specific suggestions are geared to the classroom setting, they have been omitted from this article. They are, however, available to mechanchim upon request. – JO ■



“Don’t Rush Me”

Why the Best Gift You Can Give Your Child is an Extra Year of You

AVOIDING SYSTEM BREAKDOWN

The computer upon which I am writing this article is a complex system. There are numerous sub-systems that must all work in seamless harmony if the entire system is not to crash. If the system is overloaded, I will receive a message telling me that I have performed a “fatal error” and my entire system may be shut down.

Today, there are many students who “shut down.” Some shut down only from time to time or in certain areas – for example on a test, when asked an unexpected question publicly, when a project is not coming out perfectly, or in particular subject areas. Others, tragically, shut down permanently and completely and do not wish to perform academically or spiritually at all. In either case, I fear that the system shut down is often the result of our “fatal errors” in educating our children. One of these errors is poignantly portrayed in the *Midrash in Parashas Yisro* and serves as an important point to ponder as we prepare for *Kabbalas HaTorah*.

The Torah sets the time frame for the Jewish people’s receiving of the Torah as taking place in the third month. Of

Rabbi Shlomo Goldberg is the *Menahel* of Yeshiva Ohr Eliyahu in Culver City, California. This is his first appearance in these pages.

course, the events that led the *B’nei Yisroel* to Har Sinai began with *Yetzias Mitzrayim*, seven weeks before. It would seem, therefore, that there should have been no time lost in bringing the *B’nei Yisroel* to Har Sinai, the place where they would accept their mission and meet their destiny. What was the necessity of waiting nearly two months before culminating the Exodus with *Kabbalas HaTorah*?

The *Midrash Yalkut Shemoni* (*Yisro* 271, 17) explains *Hashem’s* rationale through a *meshal* of a king who had an only son. The prince became ill for a period of time and therefore was not able to continue his studies with his teacher. As soon as the prince began to show some signs of improvement, the teacher returned to the king and requested that the prince be allowed to resume his studies. The king, however, had a “systems approach” to his son’s education. Therefore, he replied that while indeed his son’s overall condition had improved, “The glow has not yet returned to his face, so how can he be allowed to return to school? Rather, let my son recuperate for two or three months with healthy food and drink, and after that he may return to school.” So too, the *Midrash* continues, when the *B’nei Yisroel* came out of *Mitzrayim*, the goal was for them to receive the Torah as soon as possible. However, they were

still suffering from the illnesses of *Mitzrayim*, either in terms of the hard work in brick and mortar, or the spiritual maladies resulting from hundreds of years living at the bottom level of spiritual impurity. Since He is the Father, as opposed to the pedagogue, of the Jewish people, *Hashem* delayed *Kabbalas HaTorah* until the all-important glow of robust spiritual and physical health returned to the faces of His children. “Rather let them recuperate for two or three months with *manna* and water from the *be’er* (well), and afterwards they may receive the Torah. When? *Bechodesh hashlishi*—in the third month.”

In this touching *Midrash*, *Chazal* have clarified for us the distinct difference between a pedagogue and a parent. The pedagogue is concerned primarily with transmitting information to his student. He has his educational agenda and curricular program, and he cannot wait to see its implementation. The parent is also concerned with the curriculum; after all he hired the pedagogue in the first place. But as a parent, he is concerned with the totality of his child, both because this child – body, soul, and spirit – is his, and because he realizes that the educational program will not run at all unless all the systems are ready and fully functioning. Therefore, he is willing to wait.

LIKE PROFESSORS OR LIKE PARENTS?

Not infrequently, parents inspired by the best of intentions, tend to act more like professors than parents, and simply cannot wait. And who can blame them? After all, their child obviously possesses a mind the likes of which has not been seen in generations. Who would not rush this little genius into preschool at age two, with a cough and a runny nose and a note pinned to his or her shirt demanding to meet with the principal concerning having little Yankie or Rochel skipped immediately to the three-year-old or four-year-old class where he or she obviously belongs? Moreover, how can we deprive the Jewish People of the future accomplishments of our little *Gadol HaDor* for even one day? *Chazal* are teaching us that, agreed, the mind may be ready, but if the body or the emotions or the spirit is weak, then what good is a state-of-the-art software program without the hardware to run it? The

result—this parent has performed a fatal error, and today or tomorrow, partially or totally, this child will shut down.

If, however, the parents have the sense to follow *Chazal* and wait and not push, as *Hashem* did for the *B'nei Yisroel*, then they will be fulfilling the *mitzva* of following in the ways of the Al-mighty in a most dynamic fashion. *Chazal* (*Kesuvos* 50a) state that until age five, parents should “roll with their child,” which means, says *Rashi*, to treat him and speak to him kindly and softly. At age six or seven, depending on the physical strength of the child, it is permissible to “feed him like an ox.” The *Maharsha* here in *Kesuvos* and in *Baba Basra* (21a) points out that the *Gemora's* intent is that even then, the child should be fed gently and by hand, like an ox – not stuffed forcibly, like a camel.

Furthermore, the *Gemora* in *Kesuvos* explains that if a child whose physical nature is weak is brought to school before the age of six, then the parents may actually be endangering his phys-

ical well being. (See *Rashi*.) The *Rambam* (*Hilchos Talmud Torah* 2:2) states, “A child is brought to be taught at the age of six or seven, depending on his strength and physical build. Below the age of six, he should not be brought to a teacher.” In line with this mode of thinking, a prominent Rosh Yeshiva who spent his early childhood in the world of the Lithuanian *yeshivos* once mentioned to me that he did not go to school until age seven. What did he do until then? “I played, mostly,” was his response.

Although the *Maharsha* states that a child who is healthy and strong will benefit from an early start on the educational path, it seems that even then, there is strong support for the “rolling,” ox-feeding, and playing styles mentioned above. For example, the *Rav Shulchan Aruch* states that when a child first learns to speak, he should be taught the verses of “*Torah tziva lanu Moshe*” and “*Shema Yisroel*.” Afterwards, the child should be taught verses orally until he reaches the age of five. This approach differs greatly from the “rush to reading” found in many *chedarim*. The rationale seems to be that it is more beneficial to have a child acquire passive knowledge of *Lashon Hakodesh*, than active knowledge of *Alef-Bais*. In truth, when children receive a solid groundwork in the language of Torah, the *Rav Shulchan Aruch* states that their early Torah learning can then become actual learning, instead of the endless series of translation exercises that often pass for *limudei kodesh* curriculum.

THE EMOTIONAL FACTOR IN READINESS

In addition to physical readiness, Rabbi Chaim Friedlander, זצ"ל points out that there is a strong emotional element involved in a child's preparedness for formal education as well:

The maturity of a child's understanding does not determine his ability to fulfill *mitzvos*. Rather, the *halacha* defines his ability. The *halacha* determines that when a child awakens (in the night) and does not

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cry "Imma, Imma," this is a sign that he has reached the level that he is no longer dependent on his mother and does not need her as much. At this point, he is responsible to sleep in the *succa*. If so, the time to accustom a child to the *mitzva* of *succa* is not from the time that the child begins to understand the verse 'I caused them to dwell in *succos*,' but rather according to his development: when he is no longer tied to his mother." (*Mesillas Chaim B'Chinuch*, pg.11)

As we try to determine a child's readiness for school in general, or a particular class or subject, it seems from Reb Chaim, זצ"ל that we must concern ourselves primarily with his or her emotional readiness to perform. In particular, when the question of having a child skip a grade comes into play, parents and teachers must consider the emotional and social readiness of a child in addition to his mental abilities.

In fact, by rushing a child and skipping over essential developmental stages, a parent's attempts at going two steps forward might well cause their child to fall three steps back. In his seminal essays on *Limud Hamussar VeChochmas Hamussar* in *Sefer Toras Avraham*, Rabbi Avraham Grodzinsky, די"ד writes of the importance of each small step in a young child's development:

The opinions held by children seem purposeless to adult eyes. Similarly, the interactions between children seemingly have no relevance to human life, and therefore adults view them as being totally without substance. The Torah teaches, however, that there is, in fact, significant intellectual development taking place in this process. A child expresses his immature opinion to his friends, and he in turn listens to their childish opinions. Through this give and take the child continues to develop day after day until he is no longer considered to be intellectually immature. The childish side of conversations that we see in the interaction of children, is a reflection of those aspects that would not be appropriate if expressed by adults. In other words, "childish"

really refers to expressions that are not appropriate to the intellectual capacity of the people involved in the conversation. For example, if an adult would converse in the manner of a child, that would be considered childish. But if the child's conversation, no matter what form it takes, is appropriate for his age, these conversations are far from meaningless — in fact they are of absolute necessity, for through these conversations he is brought, little by little, into adulthood. (*Toras Avraham* pp. 368-369)

Throughout this insightful essay, the last *Mashgiach* of Slobodka demonstrates that the step-by-step socialization process of a child is essential to the overall intellectual development that the Torah terms *daas*. And it is the development of *daas* that transforms a child from the world of childhood to adulthood. In the rush to academics, parents might well be depriving their children of the motor, language, and social skills that are mandated by Torah as necessi-

ties for entrance into the world of Torah as fully functioning adults. The "childish" speech, games, toys, and social interactions of children are critical to their maturation and development. In this vein, Rabbi Yitzchok Ruderman, זצ"ל was once asked by a well-meaning father what subject to learn with his five-year-old son. The Rosh Yeshiva thought for a while and then responded, "At age five, I recommend that he be studying blocks!"

STRIVING FOR BALANCE

In addition to the over-burdening and educationally unsound demands sometimes practiced by schools, there is often an imbalance in the way that young children are educated in the home. Let us allow Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, זצ"ל, to be our guide in understanding the educational role of parents in the life of a young child.

Rabbi Hirsch first asserts that it is a

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child's mother who is primarily responsible for the early education of her child.

