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Imitation, Limitation and Nationhood

1. AM ECHAD

The essence of nationhood is distinction — having a unique, distinct, national identity. When one nation imitates another, or others, it thereby impairs its distinction, its national identity, its very “nationhood.” The Reform movement has, since its inception, imitated the West. It has, by doing so, impaired the very concept of Jewish nationhood — indeed, it has minimized it and trivialized it. The Am Echad public awareness campaign spearheaded by Agudath Israel has previously focused upon the “Echad” component — the unity of the Jewish people, and how the Reform movement threatens to sunder it. This article explores the other component — the “Am,” the nation. It focuses on how the Reform movement has impaired the very concept of “Am Yisroel” — the Nation of Israel — and it proposes strategies to prevent further damage. It explores the nexus between the concepts of imitation, limitation and nationhood, and it relates them to Pesach — the holiday which commemorates, among other things, the birth of the Jewish nation.

Sholom Scheinberg is an attorney residing in Baltimore, Maryland. A talmid of Yeshivas Netzach Yisroel, he is an administrative law judge for the state of Maryland. He was represented in these pages by “The Whole Truth and the Fragmented Truth” (Oct. ’96).

A Tragic Blunder

Reform Judaism has borrowed too much from the alien church ideal of Western lands. . . . At first purposing and later purporting to magnify the Synagogue, it began to move in the direction of holding the synagogue, its worship, its practices, and its mores, as distinct or distinguishable from the Jewish people. Some unhappy results followed. There ceased to be an understanding of the truth that people and faith were reciprocally pervasive, and again, almost equally lamentable, it came to be believed that people and faith moved in uncentered spheres. Coupled with this, a process of alienation began, in the end almost avowed and purposive, of Jews from what was an alien and borrowed concept of Jewishness.

The synagogue and “religion,” using that debatable term, were given a false emphasis, not a larger but a misleading emphasis. . . . The un-Jewish stress upon Credo, which is only another name for the Temple fixation of Reform Judaism, was bound to eventuate in an under emphasis of the Jewish people concept; and in what might be called a major emphasis upon the Jewish church, a minor emphasis upon the Jewish people. The major emphasis became paramount and all but solitary, the minor emphasis ultimately became an insistent negation, virtually the primary article of the Credo of Jewish Reform. Within the Temple the Jew proclaimed the Lord as One. Outside of the Temple and in the midst of life, the Reform Jew continuously echoed: “We are not a living and eternal people; we are not a people at all.”

1 The author has deliberately excluded the Conservative movement from his analysis. It is the author’s personal opinion that the Conservative movement is, and has always been, so variegated and diverse in both theory and practice, as to defy generalization. Many of the observations made in this article about Reform, would, in the author’s opinion, apply as well to the more “left-wing” elements of the Conservative movement today. The author leaves it to the judgment of each individual reader to determine which observations contained in the article apply to which elements of the Conservative movement, and to what extent they apply.
II. REFORM'S "TRAGIC BLUNDER"

The two paragraphs in the box on page 8 are a scathing critique of the Reform movement, brutal in its candor. It is not an excerpt from an "Orthodox polemic." It was not written by the author of this article, or by any other Orthodox Jew. It was penned by the man regarded by many to have been the most distinguished, gifted and articulate Reform Rabbi of the Twentieth Century — Stephen S. Wise.

This excerpt is from a remarkable short essay, "A Tragic Blunder". The central premise of this essay is that Reform has imitated Christianity in positing that "people" and "religion" are two distinct concepts. Its central proposition and admonition is that Reform should cease doing so. Reform no longer consciously and deliberately sets out to imitate Christianity, as it did in its infancy. But, Reform continues to uncritically copy whatever is au courant in the West, be it environmentalism, feminism, or the “gay” agenda.

This is imitation at its worst.

When Am Yisroel, a nation that has its own, unique, elevated mission, imitates other nations — even in seemingly mundane, "secular," "neutral" matters — it has, to that extent, impaired the full flowering of its vast innate spiritual potential. It has, to that extent, fallen short in its performance of its holy mission, to be a Mamleches Kolanim and a Goy Kodosh (a Nation of Priests and a Holy Nation). It has limited itself severely.

Conversely, when Israel struggles to maintain its distinct national identity — even in seemingly "mundane" matters — it thereby merits incalculable rewards — extending even to Ge'ula... Redemption. Distinction is, as we shall see, a primary theme in the Haggada.

Mitzrayim sought to compel Bnei Yisroel to imitate them, to become like them — spiritually and morally degraded. It is far more tragic when we, ourselves, deliberately strive to imitate alien nations and cultures. This type of imitation is national suicide.

This teaches that the Israelites were distinctive there. The essence of nationhood is distinction. Listen to the words of the Alter of Kelm in connection with the above:

The Ramban writes that the Torah has commanded us to remember and know that there is an ordered process of reward and punishment: "And know that Hashem, your G-d, is G-d, the faithful G-d, Who keeps the covenant with, and the kindness towards, those who love Him and keep His mitzvos" (Devarim 7,9). And the source of this knowledge is indicated in the previous pasuk: “Because Hashem loved you... He took you out... and delivered you from the house of slaves, from the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt.” There they saw with their own eyes that those who kept guard over the mitzvos were rewarded. Yisroel kept the mitzvos of Hashem and were delivered from their servitude; they went out from darkness to great light. The Egyptians, who rebelled against Hashem, were beset by plagues and drowned in the sea.

But how can Yisroel in Egypt be considered "observers of mitzvos"? We are accustomed to think of them as expect neither a return to Palestine, nor a sacrificial worship under the sons of Aaron, nor the restoration of any of the laws concerning the Jewish State." Encyclopaedia Judaica, Volume 14, p. 26. The MacMillan Company, New York, 1971.

Reform has since reversed itself on its rejection of Jewish nationhood. However, Reform continues to imitate the West, and thus — in spite of its claim — continues to impair, minimize and indeed, trivialize, the concept of Jewish nationhood.

In addition to the matters discussed in this article, the concept of "distinction/uniqueness" plays a clear and obvious role in the "Ma Nishiana," the "Dayeinu," and the "Chad Gadya," among other portions of the Haggada.
sunk in the depths of corruption (פריה שקרנית). They had no mitzvos through which they might be redeemed until milah (circumcision) and the korban Pesach (the Pesach sacrifice) were given to them.

Yet, we should not be amazed. Yisroel were slaves to Pharaoh and the Egyptians. Servants by nature submit to their masters and ape their ways. They are fearful and ashamed of keeping other customs. Yisroel, however, as Chazal point out, were “distinctive there in language, dress, and personal names” (Yalkut Shimoni 1:773). They did not speak Egyptian; they did not dress like Egyptians; they did not bear Egyptian names. All this was done to strengthen the traditions that they had received from their fathers who had recognized the Creator. They did not want to be swept away by, and intermingled with, the Egyptians and their loathsome ways.

It is unbelievable that a nation of downtrodden slaves who have labored at lowly tasks — producing bricks and mortar — for over two hundred years would not have left off continuously renewing their ties to the past. But there they were, standing their guard, rejecting their masters' culture on three cardinal points that help make up the bonds of society — language, clothing and names. Small wonder, then, that they are called “keepers of the mitzvos” and that it is from their deliverance that we learn of the process of reward and punishment.6

These words are truly astounding! Bnei Yisroel, we learn, merited Redemption because of something which, at first blush, appears to be both mundane and trivial — because they were distinctive in language, dress and personal names. But given their circumstances, this was an assertive, heroic act — an affirmation of a unique, exalted, national identity. It was, in fact, an act of resistance

L e t u s s t r i v e f o r 

excellence in all facets of individual and collective self-expression.

and lay it wide open to the inroads of the yeitzer hara.

Once this power gains full control, spiritual redemption is no longer possible. We are told that Israel was near this point of no return before the Exodus. If there are fifty "gates of defilement," Israel had reached the fortieth....

The significance of the following quotation should now be apparent. "If the Holy One, blessed be He, had not taken us out of Egypt [at that particular moment], we should have remained in eternal bondage to Paroh in Mitzrayim [we would never have escaped from the particular defilement

...
The *Mitzrayim* sought to forcibly “constrict” Bnei Yisroel, until the essence of its national identity, its inherent spirituality, would be completely and irrevocably crushed; smothered; extinguished. They almost succeeded. But for Hashem’s miraculous intervention, they would have succeeded. Mitzrayim sought to break down the defenses of each Jew’s personality, thus allowing their alien, yeitzer hara-based culture to flood in, until both the unique individual identity of each Jew and the unique national identity of Israel would have been totally destroyed.

This would have meant death as a nation through “constriction” — through limitation. Bnei Yisroel reached the forty-ninth level of defilement (tuma). The *Mitzrayim* had almost totally succeeded in their objective of forcibly prying open each Jew’s personality defenses, having their alien culture flood in, and thus compelling each Jew to imitate *Mitzrayim* against his or her will. The innate spirituality of each individual Jew, and therefore of Am Yisroel, did, in fact, become progressively diminished, progressively “constricted,” almost to the vanishing point — to the point of no return. Therefore, Chazal teach, had Hashem not redeemed Bnei Yisroel at the very moment of Redemption, it would have been too late. Am Yisroel’s spirituality — the essence of its national identity — would have been “constricted” until it disappeared entirely.11

Bnei Yisroel fought back! They resisted the pressure of *Mitzrayim* in very concrete ways: they deliberately retained their language, dress and personal names — three critical components of a nation. It is noteworthy that the Torah (Devarim 26:5) states: “Vayihi sham legoy. There — sham — in *Mitzrayim* — a nation whose essence is the unparalleled ability to crush individuals, societies and peoples — Israel became a nation! There, in the place where it is least likely even for a fully-formed, mature nation to survive, Israel, a not-yet formed nation, a conglomerate of individuals, became a nation!12

We must truly marvel at our ancestors, who became a nation in *Mitzrayim* because they had the courage and strength to remain distinct, in an environment that crushed expressions of distinctiveness; that excelled in its capacity to level individuals and nations.

**V. DISTINCTION OR EXTINCTION**

Bnei Yisroel were faced with two, and only two, options in galus Mitzrayim: distinction or extinction. They could strive to remain distinct, in the fundamentals of personal names, language and dress, or they would become extinct.

The Alter of Kelm teaches that Bnei Yisroel merited Redemption because they remained distinct. Had they not been distinct, they presumably would

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11 This portion of the article is, in large measure, an adaptation of the concluding paragraph of Galus Mitzrayim, which is contained on pp. 17-18 of Volume II of Michtav Me’Eliyahu.

12 The word “sham” (“there”) appears to be superfluous, both in “vayihi sham legoy” (Devarim 26:5), and in the Haggada’s commentary thereon: “meahem shehaya Yisroel metzuyanim sham.”
have become totally assimilated, they would have become extinct. The essence of Mitzrayim was its ability to overwhelm, to smother, to level, to destroy. Bnei Yisroel, against all odds, chose the path of resistance — of standing firm in their identity, of endeavoring to strengthen the traditions they had received from the Avos, who had recognized Hashem. Bnei Yisroel chose life: they elected, they struggled, to remain distinct. In so doing, they became a nation — in Mitzrayim.

The affirmative, heroic efforts by our ancestors not to imitate an alien culture led to the Ce’ula. Attempts by the Jews to imitate the Gentiles—whether during the First Temple period, the Hellenistic period, or in Nineteenth Century Germany — have always ended in disaster, and have often ended in outright Churban. A pattern appears: Resistance to imitation bring about ge’ula; its opposite — conscious, deliberate imitation — often brings about churban, the opposite of ge’ula.

Mitzrayim sought to compel Bnei Yisroel to imitate them, to become like them — spiritually and morally degraded. It is far more tragic when we, ourselves, deliberately strive to imitate alien nations and cultures. This type of imitation is national suicide.

In Galus Mitzrayim, the First Galus, Bnei Yisroel were faced with two options: distinction or extinction. These choices inhere in every galus, including the present one. The choices are always the same: we either choose to remain distinct, or we will become, as to that particular galus-land, extinct. Imitation is national suicide; distinction is the key to survival, and ultimately, to ge’ula as well.

VI. NO MORE “TRAGIC BLUNDEANS”

There are today two diametrically opposed, competing and contending visions of Judaism: There is the camp of those who would slavishly imitate the West, and there are those loyal to Torah, who look to the Torah and its infinite wisdom as its wellspring of creativity, guidance and inspiration.

