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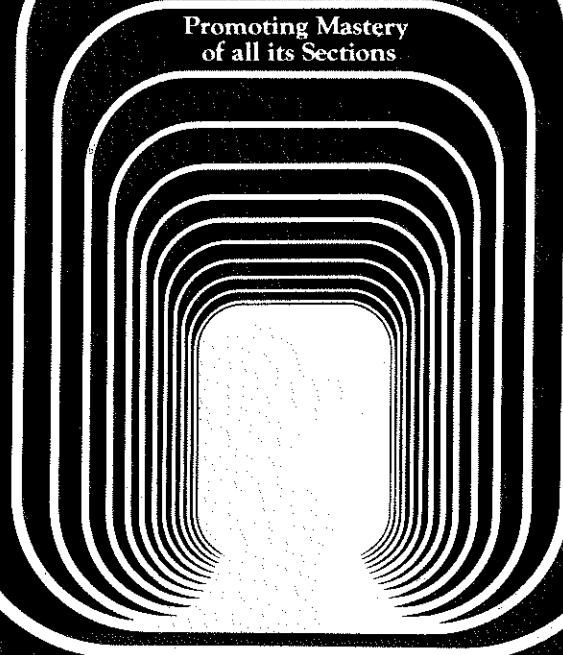
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Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe
on the Mussar Experience

The Life and Times
of Reb Yisroel Salanter

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The Relevance of the Teachings of Reb Yisroel Salanter זצ"ל



Photo: Kalman Zanis

RABBI SHLOMO WOLBE, שליט"א, one of the foremost Mussar figures of our times, was for many years Mashgiach of the Yeshiva of Beer Yaakov, Israel, and currently heads a Beis Hamussar, which he established in Jerusalem. He has published a number of works including *Alei Shur*, a guide to yeshiva students in their striving for spiritual growth.

The following is based on an address Rabbi Wolbe gave at the 41st Annual Convention of Torah Umesorah—the National Society for Hebrew Day Schools.

What is *Mussar*? Why did Reb Yisroel Salanter consider *Mussar* so vital? Is there a way to impress the relevance of *Mussar* upon our masses, as a way of life, as a desperate need?

Many have a skeptical attitude towards *Mussar*: *Mussar* promotes a pessimistic, black outlook on life. *Mussar* accentuates the imperfections of man, and perpetuates guilt and depression.

Rather than trace the cause of these distortions, let us instead portray *Mussar* as a colorful, trailblazing way of life. Let us recapture in some small way the grandeur and the splendor of Reb Yisroel's teachings and redeem them—change them from being a dead, historical artifact into a desperately relevant guide for our trying times; a treasure that we cannot afford to squander; a dynamic force that can guide our straying youth and rebuild our threatened homes.

In Search of Reality

People drift from one cause to another, unsure of where they are heading, principals in an aimless pursuit. The tragedy of it all is not so much in the energy spent on this blind, aimless motion as in the lack of a clear goal. There is only one way to correct this and that is by achieving clarity—a true perception of what one desires from life, which can only result from an earnest striving for *Emes*.

Cynics dismiss the *Emes* perspective as a bleak, negative view of things. True, it does identify the futile and the worthless, but that is only part of it. *Emes* means confronting the simple, unvarnished truth, whether obvious or concealed. But most of all, it means identifying man's true potential, and having the constant awareness of how to reach it. In the ultimate, it means assuming G-d's view of the world and thereby coming to embracing Him, for G-d has chosen *Emes* as His seal.

This article was translated and prepared for publication by Rabbi Naftoli Bassman, a member of the Kollel of Beis Medrash Govoha, Lakewood, New Jersey.

In this world so fraught with illusion, the only way to gain a perspective of *Emes* is through Torah; and this is extremely difficult to achieve, just as it is difficult to maintain. The rabbis tell us that even the most accomplished Torah scholar can only be confident of where his next step takes him as long as he is totally immersed in Torah. One momentary deviation and illusion sets in. . . . Tricky, slippery, and elusive—yes. But once the *Emes* perspective is achieved, the potential to set towering goals and achieve them come into one's grasp. This is the beauty of the *Mussar* approach to life.

Shedding Illusions—Painful Yet Joyful

There is great comfort in doing things by inertia—the illusion that "all's well" and nothing needs correction. By contrast, introspection and self-improvement can be very painful at times. Recognizing one's own faults and then purging oneself of them is far from pleasant. But on the other hand, there is no other way to achieve perfection in all its glory. Indeed, life's truly worthwhile goals are only realized through struggle. Torah, *Eretz Yisroel* and the World-to-Come, we are told, can only be won through *yesurim*, personal sacrifice, trial and tribulation. A high price, yes. But when we set our hearts on something truly valuable, price ceases to be a consideration, as long as our focus is on our goal.

This is the touchstone of the *Mussar* experience: concentrate on the attainment of purity, spirituality and eternal life; rejection of this-worldly pursuits and recognizing the futility of material happiness—these are merely by-products of the ascent toward perfection. Shedding illusions is one of the simple, joyful aspects of reaching for truth.

Reb Yisroel's Approach

Mussar, then, involves two goals: getting in touch with reality and purifying our lives. Simply stated, these involve personal revolutions—in perspective, in goal-setting, and in action. But where does one begin?

Reb Yisroel Salanter, a master of insight into human potential, charted the course for this complete change in personality. Where others faced opacity and a static condition, he had a clear, deep view of a dynamic situation. What others were later to discover as subconscious layers of snares and pitfalls embedded within the human personality, he recognized as deep wellsprings of potent forces for improvement and change. These depths, according to Reb Yisroel, could be tapped by harnessing one's powerful intellect, and then relating its pure mental concepts to a person's deepest emotions through "*hispaalus*."

Hispaalus—not easily described, but once experienced, not quickly forgotten—is the penetration of the heart by the excitement of the mind, an amalgam of intellect and emotion through a profound sense of wonder. *Wonder*—that is the key word. . . . How is it achieved? By coaxing the cold intellect into a spark, and fanning the spark until it bursts into a searing flame. . . . Making the remote immediate, telescoping the distant, the obscure, and magnifying it through the concentrated focus of all human faculties—emotion and intellect, heart and soul. . . . It is the mining of the unconscious for untapped reserves of strength and creativity, purifying them, changing the unchangeable, melding frailties into powerful, surging forces. *Hispaalus* is Reb Yisroel's quintessential ingredient in the alchemy of human change through *Mussar*.*

How the Changes Come

With this weapon, man can attack the three most troublesome areas where imperfection is deeply embedded in the sub-conscious: mechanical performance of *mitzvos*, imperfect faith, and corrupt character traits. Striving for perfection, man can rise to the task.

A *Mussar* approach affects the full range of one's life activities. But for a long while, the changes are too subtle to be noticed. They are internal, undetected. Ultimately, however, a new, highly disciplined person will emerge—the *baal Mussar*, who has succeeded in internalizing the Torah's sacred teachings.

Change, however, is not brought about by intellect and emotion alone; action must also be involved. Seemingly insignificant spoken messages, acts of kindness to another person, self-control in difficult situations—all of these contribute to the formation of a new person. Whereas *hispaalus* drives straight to the core of the sub-conscious, altering the *source* of behavior patterns, action works on the *whole* man, and together, through study

and practice, a perfected human being emerges, strengthened on all levels.

Mussar: A Multi-Faceted Experience

Mussar should not be thought of as a one-dimensional experience. First of all, the activity phase of *Mussar*, which represents the individual's interaction with different situations, will be as varied as are the people who walk the earth, compounded by the variety of challenges they encounter. Opportunities for *chessed* and demands for restraint are never identical. Moreover, in an essay, Reb Simcha Zissel Ziv** describes how the internal syllabus of *Mussar* must adjust to individual needs of each person at each particular juncture in life: sometimes lifting the person up to reality, sometimes bringing him down to reality. The inflexible person, who sees inconsistencies in the various facets of *Mussar*, is actually denying himself the heady experience of encountering truth in all its expressions.

Need for a Mentor

We must realize: in our groping for reality, there is no stronger exposure to reality than through a teacher of reality. In our search for purity, there is no greater purifying force than the living example of a pure person. In our thirst for the intense *Mussar* experience, there is no substitute for the authentic example. In our desire for self-understanding, there is nothing more enlightening than the encouragement and understanding of a wise heart. And in grappling with our daily dilemmas and challenges, there is nothing as nurturing as a guiding hand.

All these point to the need for a mentor. This is much more pressing a need in *Mussar* than in *halacha*, where once a clearly stated directive is mastered it can be followed without further guidance: Once you have learned the details of *Hilchos Netilas Yodayim* (regarding laving hands for eating bread), for instance, you are in a position to honor them consistently. *Mussar* involves approaching lofty spiritual realms, dealing with abstract concepts. Day-to-day guidance is needed to understand these abstract concepts and then apply them to the temptations and challenges of the real world; constant counseling is required to follow a gradual but firm course in rising toward perfection.

The Levels of Human Attainment

Reb Yisroel's teachings emphasize man's glorious potential, a goal that cries out for a model of perfection. Yechezkel the Prophet was a paradigm of human achievement. After he prophesied on the *Maaseh Merkava*, describing the Heavenly Majesty in minute detail, the angels themselves were so overwhelmed, they were forced to remind themselves that Yechezkel was but a

*Reb Yisroel would make a practice of repeating a key phrase, such as "Envy, lust, and honor remove a person from life" (*Avos*), countless times in a soul-penetrating chant while concentrating on the implications of the statement.

**revered "Alter of Kelm," one of Reb Yisroel's outstanding disciples.

mortal. So they called him *Ben Adam*—"son of man," which became his title. As the *Ben Adam par excellence*, he so personified the best that man can achieve that he resembled the human face engraved on the Divine Throne: "And upon the image of the throne (was) an image like the appearance of Man. . . ."

The *Malbim* commented that when man reaches the ideal state, his two levels of cognition and action—one of reason and the other of strength of character as expressed in behavior patterns—coincide. אתם קרואים אדם—"You are called Man"—the totally disciplined Jew represents this achievement, as exemplified by Yechezkel.

On the other hand, Bilaam intellectually did attain the level of *יודע דעת עליון*—"He was aware of the Divine thinking," an amazing attainment! Yet he was also a symbol of depravity—the embodiment of arrogance and corruption (see *Apos V:22*). Obviously, he was incapable of integrating lofty concepts with physical drives and passions, and instead, functioned quite differently, on two separate levels.

The role of *Mussar* is to bring the two levels into harmony with each other. Again, the mentor's perceptive heart and guiding hand are required to set the intellectual level of study and to lead the individual in his rising level of activity.

A Crucial Time, A Restless Generation

Our contemporary situation fairly cries for a resurgence of *Mussar*. Even the strongest individual is influenced by his environment, affecting his tastes, attitudes, and sense of belonging. Today's turbulent society—an extreme situation—can be described as being molded by a number of factors, but one readily thinks of several that stem from seminal thinkers and cataclysmic events of the last century. For instance: • Karl Marx, father of dialectical materialism, set the tone for a society that relegates spirituality and culture to secondary status, leaving its mark not only on the USSR and its satellites, but on a universal stress on materialism. • Charles Darwin's theory of evolution flies in the face of Jewry's constant challenge: "When will my achievements ever reach those of my forebears," encouraging man to negate tradition, while viewing himself as an end-product of animalistic drives and instincts. • Sigmund Freud portrays man as being driven by raging forces beyond his awareness and often beyond his control, rejecting a counterforce of spirituality. • Add to these the mounting dependence of man on his mechanical creations, and the resultant sense of alienation that he is experiencing. From these forces emerges the Man of the 80's: void of spirituality, void of identity, void of direction—a picture of egoism and aimless insecurity.

When under duress, Jews have always drawn strength from their sense of continuity from noble precedents. The destruction of World War II not only involved the tragic annihilation of the Six Million, it left future generations without role models and without roots. As a

result, many of our youth are virtually helpless to deal with even minor crises. They cannot contemplate taking serious steps in life without someone holding their hand. . . . The Jewish marriage and the Jewish home are not the certain successes they were fifty years ago. . . . Our needs are greater than ever, and our capabilities smaller. Where do we turn for help?

An Idea Whose Time Has Come Again

The searching members of our generation deserve an inspiring type of guidance such as Reb Yisroel had once offered. We must make them aware of the dualistic approach to man—that as his mind can soar to the highest levels, so can his emotional make-up. He must be encouraged to discard false humility, resignation, and despair, and dare strive for spiritual growth and mastery over his own destiny. A hundred and forty years ago, Reb Yisroel helped others achieve this goal through the introduction of the *Beis Hamussar*—a retreat for study and contemplation for self-improvement—tailored to meet the needs of the masses. Reb Simcha Zissel and his disciples carried on this sensitizing approach within the walls of the yeshivos—and this has been the task of the *Mashgiach*, the Yeshiva's resident guide, in the years since. But the *Beis Hamussar* for the broader masses has ceased to exist. It is time to revitalize this institution to serve everybody, from the young people floundering for lack of an anchorage in reality to members of the older generation in need of intelligent guidance.

It was said that when a town had a *Beis Hamussar*, no curse word was heard in its fish market. We, too, must reconstruct the *Beis Hamussar* for our own times, and elevate our entire communities. The crucial figure is the leader who sets the tone, establishes the relationships with those who frequent the *Beis Hamussar*, and serves as a living representation of their strivings. Lectures and workshops should be scheduled, focusing on three broad target areas:

- **the family**, ranging from *hadracha* counseling for *chasanim* to guidance for intelligent parenting, to special sessions for *baalei teshuva* to ease them into the myriad aspects of Torah life;
- **delving into classical texts**, such as Yehuda Halevi's *Kuzari* and Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato's *Derech Hashem*;
- **sessions for the individual** who yearns to reach his fullest potential and does not fear change. Nothing promotes growth as much as the interaction between searcher and guide.

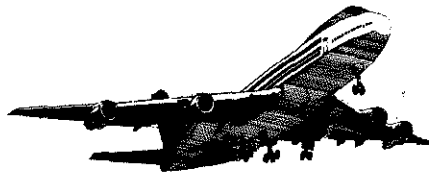
A hundred years have passed since Reb Yisroel Salanter graced the scene. This milestone offers an opportunity to contemplate . . . and then embark on the adventure of setting sail from the comfort of illusory moorings, and reaching out for reality . . . to risk growth at the cost of difficulty and pain . . . to learn how to aspire to new attainments, and to realize them. J.T.

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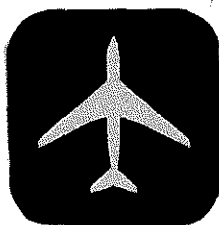
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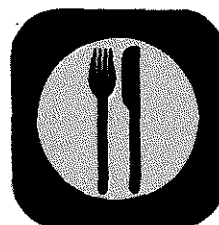
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"He Looked Into the Torah and Fashioned Man"

An Examination of the Life and Accomplishments of Reb Yisroel Salanter—A Century After His Passing

The Magnificent Forest

Upon becoming engaged to Reb Yisroel Salanter's granddaughter, the prospective groom, Reb Chaim Ozer Grodzenski, wrote a lengthy, involved *shlickel Torah* (discourse) to his future father-in-law.¹ Reb Yisroel responded to his own son-in-law:² "I am convinced that you have selected an outstanding Torah scholar as a *chassan* for my granddaughter. But it is written, (*Devarim*, 22:10) 'את בתי נתתי לאיש הזה' . . . My daughter I have given to this (*Ish*) man . . . ' First let us establish that he is worthy of the title '*Ish (Mensch)*'."

This incident summarizes Reb Yisroel's goal in the founding of the *Mussar* Movement. For as G-d had created Man, Man in turn must create the *Mensch* within himself. Reb Yisroel sought the *Mensch* in every man, and when a layer of sin obstructed the *Mensch*, he taught the world how to find him. Further, just as G-d used the Torah as a blueprint for creation,³ so did Reb Yisroel understand that the development of the ideal *Mensch* must also come from the Torah alone. Thus, Reb Yisroel's genius equipped him to be *מסתכל באוריתא ובורא איש* to delve into the most hidden recesses of Torah literature to rediscover the once obvious, to forge the Torah-*Mensch*.

Dozens of books and articles have been written about Reb Yisroel. Storybooks tend to depict him as the kindly saint, not comprehending that his *בין אדם לחברו*, his *tzidkus* (righteousness) in dealing with others was but an aspect of his *בין אדם למקום*, his service of G-d.⁴ . . . Others condensed a multi-faceted *Gaon Hador* (outstanding scholar of his generation) into just a pioneering *Baal Mussar* (teacher of ethics)—seeing all his colors through

a monochromatic lens, doing a disservice to his name as well as to their own cause. . . . And, of course, modern literary psychoanalysts presume too much and end up seeing too little.

Today, a century after his passing, let us look back at Reb Yisroel, whom Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk called *מעין הראשונים* "akin to a *Rishon*" (the great Early Commentators of 11-15 Centuries). Let us catch a glimpse of his unrivaled stature in Torah and *Yiras Shomayim* (Fear of Heaven), his greatness of mind; his sensitivity of spirit and his genius of heart, his keenness of insight, his creativity of thought and his daring in action. But above all, let us acquaint ourselves with the forest, instead of being overwhelmed by its own trees.

The Early Impact

The facts have all been recorded. Reb Yisroel was born in the fall of 5570 (1809)⁵ in Zager⁶ a provincial town near Kovno, Lithuania, to a prestigious rabbinic family. . . . Recognized as a prodigy, he was sent, at the age of 12, to study under the celebrated *Gaon* of Salant, Reb Hirsch Braude, who came to refer to him as "*Alfasi Kattan*."⁷ Rabbi Akiva Eiger lauded the *chiddushim* (novellae) he produced in his teens as "*Gaonus She'b'Gaonus*"—

Notes and Sources

1. See *Sheilos U'Tshuvos Achiezer*, III, No. 53.

2. Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Grodnanski, *Rav* in Vilna, and disciple of Reb Yisroel.

3. *Midrash Rabba* to *Bereishis* I, and see R"Dal ad. loc.

