

# THE Jewish OBSERVER

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Also in this issue:

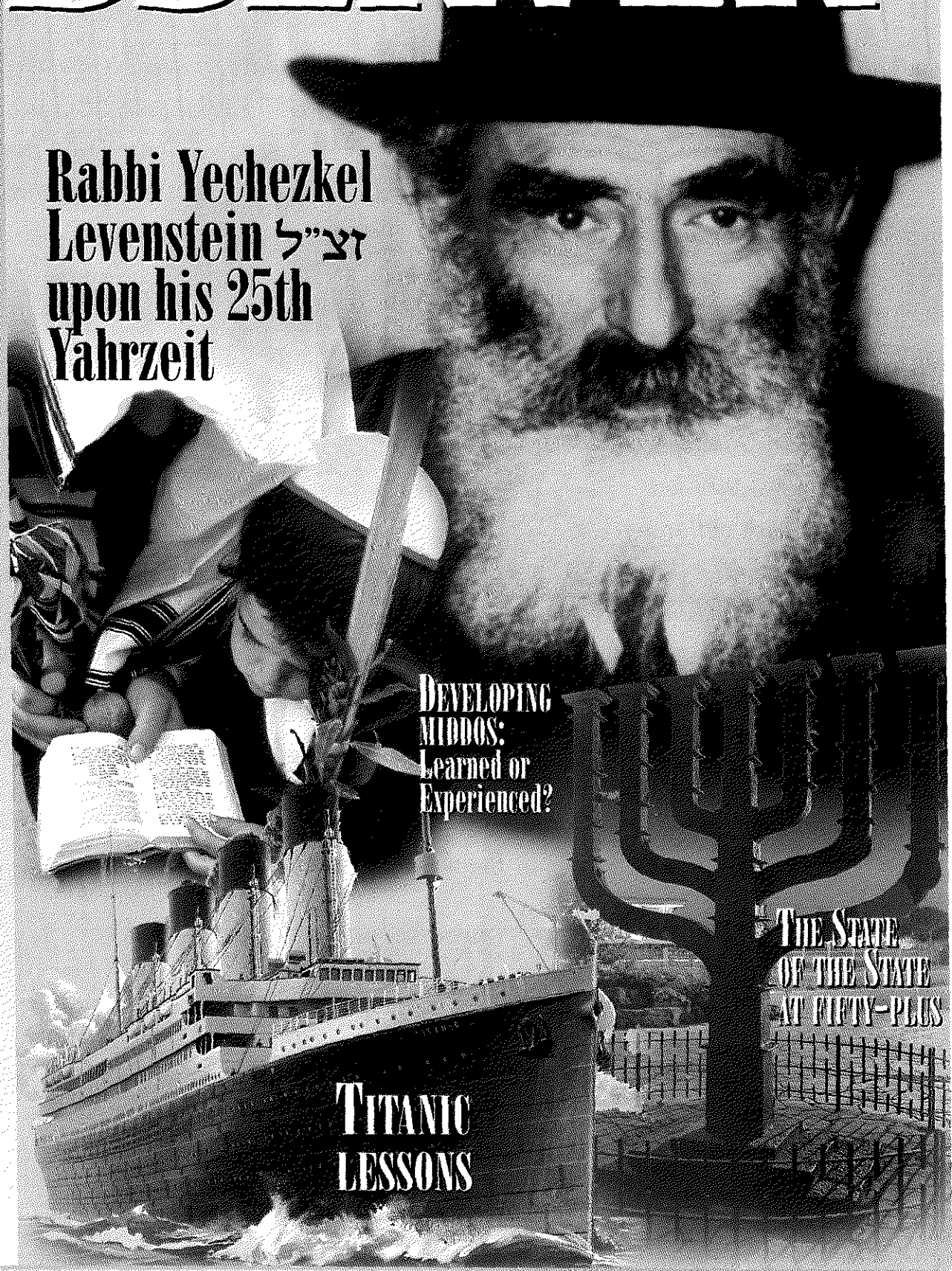
*"Spare the Rod"  
-Please!*  
RABBI MORDECHAI  
FINKELMAN

*Postcards from  
the Edge*  
EYTAN EHRBACH

*The Poverty  
of the Rich*  
PNUEL PERI

*Preparing for  
Rosh Hashana?*

## Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein זצ"ל upon his 25th Yahrzeit



DEVELOPING  
MIDDOS:  
Learned or  
Experienced?

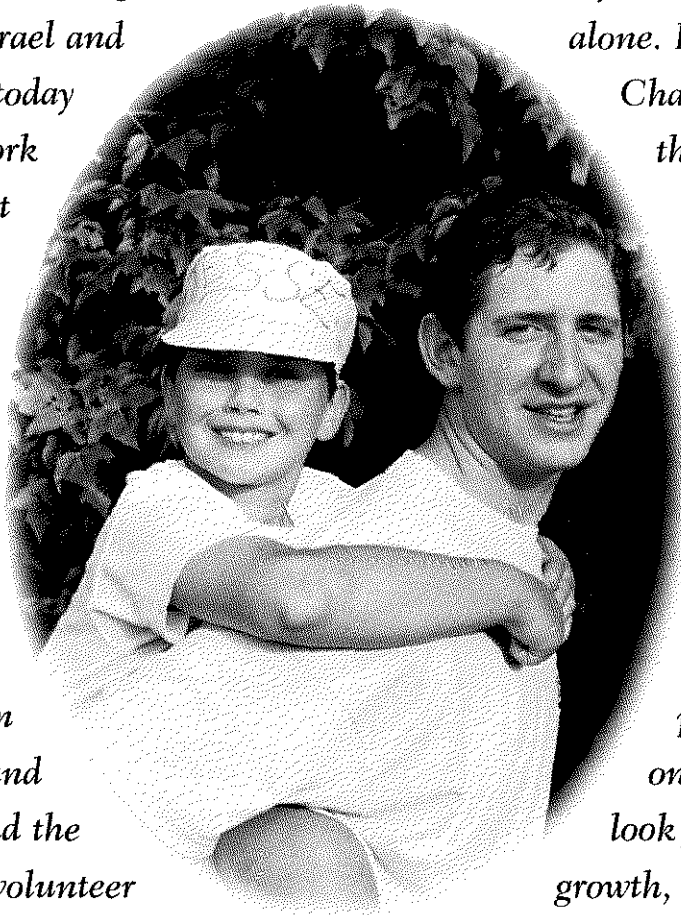
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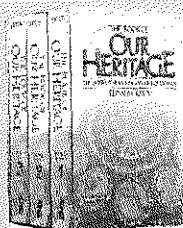
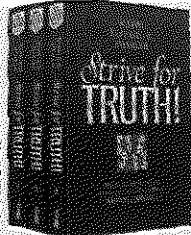
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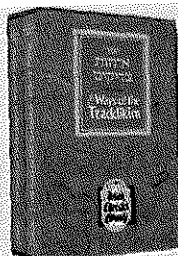
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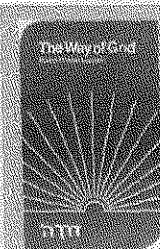
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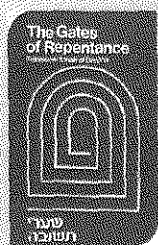


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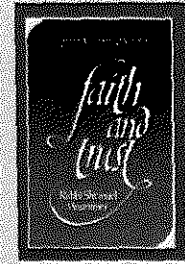


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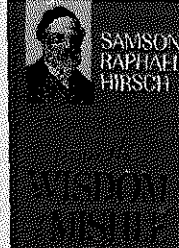
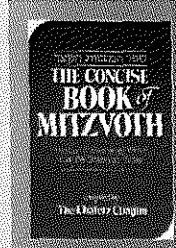
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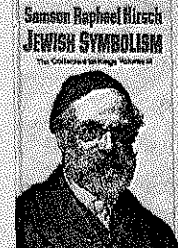


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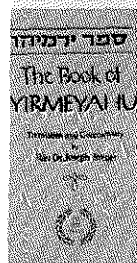
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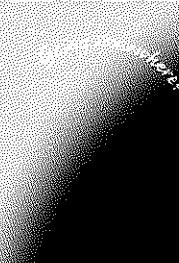
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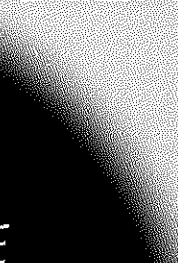


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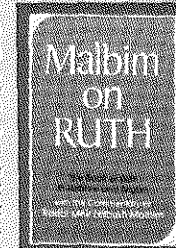
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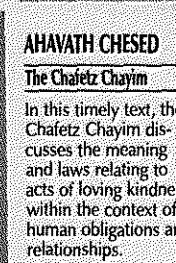
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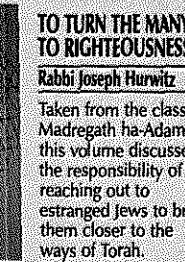
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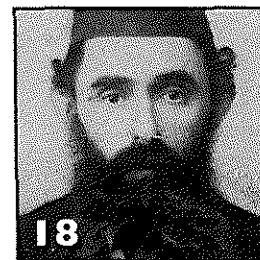
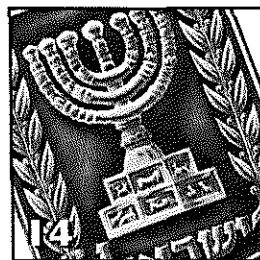
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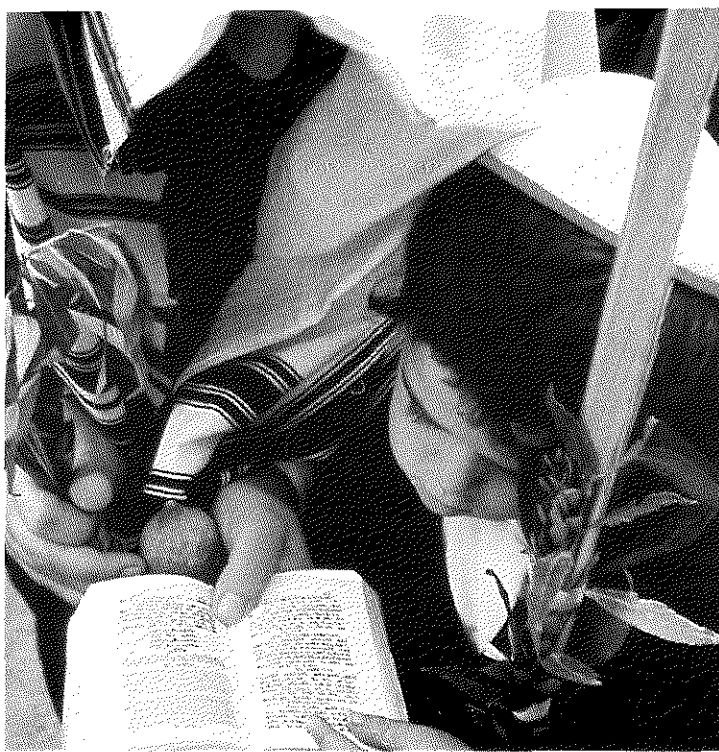
**35 SECOND LOOKS: Preparing for Rosh Hashana?**

**36 Letters to the Editor**

The results of the Israeli election on May 17 signal the possibility of radical changes ahead. The next issue will feature comment on these trends.

The graphic on page 24 of the April '99 *Jewish Observer* has passages from *Tehillim*, and must be treated with the respect due *Kisvei Kosdesh* (sacred writings).

\* Illustration above taken from the *Mashgiach's* passport photo.



# Developing Middos: Learned or Experienced?

When the Talmudic sage Hillel was asked to summarize the Torah in one sentence, he proclaimed: "Di'lach sani, lechavrach lo savid — What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor; the rest is commentary<sup>1</sup>." This is the minimum level of chessed (loving-kindness): do not harm others. A higher level is expounded by Rabbi Akiva in his famous statement: "Ve'ahavta lere'acha kamocho — Love your neighbor as yourself; this is the great principle of the Torah<sup>2</sup>." It is clear from this that the violation of mitzvos bein adam lechavero (mitzvos that govern interpersonal relationships) are at least as objectionable as those bein adam laMakom (between man and Hashem). Parents who are sensitive to this point put in a great deal of effort to teach their children middos (ethical character traits). It is the purpose of this essay to determine the most effective means by which we can develop positive character traits in our children.

<sup>1</sup>Shabbos, 31a

<sup>2</sup>. Yerushalmi Nedarim, 89, 4, See Michtav Me'Eliyahu III p. 88

Dr. Sorotzkin is a therapist with a private practice in Brooklyn. He dedicated this article *le'ilui nishmas* [to the memory of] Rabbi Chaim Segal זצ"ל, late *menahel* of Mesivta Rabbi Chaim Berlin, with whom he had the *zechus* of discussing some of the ideas addressed in this article. (Needless to say, the author alone remains responsible for its content.) The author adds: "Rabbi Segal זצ"ל personified for me the *mechanech* who taught middos by personal example."

## HOW ARE MIDDOS TAUGHT?

Clearly, the importance of *middos* has to be stressed as part of formal instruction both at home and at school. The deleterious effect of living in surroundings where "everything goes," and a culture that fails to uphold even minimal standards of moral behavior, can be observed in contemporary Western society. At the same time, by stressing formal instruction, we run the risk of overlooking other avenues of indirect influence that can often have a stronger and more lasting impact than direct instruction.

The most powerful form of indirect influence is the example parents set by their own behavior, especially in their conduct toward their children. "Children learn by example" has become a cliché as unassailable as motherhood and apple pie. In practice, however, few parents or teachers are truly comfortable relying on this "indirect" method of instruction.

Recently, a young father came over to me at a simcha and asked, "At what age should you start disciplining a child?"

"Discipline starts when a child understands the words 'yes' and 'no,'" I responded.

Realizing that this was not likely to be a purely academic question, I asked him how old his child was.

"Four," he answered.

"What is your specific need for disciplining him?" I asked.

"I need to teach him to say 'please' and 'thank you,'" he explained.

"Then it is a matter of instilling middos, rather than disciplining," I answered. "And in that case, I would ask: Do you say 'please' and 'thank you' to your son?"

He was taken aback by this question, but gave it some thought.

"I'm not sure, but probably not," was his honest response.

Although he seemed to understand my point, he could not fully accept the idea of forgoing the use of direct instruction or any degree of pressure, and to have faith in the power of setting an example.

## LEARNING BY LIVING

It is difficult to have faith in the indirect influence of setting an example. Many parents feel they are being derelict in their duty of being *mechanech* (educating) their children if they are not actively and forcefully instructing (or perhaps they are not confident in the example they are setting). From the words of Chazal (our sages), however, we see that indirect influence is the most effective means of educational influence<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>3</sup>. See also Rabbi Matis Roberts, "Whisper Above the Roar: Making the Case for Subtlety," *JO*, April '98.

The *Midrash* states that Moshe had ten names: "Yered" because he brought down the Torah to the world; "Chever" because he united the children with their Father in heaven, etc. *Hashem* told Moshe that He will call him only by the name given to him by Basya, the daughter of Pharaoh, i.e. Moshe<sup>4</sup>.

Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz זצ"ל asks: Why did *Hashem* choose to call Moshe by the one name that seems to least reflect his greatness? In fact, this name does not even reflect something that Moshe did. Rather, it relates only to what Pharaoh's daughter did, "*Ki min hamayim mishisihu* — For I drew him from the water."

Reb Chaim explains that since Pharaoh's daughter saved Moshe with *mesiras nefesh* (at the risk of her life), this character trait of being devoted to others became part of Moshe's personality.<sup>5</sup> It does not say that Moshe received lessons in self-sacrifice, nor is there evidence that he won first prize in a "devotion to others" contest<sup>6</sup>. The major contributing factor was that *he himself* was raised with self-sacrifice.

Likewise, Reb Chaim continues, the *Talmud Yerushalmi* states that we learn that Jews have the character trait of compassion for others from "*Veshamar Hashem Elokecha lecha es habris ve'es hachessed* — *Hashem* will safeguard for you the covenant and kindness that He swore to your forefathers."<sup>7</sup> The *Torah Temima* asks the obvious question: How can you learn about a characteristic of the Jewish people from a verse describing how *Hashem* treats them? Here, too, Reb Chaim explains that since *Hashem* treats the Jewish people with kindness, this virtue becomes absorbed in their national character. By treating His children with kindness, *Hashem* is, in effect, presenting them with this character trait as a gift.<sup>8</sup>

4. *Midrash Rabba, reish Vayikra*

5. See *Sichos Mussar* (5732:25): "Whenever one person endows another with a *midda*, the recipient becomes enriched beyond any reckoning."

6. As indicated above, it is not my intention to question the usefulness of these teaching tools; rather, it is to emphasize the importance of setting an example in addition to direct instruction.

7. *Devarim* 7, 12; *Yerushalmi Sanhedrin* 6:7

Some adults are convinced that the Torah laws regulating interpersonal relationships do not apply to how an adult treats a child (especially their own child or student). This idea is clearly contrary to *halacha*.

We also see from *Chazal* how people (and even nations!) develop negative traits by being treated negatively. The apathy of *Amalek* is attributed to the coldness with which Timna, the "mother" of *Amalek*, was rejected by the *Avos*<sup>9</sup>.

