

THE JEWISH OBSERVER

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"The Clash Between
Modernity and Eternity:
Standing Up for
Torah Principles"

Rabbi Elya Svei, שליט"א

Rabbi Yaakov Perlow,
Novominsker Rebbe, שליט"א

שולחן ערוך

HANDLE
WITH
CARE

MYSTERY OF THE
MISSING YEARS

IS THIS REALLY SHMITTAH?

ACTS OF THE
UNFAITHFUL

MORE ON MEDIA ABUSE

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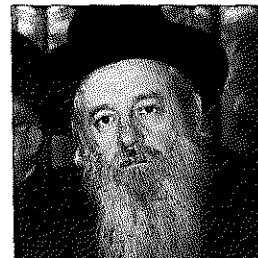
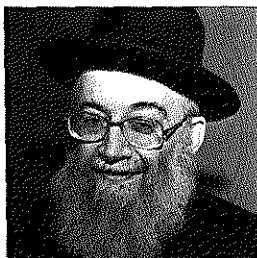
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4 **The Mandate To Promote Kiddush Sheim Shamayim**

BASED ON AN ADDRESS BY RABBI ELYA SVEI, שליט"א

9 **The Clash Between Modernity and Eternity**

BASED ON AN ADDRESS BY THE NOVOMINSKER REBBE,
RABBI YAAKOV PERLOW, שליט"א

16 **Mystery of the Missing Years** *Rabbi Yisroel Reisman*

20 **Acts Of The Unfaithful** *Fyvel Shuster*

24 **A Tribute to Rebbetzin Feige Wasserman, ע"ה** *Dr. Sara E. Freifeld*

SECOND LOOKS ON THE JEWISH SCENE

30 **Lost Jewry's Spiritual Quest**

33 **New Times, New Perspectives** *Rabbi Menachem Zupnik*

35 **Letters to the Editor**

39 **Dateline: 84 William Street**



The Mandate to Promote Kiddush Sheim Shamayim

Based on an address by Rabbi Elya Svei, שליט"א, Rosh Hayeshiva of the Yeshiva of Philadelphia.

A national convention of Agudath Israel of America is an opportunity to hear leading Torah figures discuss vital issues from a timeless perspective. Among the various presentations that addressed this year's convention theme, "The Clash Between Modernity and Eternity: Standing Up For Torah Principles," are two by members of the Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah (Council of Torah Sages)—Rabbi Elya Svei, שליט"א, and Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, שליט"א—which have been adapted for publication in these pages. While both essays touch upon many of the same issues, each offers unique insights and understandings, which make each a singular experience in applying da'as Torah to pressing problems of the day.



I. OF OVER-CONFIDENCE AND SETBACKS

Every unusual, seemingly inexplicable occurrence that befalls Klal Yisroel, Chazal say, must have some sort of initial cause, with a lesson to teach us. Thus, the violation of Dena by Shechem (see *Bereishis*, Chap. 24), so contrary to the values and conduct of Yaakov Avinu's family, must have come from some earlier weakness. Indeed, the *Midrash* points out that the misfortune befell Yaakov because he had transgressed the principle: אל תתחלל ליום מחר—"Do not be sure of yourself in regard to the morrow" (*Mishlei* 27,1).

When Yaakov had arranged the terms for his tending Lavan's sheep, he set up a number of safeguards to protect Lavan's property from embezzlement, adding, "My integrity will answer for me on the morrow" (*Bereishis* 30,33). According to Rabbi Yehuda ben Rav Shimon, G-d responded: "You are so assured of your

integrity on the morrow. On the morrow your daughter will be violated."

This may seem difficult. After all, as long as Yaakov was in Lavan's employ, his devotion and integrity were so exemplary that Yaakov emerged as the paradigm of *Emes*, to be eternally identified with this attribute. Yet Yaakov was still faulted. His self-assurance somehow implied a relaxing of his guard against a lack of adherence to principle. As a result, his family ultimately suffered a major breach in its integrity.

Like Passengers Aboard a Sinking Ship

This past year we have endured a *Chillul Hashem* of major proportions that reflects unfavorably on our Torah institutions. Unfortunately, we cannot proudly declare: "My integrity will answer for me" on this morrow.

Reading the Report of the Nunn Commission on the misappropriation of government funds by certain edu-

cational institutions¹, we cannot shrug off the smear against us by saying, "It was *that* institution... *their* actions." The *Chillul Hashem* must be borne by all of us, for the status of all Torah students has fallen. This affects us all.

As Targum Yonasan ben Uziel says in regard to the command, "Do not steal": "Do not be friends or partners with thieves, lest your children grow up to be thieves." It is thus the responsibility of the entire *Klal Yisroel* that there be no thieves amongst us.

Historically, our *shtadlonim*, those who advocated and lobbied with officials on behalf of the Jewish People, were invariably *Gedolei Torah* (such as Reb Itzel Volozhin in his time, the Chofetz Chaim and Reb Meir Shapiro in their times). By contrast, today the situation is such that any young upstart who has some kind of connection in the nation's capital will employ unacceptable tactics, and we are prepared to become his partners.

The Chazal's parable for this situation is well known.

A passenger aboard a ship drills a hole in the floor of his compartment, and all the other passengers are in uproar: "You're endangering our lives!"

"Mind your own business," he retorts. "I paid my way. The hole is in my compartment."

But the seas are stormy, and everyone's ship will sink.

Our present-day situation is no different. We are being tossed about in stormy seas, and a problem in one compartment can sink the entire ship.

Some may rationalize that the proceeds are marked for support of To-

rah institutions. But take note of a letter from Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, זצ"ל, written 17 years ago:

We must be grateful to G-d that after the Churban [of World War II], He brought us to a benevolent country that supports students in their studies, and helps *bnai Torah* maintain their courses of Torah study. We must be grateful [to this nation] and pray for its welfare and for the well-being of its leaders. At the same time, we must be aware that G-d in His Torah commands us to take heed not to take more than the officially prescribed amounts, even if loopholes exist for evading the rules.... And quite apart from thievery, such acts are forbidden as deception, misrepresentation and—worst of all—*Chillul Hashem*. In addition, they constitute a *bizayon* which besmirches Torah and its scholars. There is no way in

Every Torah Jew must realize that he carries the *Ribbono Shel Olam's* Torah with him in all his endeavors—in his business transactions as well as in his social interactions.

the world in which this can be permitted. Just as G-d despises a *korban olah* brought from stolen funds, so too does He despise Torah support that comes from illicit sources.

The letter is clear and needs no elaboration.

When Shimi ben Geira cursed Dovid Hamelech, Dovid said, "The curse does not come from Shimi, it comes from G-d." We, too, must view the critique of our community as not emanating from the Nunn Commission, but from *Hashem* Himself for our falling short of our calling as Torah Jews: to sanctify the *Sheim Shamayim* through our actions.

Torah Transforms Those Who Are Near

Torah is described as *Aish Dos—Fiery Law*—according to the *Sifra* because just as fire leaves

its impact on whatever is near, so too must Torah transform whoever is exposed to it: he learns wisdom, humility, modesty, good deeds, appropriate conduct.

When a person studies Torah, it should be apparent in his conduct, in his very being. Thus every Torah Jew must realize that he carries the *Ribbono Shel Olam's* Torah with him in all his endeavors—in his business transactions as well as in his social interactions.

When the Jews reached Mara on their way to Sinai, Moshe Rabbeinu taught them *chok umishpat*—statutes and ordinances. The Ramban spells out Moshe's lessons. Having left Egypt together *en masse*, in such close quarters to each other, the Jews must maintain certain levels of conduct: You must love one another, otherwise you will never survive. You must accept the counsel of the sages. You must establish safeguards of modesty, especially in view of your crowded living conditions. You will inevitably encounter bands of non-Jews who will be selling you their wares; deal with them with integrity....

This code of conduct was issued to the Jews *before* the Torah was given at Sinai. We certainly carry a charge to promote *Kiddush Sheim Shamayim*! Perhaps such effort on our part will contribute to a mitigation of the terrible *Chillul Sheim Shamayim* currently plaguing us.

Even with our current public image problem, however, our successes are undeniably the envy of the secular world. One need only note the contrast between our dedicated young men in pursuit of Torah knowledge, guiding their lives by Torah values, and their secular counterparts, adrift at sea without a moral compass, subject to the capricious trends of society. The difference is hard for others to swallow, and inspires all sorts of contorted views of our community. For example, sociologist Samuel Heilman, who is an "expert" on Chareidi society, is cited in a cover story of the New York Jewish Week (Dec. 3, '93) on the current Pell Grant problems:

To Samuel Heilman, the scholar of Orthodox Jewry, one thing about the schools' pattern in Pell Grant exploitation is most informative.... It virtually exploded in the last three years after many years at a fairly constant level.

¹Editor's Note: Rabbi Svei is referring to the hearings held on October 27 - 28, 1993, before the US Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, chaired by Senator Sam Nunn of Georgia, at which testimony was presented detailing allegations of various abuses of the federal Pell Grant program of assistance to higher education. The allegations of abuse were directed at a number of entities referred to by the Nunn Committee staff as "relatively small institutions" that offer courses in "Judaic Studies" and "Immigrant Culture", which "should not be confused with rabbinical seminaries." The allegations raise issues of varying degrees of severity, some of which are being contested by the institutions under investigation.

JO plans to publish in a forthcoming issue a further discussion of this topic based on a symposium at the recent national convention of Agudath Israel of America.

If we were not as wary of the violations of integrity as we should have been, we certainly are now sufficiently alarmed to correct such lapses. At the same time, however, we should not be derelict in our well-earned pride in our noble youth who continue to advance in Torah study with ultimate devotion.

It was three years ago, he observed, ...[that a particular] family, one of the major contributors to ultra-Orthodox institutions, went bankrupt amidst a hardhitting general recession that struck the community hard.

With little support from the established Jewish community, and no base of support in their own hard pressed community, Uncle Sam must have seemed the only help at hand, he said.

If the federal government now does withdraws its funds, said Heilman, "The students will go out and work. And that means they will have to make compromises, as happens when you work. The insulation they have built up over the last 25 years... will end. They're on a precipice, and they know it."

I would strongly recommend that both the writer of the above-quoted article and the expert cited therein visit Bais Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, which is the largest Torah institution of its kind in the world. They would then see for themselves how Torah study actually flourishes.

The Vilna Gaon declared that Torah cannot thrive on the basis of fraudulently gained funds. He refers to the well-known incident of how Rabbi Chiya saved Torah from being forgotten by personally instructing children (*Babba Metzia* 85b). The account begins with Rabbi Chiya planting flax to harvest linen for the purpose of fashioning nets; these he used to trap deer, whose hides he cured for parchment, on which he wrote Torah scrolls. Rabbi Chiya personally executed all of these preparatory labors, to ensure that no ill-begotten funds be used for teaching Torah to children. The Gaon goes on to say that if *seforim* (sacred books) are printed with funds borrowed on *ribbis* (usury), which is forbidden, the children are destined to forget the Torah they will learn from these books....

Torah on the scale of the Lakewood

Yeshiva could never have taken root by virtue of funds gained illicitly.

How, then, is Torah propagated in our times? Intellectually gifted, talented *Yungeleit* (young men), who could have their choice of well-paying careers in professions and the business world, have renounced such opportunities in the favor of devoting themselves to Torah study, which they love so intensely, finding it "more precious than pearls." They seek closeness to G-d, for which they are willing to endure any hardships.... Young women enter into partnership with their husbands, devoting all their energy, working to help their husbands in their quest for growth in Torah. Parents and in-laws share in the support of their children, to enable them to advance in their studies. And generous *nedivei am* (philanthropists) extend themselves in support of these scholars and the institutions that house them.

The Meshech Chochma comments on the classic partnership of Yissachar, the dweller of the tents of Torah study, and his brother Zevulun, who sponsored him through his commercial ventures: "And Leah called him 'Zevulun' to say... now my husband (yizbeileini) will make his permanent home with me." (Bereishis 30, 20).... Yissachar could not have had a house of study without Zevulun's active support. Zevulun is a key contributor to Yissachar's function as a scholar.

If we were not as wary of the violations of integrity as we should have been, we certainly are now sufficiently alarmed to correct such lapses. At the same time, however, we should not be derelict in our well-earned pride in our noble youth who continue to advance in Torah study with ultimate devotion.

II. THE OUTWARD GLANCE

According to Chazal, Dena's violation by Shechem was the result of yet another frailty: "And Dena went out to see *Bnos Ha'aretz*—the daughters of the land" (*Bereishis* 34, 1). In our present-day situation we need not "go out" to see "the daughters of the land." They and their value system have free entry into our homes and our educational facilities.

A sub-denomination of Judaism has been created that is dedicated to incorporating the value system of *bnos Haaretz* into Orthodoxy, calling itself Centrism. One can reduce our differences with this group to several primary points.

◆ We labor under the awareness that the chain of generations becomes progressively weaker. We cannot reverse this trend, but at the very least, we subjugate ourselves to the wisdom of the sages of the previous generation. In this way we can receive the *Mesora*, the sacred tradition, and maintain it to the best of our abilities. The Centrists deny this steady diminution. They promote a *Torah Umadda* ideology, whereby Torah is enhanced by the added factor of *Madda*. Thus, in their view, as generations advance and the *Madda* factor increases with added scientific insights, so too does the resultant hybrid, *Torah Umadda*, benefit. This flies in the face of our *Mesora*. *Madda* was not present when the Torah was given at Sinai, nor was it ever a component in the Torah taught in subsequent generations (including that of Reb Chaim of Brisk).