4. *Ohr HaMussar* I, 77-78, quoting his great disciple Reb Naftoli Amsterdam.

5. As obvious from the text of his tombstone in Koenigsberg, reprinted in *Ir Vilna*, pg. 128.

6. *Tnuas HaMussar*, Vol. I, pg. 138, gloss. 4

7. A reference to Rabbi Yitzchok Alfasi, towering Talmudic scholar of 11th Century Fez, in North Africa.

Rabbi Geldwerth, a member of the faculty and administration of Yeshiva Torah Temimah in Brooklyn, wrote a biography of the Tshetbiner Rav that was published in *Judaism's* THE TORAH WORLD.



Rametilles Yeshiva in Vilna, where Reb Yisroel taught.

absolutely ingenious. Reb Yisroel was married when 15 and his young wife cared for their livelihood while he developed into a rare *talmid chacham* with a widely admired approach in *pilpul*.

During the eighteen years that Salant was his home, one moment in particular changed his life and eventually revolutionized the Torah world:

Reb Yosef Zundel (1788-1868), a disciple of Reb Chaim Volozhiner, was a man whose saintliness was hidden from the average eye. Yet young Yisroel took notice of him and developed close contact with him. Yisroel realized, however, that he could see only what Reb Zundel would permit him to see. So he tried to observe him undetected, from afar, following him out to the fields when Reb Zundel would retreat there for contemplation. Once Reb Zundel noticed him and exhorted him: "Yisroel, learn Mussar and become a Yerei Shomayim!"⁸

Reb Yisroel would relate years later, that this particular moment had an everlasting impact on him. As his close disciple, Reb Itzel Blazer, later described the incident: "When he heard his master's command to learn *Mussar*, it entered his innermost heart like a fire; he then began this study of *Mussar*." "From that day on he cleaved to his mentor, until Reb Zundel moved to Jerusalem."⁹

⁸. *Nesivos Ohr* p. 124

⁹. See *Nesivos Ohr*, 111

¹⁰. Related by Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky זצ"ל in an interview granted for preparing this article.

No One Hidden—From His Wisdom

At first, Reb Yisroel planned to emulate his master as a *nistar* (a hidden saint), to move to a community where he was not known and to assume a humble position, such as a water carrier. The first requirement he set for himself was to master the entire *Shas* (Talmud) by heart. When halfway through *Shas*, he abandoned his plan, for he realized that his generation had greater need for an active leader to exert his influence amongst the broadest of circles, than for a saintly recluse.⁹

Reb Naftoli Amsterdam, one of his leading disciples, later commented: "The Rebbe at first wished to be a *nistar*, and then reconsidered. In the long run, however, he succeeded and the true measure of his greatness, always remained hidden from others."¹⁰

A Pattern of Change and Consistency

While tracing the various stages in Reb Yisroel's life, a striking feature that emerges is his willingness to make radical changes, whenever he found such necessary—by virtue of a shift in circumstances or because of his reassessment of his personal goals. For example, during his early years, Reb Yisroel decided to veer away totally from *pilpul*, in which he had gained expertise and widespread admiration. He had felt that he was sacrificing

truth for the personal gratification gained from the intellectual stimulation of the *pilpul* approach. Eventually he returned to *pilpul* because he feared a tendency toward arrogance and complacency in expecting to determine the *Gemora's* meaning by only concentrating on the page before him. . . . Other striking examples of change will follow.

At the same time, one is struck by the multiplicity of activities he undertook over the years, in so many different locales. Yet they were all unified by one underlying commitment—to help people probe beyond the surface, to bring out their inner greatness. The chronological account that follows traces the variety of activities he pursued toward this one goal.

Taking Vilna By Storm

Reb Yisroel and his close friend Reb Shmuel Salant (Reb Zundel's son-in-law, later famous as *Rav* of Yerushalayim) had together resolved not to accept any rabbinic posts; for example, they both rejected separate bids from the prestigious community of Brisk. Yet when invited to give *shiurim* in Rameillas Yeshiva in Vilna in 1840, he accepted, replacing Rabbi Eliezer Teitz, famed disciple of Rabbi Akiva Eiger. Thus, Reb Yisroel entered the lives of the Jews of Vilna, the Jerusalem of Lithuania, to leave an unforgettable impact on it.

Reb Yisroel took the people of Vilna by storm—especially its yeshiva *bachurim*—through his brilliant lectures—reverting to *pilpul* again, as he saw fit—and his *Mussar* discourses. But Reb Yisroel feared that his success was creating envy among fellow faculty members; so he left Rameillas Yeshiva to lecture in another *beis midrash*.¹¹

During this period, he attracted the attention of his peers and won the deference of such outstanding scholars as Reb Izek'el Charif and Rabbi Yoseif Dov Soloveitchik, author of *Beis Halevi*¹². He also published a number of lesser-known *Mussar* works. Reb Yisroel then began lecturing for *baalei battim* (laymen)—shoemakers, porters and wagon-drivers flocked to his talks, as he considered each audience and addressed them on their own level.

At that time, *Maggidus* (preaching: See Chaim Shapiro's "Words From the Heart," JO April '81) no longer played the commanding role it did a century earlier; *rabbanim* left it to wandering, lesser luminaries. Reb Yisroel, coupling a magnificent gift of speech with a heartening simplicity, raised the standard of *Maggidus* to its former glory.

He organized more knowledgeable *baalei battim* into groups to study the *Mussar* classics *Mesillas Yeshorim* and *Chovos Halevavos* with greater depth, and established his first *Beis Hamussar*, a room set aside to serve as a retreat from worldly turmoil, dedicated to the study and absorption of *Yiras Shomayim* (fear of G-d). Not meant to

replace a *Beis Haknesses* or *Beis Hamidrash*, but to supplement them, this *Mussar* retreat was close enough to the *Beis Hamidrash* to avoid loss of time spent in study.

Reb Yisroel viewed the *Beis Hamussar* as both a "clinic"—following the Rambam's approach to human frailty in character or *Yiras Shomayim* as a disease-condition¹³—and as a haven in the swirling winds of contemporary corruption, as he wrote: "Enter this fortress, draw the bridge up behind you, and leave the world beyond the moat!"¹⁴

Controversy in Vilna

Two unforeseen developments rocked Reb Yisroel's stay in Vilna. The first was related to Reb Yisroel's attitude toward matters of health. He accepted doctors' orders as *halacha* (Torah law), implicit in the command of "ושמרתם מאד את נפשותיכם" "And you shall guard your lives" (*Devarim* 4:15). When health concerns conflicted with other *halachos*, he usually decided with a consistent leniency as far as the latter was concerned. He seemed to share Reb Chaim Brisker's view: "I am not lenient in regard to *Shabbos* or Yom Kippur; rather I am stringent in the law of preserving a life!"¹⁵

Since Reb Yisroel never rendered any halachic decisions in Vilna, not even for his own household,¹⁶ he must have experienced enormous conflict during the peak of a cholera epidemic that devastated Vilna in late summer 1848. Reb Yisroel had committed himself to the city's welfare and rented hospital quarters with 500 beds, with his own *talmidim* nursing the stricken around the clock, seven days a week, with patient care on *Shabbos* the same as on the other days of the week. As Yom Kippur approached, he feared that the fast would weaken the people and make them dangerously susceptible to the often-fatal disease. Reb Yisroel hung placards throughout Vilna urging all who felt weak to eat on the fast day, to stave off any threat. He did this without consulting others because he apparently realized that he would not gain a consensus for such a radical, yet essential move. Immediately after *Shacharis* on Yom Kippur, he himself rose to the *bima*, and according to some accounts, publicly made *Kiddush* and ate some cakes, so as to encourage all who should to follow suit. Needless to say, there were great protests, but Reb Yisroel ignored them and reportedly made his way to other *shuls* as well, to urge others to join him.¹⁷

¹¹ R. Dovid Luria, see *Nesivos Ohr*, 109.

¹² T.H.M. I, p.150, gl. 5

¹³ *Shemona Perakim*

¹⁴ *Ohr Yisroel*, letters no. 5, 6, etc.

¹⁵ *Ishim Veshitos*, Zevin, pp. 64-65

¹⁶ *Sridei Aish*, IV,289. Some have attributed Reb Yisroel's reluctance to serve as a *Rav* to his having arrived at halachic conclusions different from many established local *minhagim*. T.H.M. 377.

¹⁷ T.H.M. I, 160-161, no. 8 for sources.

This daring episode provoked strong and mixed reactions in different circles, and was long debated.¹⁸ For all its esteem for him, the *Beis Din* of Vilna summoned Reb Yisroel for an uncomfortable exchange,¹⁹ with Reb Yisroel demonstrating clearly that his command of Torah knowledge put him beyond their ability to challenge him.

Pressure From the Haskallah

At that time, the impact of the German *Haskallah* (the Enlightenment Movement,) which was enamored with secular culture) was beginning to make its mark on Russian Jewry, especially in Vilna. The *Maskillim* prevailed on the Russian government to help them revamp the traditional *Chinuch* by demanding changes in curriculum, and they succeeded in opening several of their own elementary schools, as well as a Rabbinical Seminary in Vilna. They promoted an education that synthesized Jewish and secular knowledge for motives that went beyond a "broader education"; they were aiming at reshaping the minds and hearts of the youth, distorting the true face of Judaism.

The *Maskillim* were attracted to Reb Yisroel by his all-encompassing knowledge and were fascinated by his independence and originality, but they had totally misunderstood him and his attitudes toward *halacha*. The *Maskillim* brought considerable pressures upon him to serve as head of their Seminary. Russian Minister of Education Avaroff even interrupted one of his *shiurim* to try to influence him with magnificent offers.²⁰

Some *Rabbonim* argued that Reb Yisroel, with his rare gifts, was the only one who could save the situation and

rechart the course of this ill-conceived Rabbinical Seminary, but Reb Yisroel adamantly refused. On the one hand, he was confident that the Seminary did not have staying power, and was not worthy of the effort required to attempt to lead it properly. Moreover, in a letter to Rabbi Yaakov Lipschitz (later secretary to Kovno Rav, Rabbi Yitzchok Elchonon Spector זצ"ל), he explained his philosophy of unadulterated *rabbanus*: "... knowledge of *Shulchan Aruch* and piety is not sufficient. ... For *psak* we require *Gedolei Torah!*"²¹—and these would not emerge from a *Haskallah*-oriented seminary.

The pressures brought to bear upon Reb Yisroel to head this institution made his continued stay in Vilna unbearable, so he left for Kovno in the winter of 1848. ... Reb Yisroel was eventually vindicated, for the government later deemed the Vilna Seminary and its counterparts in other cities ineffective, and shut them all down in 1873.²²

The Kovno Years

Upon his arrival in Kovno, Reb Yisroel was engaged by the elders of the city²³ to supervise "all matters relating to piety," a position he soon left²⁴ to become Kovno's "official *Maggid*"²⁵. The *Rav*, Rabbi Leib Shapiro זצ"ל,²⁶ had insisted that Reb Yisroel only come to Kovno if he assumed some official capacity there.²⁷ Reb Yisroel obviously found this position a fitting forum from which to disseminate his *Mussar* approach. Yet, this too came to a quick end, presumably due to the anti-*Mussar* sentiments, which he had hardly experienced in Vilna.²⁸

A New Field of Endeavor

Despite setbacks, Reb Yisroel maintained his vision. He once wrote: "Give me ten great disciples, and I will alter the face of our time and revolutionize the Jewish world!"²⁹ and this call did not go unheeded. A well-known philanthropist, Tzvi Neveizer,³⁰ supplied the necessary means for Reb Yisroel to open a new *Beis Hamidrash*. Some 150 students flocked to this new Torah center, including a number of future Torah leaders—Rabbi Eliezer Gordon (later *Rav* and *Rosh HaYeshiva* of Telshe), Rabbi Yaakov Yoseph (*Maggid* of Vilna and Chief Rabbi of New York City), Rabbi Yitzchok Blazer (*Rav* of Petersburg), Rabbi Yerucham Leib Perelman (the "*Minsker Gadol*"), Rabbi Naftoli Amsterdam (*Rav* of Helsingfors, Finland), Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv ("Alter of Kelem"), Rabbi Shlomo Dovid Grodzinski (*Rav* of Ivye, father of Reb Chaim Ozer of Vilna), to mention some of the better-known disciples.

Reb Yisroel was, indeed, a unique *Rebbi*. His concern for his *talmidim* encompassed all aspects of their lives. In his yeshiva, he did away with the belittling system of

¹⁸ Rabbi Boruch Ber Lebowitz, many years later, said a *shiur* to analyze the *halacha* in question.

¹⁹ Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky related details to the writer, as transmitted to him by Rabbi Dovid Lebowitz זצ"ל who had heard the report from the Chofetz Chaim זצ"ל who had been in Vilna at the time.

²⁰ See T.H.M., I, 164.

²¹ *Zichron Yaakov* III, 132. See T.H.M. I, 165-169 in detail.

²² Atkes, *ibid.*, pg. 191, cites a contemporaneous letter written in Vilna from the Ginsburg Archives referring to the appointment of a dean to the Seminary "in place of the Salanter who fled to Kovna."

²³ See *Shvil HaZahav* of R. Mordechai Eliasberg, introductory chapters by his son Yonassan, p. XII (Warsaw: 1897)

²⁴ *Nesivos Ohr* p. 113

²⁵ Reb Naftoli Amsterdam in *Ohr HaMussar*, I, 78.

²⁶ Father of Rabbi Raphael Volozhiner—father-in-law of Reb Chaim Brisker and son-in-law of the N'tziv.

²⁷ T.H.M. I, 179-180

²⁸ See *L'Toldos HaYehudim B'Kovno* by Lipmann (Kaidon: 1931) pg. 228. *Shvil HaZahav* XVI. For full perspective of the *Mussar* conflicts of that time, see *Pulmus HaMussar*, by Rabbi Dov Katz (e.g. p. 21.)

²⁹ T.H.M., I, 171

³⁰ *Ibid.*, I, pg. 170

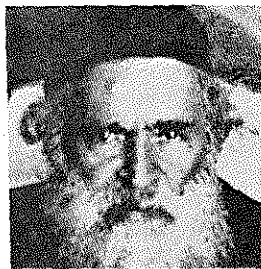
³¹ *Zichron Yaakov*, II, pg. 8



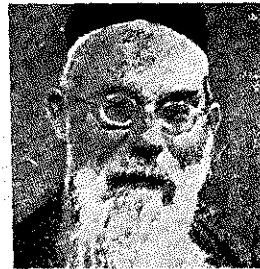
Rabbi Eliezer Gordon, Telshe



Rabbi Yitzchok Blaser
(Peterburger),
after he moved to Jerusalem



Rabbi Naftoli Amsterdam



Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel,
Slobodka



Rabbi Yaakov Yoseph,
Vilna and New York City

Among Reb Yisroel Salanter's prominent disciples:

essen kest,³¹ in which the *bachurim* were dependent on the generosity of the local townsfolk, eating paltry meals in different homes daily. He insisted that *kavod haTorah* required that the hosts bring the meals to the yeshiva, without anyone knowing who was whose specific guest.³² Even sons of wealthy families ate from these meals, to put an end to social differences amongst the students.

He was deeply concerned about the manners and general appearance of the *talmidim* so as to inspire proper respect in the eyes of the local *baalei battim*,³³ and thus enhance the young men's self-image. This effort bore results. Soon many respectable families, which earlier had shied away from a son-in-law—"a *batlan*," were vying for *chassanim* who excelled in Torah.

His Special Energies

The main thrust of Reb Yisroel's energies, however, was to produce *Gedolei Torah*, great Torah personalities, guiding his students to *shleimus*—completeness and integrity. When he recognized potential in a young man, he dedicated himself totally to his development.³⁴

With his remarkable insight he realized the aptitudes and talents of each student and directed him along his individual path, even though the yeshiva curriculum was uniform. He organized special *chaburos* (study groups) to transmit his ideas. Should an uninvited individual enter, Reb Yisroel would cease speaking immediately.³⁵

This was also a time of great personal growth for Reb Yisroel. He secluded himself for days on end, hammering out his ideas, perfecting his own character, later relaying what he saw fit to his ten select *talmidim*.³⁶ Disciples of this era later recalled the profound insights they gained in these sessions.³⁷ Eventually Reb Yisroel began to withdraw from offering regular *shiurim* in *Gemora*, which he assigned to Rabbi Eliezer Gordon.³⁸

In Kovno, as in Vilna, Reb Yisroel organized individual *Battei Mussar* for different strata of society, including one in the "woodcutters' *kloiz*," a structure that stood next to the sawmill until 1921, when it was destroyed by fire.³⁹

A New Focus

The great opponents of the now-blossoming *Mussar* Movement—motivated by sincere misgivings—felt obligated to react despite their reverence for Reb Yisroel as an individual. They shared many of the fears of earlier *Misnagdim* in their opposition to *Chassidus*—that *Mussar* would create a new sect, veering off the mainstream of *Yiddishkeit*. This opposition, the fact that Kovno did not match the challenges and opportunities of Vilna, along with other factors, brought about a shift in Reb Yisroel's area of activity. Even though Reb Yisroel had won fame and a following in Lithuania, he spent most of the next twenty-five years of his life criss-crossing Europe on various projects aimed at bringing estranged Jews back to *Yiddishkeit*, raising the level of commitment of observant Jews, working behind the scenes to protect Jews from all sorts of threatening decrees, only returning to Kovno during his final years.

This new phase began when Reb Yisroel visited Halberstadt, Germany, in 1857 for medical treatment. He stayed on in Germany to begin a major battle against the *Haskallah*, which Reb Yisroel saw as the single greatest threat to authentic *Yahadus* at that time. Its distortions of Judaism, its misleading humanism, and its assumption of non-Jewish values were the roots of the Reform Movement, which Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch was battling in Germany⁴⁰ and the *Ksav Sofer* was contending with in Hungary⁴¹. Yet, unlike the Reform

³². *Zichron Yaakov*, op. cit.

