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The Dangers of Dialogue

The Realities of Emuna
Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Klugman

Lessons I Learned From the Son of a Reform Rabbi
Rabbi Leib Kelemen

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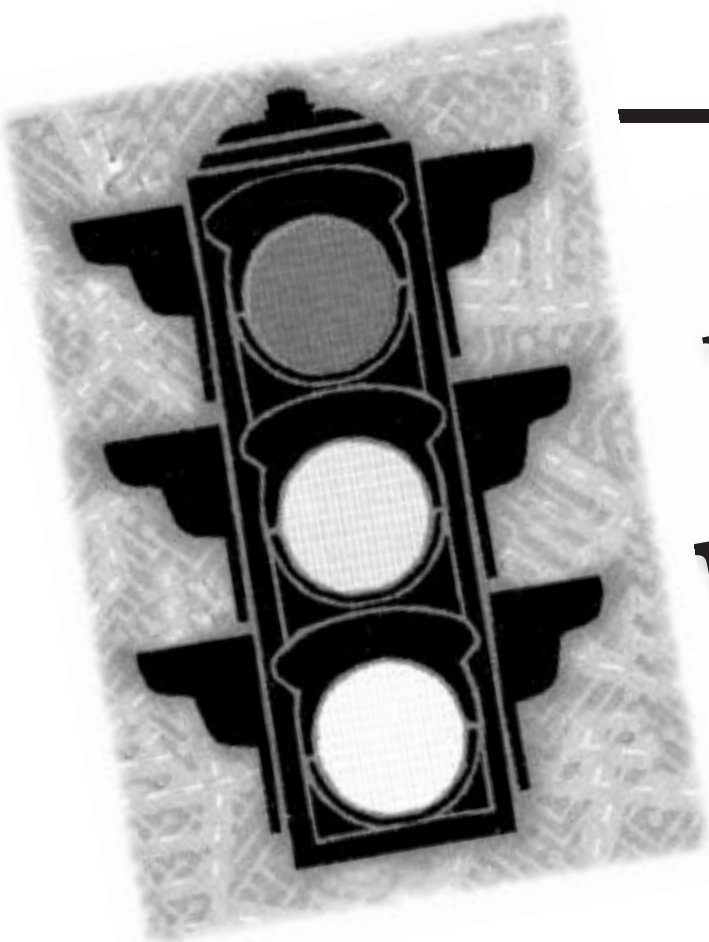
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The DANGERS of DIALOGUE

One of the blessings of living in a democratic society is the principle that civility is a given, and that part of decent interaction among different groups is a willingness to reach across barriers in camaraderie, or at the very least, with dialogue. This is a desirable – indeed, a necessary – ingredient of political and business discourse, because virtually all ideas are negotiable and discussible: Policies are always open to revision, compromise, and improvement. But this has limitations, as well – just as all blessings of democracy do. For example, freedom of speech is also a cherished privilege; in fact, we consider it a basic right. Yet, there are times when speech is limited – for example, when involving defamation, libel, or the classic case of shouting “fire” in a crowded theater.

By the same token, engaging in dialogue has limitations for Torah Jews, as it would apply to areas of Revelation and *Mesora*. Not only have rabbinical leaders restricted Orthodox representatives from participating in religious dialogue with non-Jewish spokesmen, they have also called on them to desist from dialogue with Conservative or Reform spiritual leaders. Truth is indivisible, non-

negotiable; it is not open to differing definitions, all of them “legitimate.”

For example, in 1985, when the presidents of national Orthodox and Conservative rabbinical organizations each addressed the other’s convention, the *Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah* of America* expressed categorical opposition to this exchange of convention pulpits, declaring, among other points:

The classic tenets of Judaism are not negotiable nor are they subject matter for dialogues with those who are purveying to an unwary public a “Judaism” that tears down fundamentals of our ancient heritage – all in the name of Halacha....

Instead of convincing the Conservative rabbinic leaders to reverse their beliefs and behaviors on major religious issues, which is the stated purpose of this Orthodox group’s entering into such a dialogue, the overwhelming result of this approach is the creation of a public impression that the Orthodox and Conservative groups represent merely alternative outlooks on Judaism with negotiable differences on specific localized issues.... We call upon the leaders of this Orthodox rabbinic group not to

further this false notion....

(For the full text of the Statement see *JO*, April ’85, and for further discussion, see “When There is a Need for Distinctions,” May ’85.)

A somewhat similar occurrence – the recent publication of a book consisting of a dialogue on fundamental principles of faith between a recognized Torah scholar and the leader of the Association of Reform Zionists of America – prompted a declaration by the *Moetzes Gedolei Hatorah*, rejecting the book’s premise, and therefore the book itself. (See *JO* Nov.’02.) In the pages that follow, we present an essay, “The Realities of *Emuna*,” by Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Klugman, which spells out the non-negotiable nature of our basic beliefs, followed by “The Dangers of Dialogue: Lessons I Learned from the Son of a Reform Rabbi,” by Rabbi Leib Kelemen, which explores the issue further.

N.W.

* Signatories included (in alphabetical order) Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, Rabbi Moshe Horowitz (Bostoner Rebbe), Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky, Rabbi Avrohom Pam, Rabbi Yaakov Yitzchak Ruderman, Rabbi Israel Spira (Bluzhover Rebbe), זכרוןם לברכה, and רב"ח שליט"א Rabbi Elya Svei.

The Realities Of *Emuna*

The Torah Jew today finds his convictions under constant assault from the society in which he lives. Moving into a physical ghetto is not an option in Western society. Even if it were, we have the obligation to spread the *d'var Hashem* to our not-yet-observant brothers and sisters – the vast majority of our fellow Jews – and to defend the truths of Sinai from attempts at distortion. As a result, situations will arise where the confrontation between truth and falsehood becomes inevitable and the *maamin* must respond.

A meaningful response, however, carries with it risks that may be even more dangerous than silence. Nor are the premises of the debate clear. If we define *emuna* as “belief,” how does one respond to a Jew who does not “believe” in *Hashem*? How do we define our “beliefs,” and how does that definition determine the nature, venue and format of our responses to one who does not share those beliefs, usually from lack of any exposure to the truth and beauty of Torah?

Three times the Torah describes the Jewish People as “believing.” These three “beliefs,” says the *Maharal* (*Gevuros* 47), constitute the foundation of Judaism, and without any one of them, Judaism is not viable. One is the conviction that everything is in His hands, and that without Him there is nothing (*ein od milvado*). The second belief is *Hashem's* direction of the affairs of this world (*hashgacha*). The third of the three “beliefs” is *Torah min Hashamayim*, the knowledge that *Hashem* spoke to the Jewish people at Sinai and gave them the Torah.

Discussions regarding Judaism usually center on the third belief, that of an

Rabbi Klugman lives in Jerusalem where he is a *maggid shiur* in a *yeshiva gedola*. He is a frequent contributor to these pages.

immutable, binding Torah given by G-d himself to the Jewish People at Sinai. The first two “beliefs,” after all, are not unique to Judaism. Without belief in a G-d who directs the affairs of the world there is no meaning to religion at all.