Not surprisingly, then, Modern Orthodoxy tends to glamorize innovation in both *halacha* and *hashkafa*², and even members of such groups as the Orthodox Roundtable, who were once threatened with expulsion from the Rabbinical Council of America for their radical departures from halachic norms, today are touted as respected speakers at Centrist conclaves.

² For example, in the next paragraph, a statement from Blu Greenberg is cited. She is the wife of Rabbi Yitzchak Greenberg, who also touts his own vision of *Klal Yisrael*, in the form of CLAL, which includes Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist com-

◆ Centrists have a different view in regard to the woman's role in Judaism. They have moved in the direction of the general worldview that distinctions between men and women should be obliterated. What are the results? A widely publicized article by an "Orthodox feminist" published in Moment Magazine (Dec. '93) expresses anguish that Orthodoxy lags behind the Conservative and Reform, which ordain women, while the Orthodox do not. After all, she claims, women also study Talmud nowadays, and they are familiar with the *halacha*—to at least the same degree of mastery as their male counterparts. Orthodoxy should also ordain women, she proposes. True, they are not counted in a *minyan*, but that hurdle will be overcome in time, she posits.... One cannot help but fear that, should the modernists within Orthodoxy continue on their current course, her prediction will come true.

This deterioration within modern ranks is the result of two forces at work among them: They do not segregate boys and girls in their educational institutions, and their standards for *tzenius* (personal modesty) in their homes has declined. Unfortunately, their achievements are suffering erosion because of these weaknesses.

We, for our part, must avoid the trap of "do not be sure of yourself in regard to the morrow." In our ranks, as well, *tzenius* has suffered deterioration. Recently, in Orthodox circles, for example, women have been delivering addresses at celebrations of their *simchas*, against their inherent nature as women: The *Midrash* relates that when G-d created Chava, He tapped her on every limb, commanding, "Be *tzenu'a* (modest)." *Tzenius* is the very foundation of a Jewish home. Men have been given Torah as the antidote to their *yeitzer*

ponents. What can *Klal Yisroel* gain from the inclusion of official Reform clergymen, when their ranks are so suffering from defection through intermarriage that they propose active outreach to non-Jews to replace their losses? Can *Klal Yisroel* be enriched by the inclusion of Reconstructionists who outdo themselves week after week with their outrageous pronouncements? (In mid-November, the Philadelphia *Jewish Exponent* published an article by one of their rabbis expressing admiration for Esau, the worldly outdoorsman, as compared to the cloistered Jacob, "who dwelt [only] in tents!")

Some women from less traditional circles seem to be seeking new *mitzva* expressions, such as wearing *tefillin*, or dancing with a *Sefer Torah* on *Simchas Torah*. As if they lack *mitzvos* of significance!

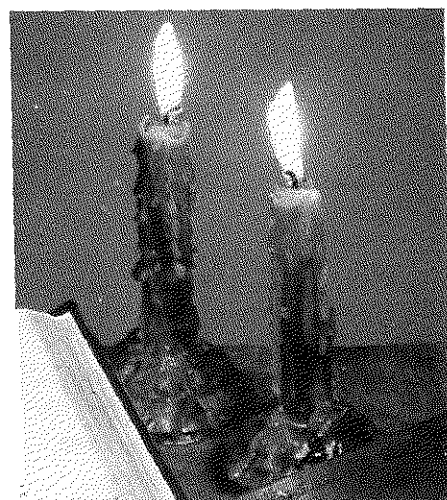
hora (evil inclination), and women have been granted *tzenius* for this purpose. Public speaking before a mixed audience is in total violation of this attribute of *tzenius*.

Women: Their Agenda, Their Mission

Some women from less traditional circles seem to be seeking new *mitzva* expressions, such as wearing *tefillin*, or dancing with a *Sefer Torah* on *Simchas Torah*. As if they lack *mitzvos* of significance! This search for the new is truly pointless, for women are already charged with specific *mitzvos* that are crucial to the formation of our people:

◆ *Sforno* explains that the *mitzva* of *challa* was introduced to *Klal Yisroel* immediately after the Sin of the *Meraglim* (the Twelve Spies). The People had forfeited their high level of *bitachon* (trust in G-d) when they balked at entering *Eretz Yisroel* because of the *Meraglim's* negative report about the Land. When women were commanded to separate the *challa* portion from their dough, they were given the opportunity to express renewed *bitachon*—declaring that all bounty comes from G-d's hands. This in turn brings blessings on the Jewish home: *Bitachon* and blessings, thanks to the Jewish women and their *mitzva*.

◆ Adam and Chava were meant to fulfill Creation's purpose by tending *Gan Eden* as commanded, but they failed. Subsequently, *Tikun Olam*, re-



Through preserving our own heritage of *tzenius*, *kedusha* and *tahara*, we can fulfill our destiny of being a *Mamleches Kohanim veGoy Kadosh*. What, by contrast, can *Bnos Haaretz* teach us?

pair of the world, could come about only through future generations. But they would have to be generations of *kedusha* (sanctity) and *tahara* (purity). The Jewish woman as custodian of the laws of family purity passes on this *tahara* through her offspring to future generations.

◆ Adam's spirituality suffered a terrible decline through his initial sin. This could be restored only through the *Shabbos*. By ushering in the *Shabbos* through kindling the *Shabbos* lights, the Jewish woman brings in the *neschama yeseira*, the "additional *neschama*," to her home, restoring spirituality to her family.

Thus the keys of *bitachon*, *tahara*, and *kedusha* are entrusted to her hands.

◆ How do women merit the after-life? "By watching over their

children's Torah educations." The Jewish woman guards the transmission of our values and our loyalty to Torah for future generations!

The decline from previous generations to ours is precipitous to the extreme. One wonders why. Perhaps one can suggest that women hesitate to cry, to pour out their tears, as *Yiddishe Mammehs* once did, when they beseech G-d on behalf of their children, that they grow up to be *talmidei chachamim* and *ba'alei middos tovos*—at *tefilla* and when they *bentch* *licht*.

One dare not underestimate the power of those precious tears! Tears cleanse the heart and open up the portals of *kedusha* and *tahara*. What, by contrast, can *Bnos Haaretz* teach us? Only the revelation of all sorts of hidden drives and desires, and a focus on the need for—and the perceived entitlement to—immediate gratification.

Through preserving our own heritage of *tzenius*, *kedusha* and *tahara*, we can fulfill our destiny of being a *Mamleches Kohanim veGoy Kadosh*.

III. OUR CONCERN FOR SECURITY

The *Zohar* relates a dialogue between the Sar (guardian angel) of Yishmael and G-d. The Sar demanded that Yishmael, as bearing a *bris mila* (circumcision), was entitled to the same closeness to G-d as Yitzchak enjoyed.

Not so, answered G-d. Yitzchak's *mila* was complete; he was circumcised on his eighth day, with *pri'ah* (an additional incision), whereas Yishmael was not circumcised until 13 years of age, and lacked *pri'ah*. As long as Yitzchak is complete in his *kedusha*, Yishmael has no claims to his legacy in *Eretz Yisroel*. But should Yitzchak, or his descendants, fall short in infusing *Eretz Yisroel* with *kedusha*, then Yishmael's children will indeed have claim to *Eretz Yisroel*.

While ordinarily one may find it difficult to conceive of *Eretz Yisroel* as "lacking" in *kedusha*, the government that is currently in power has made it its goal to rid the State, its official pronouncements, and even its school system of mention of G-d's name.

The *Ponevezher Rosh Yeshiva* (Rabbi Schach) is in anguish because *Rehovos* elected a left-wing mayor on his platform of preventing the closing of theaters on *Shabbos*. This triumph of an anti-*Shabbos* spirit, the judicial decision to permit the import of non-kosher meat to Israel for the first time in 45 years, among other trends, all serve to create a vacuum in the *kedusha* of the Land. And as a result, the Arabs are on the threshold of controlling territories that they previously did not hold. We can prevail over the Arabs in their struggle to gain control over our land, if only *kedusha* reigns in the Holy Land.

The struggle for *kedusha* is a key aspect of our battle to maintain Torah values in spite of the attractions of foreign value systems and calls for change. Through perseverance, we can flourish as a Torah people, promote *Kiddush Sheim Shamayim* in all our activities, and bring security to our beleaguered brethren in *Eretz Yisroel*. ■

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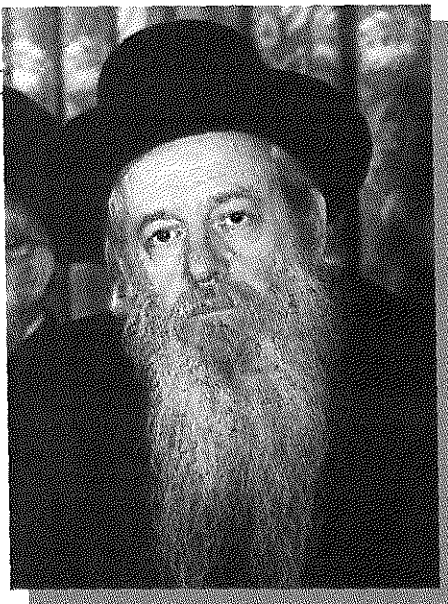
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The Clash Between Modernity and Eternity

Based on an address by Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, שליט"א, Novominsker Rebbe and Rosh Hayeshiva of Yeshivas Novominsk-Kol Yehuda, in Brooklyn, New York

I. MODERNITY: TO BE EMBRACED OR AVOIDED?

One might well question why, from a Torah perspective, there must be a clash between modernity and eternity. After all, Torah's truths address all circumstances in all times, in whichever *Golus* we Jews find ourselves—be it Babylon, Spain, Poland, or America.

Before Moshe Rabbeinu's *petira* (passing), the Torah tells us, "G-d showed him the entire land, from Gilad to Dan, all of Naftoli, and the lands of Ephraim and Menashe, and all the lands of Yehuda, all the way to Yam Ha'acharon—the last sea." To which Rashi says, "Not the 'last sea,' but 'Yom Ha'acharon—the final day'—all the events that will befall Jewry until the Resurrection of the Dead." Moshe Rabbeinu saw Klal Yisroel in all its shades and colorations until the coming of Moshiach. That is, Moshe Rabbeinu's generous gaze, his blessings to Klal Yisroel—all of these endow Klal Yisroel with an eternity that tran-

scends limitations of modernity. *Toras HaAvos*, the sacred legacy of our Avos, the Blessings of Moshe—all of these have validity until the end of days.

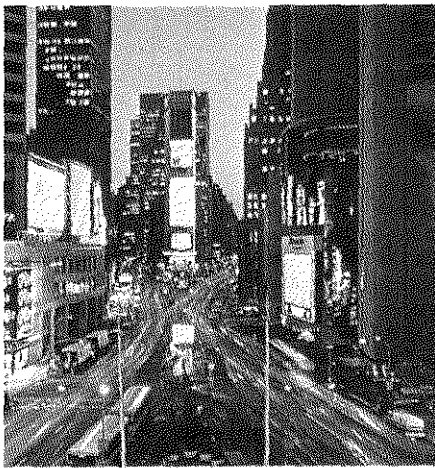
By the same token, the norms of Torah are timeless, and are applicable to every situation imposed upon us by the temporal world. Its principles provide a *derech Hachaim* for all of life's social variations: for the primitive towns of Medieval Europe and for the affluent communities of Modern America. One may therefore call into question the very premise of this discussion. Must there really be a clash between Modernity and Eternity?

And yet, we assume it is a given—we feel it in our bones, we observe it in the atmosphere of our carefully guarded lives: Modernism is not consonant with the sacred spirit of our ancestors. We must indeed recognize that if we do see a clash between modernity and Jewish eternity, it is because modernity today wears non-Jewish garb. "The Jews moved amongst the nations and learned from their actions." The mere fact that Jews live amongst

non-Jews in the world's great urban centers is unto itself a great spiritual hazard. The towering Torah leaders of earlier times foresaw this when the ghetto walls crumbled and Jews entered the mainstream societies. Such movement is fraught with risk, as expressed by Chazal (*Eiruvin* 21b).

Rava expounds: *What is the meaning of the passage: "Come, my Beloved, let us go out to the field, let us lodge in the villages. Let us arise early to the vineyards, let us see if the vine has flowered, the grape blossom has opened, the pomegranates are in bloom; there I will give my love to you" (Shir Hashirim 7:12,13).*

Rava explains the verses, phrase by phrase: "Come, my Beloved, let us go out to the field": *The Congregation of Israel spoke before the Holy One, Blessed is He, "Master of the universe, do not judge me like the residents of cities in which there is theft, immorality, vain oaths and false oaths."* Rather, "Let us go out to the field." "Come and I will show You scholars who study the Torah in poverty." "Let us lodge in the villages"—do not read this as it is written



bakform (in the villages) but rather read this as if it were written bakofrim (among the disbelievers). "Come and I will show you those upon whom You have bestowed prosperity, and yet they have denied You."

