

*If we wish to reach out to the secular world, we can do so without faulting the Talmud in its outlook about women.*

I am reminded of a visit that the late Satmar Rebbe, Rav Yoel Teitelbaum z'l, paid to the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland over thirty years ago. The Roshei Hayeshiva marveled at his knowledge and acumen. When asked to deliver a *shiur*, he immediately responded by delivering an unprepared penetrating *pilpul* (Talmudic discourse). One who has a grasp of the diverse backgrounds of this Hasidic rebbe and his hosts from Lithuania, can appreciate how Torah scholarship was able

to tear down huge barriers and erect a platform on which both parties stood to admire, and then love, each other.

How many remember seeing the interaction of the great Lithuanian Gaon Rav Aharon Kotler, z'l, with that master of Chesed (loving-kindness), the Kopitznitzer Rebbe, Rav Avrohom Yehoshua Heschel, z'l? The love that emanated from one toward the other inspired all who saw them together.

This is, perhaps, the interpretation of "V'chol banaich limudei Hashem, v'rav shalom banaich"—that when all children are imbued with Torah learning, there is peace amongst the children—Amen!

\*The term "Agunah" literally means chained. It is used to describe one who has not obtained a *get* or does not know if her husband is alive.

†The term "Tinok Shenisha" literally means a captive child. It is used in the Talmud to mean a child who was snatched at birth and reared as a Gentile.

‡The term "Maisis Umaidiach" refers to a person who influences others to do evil.

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Danziger's essay emphasizes the need for K'lal Yisroel's relationship with the outside world. According to his theory based on the views of Rabbi Samson R. Hirsch, there is "hope that the best of Western thought and lifestyle will be added to Torah teaching and practice in the process of synthesis. The combination of these separate elements will form a unified whole, and will result in an integrated personality." He stresses Hirsch's view of *Torah Im Derech Eretz* to "attain *Shekhinah*—nearness in aspects of normal living."

**"Whoever does not believe in him (i.e., the Mashiach), or whoever does not await his coming, denies not only the other prophets, but also the Torah and Moshe Rabbeinu (Rambam, Melachim 11,1)."**

The unforgettable Lakewood Rosh Yeshiva, Reb Shneur Kotler z.tz.l., posed the following question. Granted that belief in the coming of the Mashiach is one of the fundamentals of faith, as evidenced from the proof-texts cited by Rambam, those texts, however, do not speak of *awaiting* the coming of the Mashiach. Theoretically, one may believe in the ultimate coming of the Mashiach without anxiously awaiting it. One may conceivably have personal reasons for preferring the present state of affairs. Why, then, does Rambam link the awaiting of the coming of the Mashiach to the belief in his coming?

Reb Shneur offered the following insightful answer. When one realizes what the world—Jewish and general—should ideally be like and then, looking around him, sees what it actually is like, then, given one's belief in the coming of the Mashiach, one must perforce anxiously await it. To do otherwise would be to betray a lack of belief.

The gulf that separates the real from the ideal is too painful to bear without willy-nilly longing for speedy Messianic rectification.

The state of the world in general must surely await Messianic redemption. But I fear that the state of Klal Yisrael too must await the Mashiach for much-needed correction and improvement.

"The State of Klal Yisrael Today" is the title of this symposium. "Today" implies that today's world is a significant factor in "The State of Klal Yisrael." Indeed, the history of Klal Yisrael is nothing else than the record of the way it has carried out or has failed to carry out, its God-given Torah imperatives in contrast to, yet in relation to and with awareness of, the surrounding nations of the world. This is stated in the Torah, a second time in the Prophets, and a third time in the Holy Writings. Klal Yisrael never has lived, and does not now live, in a vacuum.

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**W**hat has created a majority of irreligious Jews, if not an incorrect way of relating to the world around us? The way of assimilation, of relating to the nations of the world by becoming, to a greater or lesser degree, what they are, has brought Klal Yisrael to the sorry and ironic condition of having an irreligious majority. Those who have assimilated to a greater degree are the outright secularists among us. They are the majority, just as the majority of the Western world around us is secular. Those who have assimilated to a lesser degree are the Reform and Conservative religionists among us, who view Torah Judaism from the outside, from the heretical perspective of the non-Jewish professors who originated the "Higher Anti-Semitism." They are the deniers of the divine, Sinaitic origin of the Written and the Oral Torah. They have created new religions, which they blasphemously call "Judaism." With their religious leaders, there can be no individual or institutional dialogue, for, as the Talmud teaches, dialogue with Jewish *apikorsim* merely renders them more blasphemous. To them has been applied the verse: "None that go unto her (heresy) return, neither do they attain unto the paths of life" (Proverbs 2:19). This does not apply, however, to the misled innocents among the laymen, nor to the Jewishly uninformed secularists.