"The very fact that the . . . child spends the first five or six years of his growth and training for his future life under the care and guidance of the home, means that the fundamentals of his spiritual education are the responsibility of the home – above all, that of his mother. If a mother has done her duty to the boy of five or six when she turns him over to the school, her own spiritual influence may already have been a determining factor in her child's spiritual future." (*The Collected Writings of Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch*, Vol. VII, Feldheim pp. 111-112.)

Having established the primacy of the mother's role, Rabbi Hirsch then turns to the specifics of the nature of that role.

"The first man gave the first mother in the history of mankind the name *Chava*, 'She who speaks,' or 'Giver of thoughts,' not only *Chava*, 'Giver of life.' This implies that every mother should strive to be *Chava*, the cultivator of the language and the thoughts of the child for whom she has been the giver of life, *Chava*." (ibid.)

Once duly charged with the role of teaching language and thinking skills to her child, Rabbi Hirsch attempts to help mothers avoid the temptation to turn into pedagogues instead of parents.

"Should the mother attempt to anticipate the work of the school? Should she see to it that her child is already able to read and recite the multiplication tables and so forth by the time he enters school? The answer is *No!* She should not concern herself with anything that will be the specific function of the school, for such haphazard anticipation of the work that should be done by the school is often more damaging than helpful. After all, the child cannot simply skip his early elementary grades, and the hours devoted in the classroom to skills he has already acquired before entering school will not provide him with sufficient intellectual stimulation and mental challenges. As a consequence, he will become accustomed to attending classes without paying attention to what is being taught there—which is the worst preparation for the rest of his school days." (ibid.)

(These words of Rabbi Hirsch also deal a deathblow to Sesame Street, preschool computer games, and the like.)

What, then, *should* a mother be teaching her child in his or her formative years? Instead of teaching her child skills, Rabbi Hirsch maintains that a mother should confine her activities to something far more important: she should teach her child *how to learn*.

"This means that she should teach him how to think and speak, to think and speak properly, to perceive things correctly, and to utilize his senses con-

sciously and intelligently. . . . This is the basic learning process, and this is what the mother should teach her child. Just as she taught him how to walk properly, so, too, she should teach him to acquire mental agility. She should help him learn how to utilize his senses, his intellectual capacities and his physical skills in order that he may apply them, consciously and intelligently, to the attainment of a specific objective." (ibid. p.115)

The methods used to convey this knowledge of "how to learn" require much more sensitivity, creativity and involvement than basic book learning. Again Rabbi Hirsch explains:

"Once an intelligent mother has given her child a pat of butter, or a piece of wax, of cork, of wood, of stone or of metal to feel and to compare with another, his little fingers will start on their own, very early on, to examine other objects for physical properties and differences."

The process being described by Rabbi Hirsch is that of *bina*, growing in understanding by comparing one concept to another. Such ability is a necessary prerequisite for all of the child's future Torah learning. And Rabbi Hirsch is telling us that a child's future ability to *pasken* a *halacha* correctly at the age of forty, begins with his mother's ability to teach him to cut and paste at the age of four.

Roshei Yeshiva have remarked that there are two significant deficiencies in some of today's *bachurim*. The first is burnout, resulting from sitting behind a desk since they were three years old. The second is a lack of ability to think and reason. If parents would adopt the philosophy espoused by Rabbi Hirsch, then in their early years children would develop analytic abilities through play and hands-on learning, and the formal learning experience would be postponed until later in life. In this way, both concerns would be alleviated.

It is often difficult to wait and to be sure that all systems—physical, emotional as well as intellectual – are go

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and "glowing" in the education of our children, especially when we are faced with a truly outstanding mind. Perhaps we can gain strength from the story of one great European child prodigy who was capable of engaging in learning with the *Rabbanim* of his city from a very early age. During one such session of speaking in learning, while involved in a complicated *Tosafos*, the boy heard a noise, ran to the window and shouted the Yiddish equivalent of, "Look, a horsie!" A *Tosafos* may be a *Tosafos*, but to a balanced, healthy child a horsie must also be a horsie.

FOCUS ON THE JOB DESCRIPTION

It seems to be a reasonable conclusion from all that has been stated, that children should not be rushed out of Mom's arms and into preschool, should not be relentlessly pushed academically, and should not be skipped except in very unusual situations. The "whole child" approach

would also seem to dictate an emphasis on *middos* as the fertile ground in which gifted minds can grow, and children should be taught to nurture their bodies as well as their minds.

In addition, it seems worthwhile to try to ensure that your child is one of the older students in his or her class. Research shows that children who start school at an older age get higher grades, score better on standardized tests, are less likely to fail a grade or be referred for learning disabilities testing, and are far less likely to have learning issues follow them through school and even adult life. They are more likely to fulfill their potential, be well adjusted, and emerge as leaders. ("Pupil Age at School Entrance—How Many are Ready for Success," James K. Uphoff and June Gilmore, *Educational Leadership*, January, 1986.)

The key to all this is to remember the nature of the job description of an elementary school. Rabbi Noach Orlowek, שליט"א, explains that institutions of higher learning are entrusted with cre-

ating rabbis, businessmen or professionals. If they fail, there will be one less *talmid chacham*, CEO, or lawyer in the world. The mission of an elementary school (and of a parent as well) is to create a human being. If it fails, then there will be one less person in the world. And that is called homicide.

To avoid system shut downs and fatal errors in our children, parents must remember to be parents and not pedagogues. In addition, schools must have the courage to stand up to the misplaced academic pressure placed on children by their pedagogue parents, and educate them instead as to the proper vision of education promoted by *Chazal*. By striving, as the *Midrash* states, to keep the glow on the faces of our children, parents and teachers can enact a dynamic fulfillment of the *mitzva* of walking in the ways of the Al-mighty. If this is the manner in which *Hashem* prepared His children for their *Kabbalas HaTorah*, we can be sure that it is a successful method for passing the *Mesora* to our children, as well. ■

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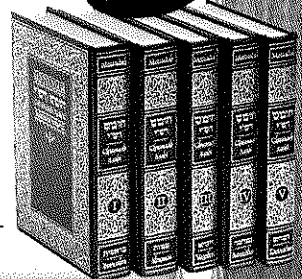
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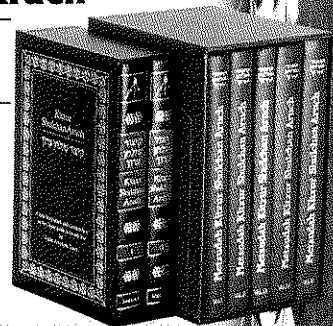
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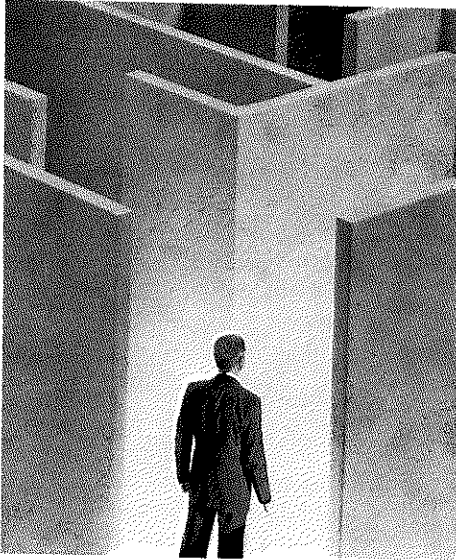


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THE SCHOOLBAG: PORTAL TO A CHILD'S SOUL

A twelve-year-old girl has many things on her mind when she runs into the house after the school-bus drops her off in the afternoon. On one particular day, she flung her schoolbag on the floor and the flap flew open, spilling the bag's contents on the rug. As she bent over to retrieve the papers, she spotted a magazine her English teacher had passed out to the class earlier that day.

The teacher had been discussing creative writing. She gave the class their assignment, and then passed out this magazine. "There are ideas in here that may help you develop your own topics," she told them. "I'm not going to assign anything specific for you to read from the magazine. Just look through it and see what you can get from the articles."

Now the girl picked up the magazine. It was called "*Writing! The Magazine of Effective Communication*." Weekly Reader Corporation produces the magazine and distributes it to classrooms throughout the country. The editors explain their purpose in creating the theme of the issue she was now holding: "...Advertising is all about writing: Writers have helped to create every ad you see. Advertising is the theme of this issue... ask yourself: What can I learn about writ-

Hollis Dorman is a parent, teacher and grant-writer from Philadelphia, PA.

The Marketplace of the Mind

ing from the pros who make the ads?"¹

The girl studied the cover for a moment. A model's bright face looked back at her – the model was holding a shoe and underneath her smile and beckoning finger was the message, "How Ad Writers Target You..."² The girl read each word and studied the model's face before tucking the magazine back in her school-bag and leaving the room. She thought about the sneaker the model held and how she could convince her mother to buy a pair just like this one.

How to use the contents of a child's school book-bag as a sophisticated Madison 5th Avenue ad campaign... Kay S. Hymowitz, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, writes in the journal *American Educator*, "*Kids learn of their sophisticated independence from retail displays and promotions, from magazines and direct mailings. With their captive audience, schools, too, have become an advertiser's promised land: kids see ads in classrooms, on book order forms, on school-buses, and now even in textbooks...*"³

Impressions... meaningless, some people exclaim. Our children need the exposure to modern ideas – they have to get along in this world. They are hurt more if they are not exposed to the outside world, our secular pundits posit.

These experts miss the major point. Moral values, including how to get along in this world, are not a criterion in the

design of modern curriculum. Children are educated through the "noisy presence of the media carnival barkers."⁴ These "barkers" will go to great length to call attention to their messages of gross materialism and sensationalism. They will use whatever means available to ensnare young consumers. These means include the educational resources which represent the values and ethical system in this country.

"Deprived of the concealed space in which to nurture a full and independent individuality... (our children) unthinkingly embrace the dominant cultural gestures of ironic detachment and emotional coolness..."⁵ Hymowitz notes the prevalent characteristics of today's youth culture. She denounces the effects of the culture on youths, especially its stranglehold over 8-12 year old children. The impact is so debilitating and total, she tells us, that the end result is a "scorched earth policy,"⁶ decimating what we know as normal developmental states in social and cognitive functioning.