"Let us arise early to the vineyards"—this refers to the synagogues and study halls; "let us see if the vine has flowered"—this refers to the students of the Mishna; "the pomegranates are in bloom"—this refers to the students of the Gemora. "There I will give my love to You"—I will show You my glory and my greatness, the praise of my sons and my daughters.

Rashi explains that large cities are places of markets, large population masses, where merchants and peddlers frequent, promoting theft and promiscuity—a society that breeds corruption and immorality—and as we see today, decadence, hedonism, and every manner of prohibited activity.

In its pristine integrity, Knesses Yisroel is not satisfied with all this. It longs for a different image of the real world: that I would return to the simplicity of life in the fields; as Rashi explains: "They will labor in the fields, and study Torah in poverty," unmodernized, perhaps primitive, yet pure, virtuous, unblemished by the ink of modern civilization, but at the same time producing talmidei chachamim delving into Torah, anchored in an entirely different standard of living—guided by an entirely different definition of life. And as the Gemora concludes, "There, I will reveal My greatness, the praise of my sons and daughters." Specifically in this kind of existence, precisely because it is unmarred by so-called progress and urbanity, can

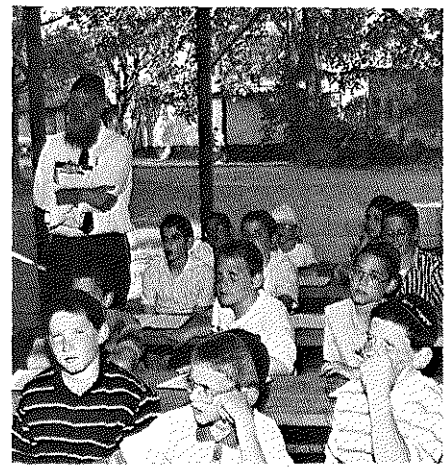
Knesses Yisroel show its true glory, the beauty of its sons and daughters.

All this may seem to us a dream world; it's just not *l'ma'aseh* any more. We live in cities, we are part of society, and we do enjoy the advances of science. We are convinced that we could not live today without electricity, the telephone, and all sorts of other technological marvels. This Gemora has a profound lesson for us regarding our thinking, about our entire state of affairs as dwellers of large cities. We must recognize the great *bidi'eved*—the after-the-fact acceptance—of our way of life, the spiritual pitfalls all around us, the mortal dangers that come in the wake of civilization and technology. While certainly a blessing to the body—and we must thank the *Ribbono Shel Olam* for all these blessings and comforts—they can often be, and often are, a plague to the *neshama*. And we all know that so well.

Of Gifts and Pitfalls

Serious Jews are surely aware that we must be alert to differentiate between the gifts G-d has bestowed upon us with modernity, and the high risks and challenges inherent in this very same modern life. Technology has made life immeasurably more convenient for us. Our contemporaries can scarcely imagine how people managed in earlier times! How did the *Rishonim* live during the Crusades? How were they able to write their commentaries on scrolls of parchment, amidst hunger, pogroms and plagues? Yet they produced an entire Torah civilization from which we are still being nurtured... a thousand years of Europe!

We must clarify for ourselves, with every step we take, which aspects of modernity we flee, as though from destructive flames, and which are blessings that we use for spiritual enrichment. The cassette player from which we learn *Daf Hayomi*, the computer scanner that checks the *Kashrus* of a *mezuzah*—these are heavenly blessings that enhance our lives. But the TV set, which modernity has planted into our homes, is an unmitigated curse—a destructive



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force to our spiritual status, and to our efforts to raise our children. The television conveys the very worst of our civilization, day in, day out, hour after hour. This aspect of modernity is a curse that should never gain entry into our communities.

To be sure, modernity represented by a whole body of Torah literature in English, which reaches out to the hearts of our brethren and brings them closer to our Father in Heaven, is invaluable. But modernity in terms of the media and popular literature, which are replete with disgusting discussions and narrations, should be avoided for the spiritual poisons that they entail. These are obvious truths; nothing new. But, then again,

Mesillas Yeshorim tells us that simple truths must be constantly reviewed, for "To the degree that these facts are widely acknowledged, to that extent do we become oblivious to them and tend to forget them."

II. DEALING WITH RELIGIOUS MODERNITY

There is yet another problematic aspect of modernity that has invaded our world. In various ways, a new philosophy of Religious Modernity has emerged, focusing on contemporary culture and how the Torah should conform to its standards and values. This philosophy, which has become a powerful force in Modern Orthodoxy, has come to articulate approaches that are diametrically opposed to our sacred ways of life—both in *halacha* and *hashkafa*, blurring the demarcations that separate Torah wisdom from secular knowledge. Before I pursue this point further, however, I must express—from the depths of my heart and with deep-felt anguish—some strong reservations.

I think that our world, our Yeshivtshe/Chassidische/heimishe world, has become all too comfortable at times, and sometimes a little too eager, to denigrate and even vilify those circles of *shomrei Torah u'mitzvos* with whom we sometimes have ideological differences. One can justify a *kana'us*

l'sheim Shamayim (zealotry sincerely meant), when directed against *Acheinu Bnei Yisroel*, especially against *shomrei hadas* who need and deserve to be criticized, and in whom we may recognize certain *hashkafos* that are not acceptable to our *chachamim*, and we feel compelled to speak out in pain and protest. But if this militancy is not mixed with a sense of *tzaar* and anguish, and coupled with feelings of the need for outreach—outreach out of sheer *ahavas Yisroel*—towards *Yidden ma'aminim bnei ma'aminim*, then this *kana'us* is, in my opinion, seriously flawed. And that extra element within it is the *ba'al davar* himself.

The *pasuk* states: "Your words are a lamp unto my feet, a light for my path" (*Tehillim* 119,105). In this case, as always, the lamp unto our feet and the light for our path should be the guidance of *Chazal*. The *Gemora* enjoins us: "One should always draw near with the right hand while rejecting with the left, not as Elisha did with Gehazi and Rabbi Yehoshua ben Prachya did with one of his *talmidim*." (Earth-shaking details regarding the latter incident are documented in "Omissions From Shas.") Even an angry "rejecting left" can be balanced and accompanied by a sensitive "drawing-near right." Then, and only then, will our vigilance and *kana'us* be effective and bring about the *kavod Shamayim* we sincerely seek.

Humanistic Liberalism vs. Emes

Having said this, one cannot help but shudder when contemplating the degree to which modernity has crept into the Orthodox world. Would you ever have imagined that a woman would read the *Megilla* on behalf of the entire congregation in an Orthodox *shul*? The rabbi of this *shul*, who sanctioned this practice, is a respected member of the Modern Orthodox world!

Did our ancestors ever imagine that institutions of Talmudic studies would be established to enable women to delve into *Gemora* with *Tosefos*, as part of "equality of rights"? (As one woman put it, "I can't walk around and be the equivalent of a card-carrying member of the club without knowing the by-laws of the organization!")

In many of the Hebrew Day Schools across the country, should a *ben Torah* object to such practice, he would be labeled as "fanatic," a "black-hatter," "not in touch with the spirit of the times." Indeed, as Rav Pinchos ben Ya'ir said, "In *Ikvesa d'Meshicha* (the era preceding the advent of *Moshiach*), *chutzpa yasgeh* (will prevail)" (*Sota* 47a). In these last throes of *golus*, we certainly do see a breakdown of respect for tradition and authority. Thus *chutzpa yasgeh* has become the hallmark among the disciples of modernity.

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◆ Unfortunately, I must mention another painful example: The *Mesoras Hahalacha* (the halachic tradition) need not be lectured about *takonas agunos*. Yet the winds of feminism have made inroads even in our own *sheitel* society, and have used the plight of *agnos* as a whip with which to bash and insult rabbis who are expert in laws of divorce.

Let me read to you the first and last paragraphs of an article entitled, "We Have The Right To Question Authority," written by one of the leading activist rabbis of Modern Orthodoxy,

We must clarify for ourselves, with every step we take, which aspects of modernity we flee, as though from destructive flames, and which are blessings that we use for spiritual enrichment.

here and in Israel:

One of the thorniest problems facing anyone who takes religion sincerely and humanistic liberalism seriously: adherence to tradition means adherence to the authority of the carriers of that tradition, but what about individual conscience and the right of dissent? Can one respect authority without becoming authoritarian? Are we to bow down to previous generations without any questions at all, piously relying on the homily that "since we don't even come up to their shoelaces," who are we to second-guess the greats, or are we allowed—and even expected—to think for ourselves and creatively interpret the sources in accordance with our contemporary understanding?...

A person must have two pockets. If he simply doesn't know, he must listen to the authorities, "...even if they tell you that what appears to you to be left is right." [That is one pocket, to be used if you don't know, if you don't trust your-

self.—R' Y.P.] But the other pocket gives one the right, even the obligation, to learn, to question, and eventually to become an authority. And then, if one is absolutely convinced that the Sages are mistaken, one must only listen when "they say right is right and left is left." [What he obviously means is that you are the authority that prevails over the Sages in such a case.—R' Y.P.]

The author of this spurious ideology revealed the source of his confusion, in his dismay over the perceived contradiction between "adherence to tradition" and "humanistic liberalism." If you understand this phrase "humanistic liberalism" in all its ramifications, as it addresses our present-day way of life, then you have your finger on the idolatry of modernity from a Torah perspective; it means the full brunt of the influence of contemporary Western culture and its corrosive effect on the *Yiddishe neshama*. This is the heart of our present-day challenge: how to protect our thoughts, our lives, our children, our standards of personal modesty, our entire way of life from the influence of these values.

◆ One more example to be given:

The primary spokesman for the mixture known as *Torah Umadda* has the following to say in his book of the same name:

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

This is neither the time nor the place to discuss the falsehood and the insidious implications of such a philosophy. This has been done already by others. What I would like to say, however, and I address this directly to the rabbis and laymen in the Modern Orthodox world, many of whom have been performing great and productive service on behalf of Torah and *Yahadus* in this country:

Your success in your holy endeavors calls for *siyatta diSh'maya* (Divine assistance), and this can be merited

only by loyalty to the pure *emes* of Torah, untampered with, undiluted, uncompromised by alien creeds. This condition for *siyatta diSh'maya* is attested to by the hundreds of effective *ktruv* workers coming out of our *yeshivos*—who present Judaism in terms of Torah and *mitzvos*, and nothing else, to be *mekarev* people to the *Ribono Shel Olam*. This is proven by the many hundreds and perhaps thousands of *ba'alei teshuva* eager to embrace *Yiddishkeit* in all its details and restrictions, not searching for watered-down versions of *Yahadus*

and Torah. To our dear brethren who live and work in contemporary society and grapple with its problems, we say: Seek not the values of humanistic liberalism nor the lifestyle of modernity as your guidelines in life. "Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders and they will inform you." Keep not the religious company of Reform and Conservative *kofrim*. We in Agudath Israel will never tire of reminding the Orthodox Union and the Rabbinical Council of America that membership in the Synagogue Council of America and mixed Boards of

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Rabbis is a travesty upon *kedushas ha'emuna vehamesora*, and an ongoing *Chillul Hashem*.

Dear brothers: Your place is not with them. Your place is with us in the *machaneh* of *Yirei Hashem* and *Shomrei Mishmeres*, regardless of whether you belong to or agree with Agudath Israel or not.

Orthodox Jews living in the American mainstream need the *chizuk* and the inspiration coming from the Torah world, its *Rabbe'im*, its *talmidim*, its dedicated laymen. So we are *mispallel* to Hashem that all the so-

If you understand this phrase "humanistic liberalism" in all its ramifications, as it addresses our present-day way of life, then you have your finger on the idolatry of modernity from a Torah perspective; it means the full brunt of the influence of contemporary Western culture and its corrosive effect on the *Yiddishe neshama*.



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called moderns as well will join our society—*Lehiskadesh Sheim Shamayim al yedei kulonu*, that G-d's Name be sanctified through our combined efforts.

III. INTRUSIONS OF MODERNITY ON THE TORAH WORLD

Once we discuss the problems we encounter in our interface with the so-called modern world, we must examine ourselves, as well. Has modernism affected only others? After all, modernity not only addresses one's philosophy; it touches on lifestyle—how one conducts one's private life, how one engages in business, how one spends one's leisure time, and how we support our communal institutions. The modern world in this *malchus shel chessed*—this benevolent country, the United States of America—has opened up to us new means for supporting Torah *Yiddishkeit*: government funds, through programs. Our faces burn with shame as newspapers proclaim that government officials testify that they have uncovered fraud and deceit among Jewish educational institutions, unjustly blackening the reputation of the entire yeshiva world. These are our sins of modernity. When I even obliquely referred to such sins in the past, I incurred the criticism of some people, but since then, the *Chillul Hashem* has grown to awesome proportions. People respond with indifference and equanimity. "Such is the nature of the game," they say.

But it is *not* a matter of insignificance. Do we have any comprehension of the magnitude of such a *Chillul Hashem*? We must have tremendous merit to be spared from the Heavenly indictment that can be provoked by such *Chillul Hashem*!