There is also a unique, historic challenge and opportunity. As has been noted many times in these pages and elsewhere, there are today hundreds of thousands of Jews who are searching for meaning and authenticity, and who may therefore be receptive to the message of Torah-true Judaism. It is incumbent upon us to rise to this historic occasion; to rise to the opportunity and the challenge to reach out to these Jews, and to influence them. The keys to doing so successfully are contained in the word “metzuyanim.”

“Metzuyan” connotes both “distinctive” and “excellent.” Let us emphasize both of these attributes. Let us proudly proclaim our allegiance to the unbroken chain of Torah transmission as the source of our national distinctiveness. And let us strive for excellence in all facets of individual and collective self-expression: Excellence in Torah scholarship; excellence in middos (character); excellence in our endeavors at building strong, vibrant Torah communities; excellence in enthusiastic, creative and diligent efforts at outreach; and excellence in our efforts to earn the respect of our non-observant brethren and of the world at large. If, like our ancestors in Mitzrayim, we, too, are metzuyanim — in both senses of the word — then, with Hashem’s help, we will be able to influence our fellow, non-observant Jews to such an extent, as to assure that there will be no more “tragic blunders” in our future.

13 It is interesting that “distinction” carries the same dual connotation in English as “metzuyan” does in Hebrew.
The Temptation to Preach

It is not exactly news that the Torah Jew is a cultural alien in modern American society. Moral relativity dominates the landscape, reducing all of the values we hold dear to a murky bog of hazy confusion. No value is sacred and no evil unacceptable. And there is no escape to the shtetl of our grandparents. Thus, in the midst of a world that produces constant violence, accepts wanton promiscuity, and debates the morality of abortion for convenience, we have to raise our children — as well as ourselves — to pursue a life of Divine service.

This situation creates a problem that has no easy solution. If we meet the world heads on, we expose ourselves to a vast range of evils that inevitably affect our attitudes and actions — often to a much greater degree than can ever be tolerable. But insulating ourselves in religious enclaves also has its dangers. For one thing, it fosters a mentality of Us vs. Them, which can cause us to rationalize various moral compromises. In addition, there is no way to isolate ourselves completely, and many who grow up protected fall with a heavy thud when they are suddenly exposed. So we all juggle with various blends of protection and exposure, trying to imbue our children with the depth of faith and strength of character to carry them through life.

Because the evils we face are so pronounced, and the values so contrary to all we hold sacred, we clearly need to make full use of every resource at our disposal.

The more subtle the approach, the deeper it penetrates. Rabbi Yosef Leib Bloch sees this as inherent in human nature; the passions that play on the surface dull the effect upon the deeper emotions within.

For this reason, there is a prevalent trend to feed our children a steady diet of strong moral messages, employing a great deal of preaching and sermonizing. Everything is spelled out in capital letters and exclamation points — and often broken down to simplistic levels of black and white.

Thus, many educators who use meaningful stories to convey the Torah’s morals fortify their tales with lengthy sermons that dwell on those morals. The same applies to the realm of creativity. In school and at home there are many opportunities for children to express their spiritual values creatively. They do so in picture and in verse, in drama and in song, in prose and in poetry. Here, too, there is a common tendency to hammer away at the points being made — to express them so clearly and repeatedly that no one can possibly miss them.

But the clamor of relentless preaching often drowns out the message being conveyed. When we spell things out so clearly that there is no challenge in receiving them, we fail to engage a child’s mind — or anything more than his superficial interest. And when we repeat ourselves over and over again until our point is coming out of their ears, they begin to associate the values we teach with the suffocation they experience in learning them.

The Penetrating Power of Subtlety

The Torah, however, prescribes a different approach to cultivating values, one that is exemplified by the way we celebrate the Passover festival. At that time, we devote an entire night to reliving the Exodus from
Egypt, and a full seven days to its commemoration. Why then, asks Rabbi Yosef Leib Bloch, do we fill our seder with mere symbols and vague allusions? Why not really bring those events to life — with plays and reenactment of all that occurred? Wouldn’t that drive home the lessons of the seder much more effectively? Rabbi Bloch answers with an insight that is absolutely vital in our age of ultra-decibels:

True spiritual achievement comes through those things that leave only subtle impressions but do not arouse emotional intensity. These, and these alone, can reach the delicate strands of the human soul and inspire them. That which is more concrete and conspicuous can bring a person to great passion, and may seem — for the moment — to make a deep impression on him. But its impact is completely absorbed by his more superficial emotions, and it never reaches the finer, loftier, elements within his soul. Therefore, we relive the exodus from Egypt with stories, symbols, and allusions rather than with dramatic presentations, for that is the way to create lasting impressions that will not be easily forgotten (Shiurei Daas, Nishmas HaTorah).

In other words, the more subtle the approach, the deeper it penetrates. Rabbi Bloch sees this as inherent in human nature; the passions that play on the surface dull the effect upon the deeper emotions within. It is also true on another level. We all have some resistance to things that accuse us of falling short, or that demand from us increased effort and energy. Thus, when something addresses our overt feelings, it also arouses our inner defenses. "What does he mean: I’m not good enough?" Or, "How can I possibly try any harder?" In many cases, we find excuses to negate the effect of that which moved us — in order to protect ourselves from their implications. The subtler influences, however, make no demands or accusations. They merely plant seeds of awareness — awareness of our obligations and our capabilities — that steadily rise to the surface of our psyche and urge us forward.

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What do you think of when you hear "Switzerland"?

Don't get me wrong. We surely need to learn, and to teach, clear moral lessons — to define the lines between right and wrong and between good and evil in no uncertain terms. But we must also maintain a balance of the overt and the subtle if we want our messages to penetrate. We need to create a general atmosphere where our children can internalize the Torah's values — naturally, comfortably, and effectively. We need, in other words, to foster the "cultural osmosis" of Yiddishkeit, without the ceaseless drum roll of overstated moralization.

Teaching, for example, can be done with subtlety. We can get our points across in ways that give breathing space to their recipients. One of today's outstanding yeshiva rebbe'im uses this approach: "I begin every class with a

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The enchanting snow-capped Swiss Alps? The world's most outstanding timepieces? Definitely, but now there is something more... The natural goodness of genuine Parve and milk (Cholov Yisroel) Schmerling Chocolates. One taste and you will never settle for "make-believe" Swiss chocolate ever again. Taste the Schmerling difference. It's one of those special things that makes Switzerland famous.
story, but I never explain its moral. That I leave for the students to figure out themselves." This is not just intellectually challenging. It also enables his students to plug in to the story at their level of devotion — and to thereby increase that level.

The same applies to creative activities. A play or a story that depicts mesirah as nefesh (self sacrifice) does not need an accompanying speech to drive the point home. The medium itself gets the message across much more effectively. And it enables the children to relate to the concept on their terms, in ways that are meaningful to them. This allows them to embrace the moral wholeheartedly, without resistance from any feeling of doubt or inadequacy that may fester within.

With a bit of imagination, this concept of subtlety opens up whole new worlds of opportunity in chinuch. Here, for example, is an idea that has been used by teachers in the classroom, but is equally applicable at home. Bring home a jar of jellybeans — or of any other item of minimal value — and introduce the following arrangement: Every time a child does something that is difficult for him, he gets a jellybean. This will vary from one child to the next. For the “absent-minded professor,” remembering to clear his place or hang up his coat may be an achievement. One who is highly competitive deserves a reward if he accepts a smaller portion (of dessert, not spinach) or a less expensive present without complaining. Kindness and cleanliness, making a careful beracha, keeping one’s bedtime — these accomplishments and many others are all worth jellybeans for those to whom they present a challenge. When the jelly bean jar is emptied, the entire family is rewarded with a special trip, treat, or activity.

However, a child earns a jellybean only if someone else recommends him for one. It can be a parent or one of his siblings, but he cannot endorse himself. (Obviously, the parents must decide if the deed qualifies for a reward.) Since the ultimate goal is far more valuable than the immediate prize, each child will recommend the others as often as possible. Thus, the cry of “It’s not fair” that fills many homes is replaced with an atmosphere of mutual support, everyone rooting for each other to earn jellybeans. At the same time, the children learn to appreciate each other’s diverse strengths and weaknesses. This fosters the awareness that true achievement is measured in terms of personal effort, and that fair treatment must always take that into consideration. And, most important, this is all done smoothly and naturally, without the speeches and lec-
tures that make a child feel like doing something wicked just to get the sour taste of preaching out of his mouth.

We need to create a general atmosphere where our children can internalize the Torah’s values — naturally, comfortably, and effectively. We need, in other words, to foster the “cultural osmosis” of Yiddishkeit, without the ceaseless drum roll of overstated moralization.

THE UNMISTAKABLE MESSAGE

These are but a few applications; the essential point is the principle itself. It is a principle that is clearly expressed in the Torah: And behold Hashem passed by, and a great and mighty wind was shattering the mountains and breaking rocks before Hashem — Hashem is not in the wind. And after the wind a quaking — Hashem is not in the quaking. And after the quaking, fire — Hashem is not in the fire. And after the fire, a still, subtle voice (Melachim I 19, 11-12). The Gemora (Chagiga 16a) concludes: And behold Hashem passed by, i.e. within that still, subtle voice.

The message here is unmistakable. Fire and brimstone can proclaim G-d’s presence, but they cannot be its carrier. True spirituality is found within the still, subtle voice — the voice that penetrates to the core of the human soul.

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With Shalom Bayis at the Cornerstone

In preparation for Pesach, we are required to devote time and effort to reviewing the relevant halachos (laws) of the Festival. In the process, not only do we become more keenly aware of detailed requirements of the specific mitzvos, we can gain insights that may have far-reaching implications in how we lead our lives.

For example, the requirement to drink daled kosos—four cups of wine during the Seder—is of such significance, that the halacha even requires a destitute person who relies on charity for basic necessities to sell his very last shirt, or to sell himself into servitude, in order to procure the wine necessary for this mitzva. The same far-reaching obligation applies to the acquisition of candles for the mitzva of lighting Chanuka neiros. There are those who seem to be perplexed as to what the Talmudic source of these laws might be.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLICIZING THE MIRACLE

At first glance, these two mitzvos share the common theme of pirsumei nissa, publicizing miracles experienced by Klal Yisroel. The four cups of wine commemorate the process of the creation of the Jewish people, while lighting the menora proclaims the miraculous survival of the soul of the Jewish nation. When we publicize the miracles of our exodus from Egypt through the drinking of the four cups of wine, we affirm our desire to be counted as members of Klal Yisroel. We triumphantly raise our cups and proclaim that we are forever thankful to Hashem for the miracles that facilitated for us the unique privilege of becoming His people. So, too, on Chanuka: with the lighting of the menora, we publicly thank Hashem for the miracles He performed that enabled us to remain His people.

Both of these mitzvos, along with their statements of belonging to the Klal, brook no excuses. Men and women, young and old, rich and poor, even the destitute— all members of Klal Yisroel—must participate in the daled kosos and the lighting of the menora.

In regard to expenditures for performing other positive commands—even those of Torah origin, such as tefillin, succa, lulav or shofar—a person is only obligated to spend twenty percent of his assets to ensure the fulfillment of the mitzva. Why, then, in regard to the aforementioned mitzvos are we obligated to spend all of our resources? It would seem reasonable to assume that it is the pirsumei nissa factor in these two mitzvos that makes them so unique. Publicizing both the creation of the Jewish people and the spiritual survival of the nation would seem to elevate these mitzvos to special status.

MAKING CHOICES AMONG MITZVOS

It would follow, then, that when a person of limited funds is called upon to perform one of these pirsumei nissa mitzvos as well as another mitzva, the pirsumei nissa mitzva takes precedence. Therefore, on seder night a person who has only enough assets to purchase either wine for the daled kosos or matzos, is required to buy the wine. Similarly, on Shabbos Chanuka, he is required to use his limited funds for the purchase of ner Chanuka and not for the purchase of wine for Kiddush.

As we often find in halacha, however, there is an exception to this rule. The Gemora (Shabbos 21b) declares that if on Friday night-Chanuka a person has funds for only one candle, it should be used for ner Shabbos and, surprisingly,
Both of these mitzvos, along with their statements of belonging to the Klal, brook no excuses. Men and women, young and old, rich and poor, even the destitute — all members of Klal Yisroel — must participate in the daled kosos and the lighting of the menora.

not for the special pirsumei nissa mitzva of ner Chanuka. The halachah follows the same ruling with regard to giving priority to the purchase of ner Yom Tov on the first night of Pesach, over buying wine for the special pirsumei mitzva of daled kosos.

