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Perspectives

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CAN WE STILL DAVEN?

*An Interview with
HaRav Yaakov Schwei*

WHAT WE REALLY NEED

Rabbi Binyomin Cohen

FOR THE FAMILY ACHDUS

Rabbi Dovid Wichnin

REJOICING WITH THE TORAH – THE 'ACID TEST' OF JEWISH DEVOTION

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ADVERTORIAL

In 2014, qualifying for a mortgage loan is more restrictive than it had been in the past. What could a family do? A co-signor is a great way for a family to be able to purchase a home. What is a "Co-signor" or a "non occupying co-borrower"? And what are the consequences of co-signing for someone else's mortgage?

If someone is looking to buy a home and they do not qualify because their income is too low, a non occupying co-borrower is a great solution, but it does come with serious responsibilities for the co-borrower and serious concerns for the home purchaser.

The first thing to address is the term "co-signor" vs. "Co-borrower". When you sign for someone else you are co-borrower with equal ownership and equal responsibility to repay the loan. It is not like the traditional co-signor relationship where if the loan were to default then you have to step up to the plate and pay it back, you are equally responsible. That means that the loan is on your credit report, if it is late, then you will be reported as late.

Before someone agrees to co-sign a few questions are usually asked. Let us answer the questions that come up:

How will this affect my credit?

This loan will be listed on your credit along with all of your other debts. If it is paid on time it will build your score. If it is paid late, it will harm your score.

Will only 1/2 the loan be my responsibility and only that portion be on my credit report?

Since you are an equal; partner in this mortgage debt, your credit report will reflect the entire liability, just like the primary borrower.

If I want to buy a house in the future, Will I be able to qualify for another mortgage if this mortgage is on my credit report?

If the loan is being paid on time, and the other party's check is paying the loan and you can prove 12 months cancelled checks from the other party, then this debt is excluded from the debt ratio. Now this is a current mortgage qualification guideline. As we have seen in the last 18 months there have been tougher restrictions on qualifications for a mortgage, so this may change, although I haven't heard anything yet.

For how many years am I responsible

You are responsible for as long as the loan lasts.

If I have a co borrower, what happens if something happens to me, will they now "inherit" or "own" my house?

This is a great question. My answer is to speak to your attorney. There can be issues and they should be addressed up front. Your attorney should advise you on these sensitive issues.

How will this debt affect my debt-to-income ratio on other credit that I may have?

This debt will be on your credit report and can affect your ability to get credit.

Will I be considered a "First Time Home Buyer" if I am a co-borrower?

Some First time homebuyers programs only check to see if you have claimed the mortgage interest deduction on your tax return. So if you aren't paying the mortgage and you do not claim the interest, you may still qualify. I would say that you should go into this assuming that you wouldn't qualify and if you want to buy a home down the road, look into each available program at that time.

If I have poor credit, will a co-borrower with great credit help me?

We qualify customers based on the lower middle score of all the borrowers. So while a co-borrower with great credit is great, it won't mitigate the fact that your credit is poor.

Who is the best candidate to be a non-occupying co-borrower?

In my opinion, someone who is very close to you, preferably a close family member such as a parent or grandparent.

If you have any mortgage related questions. Contact Ann Zeilingold NMLS# 41850. She is affiliated with First Meridian Mortgage with offices in Brooklyn, Manhattan and Pomona NY. She has been helping families with their mortgage needs for the past 25+ years. To email your own question or for a free copy of her book, "The Home Buyers Bible, The complete guide to buying a home" or if you have any mortgage questions, you can reach Ann by visiting her blog, www.annzeilingold.com or calling her on her direct line 347-289-8120 or on her cell 914-260-9000 or via email azeilingold@fmm.com. Listen to Ann live on the radio, every Thursday morning at 7:15 am for "Mortgage matters" 1300 am or streaming live at www.wrcr.com

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- FOREWORD -

One day, between Yom Kippur and Sukkos, the Mittlerer Rebbe and his son Reb Nochum went for a walk outside their home. Outside they beheld around two hundred chassidim listening intently as a yungerman chazer'd before them the maamorim from Shabbos Selichos and Rosh Hashana through the day after Yom Kippur. The chassidim were so absorbed in the maamar that they did not notice the Rebbe and his son.

The Mittlerer Rebbe hid behind some trees, and asked Reb Nochum to see who is chazering and which maamar it was. When Reb Nochum returned saying that the speaker was Avrohom Sosnitzer, the Mittlerer Rebbe said, "My father once instructed me to tell Avrohom Sosnitzer, 'When one speaks profound Chassidus it is indeed sweet, but one must not forget about Whom one is speaking – Ein Sof Boruch Hu.'"¹

Recently there has been much talk about turning to Chassidus for practical guidance in day-to-day life. But what does it mean for Chassidus to be relevant? Is Chassidus a program for self-help (albeit a better one, or, as a chossid might say, the right one)? What is Chassidus and how is it applied?

As emphasized in the above story, Chassidus, like Yiddishkeit in general, is all about the Eibershter.

Zionism was disputed by our Rebbeim because it corrupted Divine instructions into cultural symbols. As the Rebbe would often quote Rabbeinu Saadya Gaon, "Ein umaseinu uma ela b'torasa," our nation is only a nation for Torah and mitzvos. There is no Judaism other than avodas Hashem.

Likewise, Chassidus is a superior form of serving and connecting to the Eibershter. Toras HaChassidus and Darkei HaChassidus reveal the Eibershter's omnipresence and involvement in our lives – resulting in bitachon, simcha and true purpose. Focusing on an external element of Chassidus – be it soulful niggunim or tips for better relationships – is Chassidic Zionism and will not bring the desired result.

We must make Chassidus applicable and meaningful – for our sake and for our children, however we must make sure that what we are applying is actually Chassidus.

Rabbi Shimon Hellinger
General Editor

1) Likutei Dibburim Vol. 1 p. 389.



THE REBBE'S PERSPECTIVE

Prepared by Rabbi Shimon Hellinger

SHOULD CHILDREN BE SHELTERED FROM THE STREET?

WHO IS ABLE TO INFLUENCE THE "DAUGHTERS OF THE LAND"?

HOW SHOULD WE ACCOMPLISH A HEALTHY DISTANCE?

In this *sicha* from Simchas Torah, 5732¹ (1971) the Rebbe addressed these questions:

MIMICKING "THE DAUGHTERS OF THE LAND"

When young Dina sees someone with a short dress and thinks to herself that such conduct would perhaps suit her too ("and Dina went out"), this is a problem. In fact, others should be learning from *her*, and not the other way around.

She is not like her grandmother Sarah who lived a different life, a life in which "Avraham converted the men, and Sarah, the women"; she is a young Dina. If a young girl, who is 'young' both in intellect and in *yiras Shamayim*, wants to become familiar with the current style and with what the "daughters of the land" have to say, this is a problem.

A SUITABLE ENVIRONMENT

Since the Torah demands this, it indicates that it can be accomplished. If the girl attends a school where others conduct themselves inappropriately, then we must create for her another school.

The Rambam himself spent most of his day in the company of non-Jews, being one of the respected dignitaries attending the Sultan. Yet, when writing about the appropriate conduct for a Jew, he rules explicitly that if a person has the option, he must either spend

1. Unedited – printed in *Sichos Kodesh* 5732, Vol. 1, p. 94.

his time among G-d-fearing people or move away to a desert. How much more so in our day, when there *are* schools which are suitable for daughters of Sarah, Rivkah, Rochel and Leah.

One must know that Dina has no connection with the "daughters of the land," for the results of such a connection R"L are related in the *Chumash*. This separation, however, must be accomplished in an easygoing manner.

If a young girl, who is 'young' both in intellect and in *yiras Shamayim*, wants to become familiar with the current style and with what the "daughters of the land" have to say, this is a problem.

THE PARENT'S RESPONSIBILITY

When *HaShem* blesses parents with children, he gives them either the capability to educate those children according to *HaShem's* desire, or the possibility to find educators who are capable of doing so. When this is done, one is found worthy of meeting the *malochim* of *chutz la'aretz* and of *Eretz Yisroel*, as well as those on the border (as Yaakov did).

When a person tackles these tasks with *simcha*, which bursts through all boundaries and limitations, one is blessed with a *Jewish* year. One should utilize the influence that he has within his family, his community and anywhere that he can reach, to raise children who befit their title as "children of Avraham, Yitzchok and Yaakov," and as "daughters of Sarah, Rivkah, Rochel and Leah," and as the

Army of *HaShem*. We will then be able to go forth with them to greet our Righteous *Moshiach*, with the true and complete Redemption.

IN SUMMARY

- Only someone who is solely interested in positively influencing others can associate with the "daughters of the land" and influence them. A child who is interested in the styles is likely to be influenced by them.
- The Torah and the Rambam tell us to keep away from negative influences, even if it means moving away from society. Today, that isn't necessary but one must find a suitable environment.
- Parents are granted the capability to educate their children – on their own or with the help of others. They must see to it that their children are under good influence.



CAN WE STILL DAVEN?

Davening has long finished at the Ksav Sofer shul on Empire Boulevard, but HaRav Schwei is still seated at his place, wrapped in his *talis* and *tefillin*, turning the pages of a worn Tehillim. Slowly and gently he releases the words, as if parting from longtime friends. Until tomorrow.

As he wraps his Rabeinu Tam *tefillin*, a local store manager approaches the *rov*. He is greeted with a warm smile, a soft pat on his upper arm and a listening ear. The troubled shopkeeper is clearly frustrated with his neighbor, and has much more to say about him than asking for his *halacha* rights, but the *rov*, his head bent attentively, lets him finish his rant-riddled question. Never mind the details. Ten minutes later, his gruff tone has lowered and a pleasant, solution searching conversation ensues.

It's not my turn yet. A Bar Mitzvah aged boy has a *gematriya* on the *parshah* he must share, and his *rov* responds with a similar *vort* he remembers from his Samarkand *cheider* days. And he doesn't let him go before inquiring about his brother. Which brother? The one the *rov* tested on the entire *mesechta* last summer.

Next in line. I'm asking for more than ten minutes, and more than a *dvar torah*. I have some serious business at hand.

DAVENING: OUR SOURCE OF LIFE

What is the significance of *davening* in the life of a chossid?

For Chassidim, *davening* is a central aspect of *avoda*. It is the life and support of one's relationship with *HaShem*.

As *Chassidus* explains (*Likutei Torah Parshas Balak*), connecting with *HaShem* is not counted as one of the 613 *mitzvos* since it is the life of them

all. When compared to the limbs of the body, *davening* is like the spinal cord which facilitates the functioning of all the bodily organs, even though it does not serve a specific function itself.

When a person *davens* with feeling and *chayus*, the rest of his day is charged with devotion to *HaShem* and desire to fulfill his *mitzvos*. When he encounters a challenge during his work, he naturally turns to *HaShem* to help him, since he recognizes that He is the Source of all life.

For this objective, the Rebbe writes in *HaYom Yom* that the beginning of spiritual downfall is lack of proper *davening*. Every good act is then done by rote, in a cold and dry manner, eventually becoming a challenge and done in haste. One loses his *geshmak* in Torah, and his entire environment becomes crass.

The concluding statement found there is the most shocking of all: "It is obvious that he cannot have an influence on another." We must realize that the quality of our *davening* is relevant not only to our own conduct, but also to that of our family and those who look up to us.

INVIGORATING DAVENING

It sounds like *Chassidus* focuses mainly on the *kavana* of *tefilah*, rather than merely mouthing the words. Is that correct?

There are two basic aspects to *davening*: the words of the *tefilos* and the emotion with which they are said.

For many years I served as a *melamed* in the Lubavitcher Yeshivah on Bedford and Dean. The *talmidim* would travel to *Yeshivah* from Crown Heights and elsewhere by a city bus. Since the bus stop was a short distance from *Yeshivah*, I would accompany the young *bochurim* on their walk and used the time to talk with them.

One *bochur*, who interestingly was not in my class, once related to me an interesting *yechidus* he had with the Rebbe. The Rebbe spoke to him about the significance of *davening* and told him:

"Our *davening* is in place of the *korbanos* of the

Beis Hamikdash. A *korbon* has two requirements: Firstly, the animal's body must be whole, with all the limbs intact and without any blemishes. Secondly, it must have a whole soul – simply that the animal must be alive. Similarly, when one *davens*, he must ensure that both the body and the soul are complete. The words are the body of *davening*, and they must be complete, not missing any words and not mispronouncing them. If words are missing or blemished, it is like a *baal mum* (blemished animal) which is unfit

to be brought up on the *mizbeiach*. The *kavana* and understanding of the words are the life of *davening*. These are also essential to the validity of the *tefilah*. While there are many levels in this aspect, at least a basic intention of *davening* to *HaShem* is necessary."

When the Rebbe concluded, the Rebbe asked the *bochur* if he had heard this vort before. The young *bochur* replied in the affirmative: "Yes, I heard it from Rabbi Schwei..." The Rebbe smiled. As it happened, I had shared this concept with this *bochur* during

one of our walks to the bus.

POWERFUL WORDS

Why is it so important to pronounce the words of *davening* carefully?

Many people, especially those who have been educated in the deeper meaning of *davening* and the great levels of *davening* reached by great *chassidim*, assume that correct enunciation of the words of *davening* is not so important. The truth is not so.

I recall one *shochet* who had to leave soon after the *minyan* and he would tell us *bochurim*, "In Lubavitch they educated the *bochurim* not only to *daven ba'arichus* (at length), but also how to *daven quickly, ober gedavent!* (but a real *davening*)..."

On the *possuk*, "*nagila v'nismecha boch* (we will rejoice and exult with You)," *Chassidus* explains that "*boch*" refers to the twenty-two letters of the *Alef-Beis*. These holy letters are a conduit which connects our *etzem haneshomo* with the Eibershter's essence.

Maharil, the Alter Rebbe's brother, writes of the importance of correct pronunciation of *davening* in his *baskama* (approbation) to the Alter Rebbe's *siddur* printed in 5583 (1823). He writes that although *bdievid* one is *yoitzei* if he did not pronounce the words correctly, nevertheless the correct reading is a "great *mitzvah* according to the revealed Torah, and certainly according to the hidden Torah, since the letters and *nekudos* which leave a person's mouth

bear fruit Above." He writes that ensuring the correct pronunciation of the words was part of the Alter Rebbe's motivation in creating his *siddur*.

The concluding statement found there is the most shocking of all. We must realize that the quality of our *davening* is relevant not only to our own conduct, but also to that of our family and those who look up to us.

As the expression goes, *davening* should be recited "*k'moneh ma'os*", like one who counts coins. When a person counts his coins, he is meticulous to ensure that all is in order, and is careful that nothing is lost. So too, we must be careful to utter every word of *davening*, making sure that nothing is missing from our *tefillah*.

Once at a *farbrengen*, the Rebbe described a person who carelessly misses parts of *davening*. The

Rebbe spoke with pain, "*Er hibt iber shtikker fun davenen!* (He skips parts of *davening*!)"...

As a *melamed*, I would emphasize to the boys that



davening is for one's own benefit and that skipping or mispronouncing sections results in their own loss. I would explain this to them with the following *mashal*:

A Yid once went to buy sacks of wheat from a farmer. Since the Yid had no wagon, he had to *schlep* the sacks home one at a time. In order to calculate how many sacks he took and how much to pay in the end, he set aside

a quarter each time he took a sack. The foolish farmer thought to himself, "This man is leaving with all these quarters here, I can take some and he won't notice..." The fool that he was! He stole from no one but himself!