A HIRSCHIAN APPROACH TO THE NESHAMA

In Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsh's writings on education, there is one theme that predominates throughout his work. He refers to the wondrous spirituality imbedded in all Jewish children. He charges their parents with

the responsibility of cultivating and developing their offsprings' *neshamos*. To this end, we need to take a close look at what our children are exposed to in school, from the books they are given to read and especially to the supplementary materials that are passed out daily in class. For, Rabbi Hirsch writes, the purity of a child's soul is only developed through careful guidance and nurturing.

Perhaps Rabbi Hirsch's clarity can help develop our own, to lead us through the overpowering onslaught of contemporary culture. His comments are as piercing and relevant now as they

were then. His framework of reference to Torah standards is eternal and the truths he writes about can be applied to any generation.

Rabbi Hirsch eloquently argues against the influence of secular culture on the religious and educational upbringing of Jewish children. His writings are clear and evocative in their description of contemporary trends and how they destroy the spirituality inherent in every Jewish child. It behooves all of us to pay attention to his words and absorb the truth in his messages.

ON THE BUS...

Before the schoolbus draws up in the morning, different kinds of messages are delivered to the schoolchildren. What do they see and hear? Passing conversations, tidbits of information from street and store signs, watching what people wear and how they act – so much of a society's culture is absorbed from these brief encounters.

Later, on the bus, the driver flicks his radio on to a news station. No problem.... Most of the children listen to the station at home. Outside the window, two drivers honk at each other angrily over a parking space. One gets out and yells at the other. The children on the bus chuckle.

Inside the bus, the newscast is typi-

cally grim, morose – violence, unending problems.... A few boys near the front rip up little pieces of paper and throw them at each other. The bus driver orders them to stop. The boys innocently deny doing "anything wrong."

Outside, on the street, there is a large group of people waiting to cross. Some dash across the street before the light changes. The bus driver yells and swerves the bus to avoid hitting them.

One bookbag falls over and all the papers and books spill out. Upset, the owner of the bookbag, a twelve year old girl we spoke of earlier, bends down and tries to retrieve everything... crumpled papers, books, pencils, and that magazine with the fascinating cover. The bus stops suddenly and she stuffs everything back in the bookbag.

... AND LATER, AT HOME

Later, at home, the mother of the girl, my friend in a distant city, helps her sort out all the contents in the bookbag. The magazine falls to the floor. She picks it up. She studies the cover. "Where did you get this?" she asks. "From my English teacher," her daughter replies.

My friend sits down on the couch. She opens the magazine and slowly begins reading. One piece catches her

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attention. It is in the back of the magazine. Titled, "How to Create an Unmistakable Voice," it explores the author's craft and the importance of writing about what you know.

The article profiles S.E. Hinton, the author of the book *The Outsiders*. The book, my friend learns from this article, is an account of a fourteen year old boy and his violent lifestyle. He is an orphan, living in an adultless world with two older brothers. "The article," my friend later told me, "is so senseless and cruel!" She read to me: "Through Ponyboy's eyes.... [the author] shows us rumblings, a fatal fire, and the pointless deaths of three young people...."⁷ She paused. "This magazine has been in my daughter's book-bag over two weeks!"

Rabbi Hirsch cries out in his writing, "You should keep your children's education from degenerating into a reprehensible game, a paltry illusion..."

What is this game, this illusion?⁸

Rabbi Hirsch records in his essays on Jewish education the contemporary issues tearing apart the framework of the late 19th century Torah world. Examples include the influence of the Reform movement, the materialistic values of society the Jews had inculcated, and finally, the relationship between the Jews and their non-Jewish contemporaries. He also describes the movement away from the *shtetl* and into the world at large.

THE GHETTO VS. THE MARKETPLACE

In eloquent language, Rabbi Hirsch talks about the early history of the ghetto, and restrictions and lack of opportunity to mingle with the non-Jewish world. He beautifully depicts the life of the *shtetl* Jew of past centuries, whose entire physical environment was confined to a tiny, restricted neighborhood: "...there was within the souls of Jewish men and women a horizon far broader than the small strips of sky visible from the alleys in which the Jews were confined. In their hearts there shone a light of truth and clarity, a sun of peace and serenity that not even the oppressive dark-

ness of their dwellings and the even darker realities outside could obscure."⁹

The result, he explains, is: "... In the ghetto, it was possible to transmit the Jewish heritage by the mere power of personal upbringing. But in the marketplace of the modern world, Judaism can be preserved only by the power of the mind...."¹⁰

What is this "marketplace"¹¹ Rabbi Hirsch observes in the late 19th century? Unsurprisingly, it is the same set of adversarial conditions that challenge all of us today. These include a majority society favoring free-for-all lifestyles,

immorality and materialism.

When we choose to mine the depths of this material world, searching for those elements which will provide optimum comfort, what do we generally find? Our labors result in a barren lifestyle, one that lacks vitality and purpose. Our children slide from one desire to another.

Is this the sum total of our existence? Rabbi Hirsch demands. He describes children running about jubilantly. "We have no religion today. Teacher has a headache!"¹² They shout happily to one

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another when their afternoon religious studies teacher cancels. "We have no religion today," Rabbi Hirsch repeats and then adds, "These words still echo sadly in my heart...."

"The word of Hashem is a rich wheat field, intended to nourish both heart and mind... But when children are educated to only service the wants and needs of the greater society, at the expense of Torah studies... we may stimulate (our children)... excite them, perhaps even intoxicate them for a few moments, but in the final analysis will only leave them weaker and even more tired than before..."¹³

A child cannot separate the contents of what she reads from reality. Indeed, what she absorbs from reading becomes part of her understanding of reality. To a large extent, her knowledge of the world rests upon what she acquires from

her reading material. The more the material reflects the society at large, the more comfortable the reader becomes with the identifying attributes of that society.

This is a deep, subconscious process and one that influences how she relates to the world around her, including her knowledge of Torah Judaism. From the article, listen to S. E. Hinton's language in describing her character Ponyboy's encounter with a group of thugs and imagine how a young reader will relate these words to her own experiences while waiting for the schoolbus in the morning and traveling to school on that bus: "Flipped, backing up, pinned, fought, slugged – Ponyboy uses forceful verbs to describe the violence of his daily life... [his] voice consists of not only of what he says and how he says it: It's also his way

of thinking about his world. Hinton shows that Ponyboy doesn't question the aimless, sometimes violent life of his gang."¹⁴

The vision of violence which is accepted in this magazine filters through all its contents. There is not one article that can be considered parve. All material is laden with references and examples culled from the teen-age culture of violence, sensationalism and gross materialism.

ENGAGING THE READER'S ATTENTION... AND WALLET

Writers and editors skillfully employ devices to engage and captivate the reader's attention. Their aim is to sell their products to young, unsuspecting children. Hymowitz quotes Carol Herman, a senior vice president of Grey Advertising: "You've got to reach the kids throughout the day – in school, as they're shopping at the mall... you've got to become part of the fabric of their lives."¹⁵

This is a drive to turn children into savvy consumers who are well educated in product lines and anxious to procure the items. Imbedded in stories and articles are dollar signs. When the last word is read and the magazine is tucked out of sight in the bookbag, the craving for the fruits of these writers' crafts, all available for a price, remain in the reader's mind. They are planted and take hold permanently in the rich, fertile bed of thoughts a child cultivates.

"Out of the mouths of children and sucklings have you fashioned an invincible power..."¹⁶

Rabbi Hirsch comments on this *pasuk* from David Hamelech: "G-d wishes to have His throne among men built from the thoughts, emotions and words of our children..." Rabbi Hirsch lashes against a "fairy-tale world" of fabrication and witchcraft which confuses a child and prevents her from "comprehending the true connection between things..."¹⁷ He argues against exposing children to secular philosophies which only serve to "subject... [a]... child's mind to metaphysical torture."¹⁸

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He strongly condemns standards of morality based on selfishness and self-interest. His commentary is sharp and heartrending, focusing on youths raised in such a materialistically rich and spiritually impoverished atmosphere. The results are youngsters who demonstrate anger and "selfish vindictiveness,"¹⁹ destroying others for personal gain.

The question Rabbi Hirsch asks has significant overtones for all of us: "What will become of our children if painstaking attention is given to every conceivable need of theirs, but the development of their normal character is left to changing personal inclinations and outside influences...?"²⁰ He charges us with the responsibility "to see to it that the melodies of the lyre of Judaism, the visions of the Jewish spirit that have inspired Jewish hearts and the words that have been uttered by Jewish lips should find an echo also in the souls of our children. Above all, our children should be trained to apply the Divine truths of Judaism as a test and a standard by which to evaluate all the creations, views, principles and axioms developed by non-Jewish minds, so that they should not be dazzled and led astray by these creations..."²¹

Educational resources function as a vital channel of communication between society and our children. We must all recognize the influences of

contemporary sources. The principals and *menahalim* have the primary responsibility to check all curriculum materials generated by their staff, especially the English teachers, in their schools. At the same time, parents must be scrupulous in their examination of the classwork that comes home with their children. For the deception in advertising campaign has infiltrated into our world, and unless we all work together, our children will continue to be victimized in the name of sound educational practices.

