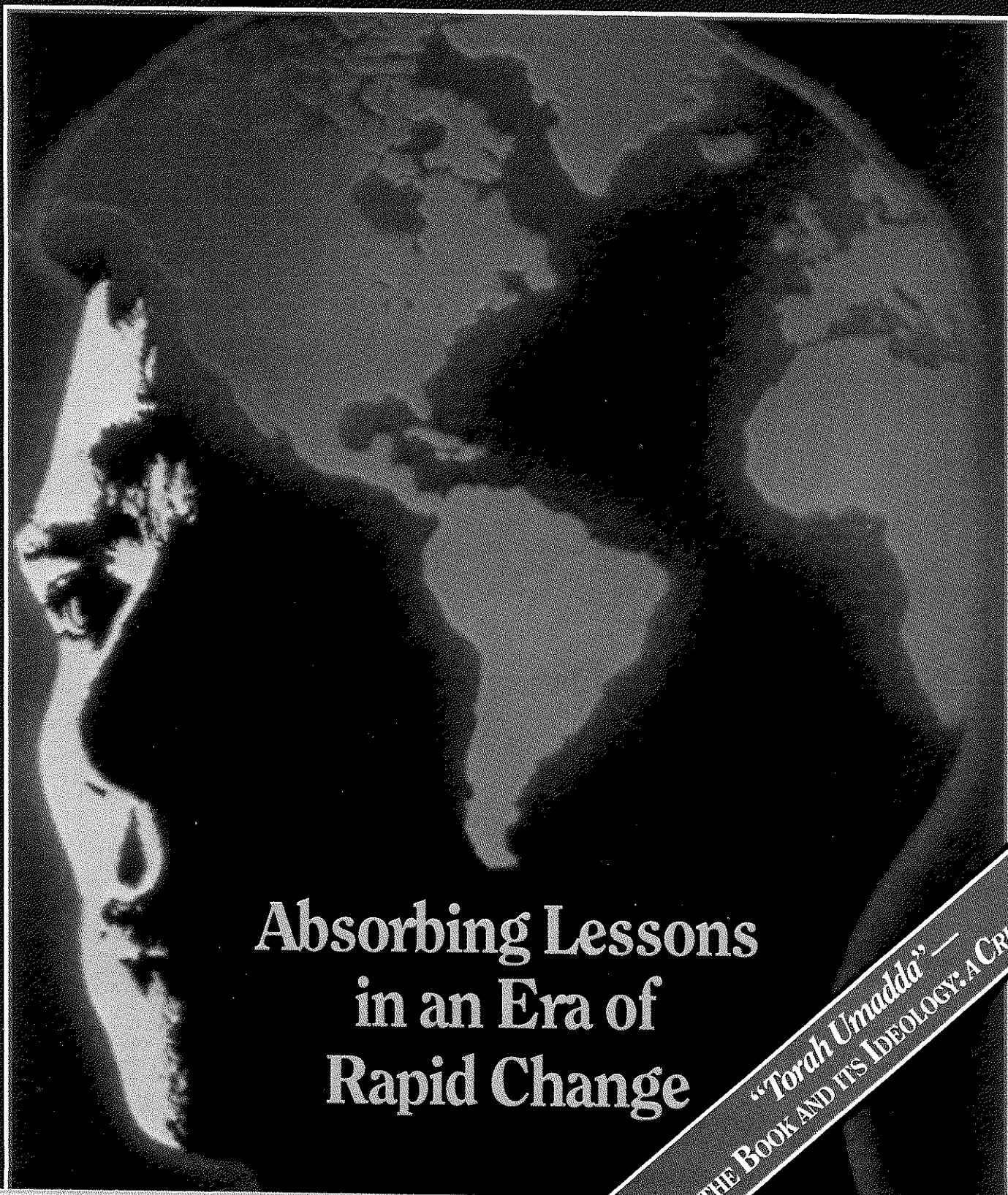


THE JEWISH OBSERVER

ADAR II 5752 / MARCH 1992
U.S.A. \$3.00 / FOREIGN \$4.00
VOLUME XXV / NUMBER 2



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in an Era of
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THE JEWISH OBSERVER (ISSN) 0021-6615 is published monthly except July and August by the Agudath Israel of America, 84 William Street, New York, N.Y. 10038. Second class postage paid in New York, N.Y.

Subscription \$22.00 per year; two years, \$36.00; three years, \$48.00. Outside of the United States (US funds drawn on a US bank only) \$10.00 surcharge per year. Single copy \$3.00; foreign \$4.00. Send address changes to The Jewish Observer, 84 William Street, N.Y., N.Y. 10038. Tel: (212) 797-9000.

Printed in the U.S.A.

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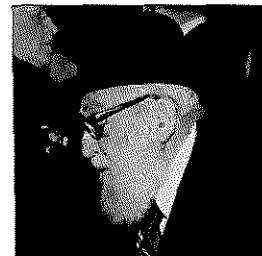
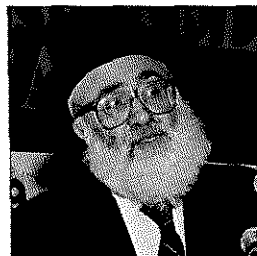
Published by
Agudath Israel of America

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MARCH 1992
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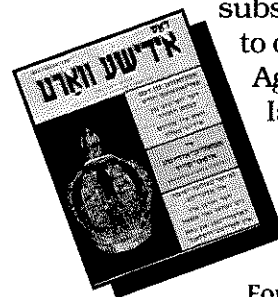
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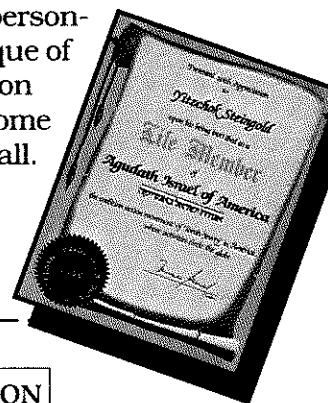
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Now that a year has passed, and we were witness to a number of other extraordinary events that took place in the interim, we are publishing two essays based on free translations of addresses that examine these events from a Torah perspective, delivered at the recent National Convention of Agudath Israel of America: by **Rabbi Elya Svei** (Rosh Hayeshiva—Yeshiva of Philadelphia) and **Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg** (Rosh Hayeshiva—Ner Israel, Baltimore), to bring these extraordinary events into perspective and to help guide us to respond to them as we should.

It



IMPLICATIONS OF A YEAR OF EARTH-SHAKING EVENTS

Changes in the World...Mandating Changes in Ourselves

EARTH-SHAKING EVENTS

This past year, we were witness to revelations of G-d's Hand in the events that surround us. If earlier generations would have seen that which we lived through, they would have burst forth with *shiros ve'sishbachos*—songs of praise to G-d.

Let us step back for a moment to better appreciate what has occurred: At those very places where for generations one was not even permitted to mention G-d's name, youngsters today are studying Torah. In buildings where uttering the "*Shema*" was forbidden, five *minyanim* (myself among them) thundered a public *Maariv*—in the Moscow airport, no less! I marveled at this and thought:

If only the Chofetz Chaim, who had declared that we should take arms to battle against the depraved Communists, would have merited to experience this! If only the revered Slutzker *Rosh Hayeshiva*, Reb Issur Zalmen Meltzer, who ran his yeshiva clandestinely under Bolshevik rule—if only he would have been privileged to visit those *chadorim* with us, to *daven* that *Maariv* with us! How they would have

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Rabbi Elya Svei שליט"א,
Rosh Hayeshiva of the
Yeshiva of Philadelphia,
presented at the recent
National Convention of
Agudath Israel of America.*

sung out with songs of praise to G-d! We, who did have the privilege to witness these events, certainly should be full of praise of G-d. Just as the Jews were enjoined by *Moshe Rabbeinu* with the words: "You saw...", referring to having been at Sinai and witnessed the Giving of the Law, making them answerable to a higher level of conduct, we too are members of a generation that saw outstanding events.

The *Meshech Chochma* points out that all modern "isms" have their roots in earlier times. Fascism, for instance, prevailed during the *Dor Hamabul* (the generation of the Deluge), when "the earth was full of *chomos* (robbery)" and strong-arm tactics prevailed. Communism has its precedent, he posited, in the *Dor*

Haflaga, when all of mankind pooled their resources to build the Tower of Babel: possessions, labor, and even families were turned over to the community to be shared by all. This violation of all standards of ethical conduct and basic decency earned G-d's wrath who brought destruction on this effort.

Indeed, the Torah's account of the *Dor Haflaga* describes the entire world as being of "one language (safa *echad*), united [in] purpose (*devarim achadim*)," which Chazal tell us were aimed against *Echod*—the supreme Oneness that is G-d.

Unity—*achdus*—is a key element in the strength of *kedusha*, the forces of sanctity. Thus when Yaakov Avinu and his children traveled to Egypt, his family is described as "*shivim nefesh*—seventy soul," in the singular, so completely were they united in thought, identity and purpose. When the forces of *tuma* (depravity and destruction) unite, as they did in the *Dor Haflaga*, they have the power to prevail, *chalila*. Thus did G-d decide to intervene with "*vaylfeitz Hashem*—and G-d scattered" them, to negate their power.

We, in our day, are witness to the disintegration of the modern-day counterpart to *Dor Haflaga*.

OVERCOMING HARDSHIP AND PERSECUTION

While he was tending Yisro's sheep, *Moshe Rabbeinu* was deeply concerned over the fate of the Jews in Egypt: How will they ever survive the harsh *Golus*? Then he saw the *sneh*-bush aflame, but not consumed by the fires that enveloped it and the message was clear. The Jews, too, would prevail in spite of their suffering.

We had agonized over the terrible suffering of our brethren in the Soviet Union, and wondered how they could ever survive. And now we have seen the Hand of G-d scatter the forces of the USSR, negating its power, crumbling the Union that held it together. Our immediate obligation is to do our utmost to meet the material needs of these Jews, while making certain that their *ge'ula*, their redemption from the Communist yoke of oppression, be complete... paralleling the consummation of *Ge'ulas Mitzrayim*, the redemption from Egypt, which was fully realized with "that they serve *Elokim* on this mountain [Sinai]," where they received the Torah. We too must lead our (former-) Soviet brethren to Sinai, and re-unite them with our Torah heritage.

Our fears over the fate of our brothers in *Eretz Yisroel* and their subsequent resolution—outright miracles, wherein those closest to the *Ribbono shel Olam* were spared the worst—are certainly cause for singing *shiras ve'sishbachos* in praise of G-d. But this is not the complete summation of the year in retrospect.

DARK CLOUDS ON THE HORIZON

We are witnessing an increase in anti-semitic expression and actions in America, and it should provoke us to some self-examination:

The Jews enjoyed a protected status in Egypt until *Yoseif Hatzaddik* died. At that point, "the land became filled with them" (*Shemos* 1,7), and the plans for persecution began to unfold (*ibid*, 10). As long as *Yoseif* was alive, the Jews remained in Goshen, honoring the exhortation of *Yaakov Avinu*: "Do

not make yourselves conspicuous [among the nations]" (*Bereishis* 42, 1). His warning to his sons was to avoid behavior that makes them seem privileged. In *Yaakov's* time, that meant not staying home in Canaan when others were traveling to Egypt to avoid starvation. They, too, should journey to Egypt to purchase food.

Let us step back for a moment to better appreciate what has occurred: At those very places where for generations one was not even permitted to mention G-d's name, youngsters today are studying Torah.

In Egypt after *Yoseif's* passing, it meant pursuing policies of restraint. But the Jews defied this counsel. They were everywhere to be found, and incurred the impatience and wrath of their host country. And the persecution began.

We must examine our own mode of behavior in America, and ask ourselves if we Jews do not overstep the warnings of *Yaakov Avinu*: "Do not make yourselves conspicuous!" Too many of us feel over-confident of our ability to play a major role in the political arena. After all, we reason, we do have senators and congressman who are close to us. Why shouldn't we exercise our full rights as citizens, and even condemn the President when it suits our fancy!

But this is not the prescribed Jewish course of action. Yes, Jews have always found ways of bringing their needs and interests to the attention of government officials through *shtadlonus*, which has been the highly-effective route pursued by *Agudath Israel*. Our predecessors showed us the way by reviewing the *Parsha of Vayishlach* (which tells of

how *Yaakov Avinu* prepared for his encounter with *Eisav* and his threatening army), before negotiating with non-Jewish officials. *Yaakov Avinu's* non-confrontational approach continues to be our source of how to conduct ourselves in our current *Golus*.

RESPONDING TO SALVATION AND SUFFERING

The paradoxical mixture of open miracles alongside the upsurge in overt anti-semitism, which we are now experiencing, can leave one confused. There is a *pasuk* at the end of the *Tochacha*, however, that shows how both trends are inter-related:

After much suffering, *Klal Yisroel* will say, "Only because G-d is not in our midst have all these sufferings befallen me" (*Devarim* 32, 17). During periods of *hastoras Panim*, when G-d (so to speak) covers His Face, and we become unaware of His Presence, then do sufferings befall us, לֹא.

The underlying message of all that has been occurring—the sweet and the bitter—is that we are totally ineffective in regard to changing events on our own. For generations, we could neither bring freedom to the Jews of the Soviet Union, nor could we succeed in fully opening up the gates of immigration from that country. Only Divine intervention could bring this about. Similarly, we were helpless in the face of the Iraqi dictator's Scud missile attacks. Only Divine protection could spare us the worst. And now, the sudden upsurge in anti-semitic acts finds us incapable of stemming the tide. These events of "suffering befalling us" only occur because we fail to recognize G-d's undeniable Presence in our midst. Since He is our only means of protection, we must increase our sensitivity to that Presence, enlarge our awareness of it, and enhance our utter dependency on it.

THE PLACE FOR INITIATIVES

There is an area where our initiatives are meaningful and where our actions can bear fruit on behalf of the existence of *Klal Yisroel*: Torah study. This was im-

We must examine our own mode of behavior in America, and ask ourselves if we Jews do not overstep the warnings of *Yaakov Avinu*: "Do not make yourselves conspicuous!"

plicit in G-d's reassurances to Aaron *Hakohein*, when his heart had felt faint for having no share in the dedication of the *Mishkan* (the portable sanctuary used during the 40 years' wandering in the wilderness): "Yours is greater than theirs."

The direct reference of G-d's words to Aaron is to the daily kindling of the *menora*, which was greater than a share in dedicating the *Mishkan* (*Rashi*). The long-range reference is to the Chanuka victory and the resultant celebration, in the distant future, which continues year after year

(*Ramban*). The ultimate and most profound reference is to Torah study, for (as the *Netziv* elaborates) kindling the *menora* was symbolic of probing the depths of the Talmud; and every Jew's involvement in Torah study, through learning and through support of its scholars and institutions, binds him to that act of sacred illumination.