The glaring question is, why do the Shabbos or Yom Tov candles take precedence over the established supremacy of the pirsumei nissa mitzvos? The Gemora offers a remarkable answer:

Rava says, “It is simple to me. [i.e. I need no textual proof.] In a contest between acquiring a candle for Shabbos and a candle for Chanuka [when there is only money for one of the two], ner Shabbos comes first, mishum shalom beisa — because of peace and harmony in the home.”

In other words, if we were to ask which mitzva in the Shulchan Aruch necessitates the primary expenditure of funds, the unequivocal answer would be ner Shabbos because the light promotes shalom bayis. This is so obvious to the Gemora that it does not even need to bring a proof.

A HALACHA-BASED PRIORITY

money so that it be in accordance with halacha. As we have seen, a mitzva that promotes shalom bayis actually takes precedence over mitzvos that are public declarations of thanks for the creation of the Jewish nation and its survival:

without shalom bayis, we cannot have a Jewish nation. We must take a good hard look, then, at how much time, money and energy we invest in building, maintaining and strengthening shalom bayis in our own homes and in our commu-
nities. Shalom bayis should assume a prime place in our lives, without any exception or loopholes.

While this article is not meant as a medium for rendering halachic decisions, it is not out of place to suggest some guidelines. For example, when one is faced with a choice of how to spend "top dollar" on various mitzvos, or whether to devote precious resources to the enhancement of shalom bayis through various means, such as shared quality time, buying that special gift, conscious consideration of one's spouse's feelings or sensitivities (no matter how irrational they may seem), or resorting to professional counseling, may I suggest that shalom bayis should definitely take precedence?

Shalom bayis is not merely something to "wax Rabbinic" about at Sheva Berachos. Shalom bayis is real and it is vital. Shalom bayis is complicated. And it is crucial to one's well-being. We all know couples in pain, couples whose shalom bayis is lacking. There are dedicated rabbanim and mentors, as well as highly capable professionals, who are skilled in helping others with their shalom bayis. And then there is the Yitti Liebel Help Line (which is also available for people outside of New York City). We cannot afford to wait until the eleventh hour to seek assistance, or to advise others to do so. We cannot hide behind the excuse of shame, because this is not shameful. It is a problem that can plague almost anyone; it must be dealt with, and it can be overcome.

Delay in receiving help can be extremely damaging. As a Rav, I have witnessed the corrosive effects it can have on the couple; as a Mashgiach, I have seen its devastating effects on the children. Chazal say that a husband and wife, through their hard-earned shalom bayis, can merit the zechus of having the Shechina dwell in their home. Like any other zechus, it takes work. Like any other zechus, it cannot be taken for granted. Shalom bayis takes work, continued work. It takes work throughout our lifetime. And where effort alone does not seem to bear fruit, one should seek help.

When I was a bachur in Lakewood, a story circulated which we all flippantly repeated but could not really appreciate at that stage of our lives. A Yungerman had shown Reb Schneur Kotler a beautiful esrog for which he had paid a small fortune. The Rosh Yeshiva commented, "You would have done better to have bought your wife something special for Yom Tov."

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HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Among the many skills taught in the General Studies Department of our yeshivas, the language arts—specifically, verbal and written communication—are among the most important. Shouldn't our yeshiva graduates, who have so much knowledge and wisdom to share, learn how to do so effectively? I certainly accept the truth of this observation, but it never touched me personally. I wasn't particularly interested in teaching writing (composition skills) to the 11th grade class in Yeshivas Novominsk-Kol Yehuda, or anywhere else for that matter, but the Rebbetzin, Mrs. Yehudis Perlow, not only invited me to do so, she persisted. So I ultimately accepted the position, but with a novel spin on the final instructional design. First, however, a few words of introduction.

The acquisition of effective writing skills is the product of conviction, among other factors. If something is meaningful, there is reason to write. If there is no compelling reason to write, one doesn't write (at least not willingly). Additionally, clear writing is an expression of clear thinking. The ability to write clearly and coherently is a sign of subject mastery. We structured the course with this in mind.

Writing about summer vacation or minority quotas on the college campus is not appropriate fare for budding talmidei chachamim. Instead, why not have them write Divrei Torah, presenting their original thoughts on a chosen topic within a given theme? This idea may have been tried before, but not being aware of any previous attempt to use as our model, we developed our own.

THE PROGRAM

Rabbi Shlomo Spira, the secular studies principal, prepared the class for the term project, clarifying any misconceptions that this was going to be a year-long vacation, that we were not serious about publication. My first few sessions with the class were spent explaining the project and delineating my expectations. The boys wanted to know details of how the project would work and what the underpinnings of its structure were. The first stirrings of life were at hand; the partnership was beginning. They acknowledged that this was going to be an interactive experiment, with each of us dependent upon the other—a very hopeful sign.

The class is expected to complete three original pieces of writing during the course of the year: one Dvar Mussar, and an interview or report focusing on some aspect of Orthodox Jewish life in Europe before World War II. At least five sources are required for the first two essays.

The talmidim prepare three drafts of each composition. Each draft is then edited by two members of the class for content appropriateness, clarity of thought, grammatical structure and use of vocabulary (special editor's sheets were developed for this purpose). In addition, each editor writes comments explaining his marks and offering suggestions for improvement.
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For the Divrei Torah, three topics were offered: the Aros, the experience in the Midbar, and Shabbos and Yom Tov. Within these themes the boys could chose almost any topic, presenting it in question-answer, novel interpretation or expositonal format.

Interestingly, many of the batehurim encountered initial difficulty with their transition from the Divrei Torah to writing their Mussar piece. Creating Divrei Torah was not a new experience; only the format was novel, and to this they were able to adjust. The Mussar piece, however, represented uncharted territory requiring much more explanation regarding content, form and approach. The Divrei Torah is a product of the intellect, but the Mussar piece must come from the heart, as well. This involves confrontation with self. The sincerity and earnestness that characterized this stage of the project was touching, for it represented an aspect of personal growth I had not anticipated — a real bonus.

Besides the actual writing, I was witness to subtle signs of maturation.

One student, frustrated by his inability to break through the writing barrier for the Mussar piece, drew a circle on the white plastic tablecloth covering his table. In the circle he wrote the word kina (envy) — his main category. Then he drew lines extending outside the circle, writing words relat-

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The Assignments
ed to, or associated with, the midda of kina — his sub-categories. Next, he listed other words associated with each sub-category. By the time he finished, he had graphically organized his essay. Excited, he cut out his outline and took it with him. Besides exhibiting creative thinking, he also displayed some excellent study skills.

OBSERVATIONS

The actual details of the curriculum, as well as the writing environment and atmosphere, are variables that were well considered and planned for, but too technical for inclusion in this article. The Learning Curve, however, is worth noting. The most exciting aspect of this experiment is the interest shown by the talmidim in perfecting the writing process, and the intensity shown during the editing process. The students actively discussed appropriate punctuation and capitalization, run-on sentences, tense and number, clarity of expression, proper spelling of transliterations, and precision of language when translating from Hebrew and Aramaic (including context sensitive and appropriate literal and figurative translations). Selecting expressive synonyms became particularly important. Even proper usage of colons and semi-colons was debated — all of it student generated.

The students did come to me for clarification and direction, however, and therein lies the beauty of the process. Conviction drives one to perform and to perform correctly. This spirit encompassed the entire writing process.

SWEETENERS

Learning by example is important. To that end, I invited two guest lecturers to expound upon the creative writing process. The first was my older brother, Nesanel Kasnett, senior editor of the ArtScroll Gemora project, who discussed the multi-tiered process of writing, editing, reviewing and rewriting necessary to produce each ArtScroll Gemora. The students asked questions, received answers, and learned that good writing doesn't happen without work, more work and then even more work. Likewise, he discussed the writing process, from original idea to final form, as it pertained to the two English sefarim he authored on Chumash.

After completion of the first essay, Rabbi Nosson Scherman, General Editor of ArtScroll Publications, addressed the group, stressing the necessity to communicate Torah in the language of the medina, a labor of love by various Jewish leaders throughout the galus. The Me'am Loaz was cited as a prime example. Further, the availability of quality English language Torah literature is one of the main elements fueling the unprecedented desire for learning that we witness today, whether in the Baal Teshuva Movement or within the ranks of the frum from birth. No greater testimony can be brought than the elevating and electrifying 10th Siyum HaShas that was recently celebrated by Orthodox Jews around the world. (See adjoining essay.)

CONCLUSION

This writing program is not an approach that is suitable for every situation, and specific factors integral to its success must be taken into consideration (see footnote 2). However, there are many students who are wasting many, many hours of time in their English studies, time when they could be attaining valuable accomplishments for themselves and, perhaps, Klal Yisroel, while maturing and refining themselves as Torah personalities. As the Rebbetzin saliently commented to Rabbi Scherman regarding his achievements (and the achievements of many others), "All of this was accomplished with high school English."

3 A Future and A Hope and Ancient Mountains, Timeless Hills are both collected essays on Chumash Bereishis.

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2 A detailed report on the mechanics, and the scope and sequence of this project is available from the author.
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While visiting Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky's Chol Hamoed Succos, someone teasingly asked what would become of the English sefarim when Moshiach comes. Some laughed, thinking the quip to be cute, but not Reb Yaakov. The Rosh Hayeshiva responded that just as Ladino, in its time, became a language of Torah and Yiddish became a language of Torah, today English has become a language of Torah. The test is whether or not a sefer expresses Torah properly. The Rosh Hayeshiva felt that there are English sefarim that pass the test and when Moshiach comes these English sefarim will indeed be used by Klal Yisroel.

Many who left yeshiva, possibly never again to attempt the serious learning of Torah, have returned in greater numbers than imagined because of the availability of quality English language sefarim that present Torah in an authentic, penetrating, and sophisticated manner.

The Chiddushei Harim comments on why Moshe Rabbeinu explained and wrote the Torah be'er heitev, in a clear elucidation in seventy languages. If Moshe Rabbeinu wrote the Torah in all the languages, then, axiomatically, this had to be necessary for the future of Klal Yisroel. Hashem revealed to Moshe that Klal Yisroel would be exiled into many lands, and that the Jewish people would have to be ready to teach and transmit the Torah to succeeding generations, no matter where they were and whatever language they spoke. It was, in a way, a sort of maaseh avos siman ivanim — the acts of our ancestors foretelling future trends. No one in the midbar (wilderness) spoke Russian, so for that generation it surely was not needed, but in our time, sacred texts written in Russian are undeniably essential.

JUDGING THE MESSAGE BY THE PRESENTER... AND HIS PRESENTATION

Picture, if you will, someone with little or no Torah knowledge, speaking in broken Hebrew or Yiddish, attempting to present a Dvar Torah. You can tell from his accent and mistakes that this person has no Torah background. What is your attitude? You'll be polite. You won't laugh because you know how to appreciate his Torah. You won't laugh and you may mimic him later. Will you remark to your friends regarding the mistakes that this person has no Torah background? What is your attitude?

Now imagine bnei Torah speaking before your average English-speaking American Jews who know nothing of Torah or bnei Torah. What will they think? The Gemora states that a talmid chacham who presents himself with less than perfectly clean clothing is worthy of death. Why? Because to people who are not talmidei chachamim, this is a Chillul Hashem. People judge Torah through the people who represent Torah. When people see those who represent Torah in a negative light, they think, "Who needs this!"

Right now we are in a struggle for the future spiritual well-being of Eretz Yisroel. The Reform and Conservative Jews are trying to wrest control of the spiritual affairs in Eretz Yisroel away from the Orthodox by projecting a distorted image of our community to those unlearned in Torah. If the Orthodox Jews are to stop them, it will only be if we can clearly present our case to people who are not frum, to people who have never learned Torah. The battle for public opinion rages here and in Eretz Yisroel, and who is speaking for us? The unaligned do not know what a talmid chacham is — they have no tools with which to appreciate his Torah knowledge. But when they see someone who stands with dignity and who speaks with clarity, they are impressed. I have always been impressed by a carpenter who truly knows how to use the tools of his trade. Where you and I might end up frustrated, with sore thumbs, the carpenter can create furniture, a house, a beautiful Aron Kodesh.

Hashem gave us tools — intelligence, wisdom, Torah. We must cultivate the ability to use these tools effectively, in the language and manner that others can

Rabbi Scherman, noted author and lecturer, is general editor of ArtScroll/Mesorah publications, edits Olomeinu (Torah U'Mesorah's magazine for children), and serves on the Editorial Board of The Jewish Observer.

1. See previous article.
understand and respect. This is how the battle for the spiritual dominance of Eretz Yisroel will be won.