From this we can conclude that the primary means of instilling the attribute of kindness in children is not by training them to say "thank you," etc.! Rather, one *treats them* with kindness (perhaps by saying "thank you" to them), and that instills this trait into their essence<sup>10</sup>. In a recent business article, the successful owner of a chain of restaurants describes his version of a

8. Since, as Reb Chaim points out, attributes such as feelings of love can be instilled even into inanimate objects, it is obvious that this process is of a *ruchniyus* nature rather than a cognitive one.

9. *Sichos Mussar* (5731:31). A well-known *Rosh Yeshiva* was once asked at a meeting for parents and educators in regard to rebellious youngsters: "How can these youngsters have no consideration for the pain they are causing their parents?" He responded, "Apparently, these parents showed little consideration for the pain they caused their children."

10. These words of *Chazal*, as explained by Reb Chaim, should reassure those parents who become excessively worried that being "too nice" to their children will cause them to become spoiled.

trickle-down "*middos*" program: "My goal is to perfect a model of hospitality that starts with the way I treat my staff."

#### TEACHING BY EXAMPLE

Some schools (and parents) pride themselves in "teaching" *middos* by using contests, essays, prizes and even punitive measures (!) to promote and encourage polite behavior. How effective are such tools if a teacher in one of these schools is not sufficiently careful to exemplify *middos* when he or she speaks to a student? If he insults, "puts down" or embarrasses a student in front of others? Or if he "just" fails to treat his students with respect? Here again, while everyone knows the cliché that "Do as I say and not as I do" is an ineffective means of instruction, this knowledge is not always internalized.<sup>11</sup> One reason for this may be the fact that some adults are convinced that the Torah laws regulating interpersonal relationships do not apply to how an adult treats a child (especially their own child, or student). This idea is clearly contrary to *halacha*.<sup>12</sup>

Rabbi Pam שליט"א spoke recently for the Chofetz Chaim Heritage Foundation on the subject of *ona'as devarim* (hurtful speech). Making it clear that this Torah prohibition also applies to teachers and parents, Rabbi Pam said: "Many children can be turned off from *Yiddishkeit* because of verbal mistreatment, either from parents or from teachers if they use sarcasm or public insults in class.... This is all included in the prohibition of *ona'as devarim*, which is part of the same negative prohibition as *lashon hara* (gossip, slander)."

Similarly, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל was asked if a teacher is permitted

11. See *Orchos Ish* p. 142 regarding how students absorb more from their *Rebbi's* actions than from his lectures; p. 143 for comments regarding the negative results from punitive demotion. Also: According to Rabbi S.R. Hirsch, "Demanding honor and obedience from our children without granting them respect and dignity in return, is doomed to failure" *Yesodoth Hachinuch*, Vol. 1. — cited by C. Juravel, *JO*, Nov. '98. (p. 42).

12. See *Choshen Mishpat* 420:103; *Minchas Chinuch, mitzva* 328; *Sefer Chassidim* 565.

to ask his students to identify the student who misbehaved (to "snitch," in the vernacular). Reb Moshe responded that for a teacher to do so would be repulsive, since it teaches the students to take lightly the prohibition of speaking *lashon hara*.<sup>13</sup>

Some educators were not comfortable giving up this well-used, direct "educational" tool. They wrote to Reb Moshe questioning his ruling based on their contention that the teacher's intention is to influence the student to stop transgress-

13. *Igros Moshe Y.D.II 103.*

ing. It seems that they could not understand how an educator could forgo a direct and "certain" educational tool (exposing and punishing the culprit) for the sake of what they perhaps saw as a dubious gain, i.e., setting an example of not encouraging *lashon hara*.

Reb Moshe responded in no uncertain terms that the concern of setting a negative example outweighs any other "educational" consideration<sup>14</sup>. Reb Moshe makes it clear that setting the right example takes precedence over the teacher's desire to "instruct" or reprimand the student.

Unfortunately, due to the zeal with which some teachers and parents approach their task of teaching an offending child to behave properly, they become oblivious to the damage they are causing by the example they are setting. Telling a child to speak *lashon hara* will inevitably cause the child to become insensitive to this *aveira* (transgression). The teacher's intentions and justifications have no mitigating effect on this negative influence.

Similarly, Reb Moshe comments on the *Midrash* that is critical of *Avraham Avinu* for sending his son to get water for his guests instead of getting it himself. Asks Reb Moshe, perhaps *Avraham* was trying to train his son in the *mitzva* of *hachnossas orchim* (hospitality). To this Reb Moshe answers that if someone wants to educate his son in a *mitzva*, the most effective method is for the son to observe his father performing the *mitzva*, rather than having the father instruct his son to perform the *mitzva*!

#### TEACHING CHILDREN TO DAVEN

Another arena where the conflict between setting an example and direct instruction is often played out is in parents' attempts to teach children to *daven*. An all too common sight in many *shuls* is a father raising his voice, reprimanding, or even hitting his son to get him to *daven*, or perhaps "only" directing his head toward the *Siddur*, in an effort to be *mechanech* him in the importance of *davening*.

This approach has been severely

14. In a personal conversation with the author, Rabbi Dovid Feinstein שליט"א (*Shevat*, 5759) indicated that there are situations where Reb Moshe would have permitted asking students to inform on their peers, (e.g., to find out which child has been playing with matches). Even in such a situation, however, every effort should be made to minimize the damage of asking children to speak *lashon hara*. He suggested having the *Rebbi* speak to the whole class about the problem without asking for the name of the culprit, or asking the *talmidim* to try to convince the perpetrator to come over on his own to the *Rebbi* to discuss his problem (perhaps by promising not to punish him). These suggestions obviously work best when the *Rebbi* establishes a close, non-threatening, warm relationship with his *talmidim*.

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criticized by many *gedolim*. Rabbi Hillel Goldberg relates an incident involving Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner זצ"ל. He had observed a father "disciplining" his son to *daven*. Every time the child would get up or divert his attention, the father redirected him. It was a battle.

"What are you doing?" Rabbi Hutner asked the father.

"I'm teaching my son to *daven!*" answered the father.

"No, you're not," said Rabbi Hutner. "You're teaching your son to grow up to tell his own son to be quiet, to sit down, to pay attention.... If you want to teach your son to *daven*, then *daven!*"<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe שליט"א is critical of parents who force a child to *daven*, thus inducing a superficial form of devotion devoid of any emotional connection. "These parents will be held responsible for making *davening* a burden for their child," cautions Rabbi Wolbe.<sup>16</sup>

In spite of this criticism — notwithstanding that anyone who bothers to investigate the matter can clearly see that this approach is counterproductive — it remains widely practiced. Why? I would suggest the following reasons.

1) The parents who use this approach tend to be poor *daveners*.<sup>17</sup> They are therefore, paradoxically but predictably, more intolerant of normal deficiencies in their children's *davening* (*kol haposel be'mumo posel*).

I was a *shul* during *Kabollas Shabbos*. A man behind me was loudly discussing the stock market with his neighbor. This man noticed his eleven-year-old son, who was sitting a few rows ahead, exchanging a few words (quietly) with his friend. The father emitted a shout, demanding that his son sit next to him so he (the father) could make sure that his son *davens* properly! What is even more amazing, is that after the son took the seat next to his father, and

the father made sure that his son had his eyes on his *Siddur*, the father resumed his conversation with his neighbor!... I am fairly certain that if the father reads this article, he would have no idea that I am describing his behavior.

2) People who tend to see things superficially think that as long as they get their child to act properly (e.g. to *daven* or to act politely), then it does not really matter how he feels about the matter. They are also unable to appreciate the indirect and subtle influence of setting an example.<sup>18</sup>

18. This approach is often defended by quoting the *Sefer Hachinuch*: "A person is influenced by his actions." However, it is clear that this is effective primarily when the gap between the behavior and person's true level is not too wide.

Another frequent objection to the "indirect" approach is from the *pasuk* in *Mishlei*, "*Chosech shivto sonai beno* — He who spares the rod hates the child. An extensive and very enlightening explanation of the true meaning of this *pasuk* can be found in the *Alei Shur* (Vol. 1, p.261) and in *Zeriah U'binyan B'chinuch* (pp.23-27) from Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe. From his discussion it is clear that the *pasuk* is criticizing those who refrain

3) The lack of appreciation of the process of natural development causes some parents to overreact to what is essentially normal (mis)behavior for the child's age.<sup>19</sup> Some parents are not cognizant that a happy, well adjusted child who is not pressured, and who sees his father *davening* solemnly, will in due time also develop the ability and inclination to *daven* seriously. Instead, they fear "If I don't put a stop to it [e.g. not *davening* seriously] now, he'll *daven* this way when he's an adult!"

from disciplining their children due to neglect or lack of interest. The *pasuk* is not recommending a specific form of punishment, which would depend on the infraction, and the age and temperament of the child. Rabbi Wolbe states that, in his congregation, one is not permitted to hit a child over the age of three. (See also *Pardes Yosef, Beshalach* p.120, and *Atara L'melech* from Rabbi Pam, p.176). In *Shimusha Shel Torah*, Rabbi Shach states that success in *chinuch* is primarily due to a positive relationship between a student and teacher. The *mechanech* must exert himself to find the way to be loved by his students, says Rabbi Shach (p.148). The point here is certainly to find the most effective means for achieving our *chinuch* goals.

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15. *The Jewish Parent Connection*, Vol. 3, No. 5, 1995, p. 14.

16. See Rabbi Wolbe's *Zer'a Ubinyan Bechinuch*, p. 46: "Tefilla should be a Jew's *neshama*. If one forces a child to *daven* in a superficially habitual manner, perhaps striking the child if he doesn't *daven*, they make him despise *tefilla*. Ultimately, he will feel no inner connection with *tefilla*, and the fault will lie with his parents who forced him to *daven* before he was ready."

17. See *ibid.cit.* p.30.



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4) Another factor is the lack of appreciation for the damage being caused by their own behavior toward their children. They are unaware that they are inculcating in their children negative attitudes toward davening, and that they are harming their relationship with their child, which is the basis of all *chinuch*.<sup>20</sup>

In addition, they are setting an example of embarrassing someone (in this case, their children) in public, and other harmful *middos*. Even if there was some benefit to this method of discipline, it would certainly be a case of *yatza secharo behefseido* (losing more than one gains). This problem is exacerbated by the attitude of some parents that when dealing with their own children, their proprietorship rights exempts them from the usual obligations of *middos* that apply to their interactions with others. It is as if they say to themselves, "It is only my own wishes, interests and needs that matter. My children must subordinate their needs to mine without resentment. In fact, it must be their pleasure to do so."<sup>21</sup>

5) Even when there is a need for direct intervention and direction, they are unaware of, or not willing to avail themselves of, more effective means of instruction. One can use a glance, a gentle comment, or a friendly pat on the cheek to redirect a child's attention to his *Siddur*

<sup>19</sup> Rabbi Wolbe (ibid.cit. p.16) criticizes parents who demand that their young children sit at the *Shabbos* table throughout the long meal. "This is impossible for a young child," declares Rabbi Wolbe. Some parents, however, interpret their child's resistance to remaining at the table as a sign of rebelliousness, etc.

Recent studies (e.g., Z. Strassberg, *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 1997 [25], 209-215), indicate that aggressive children tend to have parents who are excessively punitive. This behavior on the part of the parents is often prompted by inaccurate and overly harsh judgments as to how non-compliant their child actually is. If a parent tells a playing child to prepare for bed and the child merely politely requests additional playing time, the parent will interpret this request as reflective of *chutzpa* and non-compliance. But an even stronger factor influencing their reaction is their tendency to attribute negative intent to the child's behavior. So the child's request for additional playtime is attributed to defiant intentions ("He wants to be in control, he's being manipulative") and/or to retaliatory intentions ("He's trying to get even with me").

without creating negative feelings.

**MIDDOS OR POLITENESS?**

A related problem is when we evaluate a child's level of *middos* development by external criteria — e.g., politeness.

A young man related how he proudly told his *Rosh Yeshiva* about the efforts he invested in teaching his children to be polite. To his dismay, the *Rosh Yeshiva* was not impressed. "The Nazis *וְיָמֵינוּ* were also polite," he reminded the father.

When we try to develop *middos* in our children (or in ourselves, for that matter), we need to have a clear understanding of the essence of the *middos* and not focus merely on its external manifestations.<sup>22</sup>

For example, some people agree to do extraordinary acts of *chessed* even when they strongly resent having to do it. They

<sup>20</sup> See Rabbi Wolbe's *Alei Shur* I, p. 260: "Parents specifically establish bonds between their children and Torah. Only the deep connection between parents and children direct children on the *derech Hashem* (Divine path)."

<sup>21</sup> See *Zeri'a Ubinyan Bechinuch* by Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe, p. 28: "We frequently find parents who take action toward their children, ostensibly for educational purposes, when in fact, the true motivation is purely egoistic. At times the parents act toward their children with totally unacceptable *middos*, behavior that would be considered reprehensible in any other interpersonal context... i.e., jealousy, hate, anger, pride and especially the need for power. [The parent feels] 'My child is my possession and I am entitled to rule over him in an absolute manner. He is my 'object' and his mission in life is to serve my needs.'"

In addition, see *Sefer Habris* II 13:16: "There are people who are careful not to hurt anyone's feelings; in fact they treat everyone with love. Yet they hurt their own children's feelings. They say that 'this behavior isn't sinful since Hashem put them in my hands and He compelled them to accept my discipline — as it says, 'Honor your father...' and my intention is to discipline

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feel compelled to do so in order to gain approval in the eyes of others. This compulsion is especially strong in those with poor self-esteem. This can cause them to resent the person they are doing *chessed* for, which undermines the whole purpose of doing *chessed*.<sup>23</sup> True *chessed*, on the other hand, comes from the expansion of a satisfied self to include others,<sup>24</sup> as we see by the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, who is a *tov*, *verotzeh leheiteiv* — the essence of good, and wants to do good.

A person who feels deprived, either for emotional reasons or because his environment is under the influence of *mid-das hadin* (the attribute of justice), will find it difficult to attain true *chessed*.<sup>25</sup> A child who has difficulty sharing, in spite of being raised in an environment where sharing is an important value, is more likely an unhappy child.<sup>26</sup> Conversely, if we treat children with kindness, we make it easier for them to treat others with proper *middos*. When parents set an example of respectful interpersonal behavior in their relationship with their children, the positive impact of their formal instructions in *middos* is tremendously enhanced. ■

them in the ways of the Torah.' But, in truth, their words are neither logical nor according to the Torah, for why should their children not be included in the commandment of 'love your neighbor as yourself?...' The truth is that... one is punished more severely for hurting a relative, and therefore one who unjustly causes pain to his own child will be punished more harshly" (*Sefer Habris*).

22. See *Ohr Gedalyahu* (*Moadim* pp. 28-31) from Rabbi Gedalia Schorr זצ"ל. Both Shem and Yeffes did the same compassionate, respectful deed of covering Noach. Yet Shem was rewarded with the promise of Hashem's Presence, while Yeffes was only rewarded with the external beauty of art and culture. This is because Yeffes was motivated to cover his father by external factors, e.g. "What will the neighbors say!" and so his reward was external. Shem, by contrast, was motivated by intrinsic reasons and so was rewarded with a gift of intrinsic value. Rabbi Schorr emphasizes the destructiveness of beau-

ty that is only external. In a similar vein, Rabbi Yissocher Frand (in his very insightful tape on the root causes of *lashon hara*) quotes the *Shem Mishmuel* that if you criticize someone because of an "external" fault, it shows where you yourself are holding, i.e. in a status of superficiality.

23. See *Birchas Peretz* (Shemos 15b), wherein the Steipler Rav cautions us not to be impressed with external manifestations of *chessed*, since it may not reflect true inner feelings of *chessed*. (In fact, extreme examples of "chessed" behavior, as in the incident the Steipler referred to, may mask underlying negative feelings.)

24. See *Sichos Mussar* (5731:23); *Alei Shur* I p. 255; *Michtav MeEliyahu* I p.37, and II p.89.

25. See *Michtav MeEliyahu* I p. 236

26. Rabbi Yissochar Frand (in the tape cited above) points out that the main victim of *lashon hara* is the speaker, since it makes him into a negative person who always sees the bad in others and in events. Such a person, Rabbi Frand continues, is also likely to be very critical of his children, since he also only sees the negative in them. I would add that this phenomenon of being critical of children is not only the result of being a negative person, but also the cause. As Rabbi Frand points out, the reason there is such a *yeitzer hara* (evil inclination) to speak *lashon hara* is because it helps insecure people with low self-esteem temporarily feel better about themselves. A child who is always being

criticized by a negative parent will become insecure and develop poor self-esteem and will, therefore, also grow up with a strong *yeitzer hara* to speak *lashon hara*.