³³. T.H.M., I, 172

³⁴. *Sridei Aish*, IV, 291

³⁵. *Ohr Yisroel*, pg. 121

³⁶. T.H.M., I, pg. 174

³⁷. *Ohr Yisroel*, *ibid.*

³⁸. T.H.M. I, 175.

³⁹. T.H.M. I, 176, no. 20

⁴⁰. See *The History of Orthodox Jewry in Germany*, by Hermann Schwab, London: 1950.

⁴¹. See *L'Toldos HaRiformatzion HaDatis B'Germania V'Ungaria*, by Y.Y. Greenwald, 1948.

... As Reb Yisroel Salanter Used to Say ...

MUSSAR

When faced with a decision, ask yourself, "How would I decide if it were Ne'ilah now, at the closing moments of Yom Kippur?"

If someone talks lashon hora in the beis hamidrash in Kovna, Jews will desecrate the Shabbos in Paris.

Even a person free of the obligation to study Torah must study Mussar.

Before I started to learn Mussar, I thought the whole world deficient except me. After I started, I found the world full of sinners, including me. Now that I've learned some more, I realize that I am indeed a sinner, but I must judge the rest of the world favorably.

One doesn't learn Mussar to be a tzaddik, but to become a tzaddik.

kehillos and rabbinates, Haskallah posed a pervasive and subtle menace. In those places where Reform had not yet taken root, Haskallah was an enemy not easily recognized by the naked eye, and the battleground was not clearly defined. For sure, the Maskillim did not lack organizational skills, nor were they short of forums from which to spew forth their propaganda, but their approach was to subvert, not convert. Leaders of both Chassidim and Misnagdim recognized the threat of Haskallah, and joined forces in strengthening their positions and repelling the threat.

⁴². T.H.M. I, 218-221, 226

⁴³. Eitz Pri

⁴⁴. As related by Rav Yaakov Kamenetzky

⁴⁵. This unique Gaon shared an unusual interest in the Gra of Vilna with those—such as Reb Yisroel—of the Gra's "Cheder," as evident from his fruitful collaboration in the fascinating work *Eliyas Eliyahu* by Rabbi Yehoshua Heshel Levin dealing with the ways and works of the Gra.

⁴⁶. Originally printed together with the *Tomer Dvora*, under the title *Even Yisroel*.

⁴⁷. T.H.M. I, p. 184

⁴⁸. T.H.M. I, pg. 185

Reb Yisroel, ever the original activist, concluded that the best defense was a forceful, fresh counter-offensive. He saw a place for secular knowledge in the overall makeup of the individual,⁴² but such knowledge was only acceptable for the proper reasons, for the proper people, in the proper time and in the proper place. What he abhorred was the absence of the perceptible *lehavdil*—the recognizable distinction between Torah wisdom and secular knowledge.⁴³ The two could not be uttered in the same breath, pronounced with the same gravity, articulated in the same halls. Chazal (the rabbis of the Talmud) teach that "G-d has naught in this world but only the four cubits of *halacha*." Secular studies, then, must be excluded from the rabbinical seminary by the "only" of the Chazal.

Germany was the source of the plague, and it was there that he hoped to save what he could.⁴⁴ He settled in Koenigsberg and was soon deeply involved with the Jewish youth enrolled in the local university. He scheduled regular *shiurim* in Navi (Prophets) for them, and was generally aided by the Rav of Koenigsberg, Rabbi Yaakov Mecklenberg, author of *Ha'Ksav V'Hakabbalah*.⁴⁵ While there, he published his *Iggeres HaMussar* (Letter on the Study of Ethics)⁴⁶—a work that has been reprinted scores of times.

The Memel Approach

In 1860, he was in the border city of Memel. An important port city and mercantile center, it attracted hundreds of Lithuanian Jews to its commercial opportunities, which continued non-stop, seven days a week. Shabbos was not even a nostalgic memory in Memel's bustling main streets.

Realizing that Berlin exerted a stronger pull on Memel than did Vilna, Reb Yisroel did not take a harsh, uncompromising stance against Sabbath desecration in that setting. Instead, he resorted to a soft, graduated approach. In his first sermon he explained the concept of Shabbos to the people on their level, concluding that *Chillul Shabbos* at the port was intolerable because of the writing involved—the major Sabbath desecration of running a business. He did not discuss the actual portering of goods. Many agreed that they could postpone their writing until the weekdays, while the loading and unloading continued.

Some weeks later he suggested that without too much sacrifice, it should be possible not to send shipments, even if goods did arrive. This approach too became acceptable to the merchants. After a period of time, he convinced them that even the unloading was not vital—and the Jewish merchants of the city ceased all their port activities on the Shabbos. A revolutionized Memel emerged.⁴⁷

While there, he lectured in Talmud and Mussar for young men studying there, caring for all their needs. He also lectured for Jewish university students in Memel.⁴⁸

"So Much More That I Could Achieve"

As he continued to travel, Reb Yisroel's influence over the hundreds of *talmidim* and thousands of local *baalei battim* only inspired him to persevere. "There is so much more that I could achieve," was a comment that frequently fell from his lips, a theme that never ceased to haunt him, as many anecdotes testify.

Even a remote hint of the passage of time suggested to him undeveloped opportunities for growth and accomplishment. For instance, when he was sitting in a *shul* during the auctioning of *kibbudim* (synagogue rituals), for "100 groschen . . . 200 groschen," he began to weep. When asked why, he pointed to his gray beard: *Ich bin grau schon* (I am gray already) and I've accomplished so little!—a reflection prompted by the "groschen" of the bidding.⁴⁹

It was during this time (1860-61) that he published the celebrated Torah journal *Tevunah* (Wisdom) to enhance the prestige of Torah, while promoting discussion on the human personality and character refinement.⁵⁰ It enjoyed the participation of the *Gedolei Torah*,⁵¹ and though only twelve issues appeared, it was extremely popular.

"Amongst My People" (*Melachim II-4*)

Reb Yisroel mastered the German language and adopted the German manner of dress, to advance his work in Tilsit, Berlin, Frankfurt, Halberstadt, and other cities.⁵² As always, he was impeccable in appearance—shining shoes, sparkling buttons on his frock—dressed in the manner of a dignified layman. His impact on the lives of German Jewry appears in retrospect to have been profound. This was strengthened by his close ties with Germany's Torah leadership: Rabbi Eziel Hildesheimer, Rabbi Meir Lehmann, and Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch. He encouraged the founding of various institutions of learning in Germany, and applauded organized *halacha shiurim* for girls.⁵³ Throughout this period, Reb Yisroel's correspondence with his *talmidim* in Russia⁵⁴ demonstrated that his passionate concern for them was unaffected by time and distance. He was even active in establishing two *battei Midrash* between the years 1865 and 1869 for workers and tradesmen in Russia.

⁴⁹. *Me'oros Hagedolim*

⁵⁰. See introduction to *Tevunah*, no. 1

⁵¹. Rabbi Yoshe Ber Soloveichik, Rabbi Yosef Shaul Natanzohn, Rabbi Yitzchok Elchonon Spector, Rabbi Shlomo Kluger ז"ל, among others.

⁵². T.H.M. I, 186

⁵³. *Ibid.*, 192

⁵⁴. *Ohr Yisroel*, pgs. 48-68

⁵⁵. T.H.M. I, 192

⁵⁶. *Ibid.*, pg. 193

⁵⁷. Vilna 1881

... As Reb Yisroel Salanter Used to Say ...

SPIRITUALITY

Like a bird, man can reach undreamed-of heights as long as he works his wings. Should he relax them for but one minute, however, he plummets downward.

A person lives with himself for seventy years, and after it is all over, he still does not know himself.

With the word "Echod" in the Sh'ma, the Jew crowns G-d as King over the entire cosmos and all four corners of the world, but sometimes he forgets to include himself.

Man is a drop of intellect drowning in a sea of instincts.

Spirituality is like a bird: if you tighten your grip on it, it chokes; slacken your grip, and it flies away.

Eventually—between 1869 and 1871—Reb Yisroel returned to Vilna, when a devastating plague struck the area, taking his wife, whom he mourned for the rest of his days. With her passing, Reb Yisroel concentrated even more on his German activities.⁵⁵

Return to Kovno

When he was 67, Reb Yisroel planted a seed whose growth eventually sheltered all of Lithuania, nourishing us to this very day with its fruit: the Kollel Knesses Bais Yitzchok in Kovno. Its purpose—the furtherance of *Hora'ah and Mussar*—Rabbinics and Ethics, by supporting and guiding exceptional Torah scholars in their development as authorities. The project received the blessings, and eventually the name, of the Kovno *Rav* and *Poseik Hador* (the generation's outstanding authority in *halacha*), Rabbi Yitzchok Elchonon Spector. It was joined by such *Chavrei HaKollel* (fellows) as Reb Naftali Herz (later *Rav* of Jaffa), Rabbi Naftali Amsterdam, Rabbi Chaim (Telsher) Rabinowitz, and Rabbi Yitzchok Meltzan, among others.⁵⁶ Reb Yitzchok Elchonon's son accepted the administrative responsibilities, while Rabbi Avrohom Shenker and Rabbi Nosson Zvi Finkel (later revered as the "Alter of Slobodka") conducted the internal affairs of this great institution. Under the latter's guidance, publication of the *Eitz Pri*⁵⁷ inspired the world of Torah and *Mussar*, featuring essays from both Reb Yisroel and Reb Yitzchok Elchonon—including a foreword from the then lesser-known Reb Yisroel Meir HaKohen, author of *Sefer Chofetz Chaim*.

... As Reb Yisroel Salanter Used to Say ...

MAN and MITZVOS

The greatness of the Ari Zal and the Vilna Gaon went beyond their command of vast amounts of Torah knowledge—both the open and the esoteric parts; their greatness lay in never deviating in the slightest from the directives of the Shulchan Aruch.

A sick person never rejects a healing procedure as "unbefitting." Why, then, do we care what other people think when dealing with spiritual matters?

Man is equipped with such far-reaching vision, yet the smallest coin can obstruct his view.

Despair is the worst of ailments. No worries are justified except: "Why am I so worried?"

People say: The fool gives, the wise man takes. More accurately: The fool thinks he's giving and the wise man claims that he's taking.

One who rushes headlong to perform a mitzva can destroy the whole world in his path.

The true glory of the Kollel was realized under Rabbi Yitzchok Blazer (Peterburger), whose rousing *sichos* (lectures) were the Kollel's life-force. Reb Yisroel would,

⁵⁸ Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky זצ"ל, as a disciple of Rabbi Naftali Amsterdam and the *Alter* of Slobodka, possesses a wealth of detailed information regarding Reb Yisroel's Paris stay. He offers the following:

Under Alexander II, many reforms in the Russian regime were realized, ameliorating some of the barbarous policies of Nicholas I. The appearance of Jews on the economic and cultural scene, however, provoked dormant anti-Semitic feelings, even among intellectuals (such as the novelist Dostoyevski). Early in 1881, the Czar was assassinated by revolutionaries, and the Jews served as a convenient scapegoat. Terrifying pogroms erupted in southern Russia, and continued sporadically for several years.

Reb Yisroel, weary but tireless, utilized connections in France to persuade the Parisian Rothschild to influence his cousin in London to lend his considerable prestige to pressure *The London Times* to dispatch correspondents to the scene of these atrocities and to report them to the Western world.

The Russian regime protested the bad press to the British Foreign Office, which politely explained that freedom of the press was an accepted feature of life in Britain. While Russian Jewry's problems were far from solved, Reb Yisroel's clandestine activities were effective in mitigating some of their more open manifestations.

⁵⁹ T.H.M. I, pp. 230-236

⁶⁰ T.H.M. I, 238

upon occasion, visit Kovno, and, of course, again address the Kollel.

Several "second-generation" institutions were then formed: Reb Simcha Zissel founded the Talmud Torah in Kelem. In Vilna a *Mussar* yeshiva was established by Reb Yaakov Yoseph, while Reb Nosson Zvi Finkel started the yeshiva in Telshe, and eventually raised the banner of *Mussar* in Slobodka with "Knesses Yisroel," named for the great mentor of them all, Reb Yisroel Salanter.

The impact of these individuals and their institutions on the future great citadels of learning—Telshe, Mir, Kamenitz, Grodno, Kletzk, Chevron, Lakewood, and all their branches and seedlings—is now part of the vital history of Torah in Europe and America.

Vilna, Kovno, Koenigsberg, Memel, Berlin—Reb Yisroel's map stared back at him: *There is so much more to achieve.* He reportedly considered coming to America to establish a proper Jewish community and formal *Kehilla*, but decided against attempting to build a spiritual life in a country where the atmosphere is set by a constitution that guarantees separating Church and State, religious principle and day-to-day life.

Mission in Paris

Yet, Reb Yisroel did move on to Paris at the age of 70, despite illness and chronic severe headaches (which at times made it agonizing for him to give public addresses). *Why Paris?*⁵⁸ The generally accepted view is, to help organize a *Kehilla* under a qualified *Rav*. Rabbi Yehoshua Heschel Levin of Vilna did, in fact, become *Rav* there due to Reb Yisroel's influence. Other claim his purpose there was to arrange a French translation of the Talmud. (Reb Yisroel's goal was to have *Shas* translated into Russian and German as well.)

His Paris agenda also included offering spiritual direction for the Russian-Polish elements of the Jewish community—all incredible undertakings for an aged, ailing foreigner.⁵⁹ His living conditions, however, were horrible, and after two near-fatal mishaps, he finally left.

Returning to Koenigsberg, he filled a spiritual vacuum left by the departure of the *Malbim* from that city's rabbinate. He made one more trip to Russia to recharge his disciples with the fire of *Mussar*, visiting Kovno, Minsk, and Vilna (where he yet found time to study some of the Vilna Gaon's manuscripts). Before returning to Koenigsberg, he instructed Rabbi Yaakov Lipschitz to take up his talented pen and to give expression to Reb Yisroel's opposition to a newly-proposed Rabbinical Seminary sponsored by Baron Ginsburg.⁶⁰

The Will of the Righteous

Reb Yisroel, 73 years of age, having achieved what scores of others may only dream of accomplishing, took ill in Koenigsberg, in his attic apartment in the home of

his friend and patron, Reb Eliyahu Ber. Reb Yisroel instructed the household that come what may, no one was to desecrate the *Shabbos* on his behalf. This curious demand was in total opposition to *halacha*, which Reb Yisroel himself had so valiantly championed.

Nonetheless, he was not to be dissuaded. He explained that this was not misplaced *frumkeit* (piety) or *tzidkus*, but *halacha*: the *Gemora* rules that shepherds are not to be saved from disaster since their livelihood is by theft. (Their animals would regularly graze in neighboring fields.) "Since," Reb Yisroel continued, "people provide

me with assistance believing that I'm a *tzaddik*, I too must not be saved since I'm living by false pretenses!"

That week, Reb Eliyahu Ber's son, Binyomin, visited his sister, wife of Reb Yitzchok Elchonon's son, in Kovno. When Reb Yitzchok Elchonon inquired after Reb Yisroel's welfare, he related Reb Yisroel's strange demand. Reb Yitzchok Elchonon replied that he should relay to Reb Yisroel: "The Kovno Rav says that you must allow yourself to be saved even if *Chillus Shabbos* is involved."⁶¹

"The will of the devout shall be fulfilled"—Reb Yisroel's final illness had begun on *Motza'ei Shabbos*, 20 *Shevat*, and his passing was shortly before sundown, *Erev Shabbos*, on 25 *Shevat*, 5643/1883.

⁶¹ Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, who heard it from Binyomin Ber himself. See also *Ir Vilna* pgs. transcript of מצבתה.

Tales of Reb Yisroel

The hundreds of stories about Reb Yisroel that have been preserved portray unusual intellectual gifts, a multifaceted genius with keen sensitivity to other people's needs as well as a willingness to meet their needs, and an overwhelming sense of mission. Many are well-known: Reb Yisroel, absent from *shul* for *Kol Nidrei* because he was comforting an infant and its frightened babysitter, and this was of greater importance . . . sensing the disappointment of a youngster who (he understood) was shifted from *Maftir* to a regular *aliya* to make room for Reb Yisroel, and inviting the boy to recite the *Haftarah* for him after davening, while others were kept waiting . . . advising disciples that the greatest *hidur* (enhancement) in baking *shmura matzos* is to deal gently with the widows and other poor women working the dough . . . taking a young man to task for being so involved in *Selichos* preparation that he did not reply to someone else's greeting: "Must your *teshuvah* be at the expense of his 'Good Morning'?"

Other tales, not so widely circulated are the following, taken from *Meoras Hagedolim*:

- When disciples in Lithuania pleaded with him to return from Germany to fight *Haskallah*, he replied with a parable: A farmer was chasing a team of runaway horses down a hill. He shouted to a man sitting under a tree further down the slope to stop them. The fellow did not respond. Reaching him, the farmer asked him why he made no effort to stop the horses. "Wait here until they reach bottom and I'll bring them back for you. If I'd have grabbed them on their headlong charge, they'd have dragged me down with them. At the bottom of the hill, their energy is all spent and they can be led back."

Said Reb Yisroel: "Lithuanian Jewry is plunging headlong into *Haskallah*. I cannot grapple with them without being dragged down. The Jews of Germany have reached bottom."

- Reb Yisroel's powers of concentration were so intense that he was often oblivious of where he was.

One evening he was strolling in Koenigsberg, and did not return. Failing to respond to the questions of a gendarme, he was jailed as a suspicious alien . . . After his disciples arranged for his release, the authorities wrote on his passport: "*Immer in philosophische Gedanken versunken*. (Always immersed in philosophical thought)."

- He once failed to show up in *shul* for the first *minyan*—his regular time. After several hours passed, a search party was launched, and several children found him sitting on a large stone outside of the city, *tallis* bag in hand, lost in thought. The shouts of the children called him to where he was, and he became aware that the townspeople were concerned over his absence. Reb Yisroel was so anxious to assure them of his safety that he outran the children to return to town.