Many people look to get out of reciting *tachnun*, especially on Monday or Thursday when it is longer. This conduct is foolish. Instead of utilizing this opportunity to ask *HaShem* for forgiveness and for the *geulah* (which is the theme of the extended *tachnun* on Monday and Thursday), they look to be "freed" from it.

This point is especially true for a Chabad chossid. The Friediker Rebbe points out that unlike other Chassidic circles that omit *tachnun* on the day of the *yahrtzeit* of a *tzaddik*, *minbag* Chabad is specifically to recite it, since "What better time is there to ask than now?"

[Similarly, Reb Hendel, one of the early *mashpiim* in Lubavitch, said regarding the Monday and Thursday *tachnun*: "People don't appreciate it for what it is. There are requests in this *tefilah*, which aren't even recited during the *Yomim Noraim*..." – Editor.]

CONNECTING WITH PASSION

OK. I understand that careful enunciation of

Many people, especially those who have been educated in the deeper meaning of *davening*, assume that correct enunciation of the words of *davening* is not so important. The truth is not so.

the words of *davening* is important, but isn't *kavana* the main emphasis of *Chassidus*?

Yes, the *nesbama* of *davening* is the *kavana* and *chayus*. What this means to a person, first and foremost, is that the *davening* matters to him, he cares about it. Then, inevitably, his *davening* will be with a *chayus*. When something truly matters to someone, you can see the difference.

Reb Peretz Mochkin, our *mashpia* in *yeshiva*, would use this *mashal* in his *farbrengens*: A drowning man was desperately shouting, "*Gevald! Rateveh mir! Save me!*" While he screams, is he thinking exactly *how* he bellows the words from his mouth: "Does it sound like this or more like that?" Of course not! It's with his entire essence!

The same with our *davening*: *Chassidus* teaches that *tefilah* means connecting, as in the expression "*toifel kli cheres*," which refers to gluing together and reinforcing pottery. During *davening* we are making a connection with *HaShem*. We exclaim, "*Eibershter*, I am yours and you are mine! I am always attached to you, always yearning to fulfill your *ratzon*." With this thread we *daven* and meditate, "*mah rabu maasecha, mah godlu maasecha*," how great is *HaShem's* handiwork.

There are two aspects to our emotional connection to *HaShem* while *davening*. The first is general dedication to *HaShem*, recognizing our complete reliance on Him. The second is a thorough and comprehensive appreciation for His greatness in all of its details.

This two-fold bond is alluded to in the section of *Shacharis* beginning "*Va'Yevarech Dovid*" in a phrase that reads, "*modim anachnu lach, u'mehalelim l'shem tifartecha*," we submit ourselves to You and we praise Your glorious name. In the

first clause, "*modim*", we are dedicating ourselves with total *bittul* to *HaShem's* very Essence: "*lach*," to You. The second level is "*mehalelim*," we are praising *HaShem's* name, "*shem tifartecha*," through reflection upon *HaShem's* greatness in the various stages of the Creation that follows.

EVEN IN A RUSH

To be honest, many of us don't have the time and *yishuv badaas* to *daven* for hours. Does that mean that *Chassidus* has nothing to contribute to our *davening*?

There exists a false perception that in order to *daven* properly and with feeling a person has to set aside a few hours in order to contemplate *Chassidus* and *daven* with *avoda*. This is an unfortunate misconception. Even one who has a limited time to *daven* can be involved in his *davening* and feel that he is talking to *HaShem*.

I remember that there were many *chassidim* in the German DP camp Poking. Some of them were able to spend the time *davening* at length, while many others had to go off to work. I recall one *shochet* who had to leave soon after the *minyan* and he would tell us *bochurim*, "In Lubavitch they educated the *bochurim* not only to *daven ba'arichus* (at length), but also how to *daven* quickly, *ober gedavent!* (but a real *davening*)..."

One can always *daven* with a *chayus*, even if he is *davening* with the *minyan*. The *chayus* can come from expressing the words clearly and with *varemkait*, and also with a measure of reflection on what is being said. *Davening* should never be without any enthusiasm.

The Rebbe tells a story of a simple *chossid* of the Alter Rebbe who would *daven* every day with intense *chayus*. Fellow *mispalelim* were surprised and asked him what he thought about that gave him such *chayus*. The man answered that he had once heard a *psbat* from the Alter Rebbe on the statement "*shamor vezachor bedibur echad*" (simply meaning the two expressions regarding Shabbos—*zachor* and *shamor*—were both said by *HaShem* in the same utterance), that in every word of *davening* one must remember the *echad*, the oneness of *HaShem*.

Davening should be recited "*k'moneh ma'os*", like one who counts coins. When a person counts his coins, he is meticulous to ensure that all is in order, and is careful that nothing is lost.

Similarly, Reb Volf Greenglass, the renowned *mashpia* from Montreal, once told us of a *poshute Yid* who would *daven* with great enthusiasm. People asked him wondrously, "Why are you so passionate in *davening* when you don't even know the basic meaning of the words?!" He replied, "True, I don't know the meaning, but the words themselves are so *geshmak!*" Now, think how much more *geshmak* the *davening* could be if

we have some understanding of the *tefilos*.

A practical piece of advice is to spend less time looking at the clock and feeling limited with *davening*. Shulchan Aruch (Alter Rebbe 98:3) rules that one's *davening* should not be "a set routine" and "an obligation that one needs to fulfill," but rather a heartfelt beseeching from the King. The Alter Rebbe adds that one should therefore *daven* in a tone which rouses him.

PREPARING TO DAVEN

Why do *chassidishe minyonim* start later than other *shuls*?

One of the novelties of *chassidishe davening* was the extensive preparation carried out beforehand. Chassidim of old would invest large amounts of time learning and contemplating, so that the *davening* should be effective.

The *Novi* says, “*bikon likras elokecha Yisroel*,” prepare in honor of your G-d, *Yisroel*. We are required to prepare ourselves both physically and spiritually before standing in front of *HaShem*.

As mentioned, our *avoda* in *davening* replaces the *avoda* of the *kohanim* in the *Beis HaMikdash*. Before a *kohen* would begin his *avoda*, he would have to prepare himself by sanctifying his body in a *mikveh*, donning the proper garments and focusing his mind on the right intentions. Similarly, before we start *davening*, we prepare ourselves by going to the *mikveh*, putting on a hat, jacket and

gartel and focusing our minds through learning *Chassidus*. One should try to set aside even a few

short minutes to learn an idea of *Chassidus* and reflect upon it, which will arouse a person to a better *davening*.

The preparation affects the nature and lasting effect of the *davening*. When there is a proper *bachana*, then the individual *davens* with more *kavana* and that inspiration carries over to the rest of the day. Some level of *bachana* is a must for every person.

Still today, there are many who take the time, especially on Shabbos, to *daven* at length after the *minyan* has finished. However, we cannot adopt this practice out of context.

SUITABLE SETTING

With all the new technological gadgets popular today it can be difficult to *daven* undisturbed. What do you suggest?

Another point to be learned from the service of



the *kobanim* is regarding the setting in which they preformed their *avoda*. Before one approached *Har HaBayis* he was obligated to remove his money pouch, which connotes his outside dealings and involvements. It was expected that one conduct himself in a way that expresses the intensity of the time and place.

Similarly, when one sets out to *daven*, it is crucial that he puts aside all other preoccupations, so that the setting is right to concentrate on *davening*. Simply speaking, one needs to turn off his cell-phone so that it does not disturb him and those around him. It is not enough to set it to vibrate, since the vibration will still distract him. In addition, someone who takes out his phone to check new messages or runs out to take a call ruins the sacred atmosphere for the entire *tzibbur*.

The Rebbe would say that when one learns, he should be like Rashbi; Torah was all he had and there was nothing else to disturb him. The Rebbe himself once expressed that he should not answer the phone while occupied in Torah, just like on Shabbos! If this directive applies to learning, how much more so should our *davening* be without distractions.

All the difficulties stem from the lack of consciousness that during *davening* we are literally standing before the King. Before *davening* there is an obligation of "*da lifnei mi ata oimed*" – to recognize before Whom we stand, therefore acting appropriately. Of course, even if we do not feel that way, we must nevertheless behave as such, as the Alter Rebbe writes in Tanya.

These precepts must be examined time and

again. The Rebbe instructed many people to constantly review the beginning of *perek mem-alef* in Tanya by heart, describing "*v'hinei Hashem nitzav alav....*," how *HaShem* stands over every Yid. This prerequisite is necessary in order to be "*ovdo koro'ui*", to serve *HaShem* properly.

CHOOSING A CHAZAN

What is the best option for a person who is a *chiyuv* in memory of a parent but doesn't have time to *daven* at a slow pace? Should he *daven* at the *amud* anyway?

The *shliach tzibbur* carries the giant responsibility of setting the tone for the entire *minyan*. The Alter Rebbe writes in Tanya that the one who *davens* at the *amud* should be someone who has the time to *daven* at a composed and comfortable pace. One

who has good reason to speed up should hurry himself but not force the entire *minyan* to hurry with him.

Often a *chiyuv* serves as a *shliach tzibbur* to merit a parent, but he *davens* quickly and causes the *tzibbur* to recite portions of *davening* without *pirush hamilos* or to recite them incorrectly. This is not a *nachas* for the parent!

Instead, one who for whatever reason cannot be the ideal *chazan* should send someone else to *daven* at the *amud*, and he should recite the *kadeishim*. In this way, there will be a much greater benefit for the *neshama* of the parent and it will cause them much *nachas*.

The same holds true of *chazanim* on Shabbos. Chassidim abhorred "*chazanim*" and chose

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"*baalei tefilah*." A *chazan* preoccupies himself with "How does the *oilam* like my *davening*?" while a *baal tefilah* is conscious that he *davens* directly before the *Eibershter* on the people's behalf.

TAKING THE TRODDEN PATH

Why would *Chassidus* encourage *davening* at length not with the *minyan*? Isn't *davening* with a *minyan* valuable?

Davening with a *minyan* is an important aspect of *tefilah*. *Chazal* tell us that *HaShem* will surely attend to the *tefillos* of one who *davens* with the *minyan* since *HaShem* does not discount the *tefilah* of the community. It's worth it!

We know that *Chassidim* opted for quality

Many people look to get out of reciting *tachnun*, especially on Monday or Thursday when it is longer. Instead of utilizing this opportunity to ask *HaShem* for forgiveness and for the *geulah*, they look to be "freed" from it.

davening over *davening* with a *minyan*. The following story illustrates this tenet. Reb Yosef Yitzchak of Avrutch, son of the Tzemach Tzedek, married the daughter of Reb Yaakov Yisroel of Cherkass. On the Shabbos *Sheva Brachos*, Reb Yosef Yitzchak gave his word to his father-in-law that he would *daven* with the *minyan*, but was found later to be *davening* at length after the *tzibbur*. When asked, he said that he *does daven* with the *tzibbur* — with his "*eser kochos hanefesh*" (ten attributes of the soul).

Not merely a clever quip, Reb Yosef Yitzchak's response explained why he could bypass the *minyan*. Through intense *davening* one can arouse his "*eser kochos hanefesh*" (ten attributes of the soul), equivalent in power to a *minyan*.

Still today, there are many who take the time,



especially on Shabbos, to *daven* at length after the *minyan* has finished. However, we cannot adopt this practice out of context. Whenever we do not involve our "*eser kochos hanefesh*," we must stick to *davening* with a *tzibbur* according to its traditional interpretation.

By and large, Chassidim *davened* with the *minyan*. As a child I lived in Samarkand with the many Chassidim who traveled there after the War. Known as "Yisroel Noach's *Minyan*," one *shul* was where notable Chassidim would *daven* on Shabbos, including Reb Yisroel Noach Belinitzky and Reb Nissan Nemenov. There was still *tefilah betzibbur*; they would just *daven* together in a lengthier manner. In addition to the set *minyan*, some others stayed later to *daven ba'avoda*. One chossid could be found in one corner, one in another; some would *daven* audibly for others to hear, while others would *daven* more quietly. I recall that Reb Asher "Batumer" (Sassonkin) would stand by the *amud davening* at length. Reb Yisroel Neveler would *daven* aloud, and people could tell where in *davening* he was holding from the *niggunim* he hummed. During *birchos krias shema* he would pause and sing at length. I remember how as a youth, well before the age of *bar mitzvah*, all of this made a strong impression on me.

Davening in *shul* also provides the general benefit of spending time among fellow chassidim in a chassidishe *Beis Medrash*, which always brings positive results.

After hours of preparation and thinking *Chassidus*,

many great Chassidim would *daven* past the allotted time. This, of course, does not eliminate the need to *daven* in the proper time for anyone who is not following that regimen; the proper times for *davening* must still be observed. In fact, *Chassidus* explains the spiritual significance of the times for each of the *tefilos*. There is absolutely no room for leniencies!

***Davening* in *shul* also provides the general benefit of spending time among fellow chassidim in a chassidishe *Beis Medrash*, which always brings positive results.**

IN PREPARATION
FOR THE GEULAH

What should one do when after trying numerous times to concentrate during *davening* he has not succeeded?

We must not be discouraged by the challenges and failures we encounter when trying to *daven*. It is a precious and important *avoda*, especially in our times (as the Alter Rebbe writes in Tanya), and it is bound to face obstacles.

Someone told me that as a *bochur* he complained to Reb Nissan Nemenov that he had seriously tried and prepared himself for proper *davening*, but success evaded him. Reb Nissan advised him, "Try again, if it doesn't go, try again, and then again a third time. If something should happen on the third time, all the attempts and efforts were well worth their time."

In a letter to chassidim, printed at the end of Tanya, the Alter Rebbe emphasizes the significance of *davening* during our times, "the heels of Moshiach." We must fulfill the Alter Rebbe's directive to bring Moshiach immediately.



Rabbi Binyomin Cohen

WHAT WE REALLY NEED

*Rabbi Binyomin Cohen serves as the Rosh Yeshivah
of Yeshivah Gedolah of Melbourne, Australia.*

The year was 1924 (5685) and the place was Baltimore, Maryland, USA. It was the first night of Rosh Hashana and the Tzemach Tzedek Shul was absolutely packed. There were, at the time, four shuls in Baltimore which *davened* according to the *nusach* of the Arizal, all of them catering for Russian immigrants.

Most of these émigrés had arrived in America about twenty-five years earlier, at the turn of the century, and were therefore by now fairly well settled in their new environment. They had not forgotten their *Yiddish* or even their *Yiddishkeit*, but life in the States was not that easy. Even the most basic aspects of Jewish observance seemed to require phenomenal determination. It was extremely difficult to find a job where you did not have to work on Shabbos, and a Jewish education for the children was, at best, an antiquated and ineffective *melamed* in a musty after-school *cheder*. People were not rich, but managed. Life was a struggle, but bearable.

It was a pity that the children didn't seem to be overly enthusiastic about their *Yiddishkeit*, but what could you expect? At least people managed to stick together, had their own Yiddish-language

newspaper and kept each other company. Going to shul on Shabbos was a different matter, and was almost impossible. Of course, if they wouldn't have had to work so hard it would be entirely different, but, under the circumstances.... Not that they were happy about it, but for most people, and especially for those supporting a family, it just wasn't possible any other way.

They may not have been in shul that often during the year, but tonight was different. Tonight was Rosh Hashana. On three days of the year all the Jewish factories and businesses were closed. Which Jew wouldn't be in shul tonight and tomorrow? The place was full and the atmosphere quite intense as people squeezed into their seats and prepared themselves for davening.

A young man with a bushy brown beard sitting at the front of the shul attracted more than a few curious glances. His distinctly un-American appearance made him quite conspicuous and reminded many of those present of the towns and villages in which they had grown up. It didn't take long for even the most infrequent shul-goer to find out that this was in fact the new Rov of the shul, who had moved to Baltimore a few weeks

ago, after arriving in the USA at the beginning of the year. He too hailed from Russia, but his background and upbringing had been somewhat different from most of those present.