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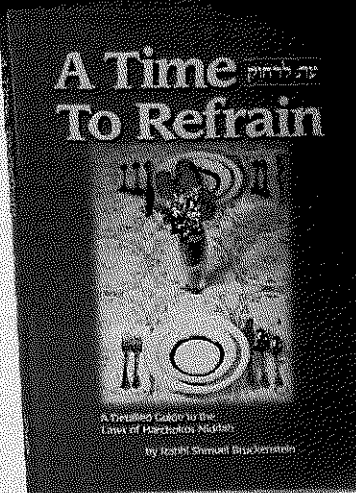
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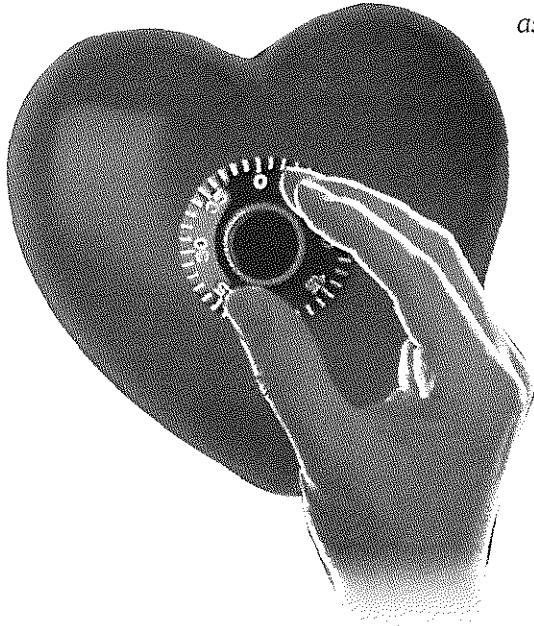
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**Rabbi Mordechai Finkelman**, a mechanech for several decades, currently 8<sup>th</sup> grade rebbi in Yeshiva Darchei Torah in Far Rockaway, NY, addresses this situation.

## “Spare the Rod” - Please!

**“Teacher! If you do not hit us, we will not behave!”**

*This powerful statement was made by the cutest, cherubic seven-year old one could ever meet. Tzvi was a student in my second grade class.*

We had become first time homeowners and had assumed the responsibility of monthly mortgage and heavy free-loan payments. Hashem Yisborach sent me a wonderful opportunity for additional income – I would rush from my 28 student, seventh-grade classroom of *Limudei Kodesh* to try and imbue 30 seven-year-olds with an appreciation for Mathematics, Science and Language Arts. By the time I arrived, precious bundles of energy had already been restrained for six hours of study. Recreation was virtually non-existent, as this particular institution owned no play area. Although I prepared interesting lessons with hands-on activity, discipline was a serious challenge.

After three weeks of pleading for cooperation, Tzvi approached my desk during a break. “Teacher! If you do not hit us, we will not behave!”

Rabbi Finkelman lives in Brooklyn, NY. This is his first appearance in *The Jewish Observer*.

“Tzvi, I do not believe in hitting. I expect that, in due time, the boys will behave because it is the right thing to do.”

Without hesitation, Tzvi returned with, “הושיע שבטנו שונא בנו – Sparing the rod is hating one’s child. If you won’t hit us, we will not be good!”

I was really astounded at the seriousness with which this last statement was said. This compassionate little fellow really believed that physical force was the most effective means of fostering cooperation.

“I’m sorry, Tzvi, but I do not agree with that method in the classroom. Now, please, go to your seat and take out your handwriting workbook.”

By the time Chanuka arrived, we had our first parents-teachers conferences, and the appreciation expressed by those who attended was very encouraging. The children were learning, behaving and enjoying themselves.

Yes – a swift smack will result in a more immediate adherence to the rules, but the child will fail to acquire the art of genuine, respectable, respectful inter-personal relationships. The route of discussion, and fair, humane punishment when necessary, is more time consuming, but more enriching and longer lasting.

Fourteen years later, does Tzvi agree

with the more gentle system of discipline? He was never asked directly. However, I have had many opportunities to cross the paths of my second graders who have become refined *B’nei Torah*. I seldom recognize these handsome young men as the bouncy little fellows who built and flew kites with me. They do recognize me, though – they greet me warmly and reminisce about the “good old days.” To this day, their parents will thank me for the positive influence of their children’s and my joint experience. It amazes me and warms my heart to see that one and a half decades have not clouded recollections of such a small part of the day of a very elementary school age child.

### DISCIPLINE WITHOUT PUNISHMENT

Tzvi’s opening statement clearly indicates the accepted and practiced disciplinary methods of this particular institute. The reaction to the “English teacher’s” alternative technique illustrates the ability of children to adapt – even within one environment – to varied styles of handling situations.

How can one discipline without physical power? A fair reward and punishment system is usually appreciated and effective. Rewards for young chil-

dren can range from honest praise to stars to jelly beans. Punishment can range from a few moments out of the room, to a reasonable, positive written assignment, to a sacrifice of a part of the student's recreation period (only part: to remove all recreation will invariably prove counterproductive).

Rabbi Shimon Schwab זצ"ל was the sole (and soul) lecturer at a parenting session of a Torah Umesorah convention. He spoke in favor of an occasional "potch." Rabbi Schwab recommended a slap on the hand for, he explained, our goal is not to hurt the child; rather to indicate our dissatisfaction.

The Rav continued to say that we should not add embarrassment by effecting the reprimand in front of others. "Hoche'ach toche'ach es amisecha —." While we must reprimand someone we love, "Velo sissa alav cheit —," we must remember not to sin by surrounding the admonishment with shame.

Teenagers are yet more delicate than seven year olds. Their egos are dangerously fragile and more difficult to mend. In the more than twenty years that Hashem has granted me the privilege to grow with teenage b'nei yeshiva, I have found that regardless of the severity of previous disciplinary measures used, calm firmness was positively welcomed.

A camp parent reminded me of this anecdote which, his son says, was a major turning point in his accepting the camp regulations.

Ari, an eleven year old "teen," arrived at the camp "beis haknesses" with his sockless feet in open sandals.

"Please go back to your bunkhouse," I said, "put on socks, and then return for Shacharis."

"Why?!" Ari asked. "In Israel people don't wear socks to daven!"

"The Mishna Berura indicates that acceptable dress codes depend upon our particular country. In America you not find a respectable man praying in visibly bare feet. You may not enter the shul like this."

Ari attempted to spar with me (verbally, of course!), but to no avail.

"I hate you, Rabbi Finkelman!" he finally blurted out.

"And I love you, Ari. And I will not permit you to enter our shul with visibly bare feet."

Ari contemplated briefly, left and returned shortly with a smile and stockinged feet. We never had a problem again.

One more advantage of patient discipline is the development of trust.

"Rebbi." It was twelve year old Shalom. "Could you please ask my mother to do something about my father? He always hits us and screams at everyone!"

An investigation of the situation proved that it wasn't "always," nor was it "everyone." The main victims were the sons who were being slapped for talking during davening. A private meeting was arranged.

"Mr. J., do you think it is beneficial for your sons to be hit for speaking during davening?"

"Yes!" came the empathetic retort. "My father hit me if I interrupted the davening, and it worked! I am doing the same for my children!"

"I hope you will forgive me for asking this question, Mr. J., but do you speak to your friends during davening, today? Do you

leave Mussaf early to be first at a Kiddush?"

"Yes! But as a child I would never have done it!"

"Well then," I said, as I prepared to rest my case, "your father's method did not work. You learned to be afraid of a 'potch' — not of Hashem. B'mechilas kevodcha — if the slap would have worked, you would not speak in shul today. Perhaps if you would speak to your boys — and the loudest speech is action — your sons would happily adhere to the laws of tefilla."

My pen does not profess to deliver what is da'as Torah. If offers, rather, food for thought culled from years of gratifying experience.

The raised voice and the intimidating slam of the hand on the desk may be effective — but only if used very sparingly. Patient direction accompanied by fair reward and punishment require more time and effort — but are also more rewarding while the lessons are longer lasting.

We do not deny that little Tzvi correctly quoted Shlomo Hamelech in Mishlei. But in Mesivta Torah Vodaas, we were taught — and continue to ascertain — that the shevet of mussar (the rod of reproach) can be a firm respectful word or a meaningful drasha — perhaps a fair penalty. ■

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# The State of the State at Fifty-Plus

## *Post-Jubilee and Us*

### IN SEARCH OF A SOBER ASSESSMENT

**T**he much-heralded Jubilee Year has passed. The fiftieth year celebrations of the State of Israel are over. The fanfare is gone and the noisy displays have been dismantled. Now it's Post-Jubilee. There are *Gedolei Yisroel* who said that the State did not stand a chance of existing for more than forty, fifty years. Yet here we are, at the fifty-first year. Was their foresight incorrect? Or perhaps their insight was really much more profound than ours.

In 1917, when the Balfour Declaration was issued, the *Rav* of Yerushalayim, Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld, זצ"ל, remarked to someone, "I feel like a Purim *Rav*!" and he explained, "On Purim when everyone gets drunk, someone is always designated to remain sober so that if a difficult problem arises, he will be available to provide a solution. I feel that all around me, people are intoxicated by dreams of a rosy future promised by the Declaration. I

Rabbi Aschkenazy is the *Rosh HaKollel* of the Boston *Kollel* in Har Nof, Jerusalem, and serves as *Hamodia's* Torah Editor. He was represented in these pages by biographies of the late Gerer *Rebbe'im*, Rabbi Simcha Bunim Alter זצ"ל (Oct. '92), and Rabbi Pinchas Menachem Alter זצ"ל (Sept. '96), both of which were co-authored with Rabbi Avrohom Chaim Carmell.

am trying not to get carried away, so that I will be able to deal with any issues that confront us in a level-headed way."

At the fifty-first anniversary of the State of Israel, we, too, have to look around ourselves soberly. Taking note of the slogans flying from all directions during this election year can be most revealing as to the State's goals and aspirations. Unfortunately, upon scrutinizing most of them, there's almost no inkling that we're talking about elections in a state that was ostensibly founded as a *Jewish State*. It seems to be a very far cry from a state based on the principles "envisioned by the prophets of Israel," as its Declaration of Independence announced.

At the time of the founding of the state, there were many stormy debates between the signators of the Declaration as to what degree any expressions of religious values might be included. While *Hashem's* Name was excluded, as a compromise, "The Rock of Israel" was used instead of a different metaphor that would have been more appealing to the secularists. Other debates raged as to what role, if any, Torah laws would play in the legal system of the new state, but all did agree that it should be a Jewish state. However, Rav Saadya Gaon's famous definition of the Jewish people

– "Our nation is only a nation by virtue of its Torah" – has borne itself out. How saddening that there are very few discernible vestiges of Jewishness today in most of its cities, next to nothing to distinguish them from London, Paris and New York.

### A STATE OF THE JEWS...

**A**s a state of the Jews, as some people called it, it's also very hard to recognize. Jewish labor, blue and white, has been replaced in many areas by workers imported from Thailand, the Philippines, Romania and what-not. Arabs are playing increasingly major roles in every field of Israeli society, whether in high-ranking positions such as judges, doctors, architects and engineers, or blue-collar jobs and manual labor, like construction, sanitation and transportation. And then there are the unidentified gentiles who came into the country under the guise of Russian Jews, or converts of the Conservative or Reform movements.

True, Torah is flourishing more than almost ever before in these past two millennia – as much because of State funding as in spite of State grumbling. Yet unfortunately, this is not apparent among those outside of Torah circles.

Too many of our Jewish brethren have lost their badges of identification, associating instead with all the trappings of the most decadent Western styles, cults and movements. "Hi" and "Bye" have displaced the age-old convivial "Shalom," earrings and wild hairstyles have replaced any semblance of Jewish dress, and names like Nimrod have been substituted for those of traditional family meaning. It seems that the prophetic words of the *Ohr Hachayim* (Rabbi Chaim ben Attar), that in this *galus*, groups within *Am Yisroel* can fall beyond the 49<sup>th</sup> level of *tuma*, have sadly been fulfilled and over-filled.

...FOR THE JEWS...

It was hoped that Israel would be a state for the Jews, a place where Jews feel at home, that was the cherished status of the Holy Land. Over the years, though, that, too, has changed. Jews who escaped from totalitarian regimes, who for decades fought tenaciously to hold onto their identity as Jews against all odds, terror and subordination, find themselves coming to Israel and being identified as Russians.

Jews who gave up comforts, status and incomes in Western society to come to their Jewish homeland find themselves branded as Americans or Anglo-Saxons. The newcomers feel almost unwanted by the official bureaucracy – certainly not *heimish*. Society is splintered – right versus left, Sephardi versus Ashkenazi, religious versus secular – the feeling of one big family has been swallowed up and lost among the many different break-ups and parties. It has bred a new generation of Israelis, without the pleasant and melodious harmony of Jewish tradition.

In fact, even Zionism is dead. Many Israelis may even be willing to agree to the infamous UN resolution equating Zionism with racism, which was once regarded as the ultimate in Anti-Semitism. The hope and dream of many citizens in Israel is that their state should be a bastion of democracy in the Middle East. From a member of the British Commonwealth, it has become a colo-

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Power, status and permissiveness have become part of the fabric of the Israeli, in stark contrast to the traditional mercy, good-hearted kindness and restraint that were always the hallmarks of Jewish heritage.

Are there still any doubts about the far-reaching vision of the *Gedolei Yisroel* half a century ago? Isn't it clear that with their profound insight, they foresaw what direction events would take? Many of their worst fears and concerns were unfortunately borne out. Much of what was supposed to testify to being a Jewish state in the Land of Israel is gone.

#### THE VISION OF THE TORAH COMMUNITY

**T**he vision of Agudath Israel and Torah-true *Yiddishkeit* stands in stark contrast. Decades ago, the Zionists sang in the anthem of their

dreams, "To be a free people in our land." On Agudath Israel's banner is emblazoned the rallying-cry of "To be a believing Jew in our land." That is the real goal and aspiration of every Torah-true Jew. Children in *Eretz Yisroel* used to sing, "*Eretz Yisroel* without Torah is like a body without a *neshama* (soul)." Secular children were taught the same song, substituting the word, "*Eretz Yisroel* without *avoda* (work)...." Work they did. A modern country, a 21<sup>st</sup> century megalopolis was established, but Torah and the *neshama* were lost. It is up to the vital, thriving Torah community in *Eretz Yisroel* and the world over to make the rallying cry of *emuna* reach all those who still have a spark of faith in *Hashem*, belief in His Torah, and an appreciation of the uniqueness of His people and His Holy Land.

It must be a call as well to all those who have lost their compasses and are floundering in the turbulent sea of emptiness, searching for a safe shore that will return purpose and meaning into

their lives. We should not be taken aback by the wild outburst of rejection and vitriolic, anti-religious attacks. Unfortunately, these are symptoms of panicking people, similar to the uncontrolled flailings of a drowning person. We must find a way to throw them a lifesaver. This requires more than just raising a banner or sounding a rallying cry. It is up to us to make our actions and our words appealing to Jews all over, to continue to reach out to them with more seminars, educational programs, and – yes – friendship. Our behavior must be recognizably governed by the highest standards of integrity in human relations, expressive of heartfelt sincerity and a real relationship to *Hashem*. In areas of both *bein adam lamakom* and *bein adam lachaveiro* – our obligations to Heaven and our interpersonal dealings – it is incumbent on us to make it clear that the Torah is contemporary and applicable to modern-day issues. The words, thoughts and message we convey to our surroundings should be comprehensible, clear and meaningful to anyone seeking guidance and direction, be it in areas of high-level spirituality or in practical sociological issues.

#### FILLING THE POST-ZIONIST VACUUM

**I**n the vacuum that has been created by the demise of Zionism and many similar ideologies, we have an opportunity to inject true values into society. We must make sure to project an image of truth that will serve as a beacon of light for all those seeking truth. We must provide answers for all those who have existential questions. We must open our hearts to the feelings of those who have been estranged from *Yiddishkeit*, so that they will feel that their emotional needs can be satisfied through our age-old values.