- In advance of a public Talmudic address, Reb Yisroel posted a list of a hundred references. Upon entering the auditorium to present his discourse, Reb Yisroel checked the list and found that a prankster had replaced his sheet with another list of a hundred references picked at random. He turned pale, and took his seat for the ten minutes that the introductions were made. He then stepped up to the *bima* and delivered a brilliant discourse, tying together all hundred random citations.

His disciple Reb Naftoli Amsterdam later commented, "It did not take Reb Yisroel ten minutes to draw upon his knowledge of *Shas* to weave together a new *pilpul*. He turned pale because on the one hand he was reluctant to display his phenomenal intellectual abilities by presenting an 'instant' Torah discourse. Instead, he planned to rise to the *bima*, declare his inability to give the posted lecture, and take his seat. On the other hand, this would prove to be a grave set-back to his campaign to spread *Mussar*. After much analysis and inner conflict—which was why he had turned pale—he decided to present the spontaneous speech, much against his nature."

The Child

*For the adult who is gentle enough to embrace
with open arms the child that lies within . . .*

The child does not stand still
He walks
He wanders
His place so broad
Yet so vague

He walks a paved road
An endless road
A road that has been walked by many

And even now he does not walk alone
For surrounding him,
Encompassing him from all sides
People
Seemingly so grown and self-assured
Gliding effortlessly past

The child struggles
A cold wind blows
The child shivers
A rise in the road
The child stumbles

What lies behind those innocent eyes
Those eyes, reflecting, encompassing the
world around

Fear
Lurking fear

Is it fear of the world without
Of the never ending stress of humanity
Threatening to swallow

Or perhaps
Fear of what lies within
Fear of the unseen
The unknown
Fear of discovering
Realizing
The hidden strengths and secrets
The locked-in key to the future
And the salve to a wound
A deep hurt

Oh, for but a fleeting moment
The hurt flashes forth from behind those
innocent eyes
And the child struggles on
Sensing much, but understanding little
Knowing this much
I am yet too young to stand still.

✠

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Knowing "Shas" Through Mifal HaShas

The forty years since World War II have witnessed some heroic attempts at rebuilding the tragic spiritual losses our people suffered in the destruction. These attempts have yielded some noteworthy, even remarkable results. But even with the blossoming of *lamdus*, *amkus*, and *hasmada*—Torah scholarship and intensity of study—some of which rivals the accomplishments of many pre-War communities, there is still an area that suffers a terrible lack. We do not have people who possess *bekiyus*—encyclopedic knowledge of all sections of the Talmud. The universally admired *Shas Yid* of yore is almost totally without heirs. Not everybody is endowed with the intellectual gifts that make a broad *bekiyus* an attainable goal, but there are definitely some who could master this key ingredient in Talmudic knowledge. Moreover, the Talmud in its entirety is interrelated, in content and in methodology, and *bekiyus* in some measure is always essential. Who is reaching those capable of broad *bekiyus*, guiding them and inspiring them to master this lost accomplishment?

These past few years have seen a resurgence in interest and activity in exploring, studying, and remembering all parts of *Shas*. *Roshei Yeshiva* have consistently been urging their students to "cover more ground" in their studies. For instance, exactly ten years ago, the *Roshei HaYeshiva* Rabbi Moshe Chevroni, Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz (Mir) זכרונם לברכה and, Rabbi Elazar Shach (Ponevezh) שליט"א issued a call for broader scope in studying, urging all yeshiva students to cover more in Talmud.

One movement in the forefront of this renaissance of *bekiyus* is the *Mifal HaShas*, a creation of the Sanz-Klausenberger Rebbe, Rabbi Yekusiel Yehudah Halberstam שליט"א with the backing of just about all prominent *Gedolei Yisroel* in Israel. The Rebbe began this undertaking about four years ago with his own now-widely heralded *Shas Kollel* flourishing in several locations in Kiryat Sanz (Netanya), Jerusalem, and Bnei Brak. The eighty young men enrolled in this tightly-structured program—half from the Klausenberger Yeshivos, half from the broad spectrum of other Israeli yeshivos—divide their day between two *Mesechtos* (tractates), usually pairing together a relatively easier one with a more difficult one. At the end of each month, they are responsible for a total of 80 *blatt Gemora*, on which they take

written examinations, with short answers and essay questions, finishing the entire *Shas* the first time around in slightly more than three years. . . . After finding that earlier *Mesechtos* are forgotten without continual *chazara* (review), a comprehensive 400-*blatt chazara*-and-testing program was instituted every sixth month.

During the first cycle, the learning encompasses the *Gemora*, *Rashi* and *Tosefos*. The second three-year program is a review of *Shas*, with the additional study of the *Rishonim* (the early commentators 11-15th century)—with continued monthly testing. The third three-year cycle includes the study of the four part *Shulchan Aruch* (The Codes). Rigorous written exams are also administered during this cycle. One striking feature of this program is accountability: whoever enters the *Shas Kollel* has a clear goal, and he must account for his time and his productivity, with continuity and perseverance.

The Klausenberger Rebbe personally oversees this arduous schedule, which allows no lapses for festivals and *simchas*. A sizeable stipend makes other employment unnecessary. The results have been the discovering of untapped talent, reintroducing to *Klal Yisroel* the almost vanished, crowning accomplishment of Talmudic scholarship—*bekiyus beShas*. The first *Siyum HaShas*, celebrating the completion of the entire Talmud by the seventy surviving members of the *Shas Kollel*, was celebrated in Jerusalem's Binyanei HaUma last year, with an overflow crowd of Rabbis, Chassidic leaders, *Roshei Yeshiva* and *bnei Torah*.



Rabbi Shimon Schwab of NY at Mifal HaShas examination.

Sidney Greenwald, of Monsey, NY, a *musmach* of *Mesivta Torah Vodaath*, is active in communal affairs.



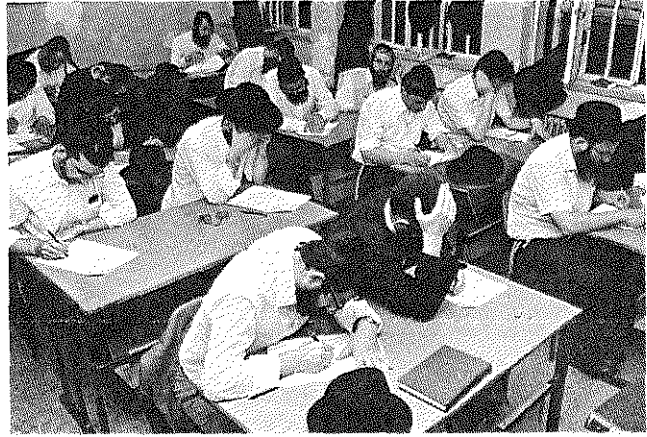
Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky and Sanz-Klausenberger Rebbe at Mifal HaShas meeting.

Mifal HaShas

The concept did not end with the Klausenberger Shas Kollel in Eretz Yisroel. The option of pursuing a similar goal in a less pressured environment was opened up to a broad cross-section of yeshiva students and Kollel members from all over Eretz Yisroel with the introduction of *Mifal HaShas HaKlalli*—(General Talmud Study System) last year. This program entails testing participants on a specific 30 *blatt Gemora* every month, rewarding those who pass with a handsome dollar stipend to enable them to continue in this ambitious program, leading them to completing *Shas* in seven and a half years.

The response was astounding: Over a thousand inquiries came in the first week! By the time it was launched, 1200 people were enrolled in Mifal HaShas, coming from virtually every type of yeshiva and Kollel in the country, bringing the annual operating budget to over \$1 million.

Visiting *rabbonim* have marvelled at the knowledge that the periodic tests have demanded, and the high calibre of the responses of the participants. Not surprisingly, the achievements of *Mifal HaShas HaKlalli* have



No time for posing (Examination at Mifal HaShas).

spurred the extension of this system to other countries, bringing *Mifal HaShas HaOlami* (World-Wide Talmud Study System) to American shores as well.

Personal Footnotes

This writer had the privilege of acquainting *Roshei Yeshiva* in the U.S. with Mifal HaShas, prior to its establishment here. While each expressed his enthusiasm for the project in his own manner, the thread running through all the interviews was: "In generations past, especially in the great Lithuanian Yeshivos, the learning of *Shas* was an ideal everyone cherished. Many *Roshei Yeshiva* and senior yeshiva fellows completed *Shas* in a one year period"—as did members of the Slobodka Yeshiva, according to Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky שליט"א.

Rabbi Yitzchok Halevi Ruderman שליט"א, *Rosh HaYeshiva* of Ner Israel, Baltimore, related of his own plan to complete *Shas* in a one-year period beginning with Rosh Hashana while he was a *bachur* in Slobodka. He undertook the project with great diligence. During the course of the year, Rabbi Ruderman's father passed away, but the tragic news was late in reaching him. . . . During this



Meeting of Roshei HaYeshiva in Israel. Mifal HaShas:

(From left to right): Rabbi R. Tukechinski (Maharil Diskin), Rabbi M.Z. Feldman (Imrei Emes), Rabbi P.M. Alter (Sfas Emes), Rabbi Y. Bloch (Mifal HaShas), Rabbi D. Weiss (Shas Kollel, Jerusalem), Rabbi S.A. Herbst (Mifal HaShas), Rabbi D. Povarsky (Ponevezh), Rabbi S. Shmerler (Sanz), Rabbi N. Karelitz (Kollel Chazon Ish), Rabbi Y. Sofer (Erlauer Rav).



Rabbi Y. Grossman (Tomchei Temimim), Rabbi Y. Sofer (Erlau), Rabbi A. Brand (Otzar Haposkim), Rabbi S. Drobkin (Grodna, Ashdod), Rabbi Y. Bratler (Ilri), Rabbi M. Shabkes (Belz).

★ ★ ★

If we aspire to recapture all the lost glory of pre-War Jewry, the mastery of Talmud—*Mesechta* by *Mesechta*—each *Mesechta* from beginning to end, to the point of *bekiyus beShas*, the means and the encouragement are now at our disposal.

Reaching For More Through V'shinantom

It would be rather impossible to identify the future *Gadol* when he is just a child or a teenager, so as to concentrate on guiding him in his development. But how about encouraging young people with potential to develop their abilities to a far greater extent than they otherwise would? And then nurturing them to continue in their growth, reaching for more, while reviewing and consolidating past achievements? Yeshivos, as communal institutions, cannot set standards or create programs that will challenge the more gifted without frustrating the average student. For this, an outside sponsor is most useful. And *V'shinantom* is a case in point.

V'shinantom is a "Made-in-Israel" program—soon to be imported to the United States. It is designed specifically to encourage students of all yeshivos to master the content of large segments of *Gemora*, with built-in incentives prodding the superior students to greater learning intensity and mastery of yet more knowledge.

How It Works

Announcements in the religious periodicals invite twelve-to-seventeen year old yeshiva students to participate in a closed-book examination on a minimum of fifty *Dafim* (two-sided folio pages of *Gemora*). Knowledge of specific classic commentaries is also required, in accordance with the level of the participant. Upon registration, the youngster designates his choice of *Dafim* to be tested on—usually the *Mesechta* (tractate) he is studying in yeshiva. A permanent file is created, with room for updates monitoring the student's progress throughout his *V'shinantom* career.

At a pre-arranged time and location, question-and-answer sheets are distributed. Anonymity is assured to avoid any possibility of favoritism. . . . At the ring of a bell (approximately two hours for fifty *Daf*) all papers must be turned in. The examiners, an impartial panel of *talmidei chachamim*, closely supervise the proceedings and may, after the test, question further orally any participant to permit him to fill in any ambiguous responses. Great care is taken—the respective *Roshei Yeshivos* of the contestants are consulted—to ascertain that *V'shinantom* does not adversely affect the students' performance in their regular courses of study.

Rabbi Malov of Brooklyn is active in communal affairs.

Learn and Earn

Successful completion of the initial fifty-*Daf* test—80% is the minimum score—entitles the *kenner* (knower) to a \$50 award, of which \$25 is held in abeyance for step two. At the second stage, the candidate is examined on fifty new *Dafim*—in addition to the previous fifty—with a different set of *she'eilos* (questions) on the original fifty. A prerequisite at each successive stage is the re-examination of previously covered *Gemora*, thus insuring continued review and cumulative mastery—a mark of all *Gedolei Yisroel*, yet a difficult demand to make within the conventional yeshiva program.

Passing step two earns the contestant \$100. Henceforth only 25% is held for the next cycle. The participant has by now absorbed one hundred *blatt* (200 pages) *Gemora*, has received \$100 and has earned an additional credit of \$50 towards stage three.

Bonuses escalate at progressive stages. At step five, for instance, mastery of 250 *blatt* earns the participant \$300, at which point the young man has already received a total of \$725 plus \$50 in credit. . . . Upon passing an examination on one thousand *blatt*, the total awards amount to \$10,400! And this *Sar Haelef* (prince of the thousand) may well be the one whom *V'shinantom* is really after . . . the proverbial one in a thousand who emerges as a Torah authority.

Why V'shinantom

Most yeshiva students terminate their formal studies upon marriage, usually when they are in their twenties. A fortunate minority remain in Kollel a few years, until they too are compelled to seek means to earn a livelihood. Today, the pressures of providing for a family are overwhelming. So much of what was learned in the yeshiva tends to evaporate with the passage of time. It is, indeed, a sorry state of affairs when the erstwhile "brilliant yeshiva *bachur*" hardly remembers the very *Mesechta* which his son is now studying.

The major cause of this problem—by unanimous agreement of *Marbitzei Torah* (educators)—is the deplorable lack of constant *chazara* (review). There is insufficient motivation, not enough stress, on reviewing a lesson one hundred times, which the Talmud extolls. As mentioned, the conventional yeshiva syllabus cannot

afford to concentrate on more than one—or even on several—*Mesechtos* at once. For if the student were to devote his major energies on *chazara* of last year's *Mesechta*, how and when would he pick up broader knowledge, in this year's *Mesechta*? Constrained by time, the *bachur* proceeds on to fresh material each semester, with minimal—if any—emphasis on *chazara*. This may be construed as an inevitable trade-off of some quality for quantity—an appropriate consideration perhaps for the "Nine Hundred and Ninty Nine," but tragically shortchanging the "One."

Case History: Starting on Top

"Nechemia" entered the *V'shinantom* office after registration had closed. He was dressed in rags—literally—his shoes did not match each other. Judging by his swarthy face, his scrawny body—skin and bones, really, draped by an oversized jacket, he had poverty was written all over him. He convinced Rabbi Shapira, the administrator, to let him have a registration blank. According to his answers on the questionnaire, Nechemia, at 14 years old, was the eldest of eleven siblings, his father was an Ashkenazi, his mother a Sephardi. He was ready to be examined on no less than 350 *blatt*—on the spot. Rabbi Shapira, not having tests prepared for his studies, summoned a *bochen* (examiner) to compile a test booklet and conduct the *bechina* (test). The youngster passed with flying colors, handily earning his \$600 award.

His eyes began to swell, and the lump in the throat became quite visible—Nechemia had noticed that the amount on the check was for only \$450. Rabbi Shapira explained that this is the procedure—that 25% is held for the next step. . . . Then the child broke down.

"But I need the \$600 today," he pleaded.

"Why should you be an exception?" asked Rabbi Shapira.

"Because my mother is in the hospital, and we must pay a medical bill today." Rabbi Shapira decided to verify

the young man's story. A visit to the address—a damp cellar in one of the poorest sections of Jerusalem—and a quick chat with the father, an illiterate but pious laborer, confirmed the facts and much more. . . . The full amount was issued immediately.

Nechemia has thus far passed his third exam on more than 600 *Dafim* with exceptionally good marks (with cash on demand, of course . . .), and continues to grow in ambition and performance. His twelve-year-old brother "Danni" recently registered for stage one. *V'shinantom* is working closely with other institutions to alleviate the family's financial plight.

A classic example of the Talmudic dictum: "Heed the children of the poor, for from among them Torah will be forthcoming. . . ."

Drop-Outs and Success

The *V'shinantom* idea was conceived by Rabbi Ezriel Tauber (of Monsey) who discussed it in detail with several prominent *Roshei Yeshivos*, and won the enthusiastic endorsement of a number of Torah leaders from a broad cross-section of communities.

To date, *V'shinantom* in Eretz Yisroel has close to one thousand active participants: Eight boys have passed stage five and are still going strong. The leader so far is a sixteen-year-old who has mastered over 700 *blatt Gemora* with *Tosfos*. Besides answering comprehension-questions on his tests, he can recite on demand several entire *Mesechtos*. The total number of examinations represent over 60,000 *Dafim* and the prizes issued to date total \$100,000. To be sure, with each progressive step, more contestants tend to drop out, but even the "dropouts" leave the program having mastered 50, 100, or 200 *Blatt Gemora*, in addition to demonstrating for themselves that they can review intensively, and that they are capable of dealing with large quantities of *Gemora* . . . So even with an escalating attrition rate, no one is a loser in *V'shinantom*.



Testing time for *V'shinantom* participants.

Reclaiming Lost Standards

The 100,000 Mishnayos Probe

At this time of the year, the reports start filtering in—50 *Mishnayos* from Aaron in East Flatbush, 500 from Benjy in Monsey, 2,000 from Chaim in Montreal, usually adding up to some 100,000 *Mishnayos* in all. The youngsters who participate in Pirchei Agudath Israel's annual *Mishnayos Baal Peh* competition must submit doc-

Erev Shabbos Kodesh
Parshas Bereishis
28 Tishrei, 5743

Dear Rabbi Silbermintz:

I would like to take this opportunity to give you a follow-up on my learning. You may remember that six years ago I won the *Siyum HaMishnayos* with 3,033 *Mishnayos Baal Peh*. Since then I have *Baruch Hashem* been *Mesayem* the *Gemora—Seder Nezikin* and just last night, *Seder Noshim*. I currently am learning *Masechtes Shabbos* and hope to finish *Rosh Chodesh Kislev*. The fact is, that most *bachurim* can't learn *bekiyus* in large amounts because they fail to retain it. I feel that the *Mishnayos B'al Peh* trained my mind and *Baruch Hashem* I can retain things. I hope to finish *Seder Moed* by Pesach and plan to do *chazara* on *Nezikin* for a *zman*. It should also be noted that this is all done during second Seder, and I am doing *iyun* first and third Seder. אי"ה I am hoping to learn *Seder Nezikin* and *Seder Noshim* by heart שקלא וטריא.