Here our *mesiras nefesh* can bear fruit. G-d takes note of our devotion to Torah, and responds to our efforts with limitless blessings and grants us cause for eternal celebration. ■

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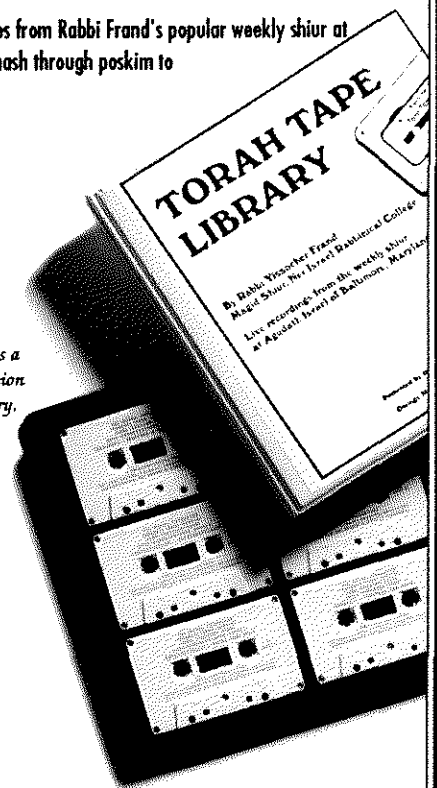
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CATAclysmic EVENTS AS A MESSAGE FOR OUR TIME



Responding as a Jew to Swirling Changes

THE CENTRAL ROLE OF JEWRY

We are currently living through an era that demonstrates a truth articulated many times by Chazal (the Rabbis of the Talmud): That all that befalls mankind is designed to teach lessons to the Jew. Moreover, cataclysmic events take place *because* of their effect on the fortunes of Jewry.

One of the most dramatic examples of this phenomenon is the major changes that took place in the fabric of the society of Ancient Egypt in the time of Yoseif Hatzaddik. The entire populace of Egypt and the surrounding region suffered from a terrible famine. All of Egypt was in upheaval, with all possessions being given to the king in exchange for food, making the people into serfs. This was a crucial turning point in human history, for from that time on, the king became the owner of his country and its people. This was the forerunner of the medieval era of powerful monarchs and subservient serfs. And all this happened so that Yoseif's brothers and their children would not

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Rabbi Yaakov Weinberg
של"ת, Rosh Hayeshiva
of Ner Israel, Baltimore,
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America.*

be disadvantaged in Egypt as aliens in a country of land-owners, but would be comfortable as peers amongst similarly dispossessed people. A complete change in social order took place because and for the sake of the relationship between the nations of the world and the Jews.

This year again, one is witness to wars in Asia, radical changes in Europe, in the Soviet Union and the near East, all revolving around Klal Yisroel or affecting them. One might dismiss such an assessment as self-centered arrogance. But these events must not be viewed in any other way.

The entire world and all that is in it exists only for the ultimate purpose

of bringing out K'vod Shomayim—the Glory of the Creator. (See Avos 6, 11, citing Yishayahu 53, 7.) This is demonstrated by the ten generations following Adam, which increasingly infuriated G-d, until the appearance of Noach. Only Noach brought out K'vod Shomayim in the world through his conduct and only he and his family merited being spared from the destruction of the *Mabul* (deluge). From his time on, the purpose of creation would be realized through Noach and his progeny alone, amongst all of Adam's offspring.

Similarly, the next ten generations also aroused G-d's wrath, until Avraham, who merited the reward of all of those who had preceded him. The K'vod Shomayim manifest by Avraham's life was equal to that which the ten preceding generations had had in potential, but had never brought to fruition. But "taking the reward of all the others" has even greater implications. The ultimate result was that amongst all the descendants of Noach, only the nation produced by Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov can be the means through

This year again, one is witness to wars in Asia, radical changes in Europe, in the Soviet Union and the near East, all revolving around *Klal Yisroel* or affecting them.

which the Glory of G-d will be manifest in this world.

Once we accept G-d as the Master of history, and recognize that His Hand controls all that takes place, we should realize that it is only through *Klal Yisroel* that He can be recognized as the G-d of history. And all that occurs to all the nations must be understood in terms of their bearing on the relationship of G-d and *Klal Yisroel*, for through them is He known, is His Hand seen, and is His Presence felt.

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THE AWARENESS IMPERATIVE

The Torah demands that when extraordinary events are taking place in our midst, we take note of them, and take them to heart. In fact, the harshest punishments of the *Tochacha*, in which G-d warns the Jews against straying from a life of Torah, are reserved for those occasion when: "V'halachta imi b'keri, when you walk with Me with indifference" (*Vayikra* 26, 21). That is, Jews will witness remarkable events, and dismiss them saying, "That's normal, natural,... such are the workings of the world."

In other words, "keri—happencstance" means that we do accept that whatever happens is because *Hashem* wills it. We may "know" it is so, and say as much, but do we truly believe it? Specifically, when we speak of the remarkable events of the past year—do we truly recognize how remarkable they were? When we speak of the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the change in the political map of the world, the re-unification of East and West Germany, do we see that these are *nissim glu'im*—outright miracles? Just two years ago, anyone who would have predicted these events, would say that at best they would occur in the distant future. If they indeed did happen in our time, this was surely a miracle, creating a whole new set of circumstances in their wake.

When we speak of the Russian immigration to Israel, or the Gulf War and the danger it posed to all those living in *Eretz Hakdoshah*, how can we fail to recognize the *Yad Hashem*?

And the current economic downturn—do we feel that this is also, no less, the *Hashgacha*—a case of *Hashem* talking to us, and telling us something—with the same remarkable impact as all the other events that we proclaim to be wonders? And whom does this recession affect, if not *Am Yisroel*, its institutions, its Torah study, its *chessed* programs?

DECIPHERING THE MESSAGE

If we are to understand that there is no *keri*, we must endeavor to decipher the message being given to us by these unusual events. We may

not know precisely what this message is, for we must look to *Gedolei Yisroel* to interpret the meaning of these events. But one thing is certain: If the *Hashgacha* is issuing warning signals to us, then we must react; it is impossible for us to continue our lives without change. And if we fail to change, then this reflects on our lack of response, our tragic expression of "walking with G-d with *keri*." Active change is the imperative of a genuine response.

Indeed, whatever our response, it must begin with a penetrating aware-

One thing is certain: If the *Hashgacha* is issuing warning signals to us, then we must react; it is impossible for us to continue our lives without change.

ness, with a sense of *achrayus*, accountability, and honesty. These elements must be reflected in the care with which we lead our lives; the time we devote to our Torah study; our *tefilla*, and the *kavana* and awareness with which we endow it; the responsibility we feel toward each other, as well as our *achrayus* to the community at large; the care with which we use our time; the clarity with which we make judgments regarding what we do and how we act.

Surely, if we perceive that all is from *Hashem*, then all of these areas should undergo change. We simply cannot continue as before, because the events of this past year must press upon us as portentous happenings. We must react with a change in who we are and how we conduct our lives. It must be evident to all that we are living differently, endowing our lives with a seriousness of purpose. We are responding to His message. With that we can lift our minds and hearts and say, "We know, *Hashem*, that You are telling us something, and we are responding to You as best we can." ■



I. TBILISI, GEORGIA

TEACHING IN THE CIS (EX-USSR)

What an exciting era of history we live in! The Jewish community of an empire that straddled Europe and Asia, a community which was once the world center of Jewish culture, the birthplace of the Yeshiva and Kollel movements, of Zionism, of modern Hebrew and Yiddish literatures, was cut off from the main body of the Jewish people for 70 years. It is now slowly, if painfully, being grafted back to the body of *Klal Yisroel*!

There are said to be three million Jews in the area that was until recently the Soviet Union. These constitute a fifth or sixth of all the Jews in the world. From time to time we hear about the revival of Jewish life there. Is it possible to participate in this epoch-making activity? This question occupied my mind for some months last year.

On investigation, I discovered that Rabbi Moshe Eisemann of Yeshiva Ner Israel, Baltimore, is heavily involved in fostering Torah education in the then-Soviet Union. I turned to him to volunteer my services to teach

Mr. Klarberg lives in Melbourne, Australia, where he is a member of the faculty of Victoria University of Technology. This his first appearance in JO.

Jewish subjects during the months of December and January.

Rabbi Eisemann told me that I was most needed at the new Jewish secondary school (opened in September, 1991) in Tbilisi, Georgia, though he added that I would be more comfortable teaching at the Yeshiva of Moscow. He put me in touch with Mr. Mordechai Neustadt, head of Agudath Israel's Vaad L'Hatzolas Nidchei Yisroel, the sponsor of these activities in Tbilisi, which organized funding for part of my fare. The other part was covered by the university at which I teach.

Phone contact was made with Reb Ariel Levin, the founder and director of the school at Tbilisi. He said there was no shortage of food, but would I please bring *tefillin*, *mezuzos*, and *tzitzis*. As for food, I did not accept his

assurances. In addition to personal belongings, I brought along the *tashmishei mitzva* that he requested, plus vacuum-packed meat, salami, cheese, chocolates and groceries, all donated, or supplied at discount prices, by generous merchants in the Melbourne community. The "Tuesday Night Shiur" of Melbourne covered the cost of dispatching the extra suitcase as unaccompanied baggage. Meat and cheese turned out to be particularly welcome.

WELCOME TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF TBILISI

Tbilisi is just south of the Caucasus Mountains at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. People in the community believe that there are about 10,000 Jews in Tbilisi.



Summer camp in Tbilisi, 1991

The two sectors of the community reflect its geographic position. About half of the Jews are from Sepharadi families living there from time immemorial, the others are the descendants of European Jews who settled there mainly in the years just prior to the Communist revolution. The major Sepharadi synagogue has about one hundred *mispallelim* on most weekdays, and over two hundred on *Shabbos*. Though there were at least half a dozen synagogues active in living memory, due to migration and oppression most have closed.

All of the twenty to thirty people who attend the "Ashkenazi" synagogue are also Sepharadim. The *shul* today follows the decisions of the *Bais Yosef* in almost everything, in keeping with Sepharadi practice. Indeed, when I asked the *Chacham* why they have *Hagboas Hatorah* after *leinen* instead of before (in accordance with the *Bais Yosef*), he answered that that custom was left from the days of the Ashkenazim!

Both synagogues have bookshelves lined with turn-of-the-century volumes of Talmud, Midrashim,

One particular volume, which speaks to us mutely of the conditions in which it was used, is a *Siddur*—re-bound in the cover of a mathematics book.

Tur, *Shulchan Aruch*, *Tanach*, and other Torah works. A few, such as *Beis Avrohom* (which unfortunately had lost its title page) were unknown to me. Most were published in the Eastern European centers of the Jewish book trade of that period; Vilna and Warsaw are the cities most mentioned on the title pages. Most of the volumes of *Tanach* have *Rashi*, *Metzudas* and *Ivri Taitech*. One particular volume, which speaks to us mutely of the conditions in which it was used, is a *Siddur*—re-bound in the cover of a mathematics book. The only new publications in the *shul* are *siddurim*.

Among the Sepharadim, observance of *Kashrus* is widespread. On any weekday morning, the synagogue courtyard is abuzz with people bringing poultry for *shechita*. Live poultry is sold in the street near the *shul*. For the purchase of meat there are three butcher shops. Throughout the period of religious oppression, *matzos* were available in Georgia, with the exception of one year. There was a period of a few weeks in the fifties when the synagogues were closed.

I was told that the authorities had then decided to convert the synagogue (which is on an important road leading from the central city square) into a cinema. The Sepharadi women of the community lay down on the street around the synagogue to stop the workmen from entering the building. When news of their bravery was reported to the communist authorities, they relented and the synagogue was saved.

In addition to religious life and the school, there are also secular organizations. There is a Maccabee sports organization, a cultural club (which

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in December organized a Chanukah party), and an Israeli dancing group. Israel is represented by a consul, and the Jewish Agency also maintains an office in Tbilisi. The physical proximity of Israel has been emphasized recently by the establishment of a weekly two-hour flight to Tel Aviv.



Rabbi Levin (center) with four Ner Israel volunteers.

MEET REB ARIEL LEVIN

When I arrived, it was Chanuka and the pupils had been granted a half holiday. That is, there were no secular subjects being taught that week. A slightly built young man with a trimmed beard and short *pe'os*, whom I soon discovered to be the remarkable Reb Ariel Levin, held the wrapt attention of over fifty boys aged 10 to 15. While I introduced myself to Reb Ariel, the students began talking amongst themselves. I could distinguish two words—"Australia" and "Ashkenazi." I understood that they were aware that a visitor from Australia was coming to teach at the school. The comment "Ashkenazi" indicated that they had at a glance determined my identity. More than two thirds of the boys are Sepharadim, and this division is important to them.

Reb Ariel is a graduate computer programmer. He is a *baal teshuva* with no formal Jewish education. He says that both his parents were committed communists; his father a journalist with a government newspaper, his mother a primary school teacher.

During his adolescent years, he would listen to the American "Freedom Radio" and became a convinced anti-communist. This led him to search for an alternative life style.

Seven years ago, at the age of 23, he had his *bris milla* in an apartment in Moscow.

Today, Reb Ariel speaks *Ivrit* fluently, has studied *halacha* through

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the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch* and has, for the past five years, covered the Torah with commentaries of *Rashi* and *Sifsei Chachamim* in accordance with the weekly *Parsha*. He has also studied a number of *p'rakim* of *Gemora*, reads the Torah in the *shul*, and has qualified as a *shochet ofos* (certified to ritually slaughter fowl)! In all areas he is basically self taught. On *Shabbos*, Reb Ariel wears a long jacket. Besides establishing a day-school, Reb Ariel has succeeded in being *mekarev* countless people to *Yiddishkeit*. Many have had *bris milla* and a number of them have become true *baalei teshuva*. Some of his *talmidim* are now learning in *yeshivos* in Israel and the United States. He is nothing less than a miracle man! (I don't believe that I have ever before been moved to describe anyone as a miracle man, but I cannot think of a more suitable term.) When he discovered that in the *mikva*, the *bor-tevilla* (pool for immersion) had a *zechila* (a leak, which renders it unfit) and the *bor mai-geshamim* (pool of rain water)

was kosher, the *bor mai-geshamim* was used for immersion until two new *boros* were built.

Dvora Levin comes from a more traditional family in Leningrad (St. Petersburg). She is a graduate radio engineer (she would have preferred to study medicine, but says that when she enrolled at the university, Jews were not accepted into the school of medicine) and is kept busy by their two baby girls. Reb Ariel frequently consults her on matters of policy. Mrs. Levin *davens* daily, supervises the *mikva*, and has, since marriage, become fluent in *Ivrit*.

REB ARIEL'S SCHOOL

Reb Ariel has purchased a three-floor tenement building. The two rooms and kitchen on the ground-floor serve as the residence for his family, as office, and as guest room. The classes occupy the flat above and the attic. "I have a school on my head," he says with his characteristic humor. There is no

There is no play-time scheduled because there is no play-space. How the school will cope with growth and the establishment of a girls' school next September is not at all clear.

play-time scheduled because there is no play-space. How the school will cope with growth and the establishment of a girls' school next September is not at all clear. (Three boys enrolled while I was there.)

The school places emphasis on Hebrew and Mathematics. Of the 35 periods per week, 10 are allocated to Hebrew, 8 to Mathematics, and 5 to English, Physics, Russian, Georgian, Biology, Chemistry, History, Geography, Music and Art are squeezed into the remaining time. Some subjects are only taught one period per fortnight. When I asked one of the best pupils to compare the Jewish school with the one he had attended previously, he said he liked it better because Math was taught at a higher standard and here he was able to learn Hebrew. A two-course hot lunch is served daily.