Avrohom Eliyahu Akselrod was born in 1893 (5653) in White Russia. At the age of thirteen he entered the Yeshivas Tomchei Tmimim in Lubavitch, studying there (and later in Krementchug and Rostov) for the next fourteen years. During this time his achievements – both scholastic and devotional – were, to say the least, exceptional, and formed the basis for a lifetime of uninterrupted immersion in the study of Torah and the service of Tefillah.

After his marriage in 1921 (5681) the previous Lubavitcher Rebbe (the Rayatz) recommended that he move, with his family, to America in order to strengthen there the learning of Torah and Chassidus. The unprecedented, and almost revolutionary, nature of this recommendation should not be under-estimated. The Rebbeim of Chabad-Lubavitch had always been totally opposed to the idea of their Chassidim moving to America. They felt that they could not condone the idea of a Chossid raising his family in a spiritual wilderness and were not prepared to give their approval or blessings to such a step, even at a time when pogroms prompted thousands of other Jews to cross the ocean. That the Rebbe Rayatz should actively encourage the newly-wed Rabbi Akselrod to set his sights on the Goldener Medinah, and to choose that as the place to bring up his family, was a clear indication of his confidence in this exceptional individual. He once indeed testified about him that, “Avrohom Elye never once lifted his eyes to look at the skyscrapers of New York”.

Such a person would surely be able to influence without becoming influenced, and to bring others close to Torah without compromising one iota of his own principles.

For some reason the young Rabbi did not leave Russia until the beginning of 1924. A few months after his arrival in the USA he was appointed as the Rov of Congregation Tzemach Tzedek in Baltimore. He was, of course, happy to have obtained a position, and people seemed to be welcoming and supportive, but something disturbed him. While still in Russia he had heard reports about the materialism rampant in America, and about the difficulties in leading a religious, Chassidic life. Hearing is one thing, but, being faced with the

They had not forgotten their Yiddish or even their Yiddishkeit, but life in the States was not that easy. It was a pity that the children didn't seem to be overly enthusiastic about their Yiddishkeit, but what could you expect?

realities of the situation, he was deeply shocked. Never before had he met people who were so involved in their livelihoods and so obsessed with their possessions. True that he had led a rather sheltered, and almost other-worldly, existence within the enclaves of Lubavitch, but he was now confronted with the opposite extreme. These people's priorities seemed to be very different from his. How on earth was he going to be able to even relate to such congregants, let alone influence them?

He had had several weeks to ponder the matter, and now here he was together with them on the first night of Rosh Hashana. What a contrast between the shul's normal appearance every Shabbos and the way it looked now! Every week it seemed to be a struggle to get a *minyan*, and now it was standing-room only. Well, at least this showed how special the day was for them. Surely, it should be no less special for him? Rabbi

Akselrod decided on the spot that Rosh Hashana in Baltimore would, for him at least, be no different from Rosh Hashana in Lubavitch. There, the focus had been on *Tefillah*, and so too it would be here.

Tefillah requires preparation. In this case he would prepare himself by reflecting on the idea of Rosh Hashana as explained at length in many *maamorim* (Chassidic discourses).

Hashem creates and enlivens this world, and similarly all higher worlds, for a period of one year. This year starts on Rosh Hashana and ends on the eve of the next Rosh Hashana. Thus, last Rosh Hashana the decision was made in the Heavenly Court to grant life for a whole year. That year just finished half an hour ago. Once again, the Day of Judgment has arrived. Hashem will now sit in judgment and decide whether to grant yet another year of Creation and life. He will examine every detail, and hopefully listen to what we have to say in our Tefillos, before arriving at His decision. In addition to our Tefillos, which will be poured out from the depths of our hearts, we will also blow the Shofar tomorrow, thus arousing the mercy of our Father in Heaven.

An awareness of all of this would have a profound

effect on a person. No wonder the Alter Rebbe interpreted the words “*hayom haras olam*” to mean that “today the world is trembling”. Today, this world and its inhabitants, as well as all other worlds and the angels in them, tremble as they face the judgment of their Creator. We stand before Hashem and beg Him to agree to be the King over the whole of Creation, as we willingly and

unconditionally accept His complete authority. On such a day, and at such a critical juncture, in what could a Jew possibly be interested or involved, other than begging and beseeching Hashem to be our King and to give us life? In comparison with this, all else is minor detail.

Engrossed in these thoughts, and a myriad of connected concepts elaborated upon in Chassidus, the Rabbi was, emotionally and spiritually, once again with his Rebbe and the atmosphere of

Rosh Hashana as it had been in Lubavitch. There, hundreds of Chassidim, and even very simple Jews, *davened* for hours on the first night of Rosh Hashana as they united themselves with the day and immersed themselves in its meaning. Rabbi Akselrod scarcely noticed what was going on around him in the shul. His body was in Baltimore, but his soul was elsewhere.



R' Avrohom Eliyahu Akselrod

The congregation finished *davening* and many of those present approached the young Rabbi in order to wish him the traditional - may you be inscribed and sealed for a good year – but the Rabbi didn't seem to hear them. He was oblivious of his surroundings and completely involved in his *davening*. It didn't stop there. The congregants had long since gone home, and the Rabbi was still *davening*. The Shamash returned to lock up the shul, after he had finished his Yomtov meal, and the Rabbi had still not finished. At long last, after a *davening* which had lasted for hours, the Rabbi left the shul and went home. The Shamash was slightly irritated at having to return to lock up the shul, but his surprise at the Rabbi's behavior was far greater. What was going on?

The next day in shul it was common knowledge that the Rabbi had prayed for hours on end, and everybody was completely baffled. Who had ever heard of a Rabbi who didn't *daven* together with everybody else? Who had ever seen a Rabbi who was unapproachable when you wanted to wish him a good year? And what on earth was this young Rabbi doing *davening* in the shul hours after everyone else had left? After all, how long is the *davening*? Does he have a different *machzor* from the rest of us?

The members of the congregation were genuinely concerned. If the Rabbi would be a conceited and aloof individual maybe his behavior would make sense, as he chose this special day to demonstrate his spiritual uniqueness and isolation. They knew, however, that this Rabbi was not at all like that. The short time he had already been in Baltimore had been more than sufficient to convince all

who met him that he was completely without airs and graces. He was an intensely warm

person who seemed to have time for everybody and was prepared to do anything to help others. This man would never dream of putting himself on a pedestal or of separating himself from his congregation. So what on earth was the explanation for his totally uncharacteristic behavior?

There could be only one answer. The Rabbi must be in deep trouble, and what more opportune time could there be than Rosh Hashana for him to pour out his heart and

pray to Hashem to help him in his time of distress. What could his problem be? Well, that wasn't very difficult to work out. No-one was very rich, and people were working a seventy-hour week just in order to make ends meet. They liked their Rabbi very much, but it was a real struggle to make sure that one had enough for one's **own** family without having the extra burden of supporting someone else's. The man was young and had just started with them and couldn't really expect them to pay him too much. No doubt he was finding it difficult to support his wife and children and was not the sort of person who would be able to take on another job in order to have a few more dollars available. Maybe he was in arrears with his rent, or maybe he couldn't afford decent clothes for his children? No wonder he had prayed so passionately last night. He was praying for a year in which he would be able to put enough food on the table, a year in which he would be spared the grinding poverty which he had, until now, had to endure.

The members of Congregation Tzemach Tzedek

Never before had he met people who were so involved in their livelihoods and so obsessed with their possessions. How on earth was he going to be able to even relate to such congregants, let alone influence them?

may have been slightly materialistic, but they were not lacking in compassion. They might not have been the most righteous and observant Jews, but they knew how to value true piety and devotion. At a special meeting of the Shul Committee, convened the night after Rosh Hashana, it was decided to significantly increase the Rabbi's salary. They had been deeply moved by his obvious distress and hardship, and hoped that the extra money would enable him to have a somewhat easier life. This, in turn, would assist him to perform his communal duties in a more peaceful and settled state of mind, to the benefit of the whole membership. The President of the congregation was chosen to be the bearer of the good news to the Rabbi, and the members of the Committee dispersed, happy to have been able to start the new year doing the right thing and helping another Jew in his time of need.

Two days later the President approached the Rabbi and informed him of the Committee's unanimous decision. The Rabbi thanked him politely and refused to accept the raise. "I really have quite enough for my needs," he said to the flabbergasted President, "and if there will be any difficulty, I am sure that Hashem will help, as He has always done."

"But I don't understand," exclaimed the bewildered President. "You *davened* for hours on the first night of Rosh Hashana. If everything is fine and you have all you need, why do you need to pray to the One Above for hours on end?"

The Rabbi looked at him in amazement, as it dawned on him that the President's understanding of *davening* and Rosh Hashana

was poles apart from his own. "On Rosh Hashana," he responded quietly, "the whole of the Jewish People and all other nations are being judged. The existence and the future of this world and all other worlds is being decided. We stand together before Hashem and beseech Him to overlook our shortcomings, and to accept us as His subjects. We crown Hashem as our King, and resolve to focus our lives upon giving ourselves over to Him completely. I had to prepare myself for a long time in order to mean sincerely what I said at the time of *davening*. Do you really believe that at such a time a person should be focused on his own material needs? I thank you for your kind offer, but I came to America in order to help and inspire my brothers to understand what is really important. I didn't come here to live a life of luxury and material comforts."

■ ■ ■

My initial reaction when I first read the above story was one of amusement. After all, Committees and Boards of Management are not normally renowned for their generosity. Even when an employee has a perfectly valid claim for increased remuneration he is often turned down. That a Committee should make an **unsolicited** offer of an increase is in itself remarkable. That their open-heartedness should have turned out to be directed to the one person who was ideologically

opposed to accepting it, is, if not laughable, at least ironic.

More serious reflection served to remind me of another story – this one, unlike the previous one, totally fictional. It has been used to illustrate and

explain the Midrash which describes the *neshama* as “the king’s daughter”.

The story goes that the daughter of the king, who had been brought up in her father’s palace in the lap of luxury, decided (for some reason) that she wished to marry a simple peasant boy who lived in a hut on the outskirts of the king’s estate. The king gave his consent to the union, but insisted that his daughter should, after her wedding, move out of the palace and live with her new husband in his home. The princess was not too keen on this, but her determination to follow the desires of her heart left her no choice. After marrying she moved into the hut, where her husband did all he could to make her comfortable. He smoothed over the earthen floor and her brought in some extra wooden crates to be used as chairs. He arranged extra ventilation in the hut and made sure that there was a plentiful supply of food. He was a truly devoted husband who would do anything to make his wife happy.

Everything was fine for the first few weeks, as the newly-wed princess was still living in the clouds. Later on, however, as reality began to set in, she was not quite so happy. After all, she was accustomed to the elegance and luxuries of her father’s abode. You **can** sit on an upturned crate, but an upholstered armchair is, somehow, more satisfying. Similarly, you **can** live perfectly well in

a hut, but this hardly compares with the grandeur and magnificence of the royal palace. Gradually, she fell into a state of depression. When he returned to the hut after a day’s toil in the field, the husband found his wife listless and unhappy. He tried to find out what was wrong, but she just burst into tears and refused to answer.

Good-hearted soul that he was, the husband had to do something about this. He thought long and hard and decided that the problem was that he was not bringing home enough food. Oh, it was true that there were plenty of potatoes and beetroots, but she would probably appreciate a more varied diet. The next day he spent several hours on the estate filling sacks and bags with carrots, turnips, various types of grain and a large variety of fruits. To top it all off, he went fishing in the nearby river and managed to catch a large trout. Returning to the hut in the evening, he brought in all the extra food and stood back expectantly, waiting for his wife’s smile and gratitude. Her reaction was just the opposite. If there had been some tears yesterday, there was now a veritable torrent of weeping. The poor husband had no idea of what he had done wrong, or what his wife wanted of him.

Later on, she sat him down and started to explain: “I grew up in my father’s palace. My every whim was catered for and I lacked nothing. Not only were



the surroundings elegant but the whole way of life was befitting of a royal family. Great emphasis was laid on culture and education. There were many libraries filled with thousands of literary classics, and chamber-music concerts were held regularly. Banquets were regular occurrences to honor important and distinguished dignitaries, who were often interesting and even fascinating personalities. That was life the way I was always used to it.

“Now I sit here in a hut without furniture or surroundings. There are no servants, no comforts, no culture and no personalities. I feel as if I have lost all that I was accustomed to, and with it my life. Do you really think that a sack of carrots or fish will satisfy me? They just emphasize to me even more how far I am from that which I really want. I need an entirely different **type** of existence from yours. You mean well, but I am not sure that you will be able to make me happy.”

Similarly, it is explained, the *nesbama* is called the king's daughter, who finds herself wedded to the physical body (corresponding to the peasant). Being a part of, and one with, Hashem, the *nesbama* has a natural desire and longing to be reunited with its source i.e. with Hashem Himself. Neither the equivalent of a sack of carrots, nor even the greatest and most impressive material accomplishments, will do anything to satisfy

Steeped as he was in the teachings of Chassidus, Rabbi Akselrod had no intention of spending his life in the peasants' hut of materialism. His place was in the King's palace, while his material necessities would be of no more than secondary importance.

the *nesbama* or to fulfill its needs. Only matters which are themselves *kedusha* i.e. Torah and Mitzvos, can provide true satisfaction for the *nesbama* which is totally *kadosh*.

Steeped as he was in the teachings of Chassidus, Rabbi Akselrod had no intention of spending his life in the peasants' hut of materialism. His place was in the King's palace, i.e. caring for his *nesbama*, while his material necessities would be of no more than secondary importance.

The Alter Rebbe said (Hayom Yom, 27th Teves) that Hashem gives us material wealth in order that we use it for a spiritual purpose. In other words, we need and want our *gashmiyus*, but only in order to achieve more and more *ruchniyus*.

We stand before Hashem on Rosh Hashono and pour out our hearts to Him in the fervent hope that He grant us for the coming year all that we desire. It might be a good idea for each one of us to first spend a few minutes considering what we are actually looking for. Merely our material needs? Are we incapable of higher ambitions and more meaningful aspirations?

May Hashem give us a good and sweet year in which we demonstrate that His needs and our needs are one and the same. ■



REJOICING WITH THE TORAH – THE ‘ACID TEST’ OF JEWISH DEVOTION

HaRav Sholom Rivkin was the Chief Rabbi and Av Bais Din of St. Louis, Missouri and a *dayan* in the Rabbinical Council of America. He was a renowned *posek* and an expert in Gittin. At the time this article was written he served as the Rabbi of Congregation Knesset Israel in St. Louis.

This article was written in 1957 for the secularized Jews of St. Louis. Though the style reflects that time and place, its message is timeless. It has been said that this article captures the life and ideals of HaRav Rivkin a”h.

This article was for whatever reason not published at the time, and was kindly given to us by his son, Rabbi Ben Zion Rivkin of Chesterfield, Missouri.

Recent years have seen a vigorous reawakening to positive Jewish living on the part of a large and significant segment of the American Jewish Community.

Formerly, the Jew who reached these shores was stunned by the imposing stature of American material greatness; he was overawed by the “bigness” of American business, and he was dazzled by the brilliant glitter of American material plenty. Thus, a great portion of the generation of Jewish immigrants that first came to this land lost itself in the whirlpool of American materialism, and, while riding on

this materialistic “merry-go-round”, lost sight of basic Jewish teachings and observances. Neglect of Jewish learning resulted in laxity of Jewish observance. The lack of adequate Jewish education for a major portion of the growing generation, resulted in the rise of the so-called “lost generation.” Hence a Jewish community grew in America a large portion of which had no orientation toward basic Jewish values and, thus, fell prey to various currents and cross-currents of secularization, assimilation, or, at best (if, indeed, there be a “best” among these...) to the professions of various pseudo “Judaisms.”