The marketplace of the mind – isn't this a fitting description of the impact of this culture on our children? Hawkers move their wares through words and pictures into the hearts and souls of our children. Be aware and vigilant, Rabbi Hirsch warns us. For, as he often writes, we are entrusted in raising our children "to be building blocks for the kingdom of G-d on earth."²² Yet, if we fail in our responsibility to protect our children from secular influences, then they will fall prey to the world's wiles and schemes. The result is the loss of our children, for "anything truly good and noble, anything truly conducive to human happiness and salvation, that comes to pass on earth is not a result of that morality based on expediency... anything truly good springs only from the attitudes that have been stirred in the hearts of men by the strains of David's harp, echoing through the ages."²³ ■

- 1 "This Issue At a Glance," *Writing!* September, 1999, p.3.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 1
- 3 Kay S. Hymowitz, "The Teening of Childhood," *American Educator*, Spring 2000, p. 46.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 20
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 46
- 7 Karen Roberts, "How To Create an Unmistakable Voice," *Writing!* September, 1999, p. 16
- 8 Hirsch, p. 15
- 9 *Ibid.*, p. 13
- 10 *Ibid.* p. 20
- 11 *Ibid.*
- 12 *Ibid.* p. 9
- 13 *Ibid.* p. 19
- 14 Roberts, p. 17
- 15 Hymowitz, p. 46
- 16 Hirsch, p. 383
- 17 *Ibid.* p. 384
- 18 *Ibid.* p. 389
- 19 *Ibid.* p. 48
- 20 *Ibid.* p. 28
- 21 *Ibid.* p. 20
- 22 *Ibid.* p. 391
- 23 *Ibid.* p. 389

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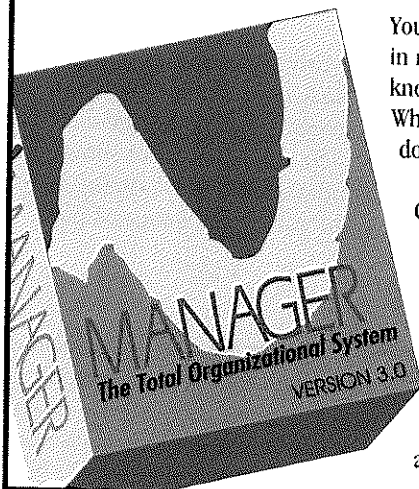
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Footnotes ^{TO} A Cover Scene

Selecting illustrations for the cover for *The Jewish Observer* is usually done by the creative staff of The Goldmark Group, Inc., who have been involved in the design and layout of the magazine since October, 1978. In preparing the previous issue, with the focus of the lead article on *Churban Europe*, they were faced with a serious concern. What image will best depict the concept of *Churban Europe* without awakening the pain for those who personally suffered the experience. After careful consideration, it was deemed preferable to allude to the suffering and losses of the War indirectly, rather than feature a graphic depiction of the wholesale deaths that took place. So, in keeping with a muted approach, yet one that would make the post-war generation take notice, a scene of a barbed wire fence was selected.

Notwithstanding all their intentions, the day after the June issue reached the Boro Park subscribers, Laibish R., a survivor who spent one of his teen years in Kaufring labor camp near Dachau, approached me, his customary smile nowhere evident:

"You have no idea what the cover of your magazine did to me," he said, and continued with the following:

The two wire fences running parallel to each other, past the guard tower, brought back a memory I'll never ever forget. Kaufring was situated next to a women's labor camp, where the inmates were involved in food preparation. They never suffered the terrible hunger we had to endure. In fact, they often had extra pieces of bread left over at the end of the day. Very often one or another of the women would pass the area at night – usually around 8 p.m. – and hurl a chunk of bread over the two high fences that separated us.

One bitter cold winter evening, I felt exceptionally hungry, so at about eight

o'clock, I told Lazer, my bunk mate, that I was going to slip out for a rendezvous with sustenance, and would share some of the bread with him.

Sure enough, one of the women was passing there, wrapped up against the chill of the black night. She flung a package over the two fences, and disappeared. No sooner did I bend down to retrieve the bread, when a spotlight hit me from the watchtower. In a flash, a guard was upon me, held me by both arms behind my back, and shoved me to the commandant's office.

The officer looked at me with piercing eyes: "You broke two rules, you know. You're out after curfew, and you stole bread from the commissary."

What could I say in defense? Nothing.

"You're going to be sorry. In fact, you'll be so sorry, you'll never break a rule again."

"Remove your shoes," he barked, "and take those socks off your feet."

The "shoes" were only open sandals, and the socks were just *shmattes*, to keep my feet warm and dry.

"And now," he told the guard, "open the gate between the fences, and let's see how he'll enjoy a night-time *shpatzir* in the fresh air, until – uh – midnight."

He led me outside, into the bitter night, opened the gate, and pushed me onto the ice-coated path that ran the length between the tall barbed-wire fences. The icy stones felt like knives. I didn't dare stand still, and found that the only way to avoid frost bite was to dance. So I danced and danced and danced. Short of breath, I began panting, but did not dare stand still.

How long was I there – an hour? It

seemed like four. Finally, my bunkmate appeared.

"What happened to you? It's 9:30, already!"

When I told him, he said, "You'll never last another 2-3 hours. I'm going to the commandant."

I wanted to warn him not to risk it, but the words froze in my throat.

Lazer presented himself to the commandant, and asked, "Why is R. sentenced to die?"

"He's being punished to make sure he doesn't break the rules again. He broke two of them."

"And for that he must die such a torturous death?"

"No. He'll live. We just want to make sure that he doesn't break the rules again. And that no one else follows in his footsteps."

"You have no reason to worry. He'll spread the word that it was a terrible lapse in judgment. But five more minutes, and he's dead!"

The commandant listened to Lazer's pleas – something unprecedented in our experience.

And now, I see your magazine's cover. The two rows of barbed-wire. The guard tower. The path between the fences. The icy memories flood my mind, and my feet start dancing again. Not a dance of joy. A dance of pain.

The bottom line: In the context of *churban Europe* – a tragedy of monumental proportions, involving infinite pain – there is no such thing as a parve, innocuous symbol. NW

KASHRUS in the Year 2000

During the past decade, the world of Kashrus supervision has changed beyond recognition.

Several factors have been driving this change or have facilitated it.

- An unprecedented rise in the demand for kosher-supervised foods
- The explosion in the number of ingredients used by the food industry
- The globalization of ingredient suppliers
- The extensive computerization of kashrus administration

We shall briefly examine those factors in this article.

THE EXPANDING DEMAND

The demand for kosher-certified food and ingredients is increasing at an astonishing rate. Among many examples, some of the most select wines from the aristocracy of French wineries (not known for their philosemitism) now have supervised productions. Surprisingly, this phenomenon is due mostly to the non-Jewish segment of the population, which views kosher certification as a guarantee of wholesomeness, naturalness and quality. Strict vegetarians, Moslems, Hindus, and people with allergies to dairy foods, look for the kosher-parve designation as their best assurance that a food contains no animal-derived ingredients, including milk and all of its derivatives.

Suddenly, the kosher and the food industries have had to undergo a mutual educational process, as manufacturers realized that a kosher symbol is an important weapon in the battle for precious space on supermarket shelves. They saw, therefore, that it was in their best interest to cooperate with *kashrus* requirements. Indeed, many companies assign the cost of their *kashrus* program

Dr. Judith Leff was educated in France and received her Ph.D. in Biology from the Sorbonne (Paris). In 1986, she became the scientific consultant for several *kashrus* organizations such as the OU, the Chaf K, and the Eidah Hachareidis among others. Her expertise is in *kashrus* questions regarding Microbiology, Biotechnology, and Flavor Chemistry.

to their advertising budget.

To their great surprise, *kashrus*-certifying organizations are finding themselves in a seller's market. The more reputable agencies use their newfound clout to raise their *kashrus* standards and upgrade their level of supervision. For example, *kashrus* organizations had not been looking too closely into the problem posed by the transportation of bulk commodities such as oil, fats, and glycerin. These items are transported from overseas by boat, then stored in holding tanks at the destination port, and finally delivered in tanker trucks. This situation is fraught with *kashrus* problems because of probable contamination with previous non-kosher loads. In the best of cases, the organizations required that the three last loads of a tanker consist of intrinsically kosher materials. When *kashrus* organizations felt sure enough of their power, they demanded that their companies use only kosher-supervised transport containers with strict monitoring of the boats and dedicated holding tanks. The companies found that they had no choice but to accept this new additional *kashrus* requirement. This means that, before taking a kosher load, a tanker truck has to be thoroughly washed under the supervision of a *Mashgiach* who delivers a *kashrus* certificate. One organization went a step further, after discovering that one of the steps in the manufacturing process of the metal used for making barrels involves a non-kosher

ingredient. Their companies were asked to switch to a more expensive kosher alternative. In this case, however, the other agencies did not agree with that organization's halachic analysis, and did not follow through.

Nowadays, a reputation for strict standards has become a matter of competition between the major *kashrus* organizations. In addition, companies with strict quality control programs require that the *kashrus* standards of their certifying agency be also at the highest level so as to be accepted by every *kashrus* agency.

THE NEW FOOD TECHNOLOGY

Fifteen years ago, if food manufacturers had been told of the present state of ingredient and food production, they would have dismissed it as pure science fiction. In fact, food technology has developed at an unprecedented rate since the early '80s. This development was facilitated by important advances made in the basic sciences: chemistry, microbiology, biotechnology, and genetic engineering.

The drive towards innovation in ingredient technology has been fueled in great part by consumers' demand for healthy food: low fat; no trans fat; no saturated fat; natural; organic; and fortified with the latest nutraceuticals. Last, but not least, there should be no difference, in taste and in cost between the healthy food and its "unredeemed"

counterpart. Further, these developments at the ingredient level have also corresponding changes in the production processes.

These technical developments in the food industry present totally new challenges to *kashrus* organizations. Previously, they were dealing with *macro-kashrus*; that is, they were checking for easily recognizable infractions, such as *treife* meat or fat, non-kosher wine or cheese, or the presence of dairy products in parve plants. Now, *kashrus* has to concern itself with entities at the microscopic or molecular level. In addition, *kashrus* agencies now must keep abreast of the latest developments in production processes. Innovations, both at the ingredient and at the production level, are constant sources of new halachic questions.

