

# THE Jewish OBSERVER

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## THE KEDUSHA... AND THE PITFALLS

*When American Families  
Move to Eretz Yisroel*

### ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

The Liberal Left vs. Religious Faith  
*— Rabbi Yonoson Rosenblum*

The Battle for the Menorah,  
*— Rabbi Yisroel Greenwald*

Empowering One's Tefilla,  
*— Rabbi Heshy Kleinman*

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**Statement of Policy**

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# Grasping the Kedusha, Avoiding the Pitfalls

## When American Families Move to Eretz Yisroel

### THE OPPORTUNITIES AND THE CHALLENGES

There are few *zechuyos* as great as the opportunity to live and raise a family in *Eretz Yisroel*. *Eretz Yisroel* is the land to which *Hashem* gives constant attention. This means that *Hashgacha prattis* (Divine guidance) is more tangible in *Eretz Yisroel*, and that life there is more naturally imbued with meaning and spirituality. The Land of Israel is the porthole through which our *kedusha* enters the world through which our *tefillos* ascend to Heaven. Living in *Eretz Yisroel* means *kirvas Hashem*, being close to the *Ribbono Shel Olam*. It facilitates *siyatta diShemaya* (Heavenly assistance) in *limud haTorah* and *kiyum hamitzvos* (observance). It is the land where all *Klal Yisroel* is meant to be.

Indeed, throughout the two-thousand-year *galus*, Jews have yearned to live in *Eretz Yisroel*, making great sacrifices simply to reach its holy soil. Inspired by Rabbi Spolter lives with his wife and four children in Kiryat Sefer, and is a *rebbe* at Mosdos Keshet, a Yerushalayim-based yeshiva for American youth at risk. *The Jewish Observer* acknowledges Rabbi Yona Taube of Kiryat Sefer for his contribution to this discussion.

the words of our *chachamim* (sages), who extol the virtues of *Eretz Yisroel* in countless Gemoras and *Midrashim*, the Jewish people have always possessed a strong emotional tie to the land, and desired to be among its inhabitants. Certainly, someone who has spent time studying in Israel has experienced the sanctity of the land permeating his being, and feels the magnetic draw of *Eretz Yisroel*. These feelings stem from *Avraham Avinu*, who, ever since he responded to the command of "*Lech lecha*," implanted this longing in the soul of every Jew.

Today, it is not only the love of *Eretz Yisroel* that draws Jews from abroad to make *aliya*. Many are seeking an escape from the materialistic Western world, which is replete with non-Jewish ideals and undesirable influences. In a time when most of the civilized world is uncivilized and common sense is uncommon, the search for a wholesome, sheltered environment in which to raise a family has drawn many to settle in the Holy Land. The chareidi communities of *Eretz Yisroel*, in particular, are oases of Torah ideals where the pursuit of spirituality is alive and well. Torah values thrive in their purest form, and Torah and mitzvos are

the natural way of life. They have resisted the influences of the outside world to an unparalleled degree, and the insatiable thirst for material gains and pleasures that plagues the modern world is practically foreign to their inhabitants. It is thus no surprise that thousands of families from across the globe are seeking refuge in these spiritual greenhouses, and planting their children in their institutions, where they can develop as genuine Torah-true *Yidden*. Moving to *Eretz Yisroel*, then, is certainly a great opportunity, but it is also a challenge. And as with all challenges, certainly in the spiritual realm, there is also a possibility of regression or even failure, Heaven forbid.

The successful integration of American families into Israeli chareidi society is not guaranteed. While some families make the adjustment with ease and embark on their new lives in *Eretz Yisroel* with great success, many find the change from an American *kehilla* to an Israeli chareidi neighborhood an enormous challenge. These families often find themselves at odds with the Israeli mentality and educational system, and have difficulty getting their children acclimated to an unfamiliar environment. For some

families, the bumps along the road to *aliya* are simply insurmountable, and their only solution is to head back to the U.S.

How does one prepare for a successful *aliya*? What are the factors that determine success or failure? What kinds of families are more likely to acclimate to Israeli society with ease? What do *rabbanim*, *mechanchim*, and *gedolei Yisroel* say about these issues? Whom can one turn to for advice? This article is an attempt to survey these areas of concern and to offer some answers.

#### GETTING ACCLIMATED

Making *aliya* is not only a spiritual or geographical move. It also means completely altering your social atmosphere. Rebbetzin Yehudis Salenger gives parenting classes and is a source of personal guidance for hundreds of Anglo families living in *Eretz Yisroel's* chareidi neighborhoods. "When someone goes to Russia or to Africa," she comments, "he expects to encounter a different culture. But for some reason, people think that when they come to *Eretz Yisroel*, it won't be that way. When they get here, they can be very surprised."