I think that I am heavily indebted to you, one of the pioneers of the *Mishnayos B'al Peh* Contest. May Hashem Yisborach grant you continued success in the upcoming *Mishnayos B'al Peh* Contest.

Sincerely yours,

P.S. If possible, refrain from using my name as Chazal tell us אין הברכה שולט אלא בדבר הסמוך מן העין us, so unless there is absolute benefit in mentioning my name, please don't.

umentation to the effect that they did commit at least one chapter of *Mishnayos* to memory, and then they join the celebration.

But what about the super-achievers—those who've memorized 1,000 *Mishnayos* or more? Is a slip of paper signed by a teen-aged group leader enough for the eleven-or-twelve-year-old who memorized 1200 *Mishnayos* to win his 20 volume *Shas*?

All candidates for a *Shas* in the national competition—those who mastered the minimum 1200—are tested for several hours by the Debriciner Rav, Rabbi Moshe Stern. . . . The Montreal candidates are submitted to an exhaustive (and exhausting) test by Rabbi Pinchas Hirschprung, Rav of their city (who never requires a text for his oral examinations). . . . A twelve-year-old Brooklyn boy who mastered all Six Sections of *Mishnayos* by heart is, as of this writing, in the midst of a laborious, *Mishna-by-Mishna* test—in content as well as text—by Rabbi Yisroel Perkowski (*Rosh Yeshiva*, Beth HaTalmud and Rav of Agudath Israel—16th Ave.)—leading to what?

Some eighty years ago, Rabbi Chaim Soloveitchik of Brisk expressed pride in one of his sons-in-law for knowing all *Mishnayos* by heart. Ironical? Not at all. As Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky explained it, Reb Chaim, the master of Talmudic analysis recognized that command of *Mishnayos* is an enviable source of precision in language, and provides the background for broad knowledge of the Talmud required for advanced scholarship . . . and others today are following this dazzling example.

Thus we find a young man from the Mid West, now on the threshold of finishing *Shas*, writing the office of Pirchei Agudath Israel to inform the director that his impetus came from the time, when but ten, that he had memorized 67 *Mishnayos*, and told his father, "I did it! I'll bet I can do a whole thousand *Mishnayos*"—and he did. (See box)

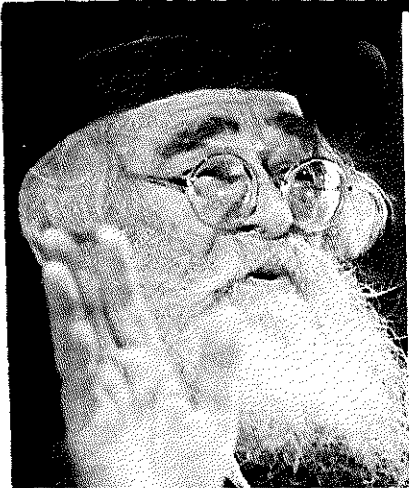
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May the A-mighty hear our prayers and proclaim an end to all grief and suffering-May he mend all hearts broken by tragedy-May the A-mighty, father of all orphans, bless those who open their hearts and their hand and grant them *Bracha* and *Hatzlacha* forevermore!

SIGNED BY:

Rabbi Alexander Asher Babad (*Tartikov*)

Rabbi Moshe Zvi Arye Bick

(*Beis Medrash Beis Moshe*)

Rabbi Simcha Bunim Ehrenfeld (*Matersdorf*)

Rabbi Moseh Feinstein (*Tifereth Jerusalem*)

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"A Penny for Tzeddaka" . . .

Two Sides of the Charity Coin

I. When Children Collect

Erev Yom Tov, busy Mrs. K. sent her two boys, Muttie and Yitzie, ages seven and four-and-a-half, collecting tzeddaka on her block. "They'll be out of my way, accomplishing something good at the same time," she reasoned, and returned to her work. Yitzie was equipped with a large half-filled pushka, while Muttie, the "big" one, took a book of "raffles" (dime and quarter receipts). Their neighbor gave them each a dime. Yitzie's dime went into the pushka. Muttie, who had neglected to take along a tzeddaka box for his raffle change, used his pocket—his left-hand pocket, since his right-hand pocket contained his own change for nash.

Down the block they walked, until they grew tired. Sitting down on a stoop to rest, Yitzie turned his pushka upside down to see which coins he could spot. "A quarter, dimes and a penny," he mumbled. He poked his finger in, and pretty soon, he pried the dime loose and it tumbled onto his lap. Innocently, he put it into his pocket. Then—"I'm hungry!" he moaned. "Let's get a taffy!"

"O.K.," obliged Muttie. "I have snack money. Let's go!"

They ran off to their favorite grocery store, pushka and pocket clanging as they ran. (A nickel slipped out through a hole in Muttie's jacket pocket, but he didn't notice.) Yitzie used his "newly-acquired" dime. Muttie took two nickels from his left pocket (instead of his right one), they said "Shehakol," and sucked their taffies with unadulterated joy.

This little scene is enacted, with slight variation, more times than we care to admit, especially during prime seasons, when tzeddaka campaigns in the schools are in full swing. Poor innocent children! Their mothers are busy, true enough. But are they really too busy to take a moment or two to evaluate—for in the final analysis, they and the fathers are the only ones who *can* and *are* obligated to evaluate: "Is my 4½ year old really ready for a pushka, unsupervised? Might he not be better off by just accompanying his older brother, or perhaps, holding a pushka only under the strict and watchful eye of a much more responsible sibling?" Or: "Is my six or seven year old really ready to handle raffles on his own?" If yes, he surely must have either a tzeddaka box to deposit the change directly, or at the very least, an envelope or secure bag or container.

Such honest evaluations and careful precautions, as well as appropriate instructions and directions, are part of true chinuch—correct orientation and approach to this

sacred mitzva.

Tzeddaka—a pillar of our world—a savior of lives—a vehicle powerful enough to change a Heavenly decree for good! Are we perhaps taking this noble concept too lightly? . . . Are we treating it with the respect, calculation and care that the Torah mandates?

One young mother of my acquaintance has recently introduced a thoughtful pattern into her household. Well before candle-lighting time on Fridays, she gathers her children around her and hands them each some coins. After she deposits her own traditional Erev Shabbos pre-candle-lighting charity, accompanied by her personal prayer for the spiritual well-being of her family, each of her children reverently drops coins into the various tzeddaka boxes. Tzeddaka to them is becoming synonymous with meticulous care, reverence and kedusha—holiness.

II. When Adults Pledge

"Rachamonim, Bayshonim, Vegomlei Chasadim . . . They are merciful, have shame, and perform acts of loving kindness . . ." three noble traits, implanted deep within the soul of every Jew by a common father, Avraham Avinu. So they pursue charitable and benevolent acts, and perform deeds of kindness, aid, sustenance and relief to all of mankind.

Take the bustling Boro Park section of Brooklyn, as an illustration in point. No one can deny the heavy emphasis its residents place on tzeddaka and chessed—charity and kindness. Walk an avenue, turn down a street, open the door of a modest office, and find the source of hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of relief and assistance for hundreds of indigent, struggling families citywide—sustained by tzeddaka money. . . .

Turn down a common looking alley on a Thursday evening—but don't be shocked by the whirl of activity going on. And take care not to trip over the hundreds of boxes and bags laden with chickens, fish, challos, cake, grape juice, fruits and vegetables, earmarked for distribution to families who cannot make it on their own. . . . Most of this food is purchased with our compassionate dollars.

Stroll down an avenue at 10 a.m. and hear a van horn honking. A line of people file in, and off the van goes on its errands of mercy, stopping at every major hospital in Manhattan, discharging visitors to the sick and lonely, to spread good cheer, or to bring a thermos of home-made soup. . . . Follow similar vans to hospitals where

B. Rishona is nom de plumme for a Brooklyn housewife who writes children's books.

the chronically ill lie waiting for the sound of those blessed footsteps, which signal the arrival of helping hands, ready to feed them the spoonfuls of food that they cannot bring to their own hungry mouths... crucial, life-saving endeavors, made possible by our contributions.

Yes, we are a nation that cares, worthy children of worthy giants and leaders who showed us the way...

You are cordially invited... to a testimonial dinner... an anniversary banquet... a festive Melave Malka... a garden party... a strawberry festival... an elegant luncheon... a candlelit supper... a Chinese auction... a Turkish Tea... a parlor meeting...

On Sunday afternoons, a weekday evening, Motzaei Shabbos... men and women are busy, rushing from one fundraising event to the next... with a sense of deep concern and obligation to our people, for the welfare of Am Yisroel, wherever they are found; for Jews and organizations in the United States, in Israel, in Russia. Truly remarkable!

Living Up to the Legacy

However, as conscientious and upright Jews, it behooves us to survey our activities, and be as equally self-searching as we are self-praising. We can always strive to reach greater heights. Larger donations? For sure, whenever possible. But even more so: Do we live up to our word even when it involves a modest donation? Do we always honor our commitments? Do we follow up on the oral pledges that we so easily utter?

Congregation Tefillos Yisroel is a prestigious Kehilla, boasting many very well-to-do, charitable congregants. David L., an established C.P.A., always at the top of the roster of donors to every worthy cause, has recently suffered a serious financial crisis. He tells no one, however, and valiantly tries to maintain his former standard of living. At the next Shabbos appeal in shul, he cannot disappoint the Gabbai, the Rabbi, or (naturally) his friends, so he overextends himself, and pledges his customary large sum. Somehow he will manage to come through, he thinks. But the pledge goes unpaid... for weeks... months... and years...

Rochel S., a popular young mother has made many new friends at the first luncheon she attended, given by her son's new school. One of the chairladies of the event is especially friendly, and calls her up three weeks later. She asks Rochel to be a sponsor for her tea, for the benefit of a poverty-stricken family about to marry off a child. Anxious to continue to please and impress, Rochel agrees to a \$50 Golden Sponsorship... The invitation to the tea arrives shortly thereafter, complete with a return envelope, and a Sponsor Pledge Reminder Card, with Rochel's pledged amount filled in. The lower left of the outer envelope, too, is efficiently stamped SPONSOR. Rochel neatly files the invitation and envelope away. As it turns out, she is unable to attend the tea due to a cold, and the return envelope lies neglected in her drawer. Other pressing needs and bills come up and demand payment: credit cards, orthodontist bills, overdue tuition, a private tutor, Yom Tov clothing for

the family—all true and legitimate needs. Rochel receives a reminder call from a hostess two months later, but somehow, the matter is again forgotten. And so pass weeks... months... and years.

With the passage of time, these matters become so stale and hazy that the sponsor forgets ever pledging, or becomes positive that she paid, putting a close to the entire matter.

A closer look at organizational files would disclose some sad facts: too many pledges—shul pledges, dinner pledges, women's sponsorship pledges—are going unpaid.

Of the total collection-deficits of many organizations, which reach astronomical sums, neglect and forgetfulness are prime factors. Ignorance of the stringency of the spoken pledge to charity is surely another contributing cause for default in payment. Whatever the reason, the situation should not continue. Tzeddaka funds are sacred funds and we cannot overemphasize our obligation to deal with them with responsibility and honesty. We should pay special heed to pledges made under severe emotional tension or stress, which may be beyond one's ability to pay. Understandably, emotions play a strong role in tzeddaka fundraising, but reason must always be in control.

III. Disbursement With Responsibility

Is This Cause Necessary?

In addition, we sometimes tend to undertake causes that are simply not necessary:

Family B., enjoying a modest, average income, experienced a financial setback when the husband-breadwinner lost his job. Mrs. B. bemoaned her husband's unemployment to her close friend, Mrs. L., who immediately telephoned another mutual friend. Together they plotted to give the family a substantial donation from some public funds they had collected in a general neighborhood project, which they were in charge of distributing. They purchased a bank check and mailed it to the family anonymously. Much later, it was discovered that the wife's brother had been filling in some missing financial corners, and, together with some savings earmarked for a future simcha, the family had been able to manage for the duration of the temporary situation, without the additional Mysterious Check.

Acting on a gut reaction, two well-meaning tzeddaka collectors allocated sacred public funds. Obviously, a Rav should always be consulted in such a situation, to determine whether or not there exists a need for a disbursement of funds. A private individual should never take responsibility on his or her own shoulders when it comes to collecting charity from the public, or disbursing it, but should always seek rabbinical endorsement and guidance.

The first and last words to all tzeddaka involvements should be: Tzeddek tzeddek tirdof—Pursue righteousness with righteousness. 

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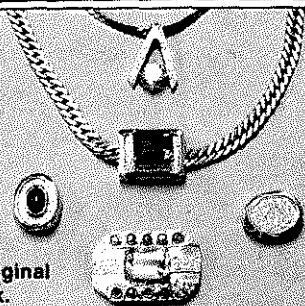
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CLASS ADV.



BOOKS

The Latest Books for Our Children

Once Upon America, Jewish Stories of Here and Now, by Blima Deutsch Silverman, illustrated by Faygie Silverman (NY, 1983, Feldheim, \$6.95).

It has previously been pointed out in these columns that it is rather easy to produce a good book for the very young, but extremely difficult to write for the pre-teens and teens. Here we need books that are down to earth and true to life, and at the same time, convey the right values—without moralizing and preaching. The present book truly lives up to this goal. Its stories are mostly set in the United States of today; they beautifully reflect what moves children, their fears and desires; and they lead the reader to look at life and its happenings with the eyes of Torah. It is to be hoped that the author and illustrator will produce many more such works.

Savta Simcha and the Cinnamon Tree, by Yaffa Ganz, illustrated by Bina Gewirtz (NY, 1984, Feldheim, \$8.95).

This beautifully produced volume is the second Savta Simcha book, starring this loveable giddy Savta as the central character. Would the young readers adopt her as a role model and measuring stick for grandmothers in general? This reviewer, for one, is not worried about this point; nor does he think they will believe that pigeons at the *Kosel Hama'aravi* fast on Tisha B'Av, or that the color of flowers can be changed by changing that of the garden shed. They might possibly consider such suggestions funny; but without any doubt, they will be impressed by the spirit of *Gemillas Chessed*, love for the Holy Land, and longing for the speedy coming of Moshiach, which permeate the pages of the book. More one cannot ask of a work; it is highly recommended.

The Three Merchants, and other stories, by Shaindel Weinbach, illustrated by Yosef Dershowitz (NY, 1983, Mesorah Publications, \$9.95—hardcover, \$6.95—softcover)

This volume, the latest addition to the Artscroll Youth Series, offers an exceedingly readable collection of stories for the young readers. Set in older times as well as the present, in the Western world as well as the East, they present a variety of new and exciting plots—not a small feat, considering the tendency of many Jewish story-tellers to follow the same traditional plot lines. On a rare occasion, the author makes use of an expression or phrase that might be somewhat difficult for the younger readers; but nowhere will that interfere with their ability to follow and enjoy the stories or to absorb the lessons to be gained from each story. Hopefully, Mrs. Weinbach will continue to provide us with such valuable reading material.

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Mitzvos, Mitzvos, Everywhere in Midos Land, by Ahuva Mandelbaum, illustrated by Rivka Malka Hess (Philadelphia, 1983, \$3.00).

This is the third volume in a series marked by originality and enthusiasm. This particular volume represents a collection of stories, each built around a *pisgam* (a Rabbinic slogan) and a song to fit the theme. The *Mussar* to be gained from each story is spelled out clearly—for older children perhaps somewhat too heavily—and the points are all well taken. This reviewer was just wondering whether the first story (in which children plan, as a surprise, to bake a cake) should have been accompanied by a warning against putting on a stove or making a fire.

Hameir L'Yisroel, a workbook on *Shemiras Halashon*, published by Yeshivath She'erith Hapletoth (Baltimore, \$2.00).

This is not a juvenile reader, fiction or non-fiction, but innumerable children will enjoy and benefit from this book. Ingeniously designed, it teaches the main rules of *Shemiras Halashon*, the prohibitions on evil talk and slander, by means of graphic illustrations; and follows through by presenting the young student with questions on the rules taught. Ideally, this workbook should be used by schools to teach this crucial aspect of Torah living; however, it can actually be worked on by a youngster under the direction of his parents. It is very

difficult to develop at a mature age sound habits of *Shemiras Halashon*; by making it so much easier to introduce these difficult *halachos* to children, this workbook will hopefully enable us to inculcate stricter observance of these laws in our community. Certainly every effort should be made to have it used as widely as possible.

The Jewish Kids Catalog, by Araya M. Burstein (Philadelphia, 1983, J.P.S., \$10.95).

This work is an interesting effort to produce yet another "catalog"—a collection of data, lists, and information of interest and value to Jewish children. The various departments of the book are certainly well chosen; they cover history and holidays, songs and crafts, information on names and on cookery, and many other areas. Unfortunately, however, the execution of the idea is so flawed as to make the book unsuitable for our children. For instance, the book projects the idea of "three branches of Judaism"; in fact, it lists outstanding Jewish personalities—but not one of the 34 personalities named after the Vilna Gaon is a Torah personality. (Stephen Wise, not surprisingly, is listed as a matter of course.) Basically, while this work stresses Jewish identity, it does not tie this identity to Torah standards and values, in disregard of Rabbi Saadiah Gaon's famous dictum that "our nation is a nation only by virtue of the Torah." Regrettably, the field is still open for a new effort to produce a satisfactory work of this kind. 

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- The yeshivos my children attend receive tens of thousands of dollars in government aid, without which my tuition would be much higher, and my children would have to do without library books, slides and filmstrip projectors, and other educational aids the schools couldn't afford to buy on their own. (Agudath Israel was instrumental in getting laws passed that forced the state and city to stop treating religious school children like second-class citizens. And today, when your yeshiva administrator needs help in applying for or retaining such government aid, Agudath Israel's staff is the address he turns to.)