The main responsibility of *kashrus* organizations is to verify that the products they certify do not contain non-approved ingredients. Nowadays, in many cases, only an analytical laboratory can check on possible infractions. For example, if it is suspected that a "parve" croissant contains butter, the only recourse (apart from finding the discarded butter containers) is for a laboratory to check for the presence of butyric acid (a readily identifiable component of butter). Unfortunately, analytical research does not

(yet) have *kashrus* concerns in mind. No methods are presently available for detecting important ingredients which are chemically identical, but may originate from either kosher or non-kosher raw materials. A common example is glycerin, which may originate from animal fat, from vegetable fat or from petrochemicals; alcohol (ethanol) is another example, it may result from chemical synthesis, from grape fermentation, or from the fermentation of various other sources of carbohydrate.

To complicate matters further, *kashrus* agencies have to keep their eyes on the world political economy. An upward swing in the price of oil may well cause a market switch from petrochemical raw materials to organic, non-kosher ones.

THE "NATURAL" CONSIDERATION

The previous era of *kashrus* was that of "what could be wrong?" In the present era, it is best not to even ask the question. Let us take an example from the flavor industry. Flavors are, surprisingly, one of the most ubiquitous ingredients in food production. If one reads the ingredient panel on any product, flavors will be listed most of the time. These even include butter flavor in the butter; cheese flavor

in the cheese; yeast flavor in the bread; oak-barrel-aged flavor for the sherry; and toothpaste flavor in the toothpaste. Furthermore, any particular flavor may contain more than 200 ingredients, many with serious *kashrus* problems. Unfortunately, flavors present some of the most difficult problems for *kashrus* supervision. What makes things worse is that a non-kosher flavor that finds its way into a kosher product (in very small amounts) cannot usually be considered as *bateil beshishim* (rendered void by virtue of its tiny amount). Because it is a flavor, its presence is recognizable or necessary despite its low concentration in the final product.

Previously, flavor ingredients used to originate from simple plant materials and mainly from chemical reactions involving petrochemical raw materials. Colors were also products of the petrochemical industry. Nowadays, due to the natural foods movement, all this has changed. Manufacturing products with a *clean* label (only natural components) has become an important goal for the food industry. Food chemists and microbiologists give their best efforts to duplicate artificial chemicals using only natural components.

The switch to natural is being accomplished on different fronts. First, many ingredients are produced by biochemical reactions which must, by law, include only natural starting raw materials. Unfortunately for *kashrus*, such raw materials include blood, animal fats, aged cheeses, gelatin, and meat. Also, many natural chemicals are produced through heat reactions between sugars and protein derivatives. Both the source of the protein and the equipment in which the reaction takes place require careful scrutiny. Likewise, even the color of flavors and food products must now be natural. Unfortunately, the food industry's natural substitutes for synthetic red and blue-red are carmine (a tropical beetle extract), and grape-skin extract. Much research, however, is done to find kosher substitutes.

Furthermore, nowadays, most natural ingredients are produced by means of biotechnology. This fast-growing

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area comprises fermentation chemicals – including enzymes – and increasingly involves genetic engineering. In the fermentation process, selected bacteria, fungi, or yeast are manipulated to produce a desired enzyme or natural chemicals, from simple raw materials such as corn syrup and added nutrients. *Kashrus* problems arise from the nature of the ingredients necessary for the microorganism's growth.

The *kashrus* world was taken by surprise when biotechnology products first appeared, a little over a decade ago. Some very basic halachic questions had to be raised. There were those who thought that microorganisms should be viewed as miniature milk-giving cows. In that conceptualization, the nature of the "cow's" food is not a concern for *kashrus*. By contrast, others ruled that allowing a company to grow microorganisms in two quarts of liquid containing non-kosher ingredients (to be added later to 200,000 gallons of kosher material) constitutes *bitul issur lechatchillo* (a prior annulment), and as such, is not acceptable: the latter view is the one usually followed by *kashrus* organizations.

"THE WORLD IS OUR BEAT"

Not so long ago, kosher supervision was a relatively local endeavor. Nowadays, due to

the globalization of world business, manufacturers often buy ingredients from Europe, China, Japan, and India, even if they have a supplier right on their doorstep. As a consequence, in order to certify a product in the United States, an organization often has to send a *Mashgiach* to the other end of the world to verify an ingredient's *kashrus* status. Not surprisingly, with *kashrus* supervision being a lucrative business (at last count, there were more than 300 kosher symbols), many important ingredients from overseas are certified by local newcomers to *kashrus* supervision.

In addition, even the best-motivated *rabbanim* often lack the necessary technical knowledge to evaluate the *kashrus* of complicated ingredients. This problem becomes worse when production takes place in distant foreign countries where surprise visits are not feasible, and the names of ingredients are written in a difficult foreign language. A further task of reputable organizations is to differentiate between reliable *rabbanim* and opportunistic "rabbis," and to disregard, as far as possible, any political fall-out.

Finally, would-be *kashrus* organizations (and consumers) should be aware that because of the globalization of the food industry and the interdependency of *kashrus* organizations, a self-contained *kashrus* supervision is no longer

feasible. Thus, food under one organization's supervision will perforce include ingredients under different supervisions. As a result, a product certified by one organization (even a "heimishe" one) usually includes ingredients certified by several agencies whose standards may well vary. Furthermore, an organization A may want to prevent a new company from using an ingredient which they consider questionable. That company may look for a *kashrus* organization B which permits the ingredient in question. More often than not, organization A ends up accepting products supervised by B which contains that (in their opinion) questionable ingredient. Many of the differences of opinion between organizations is due to a lack of agreement as to which basic ingredients require rabbinical supervision. A good many of those problems would disappear if only representatives of *kashrus* organizations, including their *poskim*, would meet on a regular basis and come to an agreement, ingredient by ingredient. There have been efforts to unify the standards of several organizations, but so far, without success.

Supervising ever-increasing numbers of companies all over the world would not have been possible without intensive and extensive computerization. The major organizations have now at their fingertips the complete

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list, constantly updated, of each company's inventory of purchased materials with their suppliers and their kosher supervision. This is a far cry from a decade ago, when companies adamantly refused to divulge the identity of their suppliers. Similarly, the output of each company, however large, is accessible at the touch of a button. Should a *kashrus* problem occur with an ingredient, in a matter of seconds, an organization can have a list of all the products that include this ingredient. This, in turn, enables the organization to alert both manufacturers and consumers.

MEETING THE GROWING CHALLENGE

As we enter the 21st century, we are continuing to witness this unprecedented historical event: the spread of *kashrus* throughout the civilized world. For the most part, *kashrus* organizations are trying to meet the unexpected challenges of a movement that shows no sign of

abating. They have realized, for example, that in this new era, the "sink or swim" method of training *Mashgichim* does not work. In response, some organizations have started a formal training program for *Mashgichim*, which includes some basic scientific knowledge and an introduction to the complexities of the halachic aspects of modern industrial *kashrus*.

There are, however, areas that still require serious improvement, such as insufficient cooperation between *kashrus* organizations and discrepancy of standards among various supervisions. Some of these problems are alleviated somewhat by frequent migrations of key personnel from agency to agency. This contributes, to some extent, to disseminate knowledge and experience. For example, the important concept of grouping ingredients according to their requirements for supervision, originated at the Chof-K. A key person took the idea to the OU, and from there, other *rabbanim* brought the system to more organizations. Finally, one more rabbi brought an improved version back to the Chof-K.

Another problem is the lack of ongoing formal scientific input. A formal scientific education – or the equivalent thereof – coupled with experience in the field is necessary in order to

have a meaningful dialogue with technical personnel and earn their respect. Moreover, in order to properly formulate halachic questions, an understanding of the scientific underpinnings of ingredient production is crucial. It would be highly desirable for *kashrus* organizations to sponsor a rabbinical student in obtaining a degree in Food Technology.

In addition, a *kashrus*-oriented analytical laboratory is greatly needed to detect substitutions of kosher to non-kosher in chemically identical ingredients. Regular laboratories have no interest in such questions. A possible solution would be for all *kashrus* organizations to choose one laboratory to which they would send all their samples requiring analysis. The agencies should also sponsor research in analytical problems specific to *kashrus*.

It is clear that impressive advances have been made in the field of *kashrus* supervision during the past decade. Looking back, we see that the main agencies have adapted remarkably well to the many challenges to *kashrus* posed by modern food technology. Technology of ingredient and food production, however, evolves constantly. Let us hope that the *kashrus* organizations will continue to meet all the challenges ahead. ■



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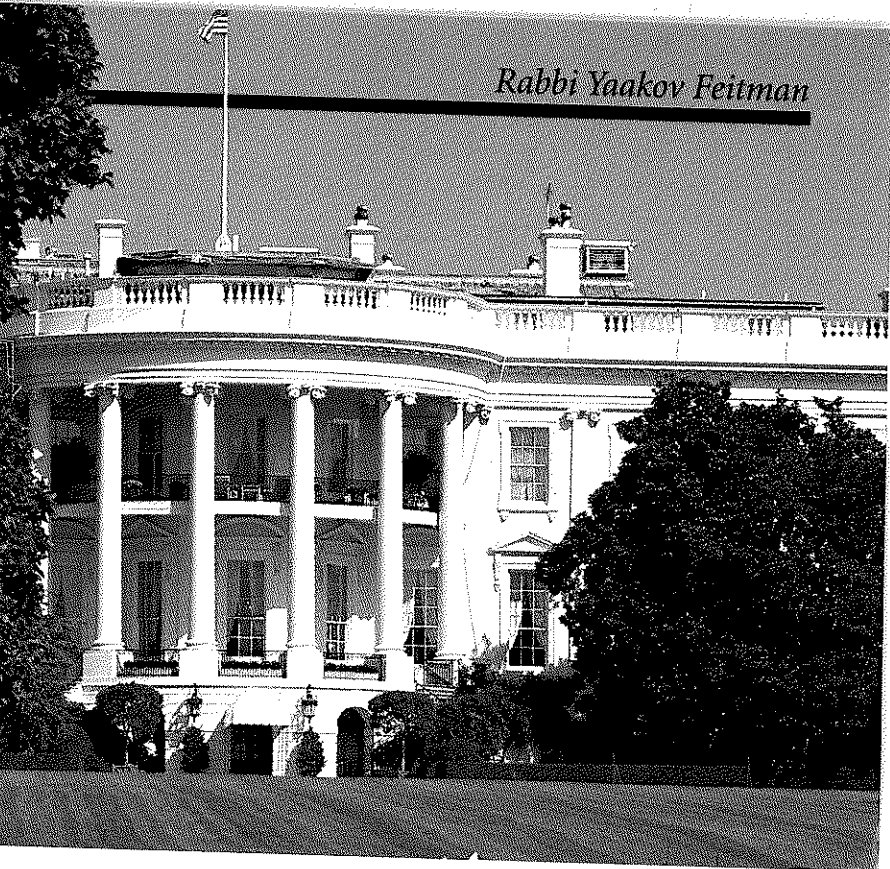
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No matter what else transpires, it is clear that something of significance has taken place. Perhaps E.L. Doctorow, one of the most prominent American novelists, is accurate in stating that this is "one of the seminal moments in American political history" (*Newsweek*, August 21). Certainly Steven Bayme of the American Jewish Committee is correct in his assessment that "this is a remarkable event in Jewish history" (*New York*, August 21). But, in the millennia-old question, "Is it good for the Jews?"

