The Great Public School Rainbow

Is It Still Worth Chasing?

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The “English Department”

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**THE GREAT PUBLIC SCHOOL RAINBOW**

What Lies at the End — Pot of Gold? or Bucket of Dross?

The Great American Dream has always been within the reach of generations of immigrants' children. Its access routes are well-marked: public school...the library...a college education...a profession (terminus). The goal “my son the doctor” may be the butt of many a joke and caustic remark, yet for many generations of immigrants, the alternative made it no laughing matter. This was a pushcart-sweatshop-lined route to bare subsistence—a life with precious little time or opportunity for personal betterment (spiritual or social), a regimen that often refused to recognize the irregularities of the Jewish calendar. While the lot of the American laborer has since undergone constant if sporadic improvement, the unflagging appeal of a white-collar existence has been far more than one of fatuous social climbing, and has even maintained a religious justification of sorts. In the final analysis, the tragic Sabbath desecration that accompanied the cultural assimilation of the “high-road” to the American Dream was almost as frequently the by-product of staying closer to the immigrant culture. So from the 1880's clear to 1940, it often seemed to be a “heads-I-win, tails-you-lose” spin between the young Jew and his cultural heritage.

Since World War II, newly arrived immigrants to America have been keeping the professional dream very much alive. They personally suffered because, starting from scratch, they had to work much harder. This was compounded by the insecurity caused by the need to adjust to a foreign land. So well-intentioned parents, hoping to spare their children these negative elements in their own search for economic independence, once again prod their young along the public school...library...profession route.

Today The American Dream is undergoing a roasting—or a greening, as some see it—and both the objective and the routes are being questioned. Even if one chooses to ignore the goals of the counter-culture, as our more conventional Orthodox community tends to do, there are some probing questions being posed by social critics that are exposing the traditional paths to success as being less than fool-proof: Is the newest generation of underprivileged being best served by a formula that worked for a more intellectually-motivated group (the Jewish lower-class)? For that matter, did all immigrant groups actually benefit economically from being schooled? Were not some ethnic groups, even fifty years ago, rather grounded to a lower socio-economic stratum, in spite of universal public education? If they did experience a rise in earning power, may it not have been as part of a general rise in living standard? Isn’t society in general overly “schooled,” and might it not benefit from a de-schooling?

Is education per sé the key to advancement for peo-

*by Nisson Wolpin*

_The Jewish Observer / December, 1972_
The immigrant culture seemed to be a pushcart-sweatshop-lined route to bare subsistence, with nights mortgaged to piece-work and no time or opportunity left for self betterment. The escape?—Public school—library—college—profession (terminus).

In addition, the traditional parent still seems to prefer the long-range goal of a professional career for his offspring to any kind of skill or labor, or an involvement in the business world, which—although a long way from the Orchard Street of old—still has a seamiest side that parents feel should be avoided. Thus the full route of the public school (in a yeshiva setting, of course)—library—college—graduate school—profession is still the road to security and success eyed by most concerned parents.

This entire pattern needs examination from a Torah-oriented point of view, both in terms of its over-all influence on the raising of future Jewish generations and the effects of these public school-type goals and methodologies on yeshiva teachings and goals.

The PS-Yeshiva Trend

These questions are being bandied about in the councils of the wise and the powerful, and have become topics for doctoral theses, Board of Education deliberations, and a library-shelf full of books. By contrast, the Orthodox Jewish community, which is usually conservative in all areas as a matter of course, still remains unquestioningly bound by the Great Public School Myth of a half-century ago. To be sure, Orthodox parents send their children to yeshiva day-schools and would never consider a public elementary or high school as long as they have an alternative. But on the other hand, the yeshivas' general-studies programs are primarily geared for college preparation, and the curricula are designed to present as close an approximation of the conventional (or more innovative) public school syllabus as an abbreviated session will allow. And while some people might put the blame for this self-imposed limitation on a lack of imagination or a shortage of time on the part of yeshiva administrators, one wonders how much tampering with the PS formula the average yeshiva parent would tolerate.

In addition, the traditional parent still seems to prefer the long-range goal of a professional career for his offspring to any kind of skill or labor, or an involvement in the business world, which—although a long way from the Orchard Street of old—still has a seamiest side that parents feel should be avoided. Thus the full route of the public school (in a yeshiva setting, of course)—library—college—graduate school—profession is still the road to security and success eyed by most concerned parents.

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Different Rainbows, Purer Gold

Rabbi Meir says: A man should ever teach his son a clean and easy vocation, and he should pray to Him who truly possesses all wealth and property; . . . there is no vocation without poverty or wealth, for neither wealth nor poverty stems from the vocation . . . only from one's merit.—Kedushin, Perek IV, Mishna 8

The Talmudic ideal of "a clean and easy vocation" has undergone a metamorphosis in nature and purpose. Rav Yehudah (Kedushin 85b) interpreted this as referring to "machta detalnyusa," an embroidery skill. An occupation of this sort, according to the Maharsho, allows one the freedom to devote the major portion of the day to Torah study, with earning a livelihood occupying only minor, irregular intervals. Some of today's professional pursuits may well be modern-day counterparts to machta detalnyusa, but it is the rare parent
who gives major consideration to the freedom to pursue Torah study that his son might gain, when selecting one career possibility over another.

Further, the emphasis on leaving-nothing-to-chance that dominates the usual vocational planning, also leaves no spare room in the Jewish psyche for the fundamental attributes of bitachon—trust in G-d and "praying to Him who truly possesses all wealth . . . ."

Thus, the intended purpose of a "clean and easy vocation" has slipped from the consciousness of young people planning careers, but the term itself is still freely applied to a great range of job opportunities—especially in the professions.

Yet the professional career, that ultimate rung on the socio-economic security scale, has become a shaky one. Teaching in the inner-city is neither clean, easy, nor secure. . . . Careers in aerospace and in some of the other more exotic "growth" industries have lately been subject to unanticipated tafslips due to government contract cancellations and bureaucratic machinations. . . . And in general, the people who are gearing themselves for professional careers will be facing relatively greater job-hunting difficulties, according to a new Federal analysis.

In fact, the regional director of the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, Herman Bienstock, specifically addressed himself to Jewish young men and women when he presented these findings to a Rabbinical Council of America Convention last summer. According to his report:

Close to 80 per cent of young Jewish people go to college, and the nation's college enrollments are expected to rise 47.7 per cent during the nineteen-seventies. . . . But the study forecasts a far slower rise in professional and technical jobs—projected to go up only from 14.2 per cent of all jobs in 1970 to 16.3 per cent in 1980.

Jewish men have tended to flow into professional and technical jobs—one of five turning to a profession, compared to one of 10 men in general. . . .

[Mr. Bienstock . . . ] suggested that Jewish organizations consider more emphasis on vocational guidance and placement and on what he called "attitudinal reconditioning, particularly in terms of value structures relating to nonprofessional job opportunities . . . ."

Nonprofessional technical jobs may become more attractive in pay and security than in the past. The crafts—particularly tool and die maker, plumber, electrician and carpenter trades—may have a "much brighter demand-supply pattern" than some others eyed by collegians, and may also provide satisfactory income and careers . . . .

A majority of young Jews would still seek white-collar professional jobs. He suggested a possible "significant return to self-employment, not of the Mom and Pop store variety" but in accounting, business advisory services, contract-cleaning . . . . (N.Y. Times, June 25, '72)

An article proposing such considerations and documenting related employment possibilities appeared in the June, 1969 edition of The Jewish Observer ("A Third Alternative: The Orthodox Worker-Scholar," by Simon Raskin); and information on this expanding field should be brought up to date.

Other Means — Other Ends

NOT ONLY MUST WE, as Orthodox Jews, take a fresh look at the end of the Public School Rainbow; we
The cry for de-schooling society does have a distasteful anti-intellectual ring to it. Yet there is much that we—the People of the Book—can learn from the critical insights of the de-schooling exponents. Ivan Illich, author of a recent book entitled "De-Schooling Society" and director of Centro Intercultural de Documentación in Cuenca, equated his views in a recent Op-Ed piece in the N.Y. Times. He went on to say:

Chief Justice Warren Burger, speaking for a unanimous Court, held that the requirements—as a condition of employment—of either a high school diploma or of success in a standardized general education test are prohibited under certain conditions by the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

This case may set us on the road to the legal recognition that schooling requirements, in and of themselves, constitute a discrimination which hampers social advancement and thus violates public policy.

Tests relevant to job competency are not prohibited by the act, but the employer has to prove that any given standard is necessary for his business. The Court extends the application of the concept of "job relevance" which appears in the legislative history of the 1964 Civil Rights Act to the requirement of a high-school diploma as well. The Court rules that any tests used "must measure the person for the job, not the person in the abstract."

This decision encourages those of us who refused to believe in the benefits of schooling. It sustains our argument that an individual's economic or social advancement should not be made to depend on his ability or willingness to attend age-specific small-groups meetings, under the authority of a teacher, for 500 to 1,000 hours every year. This constitutes the hidden curriculum of schooling which seems irrelevant both to the goals of a liberal educator and to preparation for any specific job.

The Court in Griggs tells us that "diplomas and tests are useful servants, but Congress has mandated the common-sense proposition that they are not to become masters of reality."

(N.Y. Times, May 3, '71)

To the Jew, Torah knowledge was and always will be the "master of reality," but not so our view of secular education. Readings and studies outside of Torah are useful insofar as they open up our eyes to the wonders of Creation, and give us the tools to function productively in society. Part of this productive function is earning a living, but if Ivan Illich has his way, this may offer validity to an ever shrinking share of the common secular department curriculum, and to even less of the conventional college education.

So much of the elementary and secondary syllabus in Social Studies and Language Arts is geared for fostering insights into the individual and his role in society, and for imparting broader understanding of the forces that mold history. So much of this either runs contrary to Torah values or, at best, reflects these values in secular mirrors. A good deal of the rest of these syllabuses that is not specifically career oriented may eventually prove obsolete as the implication of the Supreme Court decision in the Griggs Case becomes more concrete. Indeed, the trend toward accepting "life-experience credits" toward requirements for matriculation and graduation appears to be a nod of recognition toward some of Dr. Illich's more penetrating insights.

All of this means that, in the long run, as societal function becomes less contingent on school function, yeshivas will find justification, if not outright mandate, for shifting emphasis in existing curricula and for reapportioning the school day.

The Discipline of Text and Tests

THE APPLICATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL goals to the yeshiva setting may be a bad case of using a map of Omaha to find the best road to Jerusalem. The methodologies usually associated with public education, however, may have a greater validity as applied to yeshiva studies within a certain prescribed context. In fact, there are many yeshiva principals who have openly confessed to a debt of gratitude to the public schools for the subsequent schooling of yeshivos. To be sure, they endeavor to run their schools in a manner consistent with Hilchos Talmud Torah, but they welcome the advent of a host of teaching and administrative tools that have entered yeshiva doors on the coattails of the general studies—such as formal entrance requirements; sophisticated written comprehensive exams with short answers, multiple choices, etc.; written and oral reports of the mini-thesis variety, employing copious research techniques and compilation of facts; the assembly program as an addition to the traditional Kinus Talmidin; the employment of projectors for moving pictures, slides, and overhead visual aids; even, in some more "progressive schools," experimentation with the open classroom, somehow completing the full circle, back to the traditional "cheder"—but, unfortunately, without the traditional rebbe and the traditional environment.

Some have gone further in borrowing from the public education system, and even have suggested a unified program for all mesivta high schools, with a common messechta (tractate of Talmud) for study, required minimum pages to be mastered, specific commentaries to be covered, and system-wide comprehensive exami-
One need only study the opening paragraph of Maimonides' Hilchos Talmud Torah to be reminded that Torah study is the very life stuff of a Jew, and whether he is in his student years, his declining days, or at any point in between, it is meant to be his major pursuit. Matriculation and graduation are foreign to Torah study, and because of its companion-status with general studies, products of the American yeshiva system labor under a number of crippling misconceptions: 

- Studying that part of a messechta that is dealt with in class is in effect “covering” it—ignoring a major portion of the tome on hand.

- The yeshiva-year in many institutions is defined by the academic school calendar of 40 weeks, leaving a too generous heap of idle time for vacation—from what?—and for what purpose?