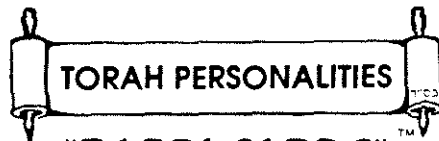
The school is religious because it is run by Reb Ariel. Only one other teacher may be described as observant. The subject "Hebrew" includes the study of *Chumash* and *Mishna* in the advanced class, but in the beginners' classes emphasis is put on spoken *Ivrit*. I was allocated the highest class.

Although all the pupils at the school are Jewish by birth, many of them were not circumcised when the school started. Reb Ariel has encouraged them to accept the offer by West European Jewish communities of a free holiday in Paris where the operation is performed under hygienic conditions in a modern hospital. This is followed by a *seuda* and tours of Paris. It was a most dramatic experi-

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ence to teach the passage in the Torah (*Parshas Lech Lecha*), dealing with the institution of *briso shel Avraham Avinu*, to a group of boys of whom many had themselves only weeks previously entered that covenant. In one case a pupil and his father were circumcised on the same day!

Reb Ariel also conducts a Sunday School for two hours every Sunday from 12 noon until 2 pm. About 60 pupils attend, forming separate groups for boys and girls. Each is taught *Ivrit* for one hour, and general Jewish knowledge for the remaining hour.

BEING BOMBARDED WITH QUESTIONS

During my stay I was constantly bombarded by questions. People wanted to know about *Yiddishkeit*, or how to get to Australia. The day I arrived I spoke in *shul* between *Mtncha* and *Maariv* and repeated a point made by Rabbi Pinchas Sheinberg שליט"א (during his

visit to Melbourne a few days previously) stressing the *din* that Chanuka lights must burn half an hour into the night, and that the *halacha* applies on Friday night, as well. It follows that



Rabbi Eisemann greeting two Tbilisi yeshiva students, arriving at JFK, Feb. '92.

one cannot carry out the *mitzva* with the small candles which are widely used. The result was a stream of inquiries till that Thursday evening. On *Zos Chanuka* some people wanted to know at which *tefilla* to stop saying "Al Hanissim."

Is it Kosher to wear one's *tallis* un-

der a leather car-jacket? What is the *din* if one feels the call of nature during *Shemoneh Esret*?

Doubts about *kashrus* were asked at a number of levels: What happens if one drops meat while one is salting it? To what extent can one rely on local provisions? Which certificates of *kashrus* from Israel and the States are acceptable?

Is the *sheva* in "Sham'u" sounded or not? (Only a Sepharadi could have the language sensitivity to ask that.) Would I like to buy pieces of *Sifrei Torah*? (Some of the pieces were *Ashkenazi Ksav* and some *Sepharadi*.) Why do these *tefillin* look strange? (They had belonged to a left-handed man.)

A number of painful questions about people's standing as Jews were asked. Thus a divorced young woman with a baby who claimed to have been told by her foster mother that her real mother was Jewish wanted to establish her status as Jewish. One such inquirer (whom I did not think I had

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helped at all by discussing his situation with him) brought me a small gift the next day.

THE TBILISI REBELLION

On Sunday, December 22, 1991, rebel forces attacked the Government building in the center of the city. Although the fighting was largely restricted to the one city block, businesses and

schools were closed throughout the city.

Two pupils, brothers who were planning to leave Tbilisi shortly, and had already enrolled at a yeshiva in New York, continued coming to school daily, and I took the opportunity to help them by introducing them to the study of *Gemora*. We covered two *blatt*. This was the same section (*ye'ush shelo mida'as*), I pointed out, that Herman Wouk describes in *This*

is *My God* (a very popular book in Russian translation) as that with which his grandfather had introduced him to the study of *Gemora*. Because of the enthusiasm of the boys, this was most productive teaching. [As of publication, the two have arrived in New York, and are already studying—and shooting expert hookshots—in the Yeshiva of Staten Island—ed.]

On Monday, January 6th, at about 5:00 a.m., President Gamsakhurdia left his bunker in the besieged Government building, and used our street as his escape route. The shooting that ensued caused consternation in the household, but lasted only a few minutes. At 8:00 a.m. I went to *shul*. It was *Rosh Chodesh*, and although there were less people in *shul* than usual, a Bar Mitzva was being celebrated. In accordance with the local custom, the father of the boy moved around the *shul* distributing sweets. Less than 50 meters from where earlier that morning there had been a shooting, the tradition was being handed down.

At 10:00 a.m. an armed man knocked on the door and inquired whether any of the president's entourage were hiding in our house. Reb Ariel explained that we were from the synagogue and had not participated in the conflict. The young man said that he respected our religion and went away (*bi'ra*). We later heard that some of the entourage had been found in neighboring houses.

The following day, Tuesday, January 7, was celebrated as a public holiday. Along with thousands of others, I took a walk across the city. Damaged and burnt-out military vehicles and buses were strewn around the city square like broken toys. Some people were crying. A battlefield is a sad thing to see even when the fighting is over. Perhaps the silence is more eloquent than the roar of the battle. It seemed to me that the victors were demonstrating their control and efficiency by having tow trucks working at clearing away the debris, even though it was a public holiday. That afternoon traffic again flowed through the city.

Slowly the pupils returned. Full attendance was only achieved on Mon-



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From Tbilisi to...the Yeshiva of Staten Island

day, January 20, when general schools and shops re-opened. As this was *Tu B'Shvat*, we celebrated by distributing dried fruit at lunch. That day, I gave my last lesson and the next day proceeded to Moscow to discover what Rabbi Eisemann had meant when he said that I would feel more comfortable at the Yeshiva of Moscow.

II. MOSCOW, RUSSIA—STILL A CENTER OF JEWISH LIFE

Despite the dissolution of the USSR, Moscow is still the nerve center of all the Jewish communities in both Russia and the newly independent republics of the CIS. Only in Moscow is there a large multiplicity of Jewish institutions,

secular and religious, catering to many facets of Jewish life. There is a growing number of cities (Kiev, Kishinev, Odessa, St. Petersburg, Tbilisi, Vilnius, and many more) where there is organized Jewish life, including schools and *yeshivos* and a few places where there are even rabbis.

Rabbis are particularly important in Russia. This, because they are being called upon to clarify questions of Jewish identity, which 70 years of life without religious marriage (or divorce) has created. Thus in a brochure listing Jewish institutions and their activities in Russia, we find next to the name of the rabbi of Moscow: "*Gittin, Giyur, Kashrut.*" Jewish divorce and conversion cases across the CIS are being referred to Moscow.

THE SYNAGOGUE ON ARCHIPOVA STREET

This is the communities' headquarters. It is a magnificent, large, rambling, late-19th century-style building. The site contains a major synagogue, seating about 600 men downstairs and a women's gallery upstairs, a minor synagogue seating perhaps 100 men, a kitchen and dining room for 20, a banquet hall, offices, a kiosk, and a cool-storage room.

A large number of people come here daily for their workaday activities. There are two rabbis, one filling the position of Chief Rabbi of the Soviet Union, the other the *Av Bets Din*, and a dozen office workers. Then there are the students and staff of the *yeshiva*, and the pupils and the teachers of the school. Poultry is slaughtered, cleaned and stored in the cool-room. In addition, there are people working in the kiosk selling Judaica in Russian, and also, on certain days as early as January, selling

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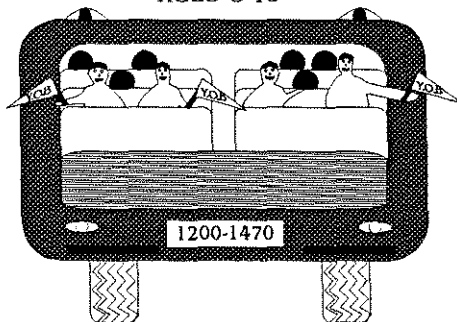
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This year ת"א our boys' division will be held in our new building

matzos. It should be noted that because throughout the year bread is the major item of diet, *matzah* for Pesach is much more important in Russia than it is in the West.

The building, like many in Russia, is rather dilapidated. Currently, there is a major refurbishing project being carried out. The laborers, added to the communal officials, the teachers, students and schoolboys, make the place a veritable beehive of activity. On *Shabbos* mornings, the presence of congregants makes up for the absence of the working people.

Unfortunately, during the second half of January, when I was there, two of the key people, the *Av Beis Din*, and the *Rosh Yeshiva*, were away on holiday.

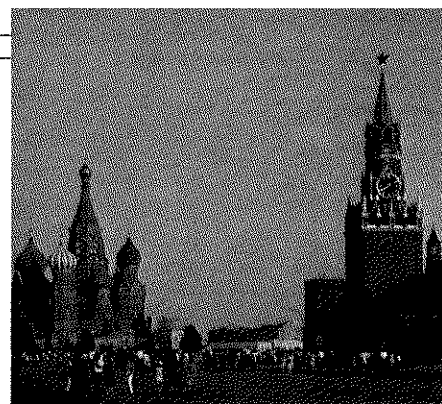
THE YESHIVA:

This is one of four *yeshivos* operating in Moscow. It was founded by Agudath Israel and occupies the banquet hall of the synagogue building. The assistant *Rosh Yeshiva*, Rabbi Baruch Ludmer, a Russian Mathematics graduate, and

baal teshuva who himself learned in Moscow and at Yeshiva Shvut Ami in Jerusalem, was in charge. He has the enormous pedagogic advantage of being able to speak the language the students understand best.

MEET THE STUDENTS

The *bachurim* at the *yeshiva* are a varied group of 15 to 20 students. The exact number is difficult to ascertain because some attend more regularly than others. The young men range in age from 18 to 30, and in place of origin from Azerbaijan (in the Middle East hard by the border of Turkey, the republic is Moslem by tradition and Turkish in vernacular), to Birobidzhan (officially, the Jewish Autonomous Region in the Far East, north of Korea, allocated by Stalin to the Jews either as a bulwark of defense against Japan or as a counterpoint to Zionism), and the Chernobyl region (which in Jewish history is famous for the radiation of the Twersky Chassidic dynasty). A number of students hail from Moscow itself, and two are the twin sons



of the *shochet* of the Sepharadi community at Nal'chik—a Farsi-speaking area just north of Georgia. As far as I could ascertain, they are the only students at the Yeshiva who were brought up Orthodox.

LEARNING IN THE MOSCOW YESHIVA

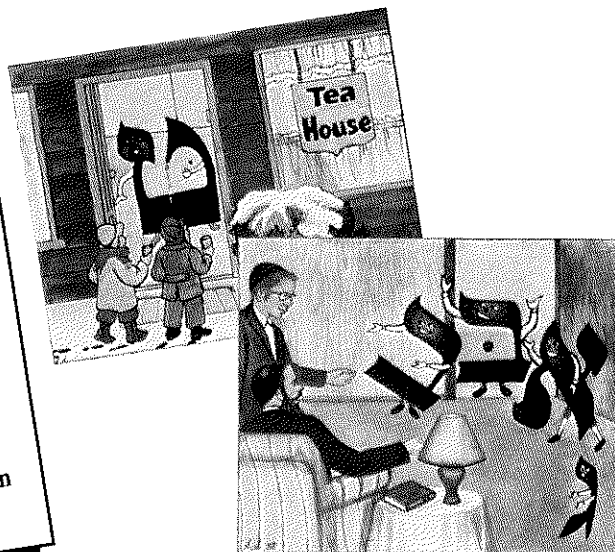
The *yeshiva* is geared to beginners. They study *Chumash* with *Rashi*, *Mishna*, *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*, and only the advanced group is studying *Gemora*. Language is a major barrier. A few understand *Ivrit*, all have some English, but none have enough for study

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It was a most dramatic experience to teach the passage in the Torah dealing with the institution of *briso shel Avraham Avinu* to boys who only weeks previously entered that covenant.

On Friday nights the *yeshiva* davens in the main *shul* to boost the numbers there. Altogether, we were 30 people. The *shul* employs two *chazanim*. The one who davened when I was there had an excellent voice. In the morning, after the *yeshiva* finished *Mussaf*, I went down to see the *shul*. There were hundreds of people there—all talking...while the *chazan* was saying *Kedusha*. Someone approached me to ask me who I was. After a few attempts, he said, "Is this a prayer where one should not talk?"

On the second Friday night that I was there, I noticed two English-speaking visitors in the foyer of the *shul*. They told me that they were reporters for *The New York*



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Because throughout the year bread is the major item of diet, *matzah* for Pesach is much more important in Russia than it is in the West.

Times. With permission, I invited them to join the *yeshiva* for dinner. It turned out that the male of the couple was the reporter and the lady his interpreter. He was Jewish and joined us at *netillas yadayim*. He was then told, please, not to take notes. Afterwards, he made arrangements with Rabbi Ludmer for an interview on the following Sunday.

MONEY MATTERS

At almost every *tefilla*, the *yeshiva* is joined by one or two outsiders. There may be locals who wish to say *Kaddish*, using a card with transliteration of *Kaddish* on it, or Western businessmen who simply want to *daven* with a *mitnayan*. As not all businessmen are Orthodox Jews, there must be a large number of Westerners doing business in Russia.

There is no shortage of food, but there is a terrible shortage of money with which to buy food. By Western standards food is cheap. By Russian standards (in January, 1992, \$20 per month was very good pay) the cost of food is prohibitive. The value of money from the West multiplies by at least 20-fold on arrival in Russia.

A LAST WORD

If you are travelling, include Russia in your itinerary. See what you can do to help. If you are a Sepharadi, the *mitzva* of visiting the Sepharadim of Southern regions is even greater. In any case, every person who steps into a synagogue brings strength and encouragement to the people who are there. ■

Rabbi Eliezer Levin זצ"ל

Mussar Personified

My father-in-law, Rabbi Eliezer Levin, died on the 14th of Shevat 5752, having achieved a great old age of 96, and a lifetime of accomplishments in the service of G-d and Israel. One of his requests to his family was that he not be eulogized. Even though, on the instructions of the great rabbis of our time, we did not follow these instructions literally, I certainly do not wish to violate his holy wish by over-eulogizing him with these words. It is therefore as an assessment rather than a eulogy that I offer this appraisal of his life.

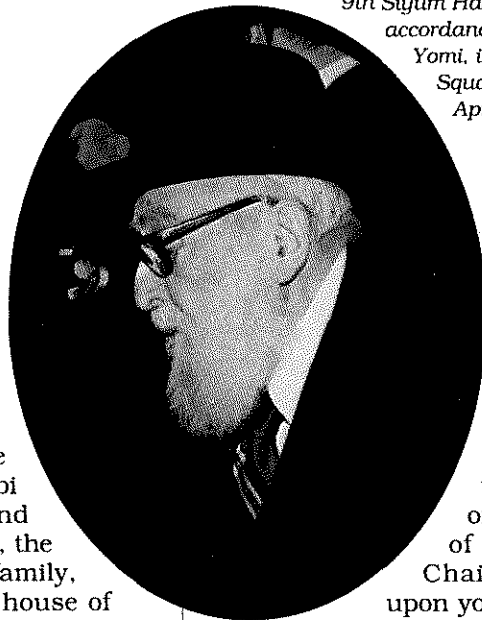
He disdained *maases* (stories)—as he put it, even *Misnagdische maasses*—because he felt most of them to be fanciful, if not downright invented and inaccurate. The true person is rarely, if ever, seen from the anecdotal biography. I pray that the true Rabbi Levin will somehow emerge from my words.