For the Torah Jew, one thing is certain about Vice-President and Democ-

atic Party presidential nominee Al Gore's choice of Senator Joseph Lieberman, a proudly observant Jew, as his Vice-Presidential running mate. It is the will of *Hashem.* Even more than events involving private individuals, G-d intervenes directly in the lives of those who have the greatest effect upon the multitudes. *Shlomo Hamelech* teaches, "The heart of a king is in the hand of *Hashem* (*Mishlei* 21,1). The *Ralbag* explains that G-d guides the decisions of rulers more closely than others because of the great repercussions of their actions. As Rabbi Shimon Schwab זצ"ל put it at the American Bicentennial, "Our *Chazal* have taught us to view the secular governments which rule over us in the lands of the diaspora as divinely appointed and not as mere historical accidents" (*Selected Writings* 1, 156).

The *Chasam Sofer* (*Derashos* 3, 37 and *Responsa*, Vol. 6, No. 86) applies this concept to our degree of reverence for secular rulers. *Kohelles* (8,1) teaches us, "I counsel you, obey the king's command, and that in the manner of an oath of G-d." The blessing upon gentile rulers, the *Chasam Sofer* reminds us, is "that He has given of His honor to a mortal." It is not simply "honor" that we ascribe to a monarch, but "His honor."

The king is chosen by G-d and therefore the respect owed him is akin to that due the Creator Himself. Therefore, even in the privacy of our homes – where there may be no penalty for disrespect – we are obligated to give proper regard to those empowered by the Creator.

"The Anchor of His Life"

So for the Jew, the process by which rulers are chosen is divinely ordained. Just as the Land of Israel is more closely under the watchful eye of Providence, so are the leaders of each country the personal instruments of G-d. If, in fact, G-d chooses to place a conspicuous representative of our people in a position of immense power and influence, it is surely a milestone which requires reflection and serious deliberation.

To be sure, there are those who have been claiming that nothing extraordinary has happened. After all, in the 1930's, Leon Blum was in office as the Prime Minister of France, and in the 19th century, Benjamin Disraeli was elected as Prime Minister of Great Britain. More recently and closer to home, Henry Kissinger wielded enor-

Rabbi Feitman is a noted author and lecturer. He is the *Rav* of Kehillas Bais Yehuda Tzvi of Cedarhurst, NY.

mous power when he was both Secretary of State and National Security Advisor in the United States.

But most people – Jews and gentiles alike – feel instinctively that something here is extraordinary. Unlike most of the Jewish political leaders of the past, Joe Lieberman is not an assimilated, let alone a baptized, Jew. He is a practicing Jew whose Judaism is, in his own words, “the anchor of his life.” It is this distinction that has changed the landscape in recent weeks and created almost unprecedented opportunities for Jews to connect or reconnect with their faith. Writing in the *Chicago Tribune* on August 9, Ron Grossman tells of “violating Orthodox Judaism’s Sabbath regulations” shortly after his Bar Mitzva. He recounts the familiar enticements of sports and being the same as everyone else, but he also felt an enduring “sense of loss” for the missing spirituality. The selection of Senator Lieberman hit him “with gale-wind force” and he hasn’t been the same since. He now waxes eloquent about the “39 categories of prohibited activities” and declares that “Six days we own. The seventh belongs to G-d.” One can only attribute this dramatic reversal to the Senator’s own passionate adherence to the spirit and laws of *Shabbos*.

Even if nothing more were accomplished, it now seems unthinkable for a noted intellectual such as Professor Norman F. Cantor to write contemptuously once again of Orthodoxy’s “compulsive rigidities, the immobile Sabbath, the arbitrary dietary schemes, the jejune liturgy” (*The Sacred Chain*, page 415). Such invective was hopefully dealt a fatal blow by the Senator and Vice-Presidential candidate who speaks so glowingly of the positive power of that “immobile” *Shabbos* in his otherwise thoroughly modern life.

Frequent References to Basic Belief

One of the most noted aspects of Senator Lieberman’s public presentations is his frequent use of the word “G-d,” famously some thirteen times in the first 90 seconds of his

acceptance speech. In fact, many Republicans were annoyed that while Lieberman was praised for his clear expressions of faith, they had been criticized for similar “fundamentalist” tendencies. In point of fact, the Senator’s references are very much in line with Torah teaching.

In *Megillas Rus*, we find that Boaz greeted his harvesters with the expression “G-d be with you” (2,4). Our sages tell us that it was Boaz’s innovation “that we should greet one another with the name of G-d” (*Rus Rabba* 4,7). The *Malbim* explains that Boaz, the leader of his generation, recognized that the times were anarchic and lawless – “When every man did as he pleased” (*Shoftim* 21, 25) – requiring religious responses to restore respect for the rule of law.

Boaz and his Court decided that they must somehow increase the awareness and consciousness of the presence of G-d in everyday life. They felt that just mentioning G-d as often as possible would heighten spirituality and begin to restore the rule of law. According to some sources, that is why Jews have been greeting each other ever since with the word “*Shalom*” – which means peace, but is also a reference to G-d. Joe Lieberman’s allusions are natural and appropriate, reflecting this ancient injunction. Undoubtedly, the Senator cannot continue such references at the same rate without making some nervous about church-state issues. But it is inherently good to know that there are those in high office who remember that there is a G-d Who is watching over us.

The one fact which should make us most proud to hail Senator Lieberman’s selection is the vocabulary almost universally used about him. From all across the political and ideological spectrum, his nomination was greeted with terms like *moral rectitude*, *conscience of the Senate*, and *man of integrity* – precisely the qualities that made him such an attractive addition to the Democratic ticket. That these qualities were understood to be inextricably linked with Senator Lieberman’s religious faith must be a source of great

nachas to us all, and great glory to Hashem.

Cautionary Notes

Yet, even given an enthusiastic embrace of the Lieberman phenomenon we need to remember that this situation is fraught with tests for Mr. Lieberman and potential perils for *Klal Yisroel*. The people of Israel have a keen almost prophetic sense of what is good for them (*Pesachim* 66a). The Jewish tendency to be inconspicuous and maintain a low profile is not merely a “*Galus* mentality,” as is so often charged. It is built into the essence of the nation. Rabbi Nosson Wachtfogel זצ”ל, the late *Mashgiach* of Bais Medrash Gavoha in Lakewood, would often repeat the Midrash (*Tanchuma Bereishis* 148,42) upon the verse in *Eicha* (2,15), “Could this be the city that was called perfect in beauty, joy of all the earth?” The Midrash comments, “Since Jerusalem became famous and everyone commented on her beauty, this led to her destruction.” The *Mashgiach* would elaborate upon the protective power of *tzenius*, a sense of national seclusion and privacy (*Lekket Reshimos, Inyanei Beis Hamikdash*, p. 35).

Some have expressed concern about Senator Lieberman’s liberal voting record on several issues of contemporary social concern. Others have noted that particularly as Vice President Mr. Lieberman may receive rabbinic guidance and *heterim* that would compromise others in seemingly identical positions. To them we say, Joseph Lieberman has often stated that he is neither a rabbi nor are his personal resolutions of quandaries case law for all Jews. There are times we will disagree with him on public policy, and there may be others when his personal religious practices do not exactly reflect our own. Nonetheless, the inspiration to be drawn from Joseph Lieberman is from one who respects the halachic process, who has made sacrifices to adhere to the laws of the Torah, and who is proud to be an observant Torah Jew. No more can or should be derived.

An Additional Concern

There is one final concern that must be mentioned, for it penetrates so deep into the essence of Jewish history. One of the first published comments upon Mr. Lieberman's selection actually sent shudders of recognition down my spine. "It's just amazing," said the director of the Reform movement's commission on social action. "On some deep level, it tells all Jews we're full citizens of this country. What a profound message. What an occasion for celebration" (*New York Magazine*, August, 21 p. 28). Laurie Goodstein, writing in *The New York Times* on August 13, declared conclusively that "Jews are no longer considered 'the other' in America."

Those who have studied Reb Meir Simcha Hakohen of Dvinsk's famous essay presaging the Holocaust undoubtedly heard the same ominous echoes I did. He took note in *Meshech Chochma* (*Parshas Bechukosei*) of *Klal Yisroel's* slow slide from complacency into national amnesia: "The Jew in general will forget his roots and consider himself a flourishing citizen. He will abandon the study of his religion ... and will think that Berlin is Jerusalem."

On the one hand, the words should make us tremble with the recognition of the palpable danger. And on the other, we can simultaneously utter praise to *Hashem* for the most benevolent of ironies. For is it not evident that the same person who activates warning sirens in our souls about becoming too contented in our exile is also the one who has aroused powerful yearnings on the part of many of our brethren to taste the same spiritual pleasures that are integral to his very essence? The news of his selection can therefore only be termed dangerously wonderful.