Because of the centrality of *Torah min Hashamayim* to the definition of Judaism, a clearer understanding of its realities is necessary if we are to grapple with the question of how to respond to and interact with those for whom this *emuna* is lacking.

When a child learns to talk, our Sages (*Succa* 42a) tell us, the first words his father teaches him are: “*Torah tziva lanu Moshe morasha Kehillas Yaakov*.” (*Devarim* 33,4) After thanking *Hashem* for one’s life when he arises in the morning, (*Modeh ani*), the Jew begins his day with the very same assertion.

Torah tziva lanu Moshe morasha Kehillas Yaakov is not only the introduction to Judaism, it encapsulates and defines the essence of the Jew and of Judaism. Each of the seven words comprising this succinct verse constitutes another dimension of *Torah min Hashamayim*.

Torah – The first two of the *Asseres Hadibros* – *Anochi* and *Lo yihiyeh lecha* – were communicated directly to *Klal Yisroel* at Sinai. Torah, our Sages tell us (*Makkos* 23b), refers to the 611 *mitzvos* which were commanded to Moshe.

Torah is the revealed Will of *Hashem*. *Hashem* is both all-inclusive, and ultimately one. Not only is He beyond all physical perceptions, His united totality does not lend itself to division or analysis. His Will and His Word is His Essence, as revealed to us. (*Hu u'retzono chad* – see *Nefesh HaChaim* IV.)

Any discussion of Torah, then, must take as its point of departure that it is the Will, the Word, and in effect the Essence of *Hashem*, as revealed to us.

Tziva – *Hashem* commanded us to follow His laws. Compliance is not optional, nor can one pick and choose which *mitzvos* to observe and which to ignore. The term *mitzva* is meaningless without belief in a *Metzaveh*, He who commanded those *mitzvos*. This aspect of *Torah miSinai* is more difficult for one raised in a society where the preeminent value is personal autonomy, which puts the stress on the individual’s rights, rather than on his obligations and restrictions.

Lanu – *Hashem* spoke to all of us, to the entirety of *Klal Yisroel* at Sinai. *Torah miSinai* is a historical fact, witnessed by three million men, women and children (*Kuzari* I, 25). As Rabbi S.R. Hirsch describes it, “Just as they had been made certain by the evidence of their own senses of the absolute Might of G-d over all the powers of man and nature, so now [did they] see and hear and experience for themselves with equal certainty. . . the fact that G-d can speak to Man and did speak to Moshe.”

Again and again, the Torah (*Devarim* 4,9ff; 5,4,19ff) stresses that *Hashem* spoke to us *face to face* at Sinai. *Emuna* in *maamad Har Sinai* (the historic Assembly at Mount Sinai), then, is based on historical realities founded on the living, lucid experiences of a whole nation. Indeed, the Torah includes all of Israel as witnesses to this: “Has a people ever heard the voice of G-d speaking from the midst of the fire as you have. . .?” (*Devarim* 4,33)

Because the entire nation witnessed the revelation at Sinai, the *Ramban* (*Shemos* 19,9) asserts “that faith will endure for all generations. And if a prophet or dreamer arises, who contests [Moshe’s] word, [the Jewish People] will dispute

him immediately, because they saw and heard themselves.”

Emuna, then, is properly defined not as belief, but rather as knowledge – or better yet, conviction. It constitutes our conviction of the veracity of a historical event, witnessed by and transmitted to us by our fathers.

Moshe – The Jew’s faith in *Toras Moshe*, the *Rambam* (*Yesodei haTorah* 8:1) explains, is also the result of first-hand experience and not “belief.” It is not dependent on any miracles *Moshe* performed, but on “the fact that the peo-

ple themselves saw and heard the fire and the voices, and saw *Moshe* enter the mist and heard the Voice speak to him, directing him to command the Jewish People.”

Not only *ma’amad Har Sinai*, emphasizes the *Chasam Sofer* (*She’eilos U’Tshuvos, Yoreh De’ah* 356), but every incident recorded by *Moshe* in the Torah (except for the doings of *Bilaam* and *Balak*), was either witnessed by the Jewish People, or – as in the history from *Adam Harishon* to the *dor haflaga* – was passed on from father to son. And, the

Chasam Sofer stresses, “parents do not bequeath lies to their children.”

Thus, when discussing the existential issues of life and the essence of Judaism, that discussion must be predicated on the awareness that just as nature is a fact, *Torah miSinai* is equally a fact.

Judaism is not a religion, Torah is not theology, and *emuna* is not belief.

Religions are human productions, creations of the mind and spirit of man, conceptions which men have formed about G-d, and concentrate primarily on worship and on the spiritual side of man. Theology comprises a system of human ideas and doctrines about G-d. Belief is intuitive, individual, vague and ultimately unprovable.

Hashem’s revelation and speaking to the Jewish People at Sinai was none of the above.

Judaism is the Divine command to the Jewish People, and concerns not merely one aspect of life, but encompasses all of life. Torah comprises *Hashem’s* concepts about man and the mandates of G-d’s will as applied to mankind and the Jewish People; not what G-d means to man, but rather what the universe, mankind and Israel mean to *Hashem*, the Creator and Ruler of them all.

And *emuna* is not belief. *Emuna* is rather the strong, unwavering (see *Shemos* 17, 12 *Vayehi yadav emuna*) conviction of the reality of *Hashem* speaking to the Jewish People at Sinai, *le’ei nei kol Yisroel*.

Morasha – The Torah is our heritage. All children, young and old, wise and ignorant, righteous or otherwise are the natural heirs to an inheritance. It is their birthright. But a *morasha*, explains Rabbi Yehoshua Leib Diskin, is different from a *yerusha*. The latter, an inheritance, is the property of the recipient. He can safeguard it, bequeath it, tamper with it or dispose of it, as he sees fit.

The Torah, say our Sages (*Avos* 2:17), is *not* a *yerusha* for the Jew. (See *Sfas Emes, Succos*.) It is not an inheritance, which is his to alter and bend to fit his fancy. It is rather a *morasha*, a heritage, bequeathed on the terms of the one who bestows it, and is not the property of the

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recipient to reformulate and modify.

There is another dimension to this *morasha*. One is obligated to share it with every other Jewish brother and sister, for they have equal rights and responsibilities to this heritage. (See *Sanhedrin* 91b.) That obligation to share, however, can only be on the terms by which we received it, and provided that sharing does not constitute or lead to damage to that heirloom.

Kehillas – *Hashem* entrusted His Torah not to the weak and fleeting individual, but to the strong, enduring and united community. Had all of *Klal Yisroel* not stood at Sinai, *k'ish echad b'lev echad*, as one man of one mind and heart, they would not have received the Torah.

From *Kehillas Yaakov* flows the *arvus* imperative, the mutual responsibility of every Jew for every other Jew. That responsibility is spiritual no less than physical. We are accountable for the spiritual health of our brethren if we are in a position to foster their wellbeing by our words and deeds, but fail to do so.