Mussar (ethical self-improvement) implies balance, perspective, faith and realism. These items were in short supply in the turbulent world of the nineteenth century when Rabbi Yisroel Salanter began the Mussar Movement. Reb Yisroel advocated inner growth, soulful serenity, an unerring eye for the details of the society and a constant self-challenge. To a great extent, the most *mussar*-authentic of all of the

Mussar Yeshivos in Lithuania was the great Talmud Torah of Kelm. Founded by the master educator, Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, and continued by his heirs, the aristocratic Dessler family, Kelm was a rigorous house of training for the *mussar* personality. There the training emphasized consistency, piety, compassion, serenity, uncompromising standards, and an aristocracy of soul and body. Rabbi Levin spent many years at Kelm as a student and later as a junior instructor. His first married years were spent in Kelm, and the house of the Levins (his Rebbitzin, Sarah Menucha Hoffenberg Levin, was herself a remarkable person who also deserves an assessment as a role model of what a Rebbitzin should be) always reflected the greatness of that great educational institution.

My father-in-law, who studied with, and for a time, lived in the same house with the sainted Chofetz Chaim, was nevertheless more Kelm than Radin, more Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv than Rabbi Yisroel Meir Kagan. He told me many times that the greatest attribute of the Chofetz Chaim was his simplicity, his humanity. One did not at the moment feel that one was in the presence of

Leading the counting of the Sefira at the 9th Siyum HaShas, in accordance with Daf Yomi, in Madison Square Garden, April, 1990.



greatness. Only later, upon reflection, did the enormity of the stature of the Chofetz Chaim dawn upon you. This trait

of simplicity and humanity,

Rabbi Levin inherited from his great mentor of Radin, but many of his other qualities were the products of the Talmud Torah of Kelm.

Rabbi Levin was a balanced person. He eschewed extremism and radical behavior and thought. He often said that too much was too little, in line with the great rule of the rabbis, "*kol yesser*

k'notul"—whatever is extra is considered as though it is lacking. From his first rabbinic position in Vaskai, Lithuania—a hamlet with 41 Jewish families—that he inherited from his father-in-law Rabbi Abraham Hoffenberg, to his last role as elder statesman

He held the Jewish community of Detroit together by the strength of his personality, by his genial smile and good cheer, and by his iron will to prevail.

and head of the tens of thousands of the Detroit Jewish community, he never lost his equilibrium. He was pragmatic in the most positive sense of the word. The task of the rabbi, he would often say, is to reconcile the community and to provide Torah leadership to all.

Rabbi Wein, of Monsey, N.Y., is dean of Shaarei Torah of Rockland County and the Bas Torah Academy, as well as *Rav* of the Congregation Bais Torah in the same community. His series of tapes on Jewish history and biographies enjoy wide circulation and popularity. Rabbi Wein is author of *Triumph of Survival*, on Jewish history. His article, "Being Truly Jewish In A Society of Plenty," was featured in *The Jewish Observer*, April '88.

He lamented the fragmentation of Orthodoxy and its communities. He held the Jewish community of Detroit together by the strength of his personality, by his genial smile and good cheer, and by his iron will to prevail. He did not agree with many of the philosophies of the variant groups of Orthodoxy. His loyalty to Agudath Israel and its political and philosophical agenda was legendary. He had served as a regional vice-president of Agudath Israel of America, and was in fact chairman of the regional vice-presidents. His last public appear-

ance in a national forum was at the 9th Siyum Hashas of Daf Yomi in Madison Square Garden, in April, 1990.

Along side this fierce loyalty, he maintained his sense of balance which taught him that the Jewish world would always include different ideas, and that as long as loyalty to Torah and Jewish observance was present, these views would have to be addressed and reconciled, and not automatically attacked and reviled.

He would build and not curse, influence and not ostracize, save and

preserve Jews and not squander them. His balance enabled him to raise his family to Torah greatness, even while his children all attended public school, and to guide his grandchildren and even great-grandchildren with a firm, but yet unseen, and many times unfelt, hand.

He knew many tragedies in his lifetime. He often stated that the price for long life was much tragedy. He observed ten *Shiva* periods of mourning, two for beloved daughters of his. His serenity in the face of adversity, his ability not only to absorb the blows of life but to be resilient and hopeful nevertheless, served as the rallying point for our family in all of our problems and difficulties. He insisted to us that we not only accept G-d's will but do so *b'simcha*, with a feeling of commitment and purpose that leads one to the happiness of Torah and spiritual accomplishment.

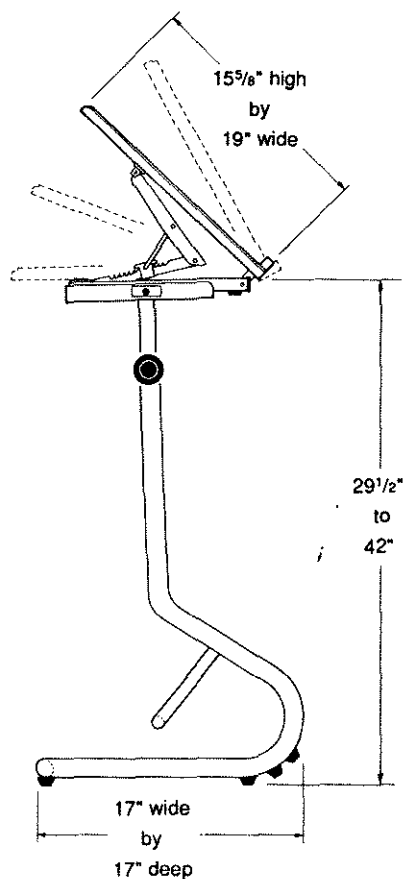
Regarding his daughters who died, he always stated that their families, which were dedicated to Torah study and greatness, justified their lives and were therefore the greatest comfort to the survivors they left behind. He said that when he saw those grandchildren, he always felt joy and not sadness. His inner serenity knew no limit.

His faith was so firm that the tragedies of our Jewish generation and of his own personal life left him unshaken in purpose. He would say that there is too much to do, and therefore, to contemplate the mysteries of G-d's judgments was a sterile exercise. He knew moments of anger and of intense frustration, of defeat and disappointment, but the outside world did not see this inner turmoil on his outward countenance. He calmed himself with the balm of his inner serenity and then proceeded to continue leading, teaching, counseling and building.

He was a *Rav*, par excellence. He was the most astute political practitioner I have ever known—in the most positive sense of the words "political practitioner." He always said the right thing at the right time to the right person. He never lied, evaded, fawned or was a sycophant. But he also never patronized, in-

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This trait of simplicity and humanity, Rabbi Levin inherited from his great mentor of Radin, but many of his other qualities were the products of the Talmud Torah of Kelm.

sulted, quarrelled or condemned. He always recognized the viewpoint of the other person, even when he intensely disagreed with it, and responded to it cleverly, incisively and in an instructive fashion. The non-Orthodox Jewish society of Detroit saw in him the leader of the Jewish community. The *Detroit Free Press* wrote a eulogy of him at his death as an editorial and not as an obituary. Even in his death, Rabbi Levin was a *Kiddush Hashem*—an example to the world of what a human being was meant to be. This, after all, the *Kiddush Hashem* aspect, was the epitome of the Mussar Movement. He picked up the phone in his study and called anyone in Detroit and asked to see him, and they would come to see him. The non-Orthodox, the Federation, the unaffiliated and—*lehavdil*—the Kollel members, the Chassidim, the Young Israelites; the *yeshivos* and the communal institutions, all responded to him because they knew that he meant only the benefit of the community and the Jewish people.

He was strong and confrontational when the situation demanded it, but he always adhered to the words of the Talmud: "One should always comfort with the right hand while chastising with the left hand." The consummate realist, he always supported attainable goals, measured progress in increments and dealt with people on a one by one basis. He was the busiest man in the world and nevertheless always had time for his family, for the lonely and the sad, for the community, and for all Jews and all people.

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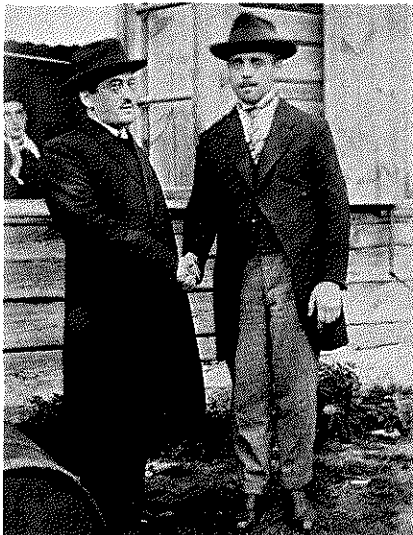
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In his youth in Kelm (left)

He was a man of rare courage. His motto, told me for the last time when I visited him in the hospital when he was already weakened beyond repair by the ravages of time, was "I never allow myself to be broken." While suffering from cardiac failure, renal blockage, double pneumonia and the ravages of old age, he nevertheless told his doctors that he expected to live many more years. He rallied from these infirmities only to undergo hernia surgery less than one month before his death. He recovered

Kelm was a rigorous house of training for the *mussar* personality. There the training emphasized consistency, piety, compassion, serenity, uncompromising standards, and an aristocracy of soul and body.

even from this and forced his release from the hospital to return to his home, there to yet conduct rabbinic meetings and advise on communal and personal matters. He regularly performed his physical therapy exercises and his will and mind were strong till the end.

His inner serenity gave him a fearlessness about danger and life. He once disarmed a distraught and irate husband who brandished a gun at a divorce hearing held at Rabbi Levin's *beis din*. While everyone present un-

derstandably dived for cover, my father-in-law rose, walked over to the man, stretched forth his hand and quietly said to him, "Please give me the gun and let us reason this matter together." His innate knowledge of people, his shrewdness in judging the character and motivations of others, allowed him to be courageous, since cowardice is usually an adjunct of ignorance and misjudgment.

Being courageous automatically guarantees being optimistic. He not only believed in the better tomorrow for the Jewish people, the Land of Israel and the world generally, he firmly visualized it in his mind's eye. It was not a theoretical dream that he saw before him, but a real world that would yet come into being.

His great strength lay in judging people, events and circumstances without prejudice and labels. His second wife, Rebbitzin Chana Heschel, was a descendant of great Chassidic masters and a loyal daughter to that tradition. He accommodated her customs and *weltanschauung*, just as she adjusted to being the wife of a great misnagdic and *mussar* Rav. He saw the positive in the varying colors of the Torah rainbow and was only disturbed when he felt the extremism in views that threatened to divide the house of Israel.

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He was an orator, a creative speaker, a strong communicator. He always had a new insight, an illustrative story, a compelling moral. And it all flowed so naturally from him in a seemingly effortless stream of Torah consciousness and knowledge.

I know of no other case of a Yiddish-speaking rabbi in his eighty-fifth year of life, training himself to deliver a ten-minute sermon in English every *Shabbos* morning, once he realized that his synagogue contained large numbers of people who no longer understood Yiddish.

He remembered everyone's name and everyone's problems. He was well-known in Chicago, Cleveland, Miami, Monsey and Israel, where his children and grandchildren lived and



Rabbi Levin at K'nessia Gedola, 1954

where he visited. Everyone looked forward to his visits, his aristocratic appearance (even when bent by age), his good words and friendly smile. The last Pesach of his life he spent in Monsey, in our home. He came to the synagogue by wheelchair, but he was the focus of everyone in the synagogue. Many people have told me that the memory of the blessings over the Torah that he recited then will remain with them all of their lives. He spoke to G-d, but in a manner that allowed man to overhear and benefit. His life was a blessing, his career an example, his cause eternal. May his memory be blessed. ■

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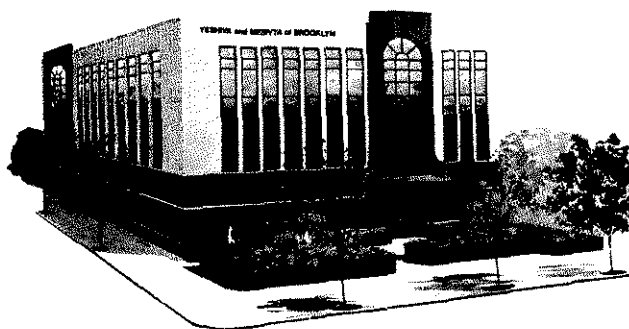
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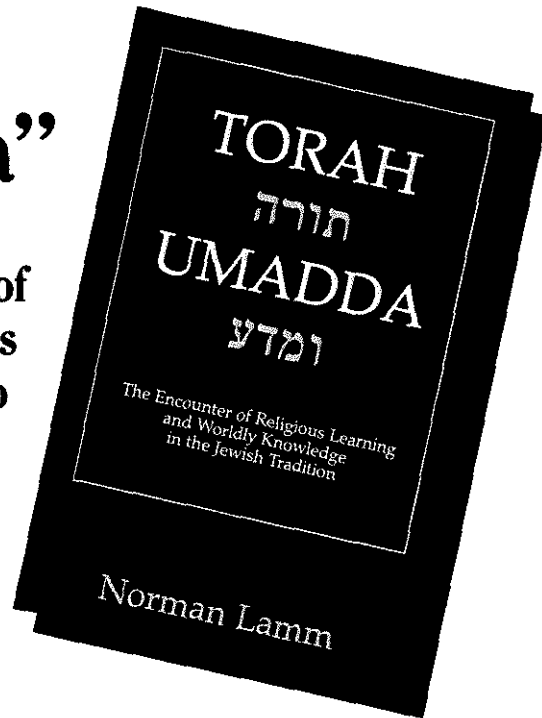


A black and white photograph of a two-story brick building, likely a school or institutional structure. The building has a flat roof and a series of rectangular windows arranged in two rows. A small, dark, rectangular object, possibly a sign or a light fixture, is visible on the upper right side of the building's facade. The building is set against a light background, and there are some trees or bushes visible in the distance to the right.

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“Torah Umadda”

A critique of
Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm's
book and its approach to
Torah study and the
pursuit of secular
knowledge.



A NEW APPROACH TO AN OLD CHALLENGE

It is over 200 years since Moses Mendelssohn brought to the fore of German Jewry the issue of Judaism's stance towards the surrounding culture, and of the proper relationship between Torah learning and secular studies. And when Napoleon's armies spread the French Enlightenment 30 years later, the confrontation between Torah and secular ideals reached Eastern Europe as well.

But the nature of the struggle between Jewish life and modernity has changed over the years. The intellectual challenge to Torah today is, if anything, less than it was sixty years ago. It is doubtful that any current Rosh Yeshiva would feel the need to prove that Torah is deeper than Kant, as one well-known *mashgiach* did in post-World War I Lithuania. Nor is there any modern-day parallel to the intellectual attraction that socialism and Zionism once exercised on yeshiva students.

Though hedonism and materialism seem more powerful lures today than great ideas, modern, post-tech-

nological society poses its own unique set of challenges. The isolation in which Jewish communities once flourished is but a historical memory. It is inconceivable today to imagine large numbers of Jews unable to speak the language of their host country, as was true in Eastern Europe a century ago. The openness of American democracy, the pervasive nature of the modern media, and the fact that most of us are consumers of advanced technology, make it harder than ever to erect barriers to the outside world. With the world a far smaller, more integrated place than ever, knowledge of the surrounding society often seems more necessary than in previous generations.