In Search of a Guiding Perspective

Finally perhaps the resolution to our search for perspective on this unique challenge and its ideal resolution – one that speaks to most of us



as well – may be found in a letter by my *Rebbe*, Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner זצ"ל. He was writing to a young man who had embarked upon a "secular career" and the former *Kollel* man became concerned that he was now living "a double life." The Rosh Yeshiva told him that he was making a terrible mistake. Having a career when one is a fully committed Torah Jew means that one is living a "broad life not a double life." Rabbi Hutner elaborated upon his distinction:

If someone lives part of his life in a home and part of his life in a rented room in a hotel, he is living a double life. But if someone rents a home with two rooms, he is living a broad life. For example, he recounted, "I once accompanied the famed Dr. Wallach of Jerusalem when he visited a pre-surgical patient and requested his mother's name. When I related the incident to one of the great scholars of the city, he commented, 'how one must envy this Jew who has such great opportunities to serve as a vehicle for the glory of Heaven.'" Rabbi Hutner concluded with the rhetorical question, "Would

you say that the doctor who recited *Tehillim* for his patient was living a double life?"

We have been privileged to witness a tremendous opportunity for one of our brethren to serve as such a vehicle for *kavod Shamayim* as well. We must pray that he will be able to withstand the tests that he will undoubtedly undergo and that he will be able to react appropriately to the compromises that will be urged upon him. As Rabbi Shomo Wolbe writes, "Man is not an isolated creature. His place and time are part of his essence. The era into which he was born leaves its imprint upon his life and the nuances of his existence are incorporated into the pattern we call history" (*Alei Shur* 2:52). Thus, Rabbi Wolbe teaches us that although we are a timeless people, each of us is connected to a particular time and place. It is there and then, with the particularities of that era and culture, that we are tested and can make our mark. The Lieberman saga is now part of our own essence. How we apply it and what we make of it will remain part our own legacy, as well. ■

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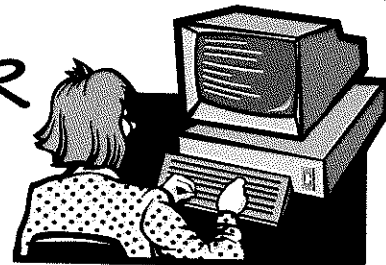
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Birthright Israel is a new, multi-million-dollar project that brings Jewish college students to Israel, all expenses paid, for ten days. Its first 3000 students arrived in January, toured the country in 73 buses, nightly filled tens of hotels, attended lectures on Jewish identity, sang together, danced together, felt their Jewishness as they never would have – either apart or at home – and then left.

Birthright's benefactors and organizers hope that on returning home these young people will retain the spark of a Jewish experience and remember that they are just as strongly united on their college campuses and in the market places of their professions as they were for ten days in Israel, ultimately to resist complete assimilation and escape the scourge of intermarriage.

"It's a matter of taking Jewish kids whose Jewish background is so poor, so limited," explained Michael Steinhardt, whose \$9 million contribution helped fund this first trip, "and before they go on to adulthood—and many of whom intermarry and disappear—to give them an opportunity, a special opportunity that maybe in the end for many of them will be too little and too late—I don't deny that—but to give them a Jewish opportunity that they will not otherwise have."

"There is no illusion here that we are going to recreate the world in 10 days," Steinhardt continued, "but we don't have to recreate the world. If it works with

20% of the kids, look what you're talking about, look at the numbers. I would consider 20% a roaring success."

If Birthright positively effects hundreds of Jewish young people, imbuing them with enough ethnic pride to want to limit their marriage choices to other Jews, will it have been a roaring success? Another philanthropist, Charles Bronfman, matched Steinhardt's \$9 million contribution. The Israeli government pledged \$70 million over the next five years. Nine other individuals and Hadassah have each pledged millions. If Birthright effects the lives of even thousands, will these investors in Jewish ethnicity truly see "roaring" returns?

Michael Steinhardt believes that they will. "Birthright is, in my view, the biggest, brightest new idea in the Diaspora on a worldwide basis in my adult lifetime," he opined. "I know of nothing that has the potential to revitalize the community in the way that Birthright does."

And perhaps he is right. I would love for him to be right, so dire are our circumstances, so desperately do we need renewal and revitalization the world over. In some ways, Birthright is an admirable attempt. Meticulously orchestrated, it does offer its participants more than song and dance. It exposes them to intriguing Orthodox lecturers. It does not condone public Sabbath desecration. Many young people, who have publicly shared their impressions, found themselves genuinely moved by the journey and experienced long-stifled longings for their own, all-but-forgotten tradition. The benefactors' sense of mission is real, their magnanimity unparalleled. Flying in one of the Boeing 747's that brought several hundred

of the students, Michael Steinhardt was overcome with emotion and wept. When all 3000 had gathered toward the program's end, he stood on stage and shouted, "Do not forsake your Jewish heritage!"—an act of love and courage.

A Frontal Attack Against Intermarriage

Despite all of this, however, I am trying with failing effort to uncover the essential, lasting worth of "revitalizing" programs like Birthright and to foresee the ultimate gains that will vindicate their invested millions.

Birthright Israel is, in essence, a frontal attack against intermarriage. Indeed, one reporter's coverage of the January excursion culminated with the news of a New Year's Eve marriage proposal.

"The trip has already produced an unexpected dividend," he wrote. "Last Friday night, a medical student surprised his girlfriend with an engagement ring one hour before midnight. She said *yes*. At least one more link in the Jewish chain has already been forged."

When Jewish young people choose to marry one another despite a dominate social climate that condones and even legitimizes intermarriage, their decision is both miraculous and courageous. I wonder, however, if it truly represents a forged link in the Jewish chain.

Was it a surprise engagement ring on New Year's Eve and a giddy, thrilling "Yes!" that has held that chain together through millennia until now? And even if to compare the circumstances of gone millennia with those of now is to unfairly diminish the relative worth of any link in our now terribly weakened

Pnuel Peri, a frequent contributor to these pages, is a writer and translator living in Jerusalem. His most recent essay to appear in *JO* was "Unsung Victims," (June '00).

chain, will the children born of today's small victories also miraculously choose courageously? From what alloy would they forge fresh links? With what tools would they build a new chain?

I am hoping against hope that Birthright can save, but my reservations loom.

They also infuriate Michael Steinhardt.

"The part that I find most reprehensible," Steinhardt told the *Jerusalem Post* concerning public criticism of his efforts, "is the Orthodox, those wonderful people who proudly say that they love all Jews and yet are prepared to see the majority of non-Orthodox Jews disappear, because those young people are not available for day schools and not available for Jewish camps.... For them to be critical of this, I think, is outrageous, and sad, and narrow-minded, and reprehensible."

"Somehow inherent in their persona," he continued, "one gets a sense of Jewish superiority, one gets a sense that they know the way, and we're going to disappear anyway, and really it doesn't much matter. And that's what I think comes out in their response to Birthright."

Insight From Boston

My criticism of Birthright is, indeed, rooted in my persona, much of which was influenced by a special man during the two years that I lived in Boston in the early 90's.

"I would like to discuss the importance of Jewish education," this man would softly announce, and his *kehilla* would listen attentively to that which he spoke of incessantly.

"Jewish education... JEWISH education... Jewish ED-U-CATION..."

He would drive these two words into people like stakes, and they would let him and love him because he would first have plunged them into his own breast every morning and afternoon as he taught their sons in day school, every evening as he gave *shiurim*, during each *Lail Shabbos halacha* or *Shalos Seudos*

drasha, and with each act of *chessed*.

His pace was furious yet measured. His endeavors were tireless, yet he stressed the importance of slow, incremental growth. This is not to say that he was paradoxical. On the contrary—he was quintessentially symbiotic. The message that he preached and embodied was that tedious, painstaking, educational growth is the very medium of alacrity and accomplishment.

The first of his nightly *Gemora shiurim* was my introduction to the Talmud. When I joined the *shiur*, he explained to me that afterward the group would not disband immediately but would split into pairs for review.

"So you'll learn for an hour and then you'll *chazar* for an hour," he said encouragingly.

"What a bargain!" he then declared, and smiled jocularly, because, of course, the benefits of learning Torah could hardly be likened to personal, selfish gain.

Yet he was also quite serious, so pleasurable to him was the prospect of gaining an hour in which to clarify and solidify the material. For him, the beauty of Jewish education was its enduring simplicity and irresistible yield. With invested time and energy, one gradually acquired the essential tools to again invest and acquire. What a bargain, indeed.

No Quick Fix

Admittedly, I followed the news coverage of Birthright Israel with my own special sensitivities, and was pensive and reserved. Investments of millions of tourist dollars will not save the Jewish youth of the Diaspora from intermarrying any more than they would the Jewish youth of Israel from naturally forming lasting bonds with the fully integrated, Hebrew-speaking children of the hundreds of thousands of gentile Russians who have made *aliya* in the last decade.

There is no quick fix. Extravagance cannot save. So cunning a virus as intermarriage cannot be frontally dispatched. Hope only lies in two words that echo from my cherished past: Jewish Education. Jewish Education. Jewish Education.

And if I stubbornly hold this opinion despite the fact that the vast majority of endangered Jewish youth have no access to anything authentically Jewish, am I, as Steinhardt decries, outrageous, narrow-minded, reprehensible and elitist, content to let generations go their way to oblivion?

How could I be when I have been educated to know that as Jews, our destinies are shared, and that their oblivion is, in part, my own? ■

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To the Editor:

I wish to commend Rabbi Lewis and *The Jewish Observer* for addressing the *aguna* problem (May '00). Your treatment of the matter was sensitive, fair, informative, and insightful. I particularly appreciated your frankness in discussing the "Hetter Me'ah Rabbanim" issue.