It is up to us to make sure that the Torah is perceived in its true light: "Its ways are ways of pleasantness and all of its paths, paths of peace." Thereby, we will speedily hear the sounds of the true Jubilee call – the *shofar* of *Moshiach* – which will herald the return of, "each man to his family and each to his heritage." ■

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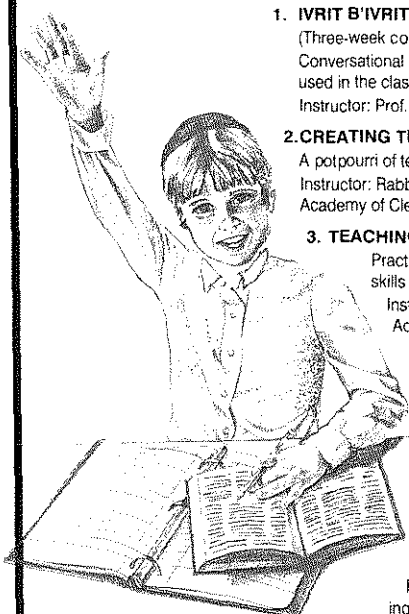
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## 3. TEACHING CHUMASH TO THE OLDER CHILD

Practical and motivational techniques to increase translating skills and comprehension proficiency. (Grade 4 and up)  
Instructor: Rabbi Menachum Meisels, Rebbi, Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, Cleveland Heights, Ohio

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(separate classes for men and women)  
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Instructor (for men): Rabbi Yitzchok Merkin, Headmaster, Yeshiva of Greater Washington  
Instructor (for women): Mrs. Sterna Lerman, Head of Parent and Teacher Program, Counterforce

## 5. TEACHING GEMORAH

How to systematically present the Gemorah, develop thinking skills, and build language skills.  
Instructor: Rabbi Menachum Meisels, Rebbi, Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, Cleveland Heights, Ohio

## 6. PRINCIPALS'/ADMINISTRATORS' SEMINAR

Enhance our mission through positive school spirit. Hands on workshop dealing with teacher supervision; leadership styles' community, parent and board relationships. Emphasis on sharing.  
Instructor: Rabbi Sholom Strajcher, Educational Director, Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, Cleveland Heights, Ohio

## 7. EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

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Instructor: Rabbi Yehoshua Kamensky, Principal-Judaic Studies, Ben Lipson Hillel Comm. School, N. Miami Beach, Miami

## 8. CREATIVE TEACHING

Exciting new methods to increase student motivation and retention.  
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## 10. DISCIPLINE WITH DIGNITY

Practical techniques to instill middos and create an atmosphere of respect and derech erez in school and home.  
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## 11. FUNDAMENTALS OF TEACHING

Learn the key elements of instruction that make one a teacher.  
Instructor: Rabbi Yaakov May, Principal, Yeshiva Shaare Torah High School, Brooklyn, NY

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Various methods to help the child develop the skills needed to succeed throughout school and life. Will include reading, writing, Chumash and notetaking.  
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## 14. HANDLING THE DIFFICULT CHILD

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Instructor: Dr. Joel Dickstein, Coordinator, P'Tach Program, Yeshiva University

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1:30-3:50	4. DISCIPLINE THROUGH COMMUNICATION	10. DISCIPLINE WITH DIGNITY	15. EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE 16. TEACHING NAVI
3:50-4:05	מנחה	מנחה	מנחה
4:05-6:25	5. TEACHING GEMORAH 6. PRINCIPALS'/ADMINISTRATORS' SEMINAR 7. EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES	11. FUNDAMENTALS OF TEACHING 12. BUILDING THE FOUNDATION	17. DIKDUK MADE SIMPLE 18. TEACHING AT ITS BEST

For more information about courses and fees, please contact: Rabbi Yitzchak Merkin or Rabbi Shmarya Rennert, c/o Torah Umesorah Summer Seminar, 160 Broadway, NY 10038, (212) 227-1000 ext 10 Fax (212) 406-6934

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בכל לבבו – ובכל נפשו – ובכל מאדו

# An Appreciation of the *Mashgiach* Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein זצוק"ל

*Twenty-five Years Since His Passing*

## "REB CHATZKEL" AND THE WORLD THAT WAS

The massive guilt that Hitler and the German nation forever bear is not only for torturing and destroying Jewish bodies, but for bringing incomparable devastation to the *Mesora* (tradition) of Torah life in Eastern Europe – a *Mesora* that had begun directly after the destruction of the first *Beis HaMikdash*.<sup>1</sup>

Unlike anything encountered in America today, families in Eastern Europe often lived for centuries in the same town or village – in some Jewish communities, for a thousand years or more. Such constancy of tradition and community assured our survival

1. Feuer, Rabbi Avrohom Chaim; Gold, Rabbi Avie, *The Complete Tishah B'Av Service*, Mesorah Publications, Brooklyn, New York, 1992, page 271 [note at bottom of page].

Rabbi Chaim Ginsburg, a grandson of the *Mashgiach*, spent many years in the Ponovez Yeshiva together with his grandfather. He is a senior *kollel* member of Bais Medrash Govoha in Lakewood, NJ, where he has been learning for the past 30 years.

Rabbi Yitzchak Kasnett is the author of many educational and curriculum materials, including *The World That Was...* series (published by the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland), with current volumes on Lithuania, Poland and Hungary/Romania. He also has contributed to *The Jewish Observer*, most recently with "The Write Stuff" (April '98).

through periods of social upheaval, wars and pogroms. In the main, it was not until after World War I, with the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the establishment of new national boundaries, and a plethora of competing social-political ideologies that adherence to traditional Torah observance in Eastern Europe began to deteriorate.<sup>2</sup>

Rabbi Nochum Velvel Dessler<sup>3</sup> recalls, "The Braude-Ziv family lived in Kelm for 12 or 13 generations. Kelm was a Jewish town; the gentiles lived in the surrounding villages. My childhood in Kelm was very sheltered. We grew up in an atmosphere of pure Torah with no distractions.... Even the games we played consisted of Torah themes. Everything revolved around Torah. At night we learned or talked together as a family. The sound of learning resounded in the night air.... The Germans destroyed an entire way of life that cannot be replicated. It was an environment where people were *mistapek bemu'at*; they felt that the little they had was enough for their needs and they didn't look for more. They lived accord-

2. Kasnett, Yitzchak, *The World That Was: Poland*, The Living Memorial Pub. Cleveland, 1997, pages 69-75. Distributed by Mesorah Publications, Brooklyn, New York

3. Founder of the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, son of Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler and a great-grandson of Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, known as "The Alter of Kelm."

ing to the Torah and their perspective of life was a Torah perspective."<sup>4</sup>

This typical vignette is crucial: Without grasping the milieu of the Eastern European Jew, it would be impossible to appreciate how a Kelm could have existed, or how an impressionable youth from a family in Warsaw, young Yechezkel Levenstein, could be inspired and molded into what Rabbi Elazar Menachem M. Shach, שליט"א described as a perfect *eved Hashem* – flawless in dedicating his very life's breath to his Creator.

*The Mashgiach taught that a person approaches the Yom HaDin in one of two ways: as an eved (a servant), or as a hired worker, and that the impending judgment is rendered quite differently for each one. It is incumbent upon the Master to care for His eved, thus the true servant of Hashem – one whose motives are solely for the sake of Heaven – passes through a judgment quite different from that of a person whose avoda involves personal motivations. In the latter case, the Master and the work-*

4. Op. cit., *The World That Was: Lithuania*, P. 57, 59. (Rabbi Dessler added, "There was an underground spring outside of Kelm where we would play. As we ran towards the spring, we would drop and put our ears to the ground to see if we could hear the sound of the running water. When we were finally close enough to hear the water, we would call out that we heard Korach crying.")

er must weigh what each has provided the other, and then the final reckoning is made.<sup>5</sup>

In Mir, Poland, with little medical help available and her life endangered, suffering from the torturous labor pains of a breech delivery, the *Mashgiach's* daughter pleaded that he should decree that she be saved. At this point in his life, it was apparent to all that his holy words penetrated the heavens and that his prayers did not go unanswered. In response to his daughter's request, however, he remained silent. Reb Chatzkel was faced with a situation that tested his true standing before *Hashem*, for who doesn't plead for Heaven's mercy when his child is in danger? Yet, to ask anything for himself was never a consideration in his *avoda*. The room was tense and everyone waited for his reply. Finally he responded, "Whatever the *Aibishter* (G-d) wants, that is what will be." Soon after, the danger passed, and mother and baby were well.

What is the essence of Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, זצ"ל – fondly referred to as Reb Chatzkel – who, with his brilliant, penetrating mind, iron will and *Ruach Hakodesh*, led the Mirrer Yeshiva during its miraculous escape from the destruction of Europe, across Communist Russia and on to safety, first in Kobe, Japan, and, finally, through War's end in Shanghai, China? Much of the vibrant, majestic yeshiva world that exists today is due in great part to Reb Chatzkel, who, together with Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz, זצ"ל, rendered the life-and-death decisions during those awesome days of World War II – decisions that were contested (sometimes bitterly) at the time, but are now universally viewed as invariably correct. Reb Chatzkel toiled to maintain the spiritual and physical well-being of the yeshiva *bachurim*, giving them the will to overcome the fearful tests they faced. He is a paradigm of the collective spirit of

5. Regarding this awesome moment of judgment, the *Mashgiach* exhorts each of us, to the best of our ability, to serve *Hashem* as selflessly as possible in the final days before Rosh Hashana. (*Ohr Yechezkel, Ellul, Jerusalem, page 101*)

Eastern European Jewry in general, and of the yeshiva world in particular; an *even hapina*, a foundation stone, upon which our Torah rests today.

#### A MOTHER'S WISH...

Rabbi Yechezkel

HaLevi Levenstein was born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1885. His father, a businessman<sup>6</sup>, was a *Varka Chassid*, while his mother's lineage included several *Chassidic Rebbe'im*. The *Mashgiach* was orphaned from his mother when he was five-years-old. Her final words to him would be a directive that would change his life, and, ultimately, help preserve Torah for future generations. From her death bed she called young Yechezkel to her side and instructed him, "Du zolst zeh'n bleiben beim lernen!" – he should dedicate his life to Torah study. Her pure words entered his young heart, and the seed of his future as one of the great leaders of *Klal Yisroel* was sown. As time passed, Mr. Levenstein expected that, at the appropriate age,

Yechezkel would enter the family business and become a *frummer ba'al habayis* like himself. In fact, Reb Chatzkel did enter into the business world for a short period of time when he was 14, but it did not last.

#### HASHGACHA PRATTIS

The story is told that after two years in business (he was 16 at the time), the *Mashgiach's* week's wages were stolen while at the *mikveh*

6. It was common for the *baal habayis* to work all day, yet still study Torah for a full eight hours, by rising early in the morning and learning until late at night. This was true in Lodz, as well. See articles on Warsaw and Lodz in: op. cit., *The World That Was: Poland*, p. 126-127.



Rabbi Tavi Hirsch Brojde זצ"ל, Menahel of the Talmud Torah of Kelm (left)  
Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz זצ"ל, Mashgiach of the Mir

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one *Erev Shabbos*. Convinced of the transitory nature of *Olam Hazei* (the mundane, material world) by this incident, he decided that it was time to fulfill his mother's directive, so he left home to devote himself fully to Torah study in a small yeshiva in Makova, Poland. Soon after, he went to learn in the famous Lomza Yeshiva. In both Lomza and Makova, the *Mashgiach* was penniless, having left home without his family's consent. An older married sister, however, sent him a few zlotys from time to time, but in both *yeshivos* he slept on a bench in the *Beis Hamidrash* and ate his meals with different families, sometimes going without food altogether.

Reb Chatzkel had a weak constitution and was sickly much of his life. He once commented that his living conditions in those years contributed to his painful arthritis later in life, but he never uttered a word of complaint – not about this or any other hardships he encountered. To the contrary, the *Mashgiach* was fond of quoting the *pasuk* in *Mish-*

*lei* (29,11), "A fool gives vent to his anger, and the wise man speaks gently afterwards." He explained:

"When a person encounters affliction and obstacles in life, he tends to become discouraged, and no longer believes that he will merit Divine assistance (*Siyata Dishmaya*). If we would truly understand the wise man's approach of waiting – that it is only at the end of the tribulation that one perceives *Hashem's* continual presence – our *emuna* and *bitachon* would be strengthened, and we would never lose hope. Our problem lies in our assumption that *Hashem* conducts His affairs in this world as we do. When a person wishes to benefit another, he does so immediately. *Hashem's* ways, however, are different, for it is only at the end of a test that *Hashem* reveals the full extent of His beneficence for those who patiently await His salvation."<sup>7</sup>

From Lomza, the *Mashgiach* went to the Chofetz Chaim's yeshiva in Radin, where he was discovered by Rabbi

Yerucham Levovitz, זצ"ל, the *Mashgiach* in the yeshiva at that time; the two developed a relationship of great affection and mutual respect that would last until Reb Yerucham's passing in 1936. Reb Chatzkel related that his first push into the world of *Mussar* was from a *shmuess* on the topic of *emuna* that he had heard from Reb Yerucham in Radin. He exclaimed, "His words bit into me," and although it was a simple *shmuess*, the words left a lasting and profound impression upon him. It was then that he resolved to make the matter of *chizuk ha'emuna* (strengthening of one's faith) a lifelong priority.<sup>8</sup> When he returned to his roommates, he asked, "How can we remain so uninspired when there is so much to accomplish?" From that day on he dedicated himself to improve his character in full measure. Later in life he would challenge his *talmidim*, "Why is it that we do not change our entire approach to life after hearing words of *mussar*?"

In "Yechezkel Warshaver," Reb Yerucham perceived a greatness of soul that prompted him to send this special *talmid* – with a letter of approbation – to Rabbi Hirsch Braude, son-in-law of Rabbi Simcha Zissel Ziv, *Rosh HaYeshiva* of the Kelm Talmud Torah.<sup>9</sup> Shortly after Reb Yechezkel arrived (in 1908), Reb Hirsch wrote Reb Yerucham a letter stating, "You should know that I have tremendous pleasure from the precious *bachurim* whom you sent. They study with wondrous dedication, and with *Hashem's* help, they are also succeeding in acquiring *yiras Shamayim*. We have great hope for the *bachur*, Yechezkel from Warsaw. He has been here for only a short while, but it appears that he has come well prepared in order

7. *Ohr Yechezkel, Emuna*, p. 218.

8. Finkelman, Rabbi Shimon and Weiss, Rabbi Yosef, *The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah*, ArtScroll Pub., Brooklyn, New York, 1997, p. 65-66.

9. The "Talmud Torah" was actually an advanced yeshiva dedicated to a high level, intensive *mussar* regimen. Reb Yerucham had learned in Kelm during the last year of *The Alter's* life, and greatly lamented that he was only able to be with this *adam hashaleim* (perfect human being) for nine months.

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to succeed."<sup>10</sup> It is related that the Chofetz Chaim's son-in-law, Reb Hirsch Levenson, traveled to Kelm to bring Reb Chatzkel back to Radin, but was not successful; in the Kelmer tradition of *avoda*, perfection of character through introspection and total discipline, the *Mashgiach* found the true expression of his soul.<sup>11</sup>

The *Mashgiach* married his *Rebbetzin* (nee Chaya Melamud) in Kelm, and their two daughters, Zlata Malka, תהי, and, עיה, להבלה Yocheved, were born there. During Reb Chatzkel's years in Kelm, Reb Yerucham became the *Mashgiach* in the Mir, and, after a while, informed Reb Chatzkel that he wanted to take similar a position in a Lithuanian yeshiva for a while. He had hoped that Reb Chatzkel would be interested in temporarily assuming his position in the Mir until his return. Reb Chatzkel consented to this arrangement, and for a period of three and a half years replaced Reb Yerucham in the Mir, after which he returned to the Kelm Talmud Torah.

Soon afterwards, Reb Chatzkel was contacted by Rabbi Aharon Kotler, זצ"ל, who asked him to serve as *Mashgiach* in Kletzk, a position he held for just over two years.<sup>12</sup> Reb Chatzkel then returned to Mir for four years, where he studied in dire poverty, having no income. The *Rebbetzin* would humorously chide Reb Chatzkel about their poverty during that period declaring, "You are like a glazer. You take the pane out of one window to put in another..." referring to his need to borrow

10. Op. cit., *The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah*, p. 66.

11. The *Mashgiach* was allowed to maintain two customs in Kelm that were otherwise not permitted: being from Warsaw, he was allowed to keep his beard; in Kelm, one stood motionless when saying the *Shemoneh Esrei*, but the *Mashgiach* was permitted to sway gently back-and-forth. In his later years in the Ponevezh Yeshiva, the *Mashgiach* stood completely motionless when he prayed, and Rabbi Shach, שליט"א, commented how he would stare in amazement that a human being could attain such total *d'veikus* to *Hashem* during *tefilla* as did the *Mashgiach*. Reb Chatzkel himself would express his sorrow when *tefilla* ended, and would rebuke those "...who act so excited when *davening* ends that they literally shake off their *taleisim* and leave *shul*."

money from one person to pay back others. Even in his penury, however, Reb Chatzkel fulfilled his father's wish that he provide a certain amount of money each month to support his step-mother after his father's death – a task he carried out unflinchingly.

During the week of *Sheva Berachos* following his oldest daughter's wedding in Mir, in the summer of 1935,<sup>13</sup> Reb Chatzkel left for *Eretz Yisroel* where he had accepted the position of *Mashgiach* in the yeshiva of Rabbi Reuven Katz in Petach Tikva. When asked by Reb Yerucham why he wanted to leave Mir, Reb Chatzkel replied that he wanted to perfect his level of *emuna*, his pure belief and trust in *Hashem*, and felt that this could only be accomplished in *Eretz Yisroel*, the land of the *Avos*. Cryptically, Reb Yerucham commented that he

12. Interestingly, Reb Chatzkel deferred coming to Kletzk for an extended period of time because he saw it as his duty to care for his elderly mother-in-law. He refused to leave Kelm as long as she was alive, and it was only after her *petira* that he finally arrived in Kletzk. Each morning, he would wash her hands for *negel vasser* and bring her a little cake and wine to give her strength.

13. Zlata Malka married Rabbi Ephraim Mordechai Ginsburg, who became one of the *Roshei Yeshiva* of the Mirrer Yeshiva in Brooklyn, after the war. Reb Chatzkel was impressed by Reb Ephraim Mordechai when he came to the Mir and stated that he would want him for his Zlata if the *bachur* was still available when she was of age. When the time came, he asked Reb Yerucham to arrange the *shidduch*.