The contemporary scene is showing hopeful signs of change for the better. The present-day American Jew is reawakening to a deeper appreciation of himself and of the age-old, timeless and eternal values which Judaism represents. No longer stunned by the glitter of American material prosperity — for he is part of it — the American Jew of this generation can hold his Jewish-cultural balance, while, in his stride, he weaves his share of the American fabric. Thus, we might say that the contemporary American Jewish community is regaining its cultural and religious equilibrium, and this balance is characterized, mainly, by a more mature and therefore more positive appreciation of true Jewish values.

Yet, this process of maturation is still far from complete. The Jewish reawakening is apparent in many areas, but it often comes in spurts and flashes. The great progress in many areas is a good sign, to be sure. But the fact that this progress is not typical of *all* phases of Jewish living, indicates that the maturation process is, as yet, not *wide* enough to encompass the entire Jewish community, nor *deep* enough to reach down into the totality of Jewish living.

Hence, the curious phenomenon of many Jews who enthusiastically adhere to a select number of Jewish observances, or espouse a select group of tenets of the Jewish faith, while they remain partly or totally unaffected by the other observances or teachings. The rise to popularity of certain Holidays — such as Chanukah and Pesach — with the simultaneous neglect of others — such as Shavuot and Simchas Torah — is symptomatic of an awakening which is definitely beginning, but

No longer stunned by the glitter of American material prosperity — for he is part of it — the American Jew of this generation can hold his Jewish-cultural balance, while, in his stride, he weaves his share of the American fabric.

which is — just as definitely! — not completely achieved. The American Jew is as one who has just opened his eyes after a deep slumber — though no longer asleep, he is still not completely awake... He is still rubbing his eyes the better and more completely to see what is before him... He is still groping to gain his sense of direction...

The purpose of this article is to discuss, particularly, the observance of Simchas Torah. Careful analysis in the light of authentic Jewish teaching will make it clear that the proper and meaningful observance of Simchas Torah is of great importance in Jewish life. While Simchas

Torah is — unfortunately — not seen by many to be so solemn or “important” a festival as, say, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, or Pesach, the observance of Simchas Torah is, in reality, of great importance. Moreover, the observance of Simchas Torah serves as a gauge to measure the extent and meaningfulness of the Jew’s observance of all the other *mitzvos*. A person might be able to mechanically observe the *mitzvos* without appreciating their significance; but

one cannot rejoice with the Torah unless the observance of *mitzvos* is a profoundly meaningful experience to him.

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THE SIMCHAS TORAH OF YESTERYEAR

I have often wondered why it is that the Simchas Torahs observed nowadays have not the warmth, the enthusiasm, the fervor and inspiration which

typified the Simchas Torahs I remember.

I hesitate to invoke the so-often-used-method of nostalgically pointing back to the “good old days.” But facts are facts. And when I see the cold, spiritless, dutiful “marching” with the Torah, I cannot help but recall the solemnly joyous and profoundly fervent Simchas Torahs I remember from my days’ in the Yeshiva, from the Bais Medrash of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and from a number of modest little Synagogues in the area of the Yeshiva.

There was true *simcha*, there was joy pouring forth from the innermost crevices of the soul. It was a joy not characterized by frivolity and levity, but by deep soul-searching and all-encompassing joy all at once. It was not the kind of joy which drags one down to the trivialities of life, but, rather, a joy which elevates one above the narrow and the petty, to achieve a new perspective of life, and to gain a deeper purpose for it.

Why don’t *we* have such Simchas Torahs? Why are we not capable of rejoicing with the Torah? Why have we not the capacity to experience this incomparable enthusiasm over our Jewishness? Why is our Simchas Torah mechanical routine, instead of profound, joyous experience?

Let us see.

A SOURCE OF JOY

A bit of reflection will make it clear that before one can rejoice with the Torah, before — for that matter — one can rejoice with anything, a number of conditions must be fulfilled:

(1) First of all — and this is most fundamental — one must *know* that with which he would rejoice. For how can one rejoice with something he does not know?

They — the Jews in every generation — who rejoiced with the Torah, knew the Torah. They devoted their lives to its study. They tasted of its richness, and had an appreciation of its limitless wisdom. They experienced its profundity, and

HARAV SHOLOM RIVKIN

R’ Sholom Rivkin was born in Yerushalayim in 5686 (1926) to HaRav Moshe Dovber and Rebbetzin Nacha Rivkin. His parents had been sent there by the Friediker Rebbe in 5683 (1923) so his father could serve as *rosh yeshiva* at Yeshivas Toras Emes. In 5688 (1928), R’ Moshe Ber travelled to the United States along with the esteemed *mashpia* of Toras Emes, HaRav Zalman Havlin, to raise funds for the *yeshiva*. While in America, he was offered to serve as *rosh yeshiva* in Mesivta Torah Vadaas. In addition, *chassidim* in the United States wrote to the Friediker Rebbe requesting that R’ Moshe Ber remain with them. The Friediker Rebbe duly instructed him to stay in the United States and take the position.

Although R’ Sholom Rivkin attended Mesivta Torah Vadaas, he would come to 770 to learn *Chassidus* according to the *seder* given to him by the Friediker Rebbe.

In 5704 (1944) at eighteen years-of-age, he had an exchange of letters with the Rebbe on a piece in *Toras Sholom* regarding the status of a “*goses*” (see inset). In 1947, R’ Rivkin became a *magid shiur* at Mesivta Chaim Berlin.

In 5709 (end of 1948), at the age of twenty-two, the Friediker Rebbe called him in to *yechidus* and instructed him to travel to S. Louis, MO, and serve as *rov* of the Nusach Ari Shul. During the encounter, the Friediker Rebbe instructed R’ Rivkin to open his hands and explained that he is pouring *brachos* for *batzlacha* in his *shlichus* into them. Finally, the Friediker Rebbe requested R’ Rivkin to write a weekly report, to which he would often respond.

After the *histalkus* of the Friediker Rebbe, R’ Rivkin continued to write to the Rebbe concerning his *shlichus* and personal matters. During a *yechidus* in 5714 (1954), he bemoaned

the fact that his influence was limited to a small *shul* with a small afternoon *Talmud Torah*. The Rebbe reassured him, affirming that he was accomplishing great things, and predicted that he would become the chief rabbi of S. Louis, (the only city in the United States which has had a chief rabbi throughout the years).

In 5715 (1955), R' Rivkin married Pesia Zuckerman, daughter of HaRav Dov Berish Zuckerman, *rav* of Buffalo, NY. Despite being a Belzer *chossid*, HaRav Zuckerman had a strong connection with the *Rebbeim*.

In 5719 (1959), R' Rivkin moved to Seattle, WA where he served as *rav* of Congregation Bikur Cholim. During those years he learned *Shluchan Oruch Even Haezer* in depth, especially *Hilchos Gittin*, and became an expert in these areas. Ten years later, he moved to New York City to serve as rabbi of the Young Israel of Wavecrest, and in 5731 (1971) he was appointed as *menahel* of the Beth Din of America (of the Rabbinical Council of America).

In 5743 (1983), R' Rivkin was offered to be Chief Rabbi and *Av Bais Din* of S. Louis, as the Rebbe had predicted. He asked the Rebbe whether to accept the position, since he was successful in his current positions. The Rebbe confirmed that he should, adding that the Friediker Rebbe had originally sent him to S. Louis, and gave his *bracha*.

In 5748 (1988), with the fall of Communism, R' Rivkin traveled to Russia to perform *gittin*, establish the spelling of city names for a *get*, and certify *shochtim* and *sofrim*. With the Rebbe's *bracha* of "*hatzlacha muflaga*" the mission was very successful.

In 5749 (1989), R' Rivkin was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. At Sunday Dollars he asked the Rebbe for a *bracha* and the Rebbe guaranteed that the disease would not affect him for 10 years. Indeed, for 10 years he did not suffer from the disease.

R' Rivkin was known for his tremendous *ahavas Yisroel* and care for *Yidden* of all backgrounds.

were inspired by its holiness. Thus, they were able to rejoice with it, for they knew — basically — *what* it was they were rejoicing *with*.

Thus, the greater was the scholar, the deeper was his knowledge of Torah, the deeper his appreciation of its richness — the greater and deeper was his joy with the Torah. It is told of the Vilna Gaon, the revered sage of Vilna, that on Simchas Torah he would greatly rejoice and "dance before the Torah with all his might" (See Mishnah Brurah, Chaye Odom, ad the laws of Shemini Atzeres and Simchas Torah).

I remember seeing aged and dignified *Roshei Yeshivah* — men who were steeped in the most profound and intricate phases of Torah learning, whose very countenances radiated reverence, thoughtfulness and wisdom — dancing joyously before the Torah with the vigor and enthusiasm of children. I can never forget the flood of joy radiating from the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, on the Yom Tov of Simchas Torah.

Think of it! These intellectual giants who measured their every word, whose every gesture bespeaks dignity and deliberation — these revered sages and teachers danced before the Torah with the sprightliness, the agility, the utter abandon and enthusiasm we often see in youngsters — a behavior, it would seem, entirely inconsistent with the dignity and gravity which usually goes with intellectual stature.

But, no — it is *because* of their intellectual stature that they so rejoiced, *because* they achieved such deep insight into Torah; *because* they had tasted its richness; *because* they knew the Torah — therefore, they rejoiced with it.

If we would rejoice with the Torah we must, first of all, know the Torah.

THE GROUND OF OUR BEING

(2) But merely knowing something does not, by itself, make for joy. A person might have a deep knowledge of a science — such as chemistry,

physics, mathematics — and yet not get enthused over it. It is possible to have knowledge of a subject and still view it with cold, impersonal detachment.

In order to be able to rejoice with Torah it is necessary — in addition to knowing it — that one be convinced of the importance of Torah for his life, of its utter centrality, as the very core of his existence. One must be imbued with the truth that Torah — and it only! — is the very ground of his being — that it is “our life and the length of our days” — that life only within the framework of Torah has meaning, and that a life devoid of Torah is meaningless,

Once a person is fired up with this conviction, he is better prepared to rejoice with the Torah. If a person is convinced that the contents of this scroll (and all that it represents) is what gives his life purpose, then he can, indeed, be impelled enthusiastically to thank G-d “Who has chosen us from all nations and given us His Torah” — then he is able to rejoice with the Torah.

They — those who truly rejoiced with the Torah — were thoroughly imbued with the conviction of the absolute relevance, the utter indispensability of Torah to life. To them life without Torah was unthinkable, and only a life of Torah had purpose and meaning. Thus, they loved the Torah. They literally loved the Torah, as surely and as intensely as one loves life itself. With the Psalmist (119:77,97) they could ecstatically cry out, “Thy Torah is my delight... Oh how I love Thy Torah!” So when they looked at the Sefer Torah, and realized that here — in this package and in what it represented — was their *raison d'être*, their “Tree of Life” — they had something with which to rejoice.

And we... If we want to rejoice with the Torah, we must first achieve this conviction. We must look at ourselves, and evaluate ourselves, and carefully study the meaning — if any— which we have given to our lives.

Even in the midst of material plenty one can have a life devoid of meaning. Does not our society

HALACHIC CORRESPONDENCE WITH THE REBBE

At eighteen-years-old, R' Rivkin corresponded with the Rebbe in learning. At that time the Rebbe Rashab's *sichos* were printed with footnotes by the Rebbe, who stood at the head of Kehos. In one *sicha*, it was recorded that the Alter Rebbe saved the life of Reb Pinchas Koritzer by rendering him a *goses* (deathly ill person) for a short while. Since a *goses* is *halachically* considered not alive, the judgment against him was thus fulfilled. While the original text attributed this *halacha* to the Rambam, the Rebbe noted that this opinion is not the Rambam's and should instead reference Rashi.

Attempting to uphold the original text, Rabbi Rivkin wrote the Rebbe a possible explanation built upon lengthy analysis of the Rambam's opinion. What ensued was an exchange of in-depth letters on the *halachic* status of a *goses* according to many *poskim*.

(The full correspondence can be found in *Toras Sholom* p. 272.)

abound with people who have more material goods than they can use, and who spend whatever they have in order to obtain new and ever newer momentary thrills, and who, yet, cannot fill the void gnawing at the base of their persons? It is not a lack of material goods from which they suffer, but something more fundamental — the basic disorientation and meaninglessness of their lives.

If we will be filled with the conviction that Torah — and only Torah— is what can give our lives ultimate meaning, then we will adopt the Torah way-of-life as ours, then — and not until then — will we be capable of rejoicing with the Torah.

HARDSHIPS FOR TORAH

(3) But there is still another prerequisite to

rejoicing with the Torah. In addition to knowing Torah, and in addition, also, to being convinced of its utter importance for life, it is necessary — if one would rejoice with the Torah — to possess yet another quality. This quality is: the readiness to sacrifice, to undergo hardships — if necessary — for Torah.

It is a basic human trait that to the degree that a person is emotionally tied-in with something, to the degree that one suffers because of something, to the degree that one is anxious over the welfare of something — to that degree is one capable of rejoicing with that thing. Anyone who has ever watched the parents of a bride or groom at the wedding, knows that nobody else is capable of rejoicing as they — the parents — rejoice. Because no one has sacrificed as much as they, and no one has experienced as much anxiety as they in bringing up their children from infancy to marriage.

One is capable of joy in regard to something, only to the degree that one is prepared to suffer for that thing.

In this light we can gain a deeper insight into the Talmudic statement: "He who mourns for the destruction of Jerusalem will merit to see its joy" (Taanis 30b). Of course, the basic intent of this statement is meant as a promise of reward: Whoever mourns the destruction of Jerusalem, *will be rewarded* in that he will be given the opportunity to participate in its joy.

But beyond this fundamental meaning, there is yet another truth expressed in this passage: Only he who cares for Jerusalem deeply enough to mourn for it, only such a person is *capable* of truly rejoicing with the joy of Jerusalem. A person whose emotions are not involved in Jerusalem's

sorrow, will not be capable of experiencing the joy in the rebuilding of Jerusalem.

For: only to the degree that one is prepared to suffer for something, is he capable of participating in its joy.

They who knew how to truly rejoice with the Torah, to them Torah is not merely a matter of convenience. Because they know the Torah, because they appreciate its value, because they are convinced of its utter indispensability for life — they are ready to suffer inconveniences, to undergo hardships, to sacrifice their all for its sake.

Is not all of Jewish history one great long testimony to the Jew's readiness to sacrifice his all for the sake of Torah? Have not countless numbers of Jews throughout the ages lovingly submitted to every physical, mental, and even spiritual pain, for the sake of G-d's Torah, so that they could remain Jews?

It is a basic human trait that to the degree that one suffers because of something — to that degree is one capable of rejoicing with that thing.

INNER DEVOTION

One example will shed light on the Jew's devotion to Torah, the extent of his readiness to sacrifice for its sake. This is one example, mind you, of countless millions throughout the centuries, but it is one which reveals most eloquently the depths of the Jewish "*neshama*", its essential inseparability from Torah.

It is a story told by Rabbi

Solomon ibn Verga (Spain 15th-16th Century) in his book *Shevet Yehudah*, shortly after the expulsion of the Jews from Spain:

"I heard from some of the elders that came out of Spain that one of the boats was infested with the plague, and the captain of the boat put the passengers ashore at some uninhabited place. And there most of them died of starvation, while

some of them gathered up all their strength to set out on foot in search of some settlement.

