

# Rabbi Wichnin Writes

— ARTICLES AUTHORED BY —

**RABBI DOVID WICHNIN A"H**

PUBLISHED IN "DI YIDDISHE HEIM" MAGAZINE







B" H

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PUBLISHED IN HONOR OF THE BAR MITZVAH CELEBRATION  
OF HATOMIM CHAIM DOVID NOTA WICHNIN  
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## Foreword

The famous Sochatchover Rebbe known by the name of his Sefer 'Avnei Nezer' once paid a surprise visit to one of his wealthy Chasidim living in Warsaw. At the time the Alter Rebbe's portrait had been made available for the first time to the public for purchase and this chassid bought a picture and hung it on his wall. As his Rebbe was coming in to the house the chassid suddenly remembered that his Rebbe was strongly opposed to hanging up portraits. Not having the time to take it down he frantically tried covering it up and taking his Rebbe on an alternative route through the house. The Rebbe noticed this and asked him 'what are you hiding there? What are you trying to avoid?'. Asked directly he had to admit that he had bought a picture of the Alter Rebbe. The Avnei Nezer asked to see the picture. He looked at the picture and said 'I can see the Alter Rebbe in his Shulchan Aruch and his Sefer Tanya.'

As HASHEM blessed us to reach the momentous occasion of our Dovid's Bar Mitzvah, we wanted to share with our guests, family and friends a portrait of Dovid's namesake, his grandfather Rabbi Dovid Wichnin OBM. A proper biography of Rabbi Wichnin is yet to have been authored and there are many facets of his life that have to be properly described. He was a dedicated Shliach, a true Chossid, an exemplary teacher, a Lamdan of great caliber, a noble Rov and a true friend and listening ear to many.

Rabbi Wichnin OBM can be "seen" through how he expressed himself. Over the years Rabbi Wichnin wrote many articles that were published in the English section of "The Yiddishe Heim" a quarterly published by Nshei Ubnos Chabad partially in Yiddish and partially in English. Through these these articles one can get a glimpse of who he was and what he was.

The English section had the great Zechus that its articles were generally edited by the Rebbe who, in many instances, corrected ideas or wordings of these articles in his holy handwriting. In his articles, Rabbi Wichnin wrote and shared about timely issues and things that he understood to be important and relevant to the community. At times the Rebbe made certain subtle changes, sometimes taking out full paragraphs and at times even saying that a particular article isn't something that has to be emphasized at this time.

A little less than 2 months ago on the Seventeenth of Cheshvan we were stunned by the passing of Mrs. Mala Wichnin מ"ה Rabbi Wichnin's life companion. Dovid's grandmother

was a woman of great stature who was very educated and dedicated her life to teaching and making a palpable difference in the lives of the students she taught. One of the most important things in her life though was the constant awareness of that which her husband taught and shared whether in writing or in classes and Farbrengens that were recorded. Whenever the yearly cycle of Tanya study reached the times when it was Rabbi Wichnin's turn to be heard on the pre-recorded Tanya phone Shiurim she made a point of listening and reminding her sons שיחיו to listen, and if there was an article or a recording that was relevant to the particular time or situation it was of utmost importance to read or listen. As great as she was, she made herself "transparent" to the ideas and points that her husband related. So, a good biography about her would also have to be made up of Rabbi Wichnin's teachings.

As we are celebrating Dovid's Bar Mitzvah we want to express sincere Shevach Vehodaa to HASHEM from the depth of our hearts for bringing us to this milestone, and we are asking that he should continue to take care of Dovid and our whole family. Words can't express our gratitude to Abba and Mommy and our grandparents for everything we have from them. May they be showered from above with an abundance of blessings of health, Nachas and happiness. A huge Yasher Koach shout-out goes to Chaim Muss and all the Chassidische Bochorim at Rebbe Responsa for making this booklet a reality against the odds.

We find ourselves in very trying times for our people. Our minds and hearts are with the Yidden in Eretz Yisroel. We cry for their spilled blood, we Daven for the complete healing of all those wounded, the safety and wellbeing of the Yidden in Eretz Yisroel and all around the world and are anxiously waiting for the return of all the captives.

We cry out to HASHEM, tonight we are doing Teshuvah! We are pining to return to you more than ever. Please instead of us having to fast tomorrow morning, let Asarah Beteves be transformed in to the Yom Tov it is meant to be. Send us Moshiach NOW!

**Nachman Dov & Rochel Wichnin**

The 10<sup>th</sup> of Teves, 5784

## A Short Biography of Rabbi Wichnin A”H

Rabbi Chaim Dovid Nota Wichnin O"BM was born in the Chassidic city of Bobruisk on the 28th of Menachem-Av 5698 (1938). His father, Rabbi Nachman Dov z"l, was known in Lubavitch as Berel Schedriner named after his hometown Schedrin, the village built by the Tzemach Tzedek to help Jews support themselves by developing the land.

After WWII broke out, the family escaped to Samarkand, Uzbekistan where his mother and sister perished in 5702 (1941) because of the terrible hunger and sicknesses that prevailed in the city. Rabbi Wichnin left Russia with his father posing as Polish citizens wishing to return back home after the war. They lived in Hallein, Austria and then moved on to France where he studied in the new Lubavitcher Yeshiva in Brunoy. Finally, they settled in Montreal, Canada (5711-1951). Rabbi Wichnin enrolled in the Tomchei Temimim Yeshiva where he excelled in his learning. He was also recalled by his peers at the Yeshiva for his stellar personality.

Rabbi Wichnin first traveled to the Rebbe in Tishrei 5712 (1951). He got married in 5723 (1962) to and moved to Brooklyn, NY. There, he started a lifelong journey of teaching and educating in many Yeshivos and schools. He was also the principal of the Lubavitch Yeshiva in Boston.

In 5737 (1976) he was called upon to serve as the Rosh Yeshivah of Tiferes Bachurim in Morristown, NJ where he taught, inspired, and uplifted many hundreds of students and their families until his passing on the 26th of Tammuz 5755 (1995). During this time, he was also was the Rav of Congregation Tzemach Tzedek - Lubavitch in Monsey, NY.

Rabbi Wichnin is fondly remembered by his students and congregants for his wise advice, compassionate heart, and listening ear. His broad knowledge, coupled with his sense of humor, drew many to him. He guided and helped people, from all walks of life, spiritually, and materially. In his unique style, he made a point of connecting to everyone at their level and as a Chassid-Par-Excellence he made a lasting impression on those who met him. Decades later, he is still sorely missed by those whom he influenced.

## The Rebbe's Edits On an Article Authored by Rabbi Wichnin

*Published below, page ???*

public addresses, and in private conversations, the Rebbe always reaches a successful conclusion. He ~~never~~ does not recognize fatigue or discouragement. The chassidim must perforce react in kind.

Occasionally, a project begun with high hopes must be abandoned because of unforeseen circumstances. The chassidim, in a normal, all too human reaction, just give it up and forget about it. But no; the Rebbe, although recognizing the realities of the situation, urges patience and trust in G-d. Since the work was <sup>altogether</sup> undertaken for the sake of the A-mighty, He must and will help, explains the Rebbe. We must exercise patience and here, for G-d does not necessarily have to abide by our ~~schedules~~ and deadlines; He is Eternal and has all the time in the world and more.

Projects which people disregard in favor of major, more important endeavors. Whether a person is searching for a better Yeshivah for his child, a better doctor for a sick member of the family, G-d forbid, or even a better position, the Rebbe will give him his undivided attention. Any Jewish community in the world, no matter how remote and forsaken, commands the same attention, to which the hundreds of thousands of personal letters <sup>to</sup> which the Rebbe graciously replies <sup>every year</sup> testify. Nothing is too small or too big. Chassidim try to follow this example, to help a needy Jew spiritually or materially whenever we can. We are often reminded by the Rebbe's words or his radiant presence that we fail to live up to our ideal intentions.

Among Chassidim there is a tradition that the Rebbe's soul is a composite of ~~all~~ the souls of his followers. Many of his chassidim

The farbrengens - special celebrations of the chassidim - can be very strenuous, lasting for seven to eight consecutive hours ~~or more~~. It is usually very crowded, and after several hours people start feeling tired and thinking of taking a break, especially on those occasions when there is a lot of dancing. Until we take a good look at the radiant face of the Rebbe. After all, it is he who has been doing the real hard work the last six, seven hours, talking on a multitude of Torah subjects, sometimes for a straight hour. So <sup>surprised</sup> musing, we observe the Rebbe suddenly rise vigorously and burst into dance, infusing his prematurely tired chassidim with the divine energy which is so naturally his.

~~Contrary to many people's mistaken opinions,~~ The chassidim as a group are second to none in the quality and quantity of their Torah learning. The Rebbe asks this of them in addition to their deeds in the service of Klal



# CANDLE LIGHT

· *Yiddishe Heim Issue 26, Winter 5726 (1965)* ·

There is something very mystical about candlelight, nay, almost magical. It induces all kinds of elated feelings. Depending on the circumstances, it can inspire feelings of festivity, solemnity, and holiness.

Recently, the New York area was engulfed for twelve hours in darkness, dubbed the "black-out." Candlelight dominated the scene and inspired some very noble human traits and deeds. People were extremely helpful to each other. Teenagers, whom we associate with all kinds of mischief, rose to the occasion and made themselves quite useful in trouble spots like traffic intersections and subway tunnels. At the same time, reports had it that a minimum of crimes were committed on this candle-lit night. In short, the candlelight, it seems, inspired an upsurge of goodwill, and brought into the open the best of human nature.

In our own tradition, candles are an integral part of the ritual on many occasions, in joy and in sorrow. In fact, sometimes candles are used more than once in the course of the same eventful experience, to arouse different emotions and responses. During a wedding celebration, for example, lighted candles are carried by the couple's parents while

they lead their children to the chuppah. At that time, the thin candles with ever-flickering flames are very much a part of the sense of solemnity that overwhelms the assembled family and guests. Later on, however, everybody enjoys the wedding meal in an air of gaiety, for that the candles on the table are very much responsible.

Words, even the most poetic ones, are just too poor to express and describe the sense of peacefulness and bliss which the weekly Shabbos candles inspire in every Jewish home and heart.

At other occasions, however, candlelight is called upon to induce a mood of seriousness and deep contemplation concerning man's very existence. On Yom Kippur, for instance, candles are lit to remind us of the graveness of G-d's judgment, upon the living as well as upon those who are no longer with us. The close relationship between the Neshomo (soul) and candlelight is even more obvious when we kindle a yahrtzeit licht on the day a close relative departed this world. Even more indicative of the symbolic candle-soul relationship is the custom of lighting candles near a dying person's bed, and throughout the seven days of mourning.

Our sages tell us that the Neshomo is very similar to candlelight in its very form and behavior. Just as the candle-flame flickers steadily, thrusting itself upwards as though pulled by a heavenly power, so a Jewish soul steadily flickers- though, at times, only with a dim light- forever yearning and aspiring to the higher horizons of the spirit. Little wonder, then, that in our deepest moments, whether of joy or sorrow, we let candles express and communicate our innermost thoughts in their own mystical language.

Candles, however, have other dimensions of a more grandiose, impressive nature. In the Beis Hamikdosh, for example, the Neir Hama'arovi, (western light) burned longer, with the same amount of oil, than the other six lights of the Menorah, a miracle which served as a symbol of the Divine Presence in our midst. There, candlelight was the means for Divine revelation, which should once more make us ponder the mystical quality of candlelight.

This leads us inevitably to the very popular Mitzvah and holiday of Chanukah. The candle (or oil) lighting of

Chanukah is different from all other occasions of candle kindling throughout the entire year, in that any personal use of their light is forbidden. No use, that is, save one — looking at them. Yes, we may and should look straight into their bright flames, for these candles are master storytellers. They tell of many heroic episodes in our blighted history. Just as the Neir Hama'arovi gave living testimony to G-d's love for us, so the neiros Chanukah tell of our unwavering loyalty to Him through the worst of trials and tribulations. Our observance and dedication to this light of Chanukah will, we pray, be the means of meriting again our first gift of light — the Beis Hamikdosh with its divine Menorah.

We do not make any personal use of them, for the candles of Chanukah are not meant to express any personal emotions — only to speak the spiritual candle language to which the Neshomo can respond.

Next time, when candles are lit in our homes, let us reflect on their glow a little longer. Let us let the candle in our hearts — the neshomo — respond to the flickering language of the flames.

# GOOD LUCK, TENTH!

· *Yiddishe Heim Issue 28, Summer 5726 (1965)* ·

Many wonderful things and ideas in this world seem to be just out-of-luck. The "tenth" is one of those.

Some, at least, get off to a good start, a great beginning, and then somehow lose their charm for us. The "tenth," however, was not even that lucky. He was gravely mistreated even before he made his appearance, and has been repeatedly rejected ever since.

Ironically enough, the tenth has a great origin and a proud identity. Consider the way he was presented to us, from amid thunder and lightning and the Sounding of the Shofar; from amid flames of fire that enveloped a smoking mountain, a Majestic Voice — the Voice of Almighty G-d — presented us the tenth: Thou Shalt not Covet...! Let us consider some of the tenth's obvious merits, those qualities which should have ensured him a respectful place in the hearts of men.

The general idea of this commandment is indeed one of the most important pillars of all religion, since it implies the belief in G-d's personal supervision over every aspect of human life, even to the point of who should or should not have a particular house, or ox, or servant.

Furthermore, this commandment, perhaps more obviously than the others, states a very basic precondition for human happiness: the qualities of contentment and self-restraint.

It is even probable that because of its cardinal importance and great scope, it was chosen to be the tenth, by way of summation and climax to the first, great nine commandments.

But despite these many merits the Tenth has never been heeded in the right degree.

Let us consider some affairs of life, past and present, wherein people chose to reject the holy teachings of this great warning: *Thou shall not Covet* and see what were the results.

But before we go on, one point has to be made dear. There is no special prohibition against jealousy in the Torah, although it is one of the most despicable traits. For coveting or desiring someone else's possessions will inevitably lead to eventual jealousy, so that covetousness and jealousy have a cause and effect relationship. The Torah, therefore, has sought to warn us against the cause, thereby enabling us to avoid the ill effects.

In history, this indivisible pair, covetousness and jealousy, have many a time appeared together and left destruction in their wake.

Consider, for example, the first serpent who, because of his desire for Adam's great honor and new lifemate, was sparked with jealousy and manipulated — successfully — to bring about Adam's downfall. As the Torah puts it, this first Sin — a result of coveting — brought death and destruction to all three participants for all the generations to come. In passing, it may be noted that the traits of coveting and jealousy are here associated with the serpent, a despicable though undoubtedly clever creature.

Obviously Cain, the jealous brother of Hevel (Abel) did not learn a lesson from the serpent's adventures in jealousy, and committed the first recorded murder in history as a result of his ill feelings toward his brother.

The episode of Joseph and his brothers is well known. As we are also told, the brother's jealousy of Joseph's high-falutin dreams turned out to be an important link in the chain of events leading to the Egyptian exile.

Of no lesser importance is the lesson we can learn from Korach's rebellion against Moshe Rabeinu. Korach we know, coveted Moshe's high office and was jealous of his honor. The fierce hatred and strife which ensued had their sad results in the terrible

tragedy that befell Korach and his followers.

And so we could go on and on. But there is no need for it. It is by now quite obvious that perhaps no other commandment was transgressed as much — and resulted in such afflictions as was this tenth. One may even assume, with good reason, that the worshipping of idols common at certain periods in our history was a result of coveting the "popular" way of life common to their neighbors in or around Eretz Israel. We must admit, if we are to be honest with ourselves, that even amongst the best of us, the most learned and observant, these ugly twin-traits, jealousy and covetousness, are sometimes prevalent in a rather shocking degree. This, thank G-d, is not true of any other of the Commandments, certainly none of the other nine.

Now let us leave history to the historians and consider the rational basis for the "Tenth" from a believer's point of view. Doesn't coveting imply the mistaken notion that having things is merely a matter of grab and snatch. Doesn't the jealous individual look at his "victim" as a grabber who got his because he is shrewd and skillful at grabbing, so that it is the only right way of getting the things one desires? Needless to say, the true situation is, thank G-d, far different. As a magid (rabbi-preacher) once said: This world may be likened to a hospital (in more ways than one) where a visitor can observe

some patients eating chicken, some only a boiled egg, some having just a glass of milk. Others, however, beg for a glass of water and are refused. Not even a fool would conclude that the patients get whatever they are able to grab — so the shrewder or quicker patient is the better fed. It may seem an overly simplified parallel, but there are numerous moments when somebody's house or jewels or carpets strike our eyes and kindle in our hearts a certain "admiration" — when our minds get befuddled and won't operate even on such a simple level.

Of course, we rarely stop to consider that the things coveted are not always what they appear to be. The coveted house may be a burden upon its owner, or the lovely wife a curse to her husband, etc.

The example of the hospital explains yet another form of jealousy, which may be called "indirect jealousy," when one says: "Let him have his, I just want something exactly like it (or better)." At this moment he is unwilling to acknowledge the fact that the reason that one man sits on a throne, and another is a laborer on starvation wages is as unfathomable, and as unaccountable by purely human reckoning, as why man subsists on fruits and meats, while cows must eat hay and straw! The One that created them all knows them and their needs best and satisfies them accordingly.

This brings us to another and final observation. In Torah learning and interpretation we are told by our sages to follow the rule of "*Noutz tchiloson b'sohfon v'sohfon bi'tchiloson.*" Freely translated this means that in every holy unit composed of a sequence of events, the first and the last are to be understood as complementary and intimately connected.

Applying this rule to the Ten Holy Commandments, we find it very enlightening to see the close connection between the First and the Tenth Commandments.

As our Torah commentaries point out, it is an amazing fact that in the first commandment G-d did not present Himself to the world as the great Creator of heaven and earth and everything therein, as would be considered appropriate in the setting of great thunder and lightning, flames and smoke... Instead G-d chose to strike a personal note, (Kavyo- chol) saying: "I am your G-d that took you out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of bondage." It is therefore as clear as possible that G-d proclaims Himself a personal G-d to each one of us, Who cares and will care for our welfare to the minutest detail, just as He did in delivering those that He chose from the depths of torture and oppression to material and spiritual heights.

If Hashem is intimately concerned with each and everyone of us and masterminds



all the intricacies of an individual's life, should we not heed this admonition of the Tenth Commandment! *Thou Shalt Not*

*Covet....!* Of course we will. Good luck to you, Tenth!

## Talks for Teens

# THE WHOLE IS TRULY GREATER!

*· Yiddishe Heim Issue 31, Adar 5727 (1967) ·*

The whole can never be greater than the sum of its parts — this is a familiar and obvious rule of our physical environment. No one apple is larger than its two halves or its four quarters. No community is bigger than the sum of its individuals, etc.

Nonetheless, were this rule to be equally applicable to a person's life, it would prove to be quite bleak indeed.

In *Koheles* (Ecclesiastes), King Solomon, the wisest of all men, says: "All is vanity!" Because this phrase is repeated seven times, the Midrash tells us that he is referring to the seven stages of a man's life. At first, in his infancy, he is likened to a King. He is petted and praised by all, his every wish gratified. In the second stage, when he begins to run about, he is likened to a pig, for even a pile of refuse arouses his interest. Later on, around the age of ten, he is like a jumping goat. In his early twenties, a person is compared to a horse,

for he runs and gallops to earn his livelihood and get married. At the fifth stage, when he already carries the burden of a family and its support, he is likened to a load-carrying donkey. In the following stage of his life, man is likened to a dog, on account of the dog-like methods he often utilizes to gain his personal advancement and his family's security. Finally, in his seventh stage, when because of senility a person is often little more than a human form, his physical and mental abilities almost gone, he is likened to the animal which most closely resembles man, but lacks his capacities.

About these "life-periods," King Solomon pronounced his verdict: they are all vain and futile! If each of these seven is meaningless, what of the whole of life, which inevitably consists of these seven parts? Must it also, according to the aforementioned rule of physics, be considered vain and futile?

It is hardly conceivable that G-d, Who is the source of all that is good, true, and everlasting, should bestow upon us a life that is essentially futile. Yet, at the end of a month or a year, how often do we ask ourselves — where have all the days gone? (In Europe, where it was customary for Yeshivah students to "essen teg," to eat in a different home every day, the people of a Yeshivah town were wont to say that the past days had been eaten by the Yeshivah bochurim...) Even if a person was able to accomplish a great deal, did take care of many important matters, the impressions left with him are elusive and transitory, and are generally pushed aside and swallowed up by daily routine and the pressure of new tasks.

Yet amazingly enough, though we see that the past has evaporated, leaving us with little to hold on to, nevertheless we look forward in eager anticipation to the immediate as well as the distant future, expecting it to bring us valuable new experiences and pleasant surprises. The future naturally seems to be the wellspring from which refreshing new fountains of goodness will flow. This human trait of hope and trust in the future is a G-d-given gift without which life would be almost unliveable.

But is this only a blissful illusion?

When gentle breezes and sunny skies announce the arrival of Spring, so many hearts are filled with a song of welcome

for the months ahead, in the sure knowledge that Spring will somehow bewitch their lives with warmth and contentment; that things will be different and better from now on. But will it really be so? Haven't we felt the same about spring seasons in years gone by?

To be sure, a good many people are not so optimistic. They contend that life is a series of unrelated, futile events, which give a person nothing to look back at, or forward to. Consequently, all they care about is the enjoyment of the moment, for this is the only thing they consider real and worthwhile. As I am personally acquainted with several such people, I have seen how haphazardly their lives are riddled with irresponsible activities; when misfortune and misery strike, they are utterly disillusioned and hopeless.

This is obviously not the kind of life that G-d wants us to live. Rather than live in this fashion, it would have been better not to have been born at all.

The Torah and Torah-inspired customs which form our lives teach and constantly remind us that the value and worthiness of our lives are measured by one criterion only. This standard has no relationship to riches, success, achievements, knowledge, or happiness. Even without having any of these gifts in any substantial measure, your life can be of tremendous and everlasting value. This one criterion is: your part in G-d's plan and its fulfillment. This

involvement in and awareness of G-d's plan, which is described in detail in the Torah, should run like a scarlet thread through every single activity of every single day of our lives. This is the only real and valid measure of the value of everything we do and everything that happens to us.

Since, according to the Torah, as soon as a person gains full mental maturity, he must set his wagon of life on the tracks leading to the fulfillment of G-d's Will and plan, the temporary stations along the route, whether they are sad or happy, do not make much of a difference. This is what Koheles may have meant when he labeled all the seven general stages of life futile and vain. We are not supposed to become obsessed by current happenings of whatever nature, for in themselves they are truly empty, as we ourselves realize after a while.

In fact, even the entire Universe, with everything in it created in the first seven days, would have no *raison d'être* if G-d's plan were not fulfilled by us, His Chosen People, chosen in fact for that very purpose. We know that it is the custom to fete the bride and groom for seven days after the joyous occasion of their wedding; we also know that a mourner must observe a seven-day mourning period. For both of them there lies therein a hint not to become obsessed by their present excessive emotions, but to remember that the extremely happy as well as the

extremely sad are all part of the Master-Plan of the seven days of creation. (On Shabbos rest and peacefulness, without which the Universe could not exist for very long, were created.)

Similarly, we learn in the Megilah of the error the Jews committed by participating in, and enjoying the feast given by the Persian emperor. Blindly excited by the honor implicit in an invitation to so important an event, they forgot that their participation did not go well with G-d's plan for His people. Haman was given the permission to remind them of their real role in life, as he described in slanderous detail to the king: a nation peculiar unto itself, with laws and regulations which are different from those of any other nation in the great empire. As the Midrash tells us, the Jews realized their mistake and gave expression to their sincere regrets for a whole year.

When Mordecai instructed Queen Esther to plead with the King to save her nation, he explained that whether or not her action will be the instrument of help for her desperate brethren, if she should make her queenhood an end in itself, she would inevitably realize its vanity and futility, while G-d's plan to save His people would come to pass by other means.

In this light, we can better appreciate the oft-repeated injunction to every Jew:

Serve G-d with joy! The question always arises: Are we not obliged to serve Him even when we are suffering sorrow? Or should we serve Him with agony instead of joy? Certainly not. Real joy is found only in the everlasting good and eternal truth of fulfilling G-d's will and thereby helping in the completion of His plan,

whether sorrow or gladness is our momentary lot.