Budding yeshiva students, kollel fellows, and Torah-directed laymen must all deal with a secular world, its resources of information and its value system. Through the years, *Gedolei Yisroel* have prescribed different approaches to this challenge. Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, *ה"ר*, for example, addresses the question in a letter, published in *Koveitz Maamarim*, wherein he limits secular studies to areas that do not deal with prohibited topics—such as alien forms of worship or atheism—and that are essential for career preparation. (Of course, *psak halacha* re-

quires comprehensive knowledge of both the circumstances of the case being judged and the *halacha*.)

By contrast, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, exponent of *Torah Im Derech Eretz*, assigned a place to secular knowledge as an auxiliary of Torah knowledge, but only to the extent that it first pass the test of consonance with Torah. In the Hirschian worldview, there is no place for the sciences or the humanities as a source of values, or as a co-equal to Torah as an area of study.

In his recently published work, *Torah Umadda: The Encounter of Religious Learning and Worldly Knowledge in the Jewish Tradition*, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, president of Yeshiva University, presents yet a different vision of the relationship between Torah learning and non-Jewish studies. Before examining his approach to this topic—which defines the Jew's view of himself in the broader world—it would be appropriate to briefly sketch the traditional approach to Torah learning.

THE PRE-EMINENT MITZVA: TORAH STUDY

The study of Torah, we affirm daily, is not only pre-eminent among the *mitzvos*, but equal

Rabbi Rosenblum, a member of a Jerusalem Kollel, is a regular contributor to these pages.

to all others combined (*Shabbos* 127a). That study is the necessary precondition for the proper performance of all other *mitzvos*. In addition, only through the study of Torah can one hope to achieve the spiritual refinement of soul which imbues the performance of all other *mitzvos* with its fullest perfection: "An ignorant man cannot be scrupulously pious" (*Avos* 2:6).

Most importantly, the study of Torah brings man into the closest contact possible with the Divine, for Torah was the blueprint from which the Holy One Blessed Be He created the world (*Zohar*: "He looked into the Torah and created the world"). Torah allows man to apprehend *Hashem* directly—nature and history, only indirectly. For that reason one who turns from the study of Torah to marvel at the wonders of nature is worthy of death (*Avos* 3:9; see *Pachad Yitzchak*, *Chanuka*, 4). Through the study of Torah, man attaches himself to the Upper Realms and thereby elevates and transforms both himself and the

Torah does not reveal its secrets easily. Those secrets are withheld from dilettantes seeking yet one more form of knowledge. Without total immersion, over a prolonged period of time, success in Torah learning is impossible.

physical world around him.

But the Torah does not reveal its secrets easily. Those secrets are withheld from dilettantes seeking yet one more form of knowledge. Without total immersion, over a prolonged period of time, success in Torah learning is impossible: "For every day that you abandon me, I will leave you two"

(*Yerushalmi Berachos*). One must be willing to forgo sleep, food, and financial security, if necessary, to hope to achieve greatness in Torah: "This is the way of Torah: eat bread with salt, drink water in small measure, sleep on the ground, live a life of deprivation—but toil in Torah" (*Avos* 6:4).

There is virtually no statement in the foregoing description with which Dr. Lamm does not agree at one point or another in *Torah Umadda*. At the same time, however, he undermines the traditional vision of Torah learning in significant ways through the open-ended approbation he gives to secular studies and the value that he attributes to these studies.¹

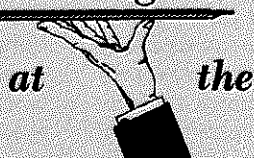
This unqualified endorsement is just one of the facets of *Torah Umadda* that gives us pause. In addition, Dr. Lamm offers various models for his approach toward synthesis of Torah and secular studies, and as we will show in Section II, none of these models seems to carry the meaning he assigns to them. Finally, he uses his formulation of *Torah Umadda* as the basis for what he identifies as a highly desirable creativity in Jewish Life. This vision of creativity is a troubling one, and will be addressed in the third section of this article.

I. TORAH AND MADDA AS COMPLEMENTARY AND EQUALLY VALID WAYS TO VIEW THE WORLD

Let us first examine how Dr. Lamm invests secular studies with intrinsic religious value: Throughout *Torah Umadda*, he dwells on the potential for "fascinating creativity" offered by a "synthesis" of Torah and Madda (p.2), on the op-

¹ This is not to say that secular knowledge has no worth or that the Orthodox community has not benefitted from it. We can readily concede that (1) a proper understanding of both science and history can bring one to a deeper appreciation of *Hashem* as both Creator and as the moving force in human history; (2) there are those who will require some post-high school education to earn a livelihood; and (3) the Orthodox community has benefitted in recent years from the infusion of the skills of *ba'alei teshuva* with broad secular educations and from their demand for sophisticated answers to the deepest questions of faith. But so broad are Dr. Lamm's claims for the value of secular education, that one might grant any or all of the above propositions without conceding anything of his essential thesis.

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portunity afforded by worldly knowledge "to create something new and original in the world of the spirit" (p.128). Worldly knowledge, he claims, offers to the religious Jew, "a large and embracing vision... and a more capacious theoretical framework into which [one] can integrate his most precious Jewish ideals" (p.85) than he would have in a pure Torah-only setting.

The effect of this emphasis on synthesis is to transform Torah and Madda into what appear as co-equal forms of knowledge. Torah and Madda are presented as composite parts of some primordial unity of all knowledge (p.141, 184), complementary—and equally valid—ways of viewing the world, just as the apparently contradictory descriptions of light as waves and as particles are both true and complementary (pp.232-236).

"Torah, faith, religious learning on one side, and madda, science, worldly knowledge on the other, together offer us a more overarching and truer vision than either one set alone. Each set gives one view of the

Creator as well as His Creation, and the other a different perspective that may not agree at all with the first....Each alone is true, but only partially true; both together present the possibility of a larger truth...."²

So great is the value of Madda for Dr. Lamm that the distinction between it and Torah finally blurs altogether:

"So long as we continue to learn Scripture and Oral Law, to acquire new knowledge and to refrain from forgetting what we know, then the study of the sciences and humanities is, in effect, the study of Gemara and thus a fulfillment of the study of Torah" [emphasis added] (p.165).³

This conclusion leads him to en-

²This extraordinary quotation gives us some idea of the vast gulf between Rabbi Lamm's *Torah Umadda* and the *Torah Im Derech Eretz* of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch—a theory which Dr. Lamm finds wanting in comparison to his own. Complementarity requires, Dr. Lamm argues, that the distinct methodologies of the Torah and secular studies be preserved and that secular studies not be taught from a Torah perspective. This position is diametrically opposed to that of Rabbi S.R. Hirsch, for whom Torah was always the litmus test for the value of any idea from non-Torah sources.

³We shall consider the validity of this view in Section II.

ertain seriously such questions as: Should one recite *birkhat ha-Torah* on entering the chemistry lab? May one study calculus all day and thereby fulfill his obligation of Talmud Torah? (pp.163-64).

Torah learning, devoid of secular knowledge, becomes in this view deficient. In a recent speech to Yeshiva University alumni entitled, "Is Chiddush a Chiddush?", Dr. Lamm maintains that one no longer hears of students in traditional *yeshivos* who are *oker harim* [lit., "uproot mountains"], blessed with creative insight, as opposed to being repositories of vast stores of knowledge. The very concepts of creativity and innovation, he maintains (based on two bits of anecdotal evidence heard second-hand), are suspect in such *yeshivos*.⁴

And in *Torah Umadda* he ex-

⁴One wonders what precisely Dr. Lamm means by creativity and innovation. If he is referring only to *chiddushei Torah*, then his comments reflect nothing more than ignorance of what is going on in traditional *yeshivos*. But if he is championing some other type of innovation, then his criticism of traditional *yeshivos* may indicate an even more fundamental divergence of approach.

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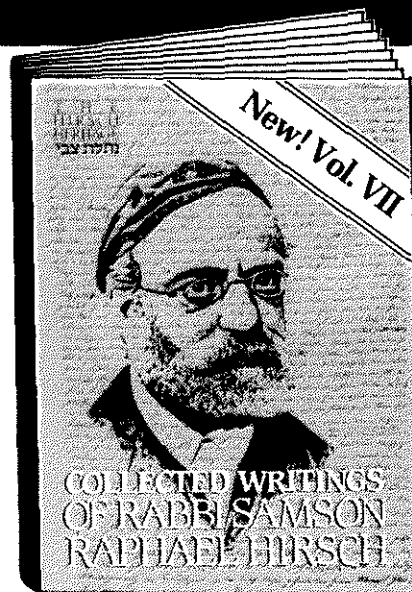
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presses his fear that the "ignorance of the facts, realities, and temper of contemporary life" of *poskim* produced by traditional *yeshivos* "will distort the knowledge base that goes into proper halachic decision-making" (p.230). He gives no examples of such distortions nor of the superiority of decisors with a secular education.⁵ By implying that the ability to be *oker harim* or

⁵ Formal scientific training is demonstrably not a prerequisite for acquisition of the knowledge base necessary for proper halachic decision-making. Many of the leading halachic works dealing with modern medicine and technology are the work of *poskim* with no formal secular training. The *posek* for the Machon of Technology and Halachah in Jerusalem is Rabbi Levi Yitzchak Halperin, who has no formal scientific training. Similarly, three of the major, recent works in the area of *Hilchos Niddah*, which in-

a *posek* depends on a broad secular education, Dr. Lamm leaves us puzzled as to how such talents were found among the Jewish people in the 32 centuries predating Yeshiva University. Similarly, one wonders why there are not infinitely more *chiddushim* in institutions that encourage secular studies than in the traditional *yeshivos*.

volves a great deal of medical knowledge, were written by *poskim* with no secular education—*Badei HaShulchan*, by Rabbi Feivel Cohen; *Gufet Halachos*, by Rabbi Joshua Wolhender; and *Shevet HaLevi*, by Rabbi Shmuel Halevi Wosner. With respect to a lack of knowledge of the "temper of contemporary life," Dr. Lamm is simply pointing to what is perhaps the central point of dispute between so-called Modern Orthodoxy and those to the "right": Is *halacha* to be brought into conformity with the "temper of the times"?

So great is the value that Dr. Lamm places on non-Torah studies that he is quite content to sacrifice the immersion in Torah studies which has always been considered the *sine qua non* of any substantial achievement in Torah (see *Mashiv Davar* 44). *Torah Umadda* is by Dr. Lamm's own admission an apologia for Yeshiva College (p.XIII) and its bifurcated curriculum—Torah studies from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and the rest of the day in Madda, with it being left to the individual himself "to perform...the essential synthesis of the teachings that [make] up Torah Umadda" (p.35).

II. THE SEARCH FOR A PEDIGREE

The bulk of *Torah Umadda* is taken up with a search for "models" for Dr. Lamm's broad approbation of secular studies. Before considering these various "models," a few general observations are in order. The first is that Dr. Lamm cites virtually no sources in either the Talmud or the vast halachic literature in support of his position.⁶ Throughout he shows a decided preference for the most esoteric sources—e.g., Lurianic kabbala, the dicta of Rav Kook—precisely, one suspects, because the meaning of these passages is so notoriously hard to pin down, much less to attach to any particular educational program. Even within the "models" he does find, Dr. Lamm, by his own admission, only focuses on implications in the thought of those who were far removed from his approach: they were either explicitly opposed to secular studies (such as Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner or the great Chassidic masters) or their closest disciples did not find in their master's

⁶ Dr. Lamm attempts to finesse this point by terming the issue of educational policy one of *meta-halacha*, which is based on "one's total *Weltanschauung*" (p.72). He then quotes Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Bloch, ז"ל, the Rav of Telshe, who described the law in this area as contingent on the nature of the individual as well as conditions of place and time. But to say that one cannot give a decision for all people in all times and places is not to remove the issue from the realm of *halacha*. Moreover, Rabbi Bloch went on to give a series of guidelines that he considered valid for all times and places, guidelines that are all inconsistent with the curriculum of Yeshiva University.

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thought a sanction for broad secular studies (as in the case of Rabbi Avraham Isaac HaKohen Kook).

Dr. Lamm's presentation is throughout more imaginative and passionate than it is convincing. One small example will give some sense of the leaps to which his argument is prone.

Explaining *Hashem's* commandment to Avraham "*vehiyei tamim*—be whole" (*Bereishis* 17:1), the *Ramban* refers to the command to "be *tamim* with the Lord your G-d" in *Devarim* (18:13). There the command follows a series of prohibitions concerning all forms of foretelling the future through recourse to necromancy or other forms of magic. The *Ramban* thus explains that the earlier command is a requirement to attribute everything to G-d and nothing to any other source. Dr. Lamm claims (p.224) that this explanation accords with his own view on the possibility of religious growth through secular studies. Apparently he means that since everything comes from *Hashem*, study of any aspect of that world or of man's cre-

To say that there is no power in the world other than *Hashem* does not turn the study of every aspect of the created world and human society—i.e., sociology, anthropology, political science, etc.—*ipso facto* into Divine service.

ations becomes a study of *Hashem*.

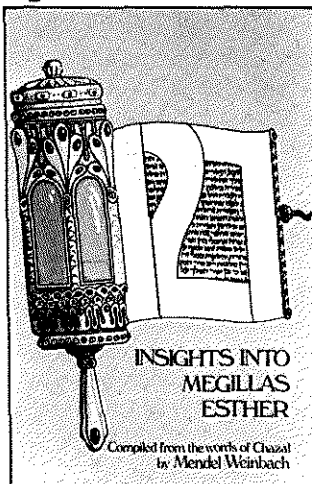
But to say that there is no power in the world other than *Hashem* does not turn the study of every aspect of the created world and human society—i.e., sociology, anthropology, political science, etc.—*ipso facto* into Divine service.

Major Thinkers... and College Students

Torah *Umadda* is replete with lists of major Jewish thinkers who had a wide familiarity with aspects of the non-Torah knowledge of their day (albeit nothing comparable to the literature or social sciences of our day). One can readily admit that such seminal figures as the *Ramban*, *Maharal*, and *Vilna Gaon* read in non-Torah texts without conceding that their example serves as a precedent for institutionalized secular studies. There is an absolute chasm between such giants and the average college student raised in a cultural milieu in which the non-Jewish influences may be at least as strong as the Torah influences, and who is often at least as familiar with present day sports heroes and popular culture icons as with Abaye and Rava. This is not, as Dr. Lamm seems to think, a mere practical distinction. When it comes to the reading of non-Torah sources, it depends on who is doing the reading; there is an absolute

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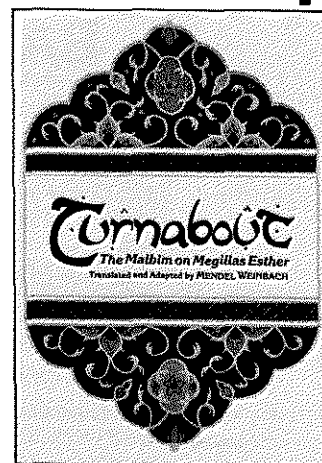
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There is an absolute chasm between a person whose perspective has been shaped by decades of intense Torah study and a young college student, who is simultaneously exposed to Torah and secular studies and left to work out their interrelation for himself.

chasm between a person whose perspective has been shaped by decades of intense Torah study and a young college student, who is simultaneously exposed to Torah and secular studies and left to work out their interrelation for himself. The difference is roughly the same as between inoculating a person with vaccine and then exposing him to smallpox, and exposing him first and only afterwards giving him the vaccine.