If we convene public gatherings to arouse people in regard to their obligations for *tzenius*, don't we have similar need to send out alarms regarding dishonesty and swindle? We certainly need Heavenly *zechusim*, and we pray that He take into account our community's vast accomplishments in the areas of Chessed, Torah study, and philanthropy (of which we may be justly proud), to outweigh the grievous liability of *Chillul Hashem*!

I would like to conclude with a story: A person had a wagon-load of merchandise stolen from him, and dispatched a messenger to enlist the help of the Baal Shem Tov to recover his loss. The Baal Shem Tov was about to leave for another community to celebrate a *bris* when the messenger arrived. He took him along, together with Reb Hersch Sofer, to the *bris*. Upon arriving at his destination, the Baal Shem Tov recognized the wagon with the stolen goods, which he traced to a man staying at a nearby inn.

The Baal Shem Tov sent Reb Hersch to summon the man to him, but Reb Hersch returned without the fellow: "When I came there, he was in the middle of davening. I couldn't disturb him."

"Go back and get him anyway," the Baal Shem said.

Again, Reb Hersch returned alone: "He was eating breakfast, delicately, with dignity. I didn't want to interrupt him."

"Go back and tell him that I know how he traveled with the stolen goods through a forest for three days. He rested here, fed his horse there, slept over at such-and-such a place...."

Reb Hersch left, and came back with the culprit. The thief returned the wagon with the stolen goods with great contrition. He joined the paupers' table at the *bris*, and ate humble bread. In the middle of the *seuda*, however, he posed one question before the Baal Shem Tov:

"Rebbe, it is obvious that you can actually see anything and everything. Please tell me, then, why do you look at lowly, insignificant things, such as how thieves steal, and where horses eat? Why don't you fix your gaze on loftier things?"

The story goes on to relate how the Baal Shem Tov addressed the question, expounding on the topic with *divrei Torah* until *Mincha*, without concluding his presentation.

While the story itself needs commentary, one message is clear: We

have the capacity for raising our sights towards loftier goals, instead of focusing on "stolen horses." We should involve ourselves with our treasures—our glorious youth and our wonderful children—thus spreading *k'vod Shamayim* and elevating *k'vod Yisroel*. May G-d grant us the wisdom to extricate ourselves from the quagmire in which we are sinking, and together join forces to become closer to אבינו שבשמים and the eternal truths of Torah. ■

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Mystery of the Missing Years

*This year,
5754 on the
Hebrew calendar,
is being observed as the
Shmittah year in Eretz Yisroel.*

*As an issue of practical halacha, there is
no doubt that this is indeed the Shmittah
year. But on closer inspection, the simple
mathematics of this recurring*

THE CALCULATION

Calculating the Shmittah year seems simple enough. The Gemora (Taanis 29a) teaches that the Second Beis Hamikdash was destroyed on a post-Shmittah year. Thus, we need only calculate the precise date of that last verified Shmittah and add to it a recurring seven year cycle.

To ascertain an accurate date, we should start at the very beginning—from the beginning of time—and calculate forward. Fortunately, the Torah provides us with information we need to be able to do so.

During Ma'aseh Bereishis, the first man and woman were created. Twenty generations later, Avraham Avinu was born. The Torah provides a precise accounting of these twenty generations. The chronology of the first ten generations (culminating in the birth of Noach) appears at the end of Parshas Bereishis. A similar listing of the next ten generations (culminating in Avram's birth) appears at the end of Parshas Noach. By adding these figures, we learn that Avraham Avinu was

Rabbi Reisman, Rav of Agudath Israel of Madison (a community in Brooklyn, N.Y.), is a popular lecturer, whose weekly series on topics in Tanach attracts an audience of over 600 people. Several of his articles have been featured in these pages.

*Sabbatical cycle provide us
with an intriguing mystery.
The mathematics simply
do not work out.*



born in the Hebrew year 1948.

This calculation is verified by Rashi (Avoda Zara 9a), who identifies 1948 as the year of Avraham's birth.

Rashi continues the chronology: Yitzchak was born when Avraham was 100 years old. This sets his birth at 2048. Rashi then demonstrates that the Jews left Egypt 400 years after Yitzchak's birth. This places the year of the Exodus at 2448.

The next piece of the puzzle is provided by a verse in Melachim I (6,1) which tells us that the first Beis Hamikdash was completed in the month of Iyar, 480 years after the Jews left Egypt. This brings us to the year 2928.

The first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed on Tisha B'av, 410 years after it was built (Rashi, Bava Basra

3b). This brings us to 3338. This was followed by a 70 year exile, which culminated in the building of the Second Beis Hamikdash (Divrei Hayomim Beis 36:21) in the year 3408. The Churban Bayis Sheini took place 420 years later (Eiruchin 12b). This calculates to the year 3828. Since the Churban took place during a post-Shmittah year, we may conclude that the year 3827 was Shmittah.

Having determined that 3827 was a Shmittah year, simple arithmetic should allow us to calculate all subsequent Shmittos. The first Post-Churban Shmittah took place in 3834; the next occurred seven years later, in 3841, and so on.

If we follow this formulation, and add 275 cycles of Shmittah (or 1925 years), we will come to the year 5752 as the most recent Shmittah year! This information would certainly be distressing to the thousands of farmers who are observing Shmittah this year. Are they two years late?

A PARTIAL RESOLUTION, BUT PROBLEMS REMAIN

Rashi and Tosefos (Avoda Zara 9a) disagree on the precise year of the second Churban. Rashi maintains that the second Beis Hamikdash was destroyed 420 years

after it was built. *Tosefos* argue that the *Beis Hamikdash* stood for 420 full years and was destroyed on *Tisha B'Av* of the 421st year. Thus, while *Rashi* places the *Churban* at 3828, *Tosefos* add a year and maintain that the *Beis Hamikdash* was destroyed in 3829. According to *Tosefos*, the year 3828 was a *Shmittah* year. This would mean that the most recent *Shmittah* was 5743. (A bit closer, but still not consistent with our practice.)

The *Tur* (*Choshen Mishpat* 67) writes that regarding "the calculation of the Sabbatical year, there is a difference of opinion, according to *Ri* (i.e. *Tosefos*) it was in the year [50]88, according to *Rashi*, in the year [50]87."

The *Tur's* calculations mirror those presented above. They result in the determination that *Shmittah* took place most recently in 5753 (according to *Ri*) or 5752 (according to *Rashi*). Here, at least, we find that this problem is noted by Rav Moshe Isserlis. In his notes to the *Tur* (*Darkei Moshe* 3), he

writes, "If so, the whole calculation [being used today] is in error, for if so, *Shmittah* should have taken place in the year 5263 and 5270...."

If we accept that this is indeed the *Shmittah* year, we are faced with two possible resolutions of our puzzle. Either we must conclude that the cal-

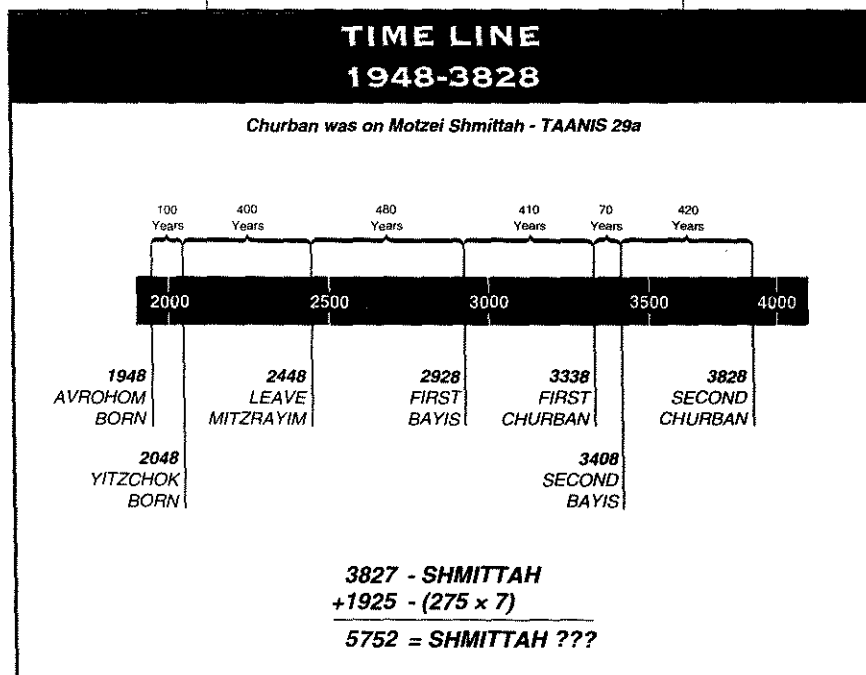
SOLVING THE MYSTERY

During the sixteenth century, Jews began to return to *Eretz Yisroel* and farm the land. The *Shmittah* calculation had somehow fallen into disuse and a disagreement erupted as to the proper year to be observed. Four different opinions were offered as to the precise year of *Shmittah*!

To resolve the problem, an inquiry was dispatched to Rav Levi Ben Chaviv (who was known by the acronym *Maralbach*) requesting a definitive ruling. His response, printed in *Teshuvos Maralbach* #143, deals with many facets of the *Shmittah* calculation. In part, he observes that different communities in Europe had conflicting designations of the year on their calendars. "This year, which is 5066 ac-

ording to our understanding, is 5065 according to the Eastern communities." He explains the basis for each opinion, as follows:

Adam was created on Rosh



culations of the *Rishonim*, listed above, are off by a year, or, if they are accurate, we must conclude that this is not actually 5754. Neither resolution seems appealing.

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Hashana, the first day of *Tishrei*. The calculations offered above count time as beginning with Adam. This is the calculation accepted by virtually all *Rishonim*, (including *Rashi*, *Tosefos* and the *Tur* mentioned above); this is

of Creation. Thus, one could argue that Adam was created at the beginning of Year Two. This adds a year to all our calculations. For example, the calculation of twenty generations leading to Avraham's birth (which adds up

ter in resolving the question of Rav Moshe Isserlis regarding our calculation. The *Tur* and *Beis Yosef* based their *Shmittah* projections on *Cheshbon Adam*. Like most other *Rishonim*, they would consider this year to be 5753. We, who count the years according to the custom of the "cities of the west," count from *Cheshbon Tohu*, and consider this to be 5754. Either way, we are precisely 1924 from the *Churban* (according to the accepted opinion of *Tosefos*, cited above).

During the sixteenth century, Jews began to return to *Eretz Yisroel* and farm the land. The *Shmittah* calculation had somehow fallen into disuse and four different opinions were offered as to the precise year of *Shmittah*!

called *Cheshbon Adam*, the calculation [which begins from] Adam.

One can argue, however, that this is not accurate. Since the creation of man took place on the sixth day of creation, the first five days of creation actually fell during *Elul* of the previous year! The Talmud (*Rosh Hashana* 2b) teaches that "[even] one day of a year is reckoned as a year." These five days would thus be counted as the first year

to 1948) would bring us to the year 1949. All the other calculations would also be advanced by a year. This would lead us to conclude that the *Churban Bayis Sheini* took place in the year 3830. This places *Shmittah* at 5754! This is known as "*Cheshbon Tohu*—calculations [which begin from] emptiness," i.e., from the days prior to Adam's creation.

Drisha (to C.M. 67) quotes this let-

RESOLVING THE PROBLEM

All our calendars place this year as 5754. The calendars also agree that this is a *Shmittah* year. This means that we are now 1924 years after the *Churban* (or 1925 years after the last pre-*Churban Shmittah*). Our calendars, therefore, assume that the *Churban* took place in the 3830 (5754 minus 1924 = 3830). We are following the custom of the communities of Western Europe (quoted by *Maralbach*), who calculated the calendar based on *Cheshbon*

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Tohu. As we have seen, this calculation places the Churban at 3830.

In short: This year (whichever it is) is indeed the *Shmittah* year. However, it is not clear that this is truly 5754! Most *Rishonim* seem to concur with the calculation of *Cheshbon Adam*. According to them, this is actually 5753.¹

5753 OR 5754?

Does it really matter if this year is 5753 or 5754? If we would agree that we are presently 1924 years after the Churban, does the labeling of the year have any halachic significance?

Maralbach (in the response cited above) suggests that there is no halachic difference how a year is labeled. It is for this reason that he tolerates the different practices of his day, where the eastern communities counted from *Cheshbon Adam*, while the western communities counted according to *Cheshbon Tohu*.

It would be interesting to know how the difference in the calendars was ever worked out. If European communities had different customs in the early sixteenth century², what happened after that time that caused all Jews to agree to count by *Cheshbon Tohu*?

In a letter printed in *Avkas Rochel* (and quoted by *Birkei Yosef* in Y.D. 330:137), Rav Yosef Karo alludes to the confusion surrounding the precise timing of *Shmittah*. He mentions a specific agreement of "all of the scholars, some 40 or 50 years ago" to set halachic policy by defining a precise *Shmittah* calculation, and urges that that policy be honored. One may theorize that such an assembly would also have set policy regarding the proper calendar designation of the year.

DATING A KESUBA

When a couple is married, the husband gives his wife a *kesuba*, a contract, which

¹ The common reference to the year of Avraham's birth as 1943 is based on *Cheshbon Adam*. Thus, a teacher who uses this (accepted) date, and at the same time refers to this year as 5754, is being inconsistent!