Working for two years as the Director of Social Services for Nefesh B'nefesh, Dr. Dodi Tobin learned a lot about the effects of *aliya* on American youth. In her opinion, there is much to consider before deciding to bring children on *aliya*. "Identity and self-esteem are major issues for adolescents," says Dr. Tobin. "Beginning around the age of nine and throughout the teen years, social life is a crucially important part of a child's life. When an adolescent is plucked out of his environment, away from his familiar friends and community, and is placed into a new culture where everything is foreign to him and he can't even communicate, it can be very distressing, and can result in rebellion." Dr. Tobin points out that parents who make *aliya* often feel like strangers in a strange land, but being adults and having made the conscious decision to make *aliya*, they generally have the resources to manage. Teenagers, on the

other hand, are brought to Israel by their parents, and may have more difficulty coping and fitting in.

#### AMERICAN YOUTH IN ISRAEL – NOT A SIMPLE SITUATION

Problems with children can range in severity from an unhappy child who just gets by, to a depressed son or daughter who doesn't want to go to school, to a rebellious teenager who is turned off from religion completely.

"When a parent says to his kid, 'Yeah, that's what the chareidi rabbanim say, but we're different,' the child learns quickly that there is 'us' and 'them.' This can be very dangerous."

Unfortunately, the latter is becoming a reality all too familiar to chareidi communities throughout the country. Children of American *olim* who don't make it in the system can quickly turn to the streets, where they meet up with more of their own breed.

Rabbi Yossi Amar is a Ramat Beit Shemesh resident who teaches in Ohr Chadash, a yeshiva/vocational training program in Telz Stone for American teenage boys.

Rabbi Amar began reaching out to troubled American teens in his neighborhood, helping them cope with their problems. "There are, unfortunately, a lot of them," he says, "both boys and girls. Some of these kids are new *olim*, and some were actually born here, but they grew up as Americans." Although he has had success in reaching many children, Rabbi Amar reports that overall, the issue of troubled American teens in *Eretz Yisroel* only seems to be getting worse. "In some communities," he says, "rebellious youth have already created their own subculture and established themselves as an entity. If a kid is not making it in the system, he knows where to find friends, and then it's all downhill

from there."

Rabbi Zev Oratz has spent the past five years working with young adults from English-speaking homes who have strayed from *Yiddishkeit*. Two years ago, he opened "The Zone, a teen hang-out located in the center of town on a street lined with bars and nightclubs. The Zone is staffed with counselors who try to make a connection with these kids and help them sort out their lives. The clientele is mainly American teenage boys and girls (on separate nights) who have come

on *aliya* and turned to the streets. Rabbi Oratz estimates that between ten and twenty-percent of children who make *aliya* in their teenage years end up going off the *derech*, meaning that a family that moves with three children in their teens (not an uncommon scenario) has a forty percent chance of one of their children abandoning *Yiddishkeit*.

*Mashgiach*, lecturer and author of numerous books on *chinuch*, Rabbi Noach Orlowek has been counseling American families in *Eretz Yisroel* for over twenty-five years. Rabbi Orlowek asserts that the most pivotal factor determining whether a family will be successful in tackling these issues or not is family stability. "Strong *shalom bayis*," says Rabbi Orlowek, "is imperative for a family to make it through *aliya*. Otherwise, the pressures and strains that are realities in *Eretz Yisroel* will have a very deleterious effect. If a family is strong, on the other hand, they may actually find the transformation from American to Israeli society to be a bonding experience, one that brings them closer together."

Considering the effects that the severe changes of *aliya* can have on children, Rabbi Orlowek counsels parents

to approach the idea of moving to *Eretz Yisroel* with children with great caution. He quotes Rabbi Nachman Bulman זצ"ל as having said that the time for families to come to *Eretz Yisroel* is either before the children are born or after they're married. "I would certainly say," he adds, "that parents who bring children here over the age of 6 or 7 are taking a big chance." Rabbi Orlowek asserts that in order for children to successfully integrate into the Israeli system, they must be confident, socially stable, and have no language problems. An overly sensitive child will most likely experience difficulties. "The society in *Eretz Yisroel* is marked by a tougher mentality. In U.S. schools, you're likely to find teachers more in tune with the needs of an American child than an Israeli teacher in a chareidi school."

#### AT THE CORE OF THE ISSUE – CLASHING MENTALITIES

The most pivotal issue for American *olim* is the vast difference between American and Israeli-chareidi mentalities. In the words of Ohr Sameach *maggid shiur* Rabbi Dovid Kaplan, fitting an American family into Israeli society is like trying to plug a 110 volt appliance into a 220 volt outlet. *Olim* often find that where they come from and where they are now living are literally two different worlds, and that get-

ting along can be a constant struggle.