This knowledge in itself should fill us with the deepest and most satisfying joy, in which we continue to serve Him through *all* the stages of life. With this great aim in mind, we render the whole of life greater than all its component parts.

## SOME REGRETTABLE DIFFERENCES

· *Yiddishe Heim* issue 33 - Tishrei 5728 (1967) ·

European Jews of the older generation have a common expression: *In der alter helm is geven ingantz n andersh*. They claim that in the "old home," in the city or shtetl in Eastern Europe everything in the sphere of Yiddishkeit was better.

This attitude angers us youngsters at times. Our rejection of the contention that we have regressed from the high Torah standards that prevailed "over there" is not chauvinistic; it is founded, rather, on many facts. Our many great Yeshivos, and their students' diligence and high level of Torah scholarship are a cause for pride, not apology. The same can be said about the numerous Yeshivos for girls, that vie in their aspirations and standards for the implementation of eternal values. Our many charitable institutions, large and small, are able, because of our economic means, to outshine their European counterparts. Our shuls and shtiblach offer warmth and welcome for the heart that comes to pray. We could go on and on — to prove that "ours" and "theirs," the old and the new, are at least equal.

There exists one area, however, where the young generation, especially here in America, *does* lag behind "the old home" — the time of year which extends from

the month of Elul through the holiday of Succos.

"Even the fish in the deepest waters tremble in the month of Elul" goes the saying. Let's face it, in our society, where not only trembling, but simple fear and awe before the spiritual are ridiculed and considered anti-social, who would dare exhibit such "old-fashioned" traits? I am, of course, referring to the society of the observant, even to some Chasidic groups.

The sound of the shofar during the month of Elul was the source of profound inspiration and awakening to our forefathers. That is why the custom was instituted in the first place, since the mitzvah to blow shofar is on Rosh Hashanah. But what really happens to most of us in Elul? "*Shall the shofar be blown in a city and the people not tremble?*" asks the prophet. If he could see the typical reaction of most of us to the sound of the shofar, which heralds the inner spirit of Elul, how the prophet would tremble in shock. Elul goes by like any other mid-year month, with hardly a thought for the year that is waning, nor for the year that is coming either. How regrettable, how painful, for in Elul ה' "goes out from His palace into the field to welcome us." But where are we?



Before we know it, Rosh Hashanah is upon us. Now we are a little more serious. We know we have to examine our total behavior of the past year, in thought, word, and deed, and repent properly for whatever requires atonement. If we are a little late repenting for the past year, at least our prayers for the next year should be said with the proper concentration and feeling. Shouldn't we be thinking of our personal flaws and frailties that are responsible for our wretched spiritual condition, and beg  $\text{נָּח}$  for new strength of mind, so that we can come closer to Him by becoming closer to our real selves? Surely we should! But do we?

Let's look around us in shul. Who is that person whose tears are streaming down his glowing face, nourished by holy flames in his heart? A businessman who knows he has hardly an hour's learning a week during the past year to his credit? A shop worker who carries on his conscience so many days that went by without Torah or prayer with a minyan? A frivolous chap who has literally thousands of empty words and empty thoughts, coupled with insults and "loshon hora," clearly marked on his soul, as well as on the heavenly account books. No, it is none of these, none of the people who should have prayed in such a manner for their own purification.

It is rather an unassuming Yeshiva bochur, a young man who spent the whole year learning Torah and davening,

who had very little to do with the mundane and profane around us. Should it not be otherwise?

We celebrate the New Year counting not from the first day of creation, but from the day man was created. Unlike the animal Kingdom, which was created as whole kinds and species, man was created alone. This means simply that man is an important entity, by and unto himself. Instead of trying, therefore, to make our individual little universe better and more complete, it is strange to see and hear some in our midst trying to solve every great world problem, discuss every item in the Sunday Times. On Rosh Hashanah, when you meet people in shul that you may not have seen a whole year, it seems that they deem it selfish to concentrate on examining one's own life of the past year, and adopting resolutions to improve during the coming year.

On Rosh Hashanah, it is good to remember that the Heavenly Court assigns more than material and financial allotments; the spiritual strength and help which we can gain by a more generous revelation of Divine Presence are also decided for the coming year.  $\text{וידע כל פעול כי . . . אתה פעלתו}$  . . . Every creature on earth, we pray, should learn to be eternally aware of the Creator... and where are we ourselves in this picture? Are we truly begging the Al-mighty that we should find more time to learn Torah, more excitement in performing mitzvos, for a purer heart, that

we show more sympathy and concrete help in a friend's sorrow? Do we beg for Heavenly help in these matters at least as fervently as we pray for our family's health and for a comfortable, even lucrative livelihood?

During the ten days of repentance between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur many of us continue "business as usual." Since everything was decided and written down in the Heavenly planbooks on Rosh Hashanah, what more can we do? We forget that this is true for . great tzadikim, or terribly evil people, but most of us are in-between.

For us, the scale of judgment hangs in balance; which way it will ultimately be tipped depends on our T'shuvah during these days of penitence. Finally on Yom Kippur when we are like angels, it is signed and sealed.

The essence of Succos is pure unadulterated joy. What is pleasanter than concentrating on our enjoyment, knowing that this very joy is at the same time a great mitzvoh. Yet the same people who prefer misplaced gaiety and complacency to the proper awe-filled and self-searching mood of Elul and Rosh Hashanah, have a long sour face on Succos. For only those whose hearts were permeated with the cleansing tears of repentance are prepared for and deservant of the intense joy of Succos. "Those who sow in tears will reap

in joy." The rejoicing, the dancing, the exhilaration does not inspire the others; at worst this "display" by "narrowminded batlanim" irritates them. Too many of us admire this "playing it cool." Why this apathy, this allergy to intense emotional experiences, which are at the very core of a healthy, red-blooded Yiddishkeit.

We are the victims of the mass media onslaught, strongly affected by the values of the culture prevailing in the 'great society.' Our sharp and ultrasensitive soul tools are becoming dulled. Because of the European living conditions, the preceding generations were not subject to this exposure. They were therefore saved from the apathy and blunted sensibility which are common to the general population here. So when the Holy Days and Succos came around, our ancestors' hearts and minds, like sensitive antennae, caught and were immediately affected by the spiritual waves prevalent at this time of year. A similarly intense emotion and devotion is alien to our spiritually dulled senses. We go for the neutral, the casual, the light-hearted, unless selfish physical interests are involved.

This of course, is the very essence of our own exile, and the exile of the Divine Presence. Let us pour out our hearts before ה', and pray that He bring the ultimate redemption very, very soon.

# Talks for Teens

## SKIPPING–FREEDOM– REMEMBRANCE

· *Yiddishe Heim, Issue 35, Spring 5728 (1968)* ·

Ever used a clock for inspiration? This is how two great tzadikim taught their disciples to draw inspiration from the movement of the clock hands. One said that when he looks at the face of the clock, he suddenly realizes how each fleeting second is bringing us closer and closer to our last moments on earth... Naturally, he finds this thought disturbing and resolves to use the time left in the best way possible to prepare for the day of judgment, whose exact date no one knows.

The other tzadik said that when he looks at the moving hands of the clock, he is aroused by the thought that every second we are getting closer and closer to the arrival of Moshiach ... Naturally, we would like to appear before him with as many merits and accomplishments as possible, so we had better hurry and get to work with greater zeal and effectiveness.

But aren't we helpless? Can we possibly stop the hands of time? What are we to do to save all those countless minutes that are slowly accumulating into days and

months, so that they should not be lost forever? We find the answer to this in the Chassidic approach to the problem of *time*. Time, we are told, like life itself, is made up of the meaningful experiences in which we participate. If time equals experience, then we can understand why the sages refer even to a young scholar as זקן — *old* — which simply means that the age of a Jew (or anyone) is not measured by how much time has elapsed since his birth, but rather by how much meaningful experience has been accumulated by this particular individual.

This brings us to the special times on the Jewish calendar — the Yomim Tovim — the Holy Days. Every *Yomtov* must become a permanent part of our treasure of meaningful life experiences from which we can readily draw inspiration and encouragement in times of need. The *Yomtov* of Pesach can certainly provide an experience of lasting significance for those who care to become deeply involved in its host of commandments and customs, as

well as the myriad interpretations of the Haggadah.

We would like to discuss here just three of the many concepts underlying the spirit of Pesach. These are: Skipping, Freedom, and Remembrance.

### **Skipping**

The concept of skipping, rooted in the very name of the *Yomtov* (Pesach — to pass-over) is given very little attention in the Seder night, as well as during the rest of the holiday. It is only mentioned in passing in the Haggadah. It has been almost completely skipped! And yet such a miraculous event as the "skipping" that G-d did on that fateful night must surely contain an everlasting and inspiring meaning. But no, it has not been ignored as non-significant. The concept of skipping is one of the fundamentals of faith.

For one example, G-d created the world and everything therein, not in an evolutionary pattern, but by skipping from one complete creation to another, forming each thing separately by direct creation rather than having it evolve from one stage to another.

For another, just as the Angel passed over — skipped — the Jewish houses on the night of death for the Egyptian firstborn, so did G-d skip over the historical stages of developing revolutionary freedom movements and

national emancipation drives, and took out a nation while they were still deeply entrenched in physical and spiritual slavery.

Again, G-d skipped over all the other nations to give the newly freed slaves the overwhelming gift and opportunity of becoming His own nation and people, the trusted emissaries to the whole world.

Let us consider world history. G-d, again, while ending the existence of many powerful nations because they had outlived their "usefulness," has chosen to "skip" over the natural consequences of the terrible conditions of our exile, and lead us to the final perfection of His kingdom on earth.

In short, we Jews do not exist and flourish according to natural law and the historical order of events. We skip these, and with G-d's personal guidance, ascend to great, undreamed-of heights. This holds true not only for the nation as a whole, but for each community and individual as well. Each one of us greatly underestimates himself if he decides that he can only aspire to naturally achievable goals. If we truly believe in the extraordinary power of "skipping," then we must be willing and able to use it. On Pesach we are each given this special divine gift of "skipping," of achieving far more by passing over natural stages of development. Each one takes as much of

this power as he is spiritually prepared to appreciate.

### Freedom

Pesach is designated as the "time of our freedom"; it is a concept central to this *Yomtov*.

We are sometimes confronted by non practicing Jews who call themselves "free-thinkers." We may then wonder. Who is *really* free?

Especially on Pesach, can we really feel free, when we are constantly on the alert, trying to carefully heed the admonition that our homes must be rid of the smallest particles of chometz and everything that smacks of chometz! Can we still consider ourselves free when we think of the year-round do's and don'ts that control every phase of our lives, and claim that those who "do as they please" do not really have freedom?

Were we taken out of Egyptian slavery just to exchange it for a different slavery? If that is so, where is our freedom?

Let us interpret freedom correctly. Freedom does not and cannot mean to do what one's heart desires. If this were freedom, we would all be considered the crudest robbers of our children's freedom, for we control their behavior and discipline them. Yet no sane parent will let his toddler or preschooler do whatever he sees fit if he cherishes the child's wellbeing.

Freedom in its real sense means the ability to be free from any coercion, free from compulsive power and circumstance. For it makes little difference, from the viewpoint of ideal freedom, whether one is forced to obey a dictator's will or his own heart's desire; in either case he cannot resist, he has no choice. If man learns to use his mental abilities to control his emotions, he has already gained a measure of freedom, freedom from the demanding whims and emotions which can at times override and even paralyze a person's freedom of action and plain common sense. Yet even if we always make it a rule to follow our intellect rather than our emotions, we are still not really enjoying freedom *par excellence*.

Our minds happen to be quite limited; they can proceed only along certain well-defined and limited lines established in the process of mental and physical growth within a certain social and educational environment. They are consequently ill-equipped to consider an infinite range of possibilities and decide whether a certain course of action is either ultimately good or harmful to the person's real needs. What is more, the human mind can project a very limited distance into the future. Something may seem wonderful for today, tomorrow, and for a long time to come, yet hardly anyone can say for sure what the results of a certain action or inaction may be in ten years, twenty years, or a generation later. Truly, only G-d, who



can perceive the whole span of human existence "in one glance" knows for sure what is really right or wrong for each individual in each specific situation and problem.

Freedom then, in its best sense, is the ability to take the best possible course of action at any given time without any hindrance from internal or external factors, be they physical, mental, or emotional. Such freedom, paradoxically perhaps, can only be achieved by a total commitment to G-d's will and direction.

There is a catch to this, however. While it is true that on Pesach we relive, and are regenerated by, the feeling of gaining freedom from human oppression and slavery through powerful Divine intervention, we cannot expect a similar redemption from inner slavery to one's thoughts, emotions and deeply-rooted habits. Because of the special autonomy granted to us by our possession of free choice, this kind of freedom is not usually given to us by Divine intervention; we must achieve it for ourselves.

### **Remembrance**

Perhaps the hardest task that faces us on Pesach, and to a lesser degree throughout the entire year, is the commandment of Remembrance. We are told that we must remember, and keep recalling, the freedom we gained when we left Egyptian

soil and slavery. This we do in many ways: by mentioning it in our prayers, as well as in the kiddush of Shabbos and the various holidays. This task of remembrance, however, is the key, the essence of the *Yomtov* Pesach. Yet we may justly ask, what does the Torah, and what do we, mean by remembering? How can we "remember" something in which we took no part, were not associated with in any way, and did not even neutrally witness!? In fact, the same question should be asked not only about *Yetzias Mitzrayim* — the Exodus from Egypt, but also about all the other events we are commanded to remember: how Amalek attacked us in the desert; the day we were standing at Mount Sinai.

It is sufficiently clear by now that the eternal commandment of the Torah, given to all generations, to "remember" does not imply recollection of a past event or forgotten memories. It means deep reflection on certain major events in our history, until we attain a thorough understanding and can, with heavenly help, "see" ourselves right in the heart of the particular situation, be it the Exodus from Egypt, receiving the Torah at Sinai, or any other occurrence we are admonished never to forget!

It is therefore our holy duty, especially on Pesach, to use every and any means (and the drama of the seder is the essential and basic tool) and all our available powers of mind and heart, to place

ourselves into the very midst of these experiences. The transforming power of our imagination must make us relive all the details of the event as described in the Torah. This is true for all the episodes that the Torah bids us to remember.

Such a thorough mental and emotional involvement is not easily achieved. Before the arrival of Pesach, we tirelessly toil to make sure that our homes are cleansed of every single shred of chometz, ready for the matzah and all that comes with it. We should certainly do no less on the mental and emotional level, to ready ourselves for the great "remembrance," for the total spiritual involvement in going out from

Egypt, ready ourselves to receive the power of Divine freedom which is bestowed upon us anew on Pesach. In all honesty, we should add that were it not for the special powers of G-d's commandment, we would certainly not be able to "remember" so vividly an event which is so far removed from us in time.

Then, and only then, will we be privileged to say and sincerely feel, not that "another Pesach has passed," but rather "another Pesach has enriched and refreshed us, has brought inspiration into our daily life of commitment and observance."

# THE FORGOTTEN ART

· *Yiddishe Heim* issue 37, *Tishrei* 5729 (1968) ·

There are at least two distinct areas of general human endeavor which the advance of science and the surge of technical know-how have not benefitted. First, let us divide the areas of human involvement in simple terms: there are the things we *use*, and there are the things we *do*, which help shape man's personality.

Among the things we use, there is hardly an item which has not been improved by the new, steadily expanding technology. The clothes we wear, the food we eat, the houses we inhabit, our means of transportation, all have changed for the better, all are superior to what was available several generations ago.

This outstanding success is not shared, however, in the area of the things we do. The human qualities which inspire exceptional human activities such as scholarship, friendship, devotion, reverence, true self-expression and refinement have actually been weakened, if not completely distorted by a lifestyle which is machine dominated. We frown on things like "automatic friendship," "computerized devotion," "mass-production scholarship," publicity inspired benevolence, and "programmed

reverence." Yet to a lesser or greater extent this is today's reality.

As a result, many fine human characteristics are either completely forsaken or have joined the march to automation. When man finds his existence automatic and his life production-oriented, it becomes senseless, purposeless, and hence intolerable. His natural instinct of self-preservation searches out some Life-saving measures. He figures, at times subconsciously, that he must try to improve his lot; failing this, at least manage to escape it, if only temporarily. Whether he indulges in some wild and brutal orgies, or becomes a consumer of so-called mind-expanding drugs, the purpose is the same. He forgets for a while that his synthetic "inspirations" are neither durable nor beneficial. He chooses not to care that the moments of "expanded mind" and frenzied illusions will be followed by days of suffering and years of bitter aftereffects. He is like the man who quenches his thirst with pickle juice...but the urge to escape the senseless life is strong and blinding.

Man has misunderstood, and consequently badly abused, the G-d given gift of technological progress and its many

ramifications. We have been provided with an "easy" life, freed from the back-breaking toil once needed to produce man's daily bread, spared many crippling diseases common in previous generations, so that we might devote our time, energies and talents to the higher goals of human life.

As King Solomon says in *Koheles*: "While it is man's nature to ascend and strive upwards, it is the beast's nature to descend and strive for the lower." According to the wisest of all men, achievement of higher goals is actually part of man's natural craving. If man does not permit his spirit true self-expression in the right direction, he will never know any peace or serenity of heart.

This is true for all humanity; it is even more valid for Jews. The very purpose of our existence is to make the spiritual, the divine, the dominant factor of this earthly life, until eventually mankind is completely and consciously permeated with the Divine Presence, and G-d's Will reigns Supreme. The Jew has it in his blood to aspire for the highest ideals.

Therefore, when we see today's Jewish youth tending "strange fields" and placing their energies and unadulterated devotion at the service of "causes" which need them little and appreciate them even less, it is heartbreaking. When asked why they are forsaking their own fold, they usually answer that Judaism offers no opportunity

for idealism or self-sacrifice. They claim it has become too mechanized and complacent, even for those who are very observant. These youths, together with their middle-aged counterparts, honestly feel that Judaism offers no real challenge, it has no use for idealists.

We must reluctantly admit that their arguments have some "justification." The daily life and activities of the average *frum* (orthodox) person give no sign, no clue, to a continuous effort, to a reaching-out to some unattainable spiritual horizon ... His life is a routine, except for Shabbos and Yom Tov. *Externally* there is little in him to inspire much admiration or any urge to emulation.

What, then, one may ask, is really missing? Shouldn't a true Torah life elevate and excite us every day of the year, in every conceivable situation? Of course it should, and it could, if we would but map out for ourselves a daily area of spiritual growth, so that eventually we can reach and touch that far-off star.

Jews have not been known to play great roles in the development of art through the ages; there is much speculation about the reasons for this. There is one specific art, however, in which we Jews have always excelled — the art of reshaping one's nature to become a *true* servant of G-d.

According to Chassidus Chabad, this complete overhaul of one's self entails

more than character refinement and spiritual self-elevation, though these are certainly necessary prerequisites. It involves rather an *absolute change* of one's personal traits and characteristics.

It is a widely accepted scientific fact that a man, in the course of his lifetime, uses a very small percentage of his intellectual capacities. Even the greatest scholar, it is claimed, uses only an insignificant part of the mind's potential.

Surely our hearts' potential to generate emotions such as love and fear of G-d, devotion, generosity, or any other meaningful attribute is just as great as the intellectual potential of the brain. Our hearts are capable of radiating feeling of the greatest intensity, longest durability, and finest quality. While the extent to which one is capable of using his brain potential is generally determined by his Creator, the extent to which we develop and refine our hearts and emotional powers is up to ourselves; it is within the realm of man's free choice.

According to the Rambam, it is the rule of the Torah that true repentance means that a person must sincerely regret his sins and resolve never to repeat, not only his bad deeds, but also his bad thoughts, improper feelings and wrong attitudes. For all of these, man is held fully responsible. We might therefore conclude that if a man is by nature fine and good,

generous and sincere, etc., he has no need for self-improvement.

Chassidus, however, points out that for a Jew to become a true servant of G-d he must *replace* his natural attributes with a "new set" of intellectualized attributes. Man, says Chassidus, does not deserve the honorable title of "G-d's Servant" when he does good deeds only because that is his natural inclination, and/or he fears a guilty conscience. When we give some coins to a poor beggar because we simply can't take his suffering, We are actually doing a service to our own peace of mind and calm nerves, rather than to G-d or even to the beggar. Of course it is an ethical act, but is it a pure unselfish mitzvah dedicated to Him?

A clear demonstration of the concept that only complete mastery over one's emotions and attributes makes one eligible for a perfect life of service is found in the Torah's description of Abraham at the *Akeidah*-sacrifice of Isaac. Only after Abraham demonstrated his unhesitating readiness to make a sacrifice of his son at G-d's command did G-d say to him: "Now I know that you are truly G-d-fearing." Why did Abraham, who had proven his loyalty to G-d many times before, whom G-d had already called "My lover," have to wait for this tenth trial of the *Akaidah* to deserve being called "truly G-d fearing?"

When we consider the story of Abraham's life, we realize that most of his

work consisted of various acts of kindness, both in the material and the spiritual sense of the word, all inspired by his great love of G-d. But outwardly, it seemed to be a case of a *naturally* kind heart that could not help but be generous. If this were so, if Abraham was merely following his natural inclination to be gentle and kind, he could not be called a selfless servant of G-d.

When, however, we see Abraham joyously getting ready for the *Akaidah*, an act incompatible with any feeling of kindness and compassion, for which he was universally known, only then do we realize that Abraham has become the absolute master over his natural feelings. Then, and only then, does G-d tell Abraham, and us, that since his heart is guided and inspired only by his understanding of G-d's greatness and by completely selfless devotion to Him, is Abraham truly the superior servant of G-d.

Of course we realize that for most people it is difficult to reach such a pinnacle of personal perfection; for some, even the first step is a great challenge. Today a person is considered outstanding if he just makes an honest attempt to rid

himself of some intolerable shortcoming or very annoying trait.

For all those who are interested, on the other hand, there is a standing challenge in Judaism to excel in the fine though difficult art of perfecting one's self through a refinement of one's character and a thorough change in self. There must be constant striving to use every opportunity and experience in a true Torah life to replace one's natural inclinations — even the good ones — with a new set of *midos* — traits that are guided only by the urgency of Divine service. This, to be sure, is a life-long process. It is, however, a personal challenge offering tremendous rewards that defy any of the standard measures of earthly success. The brilliance of a refined human heart must be infinite to qualify for the service of the Creator Who is Infinite.

Today the art of polishing one's character is a forgotten one, but let us not despair. Let us dedicate ourselves to spreading the word, far and near, that Judaism is a way of life that requires great idealism and aspirations, that offers unparalleled challenges for each and every one who is willing to rise and meet them!

# TOWARDS MORE PRODUCTIVE ENCOUNTERS

· *Yiddishe Heim Issue 39, Spring 5729 (1969)* ·

We live in an era of Dialogues, discussions, and encounters of many kinds. Here, however, I am concerned with the kind of get-togethers which have as their goal the presentation of Judaism to the non-observant Jew as attractively as possible. These confrontations, again, come in many forms. Some are conducted in the Jewish clubs — Hillel Houses — on college campuses. On these occasions the "Jewish" point of view is presented, often, by people who are themselves non-observant. Consequently, the whole discussion of a topic such as "The Jewish Commitment," or the "Jewish View of Life after Birth" (actually witnessed) is of a purely historical, philosophic, or at best, theologic nature. Even when these discussions take place within the framework of an adult education class in an orthodox synagogue under the guidance of its venerable rabbi, it rarely gets further than the recounting of centuries of Jewish suffering and martyrdom on the one hand, and on the other, the innumerable achievements of our great scientists and humanitarians through the ages.

In short, the common denominator of these various forums is the fact that they do not call for, and can hardly hope to result in, any immediate resolutions on the part of the participants to strengthen their commitments and observances of daily religious duties.

Of quite a different cut is the annual "Encounter With Chabad" held in Brooklyn at the end of December. Anyone who had the privilege of witnessing one of these encounters could not help being impressed by the pervasive sense of sincerity, urgency, and personal involvement of every one there.