² *Baal Hamaor* (*Avoda Zara* 9a) alludes to differing customs as early as the Gaonic Period.

must be dated accurately. Although a post-dated *kesuba* is valid, it takes effect only from the date inscribed on the *kesuba*. The day, month and year must therefore be filled in properly.

The standard form of the *kesuba* contains the following language: "On the ___ day of the month ___ in the year ___ according to the count that we calculate here in the city of ___ etc." This language is puzzling. It would seem simple enough to fill in a date. Why add the explanation, "according to the count that we calculate here...."? It is almost as if we are acknowledging that our calculations may be incorrect!

And indeed they may be. As we have seen, many *Rishonim* would not agree that this is the year 5754. We therefore play it safe in our *kesubos* and state clearly that the contract is meant to take effect in 5754 "according to the count that we calculate here." This would make the *kesuba* valid according to all opinions, since the date, as described, is unquestion-

ably accurate.³

The *Gemora* has an expression, *תיקון*, which is an acronym for "Tishbi (i.e. Eliyahu Hanavi) will answer unresolved problems," which will occur when Eliyahu will proclaim the advent of *Moshiach*. Among the questions to be answered then will be the exact count of that year. ■

³ See Rabbi Shimon Schwab, *Collected Writings*, Intro pg. XXX.

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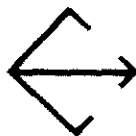
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Acts of the Unfaithful

**A Review Article
of the Latest
Novel Bashing
Orthodox Jews**



THE MOST POWERFUL PROPAGANDA MEDIUM

Two recent issues of *The Jewish Observer* featured articles dealing with damaging distortions of Orthodox Jewry—Rabbi Moshe Sherer's discussion of negative stereotyping of Orthodox Jews in the news media (Sept '93), and Yonason Rosenblum's review of *Piety and Power* (Oct '93), a derisive study of Israel's *Chareidi* community, by a well-known Israeli journalist.

Although the journalists they describe have harmed the public image of the Orthodox community, another branch of the media has spread similar negative message to more people, and with greater impact.

Popular fiction has been a powerful weapon in the battle against the Torah community since the days of the Yiddish newspapers and magazines in Eastern Europe. *Fiddler on the Roof* and the novels of Chaim Grade, Isaac Bathshevis Singer, and

Rabbi Shuster, a *musmach* of Mesivta Rabbi Chaim Berlin, is a *Rebbe* in Bet Hamidrash LeTorah High School in Skokie, Illinois.

Popular fiction has been a powerful weapon in the battle against the Torah community since the days of the Yiddish newspapers and magazines in Eastern Europe, contributing to a collective image of Torah observant Jews as an anachronistic, superstitious people crippled by "blind faith."

Chaim Potok have all contributed to a collective image of Torah observant Jews as an anachronistic, superstitious people crippled by "blind faith." [The confusion is compounded when two of the above three have been granted honorary degrees by Yeshiva University.]

Recently, a wave of novels set in the Chassidic communities of Israel and America have been propelled to the top of bestseller lists by thousands of eager readers. Titles such as *Jephte's Daughter* and *Sotah*, by Naomi Ragen (who appears on the book jacket wearing a *tichel*, standing in front of a set of

Encyclopedia Talmudis), titillate by weaving stories of dysfunctional families and communal cruelty in Jerusalem's Chassidic neighborhoods. Fiction frees the authors from the constraints of reality, while allowing them to create powerful images, which an ignorant readership adopts as their frame of reference.

WHO ARE THE RESOURCE PEOPLE?

Acts of Faith, the novel reviewed here, contains the following acknowledgements by its au-

thor, Eric Segal (famous for his wildly popular *Love Story*, of the '70s):

Rabbi Hugo Gryn and his former associate, Rabbi Larry Tabick, read through the drafts to ferret out doctrinal lapses. I was reassured on certain points by Rabbi Doctor Louis Jacobs.... I am also grateful to... Ms. Irma Rabino and Rabbi Rhonda Nebel of the Jewish Theological Seminary (where I myself was briefly a student in the early 1950s) and Dr. Philip Miller and Ms. Sylvia Posner of Hebrew Union College.

Amazing! A portrayal of Chassidic Jews constructed by a non-observant Jew with the assistance of HUC and JTS. What better way for them to disseminate their views to a vast public that rarely, if ever, attends their houses of worship, or reads the local Jewish papers? (It's not as if Chassidic Jews are an extinct breed, when there are surely Chassidic communities within a short commute of Segal's home!)

A REFORM MORALITY PLAY

The plot of *Acts of Faith* manages to fill five hundred and forty-one pages. As in many of these

"Jewish" novels, the story centers on the family of a Chassidic *Rebbe*. His daughter, always uncomfortable with the woman's role in Judaism, falls in love with an Irish "Shabbos Goy" and is sent away to a family in Me'a She'arim for correction. The family, unhappy, bitter, dishonest and cruel, abuse her until she escapes to a *Hashomer Hatzair* kibbutz where she finds warm Jews with exemplary *middos*, who welcome her with open arms. While there, she is visited by the *Shabbos Goy*, now a Catholic seminarian, who leaves her with their child, who is lovingly adopted by the kibbutz.

Events take her back to America where she meets a Reform rabbi and his wife (also a rabbi) who are wonderful, committed Jews who help her discover her destiny by encouraging her to enroll in Hebrew Union College and become a rabbi. After a period of rabbinical work in New England, she is drawn back to the kibbutz, where she becomes their teacher of Judaism and is reunited with the *Shabbos Goy*, who leaves his post as a Catholic cardinal to join her.

The *Rebbe's* son grows up in awe

of his father, yet rejects him after he attends a combined yeshiva-university program, where a psychology professor easily tempts him into a relationship with a non-Jewish woman, and general abandonment of his beliefs and practices. The event that disillusion him most is his father's participation in the exorcism of a dybbuk, which reveals his father as a slave of superstition. When he tells his father that he refuses to "get smicha" and become the next *Rebbe*, his father declares that he will sit *shiva* for him as if he were dead (not for abandoning Torah, but for discontinuing the dynasty). After a few years as a successful stockbroker, he takes over his sister's position as rabbi in New England, and eventually ends up marrying an Orthodox girl, and becoming the next *Rebbe* (without any clear renunciation of his Reform leanings) after his uncle, who had succeeded his father, is shot by another *Chassid* for refusing to build a yeshiva on the West Bank! (Eric Segal's *Chassidim* are both rabidly anti-Zionist, and Gush Emunim-style territorial hawks!)



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The typical reader leaves the book with an image of Reform movement and the *kibbutzim* as the saints and saviors of Judaism, and of *Chassidim* who are, at best, ignorant and superstitious, and at worst, evil, uncaring, hate-filled creatures.

CHOICE QUOTES

Segal's book is laced with inaccurate descriptions and false references. Here are some which demonstrate the power of the "poison pen."

☞ On Bais Yaakov education:

Deborah was enrolled in a traditional Bais Yaakov school whose sole purpose was to prepare Jewish girls to be Jewish wives.... Their teacher Mrs. Brenner constantly reminded the girls that they were privileged to help their husbands fulfill G-d's injunction to "be fruitful and multiply.... Is that all we are, Deborah thought to herself, baby machines?" (p. 13)

As she grew up she was obliged to face the painful fact that she could never serve G-d to the fullest because she had

The typical reader leaves the book with an image of Reform movement and the *kibbutzim* as the saints and saviors of Judaism, and of *Chassidim* who are, at best, ignorant and superstitious, and at worst, evil, uncaring, hate-filled creatures.

been born a woman. (p. 14)

[For good measure, the author then takes a few swipes at the laws of *taharas hamishpacha*.]

☞ On the Jews of Me'a She'arim:

It had been a shock to see Leah Shiffman up close. What had seemed from afar like a middle-aged woman was in fact a tired-looking girl in her twenties with lifeless eyes and a pallid face. (p. 94)

☞ On donations to yeshivos:

There was a generous, kindhearted Philadelphia couple.... Shiffman had somehow wangled five hundred thousand dollars out of them over lunch at the King David. Their contribution was intended to be for a much-needed dormitory. Somehow, the money found its way to an account in Zurich. (p. 338)

☞ On women's prayer at the Kosel (after Deborah starts davening out loud and other women join her):

The women were so caught up in Deborah's zeal that they sang their prayers even more loudly.... Suddenly, a wooden chair was hurled over the barrier, striking a grandmotherly woman and knocking her to the ground.... As more missiles began to fly over the barrier, the women followed Deborah's lead and threw them back.

(After the police remove the women):

Though Deborah was in shock, the irony was not lost on her. They had been banished to the Dung Gate... which for thousands of years had been used to expel the garbage. (p. 123-124)

☞ On yeshivos and their methods of study:

Unlike some of the ultraorthodox seminaries that act as if Jewish scholarship has scarcely evolved since the Babylonian Talmud...(p. 126)

☞ On Reform:

"I think what I'm looking for is a better relationship with G-d." "That's what our movement's all about," Esther spoke up, "and not everything we do is new-fangled. Calling women to the Torah used to be common practice in Talmudic times. It was the frummers themselves who 'reformed' it. (p. 262-263)

☞ The Reform Rabbi:

"I'll bet anything you didn't hear this at school—the Talmud says the G-d actually endowed women with greater understanding than men."



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EXTINGUISHING THE SPARK

The booming sales of books like *Acts of Faith* represent both a danger and a challenge to the Torah community. Thousands of non-observant Jews are curious about the mysterious world of the Orthodox. The "Jewish spark" within them leads them to Jewish novels. Unfortunately, the most popular of these novels paint such a distasteful picture of the Torah world, that many of those thousands will recoil from the idea of actually visiting, much less supporting, a yeshiva, or a Bais Yaakov. Tourists at the Kosel, who might have accepted an invitation to a *Shabbos* meal that would change their lives, will turn their backs. It is impossible to estimate the damage Eric Segal has caused by bringing the biases of his advisors at HUC and JTS to life in the minds of many gullible Jews.

Outreach workers, and every Jew who comes in contact with non-observant colleagues, relatives, and neighbors, must be aware of this phenomenon. On the coffee tables and the library shelves of America, the new Jewish novelists are *motzi sheim ra* (libelous) about us, fanning the fires of anti-Orthodox sentiment, and undermining productive relationships before they can begin.

THE CHALLENGE

The battle has already begun. As American Jewry disperses, fewer Jews actually encounter the Torah observant community. Enemies of the Orthodox community are exploiting this opportunity to bias the Jewish population, by utilizing the newspapers, magazines, novels, television and film. With one novel, Eric Segal (and his advisors) have reached more Jews than the combined efforts of all *kiruv* activities in America in the past year. Others have noticed the power of these instruments and plan to use them. Blu Greenberg (wife of Yitz Greenberg of CLAL), a leader of the far-left fringe of Modern Orthodoxy, writes...

"...One area in which we should invest greater sums is popular Jewish culture. Novels, television, theater, the

We must switch from a reactive mode, where we protest negative stereotyping after it has occurred, to a preemptive mode, where through our personal contacts and our cultural creations, we encourage the innate Jewish desire to meet a community of living *Kiddush Hashem*.

arts—creations that can stir the emotions and spirit of the neutral or indifferent." —Hadassah Magazine, June '93

We must realize that these tools will greatly increase the influence of the Greenbergs and others.

Somehow, the Torah community must find in its midst talented individuals who will be able to "stir the emotions and spirit" of the rapidly shrinking Jewish population with images of *kedusha*. If we write ar-

ticles, book reviews, and fiction that will only be read by our community, we are surrendering the global battlefield to our enemies. We must switch from a reactive mode, where we protest negative stereotyping after it has occurred, to a preemptive mode, where through our personal contacts and our cultural creations, we encourage the innate Jewish desire to meet a community of living *Kiddush Hashem*.

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Feige Wasserman, ד"ר

For anyone who knew her, the first response to the name "Rebbetzin Wasserman" is "She was a lady!" For all of us who spent time in her home and in her company, Rebbetzin Wasserman was also a hero. Together with her husband, the late Reb Simcha Wasserman, זצ"ל, she was instrumental in welcoming back into *Yiddishkeit* hundreds of young people. Like Sarah and Avraham Avinu, the Wassermans stood at the gateway ready to greet us. We poured into the Rebbetzin's home from the entire world. We each came from a different direction; each of us needed our own gate, and that gate was prepared for us in Panim Meiros 15, apartment 10.

I sat in the Wassermans' home many times and watched hippies, yuppies, preppies, New Agers, and just simple, lost folk appear at their *Shabbos* table. The young people who

came "off the Wall" were greeted with warmth and affection. No one was too strange not to be welcomed and nourished at the Rebbetzin's *Shabbos* table. There was a place waiting for everyone. It had taken us a long time to find her home, but she had always been there. With her *Shabbos* table, with her *Shabbos* lights, it had all been prepared for us from time immemorial. It was we who had tarried. Meeting her for the first time, one had a sense of *deja vu*. We had known her somewhere else. She had nourished and cared for us before. It had all happened in a dream-like past. We had stepped out of time into the realm of eternity. We were finally arriving to a long-awaited rendezvous.