Today, in 5763/2002, the only legitimate basis for Jewish unity is the same as that which united Jews at Sinai 3315 years ago. And the concern and responsibility that binds us is mandated and justified only within the framework of the *morasha* dimension, and only on its terms.

Yaakov – The Torah was given to the community of *Yaakov*, the unpretentious *lomeid Torah* and *shomer mitzvos* who constitutes the essence of the Jewish nation. There is only one real barometer of one's standing in the Jewish community: *limud haTorah* and *mitzva* observance. One's job or lack thereof, social and financial status, political or organizational positions are meaningless before G-d and one's fellow Jews. A *mamzer-Torah* scholar is more respected than an ignorant *Kohein Gadol*. (See *Mishna, Horiyos* 3:8.)

Since every individual Jew, every *Yaakov*, no matter his standing, is the bearer of G-d's word, the fact that one represents no group, institution or rabbinic establishment is not a factor in one's obligation to learn, observe the

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d'var Hashem, and to avoid *chillul Hashem*. *Kehillas Yaakov* means that every Yaakov is a representative of the community, and that there is no such thing as a private individual. Each one of us is an ambassador of the Jewish People, and our actions must reflect that.

The Torah continues: “*Vayehi beYeshurun Melech, b’ehis’aseif roshei Am, yachad Shivtei Yisroel* – He became King over Jeshurun, when the leaders of the people gathered, the tribes of Israel in unity” (*Devarim* 3,26).

Let us come together, some will tell you, let us discuss Judaism, let us have a dialogue about the substance of Torah, let us debate the meaning of mitzva. Are we not one people? Are we not required to reach out to our fellow Jews? Doesn't our obligation of arvus require us to share our Torah heritage with those who otherwise would not have access to it? If we will debate other

leaders, foster unity through dialogue, and bring a kiruv halevavos through cooperation and common educational endeavor, won't we perhaps bring about the Torah to be monarch in Jeshurun?

Indeed, *Vayehi Beyeshurun Melech*. When Torah reigns supreme, *be'his'aseif roshei Am*, when that Torah will be the central point around which the heads of the nation will gather, when *Torah tziva lanu Moshe* will constitute the unifying principle of Jews, then, and only then, can there be *yachad Shivtei Yisroel*, a genuine basis for dialogue, cooperation and authentic Jewish unity.

The concluding words of the final prophecy of the last prophet, *Malachi*, are: “*Zichru Toras Moshe avdi asher tzivisi oso vChoreiv al kol Yisroel chukim u'mishpatim* – Remember the Torah of Moshe, My servant, which I commanded him at Horeb for all of

Israel, decrees and statutes.”

That is the prescription with which *Malachi* sent *Klal Yisroel* into the era when there was to be no prophecy. The command to “remember the Torah of My servant Moshe,” was to sustain the Jewish people throughout the Second Temple era and over the centuries of *galus*. It strengthened the Jew through the blows and humiliation of two millennia of persecution and deprivation, and it has the power to ennoble him and help him endure as an *erlicher Yid*, even through the challenges of affluence, prosperity and liberal Western civilization of the twenty-first century.

A closer look at the prophet's choice of words is instructive:

Zichru Toras Moshe Avdi. Moshe is referred to here as “My servant,” explains the *Zohar* (II, 181), to stress that Moshe added nothing of his own.

The prophet continues that the command at Sinai was *al kol Yisrael*. Not *el* – to all of Yisroel, but *al* – for all of Israel. *Hashem's* command is mandatory, not subject to picking and choosing.

Toras Moshe includes not only *mishpatim*, those social laws that are comprehended in all generations, but also *chukim* that are incomprehensible to contemporary sensibilities.

Only with that awareness will we be able to bring about the realization of the prophecy that follows: “*Veheishiv lev avos al banim ve'lev banim al avosam* – And he will turn back [to G-d] the hearts of fathers, with their sons, and the hearts of sons with their fathers.”

Reaching out to our alienated brethren? Absolutely. But only on the basis of *Toras Moshe Avdi*. Without adjustments, additions, and embellishments.

“*Torah tziva lanu Moshe*.” In an unusual affirmation, *Rashi* declares: “*Achaznuha ve'lo naazvena* – We hold on to this Torah and we will not leave go.”

It is the definition of Judaism and the only authentic basis for dialogue, debate and shared endeavor. ■

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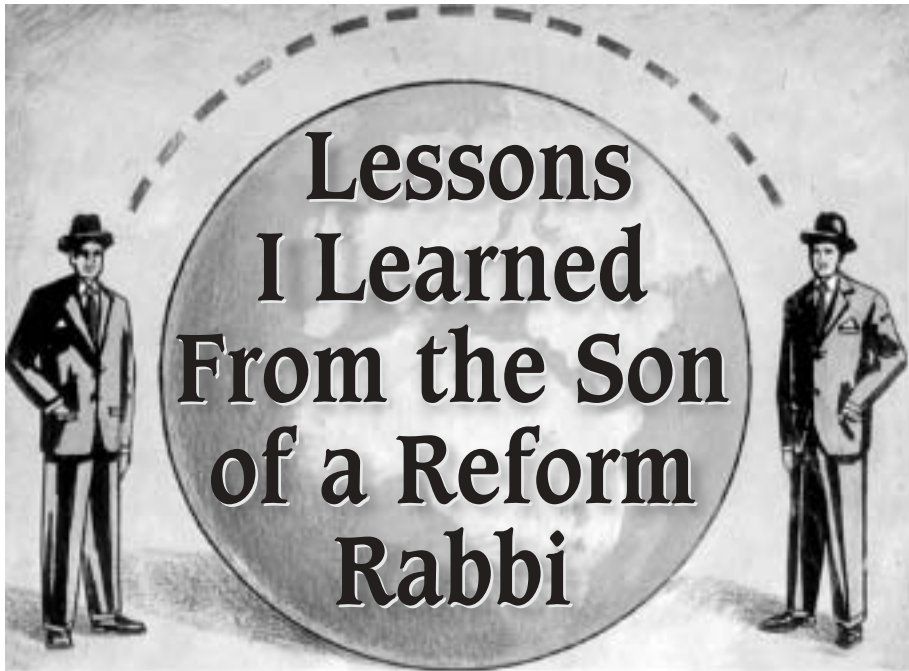
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The Dangers of Dialogue



IT STARTED WITH A LETTER FROM DAD

Several years ago, one of my students, a fresh *baal teshuva*, received a letter from his father, the leader of a Reform congregation. The young man's father had many objections to practices of the Torah world, and in this letter he complained about Orthodox rabbis' refusal to publicly dialogue with non-Orthodox leaders. He wrote to his son that the Orthodox ban on public dialogue likely has two roots: First, he suggested, Orthodoxy's case is probably too weak to defend publicly, and its leaders might be afraid that their own membership will defect if exposed to the Reform presentation. Second, he accused, the Orthodox are full of "*sinas chinam* – gratuitous hatred," and therefore isolate themselves

Rabbi Kelemen is a *rebbe* at Neve Yerushalayim in Jerusalem. His most recent book is *To Kindle a Soul: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Parents and Teachers* (Targum/Feldheim). His article "Rethinking 'Kosher' Videos and Computer Games" appeared in the September '02 *Jewish Observer*.

from the non-Orthodox – a stance he said was inconsistent with the Talmudic principle of "*Kol Yisroel areivim zeh bazeh* – All Jews are responsible for one another."