Even there, in the best of all "encounters," there are some things which could bear improvement. The ensuing suggestions are not original with me, but since I found them useful, I would like to share them with others, especially those who take an active part in these encounters.

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We must remember that time is precious, we have only so much and no more in which to make our points and try to achieve our goals. We cannot bear to

lose any time by indulging in dead-end discussions. The student, however, though he brings his sincerity and grants us his undivided attention, is compelled by his own pride to try to put us "against the wall," to get the illusion of winning an argument, of coming out on top. To this end he bombards us with open-end questions such as, what is the Chabad view on the conflict in Southeast Asia, on civil rights, the New Left, the Holocaust, etc., etc. We swallow our irritation and answer that the Chabad attitude on these issues is identical to the Orthodox-Torah viewpoint. And what is that, the student wants to know, etc.

The tremendous amount of time and patience these discussions consume are so much loss for the task at hand. These verbal exchanges can easily be avoided if we realize the reason for them. In the words of one student, "I simply don't know enough about Judaism to be able to ask more pertinent questions." If the students, therefore, were first given a substantive presentation of the structure and nature of our faith, *of* the authenticity of Torah and the relevance and viability of mitzvos, he would then know enough to ask intelligent, substantial questions that would lead to fruit-bearing answers. The questions would give the student the sense of pride he needs, and the answers would teach something relevant to the goal of the Encounter.

Here are a few examples of the points that could be included in a thought provoking introduction of Judaism:

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Although the idea of G-d as the Creator is accepted by the sincere majority of the academic community, there exists a need for some for rational proofs which demonstrate G-d's Omnipresence in the world of man. After all, were we not created in His image? We can actually see the Divine manifestation in several areas in the life of man.

Firstly, there is the concept of *unity*. Unity is one of the basic Divine characteristics. G-d is, by definition, indivisible; He is One, the perfect Unity. Although we were created in His image, we can never, of course, hope to attain this level of unity in our life of flesh and soul. A bit of introspection will lead us, however, to the realization that human beings are always striving towards harmony and unity. Take the normal intellectual exploration into the nature of some physical phenomenon. We begin with an analysis of all its possible components. Eventually, if we are successful, we arrive at a synthesis which enable us to get at the *core* of the source of the *various* processes and/or particles. This is what happened when scientists discovered the molecule and the atom.

Emotionally, too, we are most unhappy when our heart is pulled in different



directions and we are almost torn apart by inner strife. This is painful because it is unnatural. It is a most happy state of heart to have a clear goal or purpose towards which to strive. (To a Jew this state of bliss is achieved when the heart is filled with a great love for G-d, which in turn unites all his activities to the single purpose of pleasing the Al-mighty in every aspect of his life.)

The above-mentioned facts should be strong evidence — to the objective mind — that not only were we created in G-d's image, but what is more, we actually function in that same Image with our constant, unceasing striving for harmony and unity.

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People differ greatly in their taste and aesthetics, yet in one area of appreciation of beauty there is very little divergence of opinion. The beauty of nature is enjoyed and admired by everybody. The majesty of lofty mountains, the serenity of green laden valleys, fed by the clear waters of innumerable tributaries, all have universal fascination. Whatever bears the imprint of genesis, unmarred by human hands, has an immediate, captivating appeal. This is the response to the Divine handiwork from the Divine spark within us all.

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Or take for example the concept of "Good". There are almost as many interpretations of this ideal as there are

interpreters. There is one thing, however, that is universally accepted in the category of "good" — helping the weak, the needy, and the downtrodden. This comes to people naturally. From China to Australia, the educated and the primitive, the rich and the poor, all agree in principle that it is *good* to help the helpless. They also agree on the opposite, that to oppress the needy is *bad*. The difference exists only in the methods of implementation of these universal ideals. How could the whole world have arrived at the same concept throughout the generations, if it were not for the fact that it is the Divine spark within us which influences us subconsciously to emulate G-d Himself, Who takes pride in being the Protector of the oppressed and the weak.

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To cite yet another point: In observing ourselves and others, we find what we can call the "creative instinct" in almost all people. We feel a need to improve ourselves, our surroundings, and in the most creative, perhaps the whole world. We can observe this urge to improve and create even in the activities of children before they have benefitted from any education. We identify and refer to G-d as the Creator. It is easy to see wherefrom we humans got the urge to create. It is the Divine within us which actively inspires us to act ever more in His image.

But Judaism goes beyond these self-evident facts. Not only are we Jews admirers of nature, good, and creative, because we share these traits with all humanity, but we feel obliged to develop them because we have been told by G-d to do so, because this is His Will.

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This brings us to the concept of *Torah min hashamayim*, i. e. the authenticity of the Revelation at Sinai. The idea of creating a world with sensible creatures in it, without telling them what behaviour is expected of them, is utterly inconceivable. G-d Himself had to tell His creatures what He wants of them; no one else could do it for Him, could possibly know His plans and expectations. By giving us the Torah, G-d has revealed, as much as it is important for us to know, His plans for the universe, as well as for the peoples within it. Only He knows why we Jews were chosen as the main implementors of His plans and bearers of His word to humanity. We just take it from there.

We vehemently resist the minutest restrictions on our freedom, even if they are only temporary, by any of our fellow humans. Here a whole nation willingly accepts innumerable life-long restrictions and impositions without uttering a single complaint! How could they complain? With their own eyes and ears they had witnessed G-d appointing Moshe Rabbeinu their teacher of the Torah

because they themselves could not bear to listen to it directly from G-d, and asked that Moshe be the one to tell it to them. This explains the amazing fact that, though the Torah records every complaint, every dissatisfaction, and even the revolts which some unhappy souls staged in the course of the forty years that the Jews were in the desert, yet we find no allusion whatsoever of anyone ever questioning the authenticity or importance of a single commandment!

The relevance and viability of the Torah and its commandments have by now been tested in any and all kinds of conditions, ranging from extreme torture to extreme happiness. There is no other way of life that has thus been tested and has survived undaunted, unscarred and unchanged. Only Torah has this Divine quality of eternal, unchangeable existence for the Jew. Nothing else can withstand the powerful onslaught of changing times, modes of life and technology.

Actually, faith is logical and has been proven true beyond any reasonable doubt. For Jews especially, faith is a natural endowment, since we are descendants of an uninterrupted line of faithful generations, beginning with Abraham, whose very essence of existence was faith and its dissemination throughout the world community. No wonder then that whenever there is a new social movement aiming at the improvement of man's lot and of human society in general, Jews are

among its first and foremost adherents. In fact, our estranged Jewish youth gets so heated-up and carried away by their misplaced enthusiasm for alien causes that even when they are "rewarded" with disaffection, disappointments, and outright physical rejection, they turn around and join another "in" cause. How fortunate they, and the Jewish community, would be would these estranged Jews place their energies, talents and exuberance at the service of authentic Judaism. As it stands now, we find far more Jewish college students at a demonstration for a "fashionable" cause than at a demonstration protesting the wanton murder of Iraqi Jews. This fact, by the way, has caused grave concern among responsible Jewish leaders.

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To summarize: faith and its practice should come easily, and almost naturally to every Jew that knows about it. Even if he is only twelve or thirteen years old, we are confident that he has the mental capacity to subject himself to Torah faith and practice.

Why, then, are there so many thousands who are so removed from it all? Most of them are regrettably ignorant of their Jewish heritage because of educationally adverse conditions. What about those multitudes whom the Torah message has reached in one form or another? Sometimes we find ourselves in

the agonizing position of having spent a lot of time and talk with an individual or a group with seemingly no results!

We must then bear in mind two very important factors: One is the Divine gift of freedom of choice, which assures every one of us some kind of rational escape from the strongest and most convincing arguments. This basic principle is operative at all times, for it is another facet of our having been created in His image. Even if our convincing insistence on the practice of Yiddishkeit elicits no verbal rejection, our listener may be entertaining a silent mental reservation which he prefers not to reveal.

There is another factor which restrains a person from changing for the better: Such a change towards religion puts a heavy burden on the potential baal-teshuva, and not only because of the new restricted life which he will undertake. What is harder, is to look back at his entire past and pronounce those years sinful and wasted; that is something which takes more than the average kind of courage. The potential baal-teshuva will sometimes fight back with everything at his command to save himself this heavy mental and emotional burden.

The more we, however, believe in the strength of our cause, the easier it should be to understand why our arguments and pleading do not elicit the proper response in our "adversary's" heart. We believe that

Torah and its observance have definite effects on the mind and heart; it refines our characters, and renders us more sensitive to Divine teachings and admonitions. The opposite is also true for those who disregard the Divine guidelines of Torah. With every piece of non-kosher food, with every act of Sabbath desecration, with every similar negative practice, the Jewish heart and mind become more crude and less sensitive to the Divine rhythm in the universe, the Torah, and the depths of the Jewish soul. The struggling baal-teshuva should know this fact, which itself will bring him a step closer to the truth.

A few words of caution: In our initial attempt to warm up a frozen Jewish soul, we must honestly feel, and let him know it, a genuine interest in helping him because of our love and concern for him. At no time should we talk down to him, or even talk at him. Sometimes these people get the impression we are just performing a duty for which we supposedly expect some Heavenly credit.

Nothing could be more abhorrent and destructive to the great cause.

We can learn the validity of an attitude of deep concern from G-d's approach to us at Mt. Sinai. Wanting to motivate us to accept the Torah, He chose to emphasize, not His greatness in Creation and His miracles, but rather His deep concern for us in the saga of our redemption from Egypt. Abraham, too, followed the same practice; prior to teaching a hungry wayfarer to have faith in G-d, he treated him to the best food and drink and otherwise demonstrated his love and concern for him.

Then, and only then, even if we do not immediately succeed in our quest of enlightening our estranged brother's soul, no one can estimate the future effects of our efforts. We will at least have performed the mitzvah of Ahavas Yisroel — love of a fellow Jew. This in itself should gain for us G-d's Good Will, and in its wake, the Geulah Shleimah.

# KEDUSHA

· *Yiddishe Heim Issue 40, Sivan 5729 (1969)* ·

There exists a very interesting paradox concerning the concept of Kedusha-holiness. For while it is very basic to the people who live it, it is quite perplexing and elusive to those who try to comprehend it.

In the Torah we find Kedusha used in the description of people, places, objects, and special days of the year. The magnitude of this term is obvious from the fact that G-d refers to Himself as Kodosh-holy, *Ki Kodosh Ani Hashem*.

Needless to say all the aforementioned "holy things" cannot have the same Kedusha, cannot be equally holy in manner and degree. Yet they must possess a common denominator in Kedusha to justify their common frame of reference.

The concept of Kedusha seems even more elusive when we realize that in the Bible (Tanach) this term is used in various forms to describe a person or an activity which is the opposite of holy. Such are the references in the Torah to people described as *Kodeish* and *Kodeishah*, meaning a person who is "dedicated" to a life of immorality, or the phrase *Hiskadshu Imochor va'acholtem bosor*, usually translated "sanctify yourselves for tomorrow and you will eat meat," which

refers to the dedicated preparation for a quite unholy act.

Perhaps that can give us a clue to the real meaning of Kedusha. It would seem inadequate to explain Kedusha as something high and aloof, as the opposite of the secular and the profane. In human terms this would mean a life devoted to prayer, study, and meditation, coupled with the complete rejection of bodily pleasures and worldly activities. These are the ordinary associations which come to mind when we hear someone being referred to as a holy man, an *ish kodosh*; we think of extreme abstentions, even repulsion of anything smacking of the flesh and the worldly.

This, however, happens to be a crumb from an alien table, for this is the gentile idea of the mark of a holy life and a holy man. This idea stems from their view of the physical world in general and man in particular. The world is seen as full of evil, while nature is regarded as a vast network of pitfalls into which man is bound to be entrapped and contaminated unless ... unless he divorces himself completely from the unholy surroundings and divests himself of all interest in them.

Many of their so-called "saints" have ascended to this holiness by settling in a

monastery for life, removing themselves from the outside world increasingly with every added day of abstention, prayer, and meditation. Naturally only a handful of people can be expected to maintain such a state of existence.

We Jews do not share this view of life and holiness. For if this were the view of the Torah, G-d would not have commanded the whole Jewish Nation, individually as well as collectively, to be holy! Nor would He have given us so many mitzvos which are intrinsically bound up with a "normal life."

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In order to clarify the concept of Kedusha from the Torah viewpoint we may posit three factors which we can use as criteria in its application.

The first factor is *Divine Choice and Sanction*. Since it is an axiom that G-d is the only source of Kedusha in the universe, it follows that for anything to be holy it must be granted its status by Divine sanction.

The second factor is that of *Dedication*. A man, an act, a day or an object can only be holy if there is the element of dedication in his or its existence. If a man is not dedicated to any particular cause, if a cause is pursued casually i.e. without real dedication, if a day is not dedicated to any great experience or ideal, we should not call them holy.

The third factor is that of *Separation* which is akin to aloofness. Whenever a term relating to Kedusha is used in the Bible it always refers to an object, man, place, or event which is different and separated from other objects, men, places, or events. The sanctification of the Jewish people and that of the Kohanim in our midst is a case in point, wherein men have been separated from others who seemed to be their equals, and rendered holy and different. Another example is the separation of Eretz Yisroel from the rest of the earth by granting it special Divine attention. (There of course we can dwell on the problem whether it is the separation that makes for Kedusha or is it the Kedusha that causes the separation. It is clear however that separation is a necessary ingredient in Kedusha).

To summarize then, we see that the word root Kedusha implies, besides Divine choice and sanction, also the two elements of dedication and separation, dedication to a specific ideal or goal, and separation from the routine and the common. This should explain why we sometimes find Kedusha, in various forms, used to describe men and acts that are definitely unholy. This is because we deal with a situation in which there is dedication to a specific idea as well as a separation from the ordinary.

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Now let us expound a bit on these three factors. We have set the foremost factor as G-d's choice and divine sanction. But actually all creation is an act of Divine choice merely because He has chosen to create! It should follow then that everything contained in the universe is *innately* holy because G-d has chosen to create it. What is more, according to the Chassidic in-depth interpretations of creation, which sees it as an ongoing process (as described in part II of Tanya) and every moment of existence a direct and willful act of G-d, shouldn't we consider every particle and process of nature as holy?

To be sure this is true to a certain extent. We regard every creation and process of nature with due respect. This is reflected in the prohibition against wasting anything useful (*B'al Tashchis*), or even abusing foodstuff by using it as a plaything etc. We are also warned against interfering with natural processes, as in the prohibitions against plant and animal interbreeding or sterilizations. Yes, we respect nature as the handiwork of G-d, but we are not commanded to be awestruck and humble before it. So that although the whole world is created by Him, it is only in special areas that man was told "Remove your shoes from your feet, for you are standing on holy soil."

Since nature is Divine handiwork, it actually has the potential of becoming holy when and if it is used as a means of

Divine worship and service, for then, and only then, does it become submissive to G-d's will in an overt fashion.

This brings us to a slight redefinition of our first principle. Something is holy if G-d has chosen it as a means with which we can express His Superiority, Mastery and Majesty. For example, an esrog (citron) can be a neutral object one minute and holy the next, when a Jew obeying G-d's choice "takes it" to perform a particular precept on the holiday of Succos. When the esrog is used for a mitzvoh the Jew thereby proclaims G-d's Supremacy over himself by his subordination to the Divine Will. The same cannot be accomplished by using an apple instead of an esrog, for the apple is not G-d's choice for this mitzvo, so nothing is demonstrated by its use.

It is plain that man cannot invent his own means of expressing and exhibiting G-d's superiority and authority over him, but must subordinate his will to the Will of G-d. Consequently the more one is careful and exact in conforming to G-d's specifications of His Will — as revealed to us in the Halacha — the more he is sanctifying himself and the objects with which he performs his duties. For by every extra measure of preciseness and perfection in conformity to His Will, man's ego becomes more and more subordinated to the Divine Ego (Will). Again, this can only happen within the legitimate bounds which G-d prescribed for man. With the best of intentions man

cannot render objects holy merely by his choice of them as his means of Divine worship. The golden calf which some Jews worshipped in the desert was originally meant — according to Torah commentaries — as a symbol by which the True G-d will be made closer (more approachable), just as 1'havdil, the cherubim were put in the Kodosh Hakodoshim (the holiest part of the Temple). What made all the difference was the fact that while G-d commanded us to make the Golden Cherubim, He did command us not to make the Golden Calf!

When our sages tell us that there are three categories in the world, the holy, the neutral, and the unholy, we can measure these categories by the aforementioned yardstick. The holy things — including people, acts, objects and places — all have the common denominator of expressing the sovereignty of G-d by subordinating themselves and their individual characteristics to the Divine will and superiority. The neutral things include all the acts and objects which do not at the moment serve as means of expression for Divine superiority, although neither do they negate the Divine will. The unholy, of course, would include all acts and objects which negate the will of G-d and seem to deny His mastery of the world. An extreme example would be an actual idol, or an idea which is worshipped as the Supreme Good. Taking this definition one

logical step further, a person who indulges in various pleasures for the pure sake of self-satisfaction, is actually pulling himself ever further away from G-d and gravitating steadily to an unholy domain, for if his will reigns supreme he leaves no room or time for G-d's will. On the other hand, a person who always seems to subordinate his will to that of G-d's will steadily gravitate to Kedusha and eventually deserve to be called Kodosh. When G-d says in the Torah *K'doshim Tibiyu* — you must be holy — He leaves no room for doubt about His expectations of us.

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So far we have attempted to clarify the first factor of Kedusha. But we have two more: Dedication and Separation. Dedication is actually a necessity in all areas of human endeavor. Anything that is worth doing is worthy of dedication, especially something that is done for G-d. Let us take the example of charity. Giving charity is a virtuous act in anybody's opinion. Yet how are we to make it holy? How are we to turn it into a Mitzvo, a Divinely sanctioned act, rather than just a fine humane act? Only by dedication. If we dedicate an act to the great goal of conforming to G-d's will, we must think about it first, make sure that we are ready to perform it in accordance with the details of His will as described in the Halacha. Then there is Kedusha in that



act. Everything involved in that act is permeated by this holiness — the human heart, the feet that do the walking, the hand that gives, and even the actual money, all assume a measure of holiness depending on the degree of dedication.

The third factor of separation will come as a result of the first two. If we do an act, use an object, or dedicate a place, to the service of G-d in accordance with His will as prescribed by the code of law, automatically the act, the object, and the time and place so dedicated become different and separated from the routine and the mundane. A Shabbos observed according to G-d's Will, dedicated to the performance of this commandment, will never become a "Jewish Sunday" or part of a "weekend." It will always shine out as "a day in paradise," a foretaste of the World-to-Come. A Shul built in accordance with Halacha and deservant of becoming a "Makom Kodosh" a holy place, will automatically look different and feel different than just another elaborate edifice of esthetic value; nay, it will become a miniature House of G-d, where we come to unite and dedicate ourselves to Him.

This special ability to imbue the physical with holiness is an extra bonus, for even the holiest amongst us is still just

limited "flesh and blood" and soul. The something extra is G-d's generosity in granting from His own measure of holiness to every well-performed and dedicated act of ours, so that for a Shabbos to be really "great," we pray and get, if we deserve, a special aura of Kedusha which turns the day into something Divine. The same is true of all the other mitzvos. As the Sages conceived the blessings before the performance of a mitzvo, *Asher Kidshonu Bmitzvosov V'tzivonu etc.* "He has sanctified *us* with His commandments etc." Here we thank G-d for inspiring us with the spark of Kedusha which is uniquely His own, unlike any degree of holiness which man may aspire to of his own accord. For obviously when we describe Him as Kodosh it is unlike any sort of Kedusha known to man. His is the absolute rather than the relative Kedusha which is available to man. While today this panorama of Kedusha is revealed mainly in the great human mind and heart, we now come closer to the day when all the world will see with eyes of flesh that the whole universe is permeated with Kedushas Hashem Yisborach.

# ON TRIAL

· *Yiddishe Heim Issue 41, Fall 5730 (1969)* ·

Surely every Jew fears the coming of the days of awe and judgment. The tension and trembling begin a whole month in advance, at the first blast of the Shofar in the month of Elul.

Yet if we were truly honest, to G-d and to ourselves, a similar state of mind would obtain the whole year round. It may sound harsh and even frightening, but actually every day in the life of the Jew is filled with all kinds of tests and trials.

G-d is constantly testing man. Man is always engaged in some kind of task on which G-d sits in judgment, weighing all the factors involved, the efforts as well as the results, and pronouncing either a failure or a success, the latter having various degrees of perfection.

The grave question of tests and trials has been discussed by many great Jewish thinkers and the answers are as pertinent as they are deep.

The question, of course, is obvious. Why does G-d have to test man when He knows beforehand what man is going to choose and do? This question is the more critical part of a general dilemma concerning the meaning of Divine reward and punishment for human behavior, whose myriad details are clearly known

to G-d before they take place. We will leave the general questions of free choice, reward and punishment, etc. for another time. Here we will just discuss and attempt to clarify the subject of tests and trials, the subject that is known in Jewish religious philosophy as *Nisyonos*.

But before we attempt to answer the question of *nisyonos* we must first establish the area in which *nisyonos* are operative.

This area is as large as life itself, and is as complex as the most complex of G-d's creatures, the human being. Our main concern here is the Jew, though of course in a more general sense the same statement may be made about man at large. The Jew has been sanctified as a nation as well as an individual. This sanctification implies a life devoted to the service of G-d. Now let us repeat this: every phase and level of a Jew's life, whether of action, deed, or thought, whether it involves something done for one's self, or for others, must all be devoted to G-d. All the abilities, the talents, all the material and spiritual possessions, nay, the very blood and flesh that one has been given, though they all cannot be used in the same way, must all have one underlying and united goal — the Service of G-d. This is all well-known;

it would be superfluous to cite extended quotations to support this basic fact.

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Now let us honestly reflect for a moment on how many tests, simple and not so simple, a Jew is confronted with in an average day in the year!

As he opens his eyes in the morning he is already confronted with a choice. Should he be quick, alert and punctual in his arising, remembering that G-d is watching and "waiting" for his next move, or should go about it lazily, as nature would seem to command, and hold on to the sweet slumber for another pleasant while and start dressing slowly as if he wished the morning had arrived a little later.

Then, when he starts to daven, he is being tested on how honest a "job" he does. It may sound too simple and trite, but it happens to be an inescapable fact that we are *talking to G-d* when we daven; this is the essence of prayer. Yet how many words are uttered without even the awareness of their having been said!! Of course it may be easier to concentrate on the *tefillah* for those who daven only twice or three times a year, but it is surely no less incumbent upon those who daven three times a day.

The davening finished, the Jew goes "into the world", whether it is the world of labor or of business. In whatever field

this may be, he is constantly being tested. How honest is he at doing his job, and how honest is he in business? In work, for example, some people do not realize that wasting even a short time is tantamount to stealing! For this reason workers are exempted from many duties that are mandatory on other people, such as standing up before an elderly person or a great scholar. All this, so that no time belonging to the employer should be wasted by the employee, even only a very short time. Yet how many people can claim this kind of honesty at their jobs?

Or take the activity of talking. Speech is a special gift which the human being has been privileged to receive from G-d. Naturally, to abuse this very special gift is foolish and immoral, to put it mildly. When a person indulges in idle talk, not *loshon hora*, not *rechilus*, (evil gossip or rumormongering), just simple, idle, purposeless chatter, he has already failed the test. Every word uttered uselessly is an abuse and therefore a failure of a test.

A person could have been created without needs, like the angels. Yet G-d has chosen to create us with a multitude of needs, not only for physical things such as food and shelter, but also psychic needs such as those that satisfy the mental and emotional attributes. Why, Why, one is tempted to cry out, do we need so many things, whose lack and/or procurement render life so hard and complex. While we cannot help the needing, however, the

manner we satisfy our needs is the real battlefield, the arena in which people either fail or become living heroes. How a person eats, how he spends his money, how he shops, how much time and effort he expends — how he socializes with people, how honest he is in his overt concern over another's well-being if he is concerned at all; how well he performs as a father or as a son, mother or daughter etc. How does he act when business is good, and how does he react when things 'could be better'? Again, when behavior is tested, it is not only the actions themselves that are examined, but one's innermost thoughts in a given situation are obviously of great significance, and are therefore also judged on their merit, even as words uttered and deeds performed are weighed.