Nothing is more appropriate to the Rebbetzin's memory than to speak of her in conjunction with our mother Sarah, for Rebbetzin Wasserman was a modern personification of Sarah *Imeinu*.

The essence of Torah taught by Abraham and Sarah is that a person is able to change the direction of her life. Torah has no greater image of the

human potential for growth than the story of *Lech Lecha*. Indeed, this potential, known as the *koach* of *teshuva*, is the central force of our spiritual existence. It is the pull that awakens in us the desire to reduce the distance between ourselves and the Diving Source of all being.

No one who entered the Wasserman home could refrain from a great desire to reconnect to their spiritual roots. One came there by chance, by *hashgacha* or out of curiosity, but one left with a desire for *teshuva*. When one saw how the Wassermans lived in this world, one became aware of one's distance from all that is pure and true. The desire for *teshuva* was kindled in that home in anyone who was ready to undertake the journey. The Rebbetzin was an entry into the world of the spirit.

The origin of the need for *teshuva* resides in the feelings of imperfection and unrealized potential that we all experience. Rebbetzin Wasserman recognized this potential and dormant desire in her guests. She knew that there is no one who has not regretted lost opportunities, lost time,

*See J.O., Dec. '92

Dr. Sara E. Freifeld, a member of the Sh'ar Yashuv community in Far Rockaway, N.Y., is dean of the Women's Division of Touro College, in New York City.

What an adventure played itself before our eyes. We were in the birthroom of *neshamos*, watching the Wassermans weave their magic ways into the hearts and souls of these children.

mistaken priorities. She understood the world from which her guests came. She knew also how difficult it was to disengage from the iron grip of that reality. Her belief that the desire for renewal and growth exists in every Jew made Rebbetzin Wasserman's work possible without her ever being disheartened or discouraged. She recognized the potential in her guests and this filled her with energy and excitement.

Like Sarah Imeinu, Rebbetzin Wasserman lived in a perpetual state of *Shabbos*. Her entire life revolved around *Shabbos* and its guests. She knew that its special *koach* can change a Jew's life and bring him home to his spiritual roots. *Shabbos* was not just the food and candles. It was the purpose of her entire life, the goal of her *avoda*. The Rebbetzin awaited her guests with the enthusiasm of a young girl waiting for a party. *Who will come? Who will be touched? What is their story? How can I befriend them and send them on to become Jews? They are sending me six boys today; tomorrow I'll have seven girls. I wonder who else will come?*

Every Friday night the house was filled with excitement as we waited for the young people to walk from the *Kotel* to Mattersdorf. Finally the knock at the door. She would rush to open it wide, not allowing any of us the excitement of having the first glimpse at her company. "Good *Shabbos*, good *Shabbos*!" she would exclaim. What an adventure played itself before our eyes. We were in the birthroom of *neshamos*, watching the

Wassermans weave their magic ways into the hearts and souls of these children.

The Wassermans had no natural children. But they adopted each one of us and cared for us. We, of this lost generation, would want to return to their home again and again. Their home was not just for the *ba'alei teshuva*. Even the *ye-shiva* and Bais Yaakov students grew from their interaction with the Rebbetzin. Many a seminary girl has said that the highlight of her *Shabbos*

experience in *Eretz Yisroel* was the Wassermans' *Shabbos* table. The Rebbetzin and Reb Simcha showed us a *Yiddishkeit* full of sweetness and joy, of serenity and beauty, of warmth and human caring. *Simcha* and the warmth of true *shalom bayis* was their trademark, the signature of their *avoda* to their Creator.

From them we learned how to have a loving, Torah-inspired marriage. Their deep and loyal partnership is an elegy to married life. Theirs is a tale of oneness that reaches the highest heavens above. In this tradition, the

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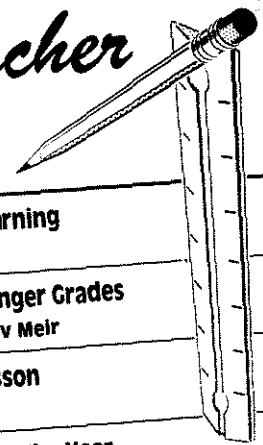
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Rebbetzin left this world to join Reb Simcha, having just completed her last *chessed* for him: that of sitting *shiva*. "A man like that," she said, "should not be left without someone to sit *shiva* for him." So he went first and she followed as soon as her final act of lovingkindness had been performed for him in this world.

No one who watched the relationship between Rebbetzin Wasserman and Reb Simcha can ever forget the great pleasure they took in each other's company and in each other's abilities. She was ever ready to leave

him the center stage. However, he had to perform to the Rebbetzin's high standards. If he spoke too low so that the guests could not hear, she would call this to his attention. "*Du redst tzum bord*" (You're speaking to your beard), she would tell him in her unfailing sense of humor. She managed him with consummate skill, for they were partners in their work for *Klal Yisroel*. He was not allowed to forfeit even one sentence of Torah by speaking unclearly. Ever watchful, she noticed when the guests did not seem to follow his teachings. Then

I sat in the Wassermans' home many times and watched hippies, yuppies, preppies, New Agers, and just simple, lost folk appear at their *Shabbos* table. No one was too strange not to be welcomed and nourished at the Rebbetzin's *Shabbos* table.

she would tell him to explain an idea again. She knew all his Torah, and she wanted to make sure that his teachings were presented in all their beauty and purity.

The food and the home were all instruments of connection to *Hashem*. How beautifully she managed her table. She had none of the misconceptions of the modern woman, that to serve the needs of the body is less important than to serve the needs of the *neshama*. A human being is one and needs both. She was the great impresario of Torah, preparing and watching so that on each *Shabbos* and *Yom Tov*, new insights and revelations of Torah were brought to life. After all, it was her portion of Torah that was taught at the table.

She was never afraid to interject her ideas, to clarify a point, to remind her husband of a good way in which to present a topic. The synchronicity of these two people was a miracle of oneness. An even greater miracle was to watch how it was all transformed into Torah. All was Torah: their home, their marriage, their love and respect for each other, their sense of humor, their service to the *Klal*.

Rebbetzin Wasserman was a diminutive figure with distinctive and royal bearing. She had a quick wit and unlimited charm. But her greatest quality was her



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The Rebbetzin believed in the potential of the human being to change, to go beyond the self and lay that self aside in the service of a greater goal. She was the first to call the girls by their Jewish names. There was no need to wait, to get used to the idea.

youthfulness and sense of adventure. She never aged and she loved an unexpected *tiyul* (trip). I remember that time we went to *Kever Rachel* together. I came prepared with a spool of red thread with which to "*mesten* the *keiver*." This custom, to go to Mother Rachel's grave and to encircle her tomb seven times with a red thread, is believed to be a *segula* for marriage. When my two daughters and I started to encircle the *Kever*, Rebbetzin Wasserman said that she wanted to join us. We gave her a spool of red thread and she proceeded to dance around the *Kever* with us. When I asked her what she was going to do with the thread, she said she was going to give it to the girls who visited her home. She served her guests even in this beautiful way; they were always in her mind. Not long after we danced around Mother Rachel's *kever*, Rebbetzin Wasserman and Reb Simcha introduced me to my late husband, Reb Shlomo Freifeld, זצ"ל.

Like Sarah *Imeinu*, the Rebbetzin believed in the potential of the human being to change, to go beyond the self and lay that self aside in the service of a greater goal. She was the first to call the girls by their Jewish names. There was no need to wait, to get used to the idea. Like herself, she imagined

that we were all ready to quickly lay aside the old—the familiar—and to embrace a new name and a new identity, just as *Hashem* changed Sarah *Imeinu*'s name when she begins a new chapter in her life and she gives birth to Isaac. In the service of *Hashem* there was no ego, no hesitation. Rebbetzin Wasserman gave us all the benefit of her own perspective and we tried to live up to her image of

us. She believed that people could grow and develop self-awareness no matter how far they had fallen into the modern culture. No one was too distant. She was never put off by the clothing, the earrings, or the extravagant hair that many of her guests wore to her *Shabbos* table. It did not matter. We were all her children, even if we were dressed in the garb of *golus*.

The Rebbetzin saw beyond the

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She was never put off by the clothing, the earrings, or the extravagant hair that many of her guests wore to her *Shabbos* table. It did not matter. We were all her children, even if we were dressed in the garb of *golus*.

posturing. She was not afraid of her young guests. They wanted to express their liberation from middle-class values. That was fine for her. Never was she afraid of their cynicism. Their college sophistication was only a veneer; it did not stop her from interacting or approaching them. She had no qualms about asking them personal questions concerning their backgrounds, their families, their lives. They were at her table and that implied a desire for connection. She understood that unspoken message and played it to the utmost.

She won them over, not because she engaged in philosophical debates, but because she represented a life superior to any experienced by the young people; they loved to be in her presence. She spoke to both the boys and the girls. Her warmth was the main instrument; it was her weapon of assault into the *neshamos* of these urbane children who had come out of curiosity or out of a need to explore the mysterious world of their forefathers. They came from hiking through all of Europe. They were the refugees and the displaced persons of our cultural collapse. No story was too unusual for her—she had heard them all. But most of all, she never turned in self-righteous indignation away from them. They did not scare her, and neither did their attitudes and pretensions to enlightenment and urbanity.

Rebbetzin Wasserman and Reb Simcha were among the first people in America who "went into *kiruv*." *Kiruv* was not a profession, with the conventions and how-to manuals of today's outreach professionals. Theirs was a response born of a need and a responsibility to impart Torah to a new generation of Americans who knew nothing and

who had seen nothing. The accomplishments of their *Shabbos* table can only be measured in *Shamayim*. There is no human barometer for the impact of such *avoda*.

It seems appropriate that both Reb Simcha and the Rebbetzin were *niftar* shortly after *Succos*. This is the *Yom Tov* that is known as *Z'man Simchaseinu*. *Simcha* is the product of *kedusha*, of our nearness to *kedusha*. Only after *Yom Kippur*, when we cleanse ourselves from impurity and sin are we able to achieve the nearness to *Hashem* that typifies *Succos*.

During *Succos*, we step out of our routine to live a great spiritual adventure; the life of Torah that awaits us. Under the elements of nature, we come into contact with the essence of our *neshamos*. We discover a truer self. It was this self in us that Rebbetzin Wasserman always addressed. She believed in us and in our potential for *kedusha*. There can be no better testimony to her memory than our continuing to grow and develop as Jews—that we exhibit the same love and tolerance for our fellow Jews as she did, that we serve *Hashem* with the same selflessness and *simcha* that characterized her *avoda*, her home and her life. ■

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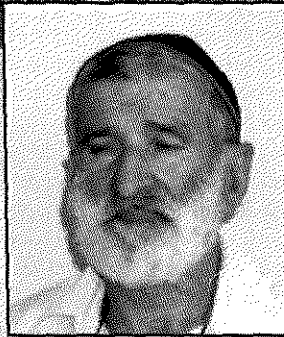
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SECOND LOOKS

Challenges and Searches, Dead Ends and Answers

Lost Jewry's Spiritual Quest

As Reform Jewry seems to be sliding over the brink to oblivion, Rabbi Alexander Schindler is frantically trying to see to it that they will prevail—at least numerically. (See Levi Reisman's Second Looks comment on the topic in Dec. JO.) As it worked out, his proposal to engage in proselytizing amongst the unchurched, which was made before the 4,000 delegates to the UAHC convention in November, dominated the columns of the Anglo-Jewish press for a time. But it was not the last word to come out of that convention. In fact, according to a JTA release just two days after the conversion story, Schindler seems to have it all wrong. There's no need to recruit outsiders to replenish diminishing ranks. Reform Jews would prefer to stay Jewish—if only Judaism's spiritual dimensions were opened up to them. We quote:

Schindler seems to have it all wrong. There's no need to recruit outsiders to replenish diminishing ranks. Reform Jews would prefer to stay Jewish—if only Judaism's spiritual dimensions were opened up to them.

Reform Jews Begin Struggle For New Sense Of Spirituality

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA)—Reform Jews are thirsting for G-d.

The quest now is to develop a language for spirituality and a Reform way to grapple with the existential questions of Jewish life.

"Reform has made explicit the universalism in Judaism, but now we must make more explicit the resources for a personal relationship with G-d in our tradition," said Rabbi Samuel Karff of Houston's Congregation Beth Israel.

...In most Reform temples, there was little energy devoted to Judaism in purely religious terms.

But all that is changing.

Tools for incorporation of spirituality into Jewish life are being borrowed from many streams of Jewish thought and behavior.

At the workshop on "Consecrating the Ordinary," Rabbi Peter Knobel of Beth Emet/The Free Synagogue, in Evanston, Ill., advised the overflow, standing-room-only crowd to reclaim mitzvot, or commandments, in their traditional forms as a way of integrating spiritual practice into life.

He spoke of reciting the "Modeh Ani," the prayer traditionally recited in the morning upon waking that thanks G-d for restoring life; of reciting Shacharit, the morning service; and of saying the "Shema" as he goes to sleep each night.

Knobel... advocated integrating blessings into each daily activity, to elevate and consecrate even the most mundane acts of life, much as the most observant Jews do.

He also suggesting double-dating correspondence, even to non-Jews, with both the English and Hebrew dates at the top of the page.