My student replied eloquently to his father's note, but to appreciate his answer, we must know a little of what this young man knew about the movement in which he was raised, and what he learned about Orthodoxy's attitude toward their non-observant brothers and sisters, who number in the millions. Let us begin with the information and insights that I and other teachers have shared with him on the latter topic – Orthodoxy's concern for their less observant brethren.

A MATTER OF INTERDEPENDENCE

We have been taught that the letters in a *Sefer Torah* correspond to the souls that were present at the giving of the Torah at Sinai. One soul, one letter... the glow and flaming sanctity of a single letter in the Torah scroll reflecting the glow and flaming

sanctity of a holy *neshama*. Should *Klal Yisroel* lack even one *neshama*, the collective soul of *Klal Yisroel* would be incomplete, just as a *Sefer Torah* is not valid if even one letter is flawed or missing. One letter times tens of thousands...tens of thousands of *neshamos* missing in their requisite dedication to Torah, leaving the rest of us woefully wanting – as a nation and as members of that nation. Like individual letters in a Torah scroll, which lack consummate sanctity if the scroll is *passul* (invalid) for being incomplete, so too is every individual's spiritual integrity lacking when other members of *Klal Yisroel* do not adhere to Torah and *mitzvos*.

How, then, especially in times like these, do we achieve fulfillment?

We attempt to reach out with love, concern and compassion to bring estranged members of *Klal Yisroel* home to our ancestral legacy. This means teaching them the essence of that legacy to which the Jewish People has been unwaveringly committed over the millennia – imbuing them with inspiration and enthusiasm. But this usually takes place in the context of personal interaction and engagement, mutual understanding and respect. Are we there, as we should be? And are they ready to accept us?

Let us stop for a moment to focus on the fact that "home" – the place where all Jews are to feel their sense of identity and give expression to it – is not a matter of geographic specifics. As the German poet Heinrich Heine* put it, "A Jewish martyr in the Spanish Inquisition was never killed on alien soil, for his feet were firmly planted in the Torah, the Jews' portable homeland." Home is a matter of mind and heart, as cogently articulated in Rabbi E.M. Klugman's article in the previous pages, "The Realities of *Emuna*." The foundation of that home can be found in *Rambam's* "Thirteen Principles of Faith," which is summarized in the *Ani Maamim* declaration printed in most *Siddurim*. To be Jewish in mind and heart, one must accept

* Heine was a Jewish apostate who had converted to Christianity to advance his literary career and alleviate his poverty, but apparently not as a religious commitment, as he wryly commented, "Had it been legal to steal a silver spoon, I would not have converted."

each of these principles. Lacking even one of them makes a person deficient in his Judaism and his relationship with *Am Yisroel* (see *Mishna in Sanhedrin* 90a, with *Rambam's Commentary*; and *Mishna Torah, Hilchos Teshuva* ch.III).

We do not write people out of Jewry if they have been deprived of a Torah upbringing. They are in the category of "tinokos shenishbu – children raised in captivity," who cannot be held accountable for lapses in knowledge and belief. But to be Jewish in essence, the convictions by which one leads his life must honor all of the Principles of Faith, and the mentors he relies on must be conversant with basic Judaism and live by its guidelines. How do these criteria relate to the spiritual home – or diaspora – of our Reform and Conservative brethren?

THE PRINCIPLES THAT DEFINE HOME

At this point, four of the *Rambam's* Principles are crucial to this discussion:

6. *I believe with complete faith that all the words of the prophets are true.*

7. *I believe with complete faith that the prophecy of Moses our teacher, peace upon him, was true, and that he was the father of the prophets – both those who preceded him and those who followed him.*

8. *I believe with complete faith that the entire Torah now in our hands is the same one that was given by Hashem to Moses, our teacher, peace be upon him.*

9. *I believe with complete faith that this Torah will not be exchanged nor will there be another Torah from the Creator, Blessed is His Name.*

Truth is Divine, it is eternal, and it cannot undergo change. This certainly applies to basic commands such as *Shabbos*, circumcision, and our ties to *Eretz Yisroel*, as spelled out clearly in the Written Law. Yet Abraham Geiger (1810-1874), one of the most influential Reform leaders of his time, was dedicated to helping Jews fit into German society – on its terms. He realized that the key to facilitating assimilation was leading

Klal Yisroel away from the *d'var Hashem* – G-d's revelations in the Written and Oral traditions – and from *mitzvos*. In 1837, Geiger called the first Reform rabbinical conference in Weisbaden, Germany, and declared: "The Talmud must go, the Bible, that collection of mostly so beautiful and exalted *human* books, as a divine work must also go." With this declaration, Reform became the first known group in more than 3,100 years of Jewish history to deny the Torah's divine origin.ⁱⁱ The ideological basis for mass assimilation was in place.

American Reform was not far behind. Shortly after Geiger organized German Reform, his American counterpart, Isaac Mayer Wise (1819-1900) launched the movement in the New World.ⁱⁱⁱ Wise went on to found the Reform seminary, Hebrew Union College IV**. In November, 1885, Dr. Kaufman Kohler convened the Pittsburgh conference of Reform leaders. At the top of his agenda was debunking the "myth" of the Torah's divine origin. Other targets of the Pittsburgh conference – all unanimously adopted – included abandonment of *bris mila*, matrilineal descent, Talmudic study, halachic observance, and rabbinical authority, creating the benchmark Pittsburgh Platform. The Reform movement thus accepted "as binding only the moral laws" of Judaism, rejecting, "all such [laws] as not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization" – including dietary laws. Kohler, who characterized Reform Jewry as "We who are no longer bound to the Shulhan Aruk,"^{iv} was then selected to be President of the Hebrew Union College

As for Reform's claim to adhering to the Torah's moral precepts – it may have sounded impressive, but it was not anchored in eternal values: In 1977, for example, the Reform leadership called for an end to discrimination against gays and "decriminalization of homosexual activity between consenting adults."^v Four years later came the famous ruling that "Sexual orientation should not be a bar to serving as a

** At their first graduation ceremony in 1883, Wise served "Little Neck Clams, Fillet de Boef, Salade de Shrimps, Grenouilles (frog legs) a la Crème, and Ice Cream."

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rabbi.^{vi} Ultimately, in 2000, the Central Conference of American [Reform] Rabbis granted its membership permission to conduct same gender marriages in the name of Judaism...Morality down the tubes together with the rest of the “Shulhan Aruk.”