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**NO EASY ROAD TO CLEAR COMMUNICATION**

If you want to be clear, it takes work... it takes a lot of work. When I was still marking papers as a Rebbe in the classroom, I would deduct points if the answer was not clear. The boys would protest, and I would respond, "Listen. You're not the Gemora and I am not your Rashi. In the Gemora, I have to figure out pshat and look in Rashi to guide me. When you write an answer and it is not clear, I may know what you mean to say, but, in the end, you didn't say it. I have to be able to understand your answer." In the beginning of the year, the talmidim considered me very mean, but by the end of the year they understood that Torah has to be right — it is Hashem's Torah and it must be right.

Rabbi Yechezkel Abramsky was once asked to say a hadran for a small group of baalei bittim in England, where he was head of the Beis Din. In the car on the way to the siyum, Rabbi Abramsky was unusually quiet. When asked why, he responded that he was thinking about what he will say at the hadran. "But Rebbe," the driver said, "there are only twelve men in the group, and maybe only one or two of them know how to read Rashi. Whatever the Rav says will be good." Rabbi Abramsky became very upset with this and responded emphatically, "I will be saying Torah, and when one speaks words of Torah, every word must be right, and 'right' means that every word must be clear."

**CISTERNS, WELLS AND SPRINGS**

Drink water from your own cisterns and flowing water from your own well. [Then] your springs will spread outward, streams of water in the thoroughfares" (Mishlei 4,15-16). The Vilna Gaon teaches that three different levels of learning are presented within these two pesukim. The first level is when one learns from a Rebbe, represented by the cistern. A cistern is supplied with water from an outside source (rain water, etc.). Similarly, when one learns from a Rebbe, his learning is derived from an outside source. The next level is when one learns on his own, drawing forth the waters of Torah from within himself. This is represented by the well, for a well has its own source of water that can continually be drawn upon. The final stage of learning is when one teaches others, represented by one's springs spreading outward and into the thoroughfares.

The Gaon comments that everyone is obligated to teach Torah — whether to the talmidim in shiur, or the members of his family. "To learn and to teach..." this is the Torah's charge — even if only to your children. Yet, no matter whom you teach, your Torah must be correct. One cannot fulfill the command to teach others is they don't respect you. If you are not concise, if you are not exact, if you don't know the lan-
People judge Torah through the people who represent Torah.

guage and cannot formulate clear explanations that can be heard and visualized, then how can you fulfill this dictum? Why should anyone want to listen to you, or be moved to appreciate Torah on your account?

The preface to the *Teshuvos* of Rabbi Akiva Eiger quotes a letter from the author to his son with instructions on how a sefer should be published.

Rabbi Akiva Eiger's whole life was a study in humility, in self-effacement. He said that he never called anyone his *talmid* because "Who knows who learned more from whom?" This supreme anav insisted that a sefer must be a study in beauty because it is Torah. It must evoke a sense of awe and appreciation from the person holding it and learning from it. The type should be clear, the paper should be of good quality, the binding should be strong and the page proofs should be reviewed over and over to remove any errors. Why? Because it is Torah, and it must be beautiful and correct.

Torah has to be pleasing, and when they listen to a *ben Torah*, they have to say: "Fortunate is the father who taught him Torah, fortunate is the mother who taught him Torah, fortunate is the Rebbe who taught him Torah."

THE PATH TO GOOD WRITING

How do you learn to write well? The only way to learn to write is by writing. Some of the best writers in the Torah world perfected their skills by corresponding with me and others. Does anyone here write letters, or do you simply pick up the phone and call instead? It is well worth the effort to write Torah correctly, and pays off in more ways than one can anticipate. *Baalei teshuva* and many who haven't learned since their yeshiva days and began to learn again, have done so because Torah was available to them in an attractive, meaningful format that appealed to their mature minds. Some have gone on to give *shuirim* on their own! Why? Because someone put in the effort to express the Torah — be’er heitev — clearly, thoroughly and beautifully.
A Letter with a Comment

LITERATURE AS A COMMUNICATOR OF VALUES TO OUR CHILDREN

To the Editor:

There have been many articles and discussions about the literature courses in our yeshivos and schools. They raised the obvious question whether the literature used has the type of language, plot, and author which the future parents of Klal Yisroel should be exposed to. I would like to raise another point which may be even more serious. Even if the material has been properly selected, there can be a problem with the way the teacher analyzes and discusses the subject matter.

Among the main objectives of a literature program (as expressed in a teacher’s guide) are “to present literary works as a model of human experience to develop the students’ capacity to envisage alternatives in human responses, in moral choices and in ways of life.” Also, “to increase their sensitivity to the needs, feelings and thoughts of others.” In other words, literature is a vehicle for philosophical and moral discussion.

I would like to help you visualize these objectives and methods by sharing with you some actual discussion questions from a literature class in a Bais Yaakov high school. These questions are direct quotations from a written assignment, so there should not be any question of misquotes or misunderstanding of the intent. The students were told to read a play by a secular author. After reading the play, they were told to consider the following questions:

1. “After we mold someone into something or someone different, are we responsible for their future? Explain why or why not.”
2. “What qualifications and characteristics make someone a lady? Consider those characteristics presented in the play as part of your answer.”
3. “In the play, reference is made by one of the characters to the ‘deserving poor’ and the ‘undeserving poor.’ What criteria do you think he uses to differentiate between the two groups?”

Let us analyze these questions and the discussion they would generate. The first question refers to responsibility for one’s actions. It clearly touches on the cardinal beliefs of Judaism — free choice, and reward and punishment, the tenth and eleventh “Ani Maamin” principles. The second question addresses the root of Bais Yaakov-type qualities to be admired in women. The question asks the student to use the play as only part of her answer. This is not a simple question of reading comprehension, but rather an opening to discuss social pressures, gender stereotyping, etc. The third question asks the student to discuss preferences in selecting recipients of tzeddaka, clearly a halacha issue.

All of these questions fit right into the Yahadus curriculum. What credentials and qualifications do our literature teachers have that we should allow them to offer evaluations with implications regarding such important concepts? Using the writings of the secular world as a springboard for these discussions, regardless of who the teacher may be, is certainly suspect. A secular or even observant teacher without Torah-based hashkafos (based on years of studying the classical sources unimpeded by foreign influences) cannot be entrusted with these issues, even if the reading material is limited to ArtScroll and Feldheim works or similar publications.

Obviously, many will answer that government credits will not be awarded if this kind of course is not given. Even if this is true, there are many boys and girls who are sent to school without the intention of their continuing in a college-level program. There are many fine yeshivos and Bais Yaakovs that clearly state that their students are expected to understand that colleges and universities are not for Bnei and Bnos Yisroel. For all these, there is no question that the subject matter must be avoided. For the others, the question must be addressed: Is the course permitted under halacha? What kind of teachers should teach this course? Should a Rebbetzin or Yahadus teacher be engaged to sit in and guide the discussion?

After reading this letter, ask your child to describe his or her English course and for yourself if the situation is the same — or different — in his or her school. I hope this letter will succeed in awakening the Klal to this problem.

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A Plea to Jewish Feminists

The Late Blossoming of Jewish Feminism

It's an irony of our times that although American women have come through the aggressive feminism of the sixties and seventies into an essential post-feminist reality, Jewish feminism has only recently come of age. Cliched concepts like "the inherent, heavy-handed patriarchalism of society," and hackneyed buzz-words like "empowerment" and "struggle" are coming to be invested with new meaning as Jewish feminists create fresh battlegrounds in the arenas of public prayer, study of Talmud, and rabbinical status. The inevitable claim is that many long-standing Orthodox traditions are denigrating to women and actually trample on their rights. Much can — and probably will — be said in explaining the truth, beauty and inherent harmony of Orthodoxy's (read: the Torah's) assigned roles for men and women, and the way this inner truth is beautifully expressed in ritual and liturgy. The debate is multifaceted, and answers do exist for all questions.

As for me, I would like to address one particular point in the discussion. The new wave of Jewish feminists is seeking legitimation for activities that stretch, if not snap, the threads of halacha and tradition, such as formal study of Mishna and Gemora, and women's minyanim. Personally, that leaves me with enough in Torah Shebichsav plus philosophical and narrative parts of the Oral Tradition to fill several lifetimes. I don't have to violate divrei Ghazal to prove that I have a brain. So let's not blur the lines.

A Spiritual Daughter of Frau Schenirer

Along with thousands of other girls, I grew up in the Bais Yaakov movement, and consider myself a spiritual daughter of Sarah Schenirer. I stand tall today as a proud, educated Jewish woman, in no small measure due to her courage and vision. I know, beyond the shadow of doubt, that she would be horrified at the use to which her name is being put today. And so, I must stand up for her honor, and set the record straight.

First of all, the facts: "Less than one hundred years ago, Talmud Torah was absolutely forbidden to the opposite sex," contends one editorialist. This is, quite simply, untrue. What is forbidden is to teach specific parts of Torah SheBaal Peh (i.e. Mishna and Gemora) to women. (See Mishna in Sota 20a; Maimonides, Laws of Talmud Torah 1:13; Chofetz Chaim in Likutei Halaches, Sota 20a.) Personally, that leaves me with enough in Torah Shebichsav plus philosophical and narrative parts of the Oral Tradition to fill several lifetimes. I don't have to violate divrei Chazal to prove that I have a brain. So let's not blur the lines.

War of the Rabbis?

Then there's that matter of Sarah Schenirer's launching her own little "War of the Rabbis" by pitting the Chofetz Chaim, the Belzer Rebbe, and the Gerrer Rebbe against the overwhelming majority of rabbis, including the Satmar Rav, Rabbi Yoel...
Teitelbaum.”
"War of the Rabbis." Hmmm. A short list of some of the many Torah giants who were solidly in her corner, in addition to those cited above: Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak Schneerson of Lubavitch, Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzenski of Vilna, Rabbi Zalman Sorotzkin of Lutzk, Rabbi Ben Zion Halberstam of Bobov, Rabbi Moshe’nu Friedman - the Boyaner Rebbe of Cracow, and Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman of Baranovitch.

In spite of such illustrious support, I do concede that she had to face much opposition until girls’ formal education became the norm. But the implied comparison, which goes something like this, is invalid: Sarah Schenirer had to circumvent Jewish tradition for the sake of a higher principle. Some rabbis agreed with her, some did not; she persevered, and has been vindicated by history. By the same token, today’s women have to circumvent Jewish tradition/law for the higher cause of women’s spirituality, derived from women’s minyanim, et al; some rabbis concur, some rabbis oppose; history will vindicate the vision of these brave women, as it did Sarah Schenirer’s.

And now for the historical facts: The list of rabbis, headed by the Chofetz Chaim, who backed Sarah Schenirer, may be short — as is the list of those who lend their rabbinical imprimatur to the cause of women’s prayer groups and Talmud study groups. But very few among the Chofetz Chaim’s opposers could claim his stature and authority. Without naming any names, it is laughable to put those rabbis who support the feminist causes today on the same pedestal as he.

"More Than Law Demands"

At the heart of the travesty is the pro-feminist contention that Bais Yaakov is history’s proof that halacha can be changed to accommodate the Zeitgeist. When essential to Judaic survival, so the argument goes, the Torah has an internal, self-correcting mechanism. “It is called lifnim meshuras hadin, which means that whilst Jews are expected to obey the basics of Torah, they are — subject to their time and place — encouraged to ‘walk beyond the narrow line of law’.”

Again, there is confusion, this time in terminology. The concept of lifnim meshuras hadin is not an invitation to “walk beyond the narrow line of the law” to the extent of possibly leaving it; rather, it implies a trip in the opposite direction, in doing more than is required, to demonstrate love of G-d.

If I may play devil’s advocate for a moment, the term that should have been
used, which truly indicates the "internal, self-correcting mechanism," is hora'as sha'a. The concept of hora'as sha'a allows breaking with Jewish tradition for a limited time, for the ultimate purpose of preservation of Torah. True hora'as sha'a may take a longer, more circuitous route; but it always comes back to home base, within the spirit of G-d's law, interpreted and passed down by those holy men known as Chazal — our Sages, of blessed memory.

A "Revolutionary." Lost in the Crowd

A t the ceremony marking the laying of the foundation stone of the first official Bais Yaakov building, in Cracow, thousands were in attendance to honor the occasion. The crowd was addressed by various notables, extolling the virtues of the pioneering students. And "courageous, bold, audacious Sarah Schenirer," at the event that marked the fulfillment of her dreams, where was she? In the audience, among her students, shunning the spotlight of the platform.