This interest in spirituality does offer some cause for hope. But first, let's put things into perspective.

Obviously, it would be overreach-

ing a bit to expect that all 4,000 Reform Jews who were present at the San Francisco conclave are now waking up with "Modeh Ani" on their lips. Unfortunately, much of this quest for spirituality ends up going askew. For example, an article in the *Northern California Jewish Bulletin* (July 9, '93) reported about former baby-boomers who are mixing Jewish symbols with aspects of alien religions in their search for spirituality:

Many, according to the survey's findings, attended synagogue... as children before leaving their faith behind. Now they are incorporating elements of their upbringing into a homegrown spiritualism, such as one Jewish family whose Mill Valley home included both a mezzuzah and tiny Buddha statues, as well as other sacred objects.

...The synagogue has failed to a certain degree, but it's not a failure of Judaism," says Alan Lew, a Conservative rabbi in San Francisco. "It's a failure of American Jews to observe Judaism."

...Rabbi Judy Shanks of Temple Isaiah in Lafayette says congregations have to work harder to incorporate Judaism in the day-to-day lives of Jews. "I think we have to create our own programs of mitzvot that will give us a Jewish daily context in which to live in the modern world."

Echoes of cries of "Hallelukah!" from the bottom of the dry well do not emanate only from California. The *L.I. Jewish World*, for example, ran a profile on "the Jewish renewal movement and its attractiveness to lots of people" on the Eastern Seaboard (Sept. 2, '93). John Weingart—an assistant State Commissioner of Environmental Affairs, of Seargentsville, N.J.—is quoted as saying,

"I enjoy the quest for spiritual meaning and finding a group of people with whom to do that. I also like what Susie says and the environment she creates with dim lights, bare feet, lots of music and silence."

"Susie" refers to Susie Schnur, a Reconstructionist Rabbi who "has a devoted circle for whom her eclectic approach to tradition—such as a Passover seder with bits of Buddhism, Native American religion and blue-collar union songs—is a tonic." (*ibid.*) After announcing her "open approach to worship in the local news-

Yarmulkes, bare-foot chanting in the sand, incense and mezuzos.... At least the 1990s will not hear a repeat of the '70s gropings for spirituality followed by out-of-hand rejection of everything associated with Judaism

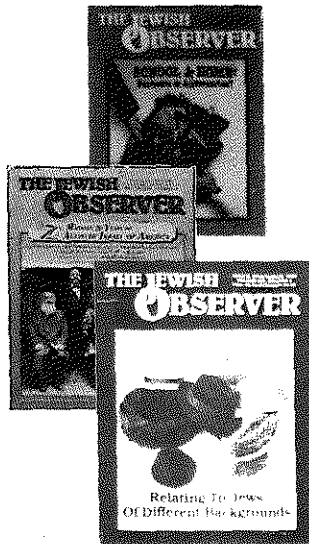
paper, several hundred people showed up for the Rosh Hashana services she led in 1992.

Yarmulkes, bare-foot chanting in the sand, incense and mezuzos.... At least the 1990s will not hear a repeat of the '70s' gropings for spirituality followed by out-of-hand rejection of everything associated with Judaism. As a case in point of the old situation: in a presentation at the national convention of Agudath Israel of America in 1980, Rabbi David Gottlieb—then of Baltimore, now associated with Yeshiva Ohr Samayach in Jerusalem—related the following incident:

A boy who had joined the Indian cult Hari Krishna came into our home about a year ago. He was born, raised and educated in Baltimore. He said to me, "My father is Jewish and I want him to become interested in spiritual things. He can't accept my cult, so I want to see whether there is anything worthwhile in Judaism for him. Tell me, does Judaism believe in a soul? Do you believe in an after-life?"

"Of course," I answered. "How could you not know that?"

"Well, in our Reform Temple they never told us about that." (Jewish Observer, June '81)



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This sense that the soul resides elsewhere is no longer the case. Even Reform Jews know that we Jews say "Modeh Ani" thanking G-d for restoring us our neshamos! The bottom line is that Jews out there—Reform, Reconstructionist, unaffiliated—are searching.

Conservative Yearnings

Conservative Jews are no less beset with an irrepressible "nagging sense of inner vapid-ity and ideological confusion," according to Rabbi Neil Gillman in his book, *Conservative Judaism: the New Century*, and traditionally, the Conservative rabbinate has done little in response. (Gillman is associate professor of philosophy at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTS), and former dean of its Rabbinical School.) In his own words,

Once, on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, I was serving as a rabbi for 3,000 people in front of me. I said to myself, "I know everything about this holiday. I know where it comes from. I know its halachot (laws). The one thing I don't know about this holiday is 'What does it all mean?' How are people supposed to be transformed by this day?"

He finds that today, lay people are more vocal in their desire for spirituality. "I have never in all my life seen the kind of hunger—theological, religious, spiritual—in the ordinary lay community that I have seen in the

So who will answer this quest for spirituality? We have no choice but to face up to the facts: This phenomenon throws a challenge in our direction. The seekers will not be satisfied with the makeshift spirituality or the theological dodging proffered by others. Only we have the soothing waters that can slake their spiritual thirst.

past two or three years," Gillman said. "The rabbis don't quite know what to do about it."

In response, JTS is trying to sensitize its students to dealing with this phenomenon. But if you think that Spirituality From Sinai, or some other "Kirvas Elokim li tov—Closeness to G-d is the essence of goodness" will ever emanate from the Conservative Movement, you are destined to be disappointed. In a discussion about which mitzvot "should" be observed and what "has to" be changed, in line with Conservative doctrine, Gillman commented,

"Classically, Jews have said that the ultimate source of obligation is G-d. G-d spoke at Sinai, and that's where all the 'shoulds' came from."

As an individual, and not a spokesman for all Conservative Jews on this issue, Gillman stated, "It is hard for me to believe that G-d spoke... G-d doesn't speak. Human beings speak. 'Speaking,' for G-d, is a metaphor. I think the 'should' comes from my community...."

(ALL QUOTATIONS FROM AN ARTICLE BY MARSHA B. COHEN IN THE BROWARD JEWISH WORLD, NOV. 18, '93.)

Meeting the Needs of Our Brothers

So who will answer this quest for spirituality? We have no choice but to face up to the facts: This phenomenon throws a challenge in our direction. The seekers will not be satisfied with the makeshift spirituality or the theological dodging proffered by others. Only we have the soothing waters that can slake their spiritual thirst. Yes, we, with the black outfits, long sleeves, wigs and tichels; for we are not as foreboding to them as we might think. (Even some of their rabbis wear yarmulkes!) And only we can recapture the Sinai experience by transmitting the Mesora as we received it—in its pristine purity.

We truly cannot walk away from this situation with a shrug of the shoulders, "They aren't interested, anyway." Every encounter with a non-religious Jew—no matter how casual the meeting—is an enviable opportunity. Our physical presence broadcasts any number of messages, and we must do our utmost to keep the content and the format of these messages positive, warm, and encouraging.

Whether through structured outreach sessions or chance business meetings, we bear the responsibility to tell them that Torah Judaism is an inviting spiritual haven. It's a nice place to visit, and great place to come home to.

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New Times, New Perspectives

They have been called "Peace Negotiations," but judging by the explosive response they've triggered—ranging from Hamas (חמאס) to the settlers (להבדיל)—the talks are ushering in anything but peace.

Much of the media's focus has been on the defiant pronouncements and violent demonstrations on behalf of the settlers, in face of threatened changes in the status of the settlements. A surprising element in these anti-government *hafganot* is the participation of Religious Zionists—a radical shift on their part from unquestioning support of the government, come what may. Moreover, their defiance has gone beyond gestures to actually withholding support from the *Medina*. For example, some congregations in America, openly identified with Zionism, dropped the long-standing tradition of sponsoring Israeli Bond drives on Yom Kippur this year. According to Rabbi Moshe Gorelik, president of the Rabbinical

Rabbi Zupnik, *Rav* of Beis Torah U'tefilla in Passaic Park, N.J., is active in outreach in Princeton University as well as other campuses in the region.

Council of America, as a result of the Israeli government's policies, some congregants in synagogues affiliated with the RCA are totally shifting their money away from traditional channels, such as the United Jewish Appeal and Israel Bonds, and are beginning to donate to private foundations that funnel money to favored causes. (JTA, Nov. 11, '93)

In addition, former Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren has questioned the propriety of saying the *tefilla* for the *Medina*, now that the current government is in effect dismantling the country. And do I hear some Religious Zionists urging others *not* to serve in the Israeli army? (Rabbi Goren, by the way, has directed Israeli soldiers to defy military orders to forcibly move settlers, should such orders ever be issued.) Finally, the news of the day tells of Israeli police having brutally beaten an innocent young boy with a *kippa sruga*—at an "illegal demonstration" called by Gush Emunim against the Peace Proposals. Unfortunately, it sometimes takes a bludgeon to the head to make one recognize a problem

that has been plaguing religiously motivated demonstrators for decades.

Sharing Some Thoughts

This shift on the part of erstwhile staunch supporters of the State has given us much food for thought. We would like to address some of these thoughts to those dissenters: You have suddenly decided that the "prime *mitzva*" of using conventional channels for supporting Israel is no longer applicable; you may actually have more important and pressing causes in Israel that deserve your direct funding. You may be delighted to learn that the *Chareidi* world has been pursuing its own in-

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dependent course in helping the Yishuv for some years now. It's nice sharing the turf with you.

You are inspired by the burning idealism of the settlers in their defiance of government policy; these settlers justify their stand because they don't want to give away one inch of sacred soil. Our community, too, has been fired by an idealism for decades, proclaiming: "Don't give an inch!"—not an inch of the *Yaldei Teheran's* Judaism, not an inch of *kavod hameis* to unauthorized autopsies, not an iota of the chastity of our daughters to military conscription, not a nuance of *Kedushas Shabbos* to open cinemas on Friday night and

commercial flights on Saturday, not a shadow of halachic integrity to a *Mihu Yehudi* law with man-sized loopholes... and the list goes on. And it has been going on since the beginning of the State.

Yes, we've even been earmarking much of our funds for the specific causes of our choice*. We chose to do our utmost to create a vibrant Judaism in *Eretz Yisroel*, and undeniably, we are succeeding. Not only in the building of *yeshivos* and other Torah

*This is really not too different from what the San Francisco Federation was until recently doing for several years, routing funds around the UJA, to help the alternative, left-wing New Israel Fund, in objection to Likud rule.

institutions, not only in funding outreach efforts and *chessed* programs, but even in our day-to-day generosity to *hachnosas kalla* emissaries, who afford us a share in their building of *Chareidi* neighborhoods throughout Jerusalem.

In short, we have always recognized that no Israeli government—not this one nor any previous one—will ever be the guarantor of our sacred Jewish way of life. This realization has called for vigilance—and, occasionally, militance—along with some creative independence to protect the spiritual identity, inch by inch, of *Am Hashochein beTzion*—the Nation That Dwells in Zion. We must say, we missed you during those long and lonely years. You were standing on the sidelines, criticizing our "lack of loyalty." But now things will be different.

Is Anyone Taking Note?

One thing though. Two years ago, *The New York Times* carried a small item, on a back page somewhere, recognizing the wisdom, in retrospect, of the Israeli bombing of the Iraqi reactor. As you probably recall, when Saddam Hussein started his military offensive against Kuwait in summer, 1990, Israel was redeemed from the harsh condemnation it had suffered in 1982 for having destroyed Iraq's nuclear power plant. Maybe, somehow, somewhere, a similar note will be found in the back of one of your publications. Maybe someone who is intellectually honest will say: Perhaps we shouldn't have been criticizing the *Chareidi Gedolim* all these years. You do have to stand up and fight to preserve true Judaism, even when it puts you at odds with official policy of the Israeli government....

More important, however, as long as we both agree on the concept that a Jewish State, to be true to its name, must operate with fidelity to Jewish principles—and we certainly share the conviction that those principles must have their source in Torah—then we do have much in common. As for the details, let us leave them for another discussion. For the meantime, welcome aboard. But please, friends, stay for the entire ride. ■

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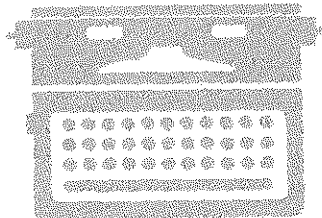
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Letters to the Editor

SWEDISH JEWRY'S ROLE IN RESCUING JEWS IN WWII

To the Editor:

Binyamin Jolkovsky's review article on Segev's *The Seventh Million* (Oct. '93) touched upon the rescue work performed by Orthodox Jewry during World War II. It is important to record these historic facts, some of which live on only through the memories of individuals.

In the many written accounts, scant attention is paid to Sweden's important role in saving lives. As a live witness of those activities, I can offer the following:

Sweden was miraculously spared German invasion while all her neighbors had been heavily affected by war. Finland went first, when the Russians invaded her in November, 1939. Several Jews were able to escape from there through the Ice Sea port of Petsamo.... Hundreds of Norwegian Jews reached safe haven in Sweden after the April 8, 1940 invasion.... Denmark's Jews were left in peace until October, 1943, when the Danes' historic rescue operation saved them. At that point, Swedish Orthodox Jews played an important role in offering not only shelter, but also an active Orthodox *shul*, the Jeshurun Synagogue which my late father, Hans Lehmann, had brought over intact from Hamburg, after Kristallnacht, at the request of his close friend Chief Rabbi Josef Carlebach, זצ"ל, the great martyr of the Holocaust.