- The academic years are considered apart from adulthood (with the notable exception of Kollel fellows), resulting in a compartmentalization of years and respective pursuits: early years of study, without thought or training for communal responsibility; contrasted with later years of middling study and communal activity of occasional responsibility and intensiveness often an outgrowth of social consciousness rather than “the action that stems from study.”

- Finally, the ultimate degradation of the philosophical turnabout, whereby a Torah education beyond certain minimums (set by whom?) can only be justified as an “axe to dig with”—that is, a stepping stone to a career; but should “my son” not be rabbinical or rosh yeshiva timber, then—what for? And, by contrast, higher secular education—even if pursued with no specific goal in mind—can only offer enhancement. So, why not?

Operating in a pluralistic society means almost limitless opportunities for self-enhancement, both materially and spiritually. If the yeshivos, its students, and their families can master the discipline of selecting the opportunities for fuller Torah growth, rejecting optional “requirements” and misleading opportunities, then new horizons in Torah education can be realized.

Operating in a pluralistic society also means the inevitability of bringing a little bit of pluralism home. If this can be limited to adopting some of the American knack for organization and structure to the yeshiva scene, this can be an aspect of the ideal of “Grecian beauty in the tents of Shem.” We can also benefit immensely by the penchant for constant criticism and reevaluation, to which every American institution is forever being subjected. We can apply some of their queries as well as some of their findings to our own popular concepts, and—to some extent—to our own institutions.

At the same time, we must be ever wary of coming home with too much foreign merchandise, for the integrity of Torah—in its definition as well as in its function as a goal and life-purpose—must not suffer from borrowed elements.

Reviewing Gemara with an electronic Clurius.

**The Side of the Ledger**

THE PITFALLS AND OPPORTUNITIES of the general studies program in yeshivos are examined critically in other pages of this issue. But what about the residue of attitudes that has settled in the yeshiva system—is it all beneficial? Probably the one attribute of a schooling mentality that educators have seized as a bonus is, at the same time, a detriment—the structuring of education, and the implication of finitude that follows. Torah study is a field of infinite dimensions and no terminations to test the results of the individual student’s efforts and the efficacy of the schools. While such an approach smacks of an over-schooling of Talmudic studies, almost to the point of strait-jacketing them, it has the definite asset of being specific in the curricular demands being made on yeshiva students, giving them a sense of accomplishment at the conclusion of the term; eliminating flabbiness from classrooms, schools and the network of yeshivos; restoring a stature to the sacred studies that it often loses by poor comparison with the rigid, defined demands of the general studies.

Some **mechanchim** have, off the record, expressed a desire to set up a long range year by year syllabus for completing Shas, or specific sections of the Talmud and Shulchan Aruch, and to create programs for their implementation in advanced yeshivos and kollelim—but since these designs have never been formally proposed, they can not be more than parenthetic to this discussion. But the wish itself, expressed in responsible quarters, reflects the extent of the “schooling” of our own educational system.

*The Jewish Observer / December, 1972*
We often take pride in the high standards of achievement of the English departments of our yeshivas. It is truly remarkable how much they accomplish in so little time—the yeshiva student reads, reckons, researches, and is as knowledgeable as any child on the block. To be sure, the teachers are not all Torah-loyal Jews, but our children know their Gemora and their geometry, and that's what counts.

Yet, an afternoon tour of all too many American yeshivas can give one cause for some second thoughts, especially after gaining a first-hand appreciation for who have a hand in molding our children's character, opinions, and attitudes; and the educational material that is at their disposal. The reader might examine the sensitive points outlined below and then consider to what extent they exist in his children's yeshivas:

The Teachers
The Teachers may, for the most part, be good educators, but woefully inadequate for meeting the particular needs of the yeshiva student. Be they Gentile or non-Orthodox Jew, they are sometimes politely tolerant of the religious environment, attempting not to interfere with yeshiva goals—but too often they range from crude ignorant meadleers to deliberate crusaders in matters concerning traditional Judaism. The non-Orthodox Jew, especially if he attended a yeshiva and then became alienated, often displays a psychological compulsion to neutralize the special mentality we try to instill, to make room for the "wishy-washy" open-mindedness which makes a virtue of anything the heart desires. Moreover, some observant teachers, who often gain a greater share of the students' confidence than others, can prove to be even more dangerous, by virtue of their limited knowledge, compromised values, or personally contrived formulas for a "secular-sacred balance."

Examine the books, the films, the periodicals distributed to the students and the accompanying advertisements for "child-fare" popular books, the books available to children in the public library, and one begins to wonder how much lower the criterion for respectability can sink.

Scan the Bulletin Boards and current-events displays. Does something become fare for our children just because it is interesting or true?—because the New York Times or other periodicals, who must satisfy the undiscerning public to survive, deem it fit to print?

Listen. Listening in on the lessons in some of the vulnerable subjects, one can note how by random statement, wisecrack, approval, or disapproval—almost imperceptibly—a brainwashing takes place.

- Mention is made of the age of the earth prior to the accepted 5733 and a student ventures, "But my Rebbe said..." and the teacher, recalling instructions to avoid religious issues, responds with an indulgent smirk, as if to say, "Well, you and your naive Rebbe..."
- Another teacher continues the discussion, declaring "I know your Rebbe is a wise man, but has he studied the evidence?..."
- And another good-hearted apologist rationalizes, "Religiously..."
speaking you're right, but the scientific facts are . . .

- A Jewish teacher becomes friendly with his students, and relates some matters of personal nature, such as his Saturday afternoon tennis game ("I wouldn't play on Yom Kippur, but . . .") and his night out with his wife in a non-kosher restaurant ("We wouldn't eat pork, but otherwise, it doesn't really matter, does it?").
- A young college co-ed, hitting it off well with her seventh grade girls' class, shares with the class some of her experiences with her fiance.
- A Catholic woman teacher asks her students what she should do for her husband (Jewish) on Chanukah.
- The idealistic social studies teacher who believes it is not enough for him to teach the subject but he must mold attitudes, loyalties, and beliefs, as well. So he conscientiously chides his teenage charges about their narrow-mindedness (we call it single-minded devotion to Torah) and challenges them to open their minds to alternate cultures and ways of life (including such models of depravity as hippie-communes), and to learn to accept them just as "you would want to be accepted by others." This idealism is usually topped with a selection of assigned readings that, by the criterion of simple decency, would be revolting.
- Another who scolds her students for displaying such a lack of respect (At least be tolerant!) for early American Indian religious ceremonies and ceremonial objects.
- Or the bulletin board displaying immodest pictures because the study unit of the month is "Vacation Fun."
- The student newspaper describing a court case wherein a daughter sued her parents for interfering with her choice of college and career, and asks the readers to take sides on the issue.

Such instances (all documented, by the way) are not daily occurrences, to be sure, and the yeshiva administrations certainly attempt to curb them, but even if they come to the fore but a few times during a school year, they are bound to leave an impression whose impact must not be minimized.

(I do not presume to have the qualifications of a Posek, and yet I submit, most emphatically, that the following references in the Shulchan Aruch must be given serious consideration. Their message cannot be evaded: EVEN HOEZER 22:4, YORE DEAH 153:1 and 245:19, TUREI ZOHOV #6.)

striving for improvement in both its Torah and general studies departments, seeking innovation and expansion in services rendered, methods employed, and teachings imparted, with the hope that the school will be even closer to its goal.

And just what is this goal? To rear a generation of Torah-true Jews. Yeshiva youngsters will grow up not merely knowing Torah but living it as well; never falling into the category of "He who learns Torah and does not keep it . . . ," but dedicated to the precept of "Know Him all your ways . . ." throughout their lives.

The achievements thus far inspire a guarded optimism as to the future of Torah in America, and stand as a superb testimony to the dedication of the mechanchim involved. Yet it may be misleading to generalize and say that in the majority of cases, the American yeshiva as a whole is promoting attainment of this ultimate goal. Specifically, it is the department of sacred studies and its idealistic staff members—who teach, influence, and persuade their charges to become bnei Torah in knowledge, action and feeling—who deserve the fullest plaudits.

By contrast, it can be disheartening to observe how the yeshiva secular department, generally speaking, participates little to promote this goal and quite often serves as a distracting influence. This is especially disturbing in view of the great potential inherent in the secular department program for serving as a full fledged partner in this pursuit.

As It Should Be — and As It Is

The secular studies may occupy a minor portion of the school day, but certainly not a negligible one. During the morning hours, the prevailing atmosphere, in addition to the Torah being taught, is one of loyalty to Torah and mitzvos. Ideally, this atmosphere should prevail throughout the school day, impressing upon the students that Torah loyalty knows no limits. This would hopefully provide a basis for negating the "Jewish in shul, American in business" philosophy.

But the reality is frequently a dilution of this atmosphere at best, and even more often, an almost total

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absence of it. In the absence of a positive spirit, a negative one finds access, and as in the futile construction of Pithom and Raamses, the Rebbi cannot continue to build on yesterday’s progress, but must first reconstruct its ruins.

Beyond the necessity of fostering a healthy Torah atmosphere in the general studies hours, the subject matter itself carries the potential of varying degrees of relevance to Torah study, thought, and mitzvah performance. What a boon it would be to the totality of the Jewishness of our students if these subjects were taught as tools to enhance Torah knowledge and service to G-d in its myriad aspects and ramifications!

Instead, in too many cases, we are confronted with a secular department that, true to its name, teaches the subject matter in its Gentile nakedness, devoid of Torah orientation, and incorporating the many anti-Torah theories and attitudes which proliferate under the banners of science and progressiveness. And our poor students cannot help but to assume an attitude, subconsciously at least, that the modern scientific and social views are the constant while the Torah must somehow conform. And again the good Rebbi must expend effort to “repair the foundation” during time that could be spent on “building the edifice.” And even after his efforts, we must ask, “Is the edifice as good as new? Is the repair perfect? Does not the fissure still show a bit? And when the students are blessed with a Rebbi who can sense a cold war in progress, they may have had for him, toss discipline to the winds, possibly lacking in purity of motive, become enraged by the anti-traditionalism of their teacher, lose any respect for a general response or posture, is of course better than nothing, but falls far short of the crying need for Torah-oriented teachers. We would not tolerate such a cursory approach in the Kashrus control of our food. Is the Jewish heart and mind to be more exposed to infiltration than the Jewish stomach?) Despite initial instructions, “...to leave religious topics alone” and “...subjects conflicting with religious beliefs should not be discussed,” the teachers proceed along their habitual way; for even if they were inclined to follow prior instructions, how can they be expected to fathom what points in their lesson have bearing on all-encompassing Judaism?

The “Frum” Backlash

In schools where student loyalty to Torah concepts is firm, the presence of secular-oriented instructors poses an additional problem. Some students, quite possibly lacking in purity of motive, become enraged by the anti-traditionalism of their teacher, lose any respect they may have had for him, toss discipline to the winds, and even become defiant and antagonistic. Even in such neutral subject areas as spelling or arithmetic one can sense a cold war in progress.

This, of course, breaks down class morale, and student-teacher rapport deteriorates. Disciplinary measures are in order. The administration must act to restore the teacher’s prestige. And what a delicately balanced tight-rope act it must be!

The Sources of the Malady

This assessment is meant to be neither an indictment nor an accusation, for none among us favors such an arrangement. This description is merely meant to convey what any objective observer could verify. To some it may even appear to be an exaggeration, for its accuracy depends upon many variables. But in whatever degree it does exist, it is a problem—even a menace—which pleads for rectification. A plan for rectification is best formulated when the roots of the problem become clear, and it is toward an analysis of the root causes of the problem and a general approach to their resolution that this article is directed. Two factors, it appears to me, nurture this objectionable situation:

ATTITUDE: In the school community, the prevalent attitude is that the yeshiva secular department is mandated to provide a public school education under yeshiva auspices. The “yeshiva auspices” refers to little more than the physical plant, whereas the “public school education” is the hallmark of all else. In the spirit of the perfection-seeking that marks the yeshiva-day school movement today, the goals for the secular department are to provide an education comparable (or superior) to the local public school district’s, whose standards are set by the State Department of Education. Such literal fidelity to statewide programs make a Torah-oriented program difficult and should one be attempted, both overt and covert opposition could be expected. This protective feeling is so deeply ingrained that when a rare teacher does inject some Torah thoughts into his lessons he encounters passive resistance that can border on animosity, and a less reticent student will stage-whisper, “Hey, I thought this was English.” More outspoken students have been known to send a petition of protest to the principal.