Frau Schenirer did what she knew she had to do to save Torah for future generations. But, in doing so, she never expressed anything but the highest reverence for the rabbis of her time — even, I am certain, the great Rabbi Tzeitelbaum of Satmar, who later opposed her. To undermine any Torah authority would be, ultimately, to undermine the impact of what she was trying to achieve.

The image of this crusader at the foundation stone ceremony, losing herself among the crowd at her own simcha, underscores a truth she embodied, which seems to be lost on those who would demand identical obligations for Jewish men and women. This woman, revolutionary and innovative where she saw a need, knew better than to equate visibility with substance. It was enough for her to see the fruition of her vision. Her life's work was to continue that vision. She did not need public accolades to validate the worth of what she had accomplished.

And I, along with all the other trees in the forest that she has planted, know that our prayer is no less precious for being whispered from behind the mehitza; our service of G-d no less valuable for being practiced in a venue that is more hidden and private than that of our husbands and fathers.

As we approach Pesach, it might be worthwhile to remember that, in the words of the Sages, it was not "in the merit of women's prayer groups," but "in the merit of righteous women," who were outstanding in their courage, their vision, and their tzniut, that "our forefathers were redeemed from Egypt."
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"And [Avraham Avinu] planted an Aishel in Be'er Sheva" (Bereishis 21,33).
What was the Aishel that Avraham Avinu planted? Different opinions have been offered by Chazal.
"One said that Aishel was an orchard. And one said it was a guest house" (Sosa 10).
"The word Aishel is an acronym for achila (eating), sheviya (drinking) and levaya (escorting guests)” (Rashi on Kesubos 8b).
"These [three] letters [of this word] are the same [as those of] sha'al (asking), because Avraham Avinu would say to all those who passed by, 'Ask for whatever you want.' Then he would give his guest whatever was requested” (Rabbeinu Bachyei on Bereishis 21,33).
The word Aishel, therefore, has come to represent the Jewish tradition of hospitality which was planted so deeply into the soul of our people by Avraham Avinu that it still continues to blossom forth today.

INFREQUENT PRACTICE

Unfortunately, there are some Jewish homes, even very frum ones, where the mitzva of hachnosas orchim (hospitality) is only practiced infrequently, if at all. These people may have lost sight of the great rewards due to those who regularly practice this mitzva. In addition to the bountiful rewards in Olam Habba, which await those who invite guests into their homes, Chazal have promised us peiros (fruits or profits) of the reward in this world (Shabbos 127a).
While that reward can come in unlimited forms, at least some of the reward must be found in the mitzva itself, as we are taught, "Schar mitzva mitzva, The reward for a mitzva is [inherent to] the mitzva" (Pirkei Avos 4:2).
What follows is but a partial list of the immediate, tangible bonuses for fulfilling the mitzva of hachnosas orchim that flow from the mitzva itself. Hopefully, after reviewing this list, more people will be enticed to plant an AisheL in their own homes.

THE FRUITS

1. A deep feeling of satisfaction and fulfillment.

Anytime you extend yourself to help a fellow Jew, you are immediately rewarded with a deep feeling of satisfaction and a profound sense of fulfillment. While this is true for all acts of chessed, it is even more so for hachnosas orchim.

For the minimal sacrifice of including a guest at your Shabbos table or in your sukka, you may benefit your guest immeasurably. Your guest may have had no where else to eat, may have had food but not the warmth of a family, or may have had both but not the Torah-true atmosphere of Shabbos or Yom Tov. In the latter case, your hospitality could result in bringing your guest closer to Yiddishkeit, providing merit for you and your family for generations to come.

2. An opportunity to make new friends.
Even if you have little impact on the lives of your guests, your hospitality is an excellent, fully legitimate vehicle for meeting new people and making new friends. And next to health, few things in life are more valuable than sincere friendship.

Hachnosas orchim not only provides opportunities for developing new relationships with peers, but it also affords unique opportunities to cultivate ties with Rabbanim and other Torah personalities whom one might not have otherwise even met. It is quite well-known, for example, that the warm, intimate relationship which Rabbi Paysach Krohn enjoyed with Rabbi Shalom Schwadron ז"ל for over thirty years, and which led to the now-classic, highly acclaimed “Maggid Series,” came about through hachnosas orchim.

3. Adding spice to your Shabbos table.

Some families have so little to discuss with each other that a typical Shabbos meal, zemiros and all, is concluded in less than forty-five minutes. By adding a guest or two, all sorts of new ideas, information, and points of view are introduced, which can liven up the conversation around your table.
To help harness the enormous spirit reverberating throughout the Americas in the wake of the historic Tenth Siyum HaShas of the Daf Yomi, Agudath Israel of America's Daf Yomi Commission reminds the public that...

- If you require assistance in the formation of a new Daf Yomi group and/or are in need of a qualified maggid shiur, the Daf Yomi Commission can help.
- For a laminated book-mark with a 16-month Daf Yomi calendar, free of charge, our office can be written or faxed. A 32-page seven-year calendar is also available, for a handling charge of $2.00 each.
- If you are aware of a new Daf Yomi shiur, please contact us for a Shiur Registration Form, so that it can be included in the new edition of the North American Directory of Daf Yomi Shiurim presently under preparation.
- In the meantime, copies of the 1996 Directory — though it does not list the myriad new groups established since the Siyum — are still available.
- You can also send for a free Directory of Daf Yomi Services, outlining the various programs and assistance available to participants in 'imud' Daf Yomi.

4. Opportunities to do other mitzvos.

Your associations with your guests will afford you countless opportunities to perform other mitzvos, which you probably would not have otherwise had. The chessed of making shidduchim is one example.

'Hachnosas orchim also provides opportunities to perform the chessed of helping people find roommates, apartments and even jobs, the latter of which, according to the Rambam, constitutes the highest form of tzeddaka.

5. Muting family tensions.

Family conflicts that lay dormant all week can easily erupt during the extended interaction of a Shabbos seuda. Whether harsh words are spoken between parents, between siblings, or between parent and child, the serenity of Shabbos is shattered.

But when a guest is at the table, everyone at home is on his or her best behavior.

"Can't you suggest anyone for me to invite for Yom Tov?" a neighbor once pleaded, desperately, with my wife. "We always make sure to have at least one guest at the table so my boys don't try to kill each other with their dirty looks and comments. But the guest we were counting on just canceled!"


One of the greatest rewards you can receive in this world from practicing hachnosas orchim is the opportunity it provides for you to learn from others, thereby improving yourself.

The first thing you can learn from your guests is how much you have to be thankful for. When you see what your guests need, it can remind you of what you have and sometimes take for granted.

You can also learn Torah from your guests, regardless of their level of Torah knowledge. This guest shares a p'shat he read in a recently published anthology;
"W e always make sure to have at least one guest at the table so my boys don’t try to kill each other with their dirty looks and comments.

that one shares a vort she heard at a shewa berachos, and still another clarifies an often misconstrued halacha about which he just consulted a leading poseik. All three have taught you Torah and enriched your life as a result.

Finally, you can become inspired by your guests to increase your own personal growth. In the words of Reb Yochanan, "As a reward for [giving the directive to his daughters], ‘Call him [into the house so that] he shall eat bread,’ [Yisro was so spiritually elevated by Moshe Rabbeinu that eventually Yisro’s] children merited that they sat in the Lishkas Ha’agaz (i.e. they were members of the Sanhedrin)" (Sanhedrin 104a).

WHERE TO FIND GUESTS

fter reviewing the list of rich rewards in this world awaiting those who practice hachnosas orchim, you may be wondering, “Where can I find guests to invite for Shabbos and Yom Tov?”

So if you and your family are considering planting an AiSHel in your home, here are ten strategies to employ in locating guests:

1. Borrow your neighbor’s guests. Surely you can think of at least one neighbor who has earned a reputation as a machnis orchim. Why not ask him to suggest the names of any of his ‘regulars’ for you to invite?

2. Ask your Rabbi. Your Rabbi comes into contact each week with many more people who would appreciate a Shabbos invitation than he can possibly invite into his own home. He would welcome your request.

3. Call a yeshiva or seminary. Almost all students in a dormitory come from out-of-town and therefore welcome Shabbos invitations each week. Just call the yeshiva and have them put your name on their hospitality list.

4. Contact a kiruv organization. Outreach professionals are constantly looking to expand their lists of potential hosts where they can send newcomers to Orthodoxy for a true taste of Torah living.

5. Spread the word you’re looking. Let your friends and neighbors know you’re “open for business.” You cannot succeed in any business if you keep it a secret.

6. Call a Jewish immigrant aid association. All immigrants are eager for social contact with local, established families. In many cases, your Shabbos table may be their first opportunity in their lives to encounter Yiddishkeit. The thrill of having an adult at your seder who has never attended one in his life, for example, is indescribable. And the glow in your home will last long after the Pesach dishes have been stored away.

7. Approach strangers in your community. Besides fulfilling the Mishna in Pirkei Avos (4:15), greeting newcomers is probably the most effective method to meet people who are looking for a Shabbos invitation.

8. Give your guests an open invitation. By giving your guests an open invitation to return, you increase the chances that they will call you on their own, without your having to call them.

9. Let your guests bring their friends. Some of our “best customers” originally came to our home as the companion of a returning guest.

10. Form a hachnosas orchim committee. Whether community-wide or only within your shul, an hachnosas orchim committee can serve as a “matchmaking” service, pairing prospective hosts with those looking for invitations.

The committee need not be run by a potential host. One very active committee in New York City, for example, was managed for many years by a single woman who became quite skilled at finding homes for even some hard-to-place guests. (She has since gotten married, perhaps her reward in this world for her active involvement in hachnosas orchim.)
Forty years ago, one could still detect in society at large those elements of decency and shame that have always characterized a civilized people. Dress was modest, and even the most aggressive non-conformists exhibited a modicum of decency.

The physics lab at a university was as likely a place as any to encounter trendsetters, and I can well recall the reaction of colleagues who learned that a certain faculty member had openly displayed a certain pornographic magazine. But he, too, retained an element of his upbringing: “I’m only reading it for the articles,” he argued.

Oh, What a Tangled Web!

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BIRDS IN THE WILDERNETS

This was in line with a noble tradition, as people watched TV “only for the news,” and — since then — use their VCR’s “only for chassuna movies,” and read secular Jewish weeklies “because of the quality features.”

We chide each other gently even as we know that sometimes there are good reasons for permitting outside influences to enter the Jewish home. Thus, I find myself discomfited on occasion by students who watch the Learning Channel and know more about recent scientific developments than I. I have remained steadfast — perhaps because I am a senior professor with tenure. What if I weren’t? Wouldn’t we admit, if pressed, that earlier generations would consider many of the ads and articles in our breakfast table New York Times to be salacious? But, of course, “we must keep up.”

The advent of the computer presents a challenge of a new kind. Many people view the PC as an invaluable tool, and in fact, some yeshivos readily comply with State mandates requiring its inclusion in the curriculum. Parents, particularly those who use the computer at work, purchase home computers (“for the kids”), little realizing that this device can expose the family to avoda zara, gilui arayos and shefichas damim (idolatry, immorality and murder) with economy and effect. Tragically, the personal computer has a special attraction to bright, creative and imaginative children: the instant gratification of challenges overcome is often enough to draw a young boy away from poring over his sefarim.

Even worse is the Internet, which has become, in a very real sense, the repository of the sum total of all human knowledge. There is virtually nothing that has been printed in the English language that is not within easy access to a ten-year-old computer operator. Nor is there any scene, process or discussion that is more than a few keystrokes away.

Torah too. Some people have been using the Internet to reach out to baalei teshuva. Others have been publishing shiurim (in English) for the immediate world. Daf Yomi study sheets, review, discussion sheets, etc. are also available to anyone, free of charge. Might this group not include women’s study groups or non-Jews who are curious about the Talmud?

The Internet provides an easy path to every kind of filth, every corrosive idea, every kind of idol worship that the sick mind can conjure.

WE HAVE BEEN WARNED

Three years ago, Yoseph Herman wrote about the “Landmines Along the Information Highway” in the February 1995 Jewish Observer, describing (and predicting) the development of the Internet, its benefits for the businessperson, and its dangers.

The intervening years have proven him correct, and it was only a matter of time before our Gedolim would be heard from.

On Wednesday, January 14, 1998, a powerful statement by the Roshei Yeshivos sitting on the Rabbinical Board of Torah Umesorah appeared in the Yated Neeman urging parents to keep the Internet out of the home and where circumstances mandate that it be present, extreme safeguards be taken. Otherwise, the Internet should remain in one’s place.
of business.