To summarize then, whatever move man may make, or the decision not to act in whatever situation he finds himself throughout his lifetime, is constantly evaluated by G-d and classified as successful or failing. All this, we must remember, is beyond the well-defined borders of *mitzvos* and *aveiros* (of Divine commands or sins), which are precisely numbered and apply only in specific situations. The larger area of life in which men are tested is filled neither with specific *mitzvos* nor with specific transgressions, but consists of "neutral" norms of behavior which a person, by his proper choice, can turn into *mitzvos* or the opposite.

It should be clear by now that a Jew who knows his duties cannot afford a *laissez faire* attitude even in the smallest corner of his life.

There are of course various degrees of testing. The *Akeida* of Isaac was a monumental test of Abraham which we still mention in our prayers as an inspiration and a meritorious "reminder" to G-d. It was the last and the biggest of Abraham's great ten trials, all of which he passed successfully. Since we are his descendants, passing these kinds of "tests" is easier for us than it was for him; he has already blazed the trail for us.

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Now to the very purpose of testing. It is certainly not meant to provide G-d with information. G-d already knows who will pass and who will fail, although it is a fact that those that tend to fail are tested very 'lightly'.

According to the Rambam (Maimonides) the purpose of testing is to demonstrate G-d's presence and supervision in the world and in the lives of men. So that when a person finds money and returns it, despite the temptation to the opposite, he is thereby loudly and convincingly announcing that G-d reigns supreme in the world and he, the person, is His humble servant.

This answer however, has certain inconsistencies, for it fails to explain what

happens in a case where no one is aware of the testing episode except for the person who was actually involved, such as was the case with Abraham, wherein only he and Yitzchok went to the mountain while the two helpers stayed behind.

The Ramban (Nachmanides) and others have a different view. They see the nisoyon as a tool that G-d "uses" to help man bring out the very highest potential that is within him. We possess some great powers but are unaware of them ourselves, because they never come to the fore. When a challenge such as a great nisoyon is encountered, a person with the proper awareness and good will can master and reveal tremendous inner powers that will in turn give him a tremendous spiritual elevation. If he fails, however, the decline is formidable. The risk is therefore great, and consequently, on the advice of our sages, we include in our prayers the request that G-d "not put us to test"; that is, to the great risky tests in which the stakes are tremendous. For the risk of failure is great. In fact, asking for a nisoyon and then failing to pass with utmost success is one of the errors attributed to King David.

Chassidus, in amplification of this concept of nisyonos, teaches us that emerging victorious from a test puts a person on the same level and perhaps even higher than a Baal Teshuva (a repentant person) who, as we know, is considered superior to a Tzadik (a completely

righteous person). The reason is that in the case of a test, a person not only summons tremendous mental and emotional powers from his psychic depths, but what is more, G-d grants the victorious man a very special spiritual power called *Daas*, which thenceforth enables a person to enjoy a very unique kind of relationship with G-d.

It should be noted here that there are similar rewards available to those who spend most of their life passing the simple daily tests. They too gradually rise in the quality of their performances, and their appreciation of things spiritual, of the Divine Presence, is enhanced. However, taking tests does not as a rule get easier as we go along. For we must remember that just as a first grader is not ordinarily burdened with seventh grade work, so the reverse is true. No observant person should go around priding himself on never having lit a match on Shabbos or never having eaten treifa knowingly; for the average observer these things are beneath his level and he is not being tested on their performance. Each one of us has specific areas which he has already conquered and for which testing has already ended. It is in the higher and more demanding duties that the battles are being fought and tests being given, in order to succeed and go on to even more difficult tasks. In short, there are no let-downs and no easy gains.

As said earlier, testing goes on relentlessly; occasionally there are greater,

more difficult tests. What we all need to meet them is constant vigilance and alertness, *always* remembering our duties and gauging our thoughts, words and deeds accordingly. This may seem frightening. So it is. However, we must remember that G-d knows our weaknesses, He is aware that we cannot always actualize our best intentions, that we sometimes surrender to a slight difficulty. For one thing, however, we have no excuse — our intentions!! They must be honest and perfect. The good-will must be

there, then the hoped-for results will eventually follow.

So now when Tishrei comes, let us remember that we are getting a battery of tests. How serious we are on Rosh Hashono, how honestly repentant on Yom Kipper, and last but not least, how truly joyful we are on Succos. Let us hope we will all succeed in passing our tests with high marks, for G-d is on our side.

# MIRROR TALK

· *Yiddishe Heim Issue 44, Summer 5730 (1970)* ·

It is an oft-repeated Chassidic maxim that *Ahavas Yisroel*, the sincere concern and love each Jew is supposed to feel for all others, is at the core of *Ahavas Hashem*, the love of G-d in particular and the concomitant love of Yiddishkeit in general. In simple words we know this to mean that the love for G-d and the Torah is often expressed through the channel of man-to-man relationships.

Our love and concern for each other stems from the awareness of a common metaphysical background, the Divine source whence our souls originated. (This is why the bond of concern amongst Jews surpasses that of any other nationalities which, despite a common historic and geographic past, do not possess our oneness of soul and identity.) We also aim for a common goal in our life — that of sanctifying His name in this world by involving more of His children in His service. This is an area of activity in which *Ahavas Yisroel* has its most dynamic application, yielding quite dramatic results.

Regrettably however, recently some harmful influences seem to have reached, penetrated, and even permeated our holy domain. Some of the torch-bearers of *Ahavas Yisroel* took their strength for

granted, very much as did the inhabitants of Jerusalem of old about whom Jeremiah said, "They never believed an enemy or attacker would ever reach the gates of Jerusalem etc." What happened to that complacency is now a matter of sad history. We fervently pray and hope a similar fate will never overtake our beautiful Chassidic way of life which is rooted in the loftiest ideals and concepts. However, being realists, we must realize that relying on hope and prayer alone when the exercise of responsibility and self criticism are musts, is merely shirking an obligation.

Upon objective reflection one becomes aware of a certain deterioration setting into the sphere of human relationships. Society around us idolizes material success, so do we. Nothing succeeds like success, as the saying goes, and nothing is more admired and desired. So much so that we not only dote on our own success but, in case of failure or frustration in its achievement, we try at least to associate with successful individuals, even if their area of success happens to be contrary to our basic beliefs!

The reasons for this phenomenon are relatively simple. Association with a man who "made it" socially, financially,

professionally, intellectually or otherwise makes the failing person feel, rightly or wrongly, that he has gained a measure of success absolutely freely. "Many are the rich man's friends" said King Solomon, and, we may add, for good reason.

Of course it is in vogue nowadays to help the unfortunate. Because of new social currents, the influence of mass media and other factors, successful people gain recognition by superficial association with the poor, by giving some of their money, time or just their name for the benefit of the needy. This is all in line with the general pervasive selfish attitude of accumulating achievements, scoring victories and winning challenges which are so sweet to one's ego. But the cause that is unspectacular, not particularly challenging or fashionable, and without the promise of being publicly acknowledged is simply rejected. No wonder we find many individuals and organizations who will help those who are in dire need, the so-called lower classes, but they couldn't care less what happens to the so-called middle class, though they are certainly aware of their particular needs.

We wouldn't be too upset if this were true only of the "outside world." When these attitudes come to be accepted and practiced in our own life, however, they create havoc.

How does it square with Ahavas Yisroel when we make it a practice to honor, admire and befriend the successful ones in our midst almost to the exclusion of all others? If we take an honest count of those we proudly call our friends, those with whom we like to spend an evening, have a long chat in shul or even help in time of need, wouldn't we recognize almost all of them as people credited with positions, achievements, or reputations that we admire. This attitude pervades our very finest people and highest circles. They too give their honor and admiration, their comfort and confidence to those that are fortunate and successful to some substantial degree. What about the rest? Those who are "average" are considered uninteresting, unchallenging and unexciting, all because they are unsuccessful. For them to earn some interest or concern from others they had better experience a tragedy, physical or spiritual, or win a lottery. Otherwise their existence is hardly acknowledged.

Just to cite a few typical examples. We often see a potential *Baal Teshuva*, a repentant individual, being helped and advised by many concerned persons. Very often this lasts only as long as the repentant involved is in obvious need of learning every new step and overcoming the terrible obstacles which he inevitably faces. A little later however, when he gives the impression of being well on his way to a mature life of yiddishkeit, he often finds



that people have lost interest in him. As soon as he is off the critical list, he ceases to be a challenge and therefore merits no more interest or attention. Not that he doesn't need it, or that he doesn't want it, nor is it yet true that he can do well without intensive care and attention. No, it is none of these. It is merely because as an object he has ceased to intrigue us. In short, he has become like one of us, "nothing special," therefore he is similarly treated.

Or take another kind of example. When someone from the academy honors us with his presence we naturally get very excited. We are overwhelmed by the fact that an individual with three college degrees has descended from up high to spend a day with us. Our joy and gratitude are written all over us. That's fine and justified. But isn't it equally right and justifiable to grant the same or more affection to the average "yungerman" who spent as many, or more, years in Yeshiva learning and living Torah, thereby sacrificing a rewarding future secular career? With this "average" young man we deal quite differently. If we do ask him "How are you," we make sure to escape after hearing the traditional B"H reply which applies equally to joy and to sorrow n"l. But we don't care to be burdened with his "trivial" problems and frustrations.

If all this takes place in front of our eyes and doesn't even hurt us, then we must be doing something wrong. What of all the

stories and biographies of Rebbes and Chassidim we heard in our youth with envy and admiration, which emphasized that every Jew is a gem, a priceless treasure, that we must seek him out even from afar and beg to be at his service in case of need etc.; that we cannot even start praising G-d in our morning prayers before we are fully committed to Ahavas Yisroel. Some of us seem to act as if all this was school talk, not really applicable to sophisticated adults.

Let's admit it. Our values have changed or at least are in the process of changing. We can relate to another human being in two ways: either as a doer and accomplisher, or just as one Jew to another irrespective of position and merit. It used to be the case, and this is what we were taught, that a Jew needed no other condition than the mere fact of his Jewishness to deserve our love and concern. Any other quality was a bonus. We loved him *more if* he had a nice character; if he was a ben Torah, a chassid blessed with admirable midos we loved him still more etc.

Today, in the computer and stock market age, our first consideration is production. We ask "how much is he worth," meaning how much has he produced for himself as well as for others. Next question is, "how much can he do for us"? Pity the man who can only give negative answers to both! Any machine in good condition is automatically superior

to him because unlike him, it can produce and do something for us.

There is an almost identical attitude and outlook in our own circles. If a *yungerman* does not have many accomplishments to his credit, his value is terribly low. If he cannot do anything for us or for our "cause" his value is nil.

Of course we cover up this ugly verdict in a holy mantle, claiming that since every Jew is born into the world to change and improve it, whoever fails in that mission has no right to exist! While we cannot interfere with his existence, the justification continues, we certainly don't owe him any concern or consideration, let alone friendship. But this argument isn't as kosher as it sounds. For isn't it true that we do have enough genuine concern and compassion for outsiders who are far below the level of the rejected in our midst? We are ready to extend to these strangers the warmth of our hearts and homes and everything in between, because of the remote chance that they may start putting on Tefillin, keeping Shabbos or Taharas Hamishpacha, or other mitzvos that are a matter of course to even the lowest amongst us! It is very much like the child who rejects the lifelong sacrifices and goods showered upon him by his parents, while he gets carried away by a candy, a compliment from a neighbor whom he may now consider closer than his own kin.

True, there is a lot to be done in this world and we should emphasize "production" in the spiritual realm, but hardly at the expense and destruction of the precious sphere of life of brotherliness, real *ahavas rayim*. Are we really so busy with our good deeds that we cannot find time to stop and think about our own, to spend an hour with them, listening and sharing and giving them our heartfelt sympathy or advice when needed. Remember the essence of *Ahavas Yisroel* is not buying things for a fellow Jew when you go shopping for yourself, or giving him food whenever you eat. This is impractical, sometimes even impossible, and usually unnecessary. What it does mean is sharing whenever feasible the other person's joys and sorrows, easing his loneliness through communication and genuine interest. True, joys and sorrows may be non-productive commodities; they are, however, a slice of life even more real than most productive activities.

Recently I overheard an exceptional young man tell another who had initiated a heart-to-heart talk with him, "Listen, before you tell me too much of your troubles, let me advise you to become a cog in the gigantic (Lubavitcher) group wheel and turn along with it, then you'll be alright." The implication, of course, was that if you are somewhat "square" and your "turning" capacity is not like everyone else's, you are in real trouble. In fact no one should "waste" his time with a

hopeless square like that. Someone's child is sick? Just express some good wishes and forget it. Is it your own child, then better keep it to yourself and don't burden anyone else. Someone in trouble? Well, if it's something interesting, sort of sensational, then let's talk about it and enjoy the gossip. If it's a common kind of problem, why bother with something boring, forget it immediately. We are not cruel, mean or indifferent to the essence of human life; we have adopted consciously or otherwise a code of behavior which reflects current social values.

The younger up-and-coming generation will naturally adopt the lifestyle which it absorbs at home, in shul, and wherever people interact. They are much less likely to take an example from our fathers of old which is contradicted by the behavior of the young fathers and mothers of today. They will never know that once upon a time when most of us were in dire need back in the old country, we lived like brothers in the best sense of the word. They will never find out that we survived inhuman hardships because each heart beat in perfect rhythm with all the others and was thereby strengthened manifold.

Today, a simple "Good Shabbos" greeting is a problem. Should you be naturally friendly and extend the greeting first, you sometimes invite rejection; your friendship is taken for granted. Some people will greet you only if you snub them first; then it is a personal challenge

to a popularity-hungry ego to reach and please you. This is a childish game but too many adults play it for real. Surely it does not square well with the Baal Shem Tov's ideal of Ahavas Yisroel of which we are supposedly the torch bearers.

It is high time we realized that we have erred. We must re-evaluate our attitudes and ideals and see whether we apply them in real life. Perhaps along with the concentration on production and performance of good deeds, we should give a little thought to the duties of the heart, for without the involvement of the heart we are like robots, holy robots but robots nonetheless. If we are guilty of following current social attitudes—idolizing performance and achievement—how can we begin to preach to others to resist social pressures and commonly accepted modes of dress and behavior?

We must rehumanize ourselves and aspire to the standards of which we speak to others and by which our ancestors lived for centuries. One of these standards, elementary but forgotten, requires that we view others as we see ourselves, possessing a good many (potential if not real) qualities, great depth and few shortcomings. As much and as often as we are ready to explain away some undesirable things about ourselves, minimizing their importance until they vanish from our eyes, we should remember that every other person, with no exception, deserves the same kind of

treatment. This may be referred to as the essence of the whole Torah; it is certainly the substance of the Ten Commandments. To some people however only the first word of the Commandments counts — אנכי — I am It!

I recall a story I once heard in Yeshiva about the previous Rebbe נבג"מ telling

about a great chassid whose rebitzen wanted to hang a mirror in his room, while her husband objected, "Your husband does not need a mirror, the Derech Hachayim (a Chassidic mussar sefer of the Mitteler Rebbe) is his mirror."

What is ours?

# A COMMON MALADY

· *Yiddishe Heim Issue 46, Winter 5731 (1970)* ·

The trouble with the world is that people concentrate on it so much that it leaves them no time or energy to concentrate on themselves—hence more trouble in the world. If we were to hear that a certain kind of a person is considered by the sages an idol worshiper, an atheist, as driving away the Divine Presence from the world, as causing G-d to cry over him, as not being privileged to rise in the time of resurrection (תחיית המתים), of being hateful to his own family, of being absolutely senseless, etc., we would be certain that the Gemorah must be referring to someone terrible, a completely evil individual such as we read about in the newspapers or in some bestseller. But the Gemorah is also talking about the kind of person found often in the best of circles, to whom selfishness is not a weakness but a philosophy of life, or even a matter of principle and of worship. He is the person who has one measure for everyone who crosses his path: What can I get from him! The value of a person is in proportion to the amount of service that he renders me, directly or indirectly, intentionally or otherwise. Whether the *Baal Gaava* actually phrases it this way or reflects these attitudes in his actions doesn't really matter. The fact is that he

lives his life as if all the people around him were created to satisfy his multiple needs, material, social, and spiritual. Or else, he seems to be saying, why do we need so many people on earth!? Even when he manages to divert his attention from himself and thinks of G-d's greatness, he comes to the same conclusion, that G-d certainly has the ability—and the obligation—to fulfill all his needs.

It doesn't mean, of course, that the *Baal Gaava* is a vain individual, certainly not in his own eyes. For in his view he possesses just about every quality a fine person should have and even more. His glaring deficiencies in the realms of intellect, emotions, and material success he sees, not as a reflection of his inferiority, but rather as a cause for blaming others for their lack of adequate services to him. His store of knowledge wasn't adequately enriched by those charged with educating him, people cheated him in business, never gave him a chance to work himself up, etc. He sure owes nothing to anyone—it's always the other way around.

If our *Baal Gaava* actually does have something to be proud of . . . then you can be sure it is highly public, magnified a hundredfold, so that he absolutely towers over his peers in his own eyes. If he is rich,

then it's not just more money that sets him apart in a crowd, for he is well aware that there are always people who are richer. But don't despair, he'll find a reason to make much of wealth, perhaps that he uses it in a way other people simply can't match. He believes his taste is superior, his house consequently more tastefully furnished, his clothing more classical and elegant, his "good times" greater experiences, something which other people can only dream about.

If a keen mind is his particular pride, then of course he is not just one of the "good heads" in his community, but he is absolutely unique. As a result he sees things in a way which others, even smart people, cannot. His opinions must therefore naturally prevail over any opposing views. He will rarely seek advice, for he believes that with his brain this would be an exercise in futility. On the other hand, depending upon his nature, he will either dispense unsolicited advice generously or refuse a word of advice even when it is desperately wanted, because his wisdom is too precious to be given away just for the asking.

While in the areas of wealth and wisdom the *Baal Gaava* has to show something to substantiate his pride, in the realm of emotions, he need show absolutely nothing. He can pride himself on being an individual of extremely fine feelings without having to prove, to himself or others, just how his emotions

are better than the average. It's a matter of feeling, he says, it's just not expressible in words or deeds. I am more sensitive, have deeper feeling, and altogether have a larger heart and a loftier soul than most people. Nature is of course quite helpful in fostering these self-deceptions. In our own eyes our appearance is much better than the way we look at others. Our faces look beautiful to us, our voices sound smooth and velvety until we hear them on a tape recorder. We feel much taller than the numbers on a measuring device. In fact, not only do normal people feel this way about themselves, they even feel the same about close relatives provided they are on good terms. So that to a parent his child always looks taller, prettier, sounds smarter, and has a better nature than his playmates. For a person with a touch of *Gaava* it's easy, therefore, to recognize his superiority wherever he prefers to see it.

It doesn't mean, however, as commonly assumed, that the *Baal Gaava* is a snob at all times. We may, in fact, quite often find him conversing or interacting with people who are his acknowledged inferiors. We sort of get an urge to praise him for this charitable attitude. But this is precisely his motivation (nothing is ever done without it). For being benevolent to these inferior individuals with whom he associates emphasizes his own superiority; he shines next to them. This is pure profit for him. The urge to be seen in the company of people acknowledged to be honorable and

of higher status is similarly motivated. The common denominator is the benefit that accrues to the *Baal Gaava*. It's pointless for him to have normal interest in his peers, for from them he gains absolutely nothing. This may all be subconscious, of course, but that doesn't make it less real.

No, he is not mean. You can see him helping the poor, the sick, or other afflicted individuals. Even a suffering animal fills him with compassion. You may ask, then why doesn't he also help some of his friends in their everyday needs? Why do teenagers sometimes relate to their parents in puzzling ways? Why not relieve his parents of the suffering he is causing them when they plead with him about a particular action which brings them grief? The answer is the same. Helping someone in a dramatic situation strengthens his pride and self-worth, while it also heightens his status in the eyes of other people, but casually helping a friend or his parents in almost any case does not do anything for his ever-hungry ego. One cannot go around taking pride in listening to his father and mother (it even sounds a little square) or being nice to a friend or a teacher for that matter. When an otherwise intelligent teenager is asked why he is completely untouched by the suffering and tremendous anxiety of his parents, while he would eagerly help a stranger in the street, he may or may not offer an excuse. If you press the point, explaining to him how much his parents

have done—and continue to do—for him, while the suffering individual that he eagerly helps never did and never will do anything for him, the boy or girl will senselessly and stubbornly stand pat. The real answer is the egotistical one, plus the fact that a feeling of gratitude is sometimes alien not only to kids but to people of all ages.

Hence it is not surprising to see some parents who never appreciate what the teacher or Rosh Yeshivah does for their child. Not only won't they ever make an effort or a gesture to thank the teacher for his work on behalf of their children, but they will even begrudge him—or her—a friendly "hello" or "how are you?". Not that they are oblivious to what the teacher is doing, for they pounce on the minutest fault in his teaching or in his relationship with their child, and criticize not only his teaching methods but his whole value as a person. From their point of view, the teacher, as a matter of course, has a duty to provide the maximum for their child no matter how difficult this child happens to be or how little cooperation the teacher gets from the parents. If the teacher does well, he has only done his duty towards them and their child, so no special thanks are due. But if he doesn't live up to their expectations, then G-d protect him from their wrath, which they won't hesitate to express even in front of their child, who is supposed to return the next day and face the teacher with . . . respect? ... or disgust?

In short, everybody owes his services to them and no special appreciation is warranted.

The *Baal Gaava*, as mentioned earlier, doesn't even exempt the Almighty Himself from the solemn duty of rendering adequate service to him. To be grateful for what G-d gives him will only make sense if the Divine gift is extraordinary, like winning a lottery or making a fantastic "shidduch" (match). The lesser things of life are taken for granted. Our *Baal Gaava* treats praying as a normal exercise, thanks to his early acquired habit of saying the words without giving them much thought, otherwise he would certainly burst out laughing right on page one of the Siddur: "Thank you, G-d, for opening my eyes"; "Thank You for returning my soul"; "Thank You for enabling me to stand, to walk, to dress, etc." How strange to give thanks for such minimal, elementary things! Thank You G-d for making the sun and the moon shine for us! What? Is that, too, a special favor that He did for me, the *Baal Gaava* thinks to himself. No, he doesn't understand that he has not been born to get but rather to give. He forgets that as a matter of fact, no one owes him anything, least of all his Creator, who already gives him more than he deserves most of the time with life, health, and minimum needs.

He does not realize that the essence of a Jew's relation with G-d and even with his fellowmen is the appreciation of every

minute of benefit which he enjoys in this world. That certainly includes the essential components of normal health such as the items enumerated in the morning prayers, as well as in many other blessings. As the Alter Rebbe once answered a complaining chosid: "You keep on asking for the things that you need, but you forget to ask yourself why you are needed in this world!" If and when we do ponder that question, we are bound to experience a complete change of mood and outlook. For this is the road that leads to the opposite of *Gaava*. It is bound to instill in our heart a *genuine* Anivus, a true feeling of humility. Real humbleness does not consist of senseless self-deprecation or excessive downgrading of one's personality. A paralyzing feeling of inferiority can be as damaging as excessive conceit, though, of course, the former is not as abhorrent in the eyes of G-d and man as the latter.

The Torah has related to us the humbleness of Moshe Rabeinu for the very purpose of showing us an example of what true humbleness really means. Moshe Rabeinu was a leader who spoke before huge masses, who fought his battles bravely and certainly recognized his own unique, unparalleled qualities. Yet the Torah calls him "the most humble man on earth." Obviously the Torah does not necessarily consider a person an *Onov*, a humble man, *only* if he walks with a bowed head, speaks in hushed tones, stays



in a corner of the shul and thinks of himself as vain, empty, and worthless. None of these characteristics were true of Moshe Rabeinu. In fact, when the Torah speaks of G-d's choice of our nation from all other nations of the world, it gives as a reason for His choice the nature of Am Yisroel as being the humblest amongst the nations. Does it mean that we must lose our sense of humility because we are a chosen people with all the honor inherent in that term? No, on the contrary, because of the great honor accorded to us in being chosen as His favorite nation, we become humble, realizing the awesome responsibility that is entailed in being great, gifted, and endowed with unusual qualities. For our main task in life is our performance in our services to G-d and man. The better equipped we are mentally, emotionally, spiritually, or materially the greater our obligation to perform well. Hence the true unpretentious humility of Moshe Rabeinu. Knowing the great qualities with which he was Divinely endowed, he felt that someone else similarly gifted would achieve much more than he. This thought was the main inspiration for his *Anivut*, to the point where he felt humble even compared to the simplest individual, for the greater the man, the deeper his humility.