PERSONNEL: Ideally, if qualified Torah-oriented teachers were available to teach the secular department subjects in yeshivos, the dire circumstances that provoked this article would probably not exist. But they are not available—at least not in sufficient number. Primarily, then, the yeshiva secular departments are staffed by “public school” quality teachers hired on the basis of certification, experience, and “availability for the price.” Their religious qualifications and their sensitivity to the special needs of the yeshiva student are at best considered a secondary credential. Consequently, the students are removed from the yeshiva environment and set adrift in a sea of alien influence, with little or no guidance as how to navigate these foreign waters. (The rare lecture by the Hebrew principal or some other such notable dealing with various anti-Torah elements in the curriculum, with a suggestion for a general response or posture, is of course better than nothing, but falls far short of the crying need for Torah-oriented teachers. We would not tolerate such a cursory approach in the Kashrus control of our food. Is the Jewish heart and mind to be more exposed to infiltration than the Jewish stomach?) Despite initial instructions, “...to leave religious topics alone” and “...subjects conflicting with religious beliefs should not be discussed,” the teachers proceed along their habitual way; for even if they were inclined to follow prior instructions, how can they be expected to fathom what points in their lesson have bearing on all-encompassing Judaism?

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The student is right in his indignation, but wrong for the way in which he expressed it. ("Aren't you boys concerned with the opinion he forms of yeshiva students?"") The teacher is indisputably wrong in his challenge to Torah loyalty; yet he must be respected nonetheless since he is, after all, the teacher. ("This is what you're going to encounter in today's world and you may as well be prepared for it sooner or later.")

Can the child's mind be fine-tuned to cope with such hair-splitting? Is he expected to see through the facade of pure intentions? Are we the way we providing the setting for rebellious behavior under the guise of pure intentions? Are we confusing the student, dulling his virtue of speaking up in the face of wrong, and causing him to doubt his values?

The prevailing secular-oriented tendency, professed by parents, fanned by the students, and supported at times by the secular department administration, not only creates this type of problem, but obstructs its solution. The few understanding teachers become discouraged, and unless they are uncommonly idealistic or influential, they will "stay out of trouble and stick to the text."

A Blueprint for Improvement

As an over-all outline for rectifying this situation, the following suggestions are presented:

Redefine the goals and purposes of the Yeshiva Secular Department. The secular department must be a full fledged partner in furthering the broad goals of the yeshiva—to rear a generation of Torah knowledgeable and loyal Jews, equipped with a clear Torah outlook concerning all that transpires in the world. It should provide inspiration for a total commitment to a Torah life in thought, attitude, expression, and deed—where the feeling is convincingly conveyed that Hashem is among us not only when we are occupied with religious concerns, but also during business, and any of life's other mundane occupations.

From this perspective, the yeshiva secular department can definitely be mandated to teach a program that parallels the public school curriculum, with the clear proviso that our ultimate purpose limits us in some areas and compels us to reach beyond their program in others.

Implement a program geared to these goals. A key step in this program is the engaging of an administrator who is actively sympathetic with these goals and purposes, who possesses the fine understanding necessary to define them, and who has the tact and stamina to implement them. Finding him is probably the most difficult aspect of this plan. This administrator would undoubtedly be a person who is not bound by conven-

tion. He would plan the curriculum accordingly, and would judge text books and other instructional material not only on the basis of quality, but adaptability to this unique program, as well.

The next most crucial and difficult step is the engaging of teachers who are particularly suited for such a program: bna and bnos Torah, with a positive Torah outlook, who have been prepared to teach secular subjects, and who will take pride in their students' mastery of the subjects—without sacrificing the sanctity with which a yeshiva classroom should pulsate.

The administrator would provide in-service training for such teachers who have all the potential, but lack the experience for the practical implementation of such a program.

In addition, he would have to launch a community re-education program to convince the proponents of untainted "progressive" secular education that our goals are the peaks of Sinai and Moriah, that nothing in the world is more worthy than such goals, and that any road that leads away from them is the ultimate regression; that we will insist on quality education, but neither will we exclude Yiddishkeit from where it belongs; nor will we provide a foothold for anti-Torah teachings, mires and opinions; that Hashem who is so firmly established as the omnipotent Creator and Governor of the world in the morning sessions will be equally in command as the Creator of the world studied in Science, the Master of the pathways of history and current events, the Progenitor of all human wisdom and accomplishment, and the sole Arbiter of good and evil.

Impress upon young men and women committed to Torah the nobility of such a "Chinuch" calling. That same idealism for dissemination of Torah (harbotzas Torah) and reaching out to others (kinus rechokin) which prompts our youth to enter the field of Torah education in the sacred studies should attract them to the secular department as well. Anyone even slightly aware of the information (and misinformation) deluge spewed forth by the various media will also be aware of the polluted influence to which our youngsters are exposed. Add to this the effect of a "neutral" or "open-minded" yeshiva secular department, and one can sense the forces which can topple our youngsters' loyalty to Torah from its precarious foothold.

Furthermore, there are many opportunities for Torah-related lessons inherent in the secular subjects, which never present themselves in the Torah Studies department, or for which the average Rabbi is not prepared, and these alone should motivate the eager young idealist to consider this field. One who could successfully tackle such a program and does not is truly a wasted resource.

As a means of opening up careers in secular-teaching to yeshiva youth, optional courses for selected students,
leading to proficiency in this area, might be offered in
the senior year of Mesifta and Beth Jacob high schools
to be followed by two years of training—as part of the
seminary curriculum for the young ladies; and for
the young men, a schedule of two lectures per week
in addition to assigned reading, so as to constitute a
minimum of interference with their post-high school
Torah study.

Since teaching in the yeshiva secular department is
less time-consuming than teaching in the Torah classes,
and takes only part of the afternoon hours, this training
might also help to alleviate the budget strain of a Kolel
fellow who is seeking part-time employment, without
surrendering the major portion of the day from inten­
sive Torah study.

Provide our own publications. Should all this ma­
terialize, then—funds and manpower permitting—the
logical subsequent steps would be the preparation of
the following materials:

- curriculum outlines to guide teachers to a Torah­
oriented approach to the subjects at hand;
- workbooks for student use, modifying and sup­
plementing standard textbook material to suit
our program;
- our own textbooks. The Catholics produce “Ca­
thedral Editions” of standard textbooks, and our
purposes demand a similar effort.

As mentioned, the potential of the general studies as
a reservoir for Torah-related learnings and attitudes is
virtually an unexplored frontier, and could well provide
the stuff for another article* if not several books.

In the meantime, it is hoped that these lines have
succeeded in making the reader aware of the problems
of the coexistence of the sacred and the secular in our
yeshiva classrooms, and a broad outline of what can
and must be done.

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Ezriel Toshavi

Rabbi Goren Takes Over
The Tragedy of Irresponsible Leadership

The struggle to survive in the usual golus situation, where Jews
are subjected to the domination of non-Jews and their culture, can
constitute an oppressive burden. . . . When the golus is imposed by
fellow Jews, the load becomes a most painful one, . . . A golus becomes
staggering in its burden when the survival of the Torah Jew is threat­
ened by an individual who, at first glance, is a member of the Torah
camp. . . . Such is the tragic dimension of the current crisis unleashed
by Rabbi Goren's recent actions.

To fully comprehend the implications of his precipitous move and
to understand why it provoked so fierce a storm of condemnation from
all quarters of responsible leadership, one must examine the back­
ground and the circumstances of his psak.

Keeping the Promise

When the New Chief Rabbi, Shlomo Goren, took office, he wasted no time in keeping his campaign prom­
is to “release” the Langers from their status of
mamzerut.

Notwithstanding the decision rendered by a Petach Tikvah rabbinical court seven years ago, and upheld
since then in the Supreme Rabbinical Court in Jeru­
salem; in spite of warnings and pleas from just about

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Ezriel Toshavi observes the Israeli scene for readers of J.O.
The Jewish Observer / December, 1972
every respected Torah authority the world over not to brush aside this halachic decision except through proper evaluation through accepted judicial procedure, Rabbi Goren convened a “blitz” court of his own. Without consultation with those who had previously judged the matter, with total disregard for the opinion of fellow Chief Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef, without revealing the names or qualifications of any of the members of his court or the basis for its judgment, without examining witnesses who could challenge or corroborate basis for decision, he declared the Langer brother and sister as Yehudim kasherim and personally arranged their marriages to their respective fiancées.

Rabbi Goren’s swift action was ostensibly designed to heal a number of painful wounds in Israeli society. Beyond freeing Chanoch and Miriam Langer to marry their chosen fiancées, Rabbi Goren had apparently entertained other hopes: to prove that halacha and “human needs” are indeed compatible; to enhance the prestige of the Chief Rabbinate and, as a result, the rabbinate in general, by demonstrating its capacity for innovative action; to take off the pressure engendered by Gideon Hausner’s motion to grant limited recognition to civil marriages; and to bring together the disparate elements of Israeli society, as one nation living under a common heritage.

Ironically, the integrity of halacha, the prestige of the Chief Rabbinate, and the unity of the Jewish people are all suffering immeasurably as a result of Rabbi Goren’s clandestinely convened court and its “blitz” procedure; and while the personal problems of the Langers may have been mitigated to their own satisfaction, the tragic proportions of the problems that beset these highly complex issues seem to loom even larger.

Symbolic of the Times

The plight of the Langers was first brought to the public attention several years ago when a beis din (rabbinical court) in Petach Tikvah refused to authorize the marriage of Chanoch, an officer in the army, to his fiancée. His sister, Miriam, was similarly restricted. As mamzerim the Langers are limited by Torah law to marry only others of similar status or converts to Judaism. They turned to their top-ranking superior, Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan, who cried out in favor of the couples’ romantic intentions, and vowed to change the law that adhered to the Torah’s marriage restrictions. As a result of General Dayan’s interest in them, they became cause celebre in Israel.

In truth, the Langers are the bitter fruit of an adulterous liaison (Chava Langer was never divorced from her first husband, Abraham Borokowski, before entering into “marriage” with Otto Langer, the father of her unfortunate children), and they should be recognized as a tragic symbol of an amoral era of promiscuity and Eros shops. Instead, they have become a symbol for the Israeli Rabbinate’s supposed lack of flexibility and humane consideration. Apparently, the sympathies of the broad public, whose opinions and attitudes are often molded by a secular-biased press, are more responsive to the unfulfilled yearnings of two hapless couples who want to marry but cannot, than they are to the profound sanctity with which the institution of marriage is endowed by Jewish law and to the gravity of violating this sanctity.

The Langer case had thus become basis for a general impatience with religious law, and as an expression of this antipathy Gideon Hausner (of the Independent Liberal Party) brought a motion to the Knesset floor last July, proposing recognition of civil marriage for all of those who cannot marry by Torah law (such as a mamzer with a Yehudi kasher, and a kohein with a divorcée). This motion was opposed by secular and religious parties alike, each for reasons of their own, and Hausner withdrew it when Golda Meir assured him that after Rabbi Goren’s imminent election to the Chief Rabbinate, he would solve the problem that was causing Hausner and company such anguish.

State of Religion

It was wholly expected that the religious community would be pained by the possibility of recognition for civil marriages in Israel. Protection of the perpetuation of at least minimal purity and continuity in Klal Yisroel was assured under the Turkish rule and British mandate, when the only legal marriages and divorces were those performed by rabbis. This should surely not be threatened today in a Jewish state under Jewish rule. The resultant prospect of two separate registries—one for those who are married by Torah Law and another for those who are not—would create an ugly schism in Jewry, and the religious community could not be a party to the creation of such a schism or even a witness to its advent.

It was this same spectre of an Israel split in two that troubled Golda Meir. It would be an unforgivable failure in her leadership if she were to preside over the splitting of the religious community from Modern Israel—especially when this community represents the legitimacy of Israel-the-Nation’s claim to Israel-the-Country. Or, as Danah Zohar, a correspondent for the (London) New Middle East, summarized it, she could not allow “the passing of a law basically contradicting the Jewish Law—a recognition that Israel and the Jewish nation are two different things, an admission that Zionism has failed, that Israel is just another nation-state.”