The question that arises, of course, is whether the corrosion that accompanies the Internet will lead our Gedolim to discourage or forbid the Internet in the office as well.

INTERNET?

Voices will urge them not to do so. Orthodox Jews are part of the outside world which has decided it wants to communicate electronically. Employers who want to reach employees where and whenever will show little patience for those of us who cannot be reached through the Internet. Customers must be reached at the location of their choice, and the Internet is burgeoning as an advertising vehicle and as a medium of commerce at a rate that was inconceivable only a few years ago.

People who deal with government (like me) are crippled without regular access to certain sites. New regulations, conversations, early warnings, complete texts and notices all appear on the Internet. People who live in Washington get some of this information first hand; people who live outside of the Beltway get this from the websites. People with neither Internet nor Washington get pitying glances.

INTERNET!

Others will point to an earlier age, when parnassa (livelihood) considerations centered around survival, around food on the table, and shoes for almost barefoot children. Jews in such dire circumstances often left their Eastern European homes to seek a livelihood in America, with consequences that impelled the saintly Chofetz Chaim to write Nidchet Yisroel. This sefer was intended to encourage Jews to remain steadfast in their commitment to Torah, but the Chofetz Chaim knew full well that many would fail. The “true and proper way,” he argued, was to avoid going to “these lands.” And to those individuals who had left and succeeded in making it in the New World, he counselled: “The Creator who provides sustenance for all will provide parnassa at home.”

We are a noble, intellectual people. We have survived in spite of wealth, not because of it, and we are well practiced in the nisyon (challenge) of coping with decadent civilizations. The lessons of history point to the ghetto, not to the Gymnasium as the means for survival of Torah. “We are ready to make the sacrifice,” some of us will announce. “Parnassa was not the only consideration for our forebears, nor is it for us.”

IT WILL NOT BE AN EASY DECISION

As noted, it will mean weaning away Torah Jews from the real world. The Internet is fast becoming essential for certain correspondence, communication, data manipulation and storage. The Internet is often the first stop for people desperate to learn about the latest treatments of a suddenly relevant disease. And the video-conferencing, which will be so important a factor in easing the burden of travel, will take place almost exclu-
sively here. Even now, telephone conversations grace by photos are enhancing station-to-station communication.

The exploding Distance Learning industry makes it unnecessary for sensitive young people to physically attend a college to obtain a degree. But it does require extensive presence on the Internet. And therefore, another deal with the Devil.

But we, more than most, should realize that we cannot deal with the Devil, no matter how he is cloaked. In 1783, Moses Mendelssohn published The Be’ur, a German translation of the Tanach, thereby singlehandedly creating the Haskalla. From the translated Bible, “Jews learned the German language; from it they imbibed culture; with it there was born a new desire for German nationality; as a result of its popularity was inaugurated a new system of Jewish education.”

And not just in Germany. Those who carried the poison of the “enlightenment” into Poland and Russia clothed it with concerns for the crushing poverty of the Jewish people (“We must teach trades,” “We need secular subjects in the Jewish school”). I would venture to say that two hundred years ago when Torah homes were also offered a Communication Highway to the outside world, they engaged in the same kind of discussions as we. Only we have the benefit of two centuries of experience: we see the assimilation process begun by Mendelssohn in full effect to this very day. We, the remnants of the Jewish people, face the blandishments of the Devil once again. Some of us will know how to respond.

AND THE REST OF US?

Judging from the balanced and sensitive language accompanying the Daas Torah that emerged from the Torah Umesorah Rabbinical Board, a blanket issur may not soon be forthcoming. Evidently, there is a recognition that many of us, as parents, as employees, and as citizens, will have to cope with the Internet, in the office and in rare and special circumstances in the home. This, in turn, raises the question of safeguards. Not just for our children, but for us.

ARE SAFEGUARDS POSSIBLE?

We aren't alone in weighing the benefits of the Internet against the dangers. Decent people everywhere have forced legislators to pass laws aimed at controlling certain sites, and in response to parental demand, software has been developed to control corrosive influences which threaten children.

It's not enough. Even as inappropriate graphics and predictable keywords are censored, innocuous words and phrases glide right through. As a result, the Internet will continue to foster friendships, gather groups, modify hashkafos and generate plots. A ten-year-old child, who would never speak to a missionary on the street, thinks nothing of bringing the missionary's message into the home.

Children love learning about the contribution of Jews to civilization. They aren't always aware that “You-know-who was a Jew, didn't you know?” signals an attempt at Shmad.

Young minds are easily manipulated, particularly one on one; “chat” group leaders are acutely aware of this potential, and adept at its use.

We may anticipate — and select against sites containing the word “homosexual.” But will we know to prevent children access to “Kabbala” sites, to “Moshiach” sites, to “Miracles”?

Software which is only partially effective is doubly dangerous. Parental fears are allayed, the PC is allowed to enter the home, and one sophisticated child later, the walls around the Torah home have been breached.

SHAMEWARE

Joseph Herman described it well when he spoke of the safeguard of shame. There are no circumstances under which many of us will per-

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mit the Internet into our homes. But for those who do, there is no means as effective as shame to keep one on the straight and narrow.

Coincidentally, about the time the Herman article appeared, I submitted a patent disclosure of a means to record what takes place on a computer screen. The idea was quite simple. At random times, the computer would be instructed to record everything on the screen and store it in a location in the hard drive. This snapshot could also be printed or transmitted at some later time.

Thus a parent might permit a child to use the Internet to research the topographies of the world’s six largest mountains. Three hours later, the child announces his homework is done. The following morning the father reviews a special file on the drive and discovers six snapshots of the screen were recorded the evening before. Two relate to geology, one is a screen with an unpleasant graphic, two screens with text from unusual discussion groups, and one is a shot of a game. Clearly child and parent will discuss.

Some skilled young people will disable the software, but that too would signal that something was amiss. In fact, the mere presence of such software on a machine would do wonders for the quality and value of the child’s Internet interaction. The same “Tattle Tale” controls could be used to ensure that employees are using their time wisely during the day, and not playing games, sending confidential information to a competitor, or otherwise abusing their position.

There are those who will decry the Big Brother aspect of all this, but I suspect very few will be from our own community.

I contacted many computer experts in our community, seeking to bring this idea to fruition. “Not too hard,” I was told. “Just a few lines of code.” But somehow, the lines never got written. Maybe it was for the best, I thought. Maybe the availability of foolproof software would encourage families to make the decision for the PC in their absence.

I have also suggested to experts that they extend the swimmer’s “buddy” system to the computer. The magic of networking can enable two friends to monitor what is taking place on each other’s screens. Similarly, an employee who knows that his/her screen can appear at random in a corner of a supervisor’s monitor will have a much more fulfilling day. I investigated hardware, as well as software solutions, to no avail.

A solution will be found, but meanwhile failure abounds. And with failure, the use of the Internet by Torah Jews must be discouraged wherever possible, in keeping with the dictate of our Gedolim. In my own professional activities I will try to pay a (non-Jewish) student to monitor crucial sites, and possibly service bureaus will sprout to enable us to have access to the resources on the Internet, without exposing ourselves to the temptations that lurk.

There are pangs of conscience to all this, and words like “inconsistent” and “hypocritical” swim in the background. But we need not feel too guilty. The Orthodox Jewish community is probably alone in its concern, and until such time as there is further direction from Gedolim, there should be no lack of people anxious to help us (for a fee) take advantage of this tool without risking our neshamos.

BRought Up Short

Sometimes I wonder what it would be like were a hacker to develop an undetectable virus which would direct the hard drives of Internet users to send random snapshots of the screen to a central repository, with accompanying name of user, for everyone to see!

But we already have this, don’t we?

And so much more! All our telephone conversations and the radio programs we hear (“only when driving”) are being recorded as well. There exists a vast repository, with complete record, our names attached, awaiting us in the World to Come.

...
It All Started With a Gift....

A magnificent gift! An expensive, fabulous gift! My uncle, who always enjoys showers us with gifts, overdid himself this time. He presented us with a brand new Windows 95 computer fully loaded with dozens of programs (only educational, at my request). My home went through a total transformation since that gift arrived. The once boisterous and disarrayed house became quiet and neat, as the children ran down to the basement each day to experiment and enjoy this new wonder machine. Peace reigned. I happily lived in a children-free kitchen.

One day as I went to the basement to check on my little angels (I haven’t called them that for three years), I felt an involuntary shiver go down my back. There they were — all five of them crowded around the computer watching the oldest play an educational game. The king on the computer looked mad as he ground his teeth. My son had answered another math example correctly, enabling him to walk off with one more of the king’s treasures. “Boom Boom” went the sound, as my son clicked the mouse at the tree, discovering yet another treasure.

My little Ephraim stared in fascination. His big blue eyes had shown similar fascination when he looked at the Aleph Beis and licked the honey in the cheder at his upsherin a few weeks earlier. I wondered to myself, will the Aleph Beis still hold the same magic for Yossie? Or will they have to compete for his interest over the colorful animation of the computer?

I stayed on... I watched more. Different programs were put on. I observed silently how they spelled words correctly. (My children were probably too engrossed in the computer program to realize my presence.) “Spell dance,” demanded the computer, and so they did. D-A-N-C-E. “Right on,” complimented the hidden voice behind the speakers. Then, rewarding their efforts, a ballerina (in a sleeveless, short tutu) performed a dance for them! Word and picture association, it’s called, I remembered. This is education in 1998!

I SHOULD BE THRILLED, BUT...

I couldn’t watch anymore. I returned to my quiet kitchen and dialed my older sister (and advisor). “I should be thrilled the kids are busy,” I lamented, “and yet something about these programs disturb me. Until now, I built my home exclusively with kedusha, not permitting anything alien to seep into my mishkan me’at, my miniature sanctuary. Is this any different? Are the designers of educational programs sensitive to offensive gestures, dress or mannerism that their cartoon figures are feeding into the minds of my pure, young kinderlach? Do I want them to say ‘right on’ or to wiggle like the cartoon figures, or to experience the violence of taking someone’s treasure or shooting down objects? Perhaps I’m overdoing it, making a big deal over innocent animated games that are simply part of the contemporary American scene.”

I paused as I awaited the sage advice of my sister. She replied: “Dina, listen to your gut feeling. If you feel something is wrong, it probably is below your standard and you should put a stop to it.” She remembered hearing a similar idea on the topic of tznius. If one is in doubt about buying a dress because perhaps it’s not in perfect harmony with standards of tznius, then let her stay away from it. In other words, follow your instincts.

“But,” I wailed, “what about my neat home and the quiet working time I gained with the kids busy with the computer?”

My sister sounded surprised. “I don’t think you’d accept that as an excuse to let the kids watch TV. When something is wrong, convenience never enters the picture. Besides, throughout our history, drawing on mestras nefesh in raising children has only had beneficial results.”

No more had to be said. I was convinced....

I’m sorry, though. If you thought I was going to offer you my computer, it is not available. We are still using it, and printing away. We create beautiful cards to cheer older relatives and to wish friends happy birthday. The kids made striking Chanuka posters to decorate a party. As far as the standard programs, they might not be so terrible, but for my kids I want only the best!

Mrs. Smith is on the faculty of Machon Bais Yaakov Hilda Birn School of Brooklyn. This is her first appearance in these pages.
The Unbroken Glass
Fifteen Years of Averting Tragedy in Klal Yisroel

SUCCESS: DISCOVERING INCOMPATIBILITY

For years, the children's ward for genetic diseases at Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center would house as many as sixteen Tay-Sachs victims, and often, there was a waiting list for beds. In 1996, the ward had not one Tay-Sachs patient. This good tidings is surely indicative of the achievements of the Dor Yeshorim organization and of the great siyata dishmaya with which its work has been blessed since its founding in 1983.

Over the last decade-and-a-half, it has become routine for yeshiva students and Bais Yaakov girls to have their blood tested for possible carrier status, through Dor Yeshorim's anonymous testing program, and to check the compatibility of a shidduch when it has been suggested. Since its founding, Dor Yeshorim has found some two hundred prospective matches incompatible. As anyone familiar with the history of a baby stricken with Tay-Sachs (or other genetic disease) can testify, the suffering of such children and their families is indescribable. Even if only one incompatible match had been avoided, it would have been well worth the founding of Dor Yeshorim for that alone. On the other hand, those who have married after having ascertained that they are genetically compatible, have the peace of mind of knowing that the diseases for which they have been tested will not afflict their children.