If the *Baal Gaava* really feels superior he would do well to remember that whatever he has more than others is a purposeful, G-d-given gift, to be used in full, not just marveled at or used to prove one's superiority with it. If a person has been given an extra measure of the good things in life, they are conditional upon their fullest utilization to facilitate the performance of the task for which all of us have been sent to this world. This is, of course, in addition to the general obligation even of those with the barest of means to use everything one has in the service of G-d. If, however, the individual who is especially endowed fails to use his 'extras' in the proper manner, he is not only undeserving of special honor but is actually much more blameworthy than the simplest of men.

Thus we may realize that the *Baal Gaava*, while "deserving" all these things with which the Gemorah "credits" him, as mentioned earlier, above all deserves to be called a fool, for he fails to grasp the real meaning of existence, for which a feeling of gratitude and humility is necessary. While *Gaava* leads a person to all kinds of terrible and despicable attitudes, *Anava*—true humility—will certainly lead him to the loftiest heights of appreciation and love in the eyes of G-d and man.

# TOP PRIORITY

· *Yiddishe Heim Issue 48, Summer 5731 (1971)* ·

*An arrogant person (goes to) Gehinom and a humble one to Gan Eden*

— ETHICS OF THE FATHERS

Living as we do in a secular society, we are inevitably *affected by* the philosophies and lifestyles of the dominant culture. These undesirable influences take on various forms. To mention just a few: age (young people are more vulnerable), upbringing (liberal or strict), and the intensity and depth of one's Torah commitment.

One kind of influence that has not spared even the best of families is the widespread disrespect and even real chutzpah which has assumed epidemic proportions, especially among teenage yeshiva boys and girls in their relationship with parents and teachers as well as with their own peers.

To be fair, we should recognize the tremendous difficulty involved in resisting a barrage of propaganda by the mass media and other factors. Many educators, doctors, psychologists and self-styled social philosophers and leaders relentlessly preach the doctrine of equal rights for parents and children, teachers and pupils, achievers and failures, etc. What's more, the policy of *equal rights* is only a beginning to the claim for *special rights* for

all those of whom respect and subordination were demanded in earlier times. Today we are called upon to treat these people in a superior manner supposedly to atone for our centuries-old guilt.

A similar transformation has taken place in the sphere of the so-called "youth culture." Since the reasoning goes- young people were denied equal status in past generations, adults must atone for their forefathers' "unethical" behavior by . . . giving young people, sons, daughters and pupils, *superior rights*.

Newspapers and even scholarly publications constantly quote students' advice and opinions on every subject under the sun and even beyond it. You begin wondering (sometimes) when and where have they managed to learn so much, since according to their almost unanimous opinion their schools are at best good for nothing and their teachers complete failures. You also wonder, if all of them are so bright, sincere and sensitive, where do all the dull adults come from?

If you ask some young people — including yeshiva students — what makes the best kind of parent or teacher, you will invariably hear many of them advising parents to either adopt a "hands-off" policy or at least act like friends to their sons and daughters. The latter alternative is especially advocated for teachers for whom the standard phrase of approval is usually "he (or she) is not acting as a teacher but rather like a friend." This is especially applicable at the high-school level. That would still be tolerable if young people would show deference and consideration for their own friends. As it is, many young people who pride themselves on being good-hearted, sincere and honest actually limit the exercise of these wonderful traits to a few very close colleagues while they deny even minimal consideration to those outside. Hence the tremendous upsurge of thievery, muggings and assaults on college campuses within the student body.

The Torah world thought it could never happen to us. We were well protected and immune. As a result of our self-confidence we neglected the human relations aspect of our education to an unforgivable degree; the terrible results are growing daily. Yeshiva boys and girls don't know what it means to be courteous to older people. Even the infirm are disregarded, whether it involves giving up a seat in a crowded shul or lending a helping hand in any other way. Needless to say, receptivity

to criticism is nil. It is by no means rare to hear a student — even at grade level — answering his rebbi's (or teacher's) critical remark with a "cool" *don't bother me!* If the student is a little older and more intelligent he (or she) often answers "O.K. so that's your opinion and you're entitled to it and I am entitled to mine, and that's that!" To expect a hello or a good Shabbos from a pupil of any age is to admit naivete and invite disappointment.

Not that the talmidim and talmidos think altogether little of respect and honor. Not so; their attitude is quite different when they happen to be on the receiving end. Pupils will actually become the teacher's (or rebbi's) enemies if they feel that they were slighted in the least. Slighting is defined not only as criticizing; even insufficient compliments is reason enough for enmity. Many of them give the impression that they sit in class not to listen but to observe a performance, for their goal is not to learn but rather to evaluate, judge, and issue the verdict. The class is a daily jury, the teacher — the plaintiff. Of course in public school it is much worse but if this is our consolation then we must bend our heads in overdue shame.

Some parents and interested observers of the Yeshiva scene claim that this whole situation is only temporary, it only lasts while the young people are at the Yeshiva. Later, however, in independent adulthood and marriage all these mavericks become

wonderful gentlemen and honorable ladies. This is insufficient comfort at best and a complete illusion at worst. Firstly, young people spend a good part of their lives in the Yeshiva environment and so do the teachers. We cannot, therefore, dismiss it lightly as an unfortunate short period of adjustment. Secondly there is ample evidence that many individuals in whom undesirable traits were discernible in the Yeshiva kept them in adulthood. Though more subtle, they were just as irritating. Furthermore, isn't the basic idea of Torah education to teach the child a way of life that he can proudly follow through ripe old age without deviating? How does that square with the attitude of neglect during the important and formative years that students spend at the Yeshivos?

First of all, abiding by the maxim of *Derech Eretz* preceding the Torah, we must realize that no real Torah learning can take place in an atmosphere of chutzpah. As the Gemora puts it, any talmid that is not overtaken by complete awe for his rebbi, to the point that his reverence even shows on his face deserves punishment! We find that some Gemora sages, to lessen their students' tension, resorted to cheerful remarks before the actual learning. If some boys and girls feel that this whole honor bit is below their dignity and their sophistication, that they are busy making greater milestones in their spiritual quests, let them remember the holy lives of the twenty four thousand talmidim of Rabbi

Akiva. It seems quite clear these great people assumed that where giant achievements in Torah and piety are concerned, mutual respect and honor cannot be too important. The Heavenly Court, however, judged them incorrect and they were terribly punished for their guilt, even though so much Torah scholarship and greatness were lost to Klal Yisroel. Similarly, our sages, speaking of Rachel's premature death, give as one of the reasons the fact that on a certain occasion Rachel spoke up before her older sister Leah. Just consider, at the moment of judgment, an act of disrespect can tip the scale of justice and outweigh many tremendously important merits.

The prophet Yeshayahu (Isaiah) foretold the lowest ebb of our exilic downfall by describing it as the total disregard the young will have for the old and the light-minded will have for those whom they ought to honor.

True enough, the current excess of

chutzpah in the world is a sure sign the days of Moshiach are drawing near, but there is no mitzvah for anyone to carry this kind of sign on the "parade route" to the full redemption. There are many different kinds of "signs" that could be proudly displayed.

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Are there any remedies? Is there any hope? What should a teacher do when a seventh grader tells him "Who do you think you are?" Or a parent whose son or daughter slaps him down with a stern "shut up!" that turns him dumbfounded and paralyzed with rage? Should they take refuge in pathetic resignation? No, No, a thousand times no! Parents and teachers must take these remarks as challenges and respond appropriately. Of course, there can be no hard and fast rules on how to react in any particular situation; it depends on a variety of factors, not the least of which is the age of the youngster. There are, however, certain methods which are helpful and productive with most intelligent youngsters.

For example, the showing of disgust in facial or verbal expression could be a potent response. Of course one should be wary of becoming entrapped in a futile, heated exchange of words. The fate of a teacher or parent could become sealed forever if he meekly removes himself from the scene of "disaster" or begins explaining himself to the "fresh" youngster, offering apologies instead of a sweeping verbal blow.

It must be understood that insults and insolence are not just motivated by anger. There is a great deal of ego assertion involved in this. This simply means that the person who insults is attempting to assert and establish his superiority over his opponent by stepping all over him or at

least knocking him to the ground verbally. Since it is done verbally rather than physically it supposedly bears the mark of superior intelligence, stronger character and a better sense of justice; things which could not be expressed through physical violence. As a result of its availability, superior force, and lack of public censure, the verbal onslaught is very often utilized by crude and insensitive souls. Hence its epidemic proportions. We must therefore cure it by treating it with its own kind of medicine — verbal retort and the showing of utter disgust with the arrogant personality. To treat him gently will just serve to strengthen his insolence because invariably these kinds of people — at any age — equate niceness with naivete and tolerance is interpreted as weakness and helplessness.

Of course the on-the-spot lecture is not the ultimate answer. This can only be a thorough education in the area of human relations. This must begin in the earliest stages of a child's development and continue throughout high-school and even beyond, for every age adds another degree of intelligence and experience. The child should get a deeper and more elaborate presentation of the laws that apply between man and his fellow man. Parents must understand that it is difficult for a teacher to request respect and honor, so it is their responsibility to press it into the child's conscience. The teacher, of course, must do the same for the parents' sake. We

must remember that every generation expects and deserves to be taught the basic and most noble rules of life. If we fail them, our suffering from their insolence will be justified, though of course every adult is ultimately responsible for his own failures, though he may attribute them to the negligence of his parents and teachers.

Most youngsters can understand that age must be respected because it invariably sharpens a person's wisdom and intelligence while giving him the invaluable gift of experience. Though some young people may feel they are overflowing with superior brains, they certainly won't admit that their mental growth has stopped. They surely expect to grow sharper and wiser as they grow older, something which their parents and teachers already have done. If they look back a year or two they will realize how they have matured and gained mentally, though at that point — a year ago — they were equally certain of having reached complete maturity and adequate intelligence. So it goes, from year to year, decade to decade. They must remember that their elders have been where they are now and advanced further and are therefore better equipped mentally and emotionally to make correct judgments. When a youngster offers advice or criticism to a teacher or a parent he must imagine himself getting similar advice or criticism from a brother or a sister who is ten years or more his junior. Wouldn't it

be almost impossible for him to accept? Yet, the young person feels that his advice is absolutely correct and his elders are being unreasonable in rejecting it.

In general we must make it clear to those with whose upbringing we are charged that every person is truly a universe unto himself. As someone once remarked, "Remember, to the other guy you are just another guy!" We must make it clear that another person is not just an event or experience in our mighty important life. He too has been created in the Divine Image — whether we like him or not — with sensitivity, wisdom, hopes, aspirations and dignity. By mistreating him — even if he isn't our superior — we are tampering with something precious, fragile and above all Divine.

An older child must be given to understand that by exhibiting chutzpah and loudness he shows what kind of person he really is; his darkest side is revealed through foul speech, insolence and brazenness. Even his own friends, in whose eyes he wishes to appear a hero by his brashness and arrogance, eventually despise him and ridicule him behind his back.

All this doesn't mean that we must encourage the development of an apologetic and meek personality in our students. In today's world this would be an inadequate preparation for a productive life and a very severe handicap. There are

many elements in our society against whom we should have the strength to stand up firmly and resolutely, in defense of our principles and cherished way of life. "To know what to answer to an atheist" also includes the knowledge of how to respond to him. It is for such occasions that we should reserve our inborn or acquired aggressiveness. As King David said, "*To a good person, we must show kindness, with a crooked person, be sly.*" Of course even that we must do in good taste so as not to achieve opposite results.

In summary, it must be said that the eradication of chutzpah from our midst, and the implantation of respect and honor in its stead is a great challenge which we must all start attacking immediately. We dare not deny the upcoming generations the chance of knowing and experiencing what a real Chassidic way of life is all about, with its beauty and refinement expressed in the most noble human relationships.

# A YEAR OF REFLECTION

· *Yiddishe Heim Issue 51, Yud-Alef Nissan 5732 (1972)* ·

When tens of thousands of Shmura Matzos are distributed to deprived Jews all over the globe; when camps turn otherwise unproductive summers into periods of wholesome religious inspiration for thousands of Jewishly estranged children; when hospitals and similar institutions around the globe echo the sounds of the Shofar on Rosh Hashonah; when multitudes of Jewish men and women across the continents perform the mitzvah of Esrog and Lulov, some for the first time in their lives, and all this is done in the name of one organization, then we must surely get the impression that it is a large, rich organization with magnificent resources of money and manpower.

When we hear that over a million Jews have donned T'fillin at the Western Wall in Jerusalem since 1967, some for the first or second time since their Bar-Mitzvah, joining the many thousands around the world who have done likewise; or how college campuses in many parts of the world play host to groups of young chassidim who tell it like it is about the inborn love of G-d in every Jewish heart, and how to live it; when we meet numerous individuals and families who have had the courage to exchange an empty and purposeless life for one of joy

in wholehearted commitment to Torah, we wonder, who is it that is accomplishing so much on so gigantic a scale?

The inescapable answer, of course, is the Lubavitcher chassidim. Those who know Lubavitch well, however, are aware that their organization is far from possessing any major financial resources or manpower. They use very few modern, streamlined, Madison Avenue methods, so naturally employed by other Jewish organizations, though with questionable results. Their secret is a spirit of selfless devotion to efforts to benefit Jews wherever they may be found.

We must admit, however, that Lubavitch hardly has a monopoly on spiritual devotion; many others have it too. Yet the performance of the Lubavitcher chassidim is unmatched. Why? What is their secret? Any one of them will be only too glad to reveal it—*THE REBBE* שליט"א Should you try to praise any Lubavitcher chossid or group for their marvelous work, you are bound to hear the same, "It's not really my own credit," reply. Australia, Europe, Eretz Yisroel, across the North American continent, everywhere you will inevitably hear it sooner or later in the conversation, "It is the Rebbe's achievement, not ours."



Do not be misled. This is not just humbleness, honesty or coyness. It is the true belief of the chassidim, and it is the simple truth. The Rebbe is the one that does it all, with the help of G-d. Not in a purely spiritual way, by serving as a source of inspiration and emulation to the tens of thousands of his ardent disciples. This is certainly a part of the story, but not the major part. The fact is that the Rebbe actually initiates, guides, and inspires every admirable activity of the chassidim, and personally checks up on the results.

Some people are awed by the volume of work done by Lubavitch and wonder at the fantastic rate of growth of their activities. The answer is again, the Rebbe. When the Rebbe succeeded his illustrious father-in-law, the former Lubavitcher Rebbe in 1950, he was only forty-eight years old. It was expected that he would give the movement a tremendous push forward, for although the former Rebbe had managed, in a mere ten years of American sojourn, and while confined to a wheelchair, to drastically change the topography of the Jewish scene in this country, there was still very much left to be done. Chassidim were confident that the Rebbe would tackle the work with all his great powers. Now, as we chassidim, together with Jews all over the world are joyously celebrating the Rebbe's seventieth birthday, we are not only amazed at all that he has actually achieved. We are awed and overwhelmed by his

steadily increasing drive and charges to us. Every year his dynamism rises along with his age, together with the volume of his towering accomplishments.

Honestly speaking, we chassidim wouldn't mind taking a little vacation, relaxing and sitting back to marvel at all the glorious achievements. But how can we when the Rebbe has not taken a single day of vacation in over two decades? How many others, in any position, have worked for over twenty years without missing a single day for any reason whatsoever? Well, the Rebbe has done just that. After working on a project for an extended period of time with dubious results, we chassidim are tempted to give it up. Didn't our Sages (in Pirkei Avos) teach us that "One is not obligated to finish the work...". All such considerations and rationalizations disintegrate in the light—and heat—of the Rebbe's example and limitless perseverance. When the Rebbe undertakes a project, he pursues it with every means at his disposal. He misses no opportunity to remind, to urge, to insist that it be completed; by mail, by phone, in public addresses and in private conversations the Rebbe presses for a successful conclusion. He does not recognize fatigue or discouragement. The chassidim must perforce react in kind.

Occasionally, a project begun with high hopes must be abandoned because of unforeseen circumstances. The chassidim, in a normal, all too human reaction, just

give it up and forget about it. But no; the Rebbe, although recognizing the realities of the situation, urges patience and trust in G-d. Since the work was altogether undertaken for the sake of the Almighty, He must and will help, explains the Rebbe. We must exercise patience and hope, for G-d does not necessarily have to abide by our schedules and deadlines; He is eternal and has all the time in the world, and more.

We are but simple mortals faced with all the problems inherent in this imperfect existence. We like to be praised when we do something worthwhile. When, after a full day's work, we Lubavitcher are asked to, and do, put in many tiresome hours trying to benefit another Jew or Jews, we feel in our hearts that we can, in all humility, claim a lot of credit compared to others, but we do not usually get that desirable pat on the back. But can a young chassid, returning all exhausted from a long trip to a college campus at 3 in the morning, really expect a compliment when he glances at the Rebbe's office and sees that it is still alight, while there are another dozen or so people still waiting in the anteroom to see the Rebbe? That young chosid knows that the Rebbe will be finishing his day's work sometime in the morning hours, when others are getting up.

The Rebbe knows who really must have personal encouragement, and in such cases gives it often and in generous measure.

Most of us get our compliments in a roundabout way, by being told that what we have done is a fine beginning, that our initial success is a good assurance that we will be successful in forthcoming efforts. Often, in the sacred way of the prophets of old, the Rebbe admonishes the chassidim to wake up to their duties and shoulder their responsibilities. He may even point out an area in which nothing has yet been done, or where there is some negligence. He may say that no one really cares whether a particular urgent project succeeds or fails. At such times the Rebbe shows signs of irritation by tone of voice, etc., like the *novi of yore* whose harsh condemnations and admonishments of our forefathers for their spiritual laxity reflected his pain and disappointment. The prophet was well aware that despite their deficiencies the Jews were still doing much more than other people to serve G-d. But he also knew that the Jews have the extra ability to rise above the prevailing circumstances if they would but try enough, according to the standards set for them from Above. The Rebbe, knowing that what we are asked to do is in our own best interests, to help us fulfill the task for which G-d has given us life, urges us to try harder. We see that the Rebbe asks more and more of himself. Can we refuse to do our share, though it is often hard to live up to his lofty standards?! Rather than appealing to the emotions, the Rebbe gives his requests for action a rational

basis. His reasons are so crystal clear that we feel like shouting out to convince the rest of the world of the validity and importance of the action. The Rebbe keeps bringing new logic and new light to every subject, refreshing our appreciation of its meaning and reinspiring us to greater deeds.

Many great Torah leaders and groups of strictly observant Jews (even chassidim), refuse to help the work of Lubavitch because they disagree with some aspects of our philosophy and some of our methods. In truth, many of us harbor a mutual distrust, but it doesn't last too long. This natural negative feeling about our opponents disappears when we observe the Rebbe's attitude. It is well known that the Rebbe actively encourages any positive influence for the benefit of Torah and mitzvos from any source. He has been known to give substantial financial and moral support to such movements, although they officially embrace an antagonistic attitude towards Lubavitch, even occasionally attacking us in print. As long as they exert a positive influence in strengthening Torah life among Jews, they will get his blessings and generous support. Happily, some of those who have opposed us, and still do, have adopted the same code. We are proud and thankful that we have inspired them in the right direction, although they hardly acknowledge this. Those who jealously refuse to forgive Lubavitch for being

admired and successful, and even descend to efforts to spoil things, can be assured that we shall overcome, and we expect to see the day that they too will be honored to join us.

There are some who possess considerable Torah scholarship and frown on any suggestion that they employ their talents in the service of the ignorant or the young, and teach them the *Aleph Beis* of Judaism. They think that unless the children are their own, it would be degrading to spend time and effort on the Torah deprived. Well, the Rebbe disagrees. Every Jewish child, near or far, is very dear to him; he spends many hours of his time talking Torah to them, enlivening them with Torah spirit, and directing and urging his chassidim to do the same.

The Rebbe never overlooks the "small vessels," whether this means "small people" that need help, or "small" projects that people disregard in favor of major, more important endeavors. Whether such a person is searching for a better Yeshivah for his child, a better doctor for a sick member of the family, G-d forbid, or even a better position, the Rebbe will give him his undivided attention. Any Jewish community in the world, no matter how remote and forsaken, commands the same attention, to which the thousands of personal letters to which the Rebbe graciously replies every year testify. Nothing is too small or too big. Chassidim try to follow this example, to help a needy

Jew, spiritually or materially whenever we can. We are often reminded by the Rebbe's words or his radiant presence that we fail to live up to our ideal intentions.

Among chassidim there is a tradition that the Rebbe's soul is a composite of the souls of his followers. Many of his chassidim are foremost Torah personalities in the Jewish world. Others are equally prominent in their qualities of piety, generosity, and communal leadership. And the dimension of the Rebbe's personality combines all this. The deeper, more esoteric aspects of the Rebbe's personality are beyond the grasp of his own chassidim, let alone of others who know him only from a distance. Yet despite his intellectual greatness, or maybe because of it, the Rebbe spends long hours, day in, day out, working to help more and more Jews live a fuller spiritual life. Who dares claim to be too busy with more important pursuits to have time for the work which the Rebbe requires!

The farbrengens — special celebrations of the chassidim — can be very strenuous, lasting for seven to eight consecutive hours. It is usually very crowded, and after several hours people start feeling tired and thinking of taking a break, especially on those occasions when there is a lot of dancing. Until we take a good look at the radiant face of the Rebbe. After all, it is he who has been doing the real hard work for the last six, seven hours, talking on a multitude of subjects, sometimes for a

straight hour at a time. So, musing, we observe the Rebbe suddenly rise vigorously and burst into dance, infusing his prematurely tired chassidim with the divine energy which is so naturally his.

The chassidim as a group are second to none in the quality and quantity of their Torah learning. The Rebbe asks this of them in addition to their deeds in the service of Klal Yisroel. Since humbleness is a supreme virtue, they are likely to play down their excellent and extensive Torah knowledge. Chassidim do not find their self-expression only in benevolent activities and joyful celebrations. Torah learning is an important part of their lives.

The Rebbe never allows the relaxation of our pursuit of excellence in Torah. Whether it is done through his unparalleled expositions of Rashi's commentary on the weekly Sidra, or by an exquisite elaboration of a Gemorah passage when making a *siyum*, or by the illumination of a difficult text in the Rambam, we benefit not only from his learning, but also from the clear guidelines of proper methods in studying. It has been said of some Torah geniuses that they were able to approximate the number of drops of water in the ocean, while others could visualize the whole ocean in a drop of water. The Rebbe's Torah insights comprise all the dimensions of Torah in every one of its smallest particles, together with the ability to explain these dimensions clearly to others. He succeeds

in showing the practical applications inherent even in the most esoteric and mystic passages.

Having a good record of courageous deeds in helping others spiritually a otherwise, and knowing how to learn still leaves something missing. We must still work at our constant self-refinement. The presence of the Rebbe, the epitome of self-refinement in life, reminds us of this. The study of chassidus goes a long way in its good effects on the character and virtues of an individual. The Rebbe however, is too concerned about this subject to miss any opportunity to emphasize what is expected of chassidim and of all Jews in the realm of self-discipline and self-sacrifice in the service of G-d. The mind, integrating the teachings of Torah as illumined by chassidus, must change the emotional attributes of the heart; in turn, they must permeate all the mundane daily activities of every Jew. These words are directed to the Rosh Yeshivah as well as to the shopworker; both of these have a constant, common need for self-improvement, and can never be satisfied

with their achievements in this area. The inspiration of the Rebbe practicing what he preaches to others is the privilege of all.