Rabbi Yisroel Perkowski<sup>1</sup> recalls a particularly hot, humid day in Shanghai when he accompanied the *Mashgiach* home from the yeshiva. Reb Yisroel remarked to *Rebbetzin* Ginsburg that her father was exhausted and would benefit from some refreshment. A few minutes later, she entered the room where they were sitting, placed a slice of cake and cup of tea on the table for her father, for which he thanked her.

After his discussion with the *Mashgiach*, Reb Yisroel stopped in the kitchen to urge the *Rebbetzin* to see to it that her father eat something; he left the cake untouched.

"Did he say anything about the food?" she asked.

"Yes," replied Reb Yisroel. "He said, 'Aza geshmak *shückel* Mezonos (Such a delicious slice of cake).'"

"Then he won't touch it," she said. "If he comments on how good something tastes or looks, he will not eat it. He keeps the *Raavad's taanis*?"

1. *Rav* of Agudath Israel of Boro Park (16th Ave.) and *Rosh Hayeshiva* of Bais HaTalmud.

2. Refraining from eating any food about which one has commented favorably.

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The Mashgiach at the city's official reception for the Mirrer Yeshiva in San Francisco, 1946

would return as the *Mashgiach* in Mir in three years.<sup>14</sup>

In Petach Tikva, as well as in all of the Torah institutions where the *Mashgiach* served, he met with great success, both in his own spiritual development and in

14. Reb Yerucham was *niftar* in 1936.

his impact on his *talmidim*. Additionally, since he was receiving a regular salary, he was able to send money back to Europe to resolve any outstanding debts from his previous four years in Mir. Reb Chatzkel's influence on the Torah world in *Eretz Yisroel* was

immense. Rabbi Shmuel Rozovsky, זצ"ל, the *Rosh Hayeshiva* of Ponevezh, often commented that he never would have become the *Rosh Hayeshiva* and *Marbitz Torah* that he became without the *Mashgiach*. This was true of many others as well.

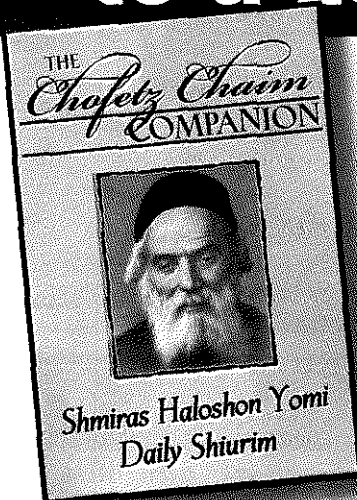
#### LEADERSHIP IN WAR

In 1938, as Reb Yerucham had predicted, the telegram from the Mirrer Yeshiva arrived, asking Reb Chatzkel to return as *Mashgiach* for a period of five years. Meanwhile, the fires of war were already being unleashed in Europe and everyone knew that the situation was one of great danger for the Jews, though no one could foresee the scope of the destruction that lay ahead. Before making his decision to return, Reb Chatzkel consulted with the Chazon Ish, who urged him to remain in *Eretz Yisroel*. His reasoning was twofold. First, he advised that it was extremely dangerous to return to Europe at that point. Additionally, the Chazon Ish was loath to see the Torah community in *Eretz Yisroel* lose Reb Chatzkel, whom he saw as one of the great Torah teachers of the generation. The *Mashgiach* later stated that regarding his own spiritual needs, it perhaps would have been better to remain in *Eretz Yisroel*; however, when weighed against the needs of a yeshiva, all personal considerations are nullified and the individual must respond to the greater needs of the *klal*, so he returned to Mir.

The story of the escape of the Mirrer Yeshiva is chronicled in a number of books and journals, and this article is not the place to present it in detail.<sup>15</sup> It is, however, appropriate to point out that Reb Chatzkel and Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz, זצ"ל, shared a close and warm relationship that reflected their mutual respect and admiration. After the yeshiva fled from Mir to Vilna (along with many other *yeshivos*)<sup>16</sup> under the unwavering supervision of Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzenski זצ"ל, they were eventually forced to relocate in Keidan, further into the heartland of Lithuania.

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When it was no longer safe in Keidan, the yeshiva divided up and went to four different towns: Krak, Krakinova, Shat and Ramigolah. While Reb Chaim oversaw the program of learning, the *Mashgiach* traveled from one village to another to be *mechazek* (encourage) the *talmidim* with his *shmuessen*.

Later, in Shanghai, when presented with demands to alter the course he had chartered for the yeshiva, the *Mashgiach* stood firm, refuting each argument with the soundest of logic based on his vast knowledge of *Tanach* and *Chazal*. It was only after he thoroughly demonstrated the faulty underpinnings of the protestations presented to him that he revealed that his *rebbe'im*, Rabbi Hirsch Braude and Rabbi Nochum Zev Ziv, had appeared to him in his dreams and had revealed the course of action that he should take.

When information detailing the full extent of the destruction of European Jewry reached the *talmidim* in Shanghai, the *Mashgiach* was alert to any signs of emotional breakdown in his students. He went so far as to see that they bathed, brushed their teeth and changed clothes regularly; all of the everyday behaviors indicative of a normal, emotionally balanced life had to be maintained.

When the *talmidim* expressed the desire to learn one of the *Masechtos* in *Seder Kodshim* (the Order of Sacrifices), the *Mashgiach* refused. He told them that after the war, the Jewish People would need to be rebuilt, and that they would require Torah leaders familiar with the more basic *yeshivische mesechtos* in *Nashim* and *Nezikin*. The *talmidim* could not fathom his words.

15. Among other publications, the reader is referred to Yechezkel Leitner's *Operation: Torah Rescue*, Feldheim Publishers, Spring Valley, New York, 1987.

16. The Mir, Kletzk, Radin, Kamenitz, Baranovich and Bialystok Yeshivos arrived in Vilna virtually intact, while only fragments of others, such as Grodno, Volozhin, Lomza, Lutsk, Novaradok, Lublin, Lubavitch, Slonim and Mezritch, were able to come. Reb Chaim Ozer took care of all of the *yeshivos* and many other refugees as well, though his health was already failing at that time. His death was a blow to those he had left behind, for he was the towering father figure of his generation, his heart encompassing the pain of every Jew.

*What world? What would be left from the utter destruction they were witnesses to and saved from?* The *Mashgiach* remained firm in his resolve: "We must be prepared to build a new generation, to rebuild what had been destroyed, to replant the song of Torah within the hearts of the next generation. Learn! Review! Create *chiddushei Torah*! You will see that the new generation will be waiting for you, and through you will Torah again be returned to its splendor."

And so it was. The *Mashgiach* once recounted that the years spent with the Mir in Shanghai were years of unprecedented spiritual achievement. "Shanghai was a time of success," he stated, "five years of success, of toil in learning, prayer and *mussar*..."<sup>17</sup>

#### STOPOVER IN AMERICA

When the Mirrer Yeshiva arrived in America and established its home in the East New York neighborhood of Brooklyn, the *Mashgiach* presided over a yeshiva whose *talmidim*, steeped in Torah and *Yiras Shamayim*, were at the forefront of those who would spread Torah across America. At that time – in 1946-7 – several American *talmidim* were granted entrance into the yeshiva, no easy feat.


17. Op. cit., *The World That Was: Lithuania*, pages 108-109.

Though far from the level of learning of their European counterparts, the *Mashgiach* spoke with them privately and, in doing so, forever changed their lives and the lives of their future *talmidim* (on many continents). When they first joined the yeshiva, however, he once openly protested at the beginning of a *shmuess*, "There are those present who are not on a level to hear my words and, thus, I have no permission to speak, since what I say might have a detrimental effect on them. I can only hope that the Torah they learn all day will protect them."

Rabbi Shlomo Brevda, שליט"א, was among that group. He relates the following:

We went up the stairs in the old *Beis Hamidrash* to the *Mashgiach's* room. He was sitting behind the desk facing the door, the light was off and the glow of the sunset radiated through the window behind him. For a long time he didn't speak. If I were to tell you what the *Mashgiach* said at that *shmuess*, you would never believe me, but this *shmuess* was just an everyday example of his genius – his originality in *machshava* – a brilliance that was almost always hidden by his *tzidkus* (righteousness). He started, "I know what you think. You've heard such extreme things in this yeshiva in Torah and *Yiddishkeit* – extreme

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because you are Americans and everything you have heard until now has been quite the opposite – so you think that we are the minute minority who still believe in the *alte dayos* (old way of looking at things). You may believe that everything we say is the *emes*, but that the rest of the world does not believe or agree with our basic belief regarding what is true and important in this world. I have heard that there is a place in America, where there are actors and actresses<sup>18</sup> who are the richest and most materialistic, self-indulgent people in America, and I am telling you that on this issue they agree with me! They die like everyone else, these materialists, and usually at their funerals someone stands before the grave and makes a eulogy.

“What,” he continued, “do these types say when they stand before an open grave at the funeral of one of their own? Do they proclaim how handsome or rich he was? How beautiful and brilliant she was? How many houses, cars and boats the person owned? Do they enumerate all of their indulgences? No! In the history of the world no one ever stood by an open grave and proclaimed how beautiful or

18. The *Mashgiach* was referring to Hollywood, but would not mention the name of the place. At that time, an excellent salary was \$200.00 a month, and actors were making \$3,000.00 a week.

wealthy the deceased was. They say that even though he became rich, he remembered his childhood friends and gave them free loans, and that he was kind to his parents. They say that he helped out the poor and the ill. The only things spoken about at a funeral,” the *Mashgiach* concluded, “are the deeds of kindness that one performs in his lifetime! Why? Because even regarding the most materialistic boor in America, in front of an open grave, *sheker* (falsehood) closes its mouth for a few minutes, and *emes*, the truth, comes out. When this happens, every person in this world will say that the only true and valuable things in this world are a person’s acts of kindness. They will never talk about the person’s material successes.”

Only *emes* existed in the *Mashgiach’s* *daled amos* (immediate surroundings). Those presenting their problems or requests to him often found, to their great dismay, the *Mashgiach* squinting back at them – literally looking right through them – before slowly responding, “That’s not what you really mean.” Many times his few cryptic words revealed his total understanding of events transpiring far from his purview. As a matter of fact, *Gedolei Torah* in *Eretz Yisroel* would ask the *Mashgiach* to include their requests in his prayers, for everyone understood

that his *tefillos* did not go unanswered.

Reb Chatzkel only remained in America for two years. The superficiality inherent in a materialistic society was not for him – and this was in 1948! He used his *shmuessen* to protect his *talmidim* from the dangers of the American lifestyle – he even cautioned them against joining in mourning Babe Ruth’s death... about baseball in general, as well as the traditional American family outing on Sundays, in particular. “What kind of society are we surrounded by...?” he protested. How distant, indeed, he must have felt from the consecrated environments of Kelm and the Mir.

#### ON TO ERETZ YISROEL

Reb Chatzkel arrived in Bnei Brak just before *Pesach* in 1949, with no source of income – money never having had influence on any of his decisions. Immediately after *Yom Tov*, Rabbi Chaim Shmulevitz, at the behest of his father-in-law, Rabbi Lazar Yudel Finkel, זצ"ל, the *Mirr* *Rosh HaYeshiva*, invited the *Mashgiach* to relocate in Yerushalayim and reestablish his relationship with the yeshiva – which he did, from 1949 until 1954, rejoining many of those under his supervision during the war years. During this time, the *Mashgiach* held *vaadim* (small discussion groups) in the yeshiva, and gave *weekly shmuessen* for the Torah elite of the Holy City in his apartment.

During a break in the *davening* on Yom Kippur in 1954, Rabbi Elazar Shach, זצ"ל, one of the *Roshei Yeshiva* in Ponevezh at the time, and a *talmid* of the *Mashgiach* in Kletzk, commented to the *Rosh HaYeshiva*, the *Ponevezher Rav*, Rabbi Yosef Kahanemen, זצ"ל, that the *davening* would be completely different if Reb Chatzkel were present. After Yom Kippur, the *Ponevezher Rav* sent Rabbi Shach to convince the *Mashgiach* to come to Ponevezh. Rabbi Lazar Yudel Finkel appealed to Reb Chatzkel to remain with the Mir, but without success. Although the Ponevezh Yeshiva was an established, major Torah institution at the time, Reb

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Chatzkel generated an immediate change – elevating the *ruach* of the yeshiva. The *Mashgiach* remained in Ponevezh until his *petira* in 1974.

#### GLIMPSES OF GREATNESS...

##### • *Hakoros Hatov*: Gratitude

The *Mashgiach* maintained a daily 45-minute *seder* in *Mishnayos* in the merit of his *rebbe'im*, Rabbi Hirsch Braude and Rabbi Nochum Zev Ziv.

##### • *Middas HaEmes*: Truth

*In the middle of one of the most moving hespeidim given in the Mirrer Yeshiva, in the presence of the cream of the yeshiva world of Yerushalayim, the Mashgiach declared, "I will tell you a story about the niftar that tears open the Jewish heart." Then he paused, saying nothing – only his eyes mirroring the introspection taking place. Finally he resumed, "I don't know if this story is actually tearing open my heart, but it should tear open all of our hearts..." After publicly correcting himself he resumed the hesped.*

The *Mashgiach* never wrote about an experience that he himself did not undergo. If he spoke of an exalted character trait, everyone knew that he had attained that quality. The Chazon Ish once remarked to a young yeshiva student, while urging him to attend the *Mashgiach's* lectures, "Reb Yechezkel has a pure heart. What emanates from such a heart will certainly penetrate other hearts. His faith in the Almighty is unfaltering." The Chazon Ish then extended his hand and withdrew it with a sharp jerk, and added, "His faith is ingrained like the reflex of removing one's hand from a flame."<sup>19</sup>

• "Give thanks to Hashem, for His kindness is forever" (*Tehillim* 136). Reb Chatzkel taught that any kindness performed by *Hashem Yisborach* for *Klal Yisrael* is eternal. He wrote that the miracles of *Yetzi'as Mitzrayim* exist even today, and those with the proper level of *emuna* are capable of experiencing

19. Hertzman, Rabbi Elchonon, *The Mashgiach*, Jerusalem, 1981, pages 12-13.

them (though the form in which they are manifest will be camouflaged). Who will say that the miraculous journey of the Mirrer Yeshiva under the *Mashgiach's* supervision was not an aspect of those miracles?

One need only study the volumes of his transcribed *shmuessen*, *Ohr Yechezkel*, to realize that he had indeed attained the sublime perfection of character that he expounded on. The *Mashgiach's* own definition of *chayim ve'tov* (life and good) – *Ahavas Hashem*<sup>20</sup> – reveals his inner-most

20. *Ohr Yechezkel*, Ellul, page 49.

essence. He taught that the final outcome of one's *avoda* must be the absolute realization of "Ein od milvado – There is no reality outside of Him."

##### • *Sheviras Hata'ava*: Self-discipline

*The Mashgiach ate very little each day throughout the ninety years of his life. At the time of this particular incident – when he was in his late sixties – he allowed himself a daily cup of tea (just tea – no cake) in the late afternoon before returning to the Mir for Mussar Seder and Ma'ariv. His house was a long, up-hill walk from the*

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*The most inspirational moment of my life, took place over 50 years ago, on a Wednesday morning at the end of one of the Mashgiach's regularly scheduled shmuessen. Standing in front of the Aron Kodesh addressing the yeshiva, the Mashgiach paused and said, "Chazal HaKedoshim say that in the last generations before Moshiach, the Emes, the Truth, will go lost."*

*He stopped speaking, extended his right arm in front of him, and squinting, pointed with his right index finger to some place in the far distance. He was searching for something with great urgency. Then he asked, "What do Chazal mean? There is no longer any Emes left in the world? It's no longer to be found?" He remained standing there, pointing and peering into the distance. The whole yeshiva was spellbound, for the Mashgiach had never done anything like this before. His outward behavior was always so normal and natural. Yet now he just stood there pointing and staring...looking...looking for the Emes. The tension was palpable.*

*Finally, he broke the silence, and in a firm voice said, "In our times there still is Emes. So what is the difference between now and the earlier generations? The Emes today is buried very, very deep, and only with great toil and constant effort will you find it. Otherwise, you can live an entire lifetime and find nothing: Es iz noch do emes. Men darf dos gut zuchen – The Emes still exists, but we have to search for it diligently and with great resolve."*

When the *Mashgiach*, Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, was *niftar* – 19 Adar, 5734 – the world lost one of the great servants of *Hashem*. His righteousness and true fear of heaven will stand eternal and shine forth before us, lighting our way.

*Zechuso yagein aleinu.*

He exclaimed, "His words bit into me," and although it was a simple *shmuess*, the words left a lasting and profound impression upon him. It was then that he resolved to make the matter of *chizuk ha'emuna* (strengthening of one's faith) a lifelong priority.