"There was one Jew among them who struggled on afoot together with his wife and two children. The wife grew faint and died, because she was not accustomed to so much difficult walking. The husband carried his children along until both he and they fainted from hunger. When he regained consciousness, he found that his two children had died.

"In great grief he rose to his feet and said: 'O Lord of all the universe, you are doing a great deal that I might even desert my faith. But know you of a certainty that — even against the will of heaven — a Jew I am and a Jew I shall remain. And neither that which you have brought upon me nor that which you will yet bring upon me will be of any avail.'

"Thereupon he gathered some earth and some grass, and covered the boys, and went forth in search of a settlement."

This was the extent of the Jew's love of Torah. He was ready to sacrifice everything — "even against the will of heaven" as it were — in order to cling to the Torah.

And when Simchas Torah came, these Jews who knew the Torah, these Jews who were convinced that without Torah life would be meaningless, these Jews who had readily and lovingly sacrificed their everything for the sake of Torah — they who suffered for its sake, were profoundly capable of rejoicing with it as no one else could. For here was a way-of-life which had been given to them by G-d, a way-of-life which was the ground of their being, the source of any meaning their lives could

have, their true guide toward any eternal bliss a creature could hope to attain.

Simchas Torah to them was not merely one individual holiday when, after sunset, they would look at the clock and dutifully say: "Now that Simchas Torah is here let us fulfill the *mitzvah* of rejoicing with the Torah..."

Simchas Torah to them was not merely one individual holiday when, after sunset, they would look at the clock and dutifully say: "Now that Simchas Torah is here let us fulfill the *mitzvah* of rejoicing with the Torah..." Simchas Torah, rather, was the epitome of their year round *simcha-shel-mitzva*, of their constant, ever-renewed joy at being Jews.

■ ■ ■

SUPREME IMPORTANCE

These are the ingredients of the true joy of Simchas

Torah: (1) Knowledge of Torah; (2) The conviction that it is the most important factor in our lives; and, (3) The readiness to sacrifice for it.

Is it any wonder, then, that so many of us are incapable of truly rejoicing with the Torah? With the tragic and abysmal estrangement of so many of our Jews from Torah — when so many lack the most elementary orientation in Torah knowledge — how can they rejoice with the Torah? When people are pre-occupied with everything under the sun, but have no time, nor real desire, for learning Torah and fulfilling *mitzvos* — when everything is more important in life than that which is the very meaning of life — when Judaism is nothing more than a hobby to many — how can such a generation be capable of rejoicing with the Torah?

When the sacred format of the Synagogue is violated for the sake of utility — when the most solemn rituals are tread under foot because the Synagogue must "attract more members" — when expediency, not sacredness, has become the most

important consideration in “organized religion” — how can such a generation possibly be capable of rejoicing with the Torah?

If the precepts of Judaism are accepted or rejected on the basis — not of their intrinsic holiness but on the basis — of their convenience when people will not forego even the most trivial pleasures for the sake of their Jewishness — when people will miss study sessions, or services in Shul, because they would rather see baseball on TV — when a person will go through a lifetime without putting on *tefillin*, because it involves getting up 15 minutes earlier daily — when people trample the laws of *kasbruth* because they say, it is “inconvenient” — when people who “want to have an Orthodox wedding” very nonchalantly refuse to have the wedding catered Kosher because they like the drapes or some other outward glitter at the “*trefa*” hotel — when in short, Torah is the least important rather than the most important factor in people's lives, how can such people be capable of rejoicing with the Torah?

Torah means nothing to the Jew unless it is the most important factor in his life. G-d's Torah will take second place to no one. G-d is of no importance unless He is of Supreme importance, and so it is with G-d's Torah.

The late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Joseph Isaac Schneerson, of sainted memory, once said: “If someone does not rejoice on Simchas Torah, it is a sign that he did not weep in repentance on Yom Kippur.”

It is because we have forgotten how to repent on Yom Kippur that we are incapable of rejoicing on Simchas Torah. We have forgotten the experience

of positive anxiety and deep involvement-of-the-soul which we should feel toward our Jewishness. How can we possibly rejoice with our Jewishness, if it is so unimportant to us?

The issue of rejoicing on Simchas Torah is more than merely the question of rejoicing on Simchas Torah. The degree and intensity of one's true joy with the Torah is the “acid-test”, the measure of the devotion of his total-self to the Torah way-of-life. Failure to rejoice with the Torah is more than merely the failure to rejoice with the Torah; it is symptomatic of one's estrangement from the Torah way-of-life.

Thus, the saintly Ari (Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi, Safed, 16th century) told his disciples that all the spiritual rungs he attained were attained by virtue of his ability to rejoice with the *mitzvos* (See the testimony of the Ari's contemporary, Rabbi Eliezer Azk'ri, Sefer Charedim, Lemberg, 1875, p. 8). It is more than merely the joy in the *mitzva* itself. Joy is indicative of the deep bond of the soul to holiness.

Conversely, when the Torah summarizes the reason for G-d's punishment upon His people, it does not tell of the many transgressions for which they were punished, but says only, “Because thou didst not serve the Lord thy G-d *with joy*” (Deut. XXVI, 47). The lack of *simcha-shel-mitzva* points to a deeper spiritual ailment, a total estrangement from Torah.

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If we want to be capable of rejoicing with the Torah we must first study it, and continually

Torah means nothing to the Jew unless it is the most important factor in his life. G-d's Torah will take second place to no one. G-d is of no importance unless He is of Supreme importance, and so it is with G-d's Torah.

strive to gain a deeper and an ever-deeper acknowledgement of its treasures.

We must also become imbued with the conviction that the Torah is the most important factor in our lives, that everything else is meaningful only in relation to it. We must, finally, be ready to sacrifice, suffer inconveniences, if necessary, for the sake

of Torah, realizing that the ultimate happiness, the deep meaningfulness of life which Judaism gives us, by far outweighs the little discomforts we might suffer.

We must first learn how to repent on Yom Kippur, so that we will be capable of truly rejoicing on Simchas Torah. ■



Rabbi Dovid Wichnin *a"h*

FOR THE FAMILY ACHDUS

PART I

This article first appeared in *Di Yiddishe Heim*, Winter 5743 (1983).

FACING THE CHALLENGE

Recently a young man came to a Rav to ask about the procedures for a divorce. "What is the matter," the Rav asked. "We are married just eight months and it's already impossible to put up with the situation. My wife is forever telling me how inefficient and *sblimazaldig* 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 isn't learning, prays at home instead of going to *shul*, then he 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."

Time was 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 Gemara 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 Sara's words when He repeated them to her husband Avraham, to avoid an angry reaction to Sara on Abraham'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 husband and wife get along should certainly try not to allow friction to deteriorate

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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 get fast results. In technology, in medicine, in transportation, we have gotten used to expect 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 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: *L'chatchilah ariber*. Loosely translated, this means don't get bogged down by initial difficulties; rise above them, 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 maintain or improve 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

Friction between a couple is neither unnatural nor is it totally a modern phenomenon. A stronger form of the old virus has apparently, emerged, highly resistant to the “medications” and remedies of previous generations.

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 in a fear in 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, 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 of exercising control in the territory around him (as the Torah says in Bereishis) which shakes his self-confidence and leads to frustration and conflict.

PERSONAL COMMITMENT

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 public 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.

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, *kasbrus* or family purity. Would anyone think of giving these up in the face of difficulty? Would a woman give

People flock to all kinds of experts, including marriage counselors, seeking quick, effective solutions to their problems. 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.

up *mikvah* 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, 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 to 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 by the young people themselves. They see one another only once or twice before the engagement. Most of these marriages are

RABBI CHAIM DOVID NOTA WICHNIN

Rabbi Chaim Dovid Nota Wichnin OBM was born in the chassidic city of Bobroisk on 28 Menachem-Av 5698 (1938). His father Rabbi Nachmon Dov was known in Lubavitch as Berel Schedriner named after Schedrin the village built by the Tzemach Tzedek to help Jews support themselves by developing the land.

After the WWII broke out the family escaped to Samarkand where in 5702 (1941) his mother and sister perished 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 Halein, Austria and then moving on to France where he studied in the new Lubavitcher Yeshiva in Brunoy. They moved to Montreal in 5711 (1951) and he enrolled in the Tomchei Temimim where he excelled in his learning and is also recalled by his peers at the Yeshiva for his stellar personality. He first travelled to be by the Rebbe in Tishrei 5712 (1951).

He got married in 5723 (1962) and moved to Brooklyn NY starting a lifelong mission of teaching and educating including teaching in many Yeshivos and schools and also as 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 where he taught, inspired and uplifted many hundreds of students and their families until his passing on 26 Tammuz 5755 (1995). At the same time he was also was the Rav of congregation Tzemach Tzedek - Lubavitch in Monsey.

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 and he guided and helped people from all walks of life spiritually and materially. In his own unique style made a point of connecting to everyone at their level and as a Chasid par excellence he made a lasting impression on those who met him. 20 years later he is still sorely missed by those whom he influenced.

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.

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 *mashpiab*, or 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 the 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 1:5 advises the husband not to tell his wife of his social, economic or personal defeats lest he lose some of his stature in her eyes [see Bartenura there]. 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, of 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 the 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.”

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.

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 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)

IN THE REBBE'S WORDS

In these letters, we learn of the deep spiritual significance of Shalom Bayis. Adapted from Eternal Joy (SIE) Vol. 3.

AN INDICATOR OF ITS VITAL IMPORTANCE

In your letter of the 12th of Cheshvan, you write that you have accepted and are following my directives regarding regular Torah study sessions and donating money to charity. However, concerning *shalom bayis*, matters have only superficially changed for the better, while internally they remain not as they should be.

I have already conveyed to you in my previous letter that there definitely will be difficulties and obstacles regarding *shalom bayis*.

Additionally, you must exert maximum effort in this area in particular, for the fact that you have a multitude of challenges indicates that *shalom bayis* is specifically one of your main spiritual tasks in life.

This can also be understood from the writings of the *AriZal*, as further explained in *Chassidus* (see *Kuntres*

HoAvodah, conclusion of chapter 6) that, except for select individuals, present-generation souls have already come down into this world and have now descended again as a *gilgul*. The main purpose of this descent is to fix some specific *mitzvos* that were lacking in their previous *gilgulim* (though they are still obligated to perform all 613 *mitzvos*).

Those *mitzvos* that were fulfilled in previous

gilgulim, the *Yetzer HaRa* does not oppose as much (only enough for the person to have free choice) because these matters were already purified and elevated. However, regarding those matters that were lacking in previous *gilgulim*, (meaning that they and their corresponding soul powers were not previously purified and elevated), the *Yetzer HaRa's* opposition operates

at full force and might. I do not need to go on at length about something that is already explained in many other places.

Most importantly, regarding your actual conduct:

I once again prompt you to increase your efforts — and they should be very intense efforts — to achieve *shalom bayis*. Even if you have to exhibit some self-control, do so because those matters that you will have to

refrain from are not matters of Torah and *mitzvos*.

As I have previously written to you: Our Sages, of blessed memory, tell us, “a woman’s tears flow relatively easily” and “the gates of tears are never closed,” and more significantly, “a person receives blessings only in the merit of his wife.”

(*Igros Kodesh*, Vol. 5, p. 39)

You must exert maximum effort in this area in particular, for the fact that you have a multitude of challenges indicates that *shalom bayis* is specifically one of your main spiritual tasks in life.

A CHALLENGE OF GALUS

In reply to the notification about your upcoming birthday: I hereby bless you that your *mazal* should increase and that you may easily be able to make an ample living, providing sustenance for your wife and all your children in a manner of tranquility — both of body and of soul.

May *HaShem* also strengthen your imprisoned divine soul, so that it can bring about actual *shalom bayis*. It continuously astonishes me how you fail to see something that is obvious to everyone else; your failure to work on *shalom bayis* is the product of the *Yetzer HaRa*, which continues to gain strength regarding this matter.

I have already told you numerous times — and I will state it once again — that it is crucial that you make a supreme effort to achieve *shalom bayis* between you and your wife, especially because my father-in-law, the Rebbe, voiced his agreement concerning your *shidduch*.

Since *Chazal* say that women are of a more emotional nature and “their tears flow more easily,” you should be the one who gives in, particularly regarding material matters.

Moreover, since throughout our history *Chazal* have spoken glowingly about the magnitude

of *shalom bayis*, it certainly must be great during the time of *Erev Shabbos Kodesh*. Now, the entire Jewish nation is in a situation of “*Erev Shabbos* after mid-day” as we become closer to the end of *galus* and the coming of Moshiach.

The closer we come to the conclusion of *galus*, the greater is the opposition from the “opposing forces” which try to prevent bringing *shalom* in the world as a whole, and specifically between husband and wife.

It is self-understood that nowadays the difficulties and concealments are particularly severe regarding *shalom bayis*. For as is known, “peace is magnificent” and the entire Torah is one whose “ways are the ways of pleasantness and all its pathways are peace.”

These difficulties are particularly acute now, in the final *galus*, as *galus* itself is a result of the lack of *shalom* (*Yoma* 9b). In other words, the closer we come to the conclusion of *galus*, the greater is

the opposition from the “opposing forces” which try to prevent bringing *shalom* in the world as a whole, and specifically between husband and wife, since husband and wife below in this world are the counterpart to the supernal “husband and wife.”

Nevertheless, we were granted the strength to overcome these obstacles and we have the ability to withstand this test.

(*Igros Kodesh*, Vol. 4, p. 433)

Seenitte All,
as told to Yaffa Leba Gottlieb



I'M NOT THE ONLY ONE!

A new addition to the popular Seenitte All series

I don't know about you, but the main thing I've been learning since I've been writing my *drashas* is that ***I'm not the only one***. I'm not the only one whose kids climb on the table, or up the walls, I'm not the only one whose *cholent* pot doesn't get scrubbed until Friday morning, and I'm not the only one whose husband must pile *sforim* ceiling high on *three* different desks *simultaneously* in order to learn with *menucha*. I keep telling myself that I am not.

I don't even know how we found space in our place for three desks. The first, a small one, came into my life when Shmuel did. It is his original desk. He began to take this desk seriously when he decided at the age of 13 that he was not going to be a major league baseball player, he was going to learn Torah. That was his decision and he never changed his mind. After we got married he put that desk in a tiny corner room which he calls his study.

The second desk, I bought for him. As a birthday gift. What a bargain, a nice big desk, from Amazing Savings, for \$68.99. It came in a deceptively flat carton. Pressed wood. A nice muscular man from the store carried it into my car service, (that was before we had a car, another story). Well when I got

it home, I couldn't begin to lift that carton. So the driver pulled it out of his trunk for me, dragged it off the street, and I opened it on the sidewalk. Let me tell you, pressed wood is much heavier than wood. Pressing things makes them dense and dense makes things heavy. The Aibishter puts air into things for a reason! Well, the pieces were so heavy that I had to carry them, one by one, up the two flights of steps to our dining room. I moved the dining room table and chairs to the side, to make room for this project. Nearly twenty pieces! But I was thinking how happy Shmuel would be to replace his little old desk with this big new one. So piece by piece I brought the whole thing up and got out the instructions and that little hexagon thing that you use to tighten the special screws. And I put the whole thing together all by myself (☺). It came with all the parts, including special screw nuts that only screw *in* but not *out*. That way the desk is nice and strong and will last forever.

When I finished I stepped back to admire it. It really was a nice big desk.

But its destiny was not to *replace* the desk in Shmuel's study. No, unfortunately it would not even ever reach that promised land. It would

remain, here, galussed in our dining room. Alas! It would not fit out our dining room door!

But *hashgacha pratis*!