Thus far we have been discussing the reaction of the assimilationists to the surrounding influences. What has been the Orthodox response? Here we come to two of our generation's greatest achievements: the renaissance of Torah study in Eretz Yisrael and in America through the growing number of higher Yeshivot, *ken yirbu*, and the astonishing Baal Teshuvah movement.

**T**he success of the Yeshiva movement (we speak here of the higher Yeshivot) must be credited in the main to the Lithuanian (and other East European) Roshei Yeshiva, who transplanted their intensive method of Torah study and their view of Torah Judaism in Eretz Yisrael and in America. The concept of *Kollel* has even been expanded. Originally, in the European Yeshivot, *Kollel* was only for the exceptionally brilliant, who were expected to become the Torah leaders of their generation as Rabbonim and Roshei Yeshiva. Today, especially in Eretz Yisrael, and to some extent in America, *Kollel* is conceived as a way of life in its own right, a fortress in which the *Kollel* families are protected from the corrosive influence of the surrounding world. *Kollel* has been expanded from a producer of exceptional *Gedolim* to a preserver of Torah commitment for even the average.

One can hardly overestimate the importance of this movement for the preservation of unadulterated Torah Judaism. Speaking of the American scene, with which I am more familiar, we can easily contemplate the tragic consequences to Torah Judaism had the *Yeshiva-Kollel* phenomenon not come to the rescue. With the superficial Torah knowledge of the pre-Yeshiva days, Torah commitment could never have been maintained in the face of American assimilatory forces. Even today we need only look at suburban communities which have not been touched by the *Kollel*-type commitment to Torah study and observance to realize what would have been the universal form of American Orthodoxy without the *Yeshiva-Kollel* influence. Fundamentally secular aspirations in the framework of schul, Shabbos and kashrus observance! There is little striving for higher religious experience and development, such as we find in the *Yeshiva-Kollel* communities and those who have been touched by the influence of their intense Torah commitment.

The Baalei Teshuvah too have, for the most part, become identified with the *Yeshiva-Kollel* outlook, and thus serve as much-needed reinforcements for Klal Yisrael.

**D**espite these providential achievements, there are issues to be faced in connection with them. In the first place, unfortunately, the *Yeshiva-Kollel* families and the Baalei Teshuvah still represent only a small segment of our people. Moreover, there is a widening cultural gulf between them and the nonreligious majority, a fact that makes it increasingly difficult for the majority to entertain the religious life as an option. To adopt that option, it is argued, is to accept outmoded patterns of dress, demeanor and speech, total disinterest in general knowledge, culture and developments, and disapproval of even the most innocent forms of recreation for even limited periods of time.

All this, it is argued, adds up to a rejection of Western culture in favor of outdated East European modes, and a negation of normal life. Some turn to this unworldly isolation as a reaction to the excesses of today's Western society, or because they are attracted to the exotic and the bizarre. For others, however, the perception of Torah Jews as thus described prevents Hashem's Torah from even getting a hearing. The result is something less than a complete *Kiddush Hashem*.

Another response to surrounding influences is followed by many in the Orthodox camp, and is described by the leaders of this community as the method of synthesis.

The Torah is studied, sometimes very diligently, the *halacha* is adhered to, but these are supplemented by secular studies and pursuits. The hope is that the best of Western thought and life-style will be added to Torah teaching and practice in a process of synthesis, in which the combination of these separate elements will form a unified whole, and will result in an integrated personality. This community is acculturated, and, therefore, less subject to the criticisms of the irreligious majority mentioned above. However, other criticisms have been levelled against them by other segments of Orthodoxy.