I would like to discuss two areas – one mentioned in the article, and one absent. Absent from the article was any discussion of a very important component in compounding the *aguna* problem – the negative role played by certain *batei din*. A few years ago, Rabbi Alfred Cohen discussed the *beis din* issue in these pages (Sept. '97), and his comments are very relevant to the matter at hand. I would encourage *The Jewish Observer* to write an in-depth piece con-

cerning *beis din* abuses as they relate to our issue. While such an article would undoubtedly ruffle many feathers, the issue must be honestly confronted as the first step to its solution.

Secondly, I wish to make a number of points regarding Rabbi Lewis's discussion of prenuptial agreements.

If Rabbi Lewis is quoting halachic authorities who question the validity of such agreements, it would only be fair to note that a number of authorities such as Rabbi Zalman Nechemia Goldberg (who is quoted elsewhere in the article) and Rabbi Ovadia Yosef have publicly approved of such agreements, in general, and of the agreement promulgated by the Rabbinical Council of America and the Beth Din of America, in particular. In the opinion of these eminent rabbis, the presence of a significant but not overwhelming financial incentive does not raise the specter of compulsion, yet does serve to create

some enforceability.

Even were a couple to forego any agreements with financial incentives, and sign nothing more than an arbitration agreement granting jurisdiction to a responsible and competent *beis din*, a great deal would be accomplished. There would then be no jockeying by either party with regard to what is often a major issue of contention – the choice of *beis din*. Refusal by either party to comply would then be very easy to demonstrate, and appropriate communal pressure could be applied.

Rabbi Lewis begins his discussion of prenuptials by stating that "It is probably too early to judge whether Prenuptial Agreements are effective in reducing *Aguna* problems." Ironically, because of Rabbi Lewis's reluctance to wholeheartedly endorse them, it is unlikely that we will ever have the chance to evaluate their effectiveness for the broad spectrum of Orthodoxy. In fact, however, it has been my experience, as well as that of other rabbis who have been using them for a while, that prenuptial agreements are indeed dramatically effective!

Even were I to grant Rabbi Lewis his skepticism regarding their effectiveness, I would still wonder as to what harm could possibly come from advocating the use of the prenuptial agreement on a large-scale basis? At the very least, signing an arbitration agreement is a no-lose situation. And were it the general practice, no negativity or stigma would be attached to it.

Once again, I thank you for a most important article.

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WHEN THE *BEIS DIN* DOESN'T
ENFORCE ITS DECISION

To the Editor:

The topic as stated on your Iyar cover "Solving the Aguna Problem – Myth & Reality," by Rabbi Yehuda Leib Lewis, is misleading to your readers. There is no current halachic solution to the *aguna* problem as the author himself concludes.

Am I to understand that the author writes that *batei din* are admittedly useless and powerless and therefore ineffective in resolving cases where the recalcitrant husband chooses to be *m'a-gain* his wife? The *beis din* can achieve nothing unless all parties involved accept its authority unquestionably.

I have been reading and re-reading the article and have come to the following conclusion, and I come to you to either confirm my conclusion or explain why it is incorrect. For 8 pages the author writes and offers no practical solution for an *aguna*. It would seem that the author in his article is more concerned with defending the *kavod* of the *rabbanim* rather than tackling the far more serious problem of halachic abuse leading to the tragedy of *agunos*.

When the *beis din* recognizes that a recalcitrant husband refuses to carry out its *psak*, why should it not permit the *aguna* to have the *psak* enforced in a secular court?

My daughter is the victim of such an abusive situation. A *beis din* being flouted and the *Rosh Yeshiva* of his *kollel* refuses to exert any moral or financial pressure to enforce the halachic *psak din*. Such apathy is not only a *chillul Hashem*, it is the cause of much antagonism against our *gedolim* and the *mosdos haTorah*. How can we decry those who attack *halacha* and *batei din* if leaders encourage even *bnei Torah* to ignore their halachic obligations?

NAME WITHHELD BY REQUEST

THE AUTHOR RESPONDS:

I have no wish to appear unsympathetic to Mrs. X's anguish, still less to seem apathetic to her daughter's tragedy.

Nevertheless her letter illustrates dramatically the dangers of commenting on specific cases and the gravity of the Torah's requirement to listen to both sides. Knowing no more than she shares with us, readers face the impossibility of choosing between the following conclusions: 1) Mrs. X (presumably a religious lady of good standing) is not telling the truth, or at least not the whole truth; or (2) her son-in-law's *Roshei Yeshiva* (presumably senior *talmidei chachamim* of repute) are indifferent to her daughter's plight and to their religious obligation to listen to decisions of a *beis din*; or (3) the *beis din* (again presumably composed of *talmidei chachamim* of repute) has erred so egregiously as to justify the *Roshei Yeshivas'* ignoring the *psak din*. I hope *JO* readers will join me in declining to draw any conclusion about what must be a tragic (and probably a complicated) case.

As the title of my piece indicated, my main purpose was to examine the myth and reality of "solutions" to the *aguna* problem. I certainly need not apologize if in doing so I defended (albeit inadequately) the *kavod* of *halacha* in general and *poskei halacha* in particular against the unjustified attacks to which they have fallen victim recently. Contrary to Mrs. X's assertion, my article considered a number of measures, specific or general, from "Naming and Shaming" to PNAs aimed at ameliorating the *aguna's* plight.

I hesitate to respond to Rabbi Auman's remarks about "certain *batei din*," not least because they refer to a specifically American phenomenon. European *batei din* are generally respected. It would seem that this is a symptom of a wider malaise in American Jewry – namely the dearth of organized *kehillos*, responsible for the totality of their members' religious needs from the cradle to the grave, headed by a *Rav* (and his *beis din*). Indeed one reader wrote directly to me arguing that the social cohesion of the old style *kehillos* reduces the likelihood of *aguna* problems. I wish he were right.

In spite of Rabbi Auman's flattering but improbable suggestion that my article may influence the outcome of the

PNA debate, I cannot deny that I harbor reservations. He asks, "What harm could come from advocating the use of PNAs on a large scale?"

There are broadly three answers:

1) So long as there is insufficient consensus as to exactly where the boundaries between coercion and legitimate encouragement lie in PNAs there is risk as to the validity of *gittin* given in their shadow. Even the great *Rabbanim* Rabbi Auman mentions, whilst far from hostile to PNAs, have neither granted a blanket approbation nor gone out to promote their use. It is significant that neither they nor their numerous pupils insist on a PNA as a condition for their officiating at weddings.

2) It is far from certain how far the courts will be prepared to enforce the terms of PNAs. If, as some fear, they decline to enforce them, the entire exercise will turn out to have been a toothless tiger. This is what I meant when I wrote that it is probably too soon to judge their efficacy.

I am not sure what Rabbi Auman means when he describes PNAs as "dramatically effective." If he means that the fact that the couple signed something generates some moral pressure later, then something simpler and innovative would surely suffice – such as the *chasan* signing to the *kesuba*, a *minhag* in several communities (*Nachlas Shiva* Ch. 12).

3) The PNA has been widely trumpeted as the panacea for *aguna* problems. In reality, there is little evidence or likelihood that it is. To claim otherwise is to invite the *agunos* and the public at large to imagine that there are simple pat solutions to the *aguna* problem and that those who voice reservations do not care. Neither is true. We have no business encouraging people to believe untruths.

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1 CONQUEST OF CANAN... I happened after the death of Joshua that the Children of Israel inspired of HASHEM, saying, 'Who should go up for us first against the Canaanite, to wage war against him?'

Joshua was great enough to lead the entire nation into battle and to triumph wherever he turned, but without a portion (Alfleich). Seeing that Joshua had died, the Canaanites would be emboldened, convinced that Israel would be vulnerable without its great leader...

וַיְהִי אַחֲרָי מוֹת יְהוֹשֻׁעַ וַיִּשְׁאַלְוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָדוֹ לֵאמֹר מִי־יֵעֲלֶה־לָנוּ אֶל־הַבְּנֵי־כְנָעַן בְּחִלְהֵם לְחַלְמֵם בּוֹ... וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה יֵעֲלֶה הַזֶּה נַחֲמִי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ...

מִי יֵעֲלֶה לָנוּ אֶל הַבְּנֵי־כְנָעַן וְיִשְׁאַלְוּ בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָדוֹ לֵאמֹר מִי־יֵעֲלֶה־לָנוּ אֶל־הַבְּנֵי־כְנָעַן בְּחִלְהֵם לְחַלְמֵם בּוֹ... וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה יֵעֲלֶה הַזֶּה נַחֲמִי אֶת־הָאָרֶץ...



8-21. Judah's earlier conquests. Having spoken of his conquests of the remaining parts of his territory, the text returns to the conquests of Judah's earlier leaders...

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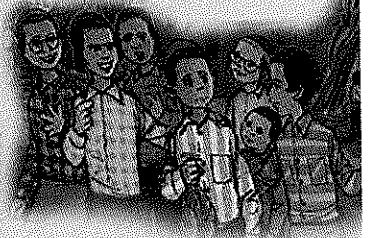


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IN THE SOLUBLE
No lesson or lecture may be learned from a child's first offering to his father. (Proverbs 2:17)

"No lesson" - a person who is widely seen, or better, a person who is completely aware, handles of life and does not give in. Hebrew: One must present everything in the right manner to the Father.

זײַ נישט צו זײַס מ'זאל דורך נישט
אויספארן, ווי נישט צו ביטער מ'זאל
דיך נישט אויסשפּײַען.

*Zei nicht zu zis m'zalt du'ch nicht
nisha tra bitter m'zal dich nicht
aishpeien.*
Don't be too sweet, lest you be
consumed; don't be too bitter,
lest you be disgorged.

MEANING
For your own good, try to maintain a balance in your relationships with others.

דאָלט מ'ך פאר אַ רב,
דיסט מ'ך ווי אַ גנב.

*Hilt mich far a rav, hilt mich
me as a rabbi
me as a thief.*

MEANING
Every person, as a human being, respect. Since "rav" is always polite, "burial" ("nu'ad Tzeken"), however, be wary of him.

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