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So for the preservation of the unity of the people of Israel, most responsible factions in Israel were anxious that Hausner's motion not be passed. And Golda Meir promised him that the situation that prompted his motion would improve.

"Mrs. Meir advises that one should be patient for changes in the relationship of religion and state. She is confident that these changes will be accomplished through the Chief Rabbinate elections."

—HATZOFEH (daily published by Mizrachi in Israel) 28 TAMMUZ, 5732

Democracy in Action

MRS. MEIR FOUND delivering her promise much more difficult than stating it. The key factor was Rabbi Goren's election to the Chief Rabbinate—for in contrast to all other well-known rabbinical figures, he had reiterated an impatience with conventional halachic procedures and claimed to have ways of solving problems like the Langers'. This was often coupled with a denial of his intention to change halacha "even one iota," but he nonetheless won a reputation for being a rabbi who "speaks the language of the times."

The rules for selecting members of the electoral college that chooses the Chief Rabbi were changed, altered, and amended countless times to assure Rabbi Goren's election (see "The Rabbinate at Bay," J.O. December, 1971). Finally, the electoral college was slated to have been composed equally of 75 lay and rabbinic members. The Mafdal (Mizrachi-Poalei Mizrachi) refused to accept such a formula and insisted on a rabbinical majority. This was ultimately granted—to the tune of 70 political leaders (including avowed anti-religious such as the notorious mayor of Nazareth), and 70 rabbis appointed by regional rabbinical groups—augmented by 10 additional rabbis, to be appointed by the Ministry of Religions. Even this concession was not fully granted, for these ten were appointed by a committee of three: Dr. Zorach Wahrmhafit (plus Golda Meir and (Mupar) Justice Minister, Yaakov Shimshon Shapiro. Dr. Wahrmhafit's nomination of Rabbi Shlomo Y. Zevin, a universally recognized Torah scholar, was voted down by the other two. He was known to oppose Rabbi Goren's election. Instead, a number of young rabbis from the Kibbutz Movement were pushed in. The final result was a body with a nominal majority of rabbis but with a virtual secular bias, and Rabbi Goren was elected. In accordance with the master plan—a distinct degradation of the independence of the Chief Rabbinate.

Authority of the Rabbinate

THE SELECTION OF A RABBI should be the privilege and responsibility of those who are committed to the spiritual goals he is meant to exemplify, of those who seek his guidance and attempt to emulate him. He should represent their highest spiritual aspirations, not the temper of the times nor the whims of the broad masses.

The foundation of rabbinical responsibility and authority includes such staples as intellectual objectivity and total independence from outside pressures—or as the Torah commands: "Thou shalt fear no man," unthreatened by the lack of sympathy of the unlettered. The rabbi must endeavor to bring the people's thinking and behavior to the Torah level, not the reverse. Yet Haaretz hailed the choice of Rabbi Goren because "it had shown that the electors were sensitive to public censure of the state of affairs."

So the threat of loss of position for non-compliance with popular demand became an ugly reality, with the replacement of Rabbi Unterman, who could not be swayed to compromise on those issues of personal status such as mamzerut that threaten halachic authority but that the masses fail to understand.

By contrast, Rabbi Goren continually espoused approaches of leniency, grandstanding for popular acclaim. As a newspaper account in Davar (8 Cheshvan, 5732) reported:

"Goren expressed his assurance that there are possibilities to run the State in accordance with halacha, but the rabbinate must discover more lenient approaches than in the past. . . . There is definitely enough elasticity in halacha to allow for a free and democratic life for the Jewish People in its own land."

"The eternity of Klal Yisroel has demonstrated that halacha possesses sufficient elasticity to fit all situations. It is only up to us to stretch it a bit more whenever more difficult problems arise. . . ."

Both the procedure and issues that propelled Rabbi Goren into office represent severe attacks on rabbinical authority—his personal popularity notwithstanding.

Delivered as Promised: Mercy in Law

WHEN HE ASCENDED to his post, Rabbi Goren begged the dissident secularists to allow him a year's time to resolve some of the more pressing marriage problems before they consider reviving the Hausner motion to recognize civil marriages. He did not keep them waiting long, but with no advance announcement convened a court of nine men.

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Three separate courts composed of leading rabbinical figures, including the Supreme Rabbinical Court in Jerusalem, had already judged the matter on three different occasions—and the findings were invariably the same: both Langers were indeed mamzerim. When Rabbi Goren invited the Rishon Letzion, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, to review the matter, he refused—having already judged the case once before in Tel Aviv. However, he did offer to join Rabbi Goren in appointing three others to sit on the matter. Rabbi Goren sidestepped this counter-offer, preferring to be more closely in control of the judicial process. But by whatever formula, court procedures, hearing of witnesses, and examination of previous findings should be a time-consuming business.

Thus on Sunday evening, November 19, when Rabbi Goren called a press conference in his house, he surprised his audience when he informed them that in adjoining rooms as the Solomon Hall in Tel Aviv, Miriam and Chanoch Langer had already married the fiancés of their choice, as Yehudim kasherim. Rabbi Goren had arranged all details of the marriage, from the appointment of the beis din that freed them from their mamzerut earlier that same day, to the assignment of rabbis to officiate at their weddings. (He personally did not attend the weddings but General Dayan was very much in evidence at both celebrations.)

Rabbi Goren revealed all of this at his hastily called press conference. But he refused to reveal the membership of his court. (He only would describe it as consisting of “5 Ashkenazim and 4 Sefardim—one of whom already judged this case before.” Participation was subsequently denied vehemently by all nine rabbis who ever judged the case.) He also would not discuss the basis for the court’s reversal on the earlier decision rendered.

A week after his lightning court convened, however, Rabbi Goren did reveal the basis of his decision—the status of Mrs. Langer’s first marriage. Her first husband, Avrohom Borokowski, had been converted to Judaism by a reputable rabbi in Likuva, Poland, some fifty years ago. . . . Now if that conversion had not been effective, Mrs. Langer’s first marriage would not have been valid, and her relationship with her second “husband” would not have been adulterous; then her children by Langer would not be mamzerim.

But Borokowski claims to have been a faithful Jew for fifty years. Why, he claims, should a near lifetime of fidelity to Torah be callously and mercilessly wiped off the record for the sake of the illegitimate aspirations of two who, by marrying contrary to halachic guidelines, will only continue to violate Torah law as long as their marriage lasts? Nonetheless, the popular concept of mercy is fulfillment of the romantic plans of two couples, who should not marry for their own sake, as well as for the sake of any children they may bear. And these hopes are being met, even at the expense of a ger tzedek’s half-century of loyalty to Torah… One is reminded of the Midrash: “He who is overly merciful when it is not permitted will ultimately be cruel to the merciful”—Ketheltes Rabbah 7.

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And as Rabbi J. Glazer, vice-president of the Central Conference of American (Reform) Rabbis declared: "It is gratifying to know that the [Langer] brother and sister will no longer be victims of petrified statutes."

Thus Rabbi Goren's action succeeded in striking sympathetic chords in the hearts of those estranged from the principles of Torah Judaism. He accomplished this by misrepresenting halacha as being adaptable to the popular concept of what seems worthy of mercy at the moment, foresaking the pivotal place of the Torah in all our judgments—"Her ways are pleasant ways" no longer applying to the immutable ways of Torah Law. . . . The limitations that society so needs and the fixed guidelines that youth so desperately craves were demonstrated to be flexible beyond meaning. . . . The Chief Rabbinate proved itself a willing tool of an imperious government. And the Chief Rabbi made the "opposition"—the guardians of our heritage—appear to be rigid and without understanding or compassion; further alienating the masses from the Torah community and its ideals.

Contempt from the Torah Leadership

DISTRICT OF RABBI GOREN'S brand of leadership was expressed in responsible rabbinical quarters over the years—especially when he would rush in where others feared to tread, such as his shofar-blasting entry into areas of the Temple Mount—the most sacred spot on Earth. According to the Rambam, trespass of the Temple Mount is punishable by kareis—severing of life in this world and the next.

In an interview published in MAARIV (25 Sivan 5731):

GEULAH COHEN: "Regarding the prohibition against tefillah on the Temple Mount—when you were yet in uniform, in defiance of the Chief Rabbinate from one side and the Ministry of Defense on the other—you entered the Temple Mount on Tisha B'Av, 5727 and prayed. The prohibition still stands. Today, as a civilian rabbi, do you expect to continue your battle to abolish this prohibition?"

RABBI GOREN: "Correct. I entered the Mountain area to pray. And correct, in this issue I disagree with those greater in number and better. . . ."

One also recalls the Helen Seidman affair, in stark contrast to the unusual stringency Rabbi Goren is exercising in regard to Avrohom Borokowski's conversion. . . . At that time the government was about to topple because of the Christian-born wife of a kibbutznik who had undergone a Reform conversion and then demanded recognition as a Jewess in a civil court. She based her claim on the then newly-drafted Law of Return that does not require giyur kehalacha. Mrs. Seidman was an avowed agnostic who saw no point in going through an Orthodox conversion ritual she did not believe in. . . . If the court would have recognized her Reform conversion as basis for Jewishness, the government coalition almost certainly would have dissolved. Rabbi Goren rushed in to rescue the situation. He "converted" Mrs. Seidman with a lightning speed that even inspired amazement among Liberal Jews, who

DAAS TORAH

DAAS TORAH

18 Kislev 5733

We are appalled at the frightful desecration of KOVOD SHOMAYIM (Divine Respect) that was perpetrated through the recent grave incident, unparalleled in Jewish history, wherein the Torah was tampered with, distorting Torah law, . . . falsifying Halachic procedure, permitting that which is strongly prohibited. In regard to this we hereby proclaim that his findings and decisions are totally invalid.

Affixing our signatures with a wounded heart

RABBI YECHESKEL ABRAMSKI
Senior Rosh Yeshiva, Head Judge of the London Beth Din, currently in Jerusalem
RABBI CHAIM SHMUELEVITZ
Rosh Yeshiva of Mir
RABBI MOSHE CHEVRONI
Rosh Yeshiva of Chevron
RABBI SHLOMO ZALMAN AUERBACH
Rosh Yeshiva of Kol Torah

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customarily take longer to perform their “conversions”; Mrs. Seidman—now “Jewish,” of course—continued to live with her kohen husband (forbidden by Torah Law), in a left-wing kibbutz that makes a practice of trampling on Torah Law; and the government’s stability was preserved.

RABBI GOREN: “In the field of conversion there is a tremendous range of flexibility in halacha—more than in other cases.”—DAVAR, 8 Cheshvan, 5732.

In view of this record, a number of reputable rabbinical judges (dayanim) announced their intention of handing in their resignations when Rabbi Goren took office this past October. While some were persuaded to remain in office (“Don’t deprive people of competent judges, merely because you question the responsibility of the man in charge”), Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashav, one of the most revered halakha authorities in Eretz Yisroel, refused to remain in his judicial position. Since Rabbi Goren’s “blitz” decision, he has become the object of even more widespread condemnation from the religious community, as his manner of “solving” this problem has generated outrage both far and wide.

On the day of Rabbi Goren’s first announcement (that the mamzerim were “kosher” and happily married), Rabbi Eliezer Menachem Shach, the venerable Rosh Yeshiva of Ponovezh, interrupted a meeting of the Central Committee of Agudath Israel of Eretz Yisroel and asked for the floor. First he referred to several occasions when the Chofetz Chaim called together conferences of rabbis, telling them: “When your bnei-heim (congregants) are asked in the World-to-Come: Why did you conduct yourselves in such a manner?—they will reply: We had a rabbi in our city and he never protested. Who needs this? You must reprimand! You must!”

“There are times,” Rabbi Shach continued, “when we must speak up. Now we must cry out for fires are raging and the Sefer Torah itself is being threatened. We must cry out—Save it!”

“The Torah is being ripped into shreds and we cannot sit by in silence. They say the Chief Rabbi is a scholar . . . But one must also fear G-d. We can not rely on any of his decisions or his hechsherin. Let each man here tell his friend—and pass the word on!”

“You must forgive my intrusion, but fires are raging!”