When the Rebbe communicates with an individual or a group, the effects can be more profound and longer lasting than some "ordinary" miracles. Chassidim are treated to these experiences quite generously, so generously that we are in danger of beginning to take it for granted and losing a great deal of appreciation in the process. We must pause and reflect on this often.

In this, the Rebbe's seventieth year, we should reflect how fortunate is our generation which is blessed with such a leader. How much more fortunate are we his chassidim in having the privilege of being in the position of moving ever closer towards him. We wish the Rebbe the best of health and increasing nachas from us, with all our hearts. May we merit being led by the Rebbe towards Moshiach *Tzidkainu* and the *geulah shleimah* very speedily in our days.

# CAN EVERYONE TEACH?

· *Yiddishe Heim Issue 68, Sivan-Tammuz 5736 (1976)* ·

Teaching has more connoisseurs than adherents. Almost everyone has an opinion about this art and about the people who practice it. They usually begin "I am not a teacher, nor an educator, but I do think this method is absolutely ..." or, "This teacher doesn't know how to teach", or, "Wow he's a great educator!" etc.

Like religion, the subject of teaching inspires long, heated, usually open-ended, arguments. Among teachers too there exists lots of professional pride, mostly toward others. Teachers, as a group, usually consider themselves experts in their field. They feel they understand the child well and have first-hand knowledge of his strengths and his weaknesses, his aspirations and desperations. If something goes wrong in the classroom it is usually blamed on outside factors rather than their own shortcomings. This strong sense of self-esteem often prevents many a teacher from heeding the advice and counsel of a colleague.

Ironically this sense of pride is only felt towards others, but not about oneself. Teachers are not generally proud of their calling, especially the ones who teach younger grades, and even more especially from teachers. Perhaps the lack of self-esteem comes from the fact that teaching

is something almost everyone is called upon to do at one time or another in various forms and contexts. Whether it be the parent, the boss at the plant, the rabbi of a shul, or the president of the country, all have to teach and educate those in their charge. If everybody is doing it, it's naturally hard to feel proud and unique because the teacher is just doing more of the same.

Yet every generation is only as good as its teachers. One would therefore expect the 'formal' teachers—those trained for that purpose—to be people of high standards and proper moral standing. Even that has been abandoned nowadays. Teachers are trained to be good technicians in the mechanics of information transfer and class management. Such intangibles as honesty, integrity, devotion, moral commitment and a sense of destiny are considered of secondary importance at best. Of course today's generation of teachers is a product of their predecessors so that we cannot blame only our contemporaries for this sorry state.

While the above is mainly applicable to teachers in general, it is also true of Torah teachers and educators who, in addition to lack of self respect, lack of adequate

preparation, and universal criticism, have their unique joys and sorrows to contend with.

One can cite an avalanche of quotations from our holy sources showing how great and lofty are those who teach Torah to others, especially to children. They are compared to the highest, most noble beings, while their work is likened to G-d's own Work—"Who teaches the Torah to the Jewish nation". Halachacally we are (of course) urged to fear and respect our teachers (almost) as much as we fear G-d—"Moro Rabcho Kmoro Shomayim," say our sages in Pirkei Avos. On the other hand, halacha is extremely demanding of teachers. It treats very strictly those who do not live up to the highest standards of performance and integrity in their work and dedication. In fact, the Torah allows the usually prohibited act of ruthless competition to be used as a tool for the improvement of teaching. Teachers who renege on their duty are actually threatened with grave consequences.

In a way, teachers or mechanchim (Torah educators) are like other Jews, only more so, to paraphrase a well-known cliché, but because their contribution is so valuable and so revered, their iniquities are reprimanded in harsher ways. As is true about the general fateful history of our nation, we are chosen for greatness and great we must remain, or else... To become as careless and apathetic as other nations, to give up the ultimate rewards in order to

avoid the risk of ultimate punishment is an alternative which is not open to us.

All this however, is acceptable when and if it comes from Heaven. True, a person usually becomes a teacher by choice; usually but not always. But what if after choosing teaching as a way of life, one suddenly (or gradually) realizes that it is much too difficult or unsuitable as an occupation? The mechanech is suddenly faced with powerful dissuasion and even outright restrictions about contemplating a change of occupation. Especially nowadays, when teaching is deemed a spiritual, life-giving activity within the Jewish community, a teacher considering change is made to feel as if he were a traitor to Jewish survival.

And here is the painful irony. On the one hand, a mechanech is made to feel that the future of every child in his charge as a Jew and as a mentch depends upon his, the teacher's, performance; that he must therefore be devoted every minute to every child. That lack of absolute dedication constitutes an act of cheating on the child's best chances for mental and spiritual development to which he is surely entitled, etc. That the teacher must always search for better, newer, and more effective methods to challenge and inspire the students. That endless lesson preparations, ways of assuring an exciting lesson delivery, working out interesting home assignments etc., are his duties.

As if that were not sufficient, the teacher is also expected to be in the proper mood when he faces the class, no matter what kind of hardships he may be afflicted with in his own private life. For if he upsets a child, he may have damaged that student's interest and excitement in Yiddishkeit for years to come. Surely that's a very heavy burden to carry. In simpler terms, if the teacher went to sleep late the night before, because he stayed up with a crying child, or for any other reason, and lacks his usual vigor the next morning, he has already committed a moral and perhaps a legal misdemeanor.

In light of the above, we should expect that the community in general and parents of students in particular would respect and admire the individual who has put himself in a position of such hazardous responsibility and hardship for their sake. We would think that the least the community of parents and other responsible individuals could do would be to treat the mechanech—melamed as graciously as possible with dignified honor, proper remuneration, and gratitude. Let it be made clear that we are not referring here to the master teacher or expert educator, of which there are very few, even less than in other less complex professions. (Even these outstanding mechanchim are regrettably considered to be on the lower rungs of the *frum* social ladder). We are talking here about the majority of teachers and mechanchim who

are the mainstay of our educational apparatus. It's what happens to them that really matters.

And what really happens? They are not respected, nor are they valued. They are neither envied nor admired. The general assumption is that most of them became teachers because they couldn't do anything else for a living! In other words they, the mechanchim, are being equated with the shlemiels of the community, a kind of a necessary but unworthy bunch.

Here is a vicious cycle. Teachers are treated disrespectfully. The students who of course knows exactly in what esteem his teacher is held, especially if he is blessed with the kind of zealous parents who never hesitate to criticize his teacher or other teachers in the child's presence, perhaps even using vivid negative terminology — that student naturally hopes to grow up and become anything... but a teacher. When the time comes for him to choose an occupation he will surely avoid the teaching field unless... unless he really can't help it. Then of course he will be confirming the "traditional" assumption that those who become teachers cannot do anything else.

The ones who really make sure that their children won't be teachers are . . . the teachers themselves. Just look and ask around and see how many teachers raised their children to follow in their



professional footsteps. The few that did are the exceptions that validate the rule.

This undesirable situation will not change without some drastic remedies. It surely won't change by giving the teachers more *mussar* and sermons on the necessity to increase devotion, dedication and contemplate the great responsibility which is theirs. All this approach can accomplish is to further frustrate those who are already ridden with feelings of guilt, inadequacy and failure about their lack of perfection. (The ones who do not feel guilty will never be moved by strong words of rebuke and moralizing in any way). All that harping on teachers' shortcomings will accomplish will be to scare away potential candidates, who will rightfully feel that teaching and Chinuch is a job of enormous demands that offers very meager returns.

We must rather make teaching an attractive endeavor to the potential teacher while he or she is still a student in the yeshiva or seminary. An educational drive must be undertaken by those whose words are respected in the community to convince parents and others to relate to teachers with the utmost honor in shul, in the marketplace, and above all at home. There must be a steady and consistent demand by community leaders that teachers be well-paid and well-praised. Teachers and mechanchim should be regarded as our real heroes for the way they maintain a daily routine of discipline,

hard work, and dedication, more than those whose occasional acts of valor for Jewish causes are usually given the highest admiration.

Furthermore, only those who really want to teach should be encouraged to do so. Student-candidates should be carefully selected on the basis of their innate ability and interest in teaching. In turn, they should be guided by the Yeshiva or Girls' Seminary administration in specially designed courses in the techniques of classroom management and all its ramifications. No one should be pressured into entering or remaining in Chinuch if he or she does not feel completely comfortable there. A teacher should not have to feel that he is binding himself into a life-long commitment as soon as he accepts his first job.

Another important consideration is that teachers and mechanchim in general should be relieved from most other community activities. It has recently become fashionable for many a teacher to spend a lot of time and energy "working with" college students, neighbors, and pedestrians, but this is sometimes at the expense of their students. They have been persuaded to feel that these "outside" activities are the ones that really count, while teaching is just a lackluster, routine necessity but hardly a real accomplishment and the "right (real) thing". Someone in authority should raise his voice and announce that while

everyone else must contribute generously to "outside" enlightenment, the teacher's main, first, and foremost responsibility is to the "inside segment" of Klal Yisroel which is sitting in the classroom and deserves all the time, talent, and energy that can be found for them, lest they too decide to join the "outside" where the "action" is.

Strange and disturbing ideas are being heard lately from those who claim to be the teachers' best friends. They claim that a little work on the "outside" is worth more than lots of toil on the "inside". Their reasoning, though simplistic, is appealing and to a degree convincing: Teaching a child in Yeshiva until after high school costs huge sums of money and tens of thousands of teaching hours, yet when the student graduates, there is no guarantee about the kind of life he will lead nor the kind of home he will establish after marriage. In short, a Yeshiva education, so very costly in financial and human terms, is indeed a risky investment. In the case of those Yeshivos that offer only an elementary-grade education the risk is of course much greater. The returns on the investment may be nil. On the other hand, these friends argue, a two-three year investment (or sometimes even less) in Jewish adults produces almost immediate results. In a relatively short while the new Baal Teshuva can be congratulated on the establishment of a

new Chassidic home. Which venture pays off better? Isn't the answer obvious?

This approach not only knocks the wind out of the teacher's sails, but it also has the harmful effect of making his contribution seem unimportant and worthless to most people, unless he is working with "haimishe" children.

The above argument is fallacious for a number of reasons, Firstly, teaching Torah is important and worthwhile for its own sake in its own time, and not just for what it will accomplish for the students' adult years. At every moment of the day or night the world exists because of the learning of Torah, especially that of children and youth. While the Baal Teshuva only holds a promise of a home where Torah will be taught to children, the students in the Yeshiva already claim the fulfillment of that promise, now. Secondly, the years that a child spends in the Yeshiva are certainly pure and holy to a large extent.

They are permeated with Torah, Tefilla, Mitzvot and other Jewishly inspiring activities. In the case of the average Baal Teshuva, however, the youthful years are lost to the individual as well as to the nation. Sometimes those years are not just empty, Jewishly speaking, but filled with acts and experiences which require many holy years and tears to rectify. (Often all this could have been avoided had a childhood teacher been the ideal kind with the proper knowledge, dedication,

and parental cooperation). Who is to say which are the more important years in life, the early years or the adult years?

Thirdly, this whole argument smacks of a dilution of all our traditional value systems. For us in the Yeshiva community, and especially for those who are Lubavitcher Chassidim, there is great pride in thoroughness. We cherish breadth, depth, and consistency, be it in Torah learning, practice of mitzvot, kind deeds, or human relations. We in fact disdain the momentary, the fleeting, and the superficial. These qualities are not easily achieved. There exists a kind of unwritten rule that whatever is too easily achieved is hardly worth that much. Such adherence to the authentic and the genuine in the human expression, which can only be achieved through arduous and long-lasting efforts, should make us more than a little suspicious of blitz-quick results. Hence, in-depth teaching, refinement of the child's character to make a real Yeshiva-mentch out of him, is surely the preferred way, if only the opportunity is available. Naturally, in the case of straying adults, we don't have much choice but to act quickly and settle, at least temporarily, for superficial, haphazard results. When the fire is blazing, consuming everything in sight, there is no time to search for the purest water and the best container, etc.

To return to our original question: "Can everyone teach?", the answer is Yes!

Everyone is obligated to share his material, mental, and spiritual blessings, no matter how meager, with others. There is always somebody who has much less, or even nothing at all, especially today, when ignorance rather than rebellion, misguidedness rather than atheism, are the prevalent evils. There are literally hundreds of thousands of Jews of all ages out there begging to be taught and guided. Even with those who seem to resist, it is mostly a question of "breaking the ice", after that it is pretty smooth sailing. It is just regrettable that this mammoth burden of lifesaving has been disproportionately assumed by a relatively small group of dedicated people while almost everyone else is occupying comfortable spectator seats with alternate reactions of praise, blame, or indifference.

The slightly different question, "Can everyone be a teacher?", has a resoundingly different answer: NO! Being a teacher means undertaking complete responsibility for the total spiritual and mental development of many individuals, building the future ranks of Am Yisroel and its leadership. This awesome task should be entrusted to chosen people only, people who should then be held in the highest esteem and admiration by parents and all others. These men and women will deserve our respect because they will be teaching not just by verbal instruction, but by serving as living examples of a proper life. The pupils will see before their eyes a

person who is always punctual, thoroughly prepared in the subject matter, with definite plans on how best to utilize every portion of class time in a creative manner. They will know well that their mechanech cherishes sincerity as well as performance, good character traits as well as good learning. They will know and feel that their teacher cares deeply for every one of them at all times. They will see that their teacher is a person who does not waste words, nor does he waste time in or out of class; they will never see him or her idling away precious hours—even in a shul. They will be proud of the fact that

their mechanech respects others and is well respected in turn because of his high dedication to the lofty ideals of Torah. In short, the student will become imbued with the proper midos, the highest aspirations in learning, and *yiras shomayim* (fear of heaven) by a living example rather than by sermons and words of rebuke. When we will produce and nourish teachers of this caliber, we will have the merit to see a generation that will surely deserve to greet Moshiach Tzidkeinu very very soon.

# BAL TASHCHIS

· *Yiddishe Heim Issue 84, Winter 5741 (1940)* ·

The world is full of good things. Much of the world's known resources have not yet been fully developed; some are not even tapped yet at all. This is now being discovered in the frantic universal search for new sources of energy, in the development of solar, nuclear, oceanic, etc., super energy potentials. The promises of the future are great, in stark contrast to the continued tightening of available energy in the present. Despite the increasing awareness of the growing scarcity of energy and its by-products, which include just about everything we use, including clean air and water, too much wasting of that precious energy goes on unabated. This is true even amongst us, Torah observant Jews, which makes it even more regrettable.

For while in society at large the reason for prudent and thrifty use of natural resources — even for those who can afford to waste — is to prevent the premature depletion of available earthly supplies of necessary commodities, we Jews must be careful about waste for a different and very important reason as well. This reason is composed of two parts. Firstly, it is a clearly stated commandment of the Torah: "*Bal Tashchis — Thou shalt not destroy or waste!*" Secondly, the fact that everything

has been created by G-d makes every item — be it a piece of bread or kilowatts of electricity — intrinsically important and imbued with a certain holiness. Furthermore, since creation is purposeful and constant, if we dare to waste or discard something, we are thereby contravening the purpose for which it has been created.

The Torah mentions the prohibition of *Bal Tashchis* in connection with the discussion of the laws pertaining to a Jewish army that is waging war against its enemy. Lest our army be tempted to destroy some of the enemy's resources, the Torah warns us: "Thou shalt not destroy its fruit trees, to wield an ax upon it, etc." (Dvorim 20, 19). Understandably, this prohibition against wanton destruction is only applicable where it would not benefit the war effort, though it will surely cause the enemy much heartache and frustration.

It should be noted at the outset of this discussion that there exists differences of opinion among Rishonim (great Torah authorities) on whether all manners of wanton destruction and waste are included in the above-mentioned Torah prohibition, or, as some — notably the Rambam — contend, (Hilchos M'lachim

6:10; *Mishneh L'Melech Halacha* 8) that the prohibition against wasteful and destructive acts other than cutting down fruit trees is *MiDrabonon*, a Rabbinic commandment. The point is still the same — Hashem is against wastefulness. For, to us, commandments based on the Five Books of Moses and those that are Rabbinically decreed are treated with equal respect and awe, for both represent His Will.

It should be explained here that the prohibition or *issur* against wasting useful things also includes the kind of destruction that may be inflicted indirectly. In the case of the fruit trees, it includes the destructive act of rerouting water channels to prevent them from watering the trees, causing their eventual withering. Furthermore, the halacha (Jewish law) is that even if the wasteful act does not actually destroy something completely, but just causes it to lessen in value, this too is prohibited. This is true even if it is done in the course of performing a mitzvah. In the case of the mitzvah of *Kriah Al Hameiss* — tearing clothing to mourn the passing of next of kin (may He prevent this), to tear the garment more than is halachically necessary is *ossur*, forbidden on account of its wastefulness.

Of course, there are cases when cutting down fruit trees and similar activities are permitted if not done in a wasteful manner. This would be the case if one

should find that the fruit tree damages his house or other more expensive trees in his orchard, or even if he needs the area of the fruit tree to build a house, etc. This is not a permit to destroy, it simply means that it is not considered wasteful in those instances, just as burning wood to cook or heat the house is not considered destructive.

And yet, despite the permission granted in such circumstances, some authorities were of the opinion that there is a danger in doing so. The Gemora (Bava Kamma 91b) tells us of the statement of R. Chanina that the reason his son died at a young age was because he cut down a fig tree before its time. In the Midrash (*Shemos Rabbah* par. 35), we find that Hashem purposely commanded that the Mishkan — Tabernacle — be built of *shittim* wood (a species of cedar) to teach us that in building a house we should use trees that bear no fruit. In another Talmudic source (*Pirkei D'Rabbi Eliezer*) we find that when one cuts down a fruit tree its (crying) voice is heard from one end of the world to the other. A similar idea is also mentioned (in *Yuma* 20:6) concerning man's soul. It is well known that every tree or grass has its own *Malach* (angel) which makes it grow steadily; the cutting-off process affects this heavenly power. The story is told (*Likutei*

*Dibburim*, Part I; page 168) of the Rebbe Rashab ז"ע who was once walking with his son, the Previous Rebbe נב"מ.

The Friediker Rebbe, who was then a young boy, tore off some leaves from a bush which they were passing. Upon seeing this, the Rebbe Rashab, his father, remarked that it was a wrong thing to do because there is life in every part of vegetation (something which is elaborated upon in the Ari Zal) and one must not destroy even a particle thereof.

On the other hand, destroying something for the purpose of a mitzvah is definitely permitted. There again the examples are mostly in the mitzvah of "*Kriah al Hameiss*" — tearing garments or other destructive acts at someone's demise. We find, for example, that there used to be a custom during the period of the Kings to destroy expensive clothing, cattle, and other items of value at the passing of a king or another great leader.

Such acts are permitted, not because it is all right to destroy, but rather because the performance of the mitzvah requires it, hence it is not wasteful. As a prime example, slaughtering an animal for a *Korbon* (sacrifice), then burning parts of it on the altar — in some cases all of it — cannot be considered destructive since the greatest "use" anything can have is its use in the context of a mitzvah.

Not only does the performance of an official mitzvah render the seeming destruction of an item a highly useful act, but even a *Hiddur Mitzvah* (the beautification and enhancement of a

mitzvah) justifies the discarding of a useful item. For example, a scribe may write a Sefer Torah, Tefillin, or Mezuzahs etc., then find that one section came out poorly written, though still kosher. He is urged to rewrite the affected part more beautifully, even though this will mean discarding (in an honorable manner) the original section.

Admittedly, the propriety of spending large sums of money for *Hiddur Mitzvah* would not prove the advisability of wasteful acts for the purpose of mitzvah enhancement, for obviously any part of a mitzvah or its enhancement is the most precious commodity money can buy. This simple fact, however, seems to have eluded the many parents who will gladly spend large sums of money on clothing and the celebration of a Bar Mitzvah but be skimpy in the purchase of beautiful Tefillin, Tzitzis or Yeshiva tuition for their son. This truly constitutes a waste of resources, over and above the wrong lesson in relative values that the Bar Mitzvah boy is taught by his parents.

We clearly see, then, that wasting physical resources is forbidden. As our sages put it (Yalkut Me'am Loez - Parshas Shoftim 20:19), "Tzaddikim (the pious) are careful not to waste even something as small as a mustard seed, and any destruction they notice causes them great pain, while the wicked enjoy the destruction of the world and eventually do things that cause self-destruction."

So, next time we see people throw out leftover food and drink, which might happen at the Yeshiva or at home, it is our responsibility to prevent it. Someone rightfully remarked that from what America discards, the nation of China could easily be fed — even overfed. The same, of course, applies to heat, light, clothing and other items that are sometimes wasted merely because of a lack of alertness and caring.

If the above is true about earthly items, how much more does it apply to human resources, which are much more precious and of very limited supply. The prohibition of Bal Tashchis can be understood as a central motif in the inner life of every Jew. We have been granted a finite, limited number of years on earth. Each one of these years is necessary for the attainment of the goal for which we were sent down here. Not only are the years counted up exactly, but even the months, weeks, days, and hours are apportioned according to the “size” and “number” of the things we are supposed to complete. Wasting any part thereof is committing a double wrong: We are destroying a most valuable, irreplaceable, commodity — time, while we are managing to rob ourselves of the necessary amount of time in which to complete all that has to be done.

Regrettably, because things are done at a much quicker pace in this jet age, an illusion is created of having plenty of time

— even time to spare. Also, because the emphasis today is more on “Ma’asim’ — doing things with and for others, we seem to be left with “pockets” of extra time between one project and the next. Even though the Rebbe Shlita keeps reminding us that every free moment must be filled with Torah or Ma’asim Tovim at every opportunity, and that this rule is true even for the busiest among us — time wasting is still one of our most rampant problems. What hurts even more is the fact that those who are alert and watch their free moments carefully are not at all respected. Sometimes they are scoffed at.

The disregard for the value of time has other wasteful by-products, especially for Yeshiva students and others whose mornings are spent under the honor system. They stay up late at night, indulging in trivial discussions or plain “drayen zich” (going around in ‘figurative’ circles). Then of course they get up late the next morning, often missing the Halachic deadline for the recital of the morning “Shema Yisroel”, a Torah commandment. Preparing for morning prayers may include some “necessary” conversations, plus “taking care” of something “very important”, maybe even getting in a glance inside a Chassidus tome in between. The realization that half the day is already gone leaves our Yeshivah student frustrated and angry with himself for having missed two important Torah deadlines — *Krias Shma* and *Shacharis* -



morning prayers, including the very last late minyan. So he decides to “*daven up*” for a quick twenty minutes or so and... hope for a better tomorrow. But the rest of this day usually follows the pattern of its start....

The Torah says about our forefather Avraham, “*Bo Bayomim*” — he came (to the end of his life) with (all) his days. Chassidus explains this praise as meaning that wasting a day not only implies that certain work has not been done; that can sometimes be corrected by working harder the next day or two. Rather: every day is an entity created by G-d, to be used, refined, elevated and transformed by the individual’s activities of *that day’s* Torah and Mitzvos. When used properly, each such day becomes part and parcel of a person’s eternal spiritual baggage which he brings along at the end to the World of Truth. Avraham Avinu’s outstanding achievement was the fact that he brought *all* his days with him at the end of his sojourn in this world. Obviously, the Torah means this as an example for all of us.

There is another important area in which we must guard against the ravages of waste, although it is harder to observe than the wasting of time, and that is the human attribute we call talents. Even an “average” individual is blessed with many abilities; intellectual, emotional, artistic, and so forth. If a person uses his powers of intellectual exploration and analysis for

petty objectives, he is wasting them to some extent. Ideally, of course, a Jew’s mind should be used solely in the pursuit of Torah and Mitzvos. Practically, however, we have to cope with everyday problems like livelihood, family obligations, and necessary social interaction. But if one uses one’s mind, however superficially, to collect and disseminate juicy facts about other people’s lives, that surely constitutes a regrettable waste of one’s highest faculties, even if there is no Torah prohibition involved in such activity.

If we lavish emotions, our heart and affection, on all kinds of “*gashmuis*”, on material things, then even if there is nothing wrong with such behavior Halachically, we are nevertheless committing the sin of Bal Tashchis — the waste of something valuable. What is more precious in life than human warmth, affection, and attachment!? Wasting honest love like that is like taking a beautiful embroidered cloth to wipe a dirty table, like using a pure gold box to store cheap pebbles. It is not a question of right or wrong, kosher or non-kosher; it is just plain, pitiful wasting precious resources.