*yeshiva. In addition, Reb Chatzkel had a very weak constitution, and the walk was exhausting for him. To fortify himself, he had this cup of tea.*

At some point the *Mashgiach* began to consider the need for this cup of tea: "I can't exist without this cup of tea? It's only a *ta'ava* (self-indulgence). Almost all of our desires, needs and worries are the machinations of the *yeitzer hara* (evil inclination)," he confided to a *talmid*. Several days later he related to this student, "It's now Wednesday. On Sunday I decided that I really didn't need my afternoon tea, and I decided to experiment. Sunday, I did not have that cup of tea, and not on Monday or Tuesday. It is now Wednesday, and I am still alive. It's all *ta'ava*! Almost all of our bodily 'needs', our desires and our worries are the product of the *yeitzer hara*."

Reb Chatzkel quoted his *rebbe*, Reb Hirsch, stating that three qualities are required for one to become a *baal mus-sar*: strong emotions, good intelligence, and the yearning to become a true *yarei Shamayim*. In a *shmuess* to his *talmidim* in 1960, the *Mashgiach* mentioned a fourth quality: to study Torah in great depth and with vigor, without any interruptions.<sup>21</sup>

21. Op. cit., *The Manchester Rosh Yeshivah*, pages 66-67.

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# Postcards From the Edge

A news item that recently appeared filled me with a great sadness. The Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported that representatives of the Reform movement presented Knesset Speaker Dan Tichon with a box, emblazoned with the words “We Are All Jews,” containing some 5,500 postcards from American Jews decrying the lack of religious freedom in Israel and the delegitimization of millions of Jews by that country.

As a committed Jew, this small incident gave me a deep sense of foreboding about the future of American Jewry. What unsettled me so was not the invocation for the umpteenth time of the myth that the Orthodox delegitimize other Jews; sadly, the recurrent propagation of this myth has desensitized me to the point that it no longer evokes the indignation that it should. Rather, what worried me about this report was something far different, as I’ll explain.

Generally, I strive to be optimistic about current Jewish events, difficult as that may sometimes be, largely because I believe in the transcendent purpose and destiny of our nation, as set forth in the Torah. This upbeat outlook has often led me to find cause for hope where others might see only reason for despair.

So, for example, the recent massive prayer rally in Jerusalem, which brought together observant Jews of varying

stripes, buoyed me with the hope that perhaps lasting unity can yet be achieved within the religious camp despite the factionalism which sometimes holds sway therein.

Or take the recent call to arms by secularist authors A.B. Yehoshua and Amos Oz, urging their fellow Israeli’s to join the non-Orthodox movements. As I read Yehoshua’s facile explanation of how he, as an avowed atheist, had joined the Reform and Conservative movements as a fan or enthusiast with no intent to participate in anything religious, I wondered: Could this prompt a re-evaluation by some in these movements of exactly what it means to be a Reform or Conservative Jew? Thanks to the wizardry of Oz, might not some of these people conclude that these groups are, in the words of *Ha’aretz* columnist Doron Rosenblum, “a sort of country club for a bit of culture, folklore and Yiddishkeit; a kind of Judaism-lite that you ‘sign up for,’ like a scout activity or a bus ride to a demonstration....”

Even in the slander of the alleged Orthodox delegitimization of their non-Orthodox brethren, I discerned a silver lining. Perhaps the perpetuation of this libel by heterodox leaders might, paradoxically, inspire their members to a renewed commitment to Jewish living. After all, as prominent Conservative Rabbi Jerome Epstein has noted, “It seems to me to be somewhat disingenuous for Conservative Jews to speak of being authentic Jews

and demand respect as Jews if we do not live by our own principles.... Is it reasonable to expect others to respect us if we do not live by the standards and values with which we identify?”

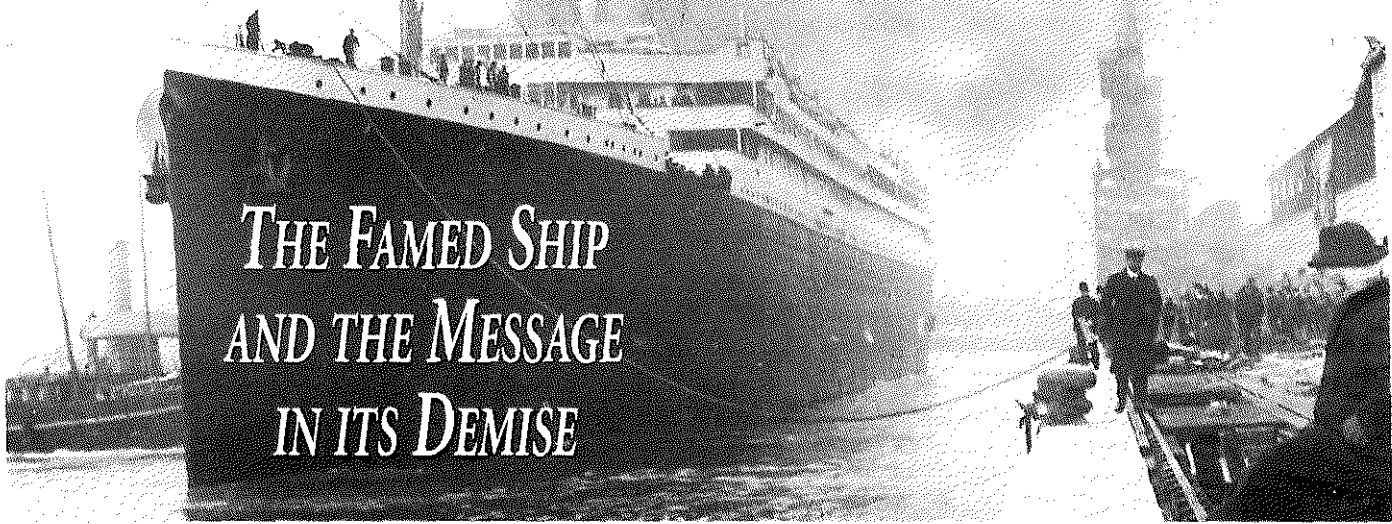
Indeed, throughout the pluralism wars I have tenaciously clung to the hope that the stirring of Jewish passions, however unfortunate the underlying cause, might be just what the doctor ordered to cure that most widespread of American Jewish diseases: apathy. However misguided the sentiment, I reasoned, isn’t it preferable for Jews to get exercised over their Judaism for a change, rather than over the fortunes of their stock portfolios or favorite sports teams?

But then I read of the postcards. I recalled that, several weeks earlier, a New York prayer rally drew a throng of Orthodox Jews estimated by police at upwards of 40,000 men, women and children on a chilly, rain-swept Sunday afternoon. The participants, who had been notified of the gathering only several days earlier, descended on lower Manhattan from as far away at Baltimore and New Haven. When asked for his reaction to this outpouring of passion and concern, Reform leader Eric Yoffie commented, “My inclination is, we would not organize any counter-rally (an anti-prayer rally, perhaps? – E.E.)... An overwhelming percentage of American Jews support the rulings the [Israeli Supreme Court] has made. We don’t need to demonstrate what is self-evident.”

Apparently, however, the Reform movement decided that it was necessary to demonstrate what was self-evident, after all. And, when they did so, the outrage of the “overwhelming percentage of American Jews” was represented by a grand total of ...5,500 postcards. Postcards with a pre-printed message, as the news reports made clear. And as I reflected on what this portends for the Jewish community, I realized that as Torah-observant Jews with a responsibility for our estranged brethren, we now face a two-fold challenge: to awaken within them the feeling that “Jewish matters,” and to channel that feeling towards a pursuit of Jewish authenticity. ■

Mr. Ehrbach, who lives on Long Island, is active in Jewish communal affairs in the Greater New York Area. This is his first appearance in these pages.

# Titanic Lessons



Nine years ago The Jewish Observer published an article I wrote based on a class I had given during General Studies to yeshiva students. It dealt with the Allied invasion of Normandy — D-Day — on May 6, 1944, and how the great armada, representing the vast military might of the West, could have been wiped out if not for a few favorable twists of fate. Torah Jews, of course, have a term for twists of fate: Hashgacha Prattis or Divine Providence. Ultimately, Hashgacha Prattis demonstrates that the world has a Master and that even the most powerful men and nations emerge as puny in its wake.

Hashgacha Prattis was no less at work during the subject of another of my classes<sup>1</sup> — the sinking of the Titanic, a topic which had fascinated me since childhood. Given the remarkable resurgence of interest in the Titanic — starting in 1985 with the discovery of the ship at the bottom of the Atlantic and climaxing over a year ago with the most successful movie in history — it occurred to me that perhaps here too was a lesson worth relating, a lesson which if unheeded endangers us in effect to becoming like passengers on Titanic, hurtling arrogantly through the darkness, glibly unaware of what lies ahead.

Yaakov Astor of Monsey, NY, is a frequent contributor to these pages.

## “G-D HIMSELF COULD NOT SINK THIS SHIP”

On April 10, 1912, the Titanic left England on her maiden voyage to New York. Tabloids had already dubbed her unsinkable. When a passenger watched deck hands carry her luggage onto the ship, she asked one of them, “Is this ship really non-sinkable?”

“Yes, Lady,” he answered. “G-d Himself could not sink this ship.”

And there was good reason to feel secure. The Titanic was so much larger than other ships of her day that new docks had to be built on each side of the Atlantic to service her. She was as long as four city blocks and as high as an eleven-story building. Just one of her funnels was large enough to drive two trains through — and she had four funnels. A single anchor weighed over 15 tons and needed 20 horses to pull it. She carried enough food to feed a small town for several months. Beyond sheer size, she was engineered for safety with the ability to stay afloat even if four of her large interior sections became flooded. Of course, no one expected to utilize that design precaution since Titanic’s captain was a man with 38 years’ experience — 38 years with an immaculate safety record.

The Titanic also received worldwide attention at the time because of her list of passengers. Astor<sup>2</sup>, Guggenheim, Strauss — even today these names are associated with wealth and aristocracy. In the world before movies, radio, television and sports stars, the public depended on socially prominent people to enrich their drab lives.

## IT WAS UNTHINKABLE ANYTHING COULD GO WRONG

Yet, on the eve of April 14, the unthinkable happened to the unsinkable. On a crystal clear night, traveling full steam ahead despite numerous iceberg warnings, lookouts spotted an iceberg dead in the Titanic’s path. Some experts claim that if the ship had not tried to swerve sideways (and rather take the iceberg head on), she would not have ultimately sunk. As luck would have it — as Hashgacha Prattis would have it — Titanic swerved to the side and the iceberg opened a hole large

<sup>1</sup> Yet another class of mine was written up as a JO article (Dec. ’93). “Day of Infamy” centered around the fateful events of December 7, 1941: the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the repulsion of the Nazis at the gates of Moscow, the beginning of the Final Solution.

<sup>2</sup> No relation to the author, he was the wealthiest man of the time.

enough to sink her within a mere three hours.<sup>3</sup>

Apropos for overconfident travelers, reaction to the severity of the collision was slow. Passengers on deck played with ice that had fallen from the passing iceberg; gentlemen in first class paused briefly but then continued their smoke, small talk and card games; sleepers in their warm beds never woke up or fell back to sleep.

Gradually, however, word spread. The bow (front) began to slant ever so slightly lower... and then ever so slightly more. Flares (spotted on a ship ten miles away but never responded to) were fired. Slowly it dawned on everyone that this was no drill (despite the fact that the ship's band came on deck to play upbeat music).

As the bow sank beneath the water, the stern (rear) lifted higher... and higher... until Titanic's monstrous propellers emerged from the otherwise calm sea and glistened in the sky. She rose higher and higher ... and then her 50,000 tons of metal snapped in half. The front of the ship descended to the depths while the remaining portion righted itself perpendicular in the air. It stayed that way for a few breathtaking moments... before sliding into the sea.

Tragically, Titanic had only enough lifeboats for half her load,<sup>4</sup> and even

3 Recent research has discovered that the iceberg punctured several small holes in the ship, which all told amounted to little more than 12 square feet of damage — 12 square feet which fatally spanned six otherwise watertight compartments.

4 After Titanic, the law was established that all ships had to have enough lifeboats for all passengers. Titanic actually carried more lifeboats than required by law at that time.

then most of the boats were lowered only partially full. After the ship was gone, hundreds of people were still alive in the water, thrashing about. With the water temperature at 28 degrees, however, all but a few were alive when a rescue ship arrived less than two hours later.

#### CONSIDER THE *HASHGACHA PRATTIS*

Consider the *Hashgacha Prattis*: Had it not been a moonless night, the iceberg could have been spotted earlier; had it not been an uncommonly calm sea, the froth of the waves lapping the berg would have alerted the lookouts to its presence in time to avoid it; had they spotted it a few seconds later<sup>5</sup>, there would have been a head-on collision and Titanic probably would not have sunk; had another ship ten miles away not turned off its radio equipment a mere ten minutes before Titanic's fatal collision, it would have heard the distress call in time to rescue passengers; had the rescue ship arrived one hour earlier... had the water been a few degrees warmer, and so on — total disaster could have been averted.

At the same time, the Divine precision of *Hashgacha Prattis* was conspiring to save a remnant — if the iceberg had inflicted a larger wound, had there been no rescue ship in the vicinity, had the lifeboats encountered stormy seas, etc. — none of the passengers would have been saved and the world would have never known what had happened. Furthermore, had it not been the Titanic, had it not been her maiden voyage, had it not been dubbed unsinkable, had it not been transporting such prominent people — it would never had made the headlines in its own day, no less arch across the decades to intrigue people today.

Yet all those elements of *Hashgacha Prattis* did occur precisely in that way because there was a greater message in the sinking of the Titanic, a message as

5 All told, there were 37 seconds between spotting the iceberg and the collision. Spotting it perhaps 10 seconds earlier or later could have averted the disaster.

relevant for the people at the beginning of the century, and apparently for people now at the turn of the century.

#### A MESSAGE FOR THE CENTURIES: THE END OF AN ERA

This article is by no means the first to seek the greater message in the tragedy of the Titanic. Perhaps the best summary was penned by Walter Lord in *A Night To Remember*, his seminal account of the event. Writing over forty years ago, he said:

Overriding everything else, the Titanic also marked the end of a general feeling of confidence. Until then men felt they had found the answer to a steady, orderly civilized life. For 100 years, the Western world had been at peace. For 100 years, technology had steadily improved. For 100 years, the benefits of peace and industry seemed to be filtering satisfactorily through society....

The Titanic woke them up.... Here was the "unsinkable ship" — perhaps man's greatest engineering achievement — going down the first time it was sailed.

But it went beyond that. If this supreme achievement was so terribly fragile, what about everything else? If wealth meant so little on this cold April night, did it mean so much the rest of the year? Scores of ministers preached that the Titanic was a heaven-sent lesson to awaken people from their complacency, to punish them for their top-heavy faith in material progress. If it was a lesson, it worked — people have never been so sure of themselves since....

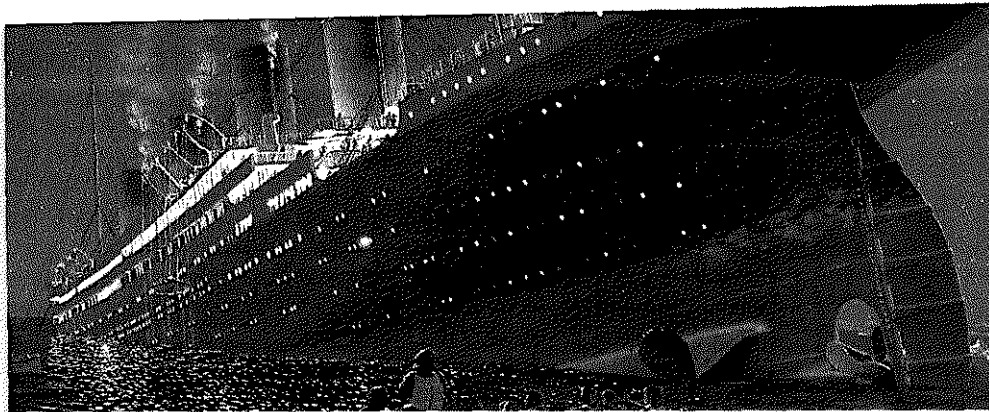
Titanic has been called a cultural metaphor because she so perfectly illustrated the era into which she was born. And that metaphor still resonates today. Isn't so much of modern society's faith in technological, medical and scientific progress still top-heavy, overshadowing oftentimes hollow proclamations that progress is merely a tool in the hand of G-d? Isn't the reason we feel relatively safe today because we consider America the technological pinnacle of



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the world, in effect “unsinkable”? And aren't we as prone as ever to the pitfalls of wealth, not the least of which is a false sense of security and an ever-encroaching complacency?

### THE TITANIC FASCINATION

**T**he Titanic metaphor speaks to people on many levels. After all is said and done, though, I would suggest that Titanic still fascinates because it makes us feel, to put it simply: big. Like D-Day, Pearl Harbor and other seminal events that so defined this century, it jerks us from our smug, provincial view of reality. It is like walking along a path, looking at trees when suddenly, unexpectedly, you come to a cliff and see the Grand Canyon in all its gaping majesty. (*Lehavdil*, this I imagine is an echo of what it must have been like to suddenly come upon the *Beis Hamikdash* when it stood in all its glory.) You feel so small.

But in the very smallness, a vista opens up. You see the Hand of Providence and can do nothing but stand back agape, in awe.