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- Because of the impression made on me by Agudah's Daf Yomi Siyum Hashas in Madison Square Garden, I made a special effort to become one of the tens of thousands of *Daf Yomi Yidden*. Four Mesechotos later, I'm still going strong!

YOUR HOME:

- I was concerned about the fringes of my Boro Park/Flatbush neighborhood. Would I have to flee again, seek another house at a sacrifice, and again pay into building funds for new *chinuch mosdos*, *shuls*, and *mikvaos* in a new neighborhood? Agudath Israel's Southern Brooklyn Community Agency is doing protecting our property values by rebuilding and repopulating these fringes.

YOUR FAMILY:

- Through Pirchei and Bnos youth activities, my children have recreational opportunities that provide them with wholesome activities and companionship on Shabbos afternoons and other non-school times.
- Camp Agudah and Camp Bnos provide my children with an outstanding summer vacation that bolsters the Ruach instilled in them during the school year.
- Because of the excitement of Pirchei Siyum Mishnayos and Hasmodoh Cor tests, my son has learned hundreds of Mishnayos and devoted scores of vacation hours to Torah learning.
- Thanks to the Agudah's Senior Citizen Center, my uncle and aunt have a place to go every day for companionship, Torah programs, and hot lunches.
- Because of *The Jewish Observer* and *Do Yiddishe Vort*, my entire family has a monthly contact with reliable, Torah-true views and analyses of current Jewish events, presented articulately, artistically and in good taste. (Did you know that these magazines' income from ads and subscriptions covers only a fraction of their cost and they are dependent on large subsidies from Agudath Israel?)

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—Marsha Shine

Marsha Shine is a member of Rabbi Hillel Belsky's Sunday Night Class in Memphis (see JO, Nov. '83).

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P.S.

The Chofetz Chaim and the Compromise on the Great Divide

Last month's JEWISH OBSERVER, devoted to the Fiftieth Yahrzeit of the Chofetz Chaim זצ"ל, also featured a report on Denver's conversion program involving the cooperation of the city's Traditional, Conservative and Reform rabbis, which resulted in the acceptance of several hundred spurious converts to Judaism—actually non-Jews—as authentic Jews. The JO article was based on exhaustive interviews by the INTERMOUNTAIN JEWISH NEWS with Denver's rabbis, which was published as a twelve-page supplement to that newspaper.

Rabbi Moshe Sherer, president of Agudath Israel of America, wrote a letter in praise of the newspaper's coverage which, in turn, inspired a letter of protest to him from Denver's three Traditional rabbis. The three also submitted their letter to the IJN for publication—making it a matter of public domain. The two letters, with Rabbi Sherer's response to the latter, are printed below to offer the readers insight into the thinking of three of the men responsible for this painful chapter in religious compromise in America, and some speculation as to what the Chofetz Chaim would have said in regard to discussing these events in public.

To the Intermountain Jewish News

Editor:

I want to express to you my heartfelt congratulations for the special edition of your newspaper exposing the arrangement which a number of rabbis in Denver had made concerning conversion procedures, which under the guise of "unity" enabled a large number of non-Jews to become certified as Jews.

Not only have you scored a journalistic coup, but you have indeed

performed an invaluable service to the Jewish community in this country and in Israel. The tragic consequences of this spiritual chicanery is mind boggling.

The two magazines published by Agudath Israel of America, *The Jewish Observer* and *Dos Yiddishe Vort* will carry feature stories about your report and its implications.

Above all, the publicity engendered by your special section will put other Jewish communities throughout the nation on guard, to

prevent the recurrence of such religious malfeasance.

RABBI MOSHE SHERER
President
Agudath Israel of America

From Three

"Traditional" Denver Rabbis

Dear Rabbi Sherer:

Through your letter to the Intermountain Jewish News you, who purport to be the great defender of *Halakha*, are guilty of violating many, many Jewish laws. Among them are:

1. It is forbidden to condemn anyone for any offense without learning firsthand about the nature of the case, without allowing the accused to explain his actions, without carefully scrutinizing and reviewing all the events which took place. (See Rashi and Tanchuma on Genesis 11,5)

2. To scurrilously libel Jews publicly is to be guilty of slander, gossip, causing humiliation, and speaking falsely. (See Chofetz Chaim, Shmiras HaLoshon)

3. To seek to divide a community which is harmonious and happy is to destroy, *Kav'yachol*, the unity of G-d Himself (See B'rochos 6a)

We invite you to meet with us to discuss the issues.

We would like you to explain to us why Orthodox, Conservative and Reform Rabbis should not make an attempt to correct a grievous problem which plagues our community and communities throughout the land.

New York Polarization?"

We would like you to explain why we, in Denver, should import New York's terrible schism and polarization between Jew and Jew, and movement and movement.

We would like you to explain why we, in Denver, should replace "love of Israel" with "unwarranted hatred."

We would like you to explain to us why you would rather excoriate Jews in the press than meet with them face to face.

We would welcome your presence in our midst and we are prepared to engage in a free and open exchange of ideas. This would be more in keeping, we believe, with the letter and the spirit of Jewish Law.

RABBI DANIEL GOLDBERGER
RABBI JEROME LIPSITZ
RABBI STANLEY M. WAGNER

Rabbi Sherer's Reply

Dear Rabbis:

I would be glad to meet with you in Denver to explain my position on the ill-conceived partnership that you had made with Reform and Conservative rabbis for a united conversion procedure, but my schedule makes that impossible. Before submitting my brief letter to the *Intermountain Jewish News*, and writing my article on this subject for the latest issue of *Dos Yiddishe Vort* (Shevat-Adar I), I discussed this subject with several outstanding Halacha authorities. As you know, after its exposure, your project drew sharp criticism from the broadest circles of Orthodox rabbis in this country.

I waited for almost two months before I took my pen in hand to write my views of your mind-boggling *geirus* procedure, as described in the *Intermountain Jewish News*, hoping that you would deny the accuracy of this story, but you never did. In fact, one of you—Rabbi Daniel Goldberger—wrote a letter as president of the Denver Rabbinical Council to *IJN* on December 16 extending your “congratulations . . . for this remarkable journalistic effort . . . [and you wrote that] these complicated and controversial issues were handled with much sensitivity and fairness. [The editors] accomplished a noteworthy achievement in making such a document available to the public.” How strange, then, that you fault us for basing our condemnation of your conversion program on a newspaper account that you laud!

If, as your letter declared, you are “certain that it will be referred to for many months to come . . . as an important source of American Jew-

ish sociology,” what further “scrutiny and review” beyond the 12-page supplement in the *IJN* is necessary?

Your little Mussar preachment that we “are guilty of violating many, many Jewish laws” by condemning your grossly irresponsible practice, invoking the Chofetz Chaim, no less, would be amusing were this situation not so tragic.

Unfortunately, your citing of the Chofetz Chaim as a source to forbid denunciation of your project, indicates an appalling lack of knowledge of his views and practices. The Chofetz Chaim publicly denounced those who openly acted against Torah interests. I refer you to his famous letter *Elbonah Shel Torah* published in 1929 regarding the Vilna Rabbinate, in which he states: “I therefore publicly declare that in all matters involving the guarding of the Faith, it is a mitzva—a sacred duty—to do all that one can, and there is not the slightest fear of violation (of the laws of *lashon hora*).”

Similarly, to drag out the old canard that those who fight the influences of Reform are “dividing a community,” flies in the face of the experience of our people. It is the deviationists, those who are responsible for the shocking pace of assimilation which plagues our people, who are “destroying the unity of G-d Himself,” and not—as you charge—those who expose them. This slogan of “Jewish unity” is constantly being distorted and exploited by the Reform leadership, to the detriment of Jewish interests, as you well know. I am deeply saddened that in this instance you join them in misusing this hallowed concept. I am sure you are in agreement with me, for Rabbi Wagner, for one, is quoted in that *Intermountain Jewish News* report as stating: “I think the lesson that we learn from this six year experiment was that it is erroneous to build the idea of Jewish unity on religious or ideological compromises.”

What Price “Jewish Unity”?

After all, what price should we pay for “Jewish unity”? Should we

be willing to accept fraudulent inquiry in a conversion procedure? (You yourselves describe how you simplistically asked the conversion candidate “Will you observe dietary laws,” when you admit that this ambiguous question was designed to avoid eliciting a response conforming with *halacha*.) And should we as the price for unity be willing to mislead the Israeli Rabbinate by issuing certificates to spurious converts that they are “*kasher l'khol davar shebikadushah*”?

My heavy schedule simply does not permit me to plan to visit your community in the foreseeable future; our meeting would have to take place in New York. I would welcome an opportunity when you next come to this city to explain to you why the Torah world is shocked and dismayed not only by your violation of *halacha*, but by compounding the offense through continuing to justify it—except for Rabbi Goldberger’s rueful comment: “In retrospect, in hindsight, it may be that it should have been realized that when you get into the interpretation of Jewish law—it should have been kept separate. The conversion program was done because we felt there was a need for *Klal Yisrael*, for unity in the community and perhaps we went overboard in that particular area.”

Meanwhile, those of us who have access to public awareness, have an obligation to continue educating the public through every possible means about the nature of the “spiritual chicanery” and “religious mfeasance” inherent in the “unholy alliance of Orthodox-Conservative-Reform rabbis” on *geirus* procedures (terms used by me in my letter to the editor), to make certain that this should not recur in other Jewish communities. True Jewish unity can only be based upon:

ומי כעמך ישראל גוי אחד בארץ.
RABBI MOSHE SHERER

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The Many Facets of Mr. Mendlowitz



To the Editor,

Rabbi Chinn's masterful portrayal of Reb Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz (Sept '83) succeeded in making the man alive again for me—an inspiring experience. Nonetheless, there are several items missing—inevitably, I suppose—that are essential to an appreciation of the many facets of the man and the scope of his accomplishments.

- As a *mechanech*, he dealt with mind, heart, spirit, and—yes—the body, too. I, personally, have passed on the wisdom expounded in his *Pir-kei Avo's* class, where he explained: "Torah is good with *derech eretz*, for the exertion of both obliterate sin—At the end of the day, if your mind isn't fatigued from learning, if you aren't worn out from physical exertion, you're open to all kinds of distractions. Learn until your mind is numb, play until your body aches—I mean *you, masmidim!*—and you will not be troubled by restlessness or intrusive thoughts."

- While Rabbi Chinn captured Mr. Mendlowitz's Chassidic fervor,

he only alluded to Reb Shraga Feivel's conviction that the *Litvishe derech halimud* (the analytical method of Talmud study associated with the Lithuanian yeshivos) was essential to his concept of Torah Vodaath. He went out of his way to engage outstanding Lithuanian Roshei Yeshiva, including such giants as Rabbi Kantrowitz, Rabbi Moshe Rosen (נור הקודש), Rabbi Dovid Lebowitz, Rabbi Shlomo Heiman, Rabbi Reuven Grozovsky, Rabbi Eliyohu Chazan זכרונם לברכה and יבדל לחיים Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky שליט"א. He undoubtedly had differences with them, but recognized that their approach to *Gemora* met a very specific need.

- Although he started out as a humble businessman who entered *chinuch* by default, Reb Shraga Feivel was a visionary who adjusted his vision to meet the changing needs of dynamic times. Thus at a *Yahrzeit* gathering a few years after his passing, several *talmidim* each recalled, in separate addresses, how their Rebbe had realized that the top-most priority for the yeshiva was to produce Torah-imbued laymen; *mechanchim* and educators to reach the masses of children in the hinterland; *Gedolei Yisroel* to replace the vast destruction of World War II in Europe. Contradictions? No. All were telling the truth, for each recounted Reb Shraga Feivel's shifting reaction to the changing scene: Torah-imbued laymen in the 30's, teachers of Torah in the early 40's, followed by Torah giants after the losses of World War became a compelling factor in setting the agenda.

- As architect of the American yeshiva system, he consulted with *Gedolei Yisroel* on every step he took—as Rabbi Chinn recounted. It is imperative to note, that in 1926, when Reb Shraga Feivel asked the

Torah giants of Europe if he should open an "English" high school, he was told "Yes," as a *hora'as sha'ah*—to meet the needs of the hour . . . with the understanding that the situation should be under periodic review.

Four years later, just after Yeshiva Rabbi Yitzchok Elchonon had opened Yeshiva College in Washington Heights, the lay leadership of Torah Vodaath insisted that Reb Shraga Feivel also open a college in Torah Vodaath. They claimed that between the attractions of Brooklyn College, City College and Yeshiva College, Torah Vodaath would lose its student body. He replied that his mandate from Reb Chaim Ozer, the Rogatchover Gaon, and others, only covered the years of compulsory schooling, through high school. They continued to insist, and in response he offered his resignation. Needless to say, the directors relented.

Thank you once more for publishing a superb autobiographical sketch!

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Mr. Mendlowitz: The Personal Dimensions

To the Editor,

The personality of many great men affect his followers in different ways. Writing a profile in the space of a few pages that encompass the multifaceted greatness of a man like Mr. Mendlowitz is a herculean task. Rabbi Chinn's article is an excellent portrayal of Mr. Mendlowitz as the man of vision and achievement who inspired the character of our Torah community. It does not, however, illicit the strong feelings and memories that I experienced as a boy in Torah Vodaath.

Rabbi Chinn's article emphasizes the influence Mr. Mendlowitz had on his disciples through his powerful and unyielding personality; but it is not the strength of his character that lingers with me, it is the softness of his spirit. His concern for the total well being of every student superceded his expectations for intellectual achievement. As an orphan during the depression years, I personally benefited when he concerned himself with my daily needs. Before he arranged for my afternoon *chavrusa*, he made sure that I would eat a nutritious lunch, and it was that concern for all students that left an indelible mark with us. He frequently asked about my widowed mother and the economic situation at home. His love for the human spirit ex-

tended to people outside the yeshiva walls.

His relationship to *baale battim* is as significant and long lasting as his relationships with his best *talmidim*. If we perpetuate the humanity that he imbedded in our spirits, then we are truly disciples of Mr. Mendlowitz.

LOUIS M. GLICK
New York City

"The Boss"— Will There Be Another?

To the Editor:

My compliments on the wonderful article by Rabbi Chinn on the life of Mr. Mendlowitz.

I am sure that Rabbi Chinn omitted the well-known fact that Mr. Mendlowitz was called "The Boss" because of *kinuy shem*—it is forbidden to use a nickname. I, however, always thought that the term "The Boss" was never a nickname, but rather a description of his job title. I have been told that he was well aware of the terminology, and was pleased with it.

In this modern day and age, titles are bandied about indiscriminately. We use the titles "Horav Hagoan," "Hagoan Horav," "Rosh Hayeshiva," etc. In my opinion, the indiscriminate use of these titles is an insult to the persons who really deserve the title.

It is interesting to note that no one is called "The Boss." It would be wonderful if more people would

strive to emulate Mr. Mendlowitz and reach the high *madreiga* of being called "The Boss."

BERNARD BERGER, ESQ.
New York City

Reb Shraga Feivel— Greatness as a Child

To the Editor:

Rabbi Yitzchok Chinn deserves a *yasher koach* for a masterfully vivid portrayal of the life and times of Reb Shraga Feivel and his laying the groundwork for the American Torah community. Regardless of what one writes of this outstanding personality, much of the life and accomplishments of "Nistar Mendlowitz" continues to remain hidden.

Permit me to relate a story told to me by his late sister, Mrs. Frayde Kaufman, ז"ל: When he was a young *bachur*, in Humenne, Shraga Feivel had already begun being different and innovative—so much so that he was the subject of controversy among the local *baalebattim*: he was seen on several occasions with a newspaper sticking out of his pocket; he was "caught" studying *Nach*—which in many circles was considered improper because of the undue emphasis the *Maskillim* place on its study. He also dared to teach Torah to his sister, almost unheard of until the founding of the Bais Yaakov movement some twenty years later. His father, who was known as "Reb Moshe Vilager" (originally from the town of Vilag), also "felt the heat" generated by the townspeople who could not tolerate the boy's conduct.

When a well-known Rebbe visited Humenne, (it may have been the Sanzer Rebbe . . .), the *baalebattim* insisted that Reb Moshe take Shraga Feivel to him and discuss his problem boy with the Rebbe. Reb Moshe complied and brought his son to the Rebbe. After they spent an hour or so together, the Rebbe told his father, "Reb Moshe, your son is a *gadol*. You must show him respect; when he enters the room—you must stand up for him." His prediction was more than justified.

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Memo on Reb Shraga Feivel

To the Editor:

Below is a memo that I circulated amongst my faculty members. After you read it, I'll share their disappointing response with you:

MEMO TO:
ALL JEWISH STUDIES TEACHERS
SUBJECT:
JEWISH OBSERVER ARTICLE
FROM: RABBI AISENSTARK
DATE: OCTOBER 31, 1983

I made 36 photo-copies of the 11 pages of the attached article so that each one of you could have your own copy to read and re-read. The article appeared in the *Jewish Observer*, a magazine which always contains interesting and relevant articles.

The story of Rebbe Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz is a most inspiring biog-

graphy of a man dedicated to authentic Chinuch.

In all my years in education, I have never read about a personality who devoted his life to Jewish education on the level of Rebbe Mendlowitz. I was so impressed that I wanted each one of you to read to read this marvelous story. Although we are not able to match Reb Shraga's accomplishments, we can certainly try. We can see what can be done with true dedication

I would welcome your comments on this article.

The results? A waste of my Xerox machine. Almost all thirty-six faculty members had already read (and re-read) the article.

(Rabbi) SHNEUR AIZENSTARK
Principal
Beth Jacob of Montreal

about Rabbi Akiba's scholarship, even if it surpassed his own. Moshe was concerned that since Rabbi Akiba, with his understanding, was able to reach even the level of *Sod*—mystical implications (inherent in the interpretation of "*Tagin*"), then where was Rabbi Akiba's transcendental commitment beyond his comprehension? He feared for Rabbi Akiba, lest he be committed to his understanding of G-d rather than to G-d Almighty Himself.

When Rabbi Akiba replied to the query "How do you know this?" by stating "*Halacha L'Moshe MiSinai*," *Moshe Rabbeinu's* composure was restored. Indeed, Rabbi Akiba, too, has that level of commitment that transcends his understanding.