- Five thousand people crowded a public square in Jerusalem in a mass demonstration on November 23

PROCLAMATION FROM LEADING RABBIS

We are shocked to the depths of our souls that one who is known as a Rabbi should be so brazen as to extend his hand to (tamper with) the Torah, to permit those forbidden to marry to do so through fallacious means, by repudiating the Judaism of a man long accepted as a sincere convert and reversing his status to that of a non-Jew. This is a great breach in the protective wall of our faith and our sacred Torah.

We therefore do declare that all judgments rendered by this man are totally void and one is forbidden to rely upon them in any way.

In signature, with broken heart

RABBI ELIEZER MENACHEM SHACH
Rosh Yeshiva of Ponovezh

RABBI YAAKOV KANEVSKY
Steigerl Rav

RABBI YOSEF SHALOM ELYASHAV
Heead of Rabbinical Court of Budapest

RABBI YISROEL VELTZ
Head of Rabbinical Court of Budapest

RABBI YOSEF ADLER
Head of Rabbinical Court of Turda

RABBI SHLOMO ZALMAN FRIEDMAN
Head of Rabbinical Court of Lugano

RABBI SHIMON YECHESKEL JAKOBOVITCH
Head of Rabbinical Court of S. Vadiest

(Signatures in alphabetical order)

More signatures to follow.

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to protest the psak that is obviously based on political expediency and satisfying the sentiments of the masses rather than on halachic considerations. Following two hours of speeches (by Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, among others), the people in the crowd rent their garments in mourning, in keeping with the halacha: When a Sefer Torah burns, one must rip his garments in mourning.

- A similar protest gathering was held in Bnei Brak on the following Saturday night, addressed by the Bnei Brak Rav, Rabbi Yaakov Landa, and the Ponevezher Rosh Hayeshiva, Rabbi Shach. This total renunciation of confidence in Rabbi Goren's reliability in halachic matters was publicly proclaimed by a growing list of leaders in the Torah community (see boxes).

- Rabbi Ovadia Yosef was known to have offered his hand to Rabbi Goren as a gesture of conciliation. There was speculation regarding the extent of the implication of this gesture. In a personal letter to Rabbi Moshe Weiss of Bnei Brak, he explained:

"I am amazed at your question (if I agree with Rabbi Goren's decision). It is well known to all that I battled firmly, with might and main, against participating in a bus din to judge this matter again. Reports that I blessed the results of his court are unfounded. . . . like so many other foolish newspaper reports.

"It is known that I already judged the case and found (their marriage) forbidden by Torah law. Some Supreme Court members proposed issuing a statement hailing Rabbi Goren's psak, but I adamantly refused, and the matter was removed from the agenda.

"My extended hand was meant only as an invitation to get on with the other business of the Chief Rabbinate—kashruth, appointment of dayanim, and so on.

"You may publicize this letter,

"In deep friendship,
(Rabbi) Ovadia Yosef"

- A declaration issued by Orthodox rabbis and Roshei Yeshivos in France on the 4th day of Chanukah, 5733, stated:

"We have seen the words of Rabbonim-Gaonim and Roshei Yeshivos in the Holy Land, and their outcry regarding the scandalous legitimizing of mamzerut to enter Israel. Who can see these men step forward and not follow suit? We extend our fullest support to all their actions."

Signed by: Rabbi Dovid Horowitz, Head of Beis Din of Strasbourg; Rabbi Yaakov Rottenberg, Head of Beis Din in Paris; Rabbi Yaakov Toledano, Rosh Yeshiva, Merkaz Torah; Rabbi Moshe Yebagi, Rosh Yeshiva Beth Yosef, Nice; Rabbi Eliyohu Munk, Rav of the Orthodox community of Paris; Rabbi Chaim Chaikin, Rosh Yeshiva Aix-les-Bains; Rabbi Yosef Zivoni, Rosh Yeshiva Beth David, Marseilles; Rabbi Shmuel Akiva Schlesinger, Head of Beis Din, Strasbourg.

- At the convention of the Agudath Israel of America, a resolution, drafted by the leading Roshei Yeshiva, was passed by all delegates,

"expressing shock and outrage over Chief Rabbi Goren's defiance of all the leading Halachic and Torah authorities in Israel and world-wide, permitting the marriage of illegitimates. His underhanded, secret and lightning-like manner points up the menace of Rabbi Goren's policy of bowing to the demands of Israel's secular establishment that the Torah and Jewish law be altered to conform to the so-called "needs of present times."

-Hatza'ot, (the Mizrahi newspaper in Israel), has been claiming that Rabbi Goren has the backing of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik of Boston. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein telephoned Rabbi Soloveitchik and he categorically denied supporting Rabbi Goren in any way.

- Rabbi Moshe Feinstein issued a statement on behalf of the Agudah Horabonim—Union of Orthodox Rabbis of the United States and Canada—stating, in part:

"Every rabbi must object to this desecration of Heavenly Glory. . . . We therefore join in the call of Torah and Knesset, reaffirming that all halachic decisions (rendered by Rabbi Goren) are null and void. . . .

"In the name of all members of the Agudah Horabonim. . . ."

"(Rabbi) Moshe Feinstein, President"

- The Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, condemned the Goren court declaration, primarily because it created a dangerous precedent with repercussions regarding rabbinical authority—both for the selection of a rabbi on the condition that he permit the forbidden, and for the announcement by the Premier (G. Meir) and Defense Minister (Dayan) that the brother and sister would be permitted to marry into Israel prior to the rabbinical judgment on the matter—virtually as though the government were rendering the decision.

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"Under such circumstances, Rabbi Goren is not responsible for the halachic decisions he issues. They are produced under pressures from the government and are totally meaningless. . . . Rabbi Goren should step down from office."

Of great significance is that most of these people are towering figures in the Torah world, and any attempt to smear them as being "extremists" or as being motivated by petty political interests is ludicrous.

Rabbi Abraham has been recognized as one of the foremost Torah authorities in the world for close to half a century, and he has always shied away from partisan issues . . . Rabbi Auerbach is a man completely immersed in halachic research and lecturing in his yeshiva . . . Rabbi Shach is a man celebrated for a discipline so encompassing that his mind is not known to stray from Torah. Only in recent years has he felt compelled to speak out on public issues . . . Rabbi Elyashiv has a long-standing affiliation with the office of the Chief Rabbinate, as Chief Justice of the Supreme Rabbinical Court . . . Rabbi Feinstein and the Lubavitcher Rebbe need no introduction to American readers, and any attempt to denigrate them as "religious extremists" needs no rebuttal.

When men of this calibre unite in outcry, the breach against Torah must be a grave one indeed.

One Nation Under Golda.

At the conclusion of the Langers' marriage ceremony, Rabbi Goren telephoned Golda Meir—in the tradition of "a messenger is beholden to report to his dispatcher"—and they exchanged congratulations. Mrs. Meir was undoubtedly pleased that she was once again presiding over one unified Israel, instead of over two countries—one composed of those who only recognize the Torah's commands as the guidelines for legality of marriage and divorce, and one made up of those who only accept "civil," man-made guidelines. But by dictating rabbinical decisions to the Chief Rabbi—actually setting up conditions for his holding office—she not only succeeded in further reducing the Chief Rabbinate from a post that was at least a rabbinate until now, to one of ridiculous puppet stature; she has also alienated an entire body of Torah loyal Jews who are now searching for alternate ways of surviving in a secular dominated Israel.

While one may have felt reasonably confident in weathering the storming confrontation between a Torah society and a secular one, it becomes a much more difficult task to survive when the secular element assumes the power to dictate the nature and form of the religious commitment of the other group. Instead of attempting to pursue paths of conciliation or rapprochement, the religious Jew is compelled to retreat and take shelter from a domineering secular establishment.

In the meantime, those who had hopes for unity at any price are not even achieving the anticipated outcome of Rabbi Goren's "humanitarian" act—a guarantee to withhold the Hausner motion for Rabbi Goren's first year in office. In spite of his initial salutary statement, Mr. Hausner recognizes that not all mazzerot problems are solved by this one decision, and he still intends to propose his motion to grant recognition to civil marriages of those who cannot marry by Torah Law. He is only waiting out a decent interval, as promised by his party, to see if the Langer case is only an isolated virtuoso performance, or if indeed Rabbi Goren can continue to bend halachic norms that form obstacles to those who wish to marry, but are forbidden to do so by Torah Law.

As the controversy churns on, Mrs. Meir is not above stepping into the thick of the battle with some incendiary statements of her own. With reference to the four yeshiva students who allegedly harassed Rabbi Goren, she declared during a cabinet meeting: "Why should these young men be free (from the Army) so that they can intimidate Chief Rabbi Goren? . . . If the hooliganism continues, we shall have to discuss the question (of Army exemptions), particularly in those yeshivot whose students will be found to have participated in this behavior."

No one would defend the rash acts of several hot-heads, whose impulsiveness is hardly representative of the general mood of pained sobriety in the religious community. Mrs. Meir's response—generalizing on this isolated act, and then hurling words of threat and intimidation—is hardly balm for a society that is being ripped apart by powerful differences.

A Time for Fasting

Fifty one years ago, when the first Chief Rabbi was elected, a day of fast was declared by Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld. The man elected to office at that time was Rabbi Avrohom Yitzchok Kook. Although Rabbi Sonnenfeld was often at odds with him on many issues, there was close friendship between the two men. Nonetheless, the fast was declared.

In explaining his reason for calling the fast, Rabbi Sonnenfeld's prescient lament was: "If some of us today (1921) fail to see the danger in a secular force controlling a rabbinical body, in years to come, all will agree."

The years have come.
A MATTER OF FACTS

When a psak (halachic decision) is rendered, there are two aspects to it: the facts on which it is based and the halachic principles that are subsequently applied to the facts.

It would be out of place to discuss here Rabbi Goren’s halachic reasoning. Halachic arguments are a matter for rabbinical authorities not laymen. But there is no real halachic controversy in this case. It would seem, except perhaps over the admissibility of the procedures adopted by Rabbi Goren. And the universal outrage by Torah authorities all over the world shows that there are no two possible views upon this matter which might let us say: “These and those are the words of G-d.”

The basic issue is the facts in the case—Rabbi Goren claims to have uncovered new facts which, according to him, justify his psak.

The facts on which a psak is based can legitimately be subjected to our examination for accuracy. A thorough—and devastating—study of Rabbi Goren’s “new facts” appeared on December 1 in Hamodia (Jerusalem) from the pen of Rabbi A. Weiss.

The following is a summary of his findings.

The protocol of Rabbi Goren’s Court was classified as a military document, but since its contents have been circulated, comment is now very much in order.

The factual basis of his decision is open to general discussion and can be totally refuted by available documented evidence.

Rabbi Goren: Borokowski never underwent a conversion. And if he ever did convert, it was because his father-in-law, Mr. Ginzberg (father of Chava), forced him into it.

Rabbi Goren simply offers no evidence to this effect.

Also, the circumcision of Borokowski, as prerequisite to his conversion, was performed by Rabbi Yitzchok Meir Parness, a well known mohel of thousands of Warsaw children, who never would have performed the circumcision for a spurious conversion.

Beyond this, Chava Langer testified on 11 Tishrei, 5727: “Avrohom said that he wanted to convert (on his own). When I told my father, he said, ‘Good; let him go to Warsaw to become a ger.’” He was not forced to convert.

One foundation of Rabbi Goren’s psak is the testimony of a social worker in Tel-Aviv to the effect that Avrohom Borokowski maintained his Christian belief after his conversion. The proof: when she investigated the absence of his boys from school, she found that he had kept them home to celebrate a Christian holiday.

Rabbi Goren presents the social worker’s file as independent testimony.

The social worker, in her deposition, stressed that she had no independent knowledge of these charges; she reported them as having been told to her by Chava (Borokowski) Langer just prior to leaving him for Otto Langer. She was at that time engaged in a legal battle with Borokowski over custody rights of the children, and she had every reason to want to discredit him. Her testimony would never be accepted in any betis din, and gains nothing by being recorded in a social worker’s dossier.

One might still suggest that perhaps she was truly interested in saving the children from Borokowski’s negative influence. This, too, is refuted by the facts. Borokowski consistently endeavored to give their sons a religious education. After Chava left them for Langer, he had them enrolled in the Tachkimon and Aliya Schools—both religious institutions, even though there were other schools more conveniently located.