KEY TO SUCCESS

The key to Dor Yeshorim's phenomenal success has been its system of confidentiality, which is the cornerstone of its program. This has served a three-fold purpose: it has made genetic testing in our community a routine matter without stigma; it has saved carriers of genetic diseases from unfounded fears regarding their status; and it has educated the Torah community in understanding that healthy siblings of stricken children are at absolutely no risk of producing such children of their own, provided that they make use of the pre-shidduch screening so that they will marry non-carriers.

Close to ten thousand proposed shidduchim are checked annually by Dor Yeshorim without anyone knowing his or her actual carrier status, and thus, without any reason for concern—as long as the proposed match is compatible.

DIRECTION AND GUIDELINES

Dor Yeshorim's achievements have not gone unnoticed in the medical community. Its director has been invited to lecture at the National Institute of Health, as well as many schools of medicine, including New York University and Harvard. In 1996, the organization was the recipient of the Robert Wood Johnson Community Health Leadership Award.

1 It cannot be stressed enough that testing and checking for compatibility should not be postponed until engagement is seriously being considered. In any event, it should be understood that exchanging Dor Yeshorim i.d. numbers to check compatibility is not a commitment towards engagement; it is simply the wise thing to do.

2 Upon being tested, the person is given an i.d. number, which is recorded along with his or her birthday; when checking compatibility, the i.d. number along with day of month (not year) of birth are submitted; only one of the parties need be a non-carrier for the match to be deemed "compatible."

3 In a letter dated September, 1997, the renowned Rosh Yeshiva and posek Rabbi Chaim Pinchus Scheinberg of Jerusalem wrote, "I wish to strengthen the hands of those involved in a mitzva, namely the directors of the Dor Yeshorim organization, that they should continue to perform their testing in total confidentiality, whereby those being tested are not told the actual results (of the individual's test). This is the correct way."

Rabbi Finkelman, a rebbe in Yeshiva Darchei Torah, Far Rockaway, NY, is a frequent contributor to these pages, including "Windows of Heaven," in Mar. '98. He is the author of several biographies published by Artscroll Mesorah Publications, as well as the recent More Shabbos Stories.
unscrupulous outsiders who may have their own reasons for wanting to know the compatibility of a given shiduch. Additionally, before this policy was instituted, there was a case where a shadchan called to check on the compatibility of two matches. One was found to be compatible, the other was not, and the shadchan mixed up the results. Thankfully, the mistake was caught in time.

A TIMELESS LESSON

When I think of Dor Yeshorim, I think of Rabbi Yaakov Yosef Herman, legendary pioneer of Torah life in America. In All for the Boss, Ruchama Shain's stirring biography of her father, Reb Yaakov Yosef, she describes how at age twelve, he spent Shabbos alone on a park bench in Manhattan, with nothing but three small challos for sustenance. With no immediate family in America to care for him, young Yaakov Yosef had been boarding with a family who had grossly mistreated him. He had left their house late Friday afternoon, never to return. There on the park bench he promised himself that when he would get married and have a home of his own, he would see to it that others would not suffer the loneliness that he was experiencing at that moment. His house would be open to all; there would always be room for another guest.

And so it was. The home of Reb Yaakov Yosef and his devoted wife was open to all, every day of the year. On Shabbos, more than twenty guests would gather around their table for each meal. "Business is booming!" Reb Yaakov Yosef would exclaim in delight. This was a man who felt tremendous personal pain and was determined to do everything possible so that no other Jew should experience similar pain.

And that is how Dor Yeshorim came into being. The organization's founder and director suffered the loss of a number of Tay-Sachs children. He has made it his life's mission to do everything in his power to help ensure that others should not suffer as he and his family did. May Hashem bless him for his efforts, and may the concern and self-sacrifice that Jews show for one another be rewarded with a flow of compassion and healing from Above for all of Klal Yisroel.

4 For this reason, requests to check compatibility are responded to only if the caller is calling from the phone number that was submitted at the time he or she was tested. If the number has changed, this should be reported as soon as possible.

It should also be noted that anyone who had their blood tested before 1995 should call Dor Yeshorim to ensure that they are included in the full range of genetic testing that the organization offers (current testing includes four genetic diseases). In most cases, further testing will not be necessary.

5 Published by Feldheim.

Baruch Hashem, he has healthy children and grandchildren. He reports that his fortunes took a decided turn for the better from the time that he decided to dedicate himself to serving the Klal.
The following are reviews of two recent works of Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. An ordained rabbi, Dr. Twerski is Assistant Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine, and founder and medical director of Gateway Rehabilitation Center in Pittsburgh. He is the author of many popular Jewish books.

Not Just Stories by Rabbi Abraham Twerski (Shaar Press, 370 pages, h.c. $22.99, s.c. $19.99)

BOOKS IN REVIEW

out the inn to which his father had referred.

When Rabbi Elazar tasted the soup, he experienced a spiritual delight, as though he were eating of the offerings of the Altar in the Temple in Jerusalem. He asked the hostess, "Please, tell me, what ingredients do you use for this soup?"

The woman began crying, "I am so sorry that it is so meager. I do not have any spices to put in. All I did was cook the beans with water and then I prayed to God: Master of the Universe! You have provided me with the mitzva of preparing a meal for a great tzaddik. If only I had meat, vegetables and spices, I would prepare a meal for him, but I have nothing. But You, Master of the Universe, have everything. You have Gan Eden, where there all the finest scents and flavors. Please put some of these in the soup, so that my holy guest can enjoy his food."

Rabbi Elazar said, "Now I know why my father longed for this soup. This pious woman's sincere prayers were answered, and the soup did indeed have the taste of Gan Eden."

A similar idea is expressed in Chapter 27, "A Self-Made Man," the story of the tzaddik Rabbi Hirsh Meshorees. The following is an extract from that story:

... One day the shammash ( sexton) took ill, and had no choice but to ask Hirsh to make... [the renowned tzaddik Rabbi Mendel of Fristik's] bed, cautioning him to do it exactly as he had seen him do it. Hirsh thanked Hashem for this privilege, and as he carefully arranged the straw, recited the Psalms with great devotion, praying to God that his efforts succeed in giving the tzaddik his much-needed rest.

The following day, Rabbi Mendel asked his shammash who had prepared his bed the night before. The shammash began excusing himself, explaining that he had taken sick. "I never slept so peacefully before," Rabbi Mendel said. "My dreams were heavenly, and when I awoke to the midnight prayers, I felt the holiness of the Psalms inspiring me."

... Rabbi Mendel had thus sensed the love and devotion that Hirsh had infused into his bed, and told the shammash that Hirsh was to make his bed every day.

But don't be misled into thinking that all stories are about prayer; they cover the complete scope of Jewish thought, from concern for others to holiday observance. The following story, for example, illustrates the importance of integrity, from Chapter 49, "Rigorous Honesty":

A young man reported to the Chofetz Chaim how thrilled he was that he was able to procure tefillin of exceptional quality [for 18 rubles, which was at that time a huge sum, whereupon he replied]... "And were you equally diligent that all precautions were taken that these 18 rubles were as perfect as the tefillin? How was the money earned? If money was borrowed and not repaid promptly on the specified date, that constitutes wrongful possession of another's property. It certainly is praiseworthy to have perfect tefillin, but they must be bought with perfectly honest money."

In fact, by the time you finish Not Just Stories — and you might finish it very quickly because it is absolutely riveting — you will have been exposed to and inspired in every topic of hashkafa. Even if you are a baal hashkafa, the freshness and the condensed nature of having a lifetime of hashkafa lessons in one powerful book will revitalize your drive. I, in fact, have read and re-read the book numerous times over the past year, drawing inspiration anew with each reading, and giving chizuk to others with these stories and lessons when they are in need.

Many people that I have encountered unfortunately don't know, have forgotten, or simply don't apply much hashkafa in their routine lives; their actions are not energized by the beauty and encouragement of the Torah outlook on daily life and mitzvah performance. For many, mitzvos are perfunctory, berachos are by rote, and life

IMPELLED TO INTROSPECT

Rabbi Twerski's Not Just Stories is a collection of Chassidic stories that are not just stories; they have lessons of life that he brings out and expounds upon with his profound Torah knowledge. Unlike most of his other books, this one preaches Torah in Torah terms (as opposed to psychological terms and concepts). These teshuvah-rousing, awe-inspiring, heart-rending, and tear-jerking stories are collected and arranged by theme, accompanied by little vertlach enhancing the stories, hopefully raising the reader's sensitivity to a particular aspect of Torah hashkafa. For example, Chapter 54, "The Secret Ingredient," contains the following story:

Toward the end of his life, Rabbi Elimelech of Lizenhov ate very little... [He once] said, "I wish I could eat, but my body rejects all things physical. Ah! One time, during my years of wandering in exile, I lodged at an inn near a certain village and there I ate a delicious soup. If that were available, I could eat it. But that is so far away!"

Many years later, [his son] Rabbi Elazar happened to be in that village, and sought D.M. Ernest learns in Mesivta Torah Vodaas and teaches High School English.

D. M. Ernest
is robotic. Chazal teach that when it comes to ruchniyus (spirituality), if a person isn't going up, then he is going down: He would be advised to pick up Rabbi Twerski's Not Just Stories and get headed in the right direction.

**Lights Along the Way** by Rabbi Abraham Twerski (Artscroll, 328 pages, h.c $21.99, s.c. $18.99)

**MESILLAS YESHARIM REVISITED**

For many of us, *Mesillas Yesharim* (Path of the Just), by Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato (Ramchal), is a sefer that causes us much anxiety. Some give up hope before they even read it, thinking: “Its principles are only applicable to a person who can divorce himself completely from gashmius (involvement in the material and physical pleasures).” Others, although they have read it many times, are overwhelmed by its lofty principles, finding it difficult to apply them to their everyday lives. Of course, there are also those who simply are not interested in mussar (ethical improvement) at all, as well as those who learn it regularly, sincerely applying its teachings.

Regardless of which type you are — the first, second, third, or even fourth — reading Rabbi Abraham Twerski's *Lights Along the Way* is a fascinating way to learn some important lessons of Mesillas Yesharim. In it, Rabbi Twerski reproduces important paragraphs in vowelized Hebrew and English translation, and then expounds on them, bringing quotes from the whole gamut of classical Jewish texts, from *Chumash* to halachic sources interwoven with historical insights, illustrative anecdotes, principles of clinical psychology, and other areas of secular and scientific knowledge. With these, he makes the original text meaningful and applicable to the reader, each on his own level.

Each section of the commentary builds upon the novel information and interpretation presented earlier, enriching the whole text with a freshness that is very satisfying, particularly for the person who is already familiar with the original. His commentary is designed to bring out important lessons for today from Ramchal's work which can often be too enigmatic for the average reader to directly apply to his own life because of its brevity. (The Vilna Gaon commented that he had not encountered one superfluous word in the first eight chapters.) But, with *Lights Along the Way*, even the hesitant reader will be guided through the text, inspired to improve himself, and motivated with practical applications for today's living.

While some commentaries of this genre use the text as a springboard for their own indirectly related drasha, Rabbi Twerski’s commentary usually flows naturally out of the text in a very readable, lucid English. The writer’s style is so clear that many deep concepts are well-explained in very few words. This economy of words is a major contributor to the fact that this commentary, which ranges from painfully serious to humorous, from deeply esoteric Kabbala to more accessible *psihat*, is — at all times — captivating and enjoyable.

This book is especially suitable for the English-speaking layman (and woman), because of its content — ranging as it does from advice to hashkafa, to secular knowledge, on subjects ranging from the purpose of creation to suffering in this world, to psychology, and more. For that same reason, I would suggest that it is also excellent for rebbi’im (for example, as a tool to make their lessons in *Mesillas Yesharim* more relevant to today’s yeshiva bachiur). Anyone, and everyone, can get a boost from *Lights Along the Way*.

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**MY MUSSAR SEDER WITH REB YISROEL MEIR**

In Rabbi Yechiel Perri's article about his sessions with “Reb Yisroel Meir” (Feb. '98), the author describes his profound appreciation for the way he discovered the subject’s deeper levels of personal tzidkus (piety is a poor translation), well hidden beneath layers of “conventional” tzidkus. In keeping with Reb Yisroel Meir’s status as a baal mussar, it was deemed appropriate to omit his family name. In response to a number of inquiries, however, it seemed preferable that we inform our readers that the subject was Rabbi Yisroel Meir Heiman הירע.