The Rambam explains, and it is easily observable, that an individual follows the patterns of his community and environment in his thoughts, inclinations, and actions. This is especially true about one’s values. True, the Torah teaches us

the right path in life and the proper perspectives, but people mostly learn about life from their human environment and experiences; it is the one school everyone attends. Therefore the Rambam advises even the Torah observer to carefully choose proper neighbors and neighborhood, lest he go astray. Better to live in a desert, etc., the Rambam continues, if one cannot find a good environment. (The Torah world recognizes as a miraculous phenomenon that Lubavitcher shlichim live, thrive, and succeed in totally alien environments).

To cite one glaring example: As a community, we have put all our eggs in one basket. We show singular admiration for those who succeed in the outside world, materially or spiritually. These ideas and values are planted by osmosis in the hearts and minds of the younger generation and reinforced by those in mid-life. The result is a lack of people who choose to be *mechanchim* — educators, a lack which troubles our community in a large measure. Dozens, if not hundreds, of our choicest young people could have made tremendous contributions to the education of thousands of children, our own and all over the world. Instead, those gifted individuals are wasting their talents and abilities on non-significant (from the Jewish People's perspective) business, trade and professions. They have known since early childhood that there is no glory

or appreciation in the *Mlechas Hakodesh* — holy work, as Chinuch is rightly called.

To change such attitudes does not call for mass meetings and heated discussions of plans to action. To avoid waste of any kind, the nature of this problem calls for individual re-evaluation of direction and purpose. That in the end will have the desired effect in the community, for what is the community if not the aggregate of its individual components. All that is needed are a few leaders — people honest and brave enough to admit the need for change, and willing to start with themselves. With Hashem's help, the rest will follow.

NOTE TO THE READER

*The thoughts and observations expressed here are neither original nor of particularly great depth. In the words of the great Reb Moshe Chaim Luzzato, in his preface to "Mesilas Yeshorim": "I have not come to teach people something they did not know before. I have come just to remind them of common, simple things which, because of their commonness and simplicity, are often overlooked and disregarded".*

# FOR THE FAMILY ACHDUS

## Part I

· *Yiddishe Heim Issue 89, Winter 5743 (1982)* ·

### I

Recently, a young man came to a Rav to ask about the procedures for a divorce. “What is the matter,” the Rav asked. “We have been married for just eight months and it’s already impossible to put up with the situation. My wife is forever telling me how inefficient and shlimazaldig I am.” “Is your wife a great *berya*, a super-capable housekeeper,” the Rav asked. “No, she admits she is worse than me. But I am the husband and she expects me to be great...”.

A woman calls up the local Rosh Yeshiva and complains that her husband doesn’t learn, prays at home instead of going to shul, and then hangs around the house doing odd chores. “I can’t stand it,” she says, “I’m bored with him.” “Have you done anything to solve this problem?” “No, I realized I fell in, I married the wrong man.”

There was a time when the religious community prided itself on being secure against family problems and was almost immune to marriage breakups. Divorce was a rarity. Things have changed; even the frum community has begun feeling the whip of the destructive storm battering society at large, causing great

damage to its most important building block — the family. Of course, the problems we are experiencing are so far minimal compared to the rest of society, but this is hardly much comfort to us.

To be sure, we have always considered *Sholom-Bayis*, family harmony, highly precious as well as fragile. Great reward is promised to those who lend a helping hand, following the example of Aharon Hakohein, to establish peace between husband and wife, as we mention at the conclusion of the morning blessings. As a matter of fact, the Gemora derives the permission — some say obligation — for a person to change the facts somewhat for the sake of family harmony, from the manner in which Hashem changed Sora’s words when He repeated them to her husband Avrohom, to avoid an angry reaction to Sora on Avrohom’s part.

Clearly then, we can learn from the above, and many other sources, that friction between a couple is neither unnatural nor is it totally a modern phenomenon. On the other hand, the message is clear that everyone who can be instrumental in helping a husband and wife get along should certainly try to not

allow friction to deteriorate into frustration which can lead to a breakup, Heaven forbid.

Now something new seems to have developed. A stronger form of the old virus has apparently emerged, highly resistant to the “medications” and remedies of previous generations. What has happened?

### **Has the Pace of Life really changed?**

This observer believes that one factor is the pace of life which has quickened considerably. We have become accustomed to getting fast results. In technology, in medicine, and in transportation, we have gotten used to expecting instant results. Naturally we tend to expect the same efficiency in the sphere of human relationships. There are courses taught by all kinds of experts on how to win friends, succeed in our personal goals, get people to do our bidding, etc. However, though they may benefit a few talented individuals, these courses and methods do not change most people’s approach to life and relationships; otherwise society today would be much finer than it was a generation or two ago.

The great expectations, however, remain. People flock to all kinds of experts, including marriage counselors, seeking quick, effective solutions to their problems. In some cases these counselors themselves are single or divorced. Most are

totally unfamiliar with the Torah outlook on life and marriage. No wonder, then, that in many cases the life of the couple becomes even more entangled *after* the counseling. Plainly, our blind trust in the social technocrats and the expectations of quick results leads to disappointments, to say the least.

### **Life: Its Quality Vs. Its Sanctity**

The stress on the quality of life so prevalent in today’s society has affected us too. True, there are many opportunities today for almost anyone in the free world. But some seem to think there is a promise — in and out of the American Constitution — that everyone can get whatever he/she desires if only one tries hard enough. What’s more, we are made to feel silly if we don’t try to grab everything life offers. Who wants to be considered a fool!

There are those who even dare to misuse the hallowed saying of the Rebbe Maharash, whose one-hundredth anniversary we observe this year: *L’chatchilah Aribber*. Loosely translated, this means don’t get bogged down by initial difficulties; rise above them, and achieve your goal! Of course the Rebbe Maharash was referring to spiritual quests, not in reaching for selfish gratifications, especially those that may hurt other people. Those whose goal in life is the expansion of the ego and personal pleasure don’t really care how many heads they

have to step on in order to get to their destination.

This approach — stressing the quality of life in a selfish context — *one's own life!* — takes many forms, from demanding the right for abortion by choice, to maintaining or improving the woman's quality of life over the right of her baby to exist, to the efforts in family planning to avoid the financial, social and emotional burdens of a large family. In its more subtle form, it may appear in an altogether kosher or even holy guise: a husband or wife deciding that he/she must be absolutely 100% happy and satisfied within the marriage in order to... serve G-d with joy. When and if compromises and accommodations inevitably have to be made, and he/she cannot feel totally content, they feel cheated and are ready to consider drastic steps... This may sound extreme, but it is not an exaggeration. In short, constant insistence on one's complete satisfaction, and consideration of one's mate as a means to this end creates havoc in the relationship.

The recent wave of equality for all, especially for women, has also put an extra strain on marriages in general and the frum marriage in particular. For one thing, it has built a fear into individuals, women in this case, lest they are not treated as equals, lest their rights are not fully recognized. This tends to put them on a sort of tightrope, always tense, watching themselves not to lose their

“balance”. Because women today are active in many more areas than they used to be, such as the professions, religious education, business and communal affairs, etc., they are more likely to clash with their husband's views and encroach on his turf. This can cut down not only on the man's ego but also on his natural, Torah-granted need to exercise control in the territory around him (as the Torah says in B'raishis) which shakes his self-confidence and leads to frustration and conflict.

### **What is the present Status of Marriage?**

Thirdly — not necessarily in order of importance — marriage has simply lost its status as a sanctified, divinely ordained institution. Society laughs at it and even dares to honor its violators (who are the stars and heroes in the public's eyes). Despite occasional lip service to the importance of a healthy family structure, society really considers it an outmoded institution, a relic of the past. In some ways this attitude has affected us too.

### **Personal Commitment**

Marriage has become less of a personal commitment than it used and ought to be. The new emphasis in marriage seems to be mainly on the personal need to settle down, raise a family and enjoy life. Or on a higher level, because getting married is a mitzvah just as Shabbos, Mezuzah and Tefillin are obligations, one also gets

married because it is a mitzvah, forgetting that this mitzvah involves a personal and emotional commitment to another party forever.

Some matches are so hastily arranged that the two people hardly get to know one another. If the young man and the girl announce their engagement after meeting just once or twice, when they have presented themselves at their best, without the advice of others, the consequences are not hard to imagine. Without a true personal commitment, made after a knowledgeable and serious consideration, even trivial problems can split a couple apart.

What is an example of true commitment? Take the commitment to observe Shabbos, kashrus or family purity. Would anyone think of giving these up in the face of difficulty? Would a woman give up Mikveh because it is too far or inconvenient? Would a person of integrity give up kashrus because kosher food is hard to get or is expensive? The same is true for Shabbos. That's commitment. Ideally marriage should also require this kind of devotion. Nowadays it rarely gets it.

Ironically, sometimes a marriage goes sour because both husband and wife benefited from it. When they married they decided that under their present circumstances this is the best they can get. They both might have had a troubled

childhood and drifted through their teens and into adulthood. When they found Yiddishkeit they were ready to regain their dignity and self-respect. They may have decided that marriage would provide the ultimate opportunity to build up their broken selves. An irresponsible person may even have said to them, "Considering your past, you can't expect to get anything really good."

As they settle into their married life and normalcy, they get an improved self-image and with it, rising expectations. They expect more of their mates, more for themselves, and begin to think that perhaps they sold themselves "short". Of course they don't dare say outright, "I want or deserve someone better." Rather it comes out in complaints and severe criticisms of one's partner, accompanied by fantasies of a better future in a different arrangement. They fail to make the connection and realize that they are good for each other because their improved self-images are the result of their marriage. For this, they should be mutually thankful and inspired to acknowledge their similarities instead of their differences.

### **How to Approach a Shidduch**

Most Yeshiva boys and girls are not very adept at analyzing the true character and personality of a prospective mate. It takes life experience to do that. In the olden days, and in some circles even today, a match was arranged by parents, with

minimal participation of the young people themselves. They see one another only once or twice before the engagement. Most of these marriages are quite successful if the couple continues living in the same environment because the parents have done all the “homework” of finding out as much as possible about the prospective chosson/kalla.

Perhaps we should advocate this approach for all shidduchim. When parents cannot do the job for whatever reason, other family members, Yeshiva Rabbis, or older friends who know the young people well should get involved in evaluating the feasibility of the match. Naturally, the official matchmakers should also help, but their efforts are certainly not sufficient. The prospective pair themselves should take the initiative in asking for help from those able to give it. Those so asked should quickly and graciously consent to help out and provide an ounce of prevention rather than have to get involved in a pound of cure for a bad situation later, G-d forbid. The mitzvah is great and it is drastically needed. Now.

## II

### **When Problems Do Emerge — Then What? Is Outside Help Useful?**

It is quite difficult, if not impossible, to give advice in an article or a general address. The nature of the issue is such that it must be handled on an individual basis, and by direct personal involvement.

Couples who need help should, right at the outset, “hook up” to an advisor and follow his/her suggestions. This person does not have to be someone great or special. It could be a rabbi, an educator, a mashpiah, or a layman who is in his middle years and has raised a family. Naturally it must be someone the couple is able to trust completely. Interestingly, the quality of his/her own performance as a husband/wife or parent is not necessarily an important criterion for this task. Many people are more capable of giving advice than following it. These people are vastly superior to professional marriage counselors and are much more available if approached sincerely. If the advisor’s wife/husband can get involved (with the couple’s consent) it may work even better and quicker.

True, the potential advisors may initially shy away from this honor. People don’t like to get involved in others’ problems, especially the marital type. It is imperative that the troubled couple should persist, gently, in their request, even offering money if appropriate, to get the person to agree. The couple’s claim to attention should be based, as mentioned, on the great mitzvah inherent in peacemaking. They should also promise to listen and follow the advice they get and to accept the advisor’s dictates. That may sometimes be the necessary incentive for the potential advisor to give his/her time, energy and interest to someone else’s

problems. The advisor should be welcome in times of “peace” as well as in times of “war”. You should invite him/her over to your home for a cup of tea, report to him any important happenings in the family, etc.

### **Start With Yourself**

Before seeking outside advice, however, several points should be kept in mind. First and foremost, the troubled couple should not divulge their situation to “friends”. When domestic strife becomes public knowledge it gets much more difficult to solve. As soon as several people know about it, it is unlikely to remain a “secret,” especially in a close-knit community. The couple must also endeavor to have frank and frequent discussions between themselves about their problems. These conversations will help clarify the issues but are beneficial only if limited to facts, reactions and complaints. Contrary to some psychological-therapy theories, there is no benefit in expressing deep-seated wishes or disappointments vis-a-vis one another. That tends to drive a deeper and more permanent wedge and inflame antagonisms. (Even in a normal relationship, the Mishna in Avos Ch. 1 advises a husband not to tell his wife of his social, economic or personal defeats lest he lose some of his stature in her eyes [see Rav on Mishna 5]. This is probably true for the wife as well.)

The couple should also try to define the positive aspects of their marriage and their areas of agreement. For example, if they both agree that they have personality faults, these should be clearly spelled out. If they come to the conclusion that they need more time to work things out, they should designate an approximate “testing period.” When there is a special source of friction—lack of livelihood, in-laws, religious observance, children — it should be separated from its consequences and ramifications so that they — or the advisor — can focus on it specifically.

Above all, couples should remember to be realistic. For, although every person is entitled to ask for the best at all times, this only applies to our requests and prayers to Hashem. It does *not* apply in relation to other people. If one of the parties seems to be incapable of being patient, generous, loving, or infusing the home life with a special aura, it may just be a fact of life and irreversible. He/she may be helpless to change. The “suffering” partner must then compromise and allow more time and good experiences to perhaps have a positive impact on their mate’s disposition. Some changes are bound to happen when the patient and helping partner will do some homework over an extensive time period.

Most young people require a period of maturing before they can be expected to become model mates and parents. There is no successful way to rush it. Ba’alei Tshuva



(those who have become observant), who usually marry at an older age, need time for a different purpose. They may lack self-confidence, or even be burdened with a heavy inferiority complex because of their backgrounds. Some of them may never have seen a good working marriage in their own families and have no idea what it takes to make one. These things cannot be taught; one must learn by observation or by trial and error, “on the job.” In these cases it is incumbent on the party with the right ideas — it usually comes more naturally to women — to extend encouragement and actually teach (without calling it a lesson) one’s mate how to live right. This cannot be done by commanding or insisting on do’s and don’ts, nor can it be done by rebuking.

Demands and rebukes, as we all know, usually cause resentment and irritation and may be counterproductive. One must “ease” the other onto the proper track with care, understanding, and a pleasant demeanor.

Please don’t react with hasty disappointment or resignation when feelings of love seem to have evaporated from the marriage. In the Torah view, true love is not of the hot-house honeymoon variety, but an emotion that grows and develops after a period of adjustment. The length of this period largely depends on individual factors inherent in each marriage, as well as on the strong will and effort the two are willing to invest daily.

*(To Be Continued)*

# FOR THE FAMILY ACHDUS

## Part II

· *Yiddishe Heim Issue 90 Spring 5743 (1983)* ·

### Marriages described in the Torah

Looking at our ancestors, the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, we find different descriptions of their marriages in the Torah. (Of course we must be cautious and “tread lightly” because these interpretations are laden with deep Torah secrets. However, as the Rebbe Shlita always says, there are lessons in the plain, superficial, *p’shat* as well.) We find for example, that it is not even mentioned that Avrohom and Sora loved one another. On the other hand, it is written that Yitzchok loved Rivka. This is mentioned specifically after Rivka successfully filled Sora’s place in Yitzhak’s home. Later we are told Yaakov loved Rochel even before he married her and it does not mention that he loved Leah.

Now there is no doubt that our Patriarchs and Matriarchs maintained the proper kind of marital relationships. What can we learn from the Torah’s different descriptions and references to their marriages? One lesson we can perhaps learn is that people may have different approaches to marriage, within the Torah context, because of their individual make-

up. Some marriages are permeated with mutual dignity and respect; the couple’s love is present and firm but stays in the background, and is not easily noticeable — sometimes even to themselves. Actually, mutual regard and deep-seated respect are of greater importance, effectiveness and duration than the emotional component of love. *Kovod* for the other person is not as easily affected by the ups and downs of daily life as the feeling of love might be.

Avrohom held Sora in such high regard that, according to our Sages, he rarely looked directly at her face. This is of course an expression of supreme *tznius*, modesty in the relationship between husband and wife which is achieved by the select few. It is well known that mutual respect leads to modesty, and modesty (*tznius*), in turn, sustains mutual dignity. When Avrohom and Sora were on their way to Egypt he expressed his recognition of her unique and great qualities which made her fit to be a queen of a great country. Soon what he feared actually happened, and Sora was immediately taken to Pharaoh’s palace because all who

saw her recognized that she is worthy to be a queen.

In one of the “disputes” between Avrohom and Sora we are told that Hashem ordered Avrohom to listen to Sora’s advice; in effect saying that Sora is not only equal, but superior to Avrohom in prophecy. In that dispute Sora expressed her anger at Avrohom in strong words. Yet it was a wonderful marriage, no doubt; one we would all wish for ourselves and our children.

Regarding Yitzchok and Rivka we find the first detailed description of a “shidduch,” the wedding that followed, and their life together. From the detailed description the Torah provides, this shidduch seems to be the standard and example of a Jewish marriage. Before the Torah tells us that Yitzchok loved Rivka, we read of the great regard and awe in which Rivka held Yitzchok. When she saw Yitzchok for the first time, we are told Rivka was visibly shaken and affected; clearly an extreme example of the kind of respect and honor a wife is supposed to have for a husband (who hopefully deserves it). (This is no contradiction to sometimes having to disagree with a husband. We later find that Yitzchok and Rivka disagreed in their approach to their two sons Yaakov and Eisov.) Then followed the love which developed only after they proved their worthiness to each other. This is true love. The initial feeling of mutual liking is a selfish one, based on

one’s own expected gratification and may wear off rather quickly, as we see in the society around us. The mature love that the Torah advocates is the love based on qualities of character and positive devotion to the welfare of the other.

The only selfish aspect of this love is the realization that one can best succeed in fulfilling one’s mission in life only with the help of the partner. For whatever one can do individually, can be done much better and more effectively with the help and cooperation of the other. This has been so ordained by the Torah, which says: “It is *not good* for man to be alone!” This of course includes even a situation where one, or both, of the partners feels that he/she is stifled or limited by the other. According to the Torah, this view is as mistaken as a preference for bachelorhood or spinsterhood.

### **Achdus as an Instrument of Family Harmony**

The Rebbe Shlita has now called for *achdus*, unity amongst Jews in general and religious Jews in particular, ultimately to spread *achdus* throughout the entire world. Achdus, as the Rebbe explains, is a step above and beyond Ahavas Yisroel. The true idea of *Ahavas Yisroel*, love for all Jews, demands of us, according to the *Yerushalmi* (Jerusalem Talmud), to feel as if we are all parts of the same body, which has many different limbs and organs,

which would make feelings of anger and revenge impossible. The right hand never feels angry at the left hand that might have hurt it, and the hand would never think of taking revenge on the feet which may have stumbled and caused it to be bruised. Achdus demands more. The Rebbe recently likened the achdus awareness to the bloodstream within the body. The same blood that flows in the hands gets to the feet, to the heart and to all other parts of the person. In other words, Achdus requires that we feel like one entity “*mamash*.”

Needless to say, this is not easy. Even “plain” Ahavas Yisroel is difficult for many. It used to be easy to love a friend, a neighbor or a townsperson. Then came the Ba’al Shem Tov and said that one must even love a Jew who lives far away, whom you have never met and perhaps never will. Yet we

must feel concerned about him and help him in every way possible. Nowadays, it seems that some people would much rather “love” someone who is continents away than be generous and caring to some of their family members, next-door neighbors, or fellow Yeshiva students. It seems as though the closer one is, the harder the Ahavas Yisroel becomes.

This is obviously a gross deviation from the Torah’s intent and the Ba’al Shem Tov’s teachings. Perhaps achdus will remedy this situation. For after all,

practically speaking, it is easier to be as one, in achdus, with those we know and especially with those that share some common experiences. Perhaps the effort to achieve achdus is a bit simpler than that required for Ahavas Yisroel because it does not stress the *Ahavah*, the love, the emotional component. It is more of a practical nature which we can work on quicker. Eventually of course it will be also permeated by a strong emotional awareness.

Marriage provides a couple with a wonderful opportunity for achdus. Aren’t husband and wife more naturally unified with each other than with anyone else? Let couples try to work on this achdus by realizing that their fate is intricately and almost inextricably bound up forever. The husband and wife should do their utmost to compromise, to overlook, to forgive and forget, to adjust and continue *giving*, to enhance their achdus, all with patience, prayer and hope. It is all worth it because they are one.

### **Advantages of the Jewish Marriage**

For any marriage to succeed and endure it takes many miracles, for men and women are very different and opposites in many aspects. Two particular individuals may be even more opposite with totally contradictory traits. How then can these two agree and cooperate in so many different things, big and small? It’s a

miracle granted by Hashem to continue the human race, but we have to do our fair share to deserve these daily *nissim*.

If each partner concentrates on the other's behavior they are bound to find faults; familiarity does not necessarily breed respect. Ideally then, the couple should not concentrate on each other or even on their marriage; they should rather focus on the task they have to accomplish together. The purpose of marriage is to provide the proper setting for the enhancement of a Jew's goal, *Avodas Hashem*, serving G-d. As mentioned previously, individually we are necessarily limited and cannot accomplish too much. By joining forces through marriage we can do greater things. Bringing new life into the world is only one of the marvels we can accomplish. Even those who are accomplishing very little that is praiseworthy can be sure that individually they would do even less.

When the husband spends extra time learning, the wife should not view it as a private activity that is robbing her of his company and attention. If the partnership of Yissachar and Zevulun, in which one studied and the other supported him, netted equal credit in G-d's eyes, the same is surely true for husband and wife, as our Sages tell us in the Gemora. Our history and tradition have always extolled the devoted wife who showed a positive attitude about her husband's Torah learning and all other good deeds, in

which she helped and encouraged him. The same is true, of course, in the case of a wife who may lower her standards for home duties at times in order to do acts of chesed and other mitzvos. Unless those activities are overdone, neither of the two should resent it. On the contrary, they should be proud and happy that their marriage fosters such devotion to the great cause of Avodas Hashem.

When their mutual goal is to consecrate every activity in life to the service of G-d, man and wife inevitably become united in purpose, then united in character, outlook and emotion, resulting in complete peace and harmony. Needless to say, this *Achdus* cannot be achieved by concentrating on the relationship itself, which is why so many worldly marriages fail. In that case the miracles that hold them together keep slipping away and they start pulling in different directions until... In short, the attitude makes the difference. It is in the couple's own hands.

### **What If Things Don't Work Out**

The reason Torah made divorce so easy, technically, is to prevent the feeling of being trapped or imprisoned within a marriage. Knowing that there is a fairly easy way out lessens the burden and the frustration when things aren't going well. While we should not condemn, out-of-hand, couples that did get divorced (*chas v'cholilah*) because of insurmountable

problems, and such certainly exist, we should remember that this is a major surgery, which should only be used to save oneself from bigger dangers. Statistically, however, we should bear in mind that most people do not feel better, do better or live better after they divorce. The children, of course, never recuperate from this tragedy. What is more, studies show that the divorced person tends to remarry a person having similar traits and faults as the one he/she divorced.

Another thing to remember in case of trouble — you are not alone. Once (a true story) a husband came to a Rav (in a frum city in Eretz Yisroel) to complain about his domestic troubles. He was very distressed and kept complaining under his breath, “Why did it have to happen to us?!” The Rav gave strange advice. He told the husband to wait till Friday, then come back to him. When he returned on Friday, the Rav told him to go to a certain street near his home and stand by the windows of six families for five minutes at each one, and then return and report what he heard. When the young man came back he was all smiles. In answer to the Rav’s question as to what he heard, the man said, “It’s amazing. Every home I went to I heard almost the same type of arguments, yelling, occasional insults and lots of tension. Yet I’m puzzled,” said the man, “because I know these couples have good marriages.” The Rav then explained that almost every home has periods of tension.