Interestingly, Titanic first set sail on April 10, 1912, which fell out on *Isru Chag*, the day after Passover (in the Diaspora). April 15, 1912, (the Titanic sunk at 2:20 AM on April 15) was exactly one week after *Shevi'i Shel Pesach*, the seventh day of Passover, which commemorates the drowning of the Egyptians in

6. Commentators typically identify water, one of the classic four elements, with *taava*, desire. There is, of course, no shortage of teachings that denigrate the Egyptians for their base behavior, for their sexual immorality and excessive pursuit of wealth. The material extravagances of those on board Titanic have already been noted. It can be said, then, that both cultures ultimately were drowned by and in their own excessive material desires.

the waters of the Red Sea. The parallel is striking: just as the Titanic represented the technological might, epitome of wealth and cultural high point of the Western world in its day, so too Egypt was the pinnacle of might, wealth and culture in its day — yet both were destroyed by water<sup>6</sup> in a fleeting moment, as a resounding demonstration of the Almighty's incomparable power and control.

*Hashgacha Prattis* does not mean that events will necessarily be manipulated to turn out the way we want them. Courageous parents and little children from the Titanic drowned, idealistic soldiers in Normandy and Pearl Harbor fell victims of war, the Holocaust took many righteous people, etc. Rather, it means that the Hand of Providence is so self-evident that our lives are momentarily suspended and in that moment we become aware of presence of the Divine. Once in that Presence, we can attain the perspective that all is well with everything in the universe, that the plan is perfect; that whatever is happening — the wars, famine, our personal pain, etc. — is consistent with the Divine design. And if you reach the next step, you attain a state where you feel your immortality, knowing that you're home forever, that you're safe forever... and that everybody else is.

Titanic, then, like so many other larger-than-life events in general history, is another reminder that even the most powerful human beings are not in control; the world has a Master who manipulates events and who brings about phenomena that we call *Hashgacha Prattis*. Titanic itself may be a ghost ship banished to the depths, but her lesson is not. Her lesson — a message as timely as it is timeless — still haunts the modern conscience. ■

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# The Poverty of the Rich

A college professor of mine once described the economic reality of the *shtetl* of his childhood with the phrase "the poverty of the rich." Even the few Jews of means, he said, were impoverished relative to our contemporary standards, such that one could gain a sense of the ghetto's general conditions through a glimpse of the actual poverty of its rich.

A young product of the modern West, I have no nostalgia for the socio-economic realities of the *shtetl*. I enjoy the comforts and physical safety of my affluent society and cannot imagine them replaced with earthen floors, infant mortality and pogroms, even as my society's decadence imperils my soul.

Modernity has bred its own challenges. Today, it is no simple task to board a bus, shield one's eyes from inappropriate dress so as not to diminish in minutes the sensitivities painstakingly cultivated over years of learning. Contrarily, from the backward, impoverished

Pnuel Peri of Jerusalem was represented in *The Jewish Observer* by "Masked Jew" (Jan. '99)

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*shtetl* emerged *gedolei Torah* and *yirei Shamayim* the likes of whom *Klal Yisroel* has not since produced.

Who, then, I wonder, is truly destitute – they, simple Jews who knew most of *Shas* (as Rabbi Nachman Bulman refers to his father) and the Torah giants of their midst, all of whom pined throughout their short, precarious lives for Jerusalem, or I, who ride a Jerusalem bus at great spiritual peril?

The spiritual poverty of the materially rich is staggering.

\*\*\*

Amidst plentitude, secular society worships the body, ultimately exploiting technology toward that end. Browsing the Internet, for example, is engaging – less for the opportunity of broadening the mind than for the experience of testing a new physical threshold. The "information superhighway" thus lends itself quite naturally to the crude, the earthy and the vulgar.

Amidst spiritual squalor, the Jewish mind struggles to survive and to guide its body through myriad daily tests of lethargy, excess and passion. How is this mind not overcome and led by the body, ultimately toward its undoing?

Rabbi Berel Wein lauds the genius of the Jew as being his survival through the ages amongst the gentiles, his preservation of mind through millennia of foreign ideals. That cunning is no less relevant today in Jerusalem, a holy city that is nonetheless pervaded with gentile images of power and desire. Perhaps

because of the holiness of the place and of the Jews wielding the images, the struggle for Jewish survival is all the fiercer.

\*\*\*

Riding a Jerusalem bus challenges the Jew, on many fronts, to remain Jewish and retain his mind's integrity. Immodesty, as noted, is problematic.

Drivers' contempt for passenger safety and dignity is equally challenging. That they do not hospitalize 80% of their daily passengers, most of whom are not trapeze artists in the Russian Circus, is an open miracle. That revelation alone, however, does not reawaken my own concern for their and others' safety and dignity, defusing within me a reactive callousness all too common here.

Egotism and pocket cellular phones are cancerous to public transit. The assumption that we are important enough to be accessible in every place at any moment – or worse, that solitude, traditionally a medium through which we absorb ourselves and G-d, can be forsaken for that accessibility – is bad enough. That we assume, however, that the world does not mind sharing our personal lives as we transform our bus seats into our living rooms, kitchen tables, and offices – or worse, that the whole world *truly* does not mind – is a crushing of our appreciation for subtlety and separateness akin to spiritual implosion.

The Jewish mind, slumped in its own debris, is then but a wistful recollection.



\*\*\*

Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler's *Michtav M' Eliyahu* is a survival manual. We should not board buses without one of its volumes. Of pleasure seekers, he writes, "Their life is not life. They experience no satiety in their pleasures. They chase only a similitude of pleasure, and glimpse but its fragment."<sup>1</sup>

His message is excruciatingly terse. We know that secular society is pleasure-based and, therefore, devoid of most things complementary to a Torah life. Do we realize, however, the severity of its emptiness? Says Rabbi Dessler, it and they, the society and its players, are not alive. Constant chasing and pursuing, never simply being, giving, loving, are themselves death. Moreover, they die for imaginary pleasure. A further irony: the false objects of their desire are never actually achieved, only envisaged from afar and, at that, only partially.

Rabbi Dessler helps us withstand the inertia of an attractive society, whose layered tragic ironies are concealed in self-fulfillment and aesthetic. He gives us the means to *fife* at the *velt*<sup>2</sup>, yet as with a ram's horn, whose piercing timbre mocks fleeting self-fulfillment and the pursuit of the aesthetic.

Our *fife*, our whistle-cry, is one of joy for being alive and drawn by an imperative whose very fragments are eternal treasures the mere chasing after which is life itself. It is also one of sorrow and fear, not only for our fellow Jews, who uninhibitedly give themselves to society, but for ourselves, who resist... yet daily walk the edge of oblivion.

\*\*\*

Settlement in a Jewish State that shares Western societal oblivion has long been an issue of survival amongst the Orthodox camps. Religious Zionists say, simply, that the land is holy and will purge itself and us, survival being somehow irresistible. The Satmar *Rav* says that its holiness cannot bear corruption, survival being absurd, so incongruent is the reality of Israel with

its ideal. Between the two is the voice – or, rather, *fife* – of the Jew living here, for whom survival is imperative and only-G-d-knows-how possible.

Recently, I understood better the Satmar position.

One winter evening while returning home on the bus, I was drawn deeply into Rabbi Dessler's text and was surprised to look up and see the beginnings of my neighborhood passing in the window. Anticipating my stop, I moved toward the bus exit, and my eyes fell upon a sign on the automatic door.

"*Zehirus!*" it warned.

My heart leaped. I thought, "Yes! *Zehirus!* Vigilance! How grand is the fragile soul!" and stood as though galvanized by the words of two *sefarim*, one grasped in my hand, the other written in red upon the door.

As the door folded open and I alighted, I laughed to myself, realizing what the public safety sign was actually saying. Almost immediately, however, anger and hopelessness swirled within me as I stepped into the cold, lamp-lit night and sensed the tragedy of "*Zehirus* (accent on the *hi*)! Guard your soul!" having become to most Israeli minds "*Zehirut* (accent on the *rut*)! Don't lean against the door!"

Where the cheapening of such classic truth is the norm, indeed, where our sages' words grace the vernacular with which too many Jews, unaware of their own tradition's wealth, commit every imaginable indiscretion and thereby mock – one would almost say ingeniously – our seemingly absurd struggle to remain Jewish, can the loudest *fife* be heard?

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Inconceivably, it can; and perhaps it is this aspect of the Jew's genius that is born of none other than a Jewish sense of humor.

Our *fife* is also a chuckle, one far more complex than an insane response to insanity. It is the mechanism by which we grasp seeming contradictions and, through them, draw into focus that which we already know to be true and

inviolable. It is the means of our survival in a secular Jewish society whose members undermine our survival, yet are known by us to be, inseparably, our own.

\*\*\*

One recent afternoon, I was riding the bus through *Givat Shaul*, Jerusalem's industrial district, when the driver halted behind a taxi blocking traffic and, characteristically, leaned upon his horn.

Infuriated, the taxi driver got out, approached the bus driver's side window and protested that he had had no choice but to block the street, offering some cause that I could not discern.

"Are you not ashamed?" the taxi driver asked, glaring into the bus.

"*Slicha*," the bus driver said, genuinely contrite. "*Lo samti lev*."

Deeply moved, I laughed.

I laughed over the utter impossibility of a similar exchange between employees of Yellow Cab and the New York Transit Authority in a culture where men, terribly alone and disenfranchised, hardly speak to one another let alone demand shame and offer contrition.

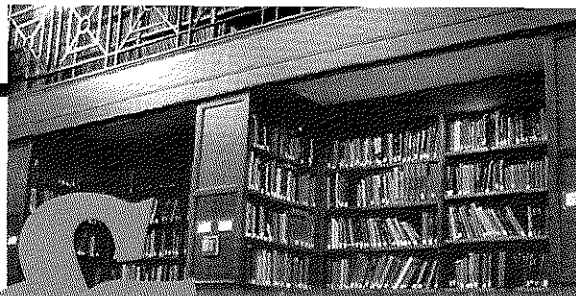
I laughed in recognition that these men, despite their secularity, had not become their New York counterparts. How could they have? They are Jews for whom shame and contrition are organic expressions of being inseparable, even as they would defame one another within a society replete with corruption and scandal.

That paradox alone requires laughter, as the dominant culture's *zehirut* drags its organic *zehirus* with it into the mire.

*Zehirus* will, of course, emerge unscathed. Until then, perhaps our last great challenge is to survive the poverty of the rich and *fife* as we await the coming of ourselves back to ourselves, a process that unfolds both despite and because of who we are. ■

1 Volume I, pg. 6

2 A Yiddish expression: to dismiss the world with a deriding whistle.



# Book Shopping & Passport Control

Isn't a library card, or the availability of a bookstore, akin to a passport? They allow you to travel to far-flung lands, explore uncharted territories, experience different and exotic situations, as well as interact with fascinating personalities.

Before embarking on a geographic journey, we usually check out the political stability, weather conditions, and the health situation in the place of our destination... and of course, our passports and credentials are reviewed by immigration officials. No less care should be the case when we take a book in hand.

There is much that is positive today: the explosive proliferation of *sefarim* and books in the vernacular – translations of classics, original works in English... *halacha*, *hashkafa*, history, biography, novels, essays and short stories.

So much to gain:

— Useful instructions. Valuable information. New insights. Stirring inspiration. Stimulating ideas.

But what of the risks?

— Unsavory characters. Compromising situations. Vulgarization of the sacred. Distortions of Torah. Misrepresentation of facts.

Is there a "State Department" to advise would-be "tourists" of the contents of the book shelves? Shouldn't one consult a "traveler's guide" before embarking on such a journey?

Yes, Judaica book stores are veritable wonderlands of stimulation, excitement and education. In fact, a girls' high school serving a Jewish community several hundred miles from New York brings its upper classes for a several-day visit to the Big Apple every year, and among the high spots is a stop at a large Hebrew book store in Brooklyn, which

stuns the visitors in terms of its size and the variety of offerings. An FAO Schwartz of Judaica, a Viennese table of reading delights. Such a huge hunger, such a vast banquet!

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Imagine, if you will, a well-equipped, up-to-date Judaica shop serving a religious community. The shoppers and browsers wander through the aisles, checking out ArtScroll's latest biography on Reb Elya Lopian and Pesach Krohn's most recent "*Maggid*" collection; Feldheim's freshest offering on *Avos* and Hanoach Teller's *Midrash and Maaseh*; plus CIS's *Visions of Greatness IV* – all beckoning amongst the smorgasbord of treats.

Then they spot a new Haggadah strikingly illustrated with full-color reproductions of scenes from the Dreamworks' animated movie, *Prince of Egypt*. Is the movie-association alongside the text meant to invite the uninitiated to a *Seder*? Perhaps. But why is the Haggadah allotted display space in a Judaica shop with a *frum* clientele? To tell the *Seder* guest, "You may have enjoyed the book, but wait till you see the movie?" [In fact, Michel Schwartz, the artist who designed the Haggadah, commented in an interview (*Intermountain Jewish News*, Mar. 19, '99), "There is a four-page center spread of the parting of the sea which makes you feel as if you are in the middle of the movie."]

Is that among the functions of a Hebrew bookstore?

Then there is a collection of breathtaking, well-crafted stories recounting incidents of *Hashgacha Prattis*, fashioned to inspire *emuna* – including an anecdote

Entering a large shul in Vilna, the Chofetz Chaim passed a spread of Hebrew books set up for sale. Amongst the *sefarim*, he noticed a number of Hebrew-language books written by *maskilim*, with a decidedly anti-religious viewpoint. He weeded them out from the pile and tossed them into a large bin of coal used to fuel the stove that heated the shul. The itinerant bookseller who had set up the display came running, "Rebbe, stop! Those are my books!"

"Tell me," asked the Chofetz Chaim, "aren't you aware that these books project an unacceptable outlook?"

"But, Rebbe," the salesman pleaded, "I have to sell them to earn a living. I can't feed my family from selling only *heilige sefarim* (sacred literature)!"

"I have a solution for you," offered the Chofetz Chaim. He took out a pencil and pad, and wrote down an address on the other side of Vilna, and handed the paper to the peddler. "This place needs a worker. You'll make much more money there than from your books."

The fellow looked at the slip of paper, and protested, "That's the local cathedral. What can I do there?"

"They need someone to ring the bells to call the people to worship."

"How could you ask me to do something like that?"

"It is preferable that you earn a living by calling Christians to worship," said the Chofetz Chaim, "than by poisoning the hearts of your fellow Jews with unacceptable books."

dote involving the exquisite timing of the baptism of an infant coinciding with the resolution of the child's severe medical crisis. Teaching us what?

And the new volume of essays amid the stacks of rabbinical reminiscences and ruminations by a rabbinical figure

who has made his mark in the modern religious world by recklessly misconstruing Rabbi Moshe Feinstein's halachic decisions on dissolving marriages (over the protests of Reb Moshe's family); a book featuring the pastoral guidance of a Reform rabbi whose earlier volume dismissed the established doctrines of Divine reward and punishment; and, of course, a best-selling feminist ideology written by the daughter of a renowned Conservative "Hasidic" figure.... deposits of dross among the gold.

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**W**e normally exercise caution when we browse in a public library, and we advise our children or our students to be similarly selective. Sort of in line with telling travelers: "The natives are friendly but don't drink the water." Judaica bookstores should be different. There we would assume: "The natives are friends, and the waters are not only thirst-quenching, but nourishing as well." And if some are not for popular consumption, let a savvy clerk guide the browsers to more potable fluids. Yet that does not seem to be the case in too many instances. What should be done?

Probably all it takes is a friendly tap on the shoulders of the proprietors of these shops – people who are responsible for a welcome mass dissemination of Torah literature as well as inspirational and entertaining reading material. For sure, these very same book-store owners would reject the concept of running a football-field-size supermarket with a sign declaring: "We sell Kosher-and-non-Kosher foods: Buyers Welcome (and Beware)." Yet feeding spiritual toxins to the *neshama* is far more hazardous, with results far longer lasting than when offering *tarfus* to the body. Tell them that. They will surely understand.

And if not, then we and those whom we are responsible for will be forewarned: It looks *heimish*, but until further notice, it may well be more prudent to stay home and simply "order by phone." ■

## Preparing for Rosh Hashana?



### Preparing for Rosh Hashana?

Maybe this way – "Hit it! ...Great – it's a homerun!...No, he caught it..."

Or this way – "Ma, one more time on the bumper cars – please! It's the greatest thing here at Jeepsers."

Impossible. But this year the week before Rosh Hashana may just possibly sound this way, unless parents and schools prevent it!

**T**he day after Labor Day – time-hallowed as the first day of school – is on Tuesday, September 7; Friday, September 10, is *Erev* Rosh Hashana. That means that there will be only three schooldays before Rosh Hashana, certainly not enough to teach even the barest minimum that our children need; and, above all, they will enter the *Aseres Yemei Teshuva* full of the vacation spirit.

The obvious solution would be to start school a week earlier. But there is no lack of possible naysayers:

- Parents who do not want to cut short the vacation period, and especially look forward to the Labor Day weekend.
- Administrators faced with the likelihood of incomplete attendance, transportation headaches, and no teachers for the afternoon general studies program.
- Hebrew teachers drafted for an extra week of teaching; moreover, some of them may have summer jobs.