Rabbi Goren quotes a letter from Borokowski’s eldest son that says that his father had him baptized in a church in Poland—proof that he never sincerely underwent conversion.

The very same letter states specifically that this baptism took place prior to his father’s conversion to Judaism. Rabbi Goren only presents part of the letter, ignoring the rest!

Rabbi Goren has a statement signed by Borokowski that confesses to lapses to Christianity.

Borokowski’s oldest son, Yehuda, claims that the statement was signed under pressure to release the unfortunate Langers from their mamzerut. He cooperated out of sympathy with his half-brother and sister, and convinced his father, who is not literate in Hebrew, to sign the paper. The elder Borokowski insists that he always did live with fidelity to Judaism and he wants to be considered a Jew from the time of his conversion.

He has initiated a libel suit against Rabbi Goren for branding him a non-Jew, and the courts have given Rabbi Goren thirty days to substantiate his labeling of Borokowski.

Rabbi Goren: In absence of outside evidence, a ger’s claim to conversion can also be considered as basis for acceptance as a convert. Borokowski never has before formally claimed to be a convert to Judaism.

In the court record of Petach Tikvah, 3 Elul 5721, Borokowski offered, unsolicited: “I am a ger who converted in Warsaw before I married. I converted in a rabbinical

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court and was married before a rabbi."

Rabbi Goren argues that the venerable Rabbi Levitsky surely was aware of Mrs. Langer's previous marriage when he presided over her second marriage to Otto Langer. Undoubtedly the Rabbi had disregarded her marriage to Borokowski on the basis of the invalidation of his conversion.

Mrs. Langer (as recorded in the protocol of the Petach Tikvah beis din, 11 Tishrei 5727, page 6): "When I married Otto Langer in Givatayim, I did not say that I already had a husband. I said that I was a maiden." Her marriage license, #64125, signed by Rabbi Levitsky, listed her by her maiden name: Chava Ginzberg.

How could Rabbi Goren base his psak on Rabbi Levitsky's assumed invalidation of the Borokowski conversion, when Rabbi Levitsky was totally unaware of Borokowski as a factor in the Langer "marriage" and probably had never heard of him?

Avrohom Borokowski has not been conducting his life in accordance with Torah and mitzvos, as is evidenced by his ignorance of basic laws and customs and his conversion is, as a result, retroactively invalid.

Rabbi Goren chooses to disregard evidence from reputable sources, such as the testimony of the rabbi of a shul in Petach Tikvah—a religious Jew—who related that he knew Borokowski as a practicing Jew who davened regularly in shul and observes Torah and mitzvos. Instead Rabbi Goren accepts the testimony of two openly irreligious young men—one is married to a non-Jewess—friends of Chanoch Langer, whose testimony was already discounted in Petach Tikvah because they could not have possessed the knowledge regarding Borokowski they pretended to have.

Rabbi Goren studiously ignores any evidence that points to Borokowski's fidelity to Torah law; for instance, the fact that Borokowski insisted on a get (rabbinical bill of divorcement) to dissolve his marriage with Chava Langer before entering a new marriage seven years after she had left him, and had refused to live with his new wife without bonadice kiddushin (religious marriage ceremony).

Rabbi Goren also chooses to ignore that, in a cross-examination before the betis din, Borokowski displayed knowledge of when and how one wears tefillin, the appropriate prayers to be recited at specific times, and so on.

Borokowski in Petach Tikvah: "Had I not been sincere about my conversion, I would never have come to Eretz Yisroel to live." (The living circumstances were much more difficult then.)

More disturbing yet is Rabbi Goren's total violation of halachic procedures for rabbinical judgment. In his hastily convened court, not one witness was examined before the judges. There was no formal convening of a betis din. New witnesses were not summoned, nor cross-examined, nor questioned in the presence of the defendant (Borokowski), denying him the basic right of challenge or denial. The names of the judges were not publicized, which is a requisite in every psak. In summary, one must stress that the decision was rendered under extreme government pressure to legitimize the Langers, and that the author of the decision did not act as a free and independent agent.

(This discussion did not deal with the popularly held belief that Chava married Otto Langer under the assumption that Avrohom Borokowski, her first husband, had perished in the Nazi death camps. This is a romanticized fiction that has no relationship to the facts nor any bearing on the case. It is now well-known that the Borokowski's migrated to Eretz Yisroel a number of years before World War II.)
SHMITTAH

5733 is the final year in the seven year Shmittah cycle—the year that, by Torah Law, Jewish farmers in Israel renounce possession of their lands.

We present here several comments and interpretations on the significance of the Shmittah, as explained by leading thinkers of recent generations—adapted from the original sources by NOSSON SCHERMAN.

A Torah People and Its Land

In external Israel must resemble other nations, and must have a land of its own as do other nations. But it is not possession of a homeland that makes Israel a nation, for Israel was a nation before it had settled in a territory of its own. Israel has a spiritual destiny to fulfill and this alone endows it with a national cohesion and character.

As for the Land—it too has a role in Israel’s spiritual destiny, and there is a constellation of mitzvos that are “dependent upon the Land,” which guide Israel to this predestination. Every seventh year on Shmittah, to ensure that Israel will not fall into the trap of believing the Land to be its own domain for mundane purposes of livelihood or conventional nationhood, Israel returns the Land to its rightful Owner and Sovereign.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, in HOREB

What Kind of Rest?

The weekly Sabbath can be a dangerous time. When a man is free from the yoke of earning a livelihood, without deadlines and timeclocks, he is free to indulge in all sorts of foolishness, idle chatter, and gluttony. Wisely did our sages say that idleness can make a human being deteriorate. The six days of labor may not allow a person time or inclination to rise up to spiritual heights, but at least they foreclose the opportunity for many varieties of sin. In the divine plan for a day of rest, man is commanded to rest, not loaf. The Torah demands that we make it Sabbath for G-d—that we use it for the spiritual pursuits that are beyond our reach during the hurried weekdays, that we use it to steep ourselves in Torah wisdom and ethics.

Rabbi Scherman is principal of the Yeshiva Karlin-Stalin of Brooklyn and is editor of Olomeinu, Torah Umesorah’s magazine for children. He is a frequent contributor to The Jewish Observer.

Shmittah—the septennial Sabbath—is an even more dangerous time, for it is not merely a day, but an entire year of idleness. How easy it would be for ordinary mortals to sink into the sloth of pleasure-seeking and lazy emptiness. Just as the weekly Sabbath was given for spiritual ends, however, so too was the Shmittah year presented with a purpose loftier than replenishing the land or granting a sabbatical to its laborers. Its purpose is that man dedicate their freedom to an intense quest for spiritual betterment. During ordinary times, such a quest is too often sporadic—the tyranny of business schedules seldom permits it to be otherwise. But once in seven years, the Torah gives to hard working laborers the opportunity to labor toward their own perfection.

Therefore our sages say that the Torah refers to Sabbath and to Shmittah in the same way: a Sabbath for G-d. Just as Sabbath must be an oasis of the spirit in a busy week, so must Shmittah be dedicated to the ends of serving G-d better.

Rabbi Aharon Levine of Reisha, in HADASH V’HOEYUN

Shmittah — The Source

The Psalmist says: “Bless the L-rd, O His messengers, mighty in strength; fulfilling His word, to listen to the voice of His word” (Tehillim 103:20). The Midrash explains the opening phrase of this verse as referring to Jews who obey the commandments of Shmittah. The end of the verse is a reference to the Jewish Nation at one of its most exalted moments: When offered the Torah, we responded with the pledge, “We will do and we will listen.”

The significance of “We will do and we will listen” as a precondition of the giving of the Torah is well-known. When G-d saw the eagerness of His children to perform His will without interposing their own self-
interest, to the point of total self-abnegation—the desire to accept the Torah without even a glimpse of its contents—He matched their desire by personally descending to bestow the precious gift of Torah to the willing recipients.

The Psalmist couples Shmittah with the stirring declaration on the eve of the giving of the Law, implying that the performance of Shmittah weighs equally in the divine scales with the national will to accept the Torah no matter what.

Indeed, the Torah itself indicates the significance of Shmittah by pointedly prefacing the chapter of Shmittah (Vayikra 25:1) with the declaration that its laws in full detail were commanded at Sinai. The reference to Sinai, of course, is meant to indicate that all commandments were fully elucidated on Mount Sinai, but this all-important lesson is taught with Shmittah as the prototype, rather than any of the other 612 commandments. What is it that is so unique about the laws of the seventh year?

We must understand that Shmittah is as meaningful as "We will do and we will listen." It represents the readiness of Jewry to mortgage its future to the will of G-d. It is no small matter for a nation's farmers to turn their backs on the source of their sustenance. G-d's pleasure in the knowledge that in the future Jews would forego title to their land's produce, if that be His wish, was equal to His pleasure at their declaration that "We will do . . ." In both cases, Jews displayed faith and trust to a degree that allowed no hesitation. In the same way, G-d gave us the Torah with the faith and trust that future performances would live up to prior intention.

Indeed, Eretz Yisroel itself was presented to us by virtue of the law of Shmittah. The Land is G-d's not ours; we are but His surrogates. Human beings mowing their tractors and combining hardly demonstrate divine ownership. But desisting from toil in Shmittah, they do! The landowner letting his fields lie fallow and opening his gates to rich and poor, even to animals, shows eloquently to Whom the land belongs. It was for this reason that G-d gave a land to the Jewish people. By means of the Land we can demonstrate our acknowledgement of His mastery. And by allowing the Land to rest on Shmittah, we are in effect returning it to G-d.

And by returning the Land to Him, we remain its masters. He gives it to us to use and enjoy only as long as we recognize that our ownership is secondary to His. Should Jews fall into the trap of thinking that their deed to the Land forecloses it from G-d, they seal its fate. Then the Land will demand back the Sabbaths of which Israel robbed it, and the debt will be paid by years of exile and desolation.

Should Israel be a nation of divine messengers armed with the strength to set aside their own desires in favor of the wish of their Maker, should they possess sufficient strength to set aside their plows and trust in His goodness, then not only will the Land be theirs, but all of its endless reservoir of blessings will be theirs, as well.

Rabbi Aryeh Leib Alter (Gerer Rebbe), in SFAS EMES

Holiness in Nature

The First Temple was destroyed because Jews committed the three cardinal sins: idolatry, adultery, and murder. They seem like widely divergent sins, but they all stemmed from the same root. The sages of the Talmud say, "The Jews worshipped idols only to permit themselves to satisfy their lusts" (Sanhedrin 63b). Even the bloodshed of that period was directed against those who dared attempt to stem the rush to depravity.

Yet the Torah itself points to another reason for the destruction and Babylonian exile. Upon reflection, however, we find that the lack of Shmittah observance was the key to the other transgressions. Shmittah—the sabbath of the earth—infuses holiness into nature. By laying his plan aside, man proclaims that the earth is the L-rd's and that the laws of nature are but His product and are subservient to His will. In the same way that the weekly Sabbath endows the preceding six days and the succeeding six days with a sanctity by virtue of man consecrating all of his activities to a holy cause, so too does the Shmittah year proclaim a sanctity that invests the other years with a higher purpose. And, indeed, the Torah uses the same title for both the day and the year: a Sabbath for G-d. The holiness of the Sabbath day carries over to the next six workdays, resulting in an added holiness for the following Sabbath. This increased holiness in turn carries over to the next work-week in an eternal ascent toward ever increasing holiness. A similar process should infuse the seven-year cycle that is consummated by the Sabbath year—an entire year of holiness, which spills over into the succeeding years of plowing, planting, and harvesting.

When Jews refrained from fulfilling the demands of Shmittah, they not only nullified a commandment. They failed to instill holiness within themselves and their activities. And they failed to elevate themselves sufficiently to withstand the pressures and lures of a mater-
ialistic earth. Nature abhors a vacuum. A life without holiness becomes a life of lust. When beauty of the spirit is lacking, attractions of the flesh take its place.

Small wonder, then, that after seventy Shmittah-less cycles, Jews had fallen to the level where they worshipped idols to legitimize their immorality and murdered those who dared stand in their way.