With the possible exception of the *Rambam*, the non-Torah studies of all those Dr. Lamm cites formed a small fraction of the time they spent in Torah learning, and, in every case, came only after acquiring a mastery of To-



rah to a degree unfathomable to us. This is a far cry from a day divided between Torah and secular studies—including art, dance, drama and modern literature—each with its fixed times. Most importantly, the non-Torah reading of each of these figures was based on a clear vision of how those readings were of an aid either to understanding the Torah, to conveying Torah, or to intensifying one's love of Hashem, or else related to their roles as leaders of their generation; it was not based on some diffuse notion that the study of any aspect of "G-d's world" is a reli-

gious act. Certainly there was no intention to "synthesize" Torah and worldly knowledge to create something new in the world of the spirit. The Vilna Gaon, for instance, bitterly criticized the *Rambam* for having been drawn after philosophy and for having been caused to err by the need to reconcile the plain meaning of the Talmud to his philosophy. All those who followed the *Rambam*, says the Gaon, refused to follow him in his attraction to philosophy (see *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh De'ah* 179 [13]).

In Search of a Source in the Talmud

On only one occasion does Dr. Lamm attempt to find sanction for his position in the Talmud (pp. 64-69). The *Gemora* in *Menachos* 99b records the position of R' Shimon bar Yochai that one fulfills the verse, "This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth; but you shall pronounce it day and night..." (*Yehoshua* 1:8), with the recitation of "*Shema*" morning and evening. The *Gemora* then records an exchange between R' Yishmael and his nephew in which the nephew asks if one such as himself *who has learned all of Torah* can learn Greek wisdom. R' Yishmael answers, on the basis of the verse from *Yehoshua*: "Find a time that is neither day nor night and you can learn Greek wisdom." Finally, the *Gemora* brings the opinion of R' Yonasan that the verse in *Yehoshua* is a blessing to *Yehoshua* for his devotion to Torah, not a *mitzva* at all.

Since R' Yishmael forbids Greek wisdom only on the grounds of *bittul Torah*, argues Dr. Lamm, and since two other *Tannaim* disagree with his interpretation of the verse on which he bases his proscription, therefore the majority opinion favors learning Greek wisdom. This is a truly remarkable conclusion in view of the fact that neither R' Shimon nor R' Yonasan said a word about Greek wisdom, and R' Shimon's opinion precedes any mention of Greek wisdom. Moreover, the entire question of Greek wisdom only arose with respect to one who knows the entirety of Torah. Finally, it must be remembered the R' Shimon is the same R' Shimon who

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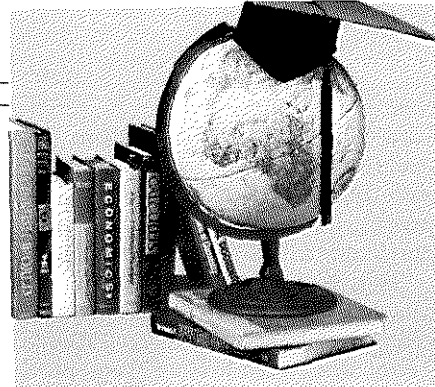
says elsewhere (*Berachos* 35b) that one should not even take time off to sow one's crops and gather them in the appointed seasons lest Torah be lost. Rabbi Lamm must assume a total reversal in R'Shimon's "hard-line" view regarding any temporal pursuits to read this innovative, permissive interpretation into the *Gemora* in *Menachos*. The accepted reading of R' Shimon's opinion in *Menachos* is not a softening of his previous stance, as Rabbi Lamm claims. Rather, in *Menachos* he was discussing a Jew's minimal obligation to study Torah; in *Berachos* he delineates the type of Torah study necessary to preserve the world (see *Tos. HaRosh* to *Berachos* 35b): The world does not exist, in R' Shimon's opinion, for the sake of those who fulfill only their minimal obligations. Read this way, R' Shimon's position is the very antithesis of support for non-Torah study of any sort!

"Textless Torah"

Dr. Lamm attempts to enunciate both a Misnagdic and a Chassidic model of secular studies. The former is based on the following syllogism: (a) Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner made a distinction between different levels of Torah learning—e.g., between the study of *Gemora* and *Tehillim*; (b) Nevertheless he did not view the study of *Tehillim* as *bittul Torah*; (c) Non-Torah studies may be considered a form of "textless Torah"; (d) Therefore non-Torah studies are not *bittul Torah*. Now, Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner made an absolute distinction between knowledge of G-d through nature and through Torah, and even between different types of Torah study. In this novel interpretation, Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner is stood completely on his head.

Dr. Lamm's entire argument that there is such a thing as "textless Torah" is predicated on the statement of the *Rambam* that those things that are called "*Pardes*" are included in the category of *Gemora* (*Hilchos Talmud Torah* 1:12). Dr. Lamm extrapolates from this statement to the conclusion that "the study of the sciences and humanities is, in effect, the study of *Gemora*" (p.165). But even the most

cursorial glance at the first four chapters of the *Rambam's Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah*, where he discusses the knowledge included in the category of *Pardes*, demonstrates how unwarranted any claim is that the *Rambam* is discussing science or humanities, in general. The *Rambam* identifies the *Pardes* as two categories of knowledge—*ma'aseh merkava* and *ma'aseh bereishis*. Knowledge of the latter can be taught only to individuals, and knowledge of the former cannot be taught at all (*Hilchos Yesodei HaTorah* 4:10-11). These caveats on the learning of *Pardes* would seem a death blow to any claim that such learning can serve as a basis for today's college curriculum. Obviously the *Rambam* is discussing some very deep esoteric knowledge; knowledge so deep that even some of the greatest men in the generations preceding him did not attain it; knowledge which should not be sought by anyone who has not "filled his belly" with the study of the *mitzvos* of the Torah (*ibid.* 4:13), a criterion not met by Dr.



Lamm's curriculum, no matter how *Pardes* is defined. And finally, it is knowledge leading directly to the fulfillment of one of five *mitzvos*: knowledge that there is a G-d; recognition that there is no other god; understanding of His unity; love of G-d; and fear of G-d. Any resemblance between the *Rambam's Pardes* and the modern college curriculum is purely coincidental.

Without the concept of "textless Torah," the entire house of cards, upon which the "mitnagdic model" is built, falls. Moreover, Dr. Lamm acknowledges, the inclusion of all sciences and humanities within the category of Torah poses another prob-

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lem: Torah is to be studied in "fear and trembling." Dr. Lamm knows too well that college students do not approach their studies with any reverence, much less "fear and trembling."

Though few of those studying in *yeshivos* themselves sustain the level of fear and trembling, at least there is a constant recognition of Torah study as activity of a radically different nature from any other. But when everything is defined as Torah, then nothing is Torah, and all sense of awe is lost.

The Chassidic Model

It is in part to surmount this problem that Dr. Lamm then turns to a "Chassidic model," according to which secular studies have religious significance as long as one approaches them with a generalized sense that all life is service of *Hashem*. Dr. Lamm ultimately finds the "Chassidic model" the most promising for his version of Torah Umadda, notwithstanding that the Chassidic leaders he quotes were uniformly hostile to all forms of secular study. Dr. Lamm's starting point is the concept of *avoda be'gashmiut*, Di-

vine service through one's mundane physical activities. The oft-quoted source for this concept in Chassidic writing is the Midrash that the Biblical Enoch was a cobbler, who recited the words, "Blessed is the Name of His glorious kingdom forever and ever" over each stitch. And its most radical formulation is found in *Noam Elimelech*: "For the *tzaddikim*, there is no difference between the study of Torah and prayer [on the one hand]...or eating and drinking [on the other]. All are...[forms of] the service of the Creator, and it is merely a matter of switching from one form of service to another." Asks Dr. Lamm, if *Hashem* can be served through eating and drinking, why not through intellectual activity such as non-Torah learning?

Rabbi Lamm himself admits that the radical formulation of *avoda be'gashmiut* found in *Noam Elimelech* should not be taken too literally.⁷ The underlying idea that every physical

⁷ The *Noam Elimelech* is, to say the least, an odd choice as the celebrant of physicality. He was renowned for his asceticism. In his famous *Tzettel Kattan*, he writes that after reciting the blessing over bread, one should always recite the following prayer: "...I am not eating for any physical pleasure,

Dr. Lamm ultimately finds the "Chassidic model" the most promising for his version of Torah Umadda, notwithstanding that the Chassidic leaders he quotes were uniformly hostile to all forms of secular study.

action can be elevated if it is performed in the prescribed manner, that nothing we do in life is spiritually neutral, is hardly revolutionary. But to say that eating may be transformed into a *mitzva* by the recitation of a *bracha*, is far from saying that one should become a gourmand, spending vast amounts of time concerned with the food he consumes. If eating itself becomes one's focus, even with the recitation of a *bracha*, one becomes a *naval be'reshus*

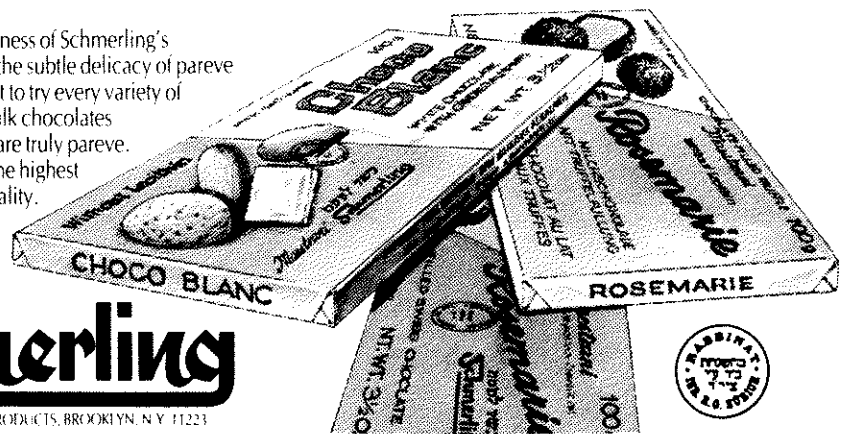
chas veshalom, but only so that my body should be strong and healthy for the service of *Hashem*...." Any time a person is not involved in Torah study, he advises, he should occupy himself with thoughts of being cast into a roaring flame for *Kiddush Hashem*.

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haTorah—a disgusting person, who nonetheless has not transgressed the Torah's minimal obligations. There is certainly no warrant, then, in the idea of *avoda be'gashmiut* for focusing large parts of one's mental energy on inquiry into secular disciplines. Chassidism may have begun, in part, as a reaction against the exclusive focus on the intellectual activity of learning Torah; it was certainly not the substitution of one form of intellection for another.

Moreover, Rabbi Lamm points out, within Chassidus itself, there was a wariness of radical, potentially antinomian extrapolations from *avoda be'gashmiut*. That is why that form of service was specifically limited to *tzaddikim*, as we saw in the quoted passage from *Noam Elimelech*. Both the Midrash about Enoch and the restriction of *avoda be'gashmiut* to a spiritual elite strongly suggest that highly refined *kavanos* (intentions) are central to the doctrine. Thus the concept of *avoda be'gashmiut* cannot solve Dr. Lamm's problem that no one approaches secular studies with the *kavana* required to confer upon those studies religious value. (The problem is hardly solved by the recitation of prayers such as the one Dr. Lamm composed to be recited upon entering the chemistry lab or opening a sociology text—p.210.)

III. TWO VISIONS OF CREATIVITY

The weakness of Dr. Lamm's "models" indicates that they were meant to be merely suggestive, not precedents in the sense used in halachic argument. One senses that Dr. Lamm does not consider such precedents necessary. This impression is confirmed by a mini-essay on the principle of the decline of the generations—*hiskatnus hadoros*—which suddenly appears in the midst of Dr. Lamm's treatment of the *Rambam*.⁸ After acknowledging

⁸ Dr. Lamm is ostensibly responding to Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman's argument that the *Rambam*'s very greatness precludes him from being used as any kind of precedential model for institutionalized secular education. But nothing Dr. Lamm writes in any way diminishes the point that no comparison is possible between the *Rambam*—perhaps the greatest Jewish figure of the post-Talmudic period—and the average college student.

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that the decline of the generations is a pervasive theme in both Talmudic and post-Talmudic rabbinic literature, Dr. Lamm proceeds to argue that nevertheless such decline is neither inevitable nor does it *always* occur in *every* respect. Each generation is left its own *makom...le'higader bo*—space in which to grow (Chullin 7a). The unstated conclusion is that there are no satisfactory precedents for Torah Umadda, but nonetheless, even at this late date in Jewish history, one may completely transform the age-old content and form of Jewish education.

Dr. Lamm does attempt to establish the right to introduce changes by adducing implication that later generations theoretically overrule earlier ones, but these attempts amount to little more than quibbles and trivial qualifications. Dr. Lamm cites the Talmudic rule that a later *beis din* greater in wisdom and numbers can overrule the *takanos* of an earlier *beis din* (p.92), as proof that the pattern of decline since Sinai is not theoretically inevitable. But as a practical matter, we find no such instances; nor would

a few such examples vitiate the general principle of decline. Moreover, it is possible that such a *beis din* greater in wisdom will one day exist—but only in the days of *Moshiach*. No serious student of *Gemora* has ever failed to be overwhelmed by his sense of inadequacy vis-a-vis earlier generations, and this feeling is reflected in the writings of the greatest scholars throughout the ages. Similarly, Dr. Lamm attributes to Rabbi Yosef Karo the view that the refusal of *Amoraim*

(Rabbis of the Talmud) to overrule *Tannaim* (Rabbis of the *Mishna*), or *Acharonim* (later commentators) to overrule *Rishonim* (early commenta-

⁹ This interpretation of voluntarism is rejected by the Chazon Ish; see exchange of letters with Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman in *Kuntras Inyanim*, Bnei Brak 1975.

tors), is only out of voluntary self-restraint (p.93)⁹. But again, that restraint has been virtually universal and reflects later generations' feeling of their comparative inferiority.

Finally, one is at loss to see what Dr. Lamm hopes to prove by quoting the Chazon Ish's statement (p.101): "I have taken it upon myself to search in

No serious student of *Gemora* has ever failed to be overwhelmed by his sense of inadequacy vis-a-vis earlier generations, and this feeling is reflected in the writings of the greatest scholars throughout the ages.

the Talmud as best I can, even though [my conclusions] may go against the *Rishonim*." As the Chazon Ish specifically writes, the failure to carry on that search would reflect a lack of true involvement in Torah study, without which it is not possible to understand the *Rishonim* either. And in terms of

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fixing the *halacha*, the Chazon Ish definitively states in the quoted passage that one may not follow his own opinion if there is an explicit contrary *psak* (halachic ruling) in the *Rishonim*; on many occasions he refused to follow in *psak* his own reading of the *Gemora* against that of the *Rishonim* (see *Chazon Ish, Yoreh De'ah* 2:23).