Yet, considering the alternative, these are problems that *must* be solved. Obviously, schools cannot impose extra

obligations on teachers unless they provide financial compensation or some other relief (some schools, looking ahead, are cutting some days off the end of the current school year, or lengthening the winter recess, but both are really undesirable).

Parents must be given to understand the impossibility of not preparing children for Rosh Hashana.

There will undoubtedly be some children who will be absent on the extra days; but since the studies on these days will be devoted to Rosh Hashana, they will at least not miss the launching of their regular curriculum.

No general studies? Nothing could bring home to our children more clearly the difference between Torah and general studies. Some schools may be able to provide extra programs or day camp activities for the few afternoons involved.

Is all this necessary?

Can one really doubt it? ■

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# READERS' FORUM



The two articles, "My Son/Daughter, the Schnorrer," by Eliyahu Mayer, and "My Son/Daughter, the Tzeddaka Gabbai," by Nisson Wolpin (March '99), generated an unusual flow of letters. Several were selected for publication, trimmed to avoid excessive repetition, followed by the authors' comments.

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## BRINGING PRESENT PROCEDURES IN LINE WITH HALACHA

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To the Editor:

Not raised by either side in your debate over "Children with *Pushkas*: Two Sides of the Coin" (JO Mar. '99), were key halachic questions: Namely, are we permitted to subject young children to the powerful temptation of handling so much money? Is this not a violation of *Lifnay iver lo sitayn michshal*, the Torah's prohibition against placing "a stumbling block before the blind"? Who is more blind than children who, *Chazal* teach us, do not even have a *yeitzer tov* (inclination for good) before Bar Mitzva? Furthermore, should not the many halachic laws pertaining to the collection of charitable funds, which include the need for responsible monetary oversight and accountability, also apply to children collecting for *tzeddaka*?

I was first asked to collect money as a youngster over 40 years ago by the yeshiva I was then attending. I vividly recall the exhilaration of suddenly finding myself in possession of more money than I had ever seen in my entire life. At first, I tried to be careful and put my own meager allowance in one pocket and the growing amount of *tzeddaka* in the other. On a particularly hot day, I figured my hard work in collecting so much money certainly entitled me to "borrow" a dime from my *tzeddaka* pocket for a well-deserved ice cream cone. Afterwards I started having second thoughts and was overcome with a

terrible fear. *Hashem* would probably strike me with lightning bolts for what I had done. He certainly would not allow me to wake up the next morning. When I woke up the next day, unscathed, I concluded that my fear of Divine retribution was probably unfounded. The next dime for an ice cream cone was a lot easier. Was I just naturally more larcenous than my classmates of yesterday were, or than today's children are? I tend to doubt it.

Many years later, I raised the above-mentioned halachic questions with the administration of my children's yeshiva. He concurred that the *nisayon* of handling *tzeddaka* money is too much for some children and that inevitably a number of them will succumb to temptation. Nonetheless, he would not call for a stop to the practice. He explained that unfortunately the money raised by the children was needed by the yeshiva to meet its budget. Obviously, *halacha* and the likely corruption of some of its young *talmidim* were less important to this yeshiva than its bottom-line.

Serious thought should be given to modifying the present procedures and bringing them in line with *halacha*. Perhaps *pushkas* themselves, which are so easily rifled, should be replaced. Instead children should be given a carefully recorded number of *tzeddaka* dollars or raffles to sell. Afterwards, the money raised and the unsold *tzeddaka* dollars or raffles should be compared with the original disbursement. I'm sure there are many others who can come up with a variety of better ideas to build accountability into the collection process.

Will modifying the present system require some extra work? Perhaps. But doesn't safeguarding the purity of our children's *neshamos* deserve our best efforts?

MENACHEM DAUM  
Brooklyn

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## THE SOURCE OF THE PUSHKA KIDS' AGGRESSION

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To the Editor:

Eliyahu Mayer's article was disturbing both for what it addresses and what it omits.

His honesty for taking on a subject that is becoming a growing-if-not-fully-recognized problem – the in-your-face solicitation by *heimishe* children for worthy Jewish causes – is admirable.

As someone who has walked the *frum* streets of Brooklyn, eaten in its restaurants and shopped in its bookstores for nearly twenty years, I also have experienced the pervasiveness of the phenomenon Mr. Mayer describes: modestly dressed boys and girls immodestly and rudely waving *pushkas* or receipt pads in a bypasser's face. Their actions demean both them and the institutions they represent.

Mr. Mayer does not cite the context that fosters the children's un-Torah actions. Let's face it. They merely copy some of the behavior they see around them: ignoring "*Gut Shabbos*" greetings, cutting in front of others at stores, scolding children in public places....

Mr. Mayer correctly points out that "parents... do have choices" about what their children do. But he neglects to write that parents have an equal choice in watching their own actions, which their children will surely emulate.

STEVE LIPMAN  
Rego Park, NY

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**PUBLISHING PRIVATE P'SAK TO  
COUNTER PUBLIC PRACTICE?**

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To the Editor:

Among the many problems I had with Eliyahu Mayer's article, two are most troubling!

1. I take offense with the way he maligns the time-honored practice in *Klal Yisroel*, of children collecting with raffle books and *pushkas*. The fact that young yeshiva boys collected in this fashion for *Chinuch Atzmai* and *Ezras Torah*, institutions headed by Reb Ahron Kotler זצ"ל and Rabbi Henkin זצ"ל, should give us some inkling into the sacred origins of this *minhag Yisroel*.

2. I do not understand how one could go public with what *Gedolim* said to him privately, as if that were their intention. Many times *Rabbanim* answer questions posed to them with a response tailored to the inquirer's personal inclinations (providing, of course, that this is within the realm of *halacha*). With their keen, perceptive insight, they have the ability to do this. In no way, however, does this give the inquirer license to publish their counsel. If they feel that publicizing such a *p'sak* is called for, they do not need some private volunteer to disseminate it; they have their own ways to do so.

AVROHOM SCHERMAN  
Lakewood, NJ

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**PUSHKA COLLECTING: JUMP START TO  
SERIOUS FUND-RAISING**

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To the Editor:

More than thirty years ago, a young boy stands with his *pushka* on a street corner waiting hopefully for someone to pass by and put a nickel or a dime, or if he's really lucky, a quarter into his *pushka*. The boy is suddenly startled and excited beyond belief to see a stranger take out a dollar bill and actually slip it in to his *tzeddaka pushka*. This young boy becomes greatly inspired and goes on to collect \$300 for *Chinuch Atzmai* and receives a small *Shas* as a prize.

Later on in life, he raises \$1500 for another organization, and is rewarded

with a trip to Eretz Yisroel. Now, more than thirty years later, this young man ב"ה has helped his Rosh Hayeshiva in Eretz Yisroel print more than twenty different *sefarim* by raising the necessary funds in America.

Every Pesach now, when I am *bodek* my Rosh Hayeshiva's *sefarim*, I'm amazed how far a *dollar bill* can go, from the time when I was that young boy standing with my *pushka* on a street corner more than thirty years ago!

Every Purim, I join my children in expressing *hakaras hatov* to their *yeshivos* by helping them raise money for their building funds. I help them collect *tzeddaka*, and in this way, I show them the proper way to use a *pushka* without offending anyone. By the same token, I try to teach them how to ignore insulting comments, such as "There goes 'my son/daughter the *schnorrer*!'"

Eliyahu Mayer's suggestion for the parents to write out checks instead of having their children collect with a *pushka* will only teach them the easy way out in life. Why shouldn't children have the tremendous *zechus* of collecting *tzeddaka*, which is a greater *mitzva* than just giving it? After my children collect *tzeddaka*, I generally write out a check for more money, just in case there's a mistake, plus the fact that I also want to contribute to that cause.

What's the next step? Are we going to stop our kids from booing Haman because it may teach them to make noise during *laining*? Perhaps they shouldn't light the Chanuka *menora*, since it may train them to play with fire! Of course not. We sit next to them during *Megilla laining*, as we are with them when they kindle the *menora* – to train them in how to do a *mitzva* carefully and safely.

Finally, when kids with *pushkas* approach me, I don't feel like I'm being surrounded by a pack of wolves or by a gang of Moslem fundamentalists! Instead, I feel like I'm being surrounded by children eager to get a *mitzva* (and also, of course, a prize).

I'm happy to give them *tzeddaka* that is *tatzil mimaves umavirin es ro'a hagzeira* (protects from death and annuls evil decrees). And who knows? Perhaps my giving a young boy with a *pushka* a *dollar bill*, I may א"ה be causing twenty more *sefarim* to be printed in the world!

RABBI MOSHE SHOCHET  
Brooklyn

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**SCHNORRER OR GABBAR? IT'S UP TO  
THE PARENT**

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To the Editor:

We were very disturbed by the article, "My Son/Daughter, the *Schnorrer*." May I answer him point for point? [- except where addressed by other letters. – NW] The first paragraph sounds like a *chiloni* contemptuously describing the *chareidim*. "Ambushed"? – For a *mitzva*? Does the author also feel ambushed when many business opportunities are knocking on his door?

Why doesn't the *JO* write "two-sides-of-the-coin" articles on teaching compassion, for example? Because there are **no two sides**! Why, then, are there two sides of the coin as far as teaching a child to give of himself – not only monetarily, but with his other resources? Of course they need to be taught and directed.

**Value of *Tzeddaka*:** Did the author ever hear of growing from "*shelo lishma*" (ulterior motives) to "*lishma*" (being selfless)? How many children became *masmidim* with an initial spark from a learning-for-a-prize-program, many of which are sponsored by Agudath Israel?

**Responsibility:** There are two parts to this. (1) In regard to the loss of money for the organization – our family has run raffle campaigns for various needs over the years – Yeshivas Bein Hazmanim (maybe to buy prizes for the author's son?), a poor Israeli family (maybe the author's old *chavrusa*?), *hachnosas kalla* (maybe the author's cousin?). I think we got every raffle stub in (after systemized calls)

and lost under \$10 (which we paid for ourselves).

(2) **Accountability:** As a mother and a teacher, I have worked on it quite successfully. Not collecting only avoids the issue, it doesn't solve it!

**Disregard for Tefilla:** You will hear people in *shul* making sales pitches and managing their business during *tefilla*. Is that also because they were taught to be pushy collectors when they were young, or because they were (un)trained in *shul*-behavior by their parents?

**Aggressiveness Training:** We would like to invite the author to our neighborhood and open his eyes to a new world of *shuls* where we see almost none of that – just *eidel neshamos* that even remember to say, “*Tizku lemitzvos*.” In addition, on our block alone, practically each family over the last ten years has sent around a child with a note to collect money for different needs in the community. *Mi ke'amcha Yisroel!*

**Begging Reinforcement:** No, collecting *tzeddaka* when young does *not* train children to be nags. Rather, it trains them to be caring individuals.

In regard to “applying the art at home for more self-serving ends” – does that mean that a child who answers “*Amein, yehei sh'mei rabba*” in a loud voice will learn to scream for more self-serving ends?

In conclusion, the author writes how every parent has choices. Yes, we do – to train our children in the area of “*Gadol hama'aseh yoser min ha'oseh* – It is greater to arouse others to do good than to do so oneself.”

We are your typical *rebbe/morah* couple – many obligations etc. who raise money for the poor on a totally voluntary basis. All our children are happily involved in it.

The *pasuk* says “*Lo yechdal evyon mikerev ha'aretz* – The poor will never be absent from the land”; it was meant to be that way and it is going to continue that way. We must thank *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* that we can be the givers and collectors, and not be on the receiving end. As the *Aruch Hashulchan* says (247:5), “I have a tradition that a

person who collects *tzeddaka* from others saves his generation from the need to knock on doors for themselves.”

So if you don't want *your* child to be “My Son/Daughter the *Schnorrer*,” collecting for himself, make sure he/she will be “My Son/Daughter the *Tzeddaka Gabbai*.”

(MRS.) ADINA SAFIR  
Monsey, NY

### The author replies:

Based on the cacophony of reactions elicited by my article, the issue of young children collecting *tzeddaka* seems to be not a two-sided coin, but rather a multifaceted gemstone.

First, I would like to reply to Rabbi Nisson Wolpin's articulate rejoinder, which I did not see until publication. My parents, ל"ר (and grandparents, ל"ר) also assumed leadership roles in communal *tzeddaka* drives and fund-raising projects for Torah institutions around the globe. But that has little bearing on my tolerance for the negative *middos* instilled in our children by the current collection campaigns.

Professor Aaron Twerski's nostalgic “Confessions of a *Gabbai*” underscores the *zechus* that is earned by one who suffers ridicule and embarrassment as a result of collecting funds for *tzeddaka*. I agree. But my article addressed the abuses *caused* by the young collectors, not those they receive.

As for Avrohom Scherman's two issues: First, there is a phenomenon, which is not new, called “getting out of hand,” which means that even honorable practices with “sacred origins” can sometimes go awry. One illustration should suffice. Initially, it was an accepted practice to dress *niftarim* (the dead) in expensive clothing before *kevura* (burial). Although this and other lavish customs had become the norm, they were eventually modified after they had gotten out of hand. (See *Moed Kattan* 27a-27b.) Similarly, reforms are now needed in the practice, however time-honored, of children taking to the streets to collect *tzeddaka*.

Regarding Mr. Scherman's second point, I must defend the *Rabbanim* with whom I consulted. They never asked me to keep their advice private and they may have even preferred that I include their names. It was my decision not to print anyone's spoken words without their reviewing the manuscript. To save time prior to publication, I simply omitted their names.

Rabbi Moshe Shochet cites the example of the potential dangers of children lighting the Chanuka *menora*, pointing out that we supervise them so that they learn to do so properly. But that only strengthens my argument, because I never see these junior collectors accompanied by their parents as they roam the streets and *batei midrash* of my neighborhood. Perhaps if parents were required to chaperon their *gabbaim*-in-training, we would see less change spilling out of young pockets, and all of the money donated would actually reach the intended recipients. And the rudeness, to which Steve Lipman and others have been subjected, might also be eliminated.

Of the many issues raised by Mrs. Safir, I would like to address two. My choice of the word “ambush” was intended as hyperbole and the tone, although not the message, was designed to be tongue-in-cheek. Some people may have been misled, and for that I apologize.

Secondly, her family is to be praised for their honesty and *chessed*. They are certainly not alone. When my wife was in elementary school (a couple of years ago), she politely solicited funds for her *Bais Yaakov* in the subway on her way home from school and she diligently accounted for every single penny. But today, such scrupulous integrity is not the rule.

Menachem Daum's courageous confession of his youthful indiscretions makes the most irrefutable argument for collection campaign reform. As a thorough rereading of my original article will prove, I never advocated the elimination of either *tzeddaka* campaigns or children learning about *tzeddaka* through active participation, as they learn about all other *mitzvos*. The main point of my

article was that revisions in our current collection code for children are sorely needed.

I thus heartily endorse Mr. Daum's proposals. If only one *chinuch* institution adopts them, the heated debate on this issue and the aspersions cast on my *hashkofos* and motivations for writing the original article will have been more than worthwhile.

ELIYAHU MAYER  
Brooklyn

### "SHRINKING THE PICTURE" OR MISPLACED PRIORITIES

To the Editor:

Rabbi Oberstein praised "an idealistic *chassan*" for taking pictures with his bride before the *badeken* so as to expedite the couple's emergence at the wedding feast, avoiding the interminable wait that usually takes place after the *yichud* (Letters, April '99). It was a generous act of consideration, an avoidance of *tircha detzibura* (inconveniencing the crowd). If this was indeed done with the approval of the young man's Rosh Yeshiva, it reflects poorly on the young couple. Apparently the Rosh Yeshiva recognized that one of the decision makers viewed shrinking the picture-taking session non-negotiable. Every frame, every pose was a must. What was left? Only to violate the hallowed *minhag* Yisroel (amongst Ashkenazim) of the *chassan* and *kalla* not seeing each other until the *badeken*. In effect, trading away the sacred moments before the *chupa* when the *chassan* and *kalla* can achieve *nitzchiyus* – eternity! – with tearful prayers, for the permanence of a staged moment caught on film.

Yes, as Rabbi Frand and Rabbi Kulefsky concurred, *tircha detzibura* is something that must be reckoned with. It is to be hoped that other families will be equally considerate of their guests, but that they do so by shortening the duration of the photography and not by trampling on *minhag* Yisroel.

YERACHMIEL WAGNER  
EAST MEADOW, L.I.

### PHOTO CREDITS

Regrettably, many of the credits for the photographs that illustrated Heshy Arem's article, "Mashgiach From A Previous Generation, Rabbi Nosson Meir Wachtfogel זצ"ל" (April '99), were either omitted or misplaced. The following are the correct attributions:

Page 5: Reb Nosson delivering a *shmuess* at the Chicago Community Kollel, photograph by Fred Eckhouse, Chicago.

Page 6: The *Mashgiach* with Rabbi

Shneur Kotler זצ"ל, courtesy Moshe Zev Weisberg, Lakewood.

Page 13: Reb Nosson with Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon שליט"א, courtesy Meir Feld.

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