Shmuel was so happy to have a *second* desk. True you have to detour a bit if you want to go *through* the dining room, which you might want to do if you need to get to Shmuel's study if, for example, you want to ask him if he would like a cup of tea. Or if you want to go through to what *used* to be the living room.

The "living room." I mean, you could *try* to live there. But you can hardly sit there, it's too full of bookcases. Even a normal self-respecting library isn't *that* full of bookcases. Well, some libraries, especially the academic ones, do have this old attic room on the fifth floor where the elevator doesn't reach, where they keep their old not so often used but very voluminous material all together. They call such place an *annex*. In an *annex*, the walls are lined with bookcases and the rest of the space is taken up by, well, bookcases, of books. A room all cramped full of books. (No I spelled that correctly. The room is not crammed. It is cramped. Ask it). Anyway, our living room is something like that, except instead of someone maybe going there every six months, someone, Shmuel, of course, goes there, or at least goes through there, twice a day, *yomom v'laylah*, morning and evening. And if he doesn't actually take out and look at several volumes, he at least pats them.

A third desk, which we acquired from a neighbor who didn't need it any more, fit somehow in the

living room *between the bookcases*! I was sure it would *not* fit. *It should not have fit* I mean, I even measured it. I told him it wouldn't fit. But Shmuel said, Seenitte, let me just please try. And he did it. He got it in there! And yet my measurements were totally accurate! *It should not have fit!!!* What I saw before my eyes was like the *aron* in

the *Bais Hamikdosh* in the *Kodosh Kadoshim* – the *aron* that had measurement but took up no space.

I guess that when you learn Torah even your desk can reach *madregas*.

Not that Shmuel learns all the time, of course. He just learns all the time when he is *home*. When I was a newbie in this world I thought that having a husband who was into learning would be cool. Really it wasn't for me at all. I mean, if you have a husband who does that you have to be

super respectful and really make sure he has peace and quiet and you are not supposed to disturb his learning, and I just wasn't the type to do (or not do) that, you know. There are just certain things I *needed* my husband for. I mean, he always knows the correct date in Hebrew and English, his spelling, even in English is impeccable, and he always carries small cash. Now, of course, we no longer live in the Stone Age, and we have apps for dates, and spell-check for spelling and credit cards for cash. But still! Shmuel is quicker than apps. And many of *my* words are not in spell check, (*forshtay?*). And certain people that I know on Kingston who hold a recycled coffee cup do not take credit cards.

Shmuel!

I'm not the only one whose kids climb on the table, or up the walls, I'm not the only one whose *cholent* pot doesn't get scrubbed until Friday morning, and I'm not the only one whose husband must pile *sforim* ceiling high on *three* different desks *simultaneously* in order to learn with *menucha*.

So what the Aibishter did in this lopsided situation was, well, He could have done two things. He could have expanded me to the point where I could get my own dates, spellings and cash, independently. I could have left my husband alone, day, evening, whenever he was learning, which would have been efficient, but lonely. So the Aibishter had *rachmonus*. He didn't change me at all. He changed Shmuel.

I can explain, and I hope I'm not going into private territory here, but these things can happen. I will start by giving a *mashal*, that applies to everyone. You know we are not to disturb anyone in their sleep, or wake them up. Everybody knows that. So I try to respect that. Really. Even, especially, as a young *kallab*. I was very careful the first time that I came into the room when I knew that Shmuel was sleeping already. I was very quiet. Didn't say anything. Then I heard him say, "You were writing late tonight."

"Oh, Shmuel. I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to wake you!"

"You didn't wake me."

But I knew he had been *sleeping*!

But if he *said* I didn't wake him, I *did not* wake him. (Shmuel only speaks *emes*.)

My eyes were used to the dark by then, so I looked at him. Oh yes, it was true, all true. I had *not* woken him! He was, even as we spoke, *asleep*!

He *was talking in his sleep*!

Talking with *seichel*. Apparently there is such a

thing.

I mean, I don't know if this is common or not. I never asked anyone, even a best friend, if their husband talks with *seichel* in their sleep. I certainly wouldn't ask my married daughters. But anyway, that was my *matzav*. I was a young *kallab* with a husband who spoke with *seichel* in his sleep.

So it is only a step away from that, if you need to know a date or a spelling or get cash, or, say you want to say some *tehillim* and you need to know what date it is in Hebrew, because your kids did something to the calendar, and your Shmuel is learning in his study behind the bookcases in the living room, and you don't want to disturb him, but...

When I was a newbie in this world I thought that having a husband who was into learning would be cool. Really it wasn't for me at all.

I mean this is necessary information. ***Shmuel!***

Or maybe I shouldn't be disturbing him!

But then I discovered that I *could* because,

Since I am me and he is him, the Aibishter gave him this ability that he can *answer questions* without *taking his mind off his learning*. Without skipping a beat.

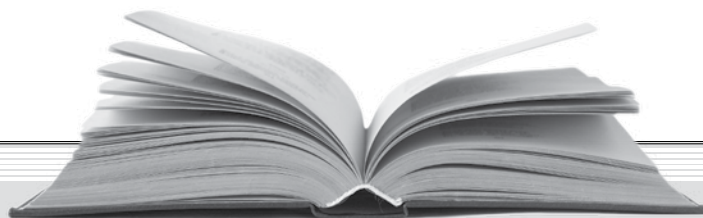
"Vav Adar."

"Thanks."

I mean, the Aibishter does that, for all of us. Two people get married and they don't perfectly fit. Like he wants to learn and she needs to yap. Or whatever.

So the Aibishter chisels a little here, and twinkles a little there, and voila. It goes. B"H.

Shalom al Yisroel! ■



BOOK REVIEW

A FRESH APPROACH

THE REBBE'S WAY OF ENCOURAGING MODESTY

Mrs. B. E.

*This piece was written after a gratitude phone-call earlier this month between myself and Rabbi Hellinger, following the publication of **Bas Melech Penima – The Rebbe on Modesty**. In our conversation, Rabbi Hellinger suggested I put my thoughts down on paper.*

As a teacher, I have for many years been frustrated with the *chinuch* about *tznius* – or lack thereof.

Indeed, *tznius* is mentioned a lot; lectured, preached, forced - but not taught. I have watched generations of students, myself as a teenager amongst them, being monitored on style, admonished on choice of clothing, but never was there education, explanation. An endeavor to create a personal love and pride in modest dress and behavior.

We were told, and I tell the same to my students, of the importance, the rewards and the details of the *halachos*. But let's be honest, just as I was

not inspired then, it doesn't inspire them either. If they're obedient (like I was) they'll follow the rules, and if not they won't, but to most of us *tznius* remains a burden; a price we have to pay, to be *frum yidden*, to do Hashem's will. (Not that *kabolas ol* is not an adequate reason to follow *halacha*, but still, how surprising is it then if we see cracks in the system?)

I have always wondered: How is it that we manage to transmit a love for Shabbos and Yom Tov, despite its rigid rules? How is it that we inspire ourselves and others to go on *shlichus* notwithstanding the great sacrifice? Is it possible

to do the same with *tznius*?

Well, it seemed not. I personally organized incentive based programs, investing thousands of hours and dollars. It did help somewhat, but it clearly wasn't the answer. Many girls reacted as if they were being talked down to, just as they felt when we published beautiful booklets on the topic.

This is why I am so excited with this new volume.

■ ■ ■

Finally, we have a comprehensive in-depth organized collection of the Rebbe's view on the topic. Of course there are words on the merit, on the role models we could find in our *imabos* and some ideas on the importance of spreading *tznius* values. But what caught me here was something more. Here was substance.

Turning the pages, I found myself taken by the Rebbe's positive, pride-oriented approach. Calling to her dignity, the Rebbe expounds on the virtue of a person not presenting herself as if her quality lies in her attractiveness. How a woman could stand above social trends, not have her style dictated by street level designers and perhaps even do her part to turn the tide back to dignified dress.

It's not a burden, the Rebbe explains in conventional terms, it's how a self-respecting woman retains her self-pride. Her sanity. To hold on to her real self, not that of the most base urges.

In the Rebbe's words, my favorite quote (page 47 in the book):

Just Ignore the Parisian Designer

Your task is to continue the tradition as we received it, and even more so. Thus, *Chazal* say that in the times before the coming of *Moshiach*, "Youth will shame the elders." Viewed from a positive perspective, this means that the father is embarrassed by his *Yiddishkeit*... However, in this generation, you, the youth, should go out and "shame the elders," and proudly announce in public that you are a Jew who observes Torah and *mitzvos*...

"The daughter will rise against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law" – but in a positive manner: The mother had a three-quarter *sheitl*, and the hair on the side was intentionally visible, since some *goy* in Paris *parkened* that this is how the hair should be styled.

But the daughter comes along and announces, "I am not ashamed! I will wear

MATERIAL AND SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS

HEALTH AND WEALTH

The Torah, a Torah of truth and of life, declares that "a woman was created for beauty."

Since a statement in the Torah cannot be removed from its simple meaning, this means that the Torah wants a Jewish woman to be beautiful – with spiritual beauty, but also with physical beauty (as is also clear from another teaching in the Gemora).

HaShem tells us in the Torah that "the nobility of a princess is inward," that this beauty must be expressed in her home (*pnima*) in a modest manner.

One then merits every good in the world, with ultimate *nachas* from one's children. Thus the Gemora tells us about the woman who gave birth to the holiest man amongst Jews, the Kohen Gadol, and not only one, but several such men. Now, a Kohen Gadol was not only holy *beruchiyus*, but he also had to be – or had to be made – "greater than his brothers," wealthier than them in the literal sense. This also includes "wealth" in terms of his physical health, for a kohen on duty could not be blemished, particularly a Kohen Gadol, who had to be handsome, also in the literal sense.

(Rush Chodesh Shvat, 5741 (1980); Sichot Kodesh 5741, Vol. 2, p. 103)

TO BE WORTHY OF REDEMPTION

TO SPEED THE GO'AL

In the merit of the way in which you will each conduct yourselves as a Jewish woman and girl should conduct herself, and share this message with all Jewish women in all countries, you will bring merit upon the entire Jewish nation, so that

A SEGULA FOR A SHIDDUCH

A young woman requested a *broche* for a *shidduch*. The Rebbe responded in his handwriting:

I confirm receipt of your letter of 11/13 concerning a *shidduch* and marriage.

The source of *brochos* is HaShem. Who gives the Torah and commands us to observe the *mitzvos*. The way to receive His *brochos* is by the daily observance [of the *Shulchan Aruch*].

Concerning a *shidduch*: First and foremost – a life of exact *tznius*, as described in our Torah, the Torah of Life.

[Handwritten signature and text in Hebrew]

a *sheitl* that covers my hair entirely. I will publicly say that I don't care what that *goy* in Paris has to say. A *goyeh* in Paris said that skirts should be shortened? What difference does that make to me? I have what Moshe Rabbeinu, *lehavdil*, said!"

This is my Rebbe: giving, demanding and teaching us to be proud with our *yiddishkeit*. To parade in the streets on Lag Ba'omer, to drive through Manhattan with a *menorah* on my car, and to walk in *tznius* clothing with confidence and pride. Just as the Rebbe infused the *chassidim* with the courage to take to the streets in *mitvza* tanks, here we see the Rebbe igniting that spark in Jewish women, imbuing us with the strength to stand up against the world.

Personally, I'm convinced that this is the solution. I find it quite amazing that all this time we didn't study the Rebbe's *sichos* (aside from a few famous pieces). I must confess that I never imagined there were so many talks and letters from the Rebbe on this topic. Apparently, there was almost no summer when *tznius* was not addressed. (Which by the way, really makes me wonder: Why weren't we given access to this treasure until now?)

■ ■ ■

Naturally, there are inspirational stories and anecdotes of bygone Chassidim, which any book covering the topic would include. But they took it a step further. A superb job was done in researching and presenting the various activities of the Rebbe, including involvement with the publication of Rabbi Wiener's *hilchos tznius* book; a directive to pull strings behind the scenes pressuring fashion designers; encouraging a *tznius* conference in Bnei Brak; intervention in the Beis Rivkah teachers dress code; advice on how to help the Chernobyl Children dress appropriately. And more.

In line with the general thought-gear approach, the editors included an excellent collection of articles pertaining to *tznius*. In my opinion, if only for making these accessible, the publishers have outdone anything out there on the subject.

Much credit is also due to its simplicity. The layout, content and structure are all user friendly, with its chapters organized in a user-friendly fashion. Special mention should also be made of the design; tasteful and feminine.

So how should you use it?

You can use it as reference guide, a serious in-depth text book for a class on the topic, or just for a dose of inspiration. I ordered copies for my entire class, and each morning we read together one short piece, and so far they find it quite interesting.

I do have my reservations with the book. Perhaps the English section should have been published separately, sparing the reader to hold a thick volume. But then again, there is merit in having the original Yiddish and Hebrew texts with you, for the serious student who wants the Rebbe's words.

Another point to consider is the length of the segments. Perhaps they should have been broken up more, bite-size style. I understand the advantage of longer, fuller, more comprehensive quotes, but nothing replaces short and sweet. Yet, credit must be given to the creative way of attempting to keep a balance, by breaking up the longer segments into smaller pieces with subtitles.

Petty criticism aside, all-in-all it's a masterpiece. A landmark first.

Thank you Merkaz Anash. Thank you Rabbi Hellinger. May it be the first of many. ■



REB PINYE'S WORK

Any 770 regular is familiar with Reb Pinye's iconic *shiur*. The *shiur* has gone through thick and thin, at the first long table after the *bimah*. Every weekday morning and Shabbos afternoon, rain or shine, Reb Pinye will be there, his snow white beard flowing down his chest and eyes peering over his glasses as he clarifies a point to his eager listeners.

Less known, however, is Reb Pinye's far reaching learning network. For decades, Reb Pinye Korf, the renowned *mashpia* of Oholei Torah and *hanhala* member of 770 Yeshiva, has actively set up *chavrusos* and *shiurim* among Anash. He personally learns with many single partners as well as small study groups each week, and he aids in forming others.

There are no rules. Sometimes a pair consists of academic equals; at times a more experienced learner assists a freshman. Some teachers will need to be paid for their time, while others will volunteer. Some prefer a *shul*, others their homes. No rules; just learning.

With the assistance of his son Reb Psachya, the past few years have seen Reb Pinye's humble *chavrusa* project evolve into an established organization, reaching new horizons.

■ ■ ■

The vision is to be *mechazek* every individual. "Every one of Anash in our *shchuna* should have set *shiurim* as much as possible, each according to his situation," says Reb Pinye. "In one of the *maamorim* in *Drushei Chasunah*, the Rebbe states that even if someone is indeed learning all day, but has another hour available for learning and does not utilize that time, he's in *ma'asar* — imprisoned to himself..."

Rabbi Yisroel Noach Blank, an energetic *yungerman* who has dedicated the past three years to furthering Reb Pinye's work, talks of the uniqueness of this program. "Yes, there are *shiurim*, but nothing replaces the *chavrusa* dynamic. The energy, the stimulation, the *gishmak* and *abavas haTorah* developed by two minds working

together to decipher a difficult passage cannot be replaced by hearing a *shiur*. Besides, there are many who don't feel comfortable in a *shiur*. Whether it's the pace, the social uneasiness to disturb with questions – a *chavrusa* structure is the solution.

"Some are looking for more consistency, others for the clarity, and a *chavrusa* makes a difference. However, we don't limit ourselves to the *chavrusa* style; whatever works for people. Reb Pinye himself gives a number of public *shiurim*, and *boruch Hashem* so do I."

"How do people respond?"

"You would be surprised how receptive people are. One of my *chavrusos*, a younger fellow, said that he'd lived here for several years. He was of course invited over for Shabbos many times, but he'd never had anyone invite him for learning. He was elated."