BEYOND THE LIMITATIONS OF HALACHA – DREAMS OF TRANSCENDENCE

Let us focus for a moment on the messianic visions of *Klal Yisroel*, and our dream of returning to the Land of Israel. These, too, revolve around the Principles of Faith, in which they find fulfillment:

12. *I believe with complete faith in the coming of the Messiah, and even though he may delay, nevertheless I anticipate every day that he will come.*

13. *I believe with complete faith that there will be a resurrection of the dead whenever the wish emanates from the Creator, Blessed is His Name and exalted is His mention, forever and for all eternity.*

Pioneer of Reform in America, Israel Mayer Wise, declared in 1850 that he didn't believe in a personal messiah or in bodily resurrection. In 1857, Wise went further and published a new prayerbook which omitted the traditional prayers for a return to Zion, the rebuilding of the Temple, and so on, paving the way for Reform's official declaration of anti-Zionism in the *Pittsburgh Platform* of 1885.

The Reform movement remained opposed to returning to Palestine (as *Eretz Yisroel* was referred to in the pre-State era) and to settling the land, until the emergence of Reform Rabbi Stephen Wise as a leading figure in the American Zionist scene in the 1940's. Even then, Zion had no religious import. Temple Emanuel, Temple Beth Shalom, and *The Temple* (in Cleveland) carried that appellation – not as an English version of *Bais Haknesses*, or as a reference to its role as a *Mikdash Me'at* (miniature sanctuary), but as designating a prime sacred site, the virtual end-goal of messianic yearnings: This is *the* “Temple,” found in every place and any place – Hamburg,

Germany, Hempstead, L.I., or Hong Kong – wherever Jews gather to realize the humanistic yearnings of mankind. With the creation of the State in 1948, the Reform consciousness has gradually made room for a Jewish homeland of sorts, as well. But “The Temple”? That's still in Cleveland.

Except for the fact that it is meant as a form of worship designed for Jews, in which way – concept, worship, commandments, ritual – Reform Judaism is hardly a form of Judaism?

THE CONSERVATIVE AGENDA OF GRADUAL REFORMATION

In passing, we must mention that in essence, the Conservative movement is a partner in denial with Reform. It is only a matter of pacing. Indeed, Zacharias Frankel (1801-1875), whom many cite as the Conservative movement's intellectual ancestor, felt that being too assertively progressive in discarding tradition (the *Mesora*) would build resentment and stimulate rebellion,

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- The menu for the *seuda* is limited to 3 courses followed by a regular dessert.
- No Viennese table and no bar.

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- A band may consist of a maximum of 5 musicians (one of the musicians may act as a vocalist) or four musicians and one additional vocalist.
- A one-man band is recommended.

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Rosh Hayeshiva, Mesivta Meor Yitzchok

and that therefore “the reformer’s task was simply to confirm the abandonment of those ideas and practices which the community had already set aside.” He taught that essential principles of Jewish faith had to be dropped – i.e., the Torah’s literal, divine authorship; the existence and integrity of a G-d-given oral tradition; and the eternity of *halacha*.

Subsequent Conservative leaders shared the Reform attitude toward *halacha* and *Mesora*. Solomon Schechter (1849-1915), who took over Jewish Theological Seminary in New York in 1902, violated *Shabbos* publicly^{vii} and wrote that “the three r’s” stood for “rotten ranting rabbis.”^{viii} Conservative historians say that Schechter’s successor, Cyrus Adler (1863-1940) “shared the anticlerical bias.”^{ix}

The next head of the Conservative seminary was Louis Finkelstein (1895-1991).^x Under Finkelstein, Conservative rabbis were taught that the Torah was a human invention, but few JTS graduates dared share these technicalities

with their congregants. Most Conservative Jews at that time continued to believe in a Divine Torah – but one that sanctioned various levels of observance, from Reform through Orthodox; in effect, anything goes.

Shortly after his appointment, the movement’s Rabbinical Assembly issued a paper permitting driving automobiles to *Shabbos* services^{xi} – despite the Biblical prohibition against lighting fires on *Shabbos*.^{xii}

And so it has continued, through erosion, chipping away, and distortion – resulting in large-scale abandonment of the very basics of Judaism and Judaic practice: Conservative Judaism – conserving in name only.

A HOLDING ACTION MOST SLIPPERY

One might argue that identification with Conservative or Reform Judaism and adapting some of their forms of worship could at least serve as a holding action for Jews

who are too far removed from a life of Torah to leap into Orthodoxy. At least they would identify with Jewish belief and with their fellow Jews. But as we have sadly demonstrated, their belief system glaringly veers far from genuine Judaism, and renounces or violates basic Principles of Faith. As a tragic case in point, a 1972 survey commissioned that year by the Central Conference of American [Reform] Rabbis, reported that “Only one in ten [Reform] rabbis states that he believes in G-d ‘in the more or less traditional Jewish sense.’”^{xiii} The remaining ninety-percent classified their faith with terms like: “Agnostic,” “Atheist,” “Bahai in spirit, Judaic in practice,” “Religious Existentialist,” and “Theological Humanist.”^{xiv}

Moreover, the social holding action is a sorry description for a slippery slope plunging away from Jewish identity. That same 1972 survey revealed that about 25 percent of Reform leaders under age 40 had married gentiles.^{xv} Ten years ago, the overall intermarriage rate among Reform Jews had topped 60 percent.^{xvi} A study from the same period found that 52% of Conservative Jews leave the movement annually: Four percent rediscover Orthodoxy, 13 percent move into Reform, and 35 percent drop all Jewish affiliation. Another study revealed a 37% intermarriage rate among Conservative Jews.^{xvii} We know that since 1990, 300,000 American Jews have absolutely vanished.^{xviii} Had the intermarriage statistics of the \$6,000,000 *Year-2000 National Jewish Population Study* not conveniently disappeared a week before their scheduled release last November, they would likely have revealed intermarriage rates among Reform and Conservative Jews in the 60%-80% range. In fact, one wonders whether their spokesmen lack either the wisdom or the integrity to admit that they, in effect, have been leading millions of their co-religionists to assimilation, decimation, and total disappearance.

In either case, neither Conservative nor Reform offers any hope for its adherents in terms of holding on to the Jewish religion or achieving generational continuity. In no way do we bring ben-

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efit to fellow Jews who are not anchored to Torah by steering them toward “progressive” forms of belief, conferring religious legitimacy on these so-called denominations of Judaism.

This is especially significant, in view of a startling paradox: there are some genuine stirrings for return to authentic Judaism among some members of the Reform rabbinate. The Central Conference of American [Reform] Rabbis actually voted overwhelmingly in May, 1999, to accept usage of the word “*mitzva*” in their official lexicon. After battling some fierce opposition, the proponents for change settled on a watered-down “encouraging” practice of certain specific *mitzvos* rather than mandating it***. This is a total reversal of an attitude of 180 years’ standing, and kindles hope that this may represent an inner yearning for recognition of the “*Metzaveh*” – the Divine Commander of these practices – and a genuine return to His fold.... Yet, as they currently frame their belief system, there is no way one can confer legitimacy on them.

Which brings our discussion back to my student, whose father – a Reform rabbi – had claimed in a letter to his son that Orthodoxy’s unwillingness to engage in dialogue with Reform was a sign of weakness; and calls for citing some of my student’s reply to his father.