Rabbi Eliyahu Elizer Dessler, in Michtav Me'Elavahu

Shmittah and Yoveil — Fulfillment as Part of the Nation, and as an Individual

"Shmittah symbolizes the Jewish community and Yoveil symbolizes understanding" — the Zohar

SOME PEOPLE gain Heavenly favor as part of a group. Would they be judged as individuals they may be found seriously lacking in many respects, but as elements in the working of a successful whole, they, too, attain status and recognition. There are others, however, who have so perfected themselves that they gain Heavenly favor purely on their own merits.

Few of us fall into the latter category. To perform our earthly missions and to be deemed worthy in the eyes of our Maker, we must unite with others in a community. Then, each individual takes on the strength of his fellows. The scholar, the philanthropist, the fervent servant of the Almighty, each judged separately, may be flawed. Taken together, they form a united phalanx of greatness in the service of Hashem. To share in such corporate greatness, every member must place the welfare of the group above private considerations.

A life without a vacuum is the year that calls out to every Jew, the fiftieth, Jubilee year—the time when all Jewish indentured servants must be freed and when every man is restored to the ownership of his ancestral lands. It is only $15 in money, but this symbol of your direct kinship with the ideals of Agudath Israel is priceless. It is your way of saying: "Yes, I'm with the G'dolei Torah in this battle for Torah!"

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2:1). If a man is threatened with a blow to the head, he will raise his arm to ward it off. The arm may be injured, but, as the source of life, the head has greater value. In the same way, a threat to the group takes precedence over a threat to any of its parts. The community, the nation, is an organism and no single member can thrive or survive if the whole is threatened. A person's willingness to endure privation or sacrifice for the good of the group is a measure of his membership in the national organism. If he is unwilling to accept hardship when the common welfare calls for it, then he is little more than a withered limb—attached to the body, but not part of it.

Shmittah calls upon the Jew for concrete expression of this concept. Rich and poor are equal partners in the produce of the land. No limb may board its riches saying, "This is mine." Should it do so, the organism responds with: "No! It is ours!" Despite individual cares and concerns, despite personal successes and failures, despite one man's wealth or poverty, happiness or woe, all are part of a nation. For six years the struggle for sustenance is primarily a private one, but on the seventh year all share because, ultimately, all are one.

For forty-nine years, seven times seven, the lesson of oneness is impressed upon the national consciousness. But, important though it is, the individual Jew must not content himself with sharing in the fortunes of the nation. True, one route to Heavenly favor is via the main conduit of the unified whole. But every person is his own man as well. He was created with his own ability and his own responsibilities, and ultimately it is his duty to perfect himself through defining his personal role in creation and playing it through.

The attainment of this goal is symbolized by Yoveil—the fiftieth, Jubilee year—the time when all Jewish indentured servants must be freed and when every man is restored to the ownership of his ancestral lands. There is no subjugation in Yoveil. No man can be master over his brother's body or property because Yoveil is the year that calls out to every Jew, "It is true that you are part of the group, that for the last seven Shmittah cycles you have transcended normal human selfishness and have submerged yourself in the Nation. But precisely because you have risen above preoccupation with yourself, you must now take the next step. Return to yourself and do justice to your own distinctiveness."

Defining that uniqueness and determining the way to perfection demands the deepest possible understanding exercised in the isolation of mind, heart, and conscience.

Wisely did the Zohar say, "Shmittah symbolizes the Jewish community and Yoveil symbolizes understanding." 

Rabbi Shmuel Borenstein (Sochauczower Rebbe), in Shem Mishmuel

The Jewish Observer / December, 1972
OF COURSE Shmittah is hard to observe. G-d Himself puts into our mouths the question, "What will we eat on the Seventh year?" But He provides the answer as well, "I will command My blessing upon you!" During the times when Jews observed Shmittah, not only the question, but also the answer was natural and comprehensible. When Jews strayed from the Torah and served Ba' al, they were left with only the question. . . . Non-believers can only ask questions, not provide answers. The regimen of Shmittah is possible, but only under a regimen of adherence to Torah. . . . How false is the condemnation of those who forbade the selling of the Land to non-Jews to permit farming during Shmittah, claiming those of stringent view were lacking in love of the Land and commitment to its resettlement, while those who were lenient and permitted the sale had a greater love for the Land! How far from the truth! Those who forbade the sale based their support on the halacha, "A non-Jew cannot take possession of Eretz Yisroel." The Land belongs to us and it cannot be deeded to a non-Jew. The very soil is holy and there is a covenant between it and the Jewish people. The Almighty has promised it to us and we have no right to assign a non-Jew title to the Land. No non-Jew can buy it. No Jew can give it away.

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It is difficult to decide whether or not the sale is legal under Jewish law, but I would pose another question. Should we not, in a newborn Jewish state, insist on living within the laws of Shmittah and thus announce to the entire world, "Israel is the holy nation of G-d"? . . . That the Nation of the Tanach upholds its tradition and demonstrates its eternal bond with its Land! Why don't we plant this year? Why do we change our way of life this year?—Because this year is a Sabbath year. It is Sabbath of G-d—for Israel and for its Land! . . .

In our Torah we find, "At the end of seven years, at the time of the Shmittah year, you should read this Torah to all Israel, in their ears..." The commentators explain that after having kept the year of Shmittah, the year that testifies to the sovereignty of Torah in the Land, the holiness of the people and the Land—only then can all of Israel gather in the Bais Hamikdosh to listen to the Torah and proclaim allegiance to it and to G-d.

Let us call out this incoming Shmittah year: 'Gut Shabbos, Eretz Yisroel! We will sanctify you with the holiness of the seventh year. And we pray that we may merit that "at the end of the seventh year, the son of David will come"; and may we merit a full and speedy redemption!

Rabbi Joseph S. Kahaneman, Ponevizhier Rav

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The name is synonymous with service for Torah Jewry: a director and officer of Torah Vodaath for nearly half a century . . . head of Vaad Hatzola's Committee on affidavits during World War II . . . first chairman of the Beth Jacob Seminary . . . president member of Agudath Israel . . . spearheading building campaign for Beth Medrash Elion.

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second looks at the jewish scene

It's Hard to Be a (Reform) Jew

The rising rate of disaffection of Jewish youth from their identity continues to alarm Jewish institutions of every type and shade. The Orthodox groups have no doubts regarding the goals of winning back the alienated to their heritage; their problems center around selection of methods, and a shortage of funds and personnel.

By contrast, the Reform Jews have no compunctions regarding sponsoring co-educational groups, the nature of the entertainment they provide, or any other such (Orthodox) religious reservations. Lack of funds does not seem to plague them either. Their fears concern the results of their efforts.

There is a homing instinct within every Jew, and like iron filings to lodestone and divining-rod to water, the Jew is drawn to his spiritual roots upon exposure to them. In their "Discover Your Jewish Self" programs, the Reform groups are faced with the quandary of sprucing up the watered-down, bogus Judaism they present their young, to make it palatable. But then, any elements of authenticity that might be present may be too potent, and their young charges might be tempted to go too far.

As a case in point, we quote an article from the Tishrei-Cheshvan edition of Reform Judaism (a publication of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations):

"There is a new movement among our youth today," reports Rabbi Allan Smith, director of camp and youth programming at the UAHC's Milton and Hattie Kutz Camp-Institute in Warwick, N. Y. "It is not revolutionary, it is not radical, it is not a movement of angry confrontation. It is instead a commitment to the idea that a man must know who he is, from where he comes. The youths today are no longer satisfied with superficial programming; they seek a deep involvement in Jewish consciousness. They want to know, they want to study, they want to teach." The Kutz Camp is a national camp of the National Federation of Temple Youth.

"One theme that recurred throughout the summer and that will probably be with us for some time," says director Kenneth Braiterman, "is a movement of our youngsters toward traditionalism and orthodoxy in their religious expression." Among the older group, the move toward traditionalism was expressed by their desire to study Talmud and liturgy; the junior high group wrote into its platform that daily worship and Hebrew study should be required, services to be held before the Sabbath meal, and kosher food should be served to those who want it.

"There is much positive value," Braiterman says, "to having our youngsters become more interested in who they are and where they come from. But," he warns,
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The Jewish Observer / December, 1972
The Rebbetzin’s Advice

October '71, we printed the complaints of an eligible miss regarding the distorted values young men employ in their search for their partners for life. Financial security seemed to assume a more important role than character.

A flood of letters followed—expressing sympathy, compassion, and blame.

Now, a full year later, Rabbi Yoseif Levov (a regular contributor to Dos Yiddishhe Vort) has submitted a further comment, quoting Rabbi Yoehor's biography of the Chofetz Chaim:

When Rabbi Yehonason Abelman (author of Zicaron Yehonason) was a young man, he was a frequent visitor at the home of the Vilna Rav, Rabbi Elya Elazar, son-in-law of the sainted Rabbi Yisroel Salanter. He was bombarded by shadchonim proposing matches with wealthy girls, assuring him of the means to continue his studies undisturbed by financial pressures.

The old Rebbetzin (Rabbi Yisroel Salanter’s wife) once asked him if he was giving serious thought to any of the proposals.

"Yes," he admitted, "to one girl in particular. Her father is very wealthy. He is offering 5,000 rubles as nedunya (dowery) as well as all living expenses for the first ten years of married life. This would free me to devote myself fully to my Torah studies for the next ten years, without any distraction."

"You are making a serious mistake," the Rebbetzin replied.

"I certainly trust your motives, but I am afraid you are naive in your understanding of how important money is to the world at large. A person never entrusts large sums of money to someone else without exacting some kind of obligation in return — interest payments, or a share of the profits—but without some return! That never happens!"

"Now you are telling me of a man who is offering you 5,000 rubles as an initial payment, and in addition underwriting your household expenses for ten years—at least 5,000 rubles more—a total of 10,000 rubles!—Can you imagine that he is prepared to give you 10,000 ruble without expecting..."
some kind of interest or dividend from you? You had better realize
that he expects a life-long obligation from you in return!

"And another point: a man ready to spend 10,000 ruble for the mar-
riage of one daughter probably is worth at least 60, or 70,000 ruble,
and most likely lives in style to competewith people in the 100,000
ruble bracket. His daughter is undoubtedly accustomed to luxuries
and comforts of the 100,000 ruble category and would surely expect
the same, at least, from her hus-
band. That is a brutal payment—an iron yoke that you won’t be able
to shake off for the rest of your life. There is nothing that so confuses,
so ruins one’s composure, so dis-
tracts a person from his studies as
does this type of yoke."

The Rebbezin’s words penetrated
his heart. He dropped all plans he
had entertained, and instead sought
to sit in the “shelter of wisdom
and truth.”
To the Editor:

As English Principal of the Viener Bais Yaakov, I am pleased to inform you that our High School Department has recently introduced The Jewish Observer as required reading for class discussion in the subject areas of Current Events and Literature. The teachers and students have enthusiastically welcomed your monthly and find it highly motivating both in content and style. I strongly urge Torah educators to seriously consider including The Jewish Observer in their curriculum.

I take this opportunity to personally thank you for the many thought-provoking and enjoyable hours of reading you bring my way each month. Torah Jewry owes your periodical and its worthy contributors much appreciation and admiration for courageously presenting the independent Torah-true viewpoint.

May I wish you continued success in all your journalistic endeavors for K'vod Shomayim.

Rabbi D. Grossman
Brooklyn, N. Y.
To the Editor:

I read with interest the articles concerning the survival of the “Kehilah” in the midst of the problems of the inner city. I would like to comment on our situation in Baltimore, Maryland, in the “Upper Park Heights” section to which reference was made in one of the articles.

This serious problem has been extensively discussed and the only solution we have to strengthen the growth of Orthodox families living in this particular section is to wholeheartedly support the “Kehilah” which is the “Shearith Israel Congregation” and its organization the center around which Torah-true families can build their ideals of community living. Only the willingness of these families, young and old, to remain and build up further what already exists will decide the bright future for many years to come.

Kurt Flamm, President
Baltimore, Md.

We invite your comment in our Letters column.