Actually, Orthodox Swedish Jews began playing an important rescue role days immediately after the outbreak of the War, on September 1, 1939. Hundreds of American yeshiva students were evacuated from Poland and reached Stockholm by boat

shortly before Rosh Hashana. Together with a small group of friends, I met the ship in the port, and helped the yeshiva students find places to stay, but also importantly, a place to *daven* during *Yamim Noraim*, before they continued their journey home to the States. Members of that group today occupy posts as rabbis or *Roshei Yeshivos* in this country.

In March, 1940, the then-Lubavitcher *Rebbe* arrived in Stockholm from Poland. I was among the group that accompanied him to the railroad station on his way to Gothenburg, from where he sailed to New York. I will never forget his penetrating eyes as he looked out of the window of his rail-car compartment.

Providentially, a great personality lived in Stockholm at that time: Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe. My late father had brought him to Stockholm, after he had been deported as a German by the Poles, following the Kristallnacht excesses against Poles in Germany. He stayed with us as our private teacher from 1938 till 1946.

It was he who urged me to leave Sweden for New York to attend yeshiva over here, since the Polish *yeshivos* where my brothers had studied were no longer in existence.

American Link to Stockholm

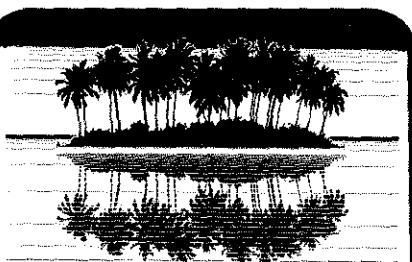
When I arrived in this country in May, 1940 (after travelling alone through Germany at the height of the War), I met Rabbi Avraham Kalmanowitz—an encounter that led to years of close cooperation in rescue work. There were regular meetings at the offices of Zeirei Agudath Israel, where rescue operations were constantly discussed and set into motion. This group, which evolved into the Vaad Hatzala, consisted mainly of



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Rabbi Kalmanowitz, Rabbi Eliezer Silver, Rabbi Yechiel Michel Gordon of Lomza, Rabbi Schulman of Slobodka, and Elimelech "Mike" Tress of the Agudah. These great rabbis would spend countless hours analyzing the telegrams from Europe as if they were learning a difficult *sugya* in Gemora.

When Moreinu Jakob Rosenheim arrived by naval convoy from England, he, too, took a very active part in the Vaad Hatzala work. I was summoned very often to be the contact to the only existing link to the stranded Mirrer and other *yeshivos* in Kaidan and other places of refuge.

It was my task to call my father in Stockholm to discuss ways and means of securing visas for the *bnai yeshiva*, to get them through Russia and Japan to these shores. On occasion, I visited the Swedish Embassy in Washington with requests for official Swedish support for our efforts. The telephone connections at that time were of course very poor and I often had to scream at the top of my voice to make myself heard. The telephone link with Sweden lasted until December 8, 1941, when Germany declared war on the USA. That day I carried out my last conversation with

my father until four years later, when he came to New York.

Rabbi Wolbe assisted my father in his work. My father knew a number of Latin American diplomats, especially the Mexican and Ecuadorian Ambassadors, who offered their cooperation. I have met Jews in Holland who told me that they were saved by getting South American passports through the help of "a Swedish Jew"—referring, of course, to my father.

My father undertook another difficult mission: shortly before VE Day in May, 1945, he travelled to Moscow, as the very first Western Jew to be admitted to that war-torn country. He managed to call together leading rabbis and community leaders, headed by the late Rabbi Sorotzkin, and gave them the comfort and courage to look forward to early resumption of contact with their Jewish brethren around the world.

When thousands of survivors, especially women survivors from Ravensbrueck concentration camp, came to Sweden, Rabbi Wolbe, assisted by Rabbi Wolf Jacobson of Copenhagen, established a home and school for hundreds of them on the island of Lidingoe, outside Stockholm. Among them was the daughter of Rabbi Avrohom Grodzensky, ר"ח (the last *Rosh Yeshiva* of Slobodka), whom Rabbi Wolbe ultimately married. They later moved to Eretz Yisroel, where Rabbi Wolbe today is the undisputed head of the *Mussar* movement. Everything is *hashgacha*.

The Towering Personality

The towering personality throughout the War was, of course, Rabbi Kalmanowitz. In the book *The Morgenthau*, by Henry Morgenthau III, there is a detailed description of Rabbi Kalmanowitz's efforts to persuade the Secretary of the Treasury to bend the rules and facilitate rescue work in occupied Europe. The book describes Rabbi Kalmanowitz as a giant of a man; actually, he was short, but his long beard and dramatic, dynamic personality, endowing him with an imposing physical presence, giving him the appearance of a Biblical prophet.

Rabbi Kalmanowitz was equally



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enthusiastic and totally dedicated as a *shtadlan*, as when he gave a *shiur*. I remember vividly the several occasions when Mr. Mendlowitz had invited him to Mesivta Torah Vodaath to give *shiurim*.

Among those who had been saved through these rescue efforts was Rabbi Aharon Kotler. I don't think there ever were as many Jewish people in New York City's Pennsylvania Station as when Reb Aharon arrived by train from the West Coast. The whole yeshiva world of America came to greet him in person.

When my father arrived in New York in October, 1945, he gave a full report to Reb Ahron and his associates in the Vaad Hatzala. A great Swedish patriot, he gave a glowing tribute to the Swedish King and those officials who had helped Jews. (That, of course, did not include the Reform Rabbi Dr. Marcus Ehrenpreis who, together with heads of the Reform congregation, had only obstructed the admission of Jewish refugees in to Sweden.)

It should be noted that the great and dedicated men of the Vaad Hatzala made no distinction as to whether they worked for the rescue of a Chassidic *Rebbe* or a Lithuanian *Rosh Yeshiva*. They had burning zeal to save every single Jew. (I remember specifically how they pored over a telegram that spoke of the location of the Bobover *Rebbe*, and discussed ways to help him escape.)

History will long remember the unmatched dedication and *mesiras nefesh* of these giants of our people. The inspiration that every generation can derive from them will be everlasting.

DR. MANFRED R. LEHMANN
Miami Beach, Florida

REQUEST FOR SOURCE FOR CELESTIAL PERSPECTIVES

To the Editor:

It would be most enlightening to know how Horav Hagoan Rav Aharon Kotler, זצ"ל, who was *niftar* in 1962, appointed Reb Shraga Grossbard, ז"ל, to head Chinuch Atzmai in 1967. Kindly supply the details of how you were privy to this information.

As great as I think the JO is, I never dreamed that the *ישיבה של מעלה* was the source for the articles published therein.

CHANA YUDKOWSKY
Brooklyn, NY

Response:

Rabbi Aharon Kotler, זצ"ל, met Reb Shraga in the summer of 1962, and, deeply impressed with him, shared with his son, Reb Shneur, זצ"ל, his hope to enlist his talents for Chinuch Atzmai. In 1967, when Reb Shneur accompanied Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky and Rabbi Yitzchok Ruderman, זצ"ל, on a mission to *Eretz Yisroel* on behalf of Chinuch Atzmai, he told them of his father's hopes, and the three acted on them. Our source (this time) is Rabbi Henach Cohen, executive director of the American Office of Chinuch Atzmai since 1955.

CORRECTION:

In the introduction to the article on the *Daf Hayomi* (Oct. '93), inadvertently a few small errors were made: the biography of Rav Meir Shapiro, זצ"ל, was translated from the unpublished Yiddish manuscript by Rabbi Charles Wengrov; Martin H. Stern served as General Editor. It was originally planned to appear in late November, but publication has been delayed, so that it can undergo the careful technical editing that a book of this importance deserves. And the tentative title is *A Blaze in the Darkening Gloom*.

Editor's Note:

Letters to the editor must be signed to be considered for publication. Names can then be withheld upon request.

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And tuck me in at night.
You help me say my "Shema,"
And then shut off the light.
Oh my Polish Lady,
You are so good to me.
With a guardian such as you,
For what do I need Mommy?
To the Editor:

I worked as a counselor in a hotel.
What I saw shocked me. There were
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November 3, 1993

Mr. Marvin Lender, Chairman
Ms. Shoshana S. Cardin, Vice Chairman
Commission on Jewish Identity and Continuity
730 Broadway
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Dear Mr. Lender and Ms. Cardin:

I write in response to your letter of October 11, inviting me to serve as a member of the North American Commission on Jewish Identity and Continuity. Please forgive me for not responding before today; your invitation raised important and sensitive questions, for which I needed to consult with the rabbinic leadership of the Agudath Israel movement, and that took some time.

You and the other persons involved in this new venture are to be commended for recognizing the urgent need to address the alarming loss of Jewish identity through the plagues of assimilation, ignorance and intermarriage that have taken such a heavy toll on the contemporary American Jewish community. I sincerely wish you well. With regret, however, I must decline your invitation to become a member of the Commission.

In our view, the problems imperiling Jewish continuity cannot seriously be attacked by pretending that "virtually every segment of the Jewish community" can come together under one banner to develop a common approach to these problems. When there is such a fundamental divergence of perspective regarding the source of the problems, there is simply no way that a meaningful consensus can be developed regarding the necessary solutions.

Your letter of October 11 says that the Commission "has been created with the full support of the key continental organizations of both the federated system and major religious movements." I do not know which "key continental organization" of the Orthodox movement was involved in the creation of this Commission. Certainly Agudath Israel's first introduction to the Commission came only when you sent me your letter of October 11. In fact, I must confess that I wonder how any of the major Orthodox organizations could go along with the creation of an Orthodox-Conservative-Reform-Reconstructionist-Secular Jewish body to combat the plagues of assimilation, ignorance and intermarriage.

My firm conviction that there can be no mutually agreed upon consensus approach among "virtually every segment of the Jewish community" to the problems that beset us may seem pessimistic, but it is painfully realistic. Consider the developments at the recent Reform conclave, at which Rabbi Alexander Schindler called for a major proselytizing effort directed at non-Jews, as a means of building up Jewish numbers. By embracing an approach that is profoundly anti-halachic, and that can only lead to further erosion of any legitimate sense of Jewish peoplehood, Rabbi Schindler and the Reform movement have made it even more preposterous to think about developing a common approach among all Jews toward ensuring Jewish survival.

I have used this characterization in the past, and I have been criticized for it, but I believe it to be absolutely apt: When a fire is raging, one does not turn to the arsonist who set the fire for solutions on how to put it out.

Within the Orthodox community there are numerous examples of outstanding outreach programs that have reached many thousands of Jewish souls. This type of outreach, which proudly portrays Judaism in all its unadulterated glory, provides the only valid approach to the problems your Commission will seek to address. Anything less than classical Judaism can not and will not stem the hemorrhaging that our people are suffering.

Sadly, but clearly, any body consisting of representatives from all elements of the Jewish community would not be prepared to accept these "extreme" views. Were I to join your Commission, I am afraid that mine would be a lonely voice in the wilderness—an uncomfortably confrontational one at that—whose input into your deliberations would have little if any impact.

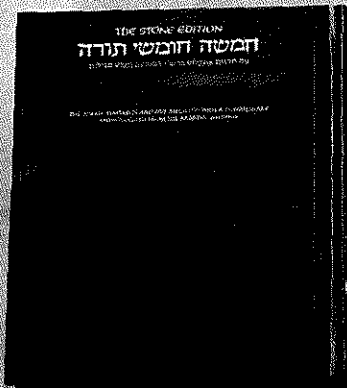
In closing, let me state that I very much appreciated receiving your invitation. Your effort to reach out to us reflects your commendable recognition that the constituency represented by Agudath Israel deserves at least a seat at the table when issues of Jewish continuity are being discussed. However, as I have indicated in this letter, it is impossible for us to come to the table when many of the persons with whom we are being asked to formulate a response to the tragedies of our time, themselves bear heavy responsibility for those very tragedies, and regrettably are so blind to the destructive nature of their entire approach to Judaism.

As always, the two of you have my kind regards and every best wish.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Moshe Sherer
President

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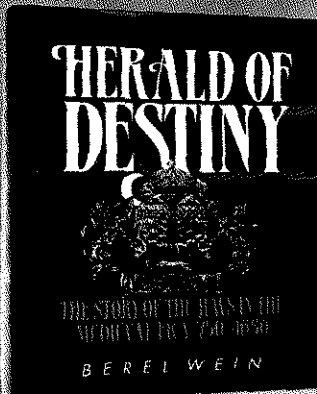
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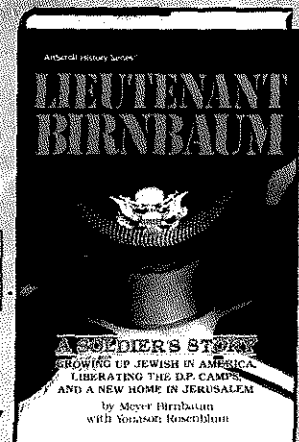
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