PUBLIC DIALOGUE – ITS PURPOSE, ITS TRAPS

My student pointed out to his father how there was a time when Christianity had needed the approval of its parent religion, and Jewish refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of its breakaway “child” damaged nascent Christian credibility. This is one of the reasons early Christians were so insistent on dialoguing publicly with Jews, especially with rabbis. Dialogue creates an air of respect.

*** For details, the reader is referred to an article on the topic by Rabbi Hillel Goldberg (JO, June ’99), which includes a statement on the phenomenon by the Novominsker *Rebbe*, Rabbi Yaakov Perlow שליט”א.

It lends the impression that although we differ in detail, we consider each other’s opinions worthy of a public hearing. There is an implicit granting of legitimacy to the partner in dialogue, and such a concession would have been a betrayal of all that is sacred in Judaism.

In much the same way, Reform and Conservative Judaism crave the approval of their parent religion, and Orthodoxy’s refusal to extend this approval has damaged these movements’ credibility. This is one of the reasons the Reform and Conservative leaders are so desperate to engage in public dialogue with representatives of the Torah world. [Case in point: Reform spokesmen have delighted in the publication of the book mentioned in the editorial introduction, in which an Orthodox rabbi engages in a protracted e-mail dialogue with a leading spokesman of the American Association of Reform Zionist, even though the Orthodox rabbi was obviously on target in his responses. And the Reform bemoaned the cancellation of the authors’ joint tour in spite of the fact that their “opponent” reportedly trounced their man in their initial appearance together. Never mind losing debater’s points. They gained much more from the process: Legitimacy. – N. W.] This craving for approval is also one of the reasons the Reform movement – despite its unconditional pluralism and extreme hesitance to prohibit any behavior – ruled in 1988 that it is forbidden for Reform Jews to “support institutions or congregations who are unwilling to recognize us or our movement,”^{xix} and this is why the same ruling calls upon Jewish Federations to cut off funding to these institutions and congregations.^{xx}

Referring to this implicit gain for Reform, my student summed up his response to his father: Christian groups once taunted us, saying that Judaism’s case is probably too weak to defend publicly, claiming that Jewish leaders might be afraid that their own membership will defect if exposed to the Christian presentation, and arguing that our refusal to debate reflects our gratuitous

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hatred for them (as opposed to their Christian love). "But Dad," he wrote, "you and I know that when Jews debated Christians [in the Middle Ages], they lost even when they won.... And the same is true about Orthodox Jews debating Reform rabbis; the Orthodox lose even when they win.... When we Orthodox give the Reform a platform, they win implied legitimacy.

THE ARVUS FACTOR

To be sure, Orthodox Jews must feel "*Kol Yisroel areivim zeh bazeh* – all Jews are responsible for one another." They must love and care for their non-Orthodox brothers and sisters. And they do.

Political scientist Raymond

Legge, Jr., recently released the results of a survey of American Jewish giving patterns. He found that Orthodox Jews are twice as likely as Reform Jews to contribute over \$5,000 to a secular charity – a remarkable disparity when one considers that the Orthodox are the least affluent sector of American Jewry, and most large Orthodox families stagger under huge tuition bills.^{xxi} The first emergency services to arrive at the crumbling Twin Towers was Hatzalah – a rescue service entirely staffed and founded by Orthodox Jews *for anyone in need*. The Israeli *chesed* organizations Yad Sarah, Ezer Mitzion, Chesed v'Zimra, and Zichron Menachem were all founded by chareidi Jews and serve the general Israeli population. Harvard Medical School's Dr. Ivo Janko recently described Ezra Lamarpeh – an Israeli emergency medical referral organization that handles 50,000 religious and secular cases a year (and run by a chareidi rabbi) – as "unparalleled in the world."

Indeed, the Orthodox do love their fellow Jews and care for them – and not just physically. Because we feel a connection to every Jew, we agonize over the spiritual implosion and disintegration now occurring in the non-observant world. The terrible

losses happening there, both personal and demographic, demand heroic measures. Since it is so difficult to gain access to large groups of assimilating Jewry without interacting with Reform and Conservative leaders, we feel additional pressure to engage in dialogue, but that would undermine our cause. We must find ways to speak with our fellow Jews before they sink into oblivion – without granting legitimacy to non-Orthodox movements: We must continue our many highly effective *kiruv* programs, as well as reach out to them with simple friendship, widespread private dialogue, and through print and electronic media.

We also need to find new avenues to convey to the apathetic masses how much we care, how ready we are to assist, and how precious is the gift we wish to impart to them. This will require creativity and *mesiras nefesh* – and that is the *tzav ha'sha'a*, the call of the hour.

Precisely because we care about every Jew, however, we cannot grant a place on the dais to those who would deny Jewry its Jewish birthright. In response to my personal query, I heard this *psak* from Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky, שליט"א, and Rabbi Aaron Schechter, שליט"א.

But I first learned this lesson from the son of a Reform rabbi. ■

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ⁱ Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 91.

ⁱⁱ Even the Sadducees, Karaites, and Christians professed belief in the Torah's Divine origin; they only rejected the Orthodox oral tradition.

ⁱⁱⁱ David Rudavsky, *Modern Jewish Religious Movements: A History of Emancipation and Adjustment* (New York: Behrman House, Inc., 1967), p. 288.

^{iv} *Ibid.*, p. 550.

^v Gustav Niebuhr, "Reform Rabbis Can Officiate at Gay Unions," *The New York Times*, March 30, 2000.

^{vi} Gustav Niebuhr, *ibid.*

^{vii} *Ibid.*, p. 60.

^{viii} *Ibid.*, p. 68.

^{ix} *Ibid.*, p. 56.

^x *Ibid.*

^{xi} *Tradition Renewed*, volume 2, p. 420.

^{xii} Exodus 35:3.

^{xiii} Theodore I. Lenin and Associates, *Rabbi and Synagogue in Reform Judaism*, (West Harford:

Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1972), pp. 98-99.

^{xiv} *Ibid.*

^{xv} Elliot Abrams, *Faith or Fear*, (New York: Free Press, 1997), p. 108.

^{xvi} Egon Mayer, "Jewish Continuity in An Age of Inter-marriage," in *Symposium on Inter-marriage and Jewish Continuity*, volume 1, Council of Jewish Federations General Assembly, Baltimore, MD, November 21, 1991.

^{xvii} North American Jewish Data Bank data extrapolated from the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey. See also Chaim I. Waxman, *American Jews in Transition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), p. 186.

^{xviii} Glenn Rosenkrantz, *Year-2000 National Jewish Population Study*, New York: United Jewish Communities, 2002.

^{xix} Central Conference of American [Reform] Rabbis, *New American Reform Responsa*, #92.

^{xx} *Ibid.*

^{xxi} Jonathan Rosenblum, "Who Are the Real Givers?," *The Jerusalem Post*, November 15, 2002

Living the Law

Reinforcing the Tradition With a Palpable Precedent

Pheasant under glass, roasted grasshopper, and over two hours of *shiurim*. What do they have in common? The pheasant wasn't exactly under glass, but they were all served at an historic kosher dinner we recently staged in Jerusalem.