The Conservative Movement prides itself with its scholars. It goes without saying that their perception of scholarship is radically different from our perception of scholarship. But even were we to momentarily concede scholarship to them as well, what they do not have and will not have is a commitment to the Divine that transcends scholarship, and that is the crux of the fallacy that is the Conservative Movement.

(RABBI) GERSHON SCHUSTERMAN
Long Beach, Cal.

Conservative: Inherently Reform

To the Editor:

I read with interest Rabbi Nissan Wolpin's article "The Further Reforming of Conservative Judaism" (Nov. 83).

Living in and, administering to the Jewish community in Orange County, California (John Birch Society country), I can state clearly without equivocation that the demarcation lines that may have once existed between the Conservative and Reform movement are now quite blurred. Other than one Conservative clergyman who has achieved national prominence due to his right wing stand (within the Conservative movement), there is little left that the movement is conserving.

It has been said that the Conservative movement is to Judaism what immunization is to physical health. By giving the body small amounts of a virus—and challenging it to defend itself against it—the body creates antibodies, to the point that it will be able to ward off the illness even should it come back in a more virulent form in the future. The Conservative movement (unlike the Re-

form movement) gives just enough *Yiddishkeit* (if it can be called such) so that its members will be insensitive to the Divinity of Torah and *mitzvos* and will be turned off to *Yiddishkeit*; this is certainly the case with its youth. They retain a smattering of *Yiddishkeit*, thinking that they know what they have rejected and as such, remain immune to *teshuvah* in the future.

Rabbi Wolpin's article addresses the Conservative misinterpretation of the *Gemora* in *Menachos* 29b, offering his own interpretation. May I respectfully submit an interpretation from the Lubavitcher Rebbe שליט"א on the same Talmudic passage which also has relevance to the very same issue:

Why was *Moshe Rabbeinu* disconcerted if, indeed, Rabbi Akiba surpassed him in Torah scholarship? Was not *Moshe Rabbeinu anav mikol haadam*—the most humble of all men? And by paying homage to *Moshe Rabbeinu* later by referring to "*Halacha L'Moshe MiSinai*"—does that suggest that *Moshe Rabbeinu's* ego had to be satisfied?

The Rebbe's interpretation: *Moshe* was not at all concerned

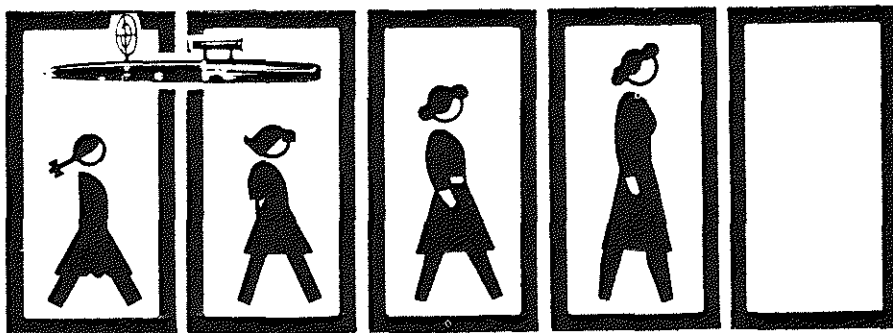
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Handelman Does Not Stand Alone

To the Editor:

I read Susan Handelman's article ("Stranger in a Strange Land," Oct. '83) with great interest; most of what she discussed applies to the single man, as well.

She makes a few points, however, that could be misunderstood and require some clarification. "Of the 613 *mitzvos*, only a very few depend on one's marital status. Before G-d, ultimately everyone is alone; the ultimate definition of a Jew is in relation to the Creator and the Torah, not to one's spouse, or children, or car pool. . . . The single woman is no less a person, no less a Jew than her married counterpart."

Obviously, she is not suggesting that the single girl is virtually the same as the married woman, or she would not have written the article! She herself mentions at the begin-

ning of the article, "the home is probably the *central* institution in Orthodox Judaism, in many ways even *more important* than the synagogue." A closer look at Chazal will show that while before G-d a person may well be judged alone, that judgment is *intricately related* to how he stands with his family, friends, and his whole community. In fact, Chazal tell us that even should a man deserve to die, G-d will allow him to live because he is needed by his wife and children, or because he is an essential part of a virtuous community.

Her plea is that the single girl must be treated like a person, which is certainly the case. We single folk, however, do have some *very basic* questions to ask ourselves before heaping shame on others for not helping us: Do I really understand all that marriage entails? How do my friends perceive me? How do I present myself to them? Do I really know what I am looking for? These are just a few of the points which may be the key to understanding why it is taking so long.

Of course, in *all* situations, assistance must be given. But let's do it as a team! The person who tries to understand, and do his part, will get a much better response from people, than someone whose attitude is just that of: "Why aren't you doing more for me?"

BRUCE FIELDS
Silver Spring, Md.

Not All "Strangers" Are Lonely

To the Editor:

In response to Susan Handelman's article "Stranger in a Strange Land: Plight of the Single Orthodox Wo-

man," (October '83) I would like to relate my experience to you. I am one of Miss Handelman's "special people": a single, 28-year old divorcee *baalas teshuva*. I have a profession also, another factor that according to Miss Handelman should further my alienation from the Orthodox community. Much to the contrary, the generous hearts and warm homes of many *Bnai* and *Bnos Torah* have been opened to me.

Through the first period of my "return," when I lived a student's life with a husband in graduate school, through my divorce and years in nursing school, I did not find myself a threat to my married Orthodox friends. I lived in Chicago, attended classes at our *shul* and in people's living rooms, a part-time learning program for women, and had many a *schmooze* over coffee with religious friends. They shared their lives with me, and I could speak my heart to them. While I was working night shifts, the year I changed the way I dressed, the year I tightened my *kashrus* and covered my hair, they were there with me. I was tutored in davening by a woman with seven children of her own. I was booked for *Shabbos* three weeks in advance. And I was questioned with real interest: *how are you, what's new . . .* the usual questions, but not just superficial social amenities. Not just women my age, not just other *baalei teshuva*, not just single women or other "professionals." Rabbonim, their wives, married friends with children, older people with grandchildren, couples with plenty of friends and family to fill their *Shabbos* tales without including questing, questioning strangers.

They may have one and all been formally and personally so generous to me because they felt obligated to "do a *mitzva*," but I doubt it. Because the genuine giver has the hallmark of loving the vessel that receives his gift. Rav Eliyahu Dessler explains to us (from *Michtav Meeliyahu*, translation by Aryeh Carmell):

We usually think it is love which causes giving because we observe that a person showers gifts and favours on the

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one he loves. But there is another side to the argument. Giving may bring about love for the same reason that a person loves what he himself has created or nurtured: he recognizes in it a part of himself.

Last year, my need for learning unsatisfied in Chicago, I left my job as an Intensive Care nurse and came to Jerusalem with a duffel bag and a box of books. I was taken almost immediately into a Yeshiva for *Baalos Teshuva*, for older women with little basic skills and some background in Orthodox life. Chazal tell us that if we make a hole the size of a pin, Hashem will widen it to the size of the entrance to a palace for us. We must take initiatives.

My friends are gathered from my teachers, Rabbonim, my fellow students, relatives of friends from the States, and the network widens every day. The only "attitude" I have encountered towards single Orthodox women is a loving admiration for a very special group of women who are doing what Torah tells them is right, despite that most of the modern Western world says.

Miss Handelman writes of those singles feeling a great deal of pain, I'd like to relate a story one of my Rabbonim told us: When he was a small boy, he and his mother were boating on a lake. Suddenly a fierce storm came up and he was terrified by the thunder and lightning. He threw himself onto his mother, and as he felt her arms protect him, all of his fear left him. His mother said: "As I am holding you now my son, so *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* holds you in His arms, always. You never have to be afraid, no matter what."

CHANI SIEGEL
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Succeeding Single-Handedly

To the Editor:

Dr. Handelman's article on the plight of the Jewish singles was timely and well done. I would differ with her, however, on several points:

Single women—like married women—have been left outside the

shul and yeshiva boards for many understandable reasons. But even those that accept women are institutions that cater to family needs and would naturally prefer married board members.

The lack of acceptance of singles on their own terms, sadly, is an outgrowth of the "Wait-Till-She-Gets-Married" syndrome. But while marriage may be the universal goal, it is *not* the universal problem-solver. And while it may overshadow all other goals in life, it should not replace them. People (and I mean girls, too) who put their energies into excelling as human beings and into doing well in their many undertakings—at work, among friends, in *tzeddaka* drives, and in personal religious development—are the kind of

people who will do well in their life tasks as good husbands and wives, and successful parents, too. It's silly to say, "What does she need it for? Will she use it when she's married?" As a person, she will use it (whatever "it" may be)—single or married.

One more comment: The older single is often advised to compromise. Too conscious a compromise may drain the "superior" partner of all willingness to be a giving member of the marriage that follows; and—let's face it—after the wedding is when compromise and giving truly must begin. If marriage is the biggest gift she can give her husband, they might both be better off single.

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Correction:



Some of the people in the above picture were identified incorrectly in the Jan. issue of J.O. They are (right) the Chofetz Chaim talking to his son Reb Leib (back to the camera); standing in the doorway Chaye Sor'ke the dienstmeidel (household help) (left) and the Chofetz Chaim's Rebbeztzin.

No Barrier to Prayers

To the Editor:

In regard to the poem "Letter to A Soviet Jew" in the November '83 issue: We are obligated to pray with the knowledge (*daas*) of before whom we stand (*Avos* 2). The *Mesilas Yeshorim* elaborates on this theme (in Chapter 19): "A person must realize that he is actually standing in front of the Creator, May His Name be Blessed, and he is talking directly to Him even though a person cannot see Him. . . ."

"With the proper intellect and a bit of contemplation and attention, a person can establish the truth of this awareness in his heart . . . now he pleads and requests of Hashem and Hashem listens as when a person speaks to his fellowman. . . ."

Thus we do know "that our prayers go up," although it is correct that we may be in doubt as to whether we've said the right thing.

In other words, we can say that even an iron curtain cannot separate Jews from their Father in Heaven (as in *Pesachim* 85b).

Similarly, we can also say that an iron curtain cannot separate one Jew from his fellow Jew and the letters and prayers that keep flowing with *Ahavas Yisroel*.

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AGUDATH ISRAEL L.A. CONFERENCE MAPS WEST COAST EXPANSION



At public session of Agudath Israel gathering in Los Angeles (from left to right): Rabbi Eliezer Adler, Rabbi Chaskel Besser, Rabbi Yaakov Perlow (at lectern), Rabbi Yaakov Krause, Rabbi Moshe Sherer, Rabbi A. Teichman, Rabbi Shmuel Bloom.

Plans to mobilize Orthodox Jews from the broadest possible circles to develop an effective Agudath Israel in the West Coast were mapped out at a two-day conference of local Orthodox leaders and national Agudath Israel officers from New York. Over 500 persons attended the conference, including representatives of over 30 Orthodox Jewish institutions from Los Angeles and San Francisco. The climax of the deliberations was a public mass meeting on Monday night addressed by the Novominsker Rebbe, **Rabbi Yaakov Perlow**, chairman of the presidium of Agudath Israel of America, and **Rabbi Moshe Sherer**, national president of the movement. The two-tier dais included rabbinic leaders from all segments within the local Orthodox community. The audience represented a cross-section of the observant Jews in the area.

Strong Enough to Reach Out

Rabbi Perlow, speaking on "The Torah Jew Confronts Contemporary Society," stated that the Orthodox Jewish community has already reached a stage of sufficient inner strength to "reach out to the spiritually deprived and inspire them to begin a Torah way of life." He stressed Agudath Israel's effort to unite observant Jews of diverse backgrounds, and called upon Orthodox Jews

to strive for even greater heights of personal spiritual fulfillment.

Rabbi Sherer described the "new breed of knowledgeable Orthodox Jew that has arisen during the past two decades, deeply committed to preserving authentic Judaism." He urged Orthodox Jews on the West Coast to "join Agudath Israel's historic effort to build coalitions to provide Orthodox Jewry with an effective voice and arm." The Agudath Israel president declared that the secular and deviationist Jewish groups are on the decline because "their children have copped out from the Jewish People since a 'Jewishness' not based upon Torah is spiritually impotent."

The opening remarks were made by conference chairman **Rabbi Jacob Friedman**, and the session was chaired by **Rabbi Yaakov Krause**, *menahel* of Yeshiva Rav Issacsohn. The audience warmly greeted the announcement by the national chairman of Agudath Israel's Daf Yomi Commission, **Rabbi Chaskel Besser**, that Agudath Israel of Los Angeles has now launched a "Dial-A-Daf" program to enable Jews in the area to study the daily Talmud program via telephone. This project, sponsored by Rabbi Abraham Rubin and family, is a project of Agudath Israel of Los Angeles, and is linked to the national Torah Communications Network.

The mass meeting was opened by **Rabbi Chaim Schnur**, president of Agudath Israel of Los Angeles, who introduced **Rabbi Avrohom Teichman**, rabbi of the Los Angeles Beis Hamidrash of Agudath Israel, who led the assembly in the recitation of T'hilim.

The national officers of Agudath Israel who flew to Los Angeles to participate in the conference, in addition to Rabbi Sherer and Rabbi Besser, were Mendel Berg, Benjamin Fishoff, Chaim Hertz, Al Rieder and Rabbi Shmuel Bloom, national administrative director of the organization.

First Orthodox Legislative Conference

A major event tied in with the Agudath Israel conference, was the first Legislative Conference under Orthodox Jewish auspices in the history of the West Coast, which was held Monday morning at the Beverly Grand Hotel. The breakfast session was addressed by **Honorable Philip Abrams**, Under Secretary of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, who came from Washington to deliver greetings from President Reagan's administration. He lauded Agudath Israel's responsible activities in representing Jewish interests to the government.

Rabbi Sherer presented Agudath Israel's legislative agenda on the national scene to the 150-person audience, consisting of state wide legislative leaders as well as local officials. He told the group, which also included members of the recently-organized chapter of the Commission on Legislation of Agudath Israel of Los Angeles and prominent Orthodox leaders, that Agudath Israel will now seek to bring to California and the West Coast the various benefits for yeshivos and Orthodox Jews that it has pioneered and achieved for other regions throughout the United States.

LI. Governor Leo T. McCarthy of California was warmly greeted when he stated that this type of political action by Orthodox Jews in the West Coast was long overdue, and pledged the assistance of the state administration to further the California legislative agenda.

The local legislative goals were presented by **Dr. Irving S. Lebovics**, co-chairman of Agudath Israel's Commission on Legislation and Civic Action in California, who also served as chairman of the function. Stanley Treitel, co-chairman of this Legislative Commission, greeted and introduced the government leaders and representatives in attendance.

Chairing the West Coast conference, in addition to Rabbi Jacob Friedman were Rabbis Chaim Schnur, Akiva Schlusser and Yosef Naiman. The local Agudath Israel leaders were joined by the New York State leadership delegation in a series of working sessions and receptions.

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AGUDATH ISRAEL NAMES ZWIEBEL DIRECTOR OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Dovid Zwiebel, an attorney since 1979 with the law firm of Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison, was named the new Director of Government Affairs for Agudath Israel of America, it was announced by the organization's president Rabbi Moshe Sherer. Mr. Zwiebel, who took office on February 6, will be responsible for the multi-faceted legislative and advocacy programs of Agudath Israel's Office of Government Affairs, which relate to the broad range of concerns of Orthodox Jewry.

Mr. Zwiebel is an honors graduate of the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, where he served as Editor-in-Chief of the Law Review. His professional articles attracted considerable attention in the legal community.

Mr. Zwiebel, who studied at the Mesivta Torah Vodaath and its Kollel, has been actively affiliated with the Agudath Israel movement. He has served as a volunteer for Agudath Israel's Jewish Education Program (JEP), as Editor of the *Zeirei Forum*, and, most recently, as member of the Agudah's Commission on Legislation and Civic Action.

In announcing the appointment of Mr. Zwiebel, Rabbi Sherer accepted with regret the resignation of Rabbi Menachem Lubinsky, the current Director of Government and Public Affairs of Agudath Israel, who is establishing his own public relations firm. Rabbi Sherer declared:

"We sincerely regret that after so many years of service with distinction to our cause, Rabbi Lubinsky will now enter the private sector. He had helped develop a number of major break-throughs for the Jewish community. However, we are delighted that Orthodox Jewry will continue to benefit from his blessed talents in his new role as a national officer at large of Agudath Israel."

Rabbi Lubinsky has served Agudath Israel in various capacities during the past 13 years: national coordinator of Zeirei Agudath Israel, editor of the *Zeirei Forum*, Assistant to the President, director of the Boro Park Senior Citizens Center, director of Project COPE (Career Opportunities and Preparation for Employment), and most recently the director of Government and Public Affairs.

The Office of Government Affairs of Agudath Israel has emerged as an effective advocate for the rights and interests of the Orthodox Jewish community. It encompasses the Commission on Legislation and Civic Action of Agudath Israel, which has been in the forefront of legislative accomplishments on behalf of the Orthodox Jewish community nationwide. Attorney Shmuel Prager, who is the general counsel and executive director of the Agudah Commission, has helped create a dramatic increase in services to yeshivos.

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AGUDATH ISRAEL TO N.Y. SENATE: STATE TUITION TAX CREDITS A MUST

"The ever increasing burden upon the parents of children in our education systems—particularly those faced with the dual burden of tuition taxation—provides clear justification for the enactment of a state tuition tax credit measure," was the essence of testimony presented at a public hearing of the New York State Senate Committee on Education by Agudath Israel of America. Testifying on behalf of the Commission on Legislation and Civic Action of Agudath Israel, attorney David B. Hamm spoke out in favor of a state tuition tax credit bill, which the Agudath Israel Legislative Commission had helped draft together with other non-public school leaders, and which was in the process of being introduced in the New York State Legislature.