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ISSUES CALL FOR STEPPED-UP ACTIVISM

In an extraordinary meeting of mind, spirit, and dedication to constructive activity, the Agudath Israel of America marked 50 years on the American scene with its national convention at Atlantic City, New Jersey, on Thanksgiving Weekend. While several convention sessions were focused on the half century history of the American Agudah and 60 years of the World Agudah, the thrust of weekend was one of drawing inspiration and guidance from past achievements to meet the myriad challenges of today and tomorrow.

OVER 1,000 DELEGATES, AND LEADERS FROM ROUND THE WORLD

The entire convention weekend seemed to thrill with the vitality of delegates from all walks of life—rabbis, yeshiva educators, professionals, industrialists, laborers, academics and students—from all parts of the Americas—Canada to Mexico, New England to California—as well as from overseas. At the heart of this dedication to finding “solutions to the problems of our times in keeping with the Torah” was a most impressive gathering of distinguished Torah leaders and heads of major American Yeshivas who spoke at the various sessions of the convention. Among them were the chairman of the Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah (Council of Torah Sages) Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem), Rabbi J. I. Ruderman (Ner Israel, Baltimore), Rabbi Yaakov Kamenskiy (Torah Vodaath), Rabbi Shmuel Klein (Beth Medrash Govoha, Lakewood), Rabbi Boruch Sorotzkin (Telehe, Wickliffe), the Novominsker Rebbe Rabbi Nochum Perlow, and Rabbi Gedaliah Schorr (Torah Vodaath). The Torah authorities called upon Orthodox Jews to set aside their differences and join the fold of Agudath Israel as the only viable umbrella-type organization embracing Torah Jews of varying lifestyles and customs.

The convention heard a report on the latest religious developments in Israel from the president of Agudath Israel in Israel, Rabbi Pinchas Menachem Alter, the dean of Sfas Emes Yeshiva of Jerusalem and brother of the famed Gerer Rebbe, who warned of the “dangers arising from the increased religious tensions because the Torah leaders feel that the secular-dominated ruling society seeks to impose its own brand of controlled religion on the Orthodox community.”

EXCITING AUDIO-VISUAL PRESENTATION

The convention took a soaring start with an evocative presentation of “50 Years of Agudath Israel in America,” accompanied by a taped narration, depicting the secular-saturated atmosphere of the New York of fifty years ago and showing how the fledgling movement valiantly struggled and ultimately succeeded in giving form and direction to the Torah aspirations of American Jewry.

A companion audio-visual showing, “60 Years of World Agudah,” was screened on Saturday night, as a prelude to the keynote sessions. The two presentations which were based on Joseph Friedenson’s authoritative “Jubilee Book of Agudath Israel” (1962), were prepared and written by Rabbi Menachem Lubinsky, and narrated by Rabbi Nosson Scherman. Mr. Friedenson introduced both of the screenings.

In response to the acclaim of those who viewed it, and a great number of inquiries regarding repeat screenings, arrangements have been made to make the slide-cassette package available to groups on request.

OVERFLOW CROWD

The Sheraton-Deauville Hotel, which housed the convention, was filled to capacity for the entire three-day period, and a number of families made use of neighboring motel facilities in order to participate in the convention sessions.

Saturday night the main convention hall was overflowing with hundreds of additional people who travelled from New York City, Philadelphia, Lakewood and other communities to be present at the stirring keynote session which was highlighted by greetings from Rabbi Moshe Feinstein as well as addresses by Rabbi Sorotzkin, Rabbi Grossbard and Rabbi Pinchas Menachem Alter.

The Jewish Observer / December, 1972
DISCUSSIONS COVER BROADC RANGE

The convention's deliberations covered a broad gamut of Jewish issues in this country and overseas. The roster of speakers who addressed the convention included the Bostoner Rebbe Rabbi Mordechai Horowitz, Rabbi Mendel Chodorow, Rabbi Leizer Levin (Detroit), Dr. Isaac Lewin, Rabbi Simcha Elberg (administrative chairman of the Agudas Ha-Rabonim), Rabbi Gedaliah Felder (Toronto), Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller (Chicago), Rabbi Nachman Bulman (Far Rockaway), Rabbi Nosson Scherman, Rabbi Levi I. Horowitz (Boston), Rabbi Mordechai Weinberg (Montreal), Rabbi Yosef Chem Garelick, Rabbi Abraham Hirschberg (Mexico), Rabbi Isaac Smail (Chicago), Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, Rabbi Chaske Besner, Rabbi B. Leizerowiczy (Philadelphia), Rabbi Chaim Yaakov Katzenstein, Rabbi Menachem Labinsky (ZAI), Rabbi Schmelzer (Chicago), Rabbi Dov Greenbaum (Spring Valley), Rabbi Nosson Wolpin (The Jewish Observer), Rabbi Menachem Shayovich (Commission on Legislation and Civic Action), Rabbi Yaakov Goldberg, and Wolf Friedman.

Among the vital issues and problems that were discussed, analyzed, and hotly debated during the three-day convention were: "The Collision of Religion and State in Israel—Is Separation the Answer?"; "What Can Agudath Israel Do for Grassroots America?"; "Agudath Israel—Independent Orthodox and the Jewish Establishment—Reproach or Rapprochement?"; "Orthodoxy's Role in Political Activism: Is the Answer Simplicity, Public Political Involvement, or... What Else?"

SESSION ON ISRAEL AND RUSSIAN JEWRY

Special sessions on the problems of Israel and of Russian Jewry were addressed by Rabbi Shlomo Rothenberg, Mr. Sander Kolitch, chairman of the Russian Immigrant Rescue Fund; Rabbi Dov Lederman and Rabbi Gavriel Beer, members of the committee in Israel of the Russian Immigrant Rescue Fund; Rabbi Shrage Grossbard (Jerusalem), director general of Chaim Atzma; Rabbi Yisroel Letkowitz; Rabbi Yisroel Spiegel, assistant editor of the Agudah daily HAMODTA of Jerusalem; Dr. Moishe Rotschild, architect of a new Orthodox hospital in Bnei Brak; and David Klein, The Russian Immigrant Rescue Fund, the major Orthodox agency working for the spiritual absorption of Russian immigrants in Israel, which was founded at last year's Agudath Israel convention, announced that it expects to double its efforts during the coming year.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

In a message to the convention, President Nixon lauded the organization for its "immeasurable contributions in a half-century of devoted service to the highest tenets of religion and the most cherished ideals of our nation." The President stated that Agudath Israel's programs have "sustained and carried forward an inspiring religious heritage, and in doing so they have strengthened the spiritual and moral fiber of our society."

The 50th National Convention of Agudath Israel ended on a highly-spirited note, as the delegates were inspired by the unusually wide range of delegates who attended from so many different walks of life. The strong role of the foremost Torah authorities of our generation, whose appearance dominated the entire gathering, also added to the heightened enthusiasm which the convention engendered. The convention's honored guest from Israel, Rabbi Pinchas Menachem Alter, was the center of attraction, and was followed by many admirers as he walked through the convention corridors. As a result of the success of this unusual gathering, many of the delegates urged that the organization begin holding its conventions annually instead of every two years.

NSHEI AGUDATH ISRAEL SESSIONS

The Agudat women's organization, Nshei Agudath Israel of America, held special sessions for its members during the national convention of Agudath Israel during which reports were rendered on the important work of the organization especially for children's institutions in Israel.

The Nshei also announced its Annual Luncheon which will be held on Sunday, February 25th, 1973 at the Shaler Hilton Hotel.

The Guests of Honor will be Rebbezina Bella Perlow (Noveminsker Rebbezina), while the Awardes will be Mrs. Zelda Greenberg, Mrs. Helen Seif, Mrs. Edith Saptimus, and Mrs. Erna Tarss. The proceeds will go for the Nshei charities, and children's homes and institutions in Israel. Members and all others interested are asked to kindly reserve this date.
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CONVENTION RESOLUTIONS

The convention adopted a resolution calling upon Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, Elliot Richardson to effectively halt the misuse of affirmative action programs to undermine the merit system in employment opportunities. The organization charged that in spite of recent guidelines published by HEW's Office for Civil Rights, which prohibits preferential treatment based on racial quotas, there are colleges and universities which continue such practice.

Another resolution called upon the Jewish Federations throughout the country to stop paying pious lip service to Jewish day schools, who need cash and not praise. The gathering expressed disappointment over the fact that the recent national convention of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds, which was held in Toronto, "paid comparatively minor attention to the major problem of the Jewish agenda: how to maintain and expand the only sure means of guaranteeing Jewish survival, the Jewish day school movement."

The convention singled out the Jewish Federation of New York as "one of the most flagrant culprits in a lopsided system of priorities, which places maximum Jewish education at the bottom of the totem pole, while concentrating on physical services which are increasingly a government responsibility." The convention declared that "the patience of Jewish educators is running out, and unless the priorities of the Federations are reordered, we may witness an explosion on the Jewish scene."

Concern about the manner in which the Jewish community is dragged into various political election battles was expressed in another convention resolution, which called upon the administration of Agudath Israel to attempt to influence Jewish groups to eliminate the predominant emphasis on Jewish interests in the political battles of American election campaigns.

In regard to the situation in Israel, the following was declared:

"The Convention of Agudath Israel of America is shocked and outraged over the recent move of Chief Rabbi Goren of Israel who, in defiance of all the leading Halachic and Torah authorities in Israel and world-wide, has dared permit the marriage of illegitimates. The underhanded, secret, and lightning-like manner in which the act was done points up the menace of Rabbi Goren's policy of bowing to the demands of Israel's secular establishment that the Torah and Jewish law be altered to conform to the so-called 'needs of present times.' In this approach there is a serious danger to the continued existence of the Jewish people as a Torah nation.

"The Convention of Agudath Israel of America again proclaims the resolution of Torah Jewry the world over to maintain and defend the eternal belief that "this Torah will not be changed." The Convention rejects the falsity that there can be varying approaches to Halacha. There is only one Torah and one Halacha. The Torah and its laws are eternal, and no power on earth can change them.

"The Convention declares that Torah Jewry will resist with all its power the current attempts (to abolish Jewish Law) and does not recognize the authority of rabbis who embark on false, dangerous departures that pose a danger to the future of the nation of Torah.

"The Convention resolves to take all steps to oppose any menace to the future of Torah according to the decisions of recognized Torah authorities of our time, who have declared that Rabbi Goren's decisions and rulings are invalid."

Z.I.A. LAUNCHES PROGRAM TO RETURN LOST YOUTH

200 delegates from all parts of the United States and Canada who attended the Zeirei Agudath Israel convention, held in conjunction with the 50th anniversary convention of Agudath Israel of America in Atlantic City on November 23-26th, unanimously resolved to embark on a new ambitious program to "reach into the heart" of thousands of alienated Jewish youth throughout the country.

Rabbi Moshe Sherer executive president of Agudath Israel of America, pledged to fund the new ambitious program of Zeirei Agudath Israel. At the opening session under the heading of "Agudath Israel on the Firing Line," Rabbi Sherer expressed the adult organization's admiration and support for the activities of Zeirei Agudath Israel. Also featured at the same session was Rabbi Chaim Dov Koller, Rosh Yesdya of Telshe Yesdya of Chicago, who urged Zeirei Agudath Israel to "reach out into the spiritual wastelands of America to enroll Jewish youth into Yesivos and Day Schools."

The Zeirei Agudath Israel delegates also heard greetings from two Roshei Yesivos. Rabbi Feivel Cohen, Roshe Yesdva of Nachlas Haleveyim, urged the youth to strengthen themselves so that they can proceed to strengthen others. Rabbi Pinchas Menachem Alter, Roshe Yesdya of Yeshiva Sha'are Emes greeted the Zeirei Agudath Israel convention. Rabbi Avrohom Telsman, a prominent member of Mesifta Torah Vodoh Kotel, noted in his address to the convention that learning Torah and responsibility for Klal Yisroel are intertwined.

The ZAI convention also heard reports from Rabbi Avrohom Fishel (Mesifta Tifereth Jerusalem), Matty Katz (Mesifta Torah Vodoh) and Larry Gewirtz (Mesifta Rabbi Simon Raphael Hirsch), Rabbi Yaakov Loner, member of the executive board, acted as the chairman for the plenary session.

Rabbi Menachem Lubinsky, national coordinator of Zeirei Agudath Israel of America, outlined a broad new range of programs for the future of Zeirei Agudath Israel of America.
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