The concept is simple and straightforward; the implementation was anything but.



INVESTIGATING THE PHEASANT

Over twenty years ago, the two of us came to Israel right after high school to study in yeshiva. As part of our studies, we decided to learn the practical laws of ritual slaughter and become certified *shochtim*. After we completed the nearly year-long course of study, a friend asked if we could slaughter pheasants for her. Not yet very experienced, we started with the basic question: *Is pheasant indeed a kosher bird?* We began to investigate.

How do we know which animals and birds are kosher? Regarding animals, the Torah provides two physical

Rabbi Zivotofsky is trained as a *shochet*, has a Ph.D. in biomedical engineering and teaches in Bar Ilan University. He lives in Beit Shemesh, from where he writes widely on Jewish topics. His last appearance in these pages was together with R. Yosef Gavriel Bechhofer in Nissan 5760.

Dr. Greenspan is a practicing *shochet*, *mohel*, and *sofer*. He lives in Efrat and has a private dental practice in Yerushalayim. This is his first appearance in these pages.

The two have been *chavrusas* and partners in “halachic adventures” for over 20 years.

indicia. Any animal that has split hooves and chews its cud is kosher. All others are not. Thus, sheep, goat, cow, deer, buffalo, gazelle, and giraffe are kosher; pig, camel, and llama are not. Regarding birds, the situation is much more complex. The Torah lists 24 species that are non-kosher. All others are acceptable. Thus, in theory, if a person knew the precise identity of all 24 listed birds, all others are acceptable. Today we no longer know what those birds are. This is the reason that both Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch and ArtScroll chose to transliterate rather than attempt to translate the names of the birds in their Torah translations. Because of this, for close to 1000 years the overriding principle is “Tradition!” The only birds that are treated as kosher are those for which a reliable tradition exists that in the previous generation it was treated as kosher.

Having clarified the principle, we realized that we needed to find out if such a tradition exists for pheasant. We found an impressively comprehensive

article by Professor Yehuda Felix, then at Bar Ilan University, in which he traced the halachic history of the *pasyon* (the Hebrew word for pheasant) for nearly 1500 years, and shows that it was always treated as a kosher bird. But names are insufficient – there is no way of knowing that the bird called “*pasyon*” 500 years ago is the same bird called “*pasyon*” today. And Felix’s trail went cold about 75 years ago.

We had all but given up hope of providing our friend with kosher pheasant when a *talmid* in the yeshiva happened to mention in passing that his *rebbe*, Rabbi Yosef Kafich, a leading Yemenite *rav* and *posek*, had just that week mentioned that he had a tradition attesting to the *kashrus* of the pheasant. Rabbi Kafich insisted that in order to properly transmit the tradition, a name is not enough. We needed to bring to him two live pheasants. He would then verify that this was indeed the bird he knew, and then we would slaughter it in his presence. No easy task, we managed to find two birds,

brought them to Rabbi Kafich, slaughtered the birds and received a letter attesting to the fact that we had the tradition and could pass it on.

THE HUNT BEGINS

That was the beginning of our hunt. But it was a hunt for traditions, not animals. We realized that traditions only can be lost, never created. Fifty years ago there were Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, Iran, etc., and each community had a local *shochet*. Jews in each locale had traditions regarding which birds in their area were kosher. Today, food production is centralized, and most of those communities are destroyed. If action is not taken soon, traditions will be lost.

A stark example of this can be seen in a book written less than 200 years ago by an Italian *shochet*. He presents diagrams of 30(!) birds that he recognized

as kosher. Today we have trouble finding 13 such birds. In order to stem the loss of traditions, we decided to organize a dinner in which we would serve all known kosher birds and as many types of animals as possible. The magnitude of the undertaking did not occur to us. First was the central task of actually finding traditions.

IN SEARCH OF THE GUINEA FOWL'S YICHUS

As an example, we suspected that the guinea fowl was kosher. So we purchased two guinea fowl, put them in a cage on top of the car, and headed out to look for old *shochtim* and *rabbanim* who may have slaughtered or supervised its slaughter in the old country. Being a bird native to North Africa, we tried North Africans and Yemenites.

We started with the Yemenite *shochet* who had taught us. No luck. He direct-

ed us to several others. Still no one recognized it. At least we were impressed with their honesty. After several attempts around Jerusalem, we were ready to give up. The following day we took the guinea fowl to an old distinguished rabbi in the Har Nof section of Jerusalem. With a faint glimmer of recognition, the rabbi asked that one be removed from the cage so he could better examine it. Nope, he did not recognize the bird. But that clever guinea took the opportunity and bolted from the room. The scene that followed, with the old rabbi in his long caftan chasing the bird, could have been out of any comedy movie. If anyone should happen to find a stray, odd-looking, lost bird in Jerusalem, it just might be our missing guinea.

Our perseverance finally paid off. While returning from *shechting* a deer in Tzefas we still had (one) guinea as a traveling partner. We stopped in to see Rabbi Elbaz, an old Algerian *shochet*. We

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had struck gold. He unquestionably recognized the bird and attested to the fact that he had slaughtered it in Algeria close to 50 years ago.

Our next subject was the partridge, another bird we suspected was kosher. Here we were having even greater difficulty. Finally I recalled that once, while researching the small Aramaic-speaking community in Israel, their chief rabbi had told me that he had slaughtered a bird named "keklik" in Turkish. Some quick research revealed he was talking about the partridge. Pay dirt again. We brought him the bird, he ID'ed it, and we were on our way with another tradition.

FILLING THE MENU

In order to bring this dinner to fruition, we also needed birds to serve. Finding quail today in Israel is relatively easy, but finding guinea fowl is another matter. A technician in the Israeli veterinary school eventually led us to his friend Rafi, but failed to inform us that Rafi calls himself "Jungle Boy."

The two deer, emu, and other assorted creatures in his backyard were interesting but immaterial to us; he had guineas he was willing to sell to us.

Pheasant were less difficult. It should be obvious that the place to buy pheasant is a large ostrich farm in the south of the country. We bought eight to start with, packed two in a box. We brought them to one of the leading *shochtim*, Rabbi Shlomo Machfud, to slaughter. He took one out of a box. I grabbed the other, and before I realized, it he was high up in the sky. If anyone finds a pheasant flying around Kiryat Malachi, that is our other missing bird!

The purpose of this dinner was to transmit the traditions. To accomplish that we needed participants. Who would come? It turned out that was not a problem. We were over-subscribed before we realized it. We also succeeded in persuading some of the most important rabbis and researchers involved in the field to join us. They came from New York, Basle, and all over Israel. At the end, nearly 100 people, Ashkenazim, Sephardim,

and Teimanim, jammed the restaurant to hear two hours of *shiurim* and partake of 13 courses. The *shiurim* covered the relevant topics of the evening: *kashrus* of birds in general and game birds in particular, *kashrus* of waterfowl, need for a *mesora* for animals, anatomic signs of animals, and *kashrus* of locusts.