In presenting the arguments for a state tuition tax credit bill, Mr. Hamm rejected contentions that the bill may be unconstitutional, adding that "the United States Supreme Court, in *Mueller v. Allen*, upheld the constitutionality of permitting state tax benefits for parents paying tuition and other educational expenses for the children. Furthermore, the constitution of New York in no

way i pacts upon this bill. This measure does not provide aid to religious schools. It aids all parents who pay tuition and other educational expenses, not just those who choose to send their children to parochial schools."

Mr. Hamm, who is part of a committee of attorneys of Agudath Israel who worked on this bill with legal experts of the other nonpublic school systems in the state, concluded his remarks by urging the Senate Education Committee, chaired by Senator James Donovan, to support the measure, which would provide a tuition tax credit for parents in public and private schools. Parents would be eligible for a tax credit of \$75 for each child in kindergarten through eighth grade, and \$100 for children in grades 9-12, up to a maximum of 50% of the child's tuition.

Attorney David Zwiebel, Director of Government Affairs of Agudath Israel, noted that while the organization continues to be one of the chief supporters of a federal tuition tax credit bill, it is now making a concerted effort around the country to pass state tuition tax credit measures following the U.S. Supreme Court's recent decision upholding the constitutionality of a Minnesota tuition tax law.

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N.J. LEGISLATURE ADOPTS ANTI-AUTOPSY MEASURE; TIME OF DEATH BILL FAILS

Trenton, N.J.—The New Jersey Legislature unanimously adopted a bill on January 9th which would bar medical examiners from performing autopsies without consent, it was announced by Rabbi Yakov Dombroff, executive director of the New Jersey chapter of the Commission on Legislation and Civic Action of Agudath Israel of America. The bill was modeled after a similar measure which was signed into law by Governor Mario Cuomo of New York last year. The bill, which was sponsored in the New Jersey Assembly by Majority Leader John Paul Doyle, passed the lower House by a unanimous vote of 66 to 0. In the Senate where the bill was also unanimously passed by a vote of 35 to 0, the key sponsor was John F. Russo, chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Governor Thomas Kean is expected to sign the anti-Autopsy measure.

The Agudath Israel regional director, whose office is in Elizabeth, N.J., had warm praise for the bill's sponsors and the Governor's office for their "sensitivity to the rights of the Orthodox Jewish community."

Rabbi Dombroff explained that the bill is basically similar to the New York law, which was developed by the National Jewish Commission on Law and Public Affairs and supported by all segments of the Orthodox Jewish community. He said that with the exception of where an investigation of a homicide or public health is involved, no autopsy could be performed without prior consent. He also had high praise for the chief state medical examiner, Robert Good, who worked very closely with Agudath Israel in the preparation of the bill.

In another significant development for the Orthodox Jewish community in New Jersey, the Assembly failed to vote on a definition of death bill after it was returned to the legislature by Governor Kean with an amendment recognizing a religious objection to the universal definition of death. Agudath Israel's office in New Jersey had impressed upon the Governor the importance of including an "exemption amendment" which would recognize the Orthodox view. The New Jersey bill under consideration is the Universal

Time of Death bill, which was already adopted in some 35 states and which defines death as the cessation of only brain stem activity. According to Jewish law, death comes with both the cessation of brain stem and cardiovascular activity.

In accepting the Agudath Israel position, the Governor exercised an amendatory veto, which is a term used to confirm the Governor's acceptance of the bill provided that the legislature votes on an amendment. The Senate accepted the Governor's amendment by a vote of 34 to 0, but the Assembly failed to act, which automatically kills the bill for now.

According to Rabbi Dombroff, legislative sponsors intend to reintroduce the measure, but this time with the "religious exemption." As a result of the position of the Governor and chief Senate sponsor Russo, the Agudath Israel official was confident that New Jersey would become the first state in the nation to include such a religious exemption. In New York, a Time of Death bill continues to be bottled up in committee as a result of the opposition of the Orthodox Jewish community and other religious elements in the state.

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THREE MONTREAL LADS MEMORIZE 7,000 MISHNAYOS

Montreal—Three Montreal members of Pirchei Agudath Israel received top honors at a celebration marking the conclusion of a *Mishnayos-By-Heart* contest, part of a regional competition sponsored by the National Council of Pirchei Agudath Israel. Mordechai Hirschfeld, Avrohom Teitz and Yudi Glustein memorized between 2,000-3,000 *Mishnayos* each, which prompted the chief rabbi, Rabbi Pinchos Hirschprung, to note: "I was overwhelmed with the knowledge and understanding of *Mishnayos* of these pre-bar mitzvah Pirchim." Rabbi Hirschprung was speaking to an overflow crowd of *roshei yeshiva, rabbanim, menaholim, madrichim* and boys from Montreal and Scranton, who participated in the second Siyum Mishnayos of Pirchei Agudath Israel of Montreal.

Studying at least one *Seder Mishnayos* or a complete *Mesechta* in honor of their Bar Mitzvah were Sholom Abramcyk, Mordechai Bernfeld, Yisroel Meir Brody, Mordechai Hirschfeld, Yudi Glustein, Simcha Lehman, Eithan Pfeiffer, Avrohom Teitz and Yisroel Wennik.

PIRCHEI EXPANSION TO JOHANNESBURG

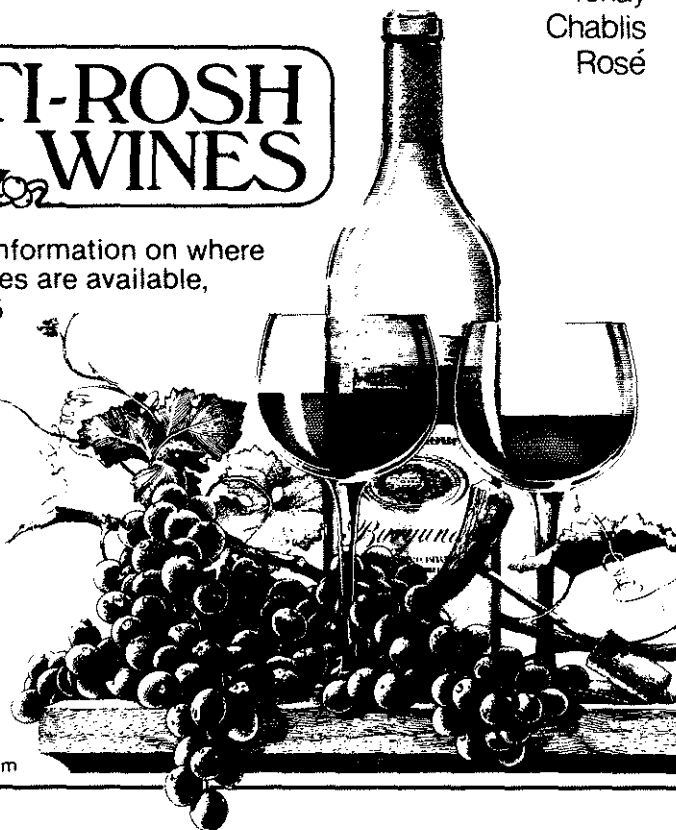
Of the 15 new chapters that were established this year through the efforts of Pirchei Agudath Israel of America, two were in Johannesburg, South Africa, according to a mid-year report by Rabbi Joshua Silbermintz, the national director of the Agudist youth movement. The American new branches are located in St. Louis, Los Angeles, Toronto, Spring Valley, Monsey, Yonkers, Jamaica Estates, Midtown Manhattan, Boro Park, Staten Island, Canarsie and Kew Gardens.

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Representatives of government, business and the community paid tribute to the Boro Park Senior Citizens Center of Agudath Israel of America as the agency celebrated its tenth anniversary on February 27th at the Armon Terrace, at 12:00 noon. According to Rabbi Zalman Weissman, director of the center, nearly 200 senior citizens from the Boro Park area participate in daily recreational programs in which many call their "second home." A hot nutritious kosher meal is served daily by the excellent culinary staff of the center, and a daily *shiur* in *Gemora* is delivered by Rabbi Eliezer Horowitz, Rav of 14th Ave. Agudath Israel.

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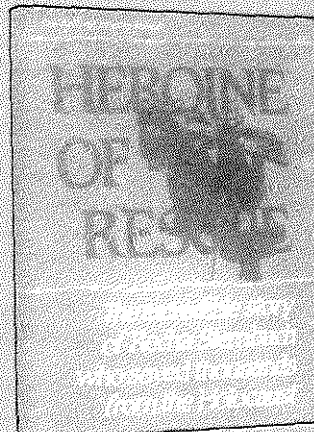
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RABBI SCHACH: 100,000 STUDENT DEFICIT IN CHINUCH ATZMAI

Urgent Need for New School Buildings

In a letter to the leadership and supporters of Chinuch Atzmai-Torah Schools for Israel, Rabbi Elazar Schach, *Ponevezh Rosh HaYeshiva*, declared that the "hundreds of thousands of Jewish children who receive no Torah education" make it imperative that we open new Torah schools. Since the funds for this are not available, portable classrooms should be purchased to launch an on-going development process. After a new school

gains government recognition and decent quarters are established, "the prefab classrooms can be transferred to other locations where new schools are needed." This calls for a special fund for the necessary financing.

The Rosh Yeshiva's letter also stated: "While Chinuch Atzmai has succeeded in expanding in number of students, there are still hundreds of thousands of Jewish children in the cities and settlements of Israel who are far removed from Jewish sanctity and receive no Torah education. We must concern ourselves with the religious com-

mitment of all Jewish children. It is therefore imperative that we open a Chinuch Atzmai-Torah School in every locale so that the sound of Torah and *tefilla* be heard all over the Land."

The Rosh HaYeshiva added: "Years ago, the leaders of Chinuch Atzmai in America set \$100 as the standard membership fee. With the passage of time, the needs have grown, and rising inflation has taken its toll. I therefore request that membership be raised to \$200."

AGUDATH ISRAEL CONFIDENT COURT CHALLENGE TO "GET" LAW WILL FAIL

The challenge to the New York State "Get" law which resulted from a suit filed last Wednesday in U.S. District Court in Manhattan by a non-Jewish woman is destined to failure, according to a statement by the Commission on Legislation and Civic Action of Agudath Israel of America. The woman, identified only as Jane Doe—her identity protected by Judge John F. Keenan—claimed that she was married in 1982 by a Pentecostal minister, but because the "Get" law requires anyone married by church officials to provide a sworn statement on the removal of barriers of remarriage, Ms. Doe thinks that she is expected to sign such an affidavit.

Ms. Doe argued that the law was unconstitutional because she said that she wasn't a member of the church in which she had been married and that in order to comply with the "Get" law, "I would have to become indoctrinated into the principles of that denomination."

Nathan Lewin, of Miller, Cassidy, Larroca and Lewin, the prominent Washington attorney and constitutional authority who drafted the "Get" law on behalf of Agudath Israel, said that he doubted that Ms. Doe had standing to sustain her suit. He added: "The statute imposes no obligation to find out a single fact about any barrier to a spouse's remarriage. It simply says that if you know of one you have to take action to correct it. Ms. Doe says she doesn't know, so she can sign it in good faith."

The "Get" law, which was signed by Governor Cuomo last August 8th, received the overwhelming support of the New York State Legislature, from a cross section of the Orthodox Jewish community, from the foremost rabbinic scholars and from leading constitutional experts. It stipulates that in a divorce procedure where the original marriage was solemnized by the clergy, an affidavit be signed that no barrier to remarriage exists prior to the granting of a civil divorce.

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AGUDATH ISRAEL BLASTS AJCONGRESS FOR NEW THEOLOGICAL DIALOGUE INSTITUTE

"The American Jewish Congress is becoming progressively less Jewish in its agenda," Agudath Israel of America declared in reaction to the recently announced AJC sponsorship, together with the Vatican Secretariat, of an Institute that would conduct theological dialogues between Jewish and Christian scholars and clergymen.

The statement of Agudath Israel of America continues:

"This pattern of abandoning the interests of Judaism began years ago. The AJC was founded in 1918 'to work to foster the creative religious and cultural survival of the Jewish People ... and to battle for human rights,' and yet for decades it has made a career of undermining the financial stability of our beleaguered Torah schools by fighting government aid to Yeshivos ... all the while proclaiming its 'sympathy' for Jewish education.

"More recently, the AJC launched a battle against the New York State 'Get Bill,' which has been carefully designed to help free an exploited wife from the halachic limbo of an ill-fated marriage. Throughout, the AJCongress has been expressing its 'sympathy' for the hapless 'Agunah,' even as it sought to remove her newly-won rights.

"And now, the American Jewish Congress is sponsoring a new Institute, whose 'principal function ... will be to promote dialogues between Christians and Jews on theological rather than political, social and ethical issues. ... The Institute's first venture was a con-

ference in Lucerne, Switzerland, between leading Jewish and Roman Catholic theologians 'on the historical and organic links between Judaism and Christianity.'

"This building of theological bridges between Jewry and the Christian community 'constitute a breach of historic Judaism and is fraught with peril to Judaism,' as leading Torah authorities declared in 1967 when the Synagogue Council of America sought to convene a similar theological dialogue conference in Boston. In a time when we are witnessing an ever-rising tide of assimilation and intermarriage, the only way 'to foster the creative religious survival of the Jewish People' (the AJC credo) is by supporting Torah study and promoting adherence to Torah values in all phases of life. While mutual respect amongst all religious groups is essential to living in a pluralistic society, seeking commonality in religious belief can only further weaken our Jewish community, which is one of the most ignorance-plagued, culturally-estranged Jewish communities in our millennia long history.

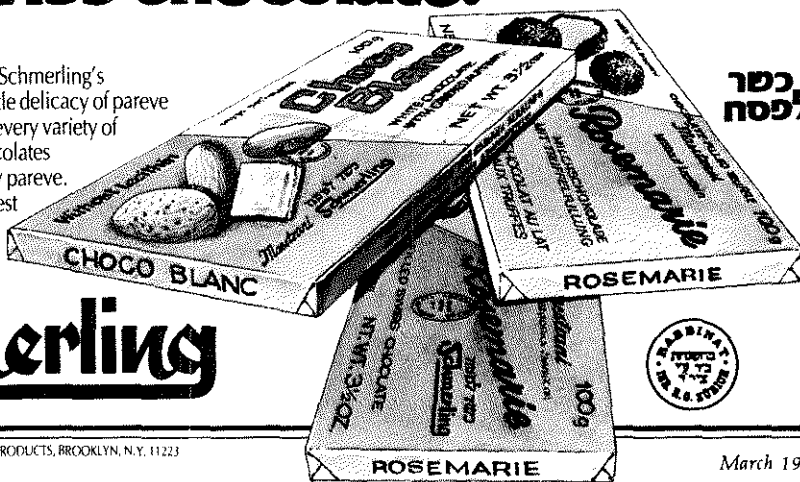
"The AJC has journeyed from weakening the bridges to our rich Jewish heritage by placing obstacles on the path of Yeshiva education, to seeking to strengthen religious bridges between Judaism and Christianity—a path filled with pitfalls and landmines.

"It is time for the American Jewish Congress to become Jewish in its outlook, Jewish in its concerns, and Jewish in its programs."

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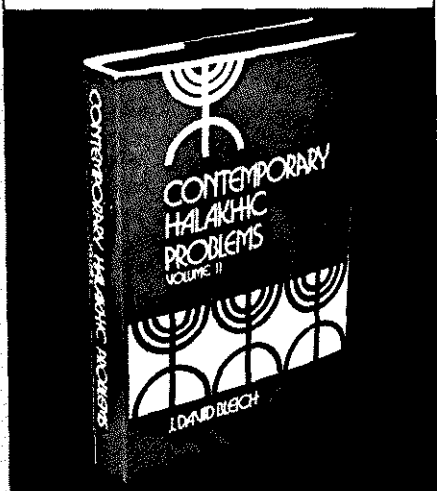


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Rabbi Ephraim Oshry, the author of **RESPNSA FROM THE HOLOCAUST**, was one of the few Halakhic authorities to survive the Holocaust in the ghetto of Kovno, Lithuania.

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- Was a Jew permitted to save his life by purchasing a certificate of baptism (even without actually undergoing conversion)?
- What laws applied to a Jew who was forced, under threat of death, to desecrate a Scroll of the Law?

- In view of a Nazi decree that any Jewish woman found to be pregnant would be put to death at once, did Jewish Law permit women to prevent conception by using a birth control device, or women already pregnant to have an abortion to save their lives?

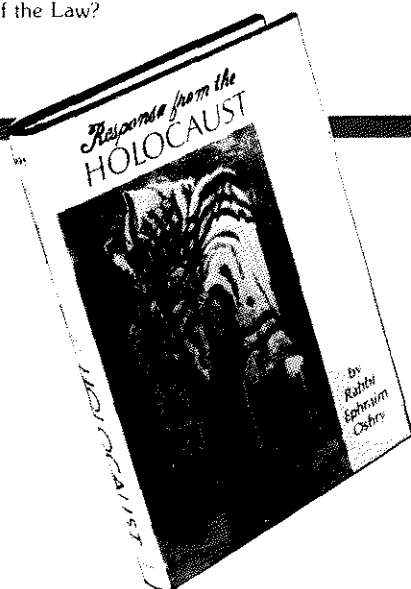
- How did Jewish Law view Jews who, directly or indirectly, assisted the Germans in oppressing and destroying other Jews?

- Could Jews recite the mourners' kaddish in memory of a Christian woman who had risked her own life to save those of Jews whom she had kept hidden in her cellar during Nazi occupation?

- What is the precise text of the blessing that sanctifiers of G-d must recite before being put to death?

Rabbi Oshry scribbled such questions and his replies on scraps of paper, which he placed into tin cans and buried in the ghetto as a record of his own religious activities and the efforts of his fellow inmates to observe their Judaism. After the liberation of Kovno in the summer of 1944 he was able to retrieve his notes. He edited them and published them in five volumes, under the title **Sh'eilos UTeshuvos MiMa'amakim** (literally, "Questions and Responses From Out of the Depths"). One of these volumes received the 1977 Leon Jolson Award for a book on the Holocaust From the Jewish Book Council.

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