It may be true, as Dr. Lamm observes, that a dwarf on the shoulders of a giant sees further than a giant. But not every dwarf succeeds in climbing onto the shoulders of a giant; most dwarfs remain just dwarfs.¹⁰ Only by committing every fibre of one's being to learning can one begin to climb at all. The traditional attitude to preceding generations is nicely captured by a story about Rabbi Aharon Kotler, זצ"ל. Reb Aharon once celebrated having found a solution to a difficult *Be'ur HaGra* which had puzzled him for years. "I was only privileged to find a solution," said Reb Aharon, "because not once in those many years did it occur to me that the problem lay with the Gaon and not with me."

Creative Understanding or Innovative Legislation?

After all the quibbles with the principle of the decline of the generations, what remains is only Dr. Lamm's plea that we not act as if there is no place in Judaism for *chiddush* or creativity (p.91). The need for creativity runs through *Torah Umadda* as a major subtheme. But Dr. Lamm confuses two types of creativity: the Jewish creativity, which is a byproduct of one's fullest efforts in Torah, and a more modern

¹⁰ Both with respect to the dwarf metaphor and his discussion of Niels Bohr's complementarity theory in the final chapter, Dr. Lamm confuses metaphor with proof. With respect to a physical quality such as height, it is easy to see how the height of a dwarf can be added to that of a giant. It is far less clear, however, that we can add to the Torah vision of earlier generations whose grasp of the entirety of Torah was far more all-encompassing than our own and whose perfection of *middos* is unknown today. Of course, the process of *halachic* decision-making involves much more than simply looking up what was decided previously. New questions are constantly arising, whose proper resolution requires the *poseik* to reason both on the basis of his vast knowledge of Talmud and of relevant *halachic* precedents. Creativity is thus a requisite of the *halachic* process, but not its goal.

idea that stresses novelty for its own sake, and makes leaving one's mark on the world the self-conscious goal of life. Every individual Jew is a creator born with the potential to transform the world through his Torah study and performance of *mitzvos* [see Dovid Freund, "Thinking About Trees: The Jew as Creator" in Janu-

ary, 1992 JO—ed.]. And every Jew must strive to fulfill his unique role in recreating the perfect world. But his ability to thus transform the world does not depend on performing a *mitzva* no one has ever performed or arriving at a conclusion in the *Gemora* that no one has ever reached. If one comes to a full understanding



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of a *Tosafos* through the complete engagement of all his mental abilities, that too is a *chiddush*. In our time, said Rabbi Chaim Brisker—perhaps the most creative Talmudic thinker of the past 150 years—a *chiddush* is achieved by properly understanding the *Rishonim*.

The desire to leave one's mark, as a goal in itself, is fraught with danger. Rabbi Meir Simcha of Dvinsk (*Meshech Chochma* to *Vayikra* 26:44) explains that it is part of human nature to seek to make a name for oneself—the more talented the person, the greater the urge to add something new. And it is precisely the lack of ability to add to the Torah of earlier generations which led Jews in *golus* to look for new ways, outside of Torah, to place their stamp on the world, and what inspired those Jews of Rabbi Meir Simcha's time who found their greatest source for innovation in German culture, to replace Jerusalem with Berlin.

IV. AND WHY NOT?

Dr. Lamm is far too astute, and his association with Yeshiva University far too long-standing, for him not to recognize the very grave dangers inherent in an open approach to virtually every aspect of secular knowledge. He writes: "Madda certainly does confront students with an array of ideas, many of

By juxtaposing the high price paid for Torah Umadda with grand rhetoric about its potential spiritual achievements, Dr. Lamm implies that it is worth the cost. But the reader is given precious little evidence upon which to reach that conclusion by himself.

which are thoroughly incompatible with traditional Jewish beliefs, and many more of which pose indirect challenges to the premises of religious faith. Moreover, the lifestyles of modernity, enshrined in literature and often justified by the social sciences, are inimical to sacred Jewish values of modesty, sexual temperance, family cohesiveness, respect for parents and elders, and the like" (p.49). And elsewhere he gives a laundry list of the underlying assumptions of mo-

dernity, which are "enshrined in literature and...justified by the social sciences": the substitution of experience for tradition, a rejection of authority, radical individualism and preoccupation with the self, a repudiation of the past, secularism, and the rejection of particularisms in favor of universalism (p.12).

"Many religious casualties have already resulted from this historic program of Torah Umadda, and there are more yet to come," Dr. Lamm acknowledges (p.134). But despite this acknowledgement, Dr. Lamm consistently downplays the danger that lies in an exposure to heretical ideas or in an educational structure that conveys the message to students that Torah and non-Torah studies are fully compatible. Objections on these grounds are consistently dismissed as "prudential," not theoretical (pp.149-50). And even the admission of casualties past, present, and future is dropped as an aside within a passage filled with high-flown rhetoric about the infusion of the holy into the profane promised by Torah Umadda.

Though he frequently notes that the particular vision of Torah and Madda for which he is an apologist is at least fifty years old, Dr. Lamm does not examine that history for the evidence needed to perform the cost-benefit analysis. We are neither told the precise nature of the casualties nor shown the examples of a grand synthesis of Torah and Madda, the spiritual monuments which would justify these costs.

Proof of the dangers posed by modernity is all about us. The history of the last 200 years of Jewish life is largely that of the attrition of all religious knowledge and practice in the face of the attractions of modernity. Aspects of modernity that may appear innocuous at first have frequently turned out to be wolves in lambs' clothing. The example of Moses Mendelssohn is instructive. Despite his own *mitzva* observance, his attraction to contemporary German culture left him without a single Jewish descendant within two generations. A reader of the recent alumni magazines of Yeshiva University and its affiliated professional

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schools would have come across pictures of alumni dressed up in formal attire for a night at the opera; or listings of honorary degrees being bestowed on great authors who are celebrated for their works that ridicule the yeshiva world or cast doubt on the veracity of Torah. Loss of faith is far from a problem of the past. A recent demographic survey ¹¹ of American Jewry shows that, despite tens of thousands of *ba'alei teshuva* and an extremely high birthrate among Orthodox Jews, the number of those identifying themselves as Orthodox is not growing numerically—i.e., the defections equal the newcomers. Certainly there are too many spiritual defections from every sector of Orthodoxy for any group to greet these findings with equanimity. But it is also undeniably true that by far the largest percentage of losses are experienced by those who define their Orthodoxy in terms of their modernity.

Dr. Aaron Rakefet, a prominent author and Modern Orthodox educator, recently told a group of Yeshiva University alumni that "parents have been so busy giving their children the message that they can live a normal life" that their children have a hard time recognizing that there are any limits at all (*Jerusalem Post*, Jan. 31, '92).

Dr. Lamm's primary response to those fearful of the consequences of the exposure of young Jews to the full panoply of secular knowledge and of an Orthodox school sponsoring the acquisition of that knowledge is: the infiltration of modernity into our lives is, in any event, inexorable (pp.49-50). That is like arguing that because one will get his feet wet jumping on rocks across a stream, he might as well plunge into the water. Just two sentences later, Dr. Lamm characterizes the current revival of "shtetlism" as an astonishing phenomenon (p.49). In other words, the traditional yeshiva world has, to a large extent, protected itself against foreign ideas even while functioning in the midst of a modern, technological society, but in his view that is worthy of a perjorative. Cutting ourselves off from *Madda*, Dr. Lamm warns, risks consigning Judaism to the status of a sect—forever outside the main-

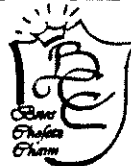
stream of history—not a nation (p.51). But a people that has preserved its national identity over two millennia, without land or political power, bound together only by a common allegiance to Torah, needs no instruction in the true meaning of nationhood. Dr. Lamm, however, is concerned that we risk eschewing any role in evolving human history. We, however, need not become like all the nations to have an impact on the world. The Jewish people are a nation destined to dwell alone, a nation whose leading role in bringing the world to its ultimate fulfillment lies precisely in preserving its distinctiveness from all the other nations. A believing Jew, far from feeling himself removed from the fate of the world, knows that ultimately he has been blessed with the greatest capacity to improve the world. As Rabbi Chaim Volozhiner teaches in *Ruach Chaim*

The effect of this emphasis on synthesis is to transform Torah and *Madda* into what appear as co-equal forms of knowledge.

(1:3), *Hashem* desires to shower the world with all manner of blessings, but can do so, *k'veyachal*, only when we fulfill His will, which is known to us through the Torah. The Jew, then, has the greatest potential to serve as a conduit for blessing to the whole world.

The only other concrete argument offered by Dr. Lamm for the need to

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invest years in the acquisition of worldly knowledge is that such knowledge is a prerequisite to reaching out to secular Jews, to being able to speak their idiom and to counter their arguments.¹² This argument

¹² Dr. Lamm also suggests that we must know the demonic aspects of secular culture so that we can defend ourselves (p.51). After the Holocaust, however, it is doubtful that we need any instruction in the demonic potential of various secular ideas or that our defense lies in schoolbooks. Moreover, the standard college curriculum is value-free, dealing with all branches of knowledge on equal terms, as if Torah and Shakespeare (*lehaudil*) were of identical validity.

**The Ultimate Trade-Off:
For What Benefit?**

Dr. Lamm ultimately fails to provide any reason why one should lessen his study of that which brings us the World-to-Come for that which primarily enhances our appreciation of this world; why one should exchange the study of Torah, through which Hashem is apprehended most directly, for the study of nature, through which He can only be deduced. The Torah is eternal and unchanging; much of Mada is ephemeral, with new "discoveries" supplanted in their turn. (Dr. Lamm himself critiques both the Rambam and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch for having been enchanted with philosophies—neo-Aristotelianism and German idealism, respectively—which today seem outdated.)

To Dr. Lamm, the distinction between a Jew and a human being is an "artificial" one (p.143). And thus he is led to the celebration of a life of exploration of what it means to be fully human (p.216)—a life in which the study of the music of Beethoven, the painting of Cezanne, and the poetry of Wordsworth takes its rightful place alongside the study of Torah, for that study reveals the potential with which the Creator has imbued those created in His Image (p.223).

The distinction between a Jew and a human being, however, is fundamental: All men are created in the Divine Image; only Jews are called children of the Omnipresent. And that special closeness is reflected in the gift of the Torah, given to Israel alone (Avos 3:18). Our task in the world is not to discover what it means to be fully human, but what it means to be fully Jewish; it is to develop ourselves in those areas given to us alone and thereby reveal Hashem's Will to mankind. ■

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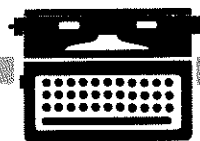
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Letters^{to}the Editor

ORTHODOX CULPABILITY IN PROLIFERATION OF MAMZEIRIM AMONG THE NON-ORTHODOX

To the Editor:

An article in JO some months ago criticized the Conservative and Reform groups for polluting the *yichus* of Klal Yisroel through their laxity in accepting *geirim* and their acceptance of patrimonial lineage as a criterion of Jewishness.

May I respectfully call a blatant omission to your attention. According to the ruling of Rav Moshe Feinstein ז"ל, which most practicing Orthodox Rabbis have accepted as halachic norm (notwithstanding that Rav Yosef Henkin ז"ל took issue with this ruling), Conservative and Reform marriages have no halachic validity. Therefore, their clergymen are in no way culpable in the proliferation of *mamzeirim* in our midst, when they perform first marriages. On the other hand, Orthodox clergymen are marrying non-observant couples upon whom they have no subsequent influence when the marriage dissolves without the giving of a valid *get*. Since the chances of a dissolution of a marriage is close to 50% in this group, it follows that only Orthodox Rabbis are the ones who are responsible for the *mamzeirim* problem.

Hasn't the time come for the Orthodox Rabbinical organizations to take the bull by the horns and insist that no one perform a marriage of a non-Orthodox couple where the couple is not under the subsequent influence of the Rabbi performing the ceremony?

The Conservatives and Reform are responsible for the *goyim* in our "dough" (see *Kiddushin* 69b) while the Orthodox are culpable for the *mamzeirim*. *Goyim*, when "discov-

ered," can at least convert, while *mamzeirim* cannot; and many are aware of the personal and communal tragedies when people realize that they are *mamzeirim*.

RABBI DOVID COHEN
RAV OF GVUL YAABETZ CONG.
Brooklyn, N.Y.

THE CHAZON ISH, SANCTITY AND SCIENCE

To the Editor:

In connection with the review of the book, *Sanctity and Science* (Feb. '92), I would like your readers to know that the *Chazon Ish* considered *metzitza* with a glass tube the preferable way of performing this part of the *mitzva* of *milla*. When challenged that the *chachamin* called for *metzitza b'peh*, e.g. orally, he replied that this is *b'peh*.

RABBI PINCHAS DEUTSCH
The writer of the above letter was a
talmid of the Chazon Ish.

PROMOTING TZENIUS IN JO: WHEN WORDS AND GRAPHICS CLASH

To the Editor:

Rabbi Kirzner's article, the "Majesty of *Tzenius*," and your thoughts on "Selling *Tzenius*" were very timely, welcome and appreciated. But it's ironic and the same time disappointing that in this very issue that concentrates on the outside influences on the Jewish home, these fine points should be heralded in by the pictures exhibited there. *The Jewish Observer* that speaks on behalf of Torah Orthodoxy¹ cannot afford a standard that would not be condoned in a genera-

¹ Webster's dictionary—"orthodox—true, authentic"

tion of the Chofetz Chaim.

One can be sure that the Chofetz Chaim or other *Gedolei Yisroel* would not agree to print pictures to be seen by men and young yeshiva students even of "old fashioned ladies" whose clothing may measure up to the *halacha* of *tzenius*. We also have to realize, as pointed out in this issue, that *tzenius* is not only covering our body with material of cloth, and therefore who has the "broad shoulders" to say that all the pictures shown truly illustrate how a Jewish woman should go in public?

Besides that which I have written, which some people may consider going "too far," I must point out that the dresses of some of the pictures are not permissible according to *halacha*—at least according to the *poskim* that I have seen. It's brought down by *poskim* that the face and the neck of a woman do not have to be covered. The most lenient view that I came across is that the "neck" is considered down to the area above the collar bone. When *Hagaon* Reb Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל was asked how high the neck-line of a woman's clothing should be, he answered "the height where a man wears his shirt with a neck-tie" (as reported by Rabbi Elimelech Bluth).

Unfortunately, a mistake has crept in, and many women, who otherwise are *halacha*-oriented, believe that up to a "tefach" (3"-4") of exposure is permissible. This is an error (see *Igros Moshe, Even Haezer* 58), for this only

applies to someone else's concern regarding pronouncing *Divrei Kedusha* (prayers or Torah) in front of such a person. It's possible that there might have been some areas in Europe where such dress was tolerated; however, it is the duty even for the descendants of families from such areas to examine whether there was a *psak* that this was permissible, or if it was in the category of "*mutav she'yithy shogegin*" (it is preferable that the error be committed in innocence), due to the *haskala* and the threat of defection from Torah ranks.

I am almost certain that the inclusion of these pictures was a mistake of the "last minute rush" and not reviewed by the editorial board; nevertheless, since *The Jewish Observer* has won the confidence of the public that everything therein conforms with *halacha*, it's imperative that this mistake should be rectified in your pages.