"And you've seen success?"

"Well, one of my *chavrusos* had been learning with me in a *shul*. After some time, he started walking around, pulling more people to join the *shiur*. We now have 5 participants. If a 500% increase isn't success, what is?"

■ ■ ■

Rabbi Blank's pure voice may inspire, but hearing the same from the field makes it that much more real.

Mr. Michael Atzmon relates: "When I found out my wife was expecting our first child I made a *bachlatah* to learn how to learn on my own. This proved to be very difficult for me especially after coming home from 8 to 9 hours at work. A *Mishnayos chavrusah* with Yisroel gave me the push I needed to commit to a learning schedule. After several weeks I am already much more comfortable learning *Bartenurah* on my own and look forward all week to our time together."

Mr. Shea Schneider also sings its praises. "Reb Pinyeh's *chavrusa* system provides the flexibility and personalization I need as a working *yungerman*. I look forward to completing and making a *siyum* on the *masechta* I learned over the past year."

Rabbi Shimmy Weinbaum, renowned director of Tzivos Hashem programs, says that he too gains from this program. "I spend more than 12 hours a day involved in my *shlichus* work, but none of that comes to the three hours a week that I turn off my phone, shutdown my computer and learn with my *chavrusa*. I hope IYH to be able to increase my time for learning, as it improves my *shlichus* and my entire family."



Mr. Dovid Babinet feels he owes very much to the program. “Because of my schedule I cannot attend many local *shiurim*,” he explains. “I also don’t feel confident enough to understand the subjects on my own, so without this program I would never have the opportunity to learn them. I believe in this program, and when I have more resources with G-d’s help, I plan to support it more.”

But what’s the secret? Why are so many ready to commit to learning after a long day? Apparently man searches for significance in life.

In the words of Mr. Tomer Weingarten, “It’s really nice to put our phones aside and learn and talk about things of purpose and meaning.”

■ ■ ■

“We will do whatever it takes to encourage learning,” says Rabbi Blank with *chasidishe* fervor. “Sometimes we will have to get involved and invest many hours to find the right match, to get the right chemistry. This is part of what we do; a *shidduch*-system for *chavrusos*...”

All avenues are an option, as long as the results are there. A *shul* or *beis medrash* aren’t the only places. Some prefer their homes, others their office, yet others prefer learning over the phone. One pair learned over the counter in one of the local supermarkets – while waiting for customers, the two would sway behind the register, their *Gemaros* in hand.

When an idea for a weekly *melave malka farbrengen* came up from the *shiurim* attendees, Reb Pinye was all for it. And that’s what happened. Weekly



Mr. Michael Atzmon and Rabbi Blank



With Mr. Arkeh Deitch in 770



Rabbi Zushe Wilmowsky and a chavrusa

in Reb Pinye's home, the *Motzoei Shabbos shiur* on the Friediker Rebbe's *sichos* takes place.

Many beneficiaries of the program donate to support these dedicated *yungeleit*, thus forming somewhat of a Yissochor-Zevulun partnership. However, there is no official charge; if a *chavrusa* is the key to getting someone to learn Torah, Reb Pinye will organize the funds.

"So where do the funds come from?" I ask Reb Pinye.

"Nu, nu," he mutters.

Rabbi Blank offers more insight. "Reb Pinye has been doing this for years. He has thousands of students: people who have benefited from his work, *talmidim* from *yeshiva*, and just admirers. When approached, how can they refuse?

"However, truth to be told, so much more can be done. Every dollar that comes in is translated immediately to another minute of Torah study. We're growing, but it's nothing close to where we should be. Funds would change that."

"Where should we be?"

"As Reb Pinye says, 'Not one *Yid* in Crown Heights

should be without a daily *kvias itim*.'"

■ ■ ■

It's an old school *moisad*. The focus is on the results, everything else is secondary (if that).

Since *Matan Torah*, *Yidden* have disseminated Torah without a letterhead. And so it was in Lubavitch, Rostov and Leningrad. And so they did in Samarkand. And so does Reb Pinye in New York.

When asked as to the name of his *moisad*, Reb Pinye smiles understandingly, somewhat pitifully, as if to say, "Oh, so you're American..."

Rabbi Blank concludes, "To arrange a *chavrusa* or *shiur* please contact us (347-927-9508 or learningtoday1@gmail.com) or simply approach Reb Pinye in 770."

■ ■ ■

Tax deductible donations can be sent to Lubavitch Youth Organization, 770 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn NY 11213, clearly marked for Rabbi Korf. To donate by credit card call 347-927-9508. ■

COUNTER PERSPECTIVE

RESPONSES TO PREVIOUS ARTICLES

Kosher Education (6)

Dear Editor,

In your previous issue, Rabbi Z.S. writes that publishing a letter of the Rebbe about *chinuch* with the subtitle "*Yiras Shamayim* Above Professionalism" can be misleading because "only in extreme cases when it is impossible to find kosher education does it come to a matter of choosing between the two."

As someone who is very involved with several of our communities' *mosdos bachinuch*, I believe that not only was there nothing wrong with what was printed, but printing the letter with the accompanying subtitle was in fact very much needed.

As shocking as it may seem to some of your readers, it seems to me that one of the biggest problems currently facing our *chinuch* system is the level of *yiras shamayim* of our teachers. Unfortunately, while in the past few years much emphasis has been put on enhancing the "professionalism" of our educators, not enough emphasis was put on strengthening their *yiras shamayim*.

Anyone who is familiar with the *sichos* and letters of our Rabbeim knows that the number one purpose of a Lubavitch *mosad chinuch* is to produce *talmidim* that will not only be *frum yidden* but will also have the special connection to Torah and *mitzvos* that befits a chossid *Chabad*. It doesn't

take a genius to understand that even with the most advanced teaching methods it is impossible for teachers to impart to their students something which they themselves don't have. Anyone with a true understanding of *chassidishe chinuch* understands that a *melamed* whose job is to teach the children about *midos tovos*, *yiras shamayim*, *emunah*, *mitzvos*, *brachos*, *davening* and so on must be someone who has very strong feelings toward these things, and it must be obvious from the way he *davens* or does a *mitzvah* that Torah and *mitzvos* are the most important thing in his life. In order for a "*gemara rebbi*" to develop in his students the lifelong connection that a *yid* must have to *limud hagemara*, that special connection must be visible on the *rebbe* himself; he must be someone who when has some spare time takes out a *gemara* and learns with *geshmak*.

Although there are B"H many true *chasidishe melamdim* and teachers, if we are honest with ourselves we will see that many of our *melamdim* lack the *yiras shamayim*, connection to Torah, and *chassidishkeit* that is needed to be a proper *melamed*. If we take a good look at the *davening*, *eidilkeit*, *yiras shamayim*, and *kvias itim leTorah* of some of our *melamdim* we will see that they lack the devotion, seriousness and warmth that is necessary in order to produce true chassidim.

Many of these *melamdim* are considered excellent teachers because they are experts at implementing

the most advanced teaching techniques. But we need to remember that the real way to measure a teacher's success is not by how knowledgeable he is in teaching techniques, but by seeing if the values that he teaches remain with his students years later.

Ask anyone involved with *yeshiva gedolah* aged bochurim which *mesivtas* and elementary schools are known for producing serious learners — you might be surprised but you will not hear the names of those *mosdos* that are known for having the most sophisticated teaching methods, rather you will hear the names of *mosdos* that are known for having teachers who may be less professional but have a very deep connection to *limud hatorah* and take Torah learning seriously in their private life and are therefore successful in transmitting their connection to *limud baTorah* to

their students.

The point of this letter is not to diminish the importance of training highly professional teachers under the guidance of qualified *chassidishe Rabbonim* and *mechanchim*, but to stress that making sure that the teachers themselves are on a high level of *yiras shamayim* and *limud hatorah* is even more important.

I would like to thank the esteemed editor of Perspectives for once again saying loud and clear that which needed to be said. As Rabbi Hellinger correctly pointed out, a teacher that has basic teaching and class management skills is an absolute necessity, the discussion here is about "excellence" in professional teaching.

A *melamed* in a Crown Heights *mosad*

Kosher Education (6)

Thank you for the stimulating conversation on education and educators.

I would like bring to your attention a brilliant article by Rabbi Dovid Wichnin entitled "Can Everyone Teach?" published in the Yiddishe Heim Issue 68. In his article he extols the position of teachers, as well as their responsibility. He explains that while every person and must teach, not everyone is a "teacher." A teacher is someone who serves as a living example of everything he stands for.

Perhaps you should consider reprinting that article as I see you often do with quality articles from the Yiddishe Heim.

Thank you for your work.

EDITOR'S RESPONSE

Thank you for the reference. Interestingly, that

article was printed in the very first issue of our magazine. For the benefit of those readers who did not receive that issue, we quote here a relevant paragraph:

"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 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.”

The complete article (in Issue 1 of Perspectives) can be found online at: www.MerkazAnash.com/perspectives.

The Rebbe's Community (7)

Rabbi Hellinger,

First and foremost, I'd like to compliment your Tammuz issue of the Perspectives magazine. Like its predecessors, it is *molei vigodush* of *toichen* and *chassidishe* "fuel".

A few *heo'oros*:

1) The "advertisement" for the Connection hotline takes pride in the fact that there is no website (*yasher koiach!*). Ironically, the picture is of a Smartphone. Perhaps the graphic can be altered to one of the flip-phone variety making it clear it does not have internet.

2) The interview with Rabbi Schapiro is amazing. *Poshut gold!* This message must be repeated again and again and shouted from the rooftops! One need not be a *shliach* to be a Lubavitcher chossid. Yes, shlichus is the *tzav hasho'o* of *Dor Hashvi'i*,

but dare I say that the main *shlichus* now is to be a good Jew. *Poshut a chassidishe yid*. To walk around and go to work in a hat and jacket *vichulu vichulu vichulu*. And the *oilam* needs to hear it specifically from (someone who is considered) a *shliach*. The article really hit the spot. Let's hear more from him and others of his school of thought.

3) Thank you for answering Rabbi S. the way you did. When I read his letter, I thought to myself: "Wow, the record must really be set straight here!", and there I turn the page and your article did 100 times better than I could have dreamed. Thanks for sticking to the truth.

4) The entire issue is amazing. Keep up the wonderful work.

How can I subscribe to receive this to my home?

Kol tuv,

MB

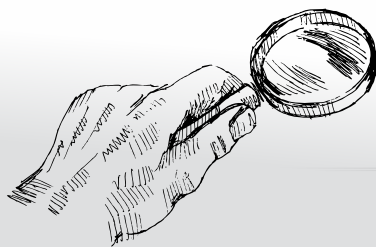
■ ■ ■

Dear editor,

I am writing to personally thank you for the quality magazine which is an inspiration every time. I have saved every issue, and plan on having

them bound in a book format so that they could be re-read over and over again.

I have nothing else to add!



my **PERSPECTIVE**

Why the Need to Sweat?

Rabbi Mendy Wolf

Based on *maamorim* Vhaya Ki Savo 5666 and Ashrecha 5667

From time to time we ask ourselves, why do we need to sweat in order to make a living?

Yes. We all know that “*Bzeias apecha tochal lechem*” is an outcome of eating from the *Eitz Hadaas*. But, how does eating from the *Eitz Hadaas* lead to “sweating for bread”? Reward and punishment are supposed to reflect the deed. Perhaps a punishment prohibiting us from eating fruit would make more sense. Punishing humanity with “toil and sweat”, seems like a misplaced consequence?

The answer to this query can be found, through exploring a fascinating phenomenon in nature:

Normally, growth comes when one is fit and strong. To carry heavy furniture, you need to eat well and exercise. You need a strong body in order to lift heavy weights. The same applies to learning; you need a clear mind in order to think. When you’re tired, you go to sleep. We don’t find anyone saying, “Oh, I’m so tired! It’s a perfect

time to brainstorm.” Optimum functionality is a necessity to growth.

Nonetheless, when planting a seed, growth comes only when the seed is rotten. Rotting becomes the platform for growth.

The same phenomenon is found in creative thinking. Creativity comes at a breaking point. *Suddenly*, when least expected, creativity hits. Frustrating moments precede creative moments; creativity happens when it feels like ‘it is just not happening.’ The overwhelming sensation of feeling lost breeds a moment when suddenly it all makes sense.

Rotting and frustration demonstrate a dead end. Yet, for trees and novel ideas, they are the turning point.

THE THRILL OF CREATIVITY

Creativity is the common denominator between

the growth of a tree and the birth of a brilliant idea. Creativity is unique. It doesn't follow, it leads. It's not dependent, it's independent. It's not continuing a story; it gives birth to a novelty, a story that has yet to be told.

You want to lead? You want to be creative? You want to feel like you came up with the idea? You've got to first feel deeply frustrated!

Creativity can only happen once you recognize that there's a boss. Don't think you will just cruise along and make it happen. First, realize how you've come to the end of your amazing talents. You will almost come to the conclusion of "I can't continue". *Then* it will happen.

This is Hashem's way of allowing us to recognize His existence from within nature. Hashem created nature in such a way that nature itself suggests that there is a boss. Nature screams out "I'm done," and that's when creativity sprouts up. Nature recognizes its limits, and that's when it will grow. Novelty and creativity are G-dly energy that we tap into once we recognize that there is a G-d.

SWEATING THERAPY

The "toil and sweat" to make a living is nature's circuit break to recognize our limitations. We think that **we** can make it; that **we** can be independent people making a living. Nature itself forces us to recognize our boundaries. We get hit nine times on the head before we make it. We try many different venues and attempts, not knowing which one will succeed. Most of the journey is held in limbo, filled with uncertainty, feeling like it's not happening. And then - after the sweat - it happens.

Recognize the boss and then it will happen.

That was Hashem's direct response to the *Chet Eitz Hadaas*: The sin was born by ignoring Hashem's words; He said don't eat, we ate. We thought we can make it out on our own.

Hashem responded by imbedding in nature the

concept of sweat. You can't sit on the couch and make a living. You've got to sweat. You've got to realize your limitations, that you cannot make it on your own; that you can only make it with "Me". The sweat therapy helps us recognize how we need Him. It's not a punishment, it's a training process.

SWEATING OUR WAY TO HASHEM

Sweat and frustration is part and parcel of completing a *mitzvah*. *Mitzvos* often demand physical labor, sweat and toil. In addition, many times we must fulfill a *mitzvah* even though we don't understand it.

What's the logic? Feelings should be our primary motivators. Feelings and appreciation are what connect us into everlasting relationships!

The "do it 'just because'" and the sweat of a *mitzvah* are steps in the Creator-recognition training.

Mitzvos are Hashem's way of training each and every body part with recognition of His existence. Each *mitzvah* deals with a unique part of the body. Tefillin for example train the hand. "Sweat mode" is an integral component in the training process. Regardless of our mood, we put it on. The hand learns the ability to "push beyond its comfort zone". The hand now has the ability to do good things, although it won't feel like it. Perhaps the hand will now find it easier to give *tzedakah*.

It's therapeutic. The first time it may be tough, but eventually it comes through.

Sweating is one of the unique traits only humans have. We can do things although we don't feel like it. Angels only do things because they feel like doing it. They are *forced* to do it by their overwhelming feelings.

Humans Sweat. We have the ability to push. We **throw** ourselves into things. We just do it, even before the appreciation of it, in order to be a part of it.

Throwing is far more powerful than *appreciating*. It demonstrates where we **belong**, driving in the

right direction. If we *want* to belong, then we *will* belong. It won't take long and we will start appreciating and even loving what we're doing.