Left to our own devices, we may have cooked all 13 types of birds in one big stew. But our master chef, Moshe Basson, prepared each one differently. For example, rather than starting with chicken soup, we had "shiluach hakein" soup (pigeon and dove soup with a nest of pasta and a *fleishig* egg). To be complete, we did serve chicken, but it was prepared with tamrini sauce and stuffed into a large fig.

SPARROW-SIZED LEGAL LOOPHOLE

Legal issues arose as well. It never would have occurred to us that the Sparrow is a protected species in Israel. But it is. Thankfully, Minister Rabbi Yitzchak Levi procured for us a one-time

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dispensation to slaughter several of them. Unfortunately, he was unable to do the same for ibex or antelope.

After hunting for traditions, searching for birds, and clearing the legal hurdles, the dinner eventually included: chicken, turkey, duck, goose, muscovy duck, mallard, pigeon, dove, pheasant, partridge, quail, guinea fowl, sparrow, cow udder, lamb, bison, water buffalo, and deer. And of course there was a need for a special dessert.

The Torah states that certain *chagavim* (grasshoppers) are kosher. But just like birds, there is a need for a tradition regarding the identity of the kosher species. Dr. Zohar Amar of Bar Ilan University is an expert on the subject. Jews from Morocco and Yemen still eat them to this day, and Amar has interviewed hundreds of these Jews. We procured several hundred of the kosher species, and the day before the big dinner visited several Yemenite Jews in Kiryat Ekron who had moved to Israel only seven years ago. Dressed in traditional garb and using a traditional oven, they roasted and boiled the grasshoppers for us the way they did in Yemen. And then they actually ate them! The chef prepared several more, and at the meal there were more than enough for everyone to partake. Surprisingly, many more of the participants actually tried them than we expected.

OF ELUSIVE, HOPPING PRECEDENTS

This course presented an interesting *halachic* question. Regarding birds, it is clear from the *Shach* and *Aruch Hashulchan* that one can rely on the *Mesora* from another community. But does the same *halacha* apply to *chagavim*? There was no uniform answer on this. Many of the Ashkenazi participants asked their own *poskim* and received divergent answers. While many rabbis ruled against eating, some of the leading *poskim* in Yerushalaim gave the green light to rely on the Yemenite tradition and eat *chagavim*.

Originally, the *Mashgiach* of the restaurant was hesitant about serving grasshoppers for fear it would jeopardize his kosher certification. After we received a letter from former Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef that stated that even for those Jews who do not treat them as kosher, they do not make the dishes non-kosher, the chef was so excited that he now wants to add them to his regular menu.

The main purpose of this dinner was the preservation and transmission of *mesoros*. As Rabbi Kafich had

explained all those years ago, that cannot be done via a name or something on a dinner plate. For that purpose, we needed to find real animals again. Present at the dinner were live grasshoppers, a pair of quails, a guinea fowl, muscovy duck, and several sparrows. A taxidermied pheasant and partridge were also present. Each of these was displayed, described, and discussed. Those birds participated in the historic process of transmitting the traditions to a room full of people, satiated both physically and spiritually. ■

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Dear Friend,

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BOOKS IN REVIEW

The Torah Lifestyle: Finding Meaning and Purpose in a World Transformed, by Rabbi B. Shafier (Frederick Fell, 2002, 200 pages, Trade Paperback \$16.00, distributed by Judaica Press)

In Torah study, the question is all-powerful. The student puts the question to the *rebbe*. The *rebbe*, in turn, elucidates the meaning of the Torah by himself asking probing questions. Traditionally, this has been played out in a dialogue aimed at uncovering true meaning. It is the power of this method that drives *The Torah Lifestyle*.

Part fiction, part non-fiction, the book relies on the device of a first-person dialogue between author Rabbi Shafier, and “David,” a thirty-something, non-observant lawyer. David is on the verge of marriage and approaches the Rabbi to ask The Big Question. Preparing himself for the inevitable “she’s not Jewish” problem, the Rabbi is stunned to hear instead, “She wants to be Torah observant and I don’t understand why!”

Rabbi Golding, managing editor of *The Jewish Observer*, has first-hand knowledge of Rabbi Shafier’s efforts in *kiruv*, which are well represented by his book.

Over the course of a series of encounters in the Rabbi’s study, the young lawyer, who is eventually joined at the sessions by his wife-to-be, pushes the Rabbi to provide detailed answers. The device works in a surprisingly uncomplicated manner. It permits Rabbi Shafier to use his book’s rabbi to lay out answers that are accessible and deeply satisfying. The answers are, of course, firmly rooted in the Torah, the Talmud, and the commentaries of the sages. But because they are encountered in dialogue, the complex truths have the engaging quality of vernacular speech.

This quality, however, should serve as a note of caution to JO readers – this book may not be for every yeshiva boy or Bais Yaakov girl who has been sheltered from the influences of modern media. Most of the discussions are geared to those for whom T.V. and movies are the norm. It is for this reason that a reservation is expressed; the book is primarily addressing those who are assimilated and searching – and an occasional reference may not be appropriate for members of yeshiva-type homes. The book as a whole, however, is truly excellent. Hence this review, albeit with a caveat.

As mentioned, this device of using vernacular speech works to the book’s advantage. In his style and tone, Rabbi Shafier manages to satisfy two diametrically opposing criteria: the work is highly readable and even genuinely amusing, yet it is never trite. The book as a whole is well-structured, yet each of the 22 chapters can stand alone as a discrete lesson, offering the reader fresh and meaningful insights into the power of Torah and *mitzvos* in a manner that affords rich insights for both the observant and non-observant, the novice and the experienced Torah student.

For the past 13 years, Rabbi Shafier, currently a *mesivta rebbe* in Yeshiva Zichron Yaakov, Monsey, NY, has been

a popular inspirational speaker and lecturer, and a Jewish educator in both congregations and high schools, most notably in Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim in Rochester, NY. While there has been a boom in Torah-study books and commentaries in recent years, *The Torah Lifestyle* is unlike others in that it does not attempt to deal with traditional *halacha* questions or answers. It is a call to arms – summoning the reader to come to terms with the most basic questions of life. The book only briefly skims over the answers evident in



the Torah, leading the reader to the right conclusions.

Rabbi Shafier explains why he wrote the book:

“The ways of the Torah are pleasant; so the journey, while taking courage and fortitude, is pleasant. In all my years of teaching Torah, I have never met anyone who said these ways are harsh. The only issue has been, understanding its approach, and being open enough to listen.

“We have this one opportunity, one shot, at this thing that we call life. If we can wake up, and use it correctly, if we can find our path, then our life will be enriched for eternity, and our passage along the way will be pleasant.

“...This book, in effect, is a clarion call, a call to my people to rediscover what we have known for generations. When we landed on these shores, and were thrown into the tempests of social and moral change, it seems that we lost hold of that eternal message. That which was the bedrock of our people, and somehow in the fast paced environment of the times that we live in, we have lost touch with. But the route is there to return to our heritage; to return to that eternal tree of life.”

If you know of a “wandering” Jew in search of answers, get him this book. He’ll find his way home, and will be grateful. Eternally. ■

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