A *talmid* of Yeshivas Ner Israel in Baltimore, he had an exceptionally close relationship with the late Mashgiach, Rabbi Dovid Kronglas הירע (see *JO* March '75). He lived in Far Rockaway for the last 30 years, where he had a profound impact on others, served as a primary grade Rebbe in the Hebrew Academy of Long Beach, and is survived by his widow Rebbetzin Sarah Heiman, principal in Torah Academy for Girls (Far Rockaway) and five children.

Yehi zichro baruch!

**CORRECTIONS**

In the article on Louis J. Septimus הירע (Mar. '98), the photograph on p.30 shows Mr. Septimus with a Sefer Torah, holding an unidentified child; he was his grandson Yakov Septimus. The audio tape attached to his alarm clock (p.34) had a recording of his own voice singing “Avinu Malkeinu.”
PROTEST MAY PAY, BUT IS IT WARRANTED?

To the Editor:

In reference to “Protest Pays” (Jan. ‘98): upon viewing an educational film in a museum with his children, the author was shocked to find that it contained scenes that were “objectionable by Torah standards, but apparently not by educational standards.” He had expected “at least a warning... which would have warranted a P.G. rating in a regular theater.”

It is unclear to me where the author’s initial assumption that all was spiritually safe was coming from. He writes that the film “was billed as an educational one” and that the museum staff issued no warning. So what? I submit that at the time the author entered the museum, he should have been fully aware that there was a risk of viewing inappropriate exhibits. Such is the society we are living in today. Ever since the early 1900’s, we have been in a progressively permissive era, in a society where every opportunity to desensitize the public to immodesty is pounced upon.

Furthermore, by secular standards, it is quite possible that the above-mentioned scenes were perfectly acceptable, and this even from a Torah point of view. I’m no scholar, but to my knowledge gentiles are not obligated to refrain from kirkur or even histaklus (avoiding prurient scenes or thoughts). Did the museum claim to have had rabbinical supervision?

The author was then further incensed by the seeming indifference of the other religious viewers (some of them bearded, although I fail to recognize the significance of that), and their passive attitude. He felt that they were obligated to protest not only “to let off steam and express moral outrage,” but also “to protect the rest of us from encountering the same hor (spiritual pothole) in a reshus harabbim (public domain).”

To my surprise, I found myself siding with his position. I would agree, for example, that were it to be within my power to enact some sort of agreement with the bus system not to post immodest advertisements on the buses that enter our community, that it would be my duty to do so. There is, however, a basic difference. The buses are entering our domain and there’s no stopping them. Unless we seclude ourselves behind the four walls of our homes we are forced to observe them. Now that is a bor birestus harabbim. As opposed to our entering their territory, their places of entertainment or education. If there is fear of immoral exposure, perhaps there is no justification of being there in the first place (as the author himself agrees in his concluding paragraph). Certainly their say-so does not kasher it for us.

I’m not advocating total isolation from the society around us. I don’t think that’s possible; and even if it were, it

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wouldn't be my place to say so. However, I don't believe that this called for expressing "moral outrage." In other words, my conclusion would not have been "How dare they!" but rather: "My mistake, this wasn't for me." In fact, I believe that the bearded man's response was correct. We are in galus. It's not our place to tell them how to run their places of entertainment. Nor must their institutions of education conform with our Torah needs. Let us rather focus on our forms of entertainment, and see to it that they stand up to Torah-true measures.

MENDY WIENER
Lakewood, NJ

Author's Response:

Mr. Wiener raises some valid questions. I welcome the opportunity to fill in some relevant details which I omitted from my original article.

On what basis, he asks, did I assume that the museum was "spiritually safe"? First, this was not a museum of natural history, cinema or art. This was a maritime museum which contained a small aquarium and other exhibits on marine life — hardly a venue one might suspect as being spiritually hazardous.

Second, the film was described as "aerial views of the Grand Canyon." No mention was made of any human actors whatsoever.

Does this constitute "rabbinical supervision"? Certainly not. And as I asserted at the end of the article, "a museum is never a guaranteed spiritually-safe venue for a Chol Hamo'ed outing."

In all fairness, however, I was not exactly reckless in my choice of Chol Hamo'ed entertainment. Nor was I alone. The man I quoted, for example, was not only wearing a beard, but also a black suit and hat. He was not a businessman but a kollel Yungerman. A high percentage of the audience was similarly attired, which combined to lull me into erroneously assuming that I was not out of bounds.

True, "Alle essen du" doesn't make it kosher. But it can explain why someone might drop his guard, somewhat.

Now, for the record: yes, it was a mistake. But once I fell in, I do believe that it was my place to express my opinion. Democracies are not only for liberals. Why should my voice calling for greater decency be silenced? Should only those who want more violence and immorality speak up?

No, non-Jews have no prohibition against hirhur and histaklus. But are we prohibited from stating that all would be better off without watching such scenes? Years ago, the American Medical Association came out against television. Why are they allowed to express their views while religious Jews must remain silent?

Furthermore, just as I "fell in" and mistakenly entered that theater, undoubtedly and unfortunately, other religious Jews will follow. If the producers of the movie keep their word, "to recut the movie and remove the scenes that offended [me]," and as a result, even one fellow Jew is spared from watching prohibited scenes, will that not be beneficial?

Finally, Mr. Wiener may have written his letter before he saw the letter-to-the-editor from Paulette Sora Yaged (Mar. '98). I am not endorsing her having watched the movie that was "shown in the jurors' waiting room which featured vile and sadistic violence." But her success story illustrated how much good can be accomplished for Jew and non-Jew alike by just voicing a complaint.

Surely Mr. Wiener would not prefer that Ms. Yaged had kept quiet, telling herself that it was not her place to express disapproval. Had she taken the "This is galus" approach, that same "vile and sadistic" movie might still be playing. Had that been the case, I do not believe anyone of us would have been better off.

ELYAHU MAYER
New York, N.Y.

THE MESHICHISTIC THRUST VS. THE TRUE LUBAVITCH LEGACY

To the Editor:

Kudos to Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller for his timely article ("G-d-Centered or Rebbe/Messiah Centered: Which is Normative Judaism?" Mar. '98) in which he clearly points out the problems with the Meshichistic philosophy and movement. Their massive proofs from the Zohar and elsewhere that seek to support their Meshichistic views simply demonstrate how dangerous it is for the unlearned to study Zohar and other Kabbalistic works, and how easily one can misconstrue and misinterpret their meaning.

The Rambam (in his Pirush Hamishnahos to Sanhedrin, Chalek) discusses this problem at length. He clearly describes the "second Kat (category)" that explains...
The results are catastrophic. They have brought untold damage to the Rebbe's great legacy, as well as to the countless thousands of admirers who continue to follow in his ways. They malign the very name of Lubavitch and turn it into a laughing stock and mockery of all the Rebbe stood for. The vulgarities and demonizations against those who don't dance to their outlandish "Yechi" beat is deafeining. To "Bring Moshiach Now," there must be true peace, love and harmony among all Jews and not just catchy slogans and empty misleading propaganda!

It began with the innocent claim that the Rebbe may be the Moshiach and continued with the preposterous claim that the Rebbe is definitely Moshiach. After his passing, some continued on with the senseless claim that he will come back as the resurrected Moshiach, while another lunatic fringe group claimed that he still lives on physically while another lunatic fringe group claimed that he still lives on physically and is only in hiding. The lunacy progressed with some now referring to him as "Boreinu," omniscient, omnipotent, etc.—outright kefira—a natural outgrowth of this insanity. Once one veers off the trodden path, one never knows where it may lead!

The hatred they have generated, and the division and broken hearts that they have caused among their own families is beyond description. They have brainwashed young children with ideologies that have caused them to rebel against their own parents, and they have turned their own Torah institutions into havens of hatred for so-called "non-believers." The results are catastrophic.

Our belief in Mattan Torah is built on the Mesora that we have received from our parents, going back scores of generations, and is based on the concept that "A parent does not transmit falsehoods to his children," just imagine what will happen to these children when they grow up and realize they have been duped into believing a fairy tale no different than Santa Claus. A religion based on fantasies and illusions puts the entire belief of Mattan Torah into jeopardy!

Yet the Meshichistic movement threatens to bring his sacred edifice crashing down on the remnants of the ultra-Orthodox world!
down in shambles, as its adherents bring ridicule and scorn upon all that he devotedly built for half a century.

It is time to openly and strongly protest these flagrant and outrageous views and statements, which are far from the mainstream of Torah thought, and in direct opposition to “the clarity and purity of Torah” as expressed by the Rebbe himself. This must be done before the awesome accomplishments of the Rebbe are chas v’shalom consigned to the scrap heap of movements that did not survive their leader.

Rabbi Eli Teitelbaum, Director, 
Torah Communications Network
Brooklyn, NY

To the Editor:
May I share the following with your readers?

A number of years ago someone gave me a ride, and as we talked, the subject of baalei teshuva came up. A cousin of his had come for Shabbos, and he brought along a friend who was a baal teshuva. “And you’d never even know he was a baal teshuva.”

I asked what he meant, and he said, “Oh, you know, things like, well, he talks during davening.”

If two people who don’t even know each other could say the same thing about the same subject fifteen years ago, it’s time to openly and strongly protest these flagrant and outrageous views and statements, which are far from the mainstream of Torah thought, and in direct opposition to “the clarity and purity of Torah” as expressed by the Rebbe himself. This must be done before the awesome accomplishments of the Rebbe are chas v’shalom consigned to the scrap heap of movements that did not survive their leader.

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Brooklyn, NY
apart, it must be a commonly held thought. But why?
I don't know the answer, but if that's the case, then call me a baal teshuvah.

SAM LEVI
Brooklyn, NY

MR. SEPTIMUS' INSPIRATION TO LEAD THE TEFILLOS

To the Editor:

It was with a great deal of interest that I read the March '98 issue of The Jewish Observer. I was particularly drawn to the article concerning Louis J. Septimus. I knew Mr. Septimus when we were both very young, and he was always, even in his youth, a role model.

I was not surprised to learn from this article that Louis officiated at the high holiday services in a synagogue. I would like to clarify where Louis got his inspiration and his know-how of chanting the prayers in the proper, accepted manner.

In the 1920's, my father was the year-round baal tefilla in a synagogue. He was requested by the officers of the synagogue to prepare a small choir of 5 or 6 voices to accompany him. Louis Septimus was one of those few, as were my brother and I. He was at that time very talented in rendering the services, and it was from that time on that he had acquired the inspiration to lead the congregation in prayer. In fact, if my memory serves me, I believe that one of Louis's younger brothers was also a member of the choir.

Rabbi Avraham Chill
Jerusalem

The Jewish Observer, April 1998
Close to 3000 Participants in Lakewood For Pirchei Agudath Israel Siyum Mishnayos

Well over 2700 nine-to-thirteen-year-old Jewish boys converged on Lakewood, New Jersey, on Motza'ei Shabbos, March 7, for the 35th annual Pirchei Agudath Israel Siyum Mishnayos (Mishna-completion) celebration — the first time the much-anticipated event was held in New Jersey.

Over a thousand boys — from throughout the tri-state area and Jewish communities in cities as far away as Atlanta and Providence — arrived in time to experience the annual Pirchei Agudath Israel "Interbranch Shabbos" that preceded the Siyum.

The massive Saturday night celebration was held at the Bais Faiga Hall, a spacious site that was nevertheless quickly filled to overflow, forcing the activation of a contingency plan that utilized auxiliary rooms and hallways equipped with audio-visual monitors.

A hush fell over the thousands of boys as the evening’s two main speakers — Rabbi Aryeh Malkiel Kotler, Rosh HaYeshiva, Beth Medrash Govoha, and Rabbi Matisyahu Solomon, Mashgiach, Beth Medrash Govoha — addressed them.

And thousands of eyes turned as one when Rabbi Shimon Grana, Pirchei Agudath Israel’s national director, announced the arrival of Rabbi Nosson Wachtfogel, the revered Mashgiach emeritus of Beth Medrash Govoha, and informed the boys that the presence of such outstanding Torah luminaries was born of honor for the Torah they had studied. As the Mashgiach slowly advanced to the dais, all present rose and began to sing and dance.

To qualify for participation in the Siyum, each of the boys in attendance had to master at least two chapters of Mishna or memorize one. During the program, special certificates were awarded boys who had mastered or memorized large amounts of Mishna.

After the Siyum, Rabbi Grana expressed his deep gratitude to the entire Lakewood community for opening its homes, synagogues and study halls to the visiting boys — and for giving the guests a Shabbos and a Siyum that few of them will likely ever forget.
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