It is argued that the approach of synthesis is philosophically untenable and practically harmful. To say that the Torah needs to be supplemented by and synthesized with the cultural attainments of the nations is an insult to God's Teaching, "Torath Hashem temimah" ("the perfect Torah of Hashem"). In practice, those who seek such synthesis are prone to suffer from philosophic-religious schizophrenia of varying intensity. Most often the academic outlook and the cultural pursuits of the West become ascendant, while the Torah life shrinks to an ethnic observance, a familial practice, and an affirmation of nationalism. The main effort of mind and heart finds its expression in non-Torah activity. Less often the Torah becomes dominant to the exclusion of secular interests in much the same way as in the case of the *Yeshiva-Kollel* movement.

**W**hat is the solution? If the solution lies in adopting one of the options outlined above, there can be no doubt that the option to be favored is the one which has demonstrated the greatest devotion to Torah in observance and in study. The *Yeshiva-Kollel* approach has withstood most successfully the onslaughts of the secular and permissive surroundings, because in that approach life revolves around the Torah. The criticism of cultural anachronism pales in the face of a pure Torah life without compromise. Survivability as a Torah people must be our first priority.

However, there is another option, unmentioned above, that, in the opinion of this writer, provides the most acceptable solution. It was formulated by a recognized *Gaon* and *Tzaddik*, born and educated in the West, whose brilliant mind had a comprehensive and penetrating grasp of Western knowledge and culture, and who was thus enabled to judge from *first-hand* experience what the relationship of Torah to that culture should be. His program, though educationally limited by the historical conditions of his day, was a proven success, which generated a veritable Kiddush Hashem. I speak, of course, of that great God-conscious leader, spiritual giant and religious genius, R. Samson Raphael Hirsch z.tz.l. and his program of *Torah Im Derech Eretz*.

This is no synthesis, which was the fatal flaw of Mendelssohn's system, according to R. Hirsch. We follow only God's Torah. But "Derech Eretz kad'mah la-Torah," civilization, or culture, precedes the Torah chronologically and logically. It is the given raw material of life, which the

Torah does *not* supply. The relationship of culture to Torah, is that of substance to form, in the Aristotelian sense. The task of any generation is to "Toraize" the culture of *that* generation, and to reject whatever cannot be "Toraized." In our times of rampant immorality and crumbling values much, even most, of the raw material must be rejected outright. Yet our generation is also the repository of the best that the human spirit has produced in science and in culture, which can indeed be "Toraized." "Toraization," not supplementation, is the essence of *Torah Im Derech Eretz*, and its goal, as reiterated by R. Hirsch time and again, is to attain *Shekhnah*-nearness in all aspects of normal living. A far cry from synthesis!

In this system there is a spectrum, as there has always been, in Klal Yisrael, ranging from those who make the study of Torah their profession to those who set aside only minimal periods for study during the day and during the night, with the majority in between. A healthy Torah community has always been based on many and varied occupations and professions. But those who choose to make the study of Torah their profession are considered the most valued resource of the community, the highest of all professions. The goal of all is to moderate *Derech Eretz* and to maximize the study of Torah. Yet, in this system even those who make the study of Torah their profession, even the Roshei Yeshiva and leading authorities, despite severe limitations of time, maintain an interest in and relate to general thought and affairs. Intensive Torah "learning" need not be the prerogative of the non-Hirschian world.

**I** have suggested an option in theory. In practice, I do not realistically expect the implementation of this ideal form of *Torah Im Derech Eretz* in our time. Opposition of the establishment and preconceived notions are powerful deterrents to any change of the status quo. As stated at the outset, I fear that fundamental correction and improvement must await the Mashiach. Try, for example, to suggest to even the "most religious and observant" among us that much of what passes for prayer is often a mere ritual exercise; that the essence of "kavvanah" is not loud exclamation and strong bodily motions, nor even facial grimace, but the quiet spiritual inwardness that results from an immediate awareness that we are indeed in the presence of God, to Whom we are directing (kaven) our words; that we ought not to "daven" assertively and aggressively at Hashem, but submissively to Him in prayerful petition—then you will realize how far you can affect the status quo without Mashiach. Many of our best people are mitzvah-oriented, not God-oriented. The mitzvos, which Hashem gave us to evoke spirituality, have become a substitute for it.

Indeed, "whoever does not await his coming denies the Torah." May he come speedily, in our days, to save the remnant of Klal Yisrael and to restore the Torah to its original glory. In the meantime, less smugness, more self-criticism, and a search for improvement and solutions are in order. Hence this article.