Since I have in the past encouraged *talmidim* to read *The Jewish Observer* and would like to continue to do so, I would like to recommend a stronger vigilance so that *The Jewish Observer* should properly represent the "True, Authentic" Torah outlook.

A MECHANECH IN A
LARGE METROPOLITAN AREA

The specific illustration of the letter-writer's reference was marked for exclusion from the series that was printed in the magazine. It was included through a technical error, and we express our apology to the readers.

N.W.

THE JEWISH HOME UNDER SIEGE: BY MORE THAN TV

To the Editor

Before stating my views, I would like to commend the JO on the very appropriate article it published (Feb. '92) based on Rabbi Schwab's address at the Agudah convention. Although this article encompassed most of the issues that were addressed, I feel that one area, well worthy of mention, had not been discussed properly or sufficiently, and I therefore would like to focus attention on this topic by precisely citing the article itself. It stated that rather than exposing oneself to the filth projected on the television screen, one should obtain information regarding matters such as politics or finances from outside sources—radios, newspapers and so forth.

However, I would like to caution those who readily accept this advice

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as an ultimate solution. As many have realized, the entire media coverage of recent events is dominated by filth, as can easily be perceived by just glancing at the front page of a newspaper, opening up a "news" magazine, or turning on the radio. The newspaper that claims to offer "news fit to print" is now unabashedly circulating garbage. The radio station that boasts "the news of the world in just 22 minutes" is filling up those minutes with the lurid details of horrifying crimes. Examples like these are numerous and I therefore firmly believe that the situation in the out-

side world necessitates an awareness of what enters each Jewish household, meaning that all tools of the media must be closely screened before they are rendered appropriate.

We have little choice but to exercise this caution so as to shelter our families from the values of a decadent society.

ZELDY LOWINGER
Brooklyn, N.Y.

ESTABLISHING LINES OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TEACHER AND STUDENT

To the Editor:

I found the standards set forth in *Chovos Hataalmidim* and so masterfully presented by Rabbi Blumenfeld in the JO article "An Educator's Credo" (Feb. '91) personally challenging. Undoubtedly, this article has prompted many of the JO readers in *chinuch* to improve their methods of teaching the "tuned-in" student and redouble their efforts in teaching the "turned-off" student.

While every teacher devotes time and energy to develop a relationship with his students, he realizes he must also open up lines of communication with their parents. Problems can, in some cases, be nipped in the bud with just a phone call or short note; but, of course, it is the PTA conference that is designated for teacher and parent to sit down together and discuss their joint charge.

Yet every such conference has PTA Pitfalls, most of which are unique to the departmental setup in high school.

PTA finds me, a one-subject teacher, sitting across from many a confused mother who is trying to decipher her daughter's list of some dozen teachers' names. How much

can I realistically expect to achieve with a parent, now hearing my name for the first time, or perhaps still figuring out which of her daughters I teach? Will a mere mention of a minor problem get distorted out of proportion by the time it's relayed at home two hours and some twenty teachers later? Can I hope for constructive criticism to bear results, or is it so well-sandwiched in praise that the parent may render it insignificant? Many mothers are hesitant to risk antagonizing their teenagers about something seemingly trivial. And even if, under the best of circumstances, the parent hears it like it is, she may be at a loss as to how to take action with her adolescent high schoolers.

The bright side of teacher-parent communication is the *nachas* reports, which parents deserve to receive and teachers are delighted to deliver. But does the mother ever hear it in its entirety? Not very often.

Most scenarios have the mother rushing home from PTA to take care of other pressing responsibilities. To the chagrin of her daughter waiting anxiously at home, the mother bundles the twenty-odd reports into one general "very nice, very good." (And sometimes a "You never told me Mrs. So-and-So is your teacher! We're *Mechutanim!*") When pressed for details, the mother may confess how confusing the whole experience was and, in fact, she may have forgotten which teacher said what.

Beyond PTA— completing the triangle

While PTA has its definitive role to play, connecting teacher and parent, it leaves a blank when it comes to

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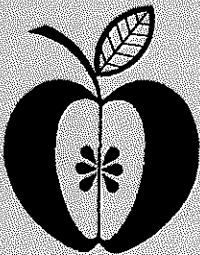
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drawing the third line of the communication triangle: teacher, parent and student. To fill in the gap, more emphasis should be placed on Teacher-Student communication for which I propose "STA." STA, a student-teacher conference, is simply a one-to-one formal meeting when teacher and student sit down together to talk.

During a class lesson, an individual, sometimes sitting at the furthest corner of a thirty-five-seat classroom, may feel she's just another student being talked at by a lecturer. During the STA conference, the student is sitting right near the teacher and feels she is an individual speaking with a concerned adult. STA lays the groundwork for a relationship even if not much is said. When eye-to-eye contact is made, the teacher takes on a personal dimension. The student, too, is seen differently when the teacher is forced to relate to her as more than just another entry in the rollbook.

STA communication may be awkward, but I contend it is communication of the truest form—no third parties, no pandering to parents, no hiding behind superficial statements.

During STA, a teacher tailors her comments not only to the student's needs but to her reactions, questions and defenses, too. The student who deserves kudos, hears it firsthand and in heaping measures. The student who applies herself but doesn't excel scholastically, has a chance to tell the teacher of her frustrations. She can receive specific suggestions or, at the least, acknowledgement of her efforts. The student whose grades in the rollbook may not rank high can now find out that her attitude and personality rank her right on top in

the teacher's eyes. Listening to praise may be uncomfortable but gratifying, nevertheless.

And the hard-to-reach student?

- The one whose mother the teacher had so much to say to at PTA but who never showed?

With STA, attendance is no problem. It is mandatory for the students to come. (It can be instituted during or after school hours.)

- And the one whose mother from whom the teacher withheld the whole truth, since she probably couldn't help anyway?

Now, with STA, the student herself is being held responsible for a change in her behavior.

- What about the one whom the teacher always wanted to speak to, but held back from singling out for fear she'd react negatively?

With STA, she is just the next girl on the list.

- Then there's the student with a less-than-perfect mark in conduct whose mother defends her daughter's contention that the mark was unfounded.

During STA, the pupil in question hears directly what exactly it is in her behavior that the teacher takes issue with.

Altogether, STA gives the teacher a chance to discuss problems in a non-threatening way as opposed to a reprimand coming directly on the heels of a confrontation. This kind of atmosphere will be more productive.

After the short meeting (the teacher should wisely limit the time), a relationship has been formed. Now when an infraction is repeated, a word or two, even a hand signal to the

student, can suffice as a follow-up. Had the student pleaded innocent to the teacher's "charges," these reminders are clear and immediate indicators of the wrongdoing.

Finally, STA is the ideal time to mention the so called "little things" that teachers neglect to bring up. Minor points—like "I want you to participate more in class," or "Wait until I finish the topic before you jump up with your questions"—can be raised at STA to prevent problems from mushrooming over time.

I am still in the experimental stages of STA. It has worked well on the high school level, and I feel it could be incorporated into lower grades as well. My first indicator of success was when the girls who were absent on STA Day sought me out to have their time with me. I gave my students a questionnaire (no names) to hear their side of the encounter and was delighted to find that an overwhelming majority would want to

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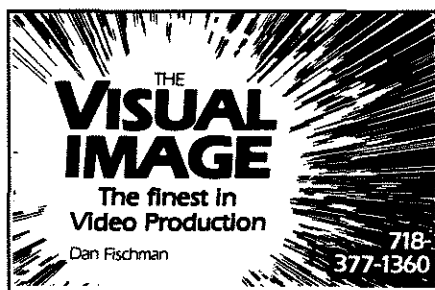
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I wonder if we could find room for STA on that already firmly packed school calendar. It can be the starting point of (and I quote from Rabbi Blumenfeld) "the educator who wants to inspire (the *talmid*'s) growth by lowering himself to the *talmid*."

I know how STA has urged me on in "considering (the) uniqueness of each *talmid(ah)* personally and individually by communicating effectively and enhancing his (/her) self image."

I hope others will benefit from it, too.

(MRS.) HINDY KVIAT
Brooklyn, N.Y.

CORRECTION

Unfortunately, a Second Looks article in the October JO, "Rabbinical Cooperation—Toward What End?," contained some mistakes, for which we apologize. The article described a decision regarding guidelines for issuing "Do Not Resuscitate" orders, rendered by the Commission on Law, Legislation, and Public Policy of the Southern California Board of Rabbis—a group that includes Reform, Conservative and Orthodox members.

We referred to the body that issued the decision as a "*beis din*." The group did not call itself a *beis din*. Our use of the word "*beis din*" was meant to be descriptive of a group (e.g., the Commission on Law, *et al*) that issues halachic rulings, rather than to be definitive. (For that matter, a group that includes members of the Reform and Conservative clergy cannot be considered a *beis din*, no matter what it calls itself.)

Additionally, we referred to Rabbi Laura Geller (Reform) as a member of the Commission that issued the halachic ruling. She was not.

Our error was based on a photo accompanying a newspaper story on the Southern California Board of Rabbis, in which she, among others, appears with Orthodox rabbis.

Nonetheless, we stand by the basic thrust of the article. In both the regional Board of Rabbis and the specific Commission that issued the halachic ruling, it is unacceptable for Orthodox rabbis to sit with Conservative and Reform rabbis, whether Ms. Geller is among them or not. The fact that other Reform Rabbis were on the Commission that issued the specific ruling and Ms. Geller was not, does not, in our view, make the composition of the group any more acceptable. A Reform rabbi is not less a Reform rabbi if he is of the male gender.

We still maintain that the eleven signatories on the historic *psak* against serving on religious boards together with Reform and Conservative clergy—Rabbi Aaron Kotler, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein and Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner *zichronam livracha*, among them—would have been outraged with the Orthodox participation in the Board and on this Commission, in defiance of their oft-repeated halachic decision.

CORRECTION

The signature on the letter, "The Corrosive Atmosphere on the Workplace," on p. 38 of JO, Feb. '92, was printed incorrectly. The writer was Mrs. Frieda Bergstein of Brooklyn, N.Y.

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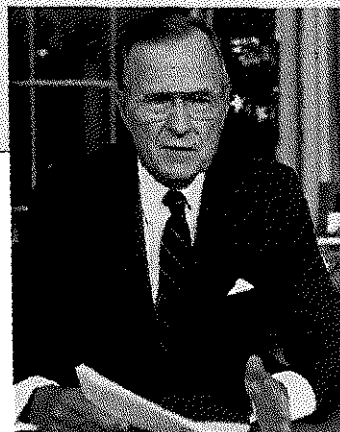
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February 3, 1992

The Honorable George Bush
President of the United States
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Dear Mr. President:

Last week I had occasion to write to you about your excellent State of the Union address. Today I turn to another issue, one that is of great concern to all segments of the American Jewish community: Israel's request for U.S. loan guarantees to help resettle Russian Jewish immigrants.

You may recall that I corresponded with you once before on this subject, this past September, when the issue was first on the public agenda. You decided at that time to postpone consideration of the request for 120 days. Now that the issue is before you again, I would like to respectfully reiterate my own sense of the importance of keeping separate two issues that have apparently become intertwined in many people's minds: humanitarian aid to needy immigrants on the one hand and Israel's settlement policies on the other.

Whatever the eventual resolution of the controversy over Israeli settlements, it should have no bearing on an issue that clearly does unite the United States and Israel: the need to provide humanitarian assistance for hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews who have flocked to Israel in search of a better life. Of course, Israel rejoices at the opportunity to welcome these Jews, and it is making many sacrifices to absorb the newly arriving masses. However, even with all its belt-tightening, the success of Israel's efforts to absorb such a large influx of Russian Jews depends largely on the humanitarian assistance it seeks from the United States.

Making the humanitarian aid issue contingent upon resolution of the settlements debate would represent an unfortunate departure from America's longstanding policy in the area of international humanitarianism. I respectfully appeal to you — and particularly to your well-honed sense of compassion, which I have had frequent occasion to admire over the years — to help make it possible for these Russian Jews to live a normal life in their new haven of freedom.

Many thanks for your attention. As always, best wishes and warm regards.

Sincerely,
Rabbi Morris Sherer
President, Agudath Israel of America
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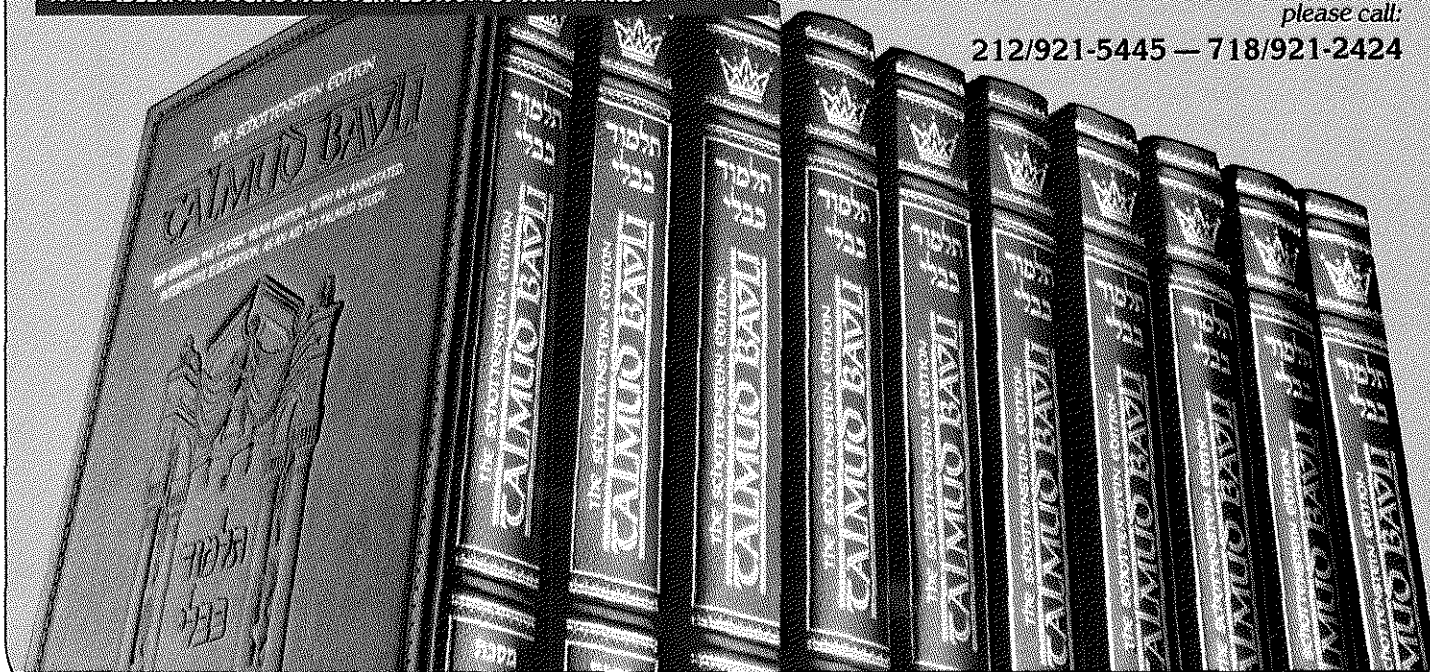
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