Think of someone who doesn't want to go to work, and he pushes himself to go to work. That takes resolve and commitment. Eventually he will get into it. Pushing ourselves to do a *mitzvah* takes resolve and commitment. It should be respected! The sweat that is so essential in making a living is as essential in making a Jew.

Remember, sweating is the secret ingredient

in creativity. The sweat for a *mitzvah* opens a connection to the Creator, to which there is no greater novelty. A creation being connected to the creator! "Sweat mode" brings about the recognition that we are not an equal in our relationship with Hashem; He is the lead and we are lucky enough to be able to connect to Him.

Just as 'sweating for a living' helps humans recognize Hashem, so too, sweating for a *mitzvah* is Hashem's unique way of helping Jews maintain our uniquely deep and dynamic connection with Him. ■

Is This Education?

Shifra Kellman

My son is a regular kid. He's no 'goody-goody,' but could enjoy learning if it's taught well. He's no *tzaddik*, but does aspire to be a good *chossid*. That said, I must share with you a troubling conversation I had with him yesterday.

He was talking with bright eyes of his camp learning-teacher. He's the best basketball shooter he's ever met, he's really funny and *very* cool. And yes, *cool* is a term he also picked up from this man of education.

Apparently, this role model wears different color shirts every day, is proficient in all styles of 'Jewish' music and has the latest model iPhone. Really cool.

It's also from him that he learned that having a good time is not merely a way to refresh, to recharge, in order to be a health yid, but it's a virtue on its own. It's like, if you don't "know how to have fun," there's something wrong with you, and someone who is good at it deserves respect.

(And by the way, don't get me wrong. There's

nothing bad about a good game of basketball or a good joke, and enjoying it. But is that what my son should respect in his educator? How then could I expect to aspire for anything other than that?)

What's most disturbing is the fact that I've actually had to pay thousands of dollars to get this "*chassidishe* education". To pay, to watch mine, my husbands and the Cheder staff's years of toil and tears spiral down the drain.

When I complained to the camp administrator, begging him to at least make a dress code for the staff, he told me to calm down. "It's only camp. It doesn't really do any damage. Two months can hardly affect a good kid."

Totally confused, I pulled out the camp brochure, which promises "a summer he will never forget..." and "the power of a 24 hour environment."

It's time we ask ourselves a simple question. Would I let my son's counselor or learning teacher serve as my son's *rebbe* in school? If not (due to

lack of maturity, *yiras Shomayim* or educational experience), then what am I doing trusting him with an even more responsible position, where he molds him for two months, eating, sleeping and playing with him?

And I haven't even started with the head counselor, educator-in-chief of 400 children. He's already twenty two and three quarters. He doesn't really feel ready to have a child of his own, but is fully responsible to serve the needs of ours. ("What do you mean no experience? He was camper for six years, waiter and counselor. He was general

of the winning team, was hands down the best actor and even took an educational course a week before the summer...")

We invest so much in our children's *chinuch*; it's our life mission. Why then are we so complacent with this crucial influence?

I believe that if the camps felt the pressure from the parents, matters would be different. It's up to us to look at ourselves as demanding customers, as rightful consumers, before all our values are consumed. ■

A Letter to My Employer

C.M.G.

I was a head counselor this summer at a Chabad house. The *Shliach* and *Shlucha* are really fine people, truly a pleasure to work with – on a material level. That's where it ends. Having no other platform, I turn to Perspectives, to publish a letter to my summer employers.

■ ■ ■

Dear Shliach,

I must begin with a note of respect, more like admiration, that I have to you for making the big move so many years ago, to spread true *yiddishkeit* in such a reform ridden city. I wish the same for myself, when the decision will have to be made.

However, I feel I must express the disheartening experience it was for me. You cannot imagine what kind of frustration I went through, having to stand up for my values against those who should be my inspiration.

Every night, you were the topic of heated discussions among us counselors. If the point of you coming to town was to bring true *yiddishkeit*,

how is it that you encouraged us to sing on a bus full of boys? To make-do with questionable *hechsheirim*? To work closely with young men who are very friendly and too eager to help?

And I must tell you, that after two months, many of us toned down. We didn't think it became right, but yes, by following your directives we did lose some sensitivity. There's a limit to how strong we could be when our questioning the trip to a Water Park is countered by a smug smile, making us feel like nerds.

Believe me, I am not Hashem's police man, and I have no intention of interfering in your *shlichus*. But please understand: I left the summer with a deep scar of disillusionment and confusion. I know many *shluchim* who abide by the Rebbe's standards, but the experience with you has made me weak. Like, I'm really not sure how strong I'll be in my *shlichus*.

So what's my point? It's about next year. Just be aware, that by you dropping standards, it's not a private decision. It has far reaching affects, to which I could testify.

■ ■ ■

Let me also add something to my mother:

Mammy, you may not believe me, but I am a little upset that you didn't interfere with my summer plans. You could be sure I would have given you some attitude like only I know how... But still, how could you let me decide like that? Am I supposed to expect this from *sbluchim*?! To me a rabbi is a rabbi.

I am thinking about Chani. Next year, she'll be doing the same, and we all know that she's not looking to be too strict... My friend in another camp was provided with a car without

restrictions, and I don't have to tell you what a group of teenage girls, free from 4pm, could get up to. Don't you think it would be a good idea to make a few research phone calls beforehand? (Perhaps a call to the *Sbliach* during camp would also remind him of his responsibility.)

I know it's hard to walk the fine line of giving independence and getting involved, but I think if you would realize how crucial the summer could be, you wouldn't be so laidback. We're not in the early eighties, when you worked for chassidim of that generation. The times are changing, and every step counts. ■

“HaAdam Eitz HaSadeh”: The Unvoiced Message of the Trees

Tuvia Simon

Did you ever hear a tree complain?

Let's take a look at the life of a tree. From the very initial stages it's expected to grow and grow, bigger, better, wider, taller. Through its different stages of life, it's not given the peace of mind to stay the same. If it's in winter, at the coldest time of year, when everyone else is throwing on the layers, it stands naked and bare. Having shed all its leaves, its main sign of growth and beauty, its glory and majesty, have been stripped from the bony branches of the undressed tree. If during the summer months when all delight in the sun's rays, removing outer garments to be relieved of unwanted insulation, there she stands, fully clothed, humbly covering her previously exposed limbs.

Now imagine what an older tree goes through. Standing tall and strong in the autumn of her years. Birds are here to make their nests or simply a place to hide, perch, or rest. Woodpeckers peck, without even a flinch. Cats scrape at the trunk

or climb if they dare. Dogs have their business with trees, no report required. Children come to climb, swing and carve names or tags. She's used for shade, people sit underneath or beside her, resting on her, she supports them. They don't think to ask why would she mind, she's a tree? Children make tree houses, banging nails into her sides through heavy planks of wood (guess where the wood came from?!). People thoughtlessly tear off a leaf, break a branch, throw a stone or scratch their backs. They come in handy for target practice or as a stump for baseball, rounders, or cricket, she knows her place. She's rained upon, snowed upon, the sun beats down on her. She's blown to and fro by the wind and tickled by soft breezes. Blasted by heat and left out in the freezing cold. Especially now, when we as a world breath out so much pollution, what does she do, self-effacing as she is, she provides oxygen. Some trees, in fact a lot of trees are not even given the privilege and enjoyment of keeping family ties, remaining attached to their roots. Instead, they're

felled, chopped, mashed and smashed, becoming shelves, ornaments, toys, cupboards, desks, chairs and window frames. The list goes on and on. This very piece of paper being written on, and with all this, yes with *all* this, ask yourself the questions, “did you ever hear a tree complain?” Humbling isn’t it?

Man is compared to a tree in the field, if only we could be so humble at heart. Maybe we wouldn’t tear at each other’s throats, or even at our own. The tree wasn’t supplied the tests to move around freely. It would probably be, in fact definitely be, rather dangerous if they had. No tree shouts at another, steps on another, hurts another’s feelings, gets in their way, interrupts them or embarrasses them. Did you ever see one make fun or jeer at another because of difference in size, shape, color, height or strength? Have you ever heard a tree boast? A tree will never argue back, say what you like, she won’t put up a fight, (raise a branch). Selfless things, no matter how far away that little leaf is on the very highest branch it will make sure to provide it with essential vitamins and water for its growth and continued health. Does it get so much as a thank you? The leaves, all of

them, having sapped as much energy as possible take flight, no well wishes, no good-byes. Now ask yourself the question, did you ever hear a tree complain?

A point must be added here. When the lights are turned out, a slow surging process, daily remorseing the light of her life, the dimming of the skies, does she wave a branch in complaint, make a fuss? Not her, just pure and complete, simple acceptance. Generally, before the majority of risers, she’s been given the ability to see in broad daylight. Dawn has broken the darkness of night, it wasn’t her choice and she wasn’t asked. She doesn’t so much as drop a leaf. There’s an understanding about her that leads no matter what she’s put through to aspire and blissful serenity that veritably lasts a lifetime. How does she do it? Due to her having built and added through years of effort and growth, layer after layer from within of thick skinned experience to protect her innermost core. The binding and attachment to her very essential service, the source of life itself.

Self-discipline and control in love, life and happiness empower a person to battle with and overcome all personal barriers and restrictions. ■

Ahavas Yisroel Winter Suggestion

Yaakov Bronstein

Winter is approaching, and as the snow falls the shovels come out. We all remember last year’s unbearable frost, days off work and having to trudge through slush and black ice.

Ahavas Yisroel is the tenant of Chabad thought. In our *nussach*, *nusach ho’arizal*, we accept upon ourselves this holy *mitzvah* every day before we begin any other *avoda*. So as Lubavitcher chassidim, it seems appropriate to stop for a second before we take shovel back inside, and think of the elderly neighbor or of the overworked

mother down the block.

The shovel is already in hand; we’re anyways in overcoats. A small *chesed* can go a far way. And by the way, the *chesed* is not just to the neighbor, it’s to many more walking down the sidewalk that morning, on the way to *shul*, *yeshiva* and work.

With hopes for a cleaner Crown Heights and a warmer winter.

At least, warmer with love. ■

Afraid to Educate

Rochi Bell

Dear Perspectives staff,

Firstly, I would like to express my appreciation for your quality quarterly. I read and reread every magazine, thoroughly enjoying every minute.

There is an issue which I feel needs more attention and I believe this might be the right platform for it, being the only publication to actually address the real issues facing Anash.

I am referring to the excessive l'chaim behaviors some of our youth are being taught.

Please don't get me wrong. I grew up in home where my father said l'chaim on Shabbos Mevorchim in shul, and it was quite apparent during the subsequent seudah at home... In fact, I have some beautiful childhood memories of looking forward to Shabbos Mevorchim, when the Shabbos seudah would be filled with hearty niggunim, stories and joy. I myself experienced the warmth that a farbrengen, including the mashkeh, brings into a home and it is for this reason that I encourage my husband to attend farbrengens.

However, a clear distinction must be made between a farbrengen, and a sixteen year-old

having fun. I am sure our mechanchim are not naïve enough to think that a youngster having excessive l'chaims will actually help him listen to the mashpia farbrenging. I am also quite sure that they are aware of the side effects, ruchnius and gashmius.

So why do they let it?

The only sad explanation I have come up with is that the yeshivah staff is scared. They are simply scared of the kids, not wanting to be the unpopular, square, rigid educators. They are afraid to educate.

And if I may dare add, this is merely a symptom. I understand that the issue exists in other areas too, the amount they are challenged in learning and the standards set for yiras shomayim.

So what is the solution?

I believe it lies with us, the parents. If they are by nature cowards, pardon the frankness, let them be afraid of us. We must take a stand, and make them understand that if they are not ready to educate, to demand higher standards and to be firm – then they will be unpopular with us.

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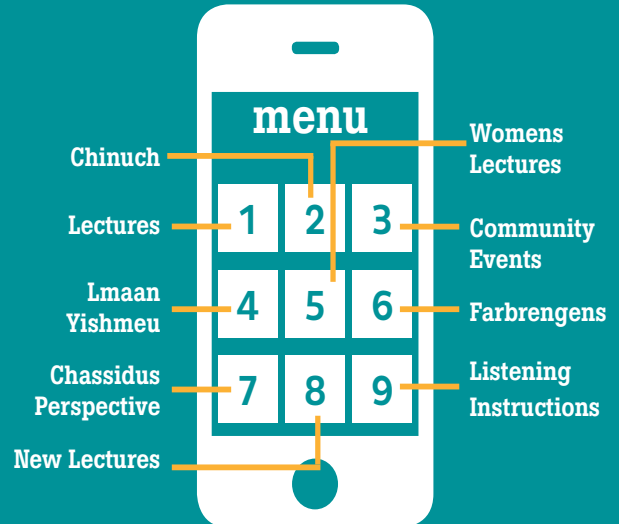
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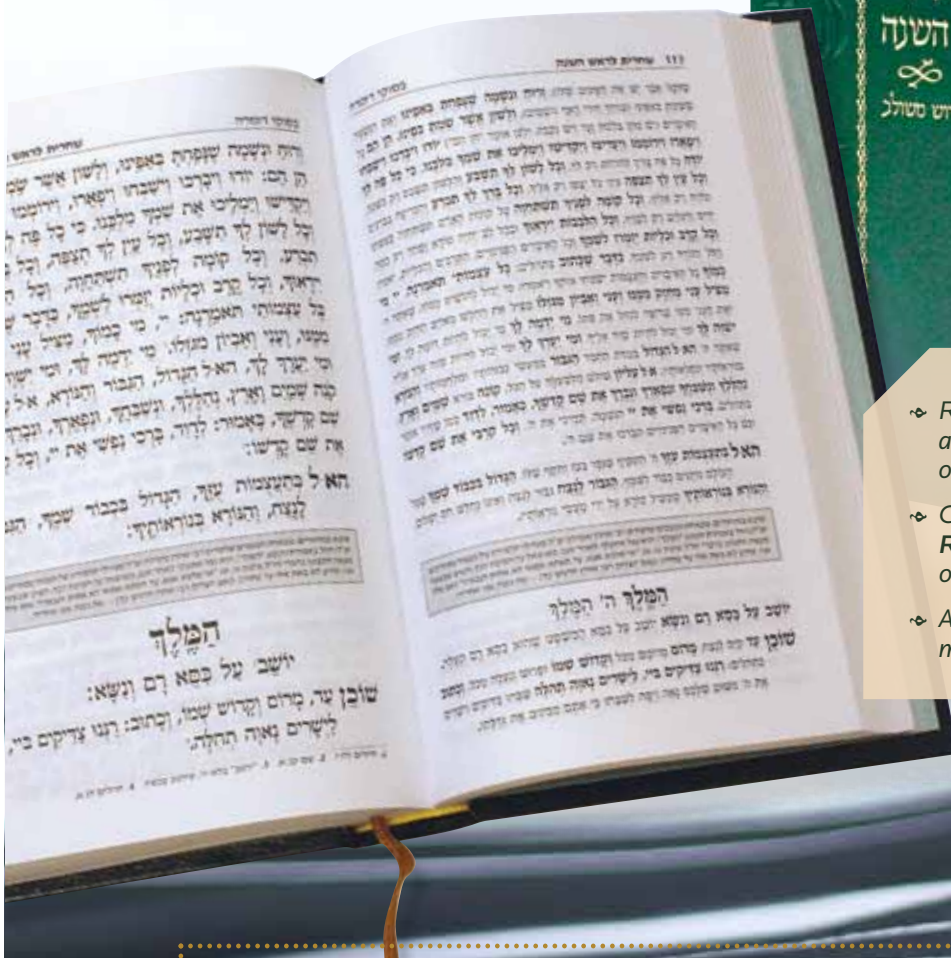
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