Some experience it at time-pressure moments, such as Erev Shabbos and Yom Tov. Some get it when it’s time to pay rent and bills, and some when there is a simcha in the family. These periods of tension should not be misinterpreted as meaning that the marriage is going sour or that the two dislike each other. No. Anger does not equal hate. This must always be remembered. You just have to know how to see it in the right perspective, in the context in which it is happening.

It should be mentioned here that *Derech Eretz*, ethical conduct and Torah principles apply even in times of anger. And yes, even when we are certain that our anger is justified. The Gemora says that a person can be recognized in three things; by his *anger*, his handling of money and his drinking habits. Some couples think that in moments of anger and argument everything is kosher and fair. This is wrong. Furthermore, if you can burst out with such drastic words or actions in your anger, you are revealing a really bad aspect of yourself, which apparently the other party has to put up with. Don’t blame your partner for whatever happened. Look at your uncontrollable anger and blame yourself, at least partly, for the situation. This should calm you down, in a spirit of honest humility, leading hopefully to increased efforts in self-refinement and forgiveness to others.

One of the ways of getting to see things clearer is *T’fillah*-prayer, to ask and beg

Hashem to have mercy upon us and show us the right way in our own lives. He usually responds to our sincere requests, especially in the area in which He has such

great stakes — *Sholom Bayis* — for we are told that the Divine Presence — the *Shechina* is the silent partner in every marriage!

# WE ARE ALL GETTING OLDER — BORUCH HASHEM

· *Yiddishe Heim Issue 95 Spring 5745 (1985)* ·

Recently a visitor asked an older Rabbi his age. The Rav replied: “I was never as old as I am today”.

For good or for better, this is true for all of us, yet we don’t all react to this process of growing older equally. Some of us take it very personally and negatively, while others take it in stride. There is no doubt that our society almost universally prizes youthfulness. Not only do the myriad of educational establishments cater to the young, but even the industrial and commercial markets prefer youth.

To say to someone that s/he looks young is always complimentary and sincerely appreciated; the opposite remark is either an insult or an expression of sympathy. As a result, older people are referred to by various euphemisms; “mature adults”, “senior citizens”, etc. Just *don’t* call them old!

However, as Jews who are shomrei Torah we need not despair at the thought of the inevitable — getting old. The Torah has quite a positive view of old age, something that should give us strength and confidence, even a sense of dignity. This is true not only because the Torah

commands us to respect the elderly, but also because of the Torah’s view on the innate qualities of age. As an example, it should be noted that “Zokain” is a title shared by both an old person and a Talmid Chochom, a Torah scholar.

We all remember that when Moshe Rabbeinu needed help in conducting the affairs of our (very complex) nation, he was told by Hashem to gather seventy “*Z’kainim*” — elderly scholars — who would share some of his greatness and become capable of assisting him. According to the Gemora (Bava Metzia 87) it was Avrohom Avinu — our Patriarch Abraham — who prayed that Hashem make people look old so there could be a visible difference between father and son. Until then the young and the old looked alike. When Avrohom Avinu minted coins (as kings do) there was an engraving of a young couple on one side and an elderly couple on the other, simply telling everyone that youth and old age are two sides of the same (human) coin.

And what is considered the most awful social deterioration in the pre-Moshiach period? What is the biggest curse to befall our nation? According to the prophet



Yeshayahu, it is the prediction that “the youngster will dare to (defy) stand up against the old person.” (Hagiga 14a).

While it is true that there is a big difference between elderly scholars and plain old folks, as the Mishna puts it: “Older Torah scholars, the older they get, the stronger (more settled) their minds gets, while the minds of ignorant persons get more disturbed as they grow older” (Kanim Ch. 3). It is nevertheless a sacred duty to grant respect to *any* old person, even a non-Jew. As the Gemora tells us, R. Yochanan used to stand up before old gentiles, explaining, “They have experienced many of life’s troubles and have had many miracles happen to them, etc.”

Regretfully, the frum community has become, to some extent, infected with society’s disease of adoring the young and (almost) abhorring the elderly. Even in some very fine families it is not uncommon to see an older parent ignored, even abandoned, and in some cases ridiculed. Needless to say, old people’s opinions are often not respected and sometimes totally ignored.

Shouldn’t we stop and think, if only from a sense of fairness, how much insult and suffering we cause the elderly among us when we show little regard for them and their feelings. Some of us are naive enough to assume that the old person neither notices nor understands what is

being done. The opposite is actually true. Older people are supersensitive, because of their wisdom, experience and helplessness, to the way we treat them.

The reason we don’t hear many of them protesting against the wrong kind of treatment is mainly... fear. They’re fearful lest they alienate us — the young — as we may become upset with their demands and frustrations, their words of rebuke. So they choose to swallow the bitter pills of disdain and rejection and keep quiet.

From the Halachic point of view we owe our parents and grandparents great respect as an outright obligation of the highest order. In the Torah, Hashem compares the honoring of one’s parents to honoring Him (unless the parents’ advice contradicts the Torah’s). Granted, it is a very difficult mitzvah to perform for many. However, would we think of compromising the observance of Shabbos, kashrus, or family purity just because it gets difficult?

The commentaries point out that nowhere did the Torah command us to love our parents. Either we love them naturally or else no commandment will help, because an emotion cannot function by decree. The point then is that the Torah command is to honor them, take good care of them, and fear them with absolute respect, whether we love them or not.

From the human and moral perspective, this is no less incumbent upon

us than other obligations we attend to in the course of the day. If we reflect for even a moment on what our parents and grandparents have done for us, do we owe them any less than what we owe our next-door neighbor or even our best friend, who may need our assistance or attention? Yet, many otherwise fine individuals, who pride themselves on always being “ready to help where help is needed”, can let days, weeks or months pass without paying any real attention to the needs of their elderly relatives, not even granting them a five-minute phone conversation or a thirty-minute visit.

Sure, we are all aware of the “reasons” and rationalizations for this pattern of behavior. Some parents do become very demanding and generally difficult to deal with. Some become bores, others very authoritative and dictatorial to their grown children. They like to tell their children — and in some parents’ eyes, we always remain children that need guidance — which friends to keep, which places to avoid, which items to buy, etc. Some love to criticize the way the grandchildren are being brought up, how the house is set up, how the money is spent and so on.

All of the above, plus other reasons, make the mitzvah of honoring — not contradicting — parents super hard. Yet, Halacha does not accept these kinds of reasons as exemptions. We have only two kosher options in most “normal” situations: either listen to them or

convince them to let us do things our own way. Ignoring them is not an acceptable alternative.

Compare, if you will, the annoyance of parental meddling to the frustration we often experience with our children, who insist on getting their own way against our better judgment. Don’t we try to reason with them? Sometimes we try to compromise, but mostly in this modern day and age, we simply give in to them.

Now let’s examine the facts. There is no sin in ignoring the wishes of a child; neither is there a mitzvah in fulfilling them. This is not the case, however, with the wishes of parents. Why then do we sometimes maintain this double standard — giving in to our children while ignoring our parents? There is only one basic reason for this mistaken conduct. Simply put, it makes us feel good to make our children happy, to see them smile. The same is not the case with parents and grandparents.

As a matter of fact, the greater the mitzvah, the harder it gets. It is easier for us to accommodate the wishes of grandparents than those of parents. Often we find it easier to do a kindness for a stranger, where the mitzvah is even a lesser one. The *real, real* charity begins at home, literally.

These attitudes have definite consequences, not only in terms of mitzvos done or not done, and the

resultant rewards, but also in terms of practical results within the family. Our children clearly see how we deal with our parents; they will remember to do the same to us. Is it any wonder that children are so disrespectful nowadays? What have they seen practiced?

For some of us it would be advisable to start improving on the easy part of this mitzvah, then work up to the harder parts. As said, it is not too difficult to honor older people who are not relatives. This too is a mitzvah which is great in its own right.

In many places we find that Hashem accorded honor to the elderly. Our Sages tell us that in the future Hashem will seat the elderly in a semi-circle while He (Kaviyochol) will sit at the head of this assembly like the chief judge of the court. The Midrash says: Hashem declared, "Since the Jewish people have no good deeds for which they deserve redemption, (they will be redeemed) only in the merit of the elders." (Shmos Rabba, par. 3, 5)

Do we need a greater recommendation?

The story is told about a great Jewish community where a Yeshiva was needed. There was also a strong need for an old-age home, but not enough money for both. Two factions were formed; one favored the Yeshiva, while the other advocated the home for the aged. The Rav of the community then stood up and said, "I have an answer to make you both happy.

If you build a good Yeshiva you will then have no need for the old age home. We will teach the children to honor their parents properly and care for them adequately." The people understood. He won.

As things stand, we must admit, to our embarrassment, that some of our finest Yeshivos are remiss in the teaching of this great mitzvah of honoring older people. Yes, a concentrated effort is required to teach our children the greatness of honoring parents, grandparents, and older people in general, no less than teaching them the importance of kashrus, Shabbos, Torah study, etc. The first beneficiary of this effort will be the teacher himself, who otherwise finds little opportunity to teach his students to respect him/her for obvious reasons. Can s/he say "Respect me!?"

It is much easier and more appropriate to instruct the students to respect teachers in general, their next-door neighbor, the people in shul and surely parents and grandparents.

This effort will enjoy the most success when it is done in collaboration with parents. When a parent takes a few minutes to greet an elderly person when walking with a child of any age in the street, it is a powerful lesson. If the parent is a bit more ambitious and/or creative, s/he would take another few minutes to extol the virtues of the elderly, perhaps to

explain to the child how good the older person was made to feel merely by the attention s/he received. This too would go a long way to inculcate respect in the child's heart. Parents should also point out that there

is much one can learn from older people in Torah and certainly in the wisdom of life. It may also be pointed out that by conversing with the older person one gets to find out the needs of that person and how they might be satisfied. All this for a relatively small investment of time and effort. Truly a bargain.

The truth of the matter is that most older people are not very demanding. They have learned the hard way to be self-preserving by being self-sufficient. They just need a little love, a smile and occasional attention from a younger person to put some sunlight into their dreary days.

We can easily provide that bit of light and warmth to nourish them, thereby gaining a deep satisfaction in addition to the multitude of Hashem's blessings in both worlds. Let us do it more often.

# The Art of “Waiting”

· *Yiddishe Heim Issue 112, Spring 5752 (1992)* ·

Let's begin with a question: Is the waiting for the Geulah (redemption) getting easier for you with the passage of time? Or has the intense anticipation been causing you anxiety and occasional fleeting thoughts of resignation because Moshiach hasn't arrived yet?

It is not unusual to experience both of these reactions from time to time. To learn how to handle these fluctuating feelings in a positive way, we have to refine the art of waiting and make it a rewarding experience.

The key is to *live* the waiting for Moshiach, not just wait. This is what the Rebbe Shlita teaches us in every farbrengen and in every Sicha.

## Joyous Anticipation: Seeing the “Hidden” Good

Like waiting for one's wedding day or a long-awaited “dream vacation,” times when the anticipation itself is filled with joy and deep delight, so a thousandfold over, should be the waiting for Moshiach.

First and foremost we must realize that the coming of Moshiach is the surest thing in life, the most certain event in Jewish history. As one Rabbi recently told several “singles” who were worried and saddened by their inability to find a *Shidduch*: “Whether you will get married or not no one knows for sure; there are people who unfortunately remain single throughout a lifetime. However, there is no doubt whatsoever that Moshiach is coming. So instead of being agitated about your personal prospects, join the absolutely joyous and certain expectation of the Geulah and focus on it consistently.”

All of us carry such “*pecklach*,” which is the Yiddish expression for the “bundle” of life's burdens and troubles. For some of us it may be the lack of a good *pamoso* (livelihood); for others the lack of nachas from children, or the lack of children, conditions which are accompanied by bone-deep pain and disappointment. For some the burden may be family and social

friction, or sometimes it is the lack of any significant achievements, material or spiritual, that weighs heavily on our conscience. All this, of course, is in addition to the malaise of society in general and of the Jewish people in particular. It includes the inescapable

realization that 90% of world Jewry is totally assimilated to this very day, a condition which is sometimes referred to as *Golus Hashechina* — Hashem’s (*kavyochol*) own exile in this world.

For all these individual and collective ills there is a new prescription — Moshiach! We have not a shred of doubt that with his coming all our ills will heal completely. We will lead a life that is totally good and totally pleasant, personally and universally.

Many of us are filled with a burning ambition to know much Torah — Nigleh and Chassidus — but for one reason or another we are unlikely to attain that goal. We have no time to learn, or perhaps the mind is weak and overloaded with many worries and distractions and cannot grasp the subject matter well enough. What we do manage to learn, we seem to forget rather quickly. There... Moshiach is coming to the rescue. In his time the Jews will know and retain as much as in the above-quoted Rambam.

One of our heaviest burdens is the total perplexity with which we face the tragedies that befall us, our close friends, and our nation in general. The Holocaust and the seventy years of the torture of Russian Jewry are gnawing pains in our hearts. No less is the sharp sense of pain and helplessness at the tragic passing of some young people from our midst. We feel that if we could only understand the reasons for these tragedies, they wouldn’t hurt so much. Though it is hard to explain how knowing the reason lessens the tragic dimensions of the calamity, nevertheless we keep asking ... Why? Why?

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Well, Moshiach will usher in a time in which all complexities will become crystal clear to us. We will not only understand why it happened, but what is more, we will also be able to see the good that was hidden in these painful occurrences. That sure explanation should calm us today, right now! As the Rambam says at the conclusion of his Mishneh Torah “Jews will be great in wisdom and they will know the *hidden things*.”

Along with the yearning for Moshiach is another important principle of the Rambam’s 13: The absolute faith that we have in *Tchiyas Hamaisim* — the coming back to life of all those who have departed this world. Consider the experience of seeing all our beloved family members and friends sitting together with us in Yerushalayim. What are we going to say to

them and they to us? Imagine the indescribable joy and excitement of being with them again. Hopefully they will share with us their experiences when they were “away,” and tell us things that we have never heard before.

Imagine seeing all the great Tzaddikim standing in our midst — Moshe Rabbeinu, Rebi Akiva, the Arizal, the Baal Shem Tov, the Alter Rebbe and all the others. The anticipation for these delightful and thrilling things should fill our lives with joy and gladness now. The strength of our faith is itself part of the effort towards making this happen, as our sages teach us.

### **Every Mitzvah Brings Moshiach Closer**

Waiting for Moshiach realistically should enable us to take life's troubles in stride, knowing that they are all of a temporary nature. On the other hand, we should be able to do Mitzvos with great joy, knowing that each one brings Moshiach a step closer.

Furthermore, the Mitzvos themselves should have greater significance for us, knowing that soon, our training in their performance will yield their ultimate fruit. It is known that mitzvos done prior to the Geulah are considered an exercise, practicing for the highest level of Mitzvos we will do after the Geulah. (See Rashi's commentary to the Parsha of Sh'ma, “*v'hoyo im shomoa*,” in the Sidra Aikev.) The Ramban also elaborates on the idea that Mitzvos in Golus are only a practice and a preparation for the way we will do them in Moshiach's time. This awareness should inform every Mitzvah with a yearning and a joy, the likes of which we couldn't experience before, when the Geulah was still far off.

One Mitzvah that we can do now, at every moment of every day, which will *not* be available later, is this very Mitzvah of waiting for Moshiach's coming at any and every moment. Even though this is not officially counted as one of the positive mitzvahs, it is nevertheless a most important principle of faith, a super-virtuous deed, especially when done intensely and wholeheartedly.

The Rebbe recently gave an example of honest and absolutely sincere belief in the coming of Moshiach. The Rebbe posed a question to a great Rav who was wondering about this whole new excitement relating to the coming of Moshiach. “Since Jews have always believed with complete faith in our Geulah,” the Rebbe asked, “Would you be ready to lend someone money to be repaid when Moshiach comes?” The Rav shrugged his shoulders. “That's the point,” said the Rebbe, “if you really, really believed, then you would lend him the money.” In other words, Moshiach's coming has to be as real as lending or spending money.

## Compelling Reasons for Our Belief

The fall of the evil communist empire is an event of such great magnitude that it is probably impossible to appreciate and evaluate it fully until some passage of time has elapsed. It is not just the elimination of a constant threat of the greatest proportions to world peace, which in itself would be a sufficiently favorable development toward the Moshiach era of peaceful coexistence among nations promised by our prophets. Even more important, perhaps, is the sheer collapse of a nest of evil which was the source of some of the greatest atrocities in history, especially against religion and its true bearers, the Jewish people. Their gruesome acts were always done as an act of flaunting their atheistic flag; even when they sent up the Sputnik, their proudest comment was that they found no angels up in heaven.

We are certainly entitled to view their downfall as a punishment from Hashem for their evil conduct. And even more important is the fact that their downfall came without a war or a revolution; they just collapsed under their own evil weight. That is why this event is qualitatively different from the fall of other empires throughout history, which always happened through war or natural calamities. The bubble of evil had never burst by itself before. This is a specifically pre-Moshiach development, when “the evil shall dissipate like smoke” (from Rosh Hashana davening based on the words of prophets).

Add to this the building of numerous centers of Torah learning, shuls for davening, Mikvaos and numerous summer camps that are now operating in Russia officially, under government protection. A greater revenge and victory of good over evil is hard to imagine. Who could have foretold that in the bastion of cruelty and atheism, the Kremlin, thousands of Jews would gather to celebrate the miracles of Chanukah and the whole world would be able to see and hear them and answer *Omein*.

No smaller miracle and preparation for the ingathering of exiles, is the exodus of hundreds of thousands of Jews from the Soviet Union. That, too, was beyond anybody’s imagination just a short (historical) while ago. Mind you, this is not like the Spanish expulsion or similar mass rejections of the country’s Jewish population. On the contrary, the Jews are free to stay.

Neither is the miserable economic condition in Russia insignificant in the context of the collapse of evil. Seeing this once giant and proud “Kelipa” stretching out a beggar’s hand to the world for basic necessities is enough to make us ponder His ways. Could there be a greater embarrassment?



Beating swords into plowshares is beginning to be a reality. In Russia itself, weapons of mass destruction are being disassembled and broken down and the weapons factories are being transformed for civilian manufacturing. The same is true in other former Communist countries. Of course, since the Geulah is not here yet, plenty of weapons are still around, unfortunately. In America, too, plans are being made for tens of billions of dollars to be diverted from war use to peaceful purposes, something America has never done before on such a scale!

It would be sinful and totally ungrateful on our part to ignore all these facts and take them for granted as just political events. We should not be expecting supernatural happenings, or obvious miracles. The events of the recent past are the closest we have come to pre-Moshiach changes. So there is no need to be disappointed, as some people seem to be. The more obvious miracles (in the plainest sense of the word) are planned for a later phase of the Geulah, as explained in our holy books.

The spirit of T'shuvah that is flourishing the world over, thank G-d, has gotten a special boost from the immediacy-of-the-Geulah fever. This in itself is a harbinger of a major worldwide spiritual change that Moshiach will bring to a successful climax. It is an added reminder that not everything has to happen before Moshiach comes; we have to leave some work for him to do when he ascends the throne.

Some are fearful of the predicted "*Chevlei Moshiach*", the pre-Moshiach sufferings which the Talmud describes in stark colors. There is no need to fear those predictions; they have already happened in full measure. This, by the way, is not just the opinion of the Rebbe Shlita, but of most of the great Tzaddikim of the past 50 years. The last of the pre-Moshiach pangs seems to have occurred when the 39 missiles fell in Eretz Yisroel during the Gulf War.

### **Impediments to the Geulah**

There still seems to be some impediments to the Geulah about which we can only pray and ask Hashem to have mercy upon us, remove them and to disregard some gaps in our preparations.

Of course *Achdus*, a larger measure of unity among Klal Yisroel, with more Torah, prayer and acts of kindness would have brought the Geulah earlier, possibly much earlier. It seems however, given existing conditions and the nature of the Jewish people, that it would not be practical for Moshiach to wait for such a major change, however desirable, as complete *Achdus*. It is clearly the task of the great Moshiach to use his G-dly powers to remove the deeply ingrained divisions within the Jewish people which date from the time of Yosef and

his brothers. He will supplement them with a sense of total unity! This would probably be the greatest miracle accomplished by Moshiach at the appropriate time.

One of the impediments is surely the fact that many people are unwilling

to have full faith in the imminence of the Geulah, or even in the Geulah in general. We may not be judgmental with them, because the Jewish nation has been disappointed a number of times in our tragic history. Instead, we must strengthen and live our faith in Moshiach to the fullest, until our *Bitachon* and confidence spills over into their hearts.

Neither should we be overly upset about the voices of opposition and ridicule that one hears on the Jewish street, as well as from many yeshivos and shuls. Their negativism should not bother us, following the rule stated in the beginning of the Shulchan Aruch — “*Al yisbayesh mipnai ha'maligim*” — do not be embarrassed or weakened by the scoffers. What is more, their opposition actually adds to the general awareness of Jews and society in general of the coming of Moshiach. G-d forbid that they should ignore us. The fact that at times they are vocal, even vociferous in their opposition forces them to focus on this great tenet of faith. Before we were encouraged to be excited about it, others hardly gave it a thought. It was on the back of their minds, with no fire underneath.

The fact that the Rebbe *Zol Gezunt Zein* (may he be strong and well) is going through a difficult time of physical recuperation certainly concerns us deeply; we pray for his complete and speedy recovery, with G-d's help. But this temporary situation should in no way weaken our faith and confidence in the nearness of the Geulah. The sages tell us that a Tzaddik is called the foundation of the world. The Rebbe's condition is not a personal medical problem; it is a trembling of the world's foundation that needed to happen for a short while just prior to Moshiach's coming (stated in various Midrashim and the Yalkut Shimoni in particular).

It is said that in the time of Moshiach things are going to be so pleasant and easy that they will not pose any challenge to our freedom of choice, because the presence and powers of the “good” will be so obvious. But there is an advantage in facing challenges. For as we know from experience, challenges make us work hard and bring out the best within us when we rise up to them successfully. This, then, is the task before us in the few moments of Golus that are left: To use all our strength to choose the “good” in every aspect of life, including the aspect of strengthening our faith and joy in confident anticipation of the *Geulah Shlaima bimhairo b'yomainu* — Now!

And as we wait for that precious moment, thinking of the wonderful things awaiting us should make the waiting, the anticipation, a joy and pure delight.

לע"נ

הרה"ח התמים הרב **חיים דוד נטע** בן הרה"ח  
התמים הרב **נחמן דוב וויכנין**

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לע"נ

ר' **משה יצחק אייזיק** בן ר' **אברהם אליעזר הכהן**  
וזוגתו מרת **חינקה** בת ר' **חיים**  
ובנם הרב **אברהם אליעזר** בן **משה יצחק אייזיק**  
**וואסערמאן**

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לע"נ

הרב **חיים** בן הרב **יוסף אייזיק**  
וזוגתו מרת **רבקה** בת ר' **יעקב**  
**מאס**



לע"נ

האשה הצנועה והמשכלת

נפש עדינה ויראת ה'

מרת

## מאלע

בת ר' יואל ומרת זעלדא זעבראוויטש ע"ה  
אלמנת הרה"ח התמים הרב חיים דוד נטע

## וויכנין

ז"ל

עמדה לימין בעלה בעבודתו בשליחות  
כ"ק אדמו"ר מליובאוויטש נשיא דורנו

משחר נעוריה מאסה בהבלי העולם  
ונתנה לבה לדרוש ולתור בחכמה ודעת אלקים  
וללכת באמת ובמישור

חינכה במשך כשישים שנה בנות ישראל  
לתורה, ליראת שמים ולדרך ארץ  
ולימדתן לזכור ימות עולם ולהבין שנות דור ודור

תפלתה כמונה מעות  
קיימה מצוות בהידור  
והצטיינה ברגישותה לזולת

נולדה בפולין ט' טבת תש"ה  
ונפטרה בשם טוב בירושלים עיה"ק ת"ו  
י"ז מרחשון ה'תשפ"ד