Israeli society in general is very polarized. Affiliation with one group or another is a crucial fact of life. Either you decide to which group you belong, or society will take one look at you and label you. There is no riding the fence, no middle of the road, no "I'm okay, you're okay." The polar nature of Israeli society has driven the chareidim to express their extreme allegiance to Torah in every aspect of their lives. Where one lives, how he dresses, which institutions he supports, where his children go to school – each of these makes a public statement of affiliation.

There are strict unwritten rules about what children should and should not be doing, and many extracurricular activities or creative outlets are off-limits for boys. The home is meant to be a paradigm of Torah values no less than the classroom, and the community has a right (and the might) to demand that their standards be respected within the privacy of one's home. Educationally, stress is placed more on excelling and covering ground and less on meeting the needs of the individual student. Socially, Torah scholarship and being in *kollel* are measuring sticks of prominence. By contrast, American society is built on egalitarian principles, which means respecting everyone for who they are, and downplaying differences and disagree-

ments for the sake of unity and the common good. Americans are, in general, more unassuming and non-confrontational. In the context of the *frum* Torah world, the American mentality encourages self-expression within the framework of unwavering allegiance to Torah and mitzvos. A Torah community can thus be made up of families who fit into a general *hashkafa* category, despite minor discrepancies in their particular affiliations, mode of dress, or social interests.

#### ASK THE EXPERTS

Bringing these two worlds together is a very difficult task, and one that many families making *aliya* are simply unprepared for. According to noted lecturer and *mechanech*, Rabbi Zecharya Greenwald, problems occur when Americans come to *Eretz Yisroel* without wanting to make any changes in their lifestyle. People who want to live an American lifestyle in *Eretz Yisroel* are setting themselves up for conflict, especially between the home and the schools. Rabbi Greenwald tells families who are making *aliya* that they must become absorbed into society, which includes making outward changes. "Families are often attracted to *Eretz Yisroel*," he comments, "because there are things that they admire about the *chimuch* or the simple way of life. What they must realize is that it is precisely the attitude of the strict Israeli system that produces these desirable characteristics."

Others echo Rabbi Greenwald's remarks. Rabbi Zev Leff, *Rav* of Moshav Matityahu, counsels families making *aliya* to "leave some of your *hashkafos* from *Chutz La'aretz* behind." When a family comes to *Eretz Yisroel*, he says, they must conform to what the school wants.

Rabbi Orlowek offers: "Parents must be aware that the system here has a very different approach from that of the American chareidi institutions. If you want to live in *Eretz Yisroel*, you must be in line with the *daas Torah* here. This means that your children's options for *parnassa* are going to be very limited, by nature of the schools they attend. It means less *limudei chol* (secular studies)

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than you may have had. It means accepting and supporting an outlook that is more polarized than the typical American outlook.”

Rabbi Mordechai Rottman, who heads Kol Banaich, a yeshiva/vocational training program in Yerushalayim for *bachurim* who aren't making it in the yeshiva system, points to incongruence between the home and the school as a major precipitator of problems for children of *olim*. Rabbi Rottman advises parents to make an honest assessment of themselves and figure out what *hashkafa* fits their household, before choosing schools for their children. If they can't find a school that fits their home, he says, then they must make their home fit the school. Otherwise, they are setting their child up for conflict and confusion, and they are teaching him that “it's okay to challenge authority.”

When parents show children that they disagree with the establishment even on minor points, they are giving their children a license to reject. The kids will decide *what* to reject. Rabbi Orlowek, who has witnessed this scenario time and time again, cautions parents: “When a parent says to his kid, ‘Yeah, that's what the chareidi rabbanim say, but we're different,’ the child learns quickly that there is ‘us’ and ‘them.’ This can be very dangerous.”

Even when parents are willing and able to conform, their children may not be as quick to adapt socially to their new environment. Rabbi Greenwald observes that for many children, fitting into the Israeli system is a real struggle. “When children reach age nine or ten, they have already adapted an American mentality in many respects. They are used to dressing a certain way, acting a certain way, relating to their teachers in a certain way. They are used to a certain permissiveness. When they move to *Eretz Yisroel*, all of these things change. Unless a child is very spiritually motivated, extremely resilient, and easily adapts to new situations, he or she is being put at serious risk.” Rabbi Rottman adds that because American children might look and act differently than their Israeli counterparts, when choosing a neighborhood to settle in, *olim* should consider how

their children will fit in. “In some chareidi communities,” he says, “a kid who wears white sneakers will be looked at as an outcast. You don't want your children walking around feeling like bums.”

Rabbi Avrohom Weinberg, who heads a yeshiva for Israeli drop-outs in Rosh Ha'ayin, explains: “American kids come to Israel with a lot of cultural baggage,” he says. “There are things that are accepted in yeshivish American society that are considered by Israelis to be *treif*. If a *bachur* follows professional sports in

America, for example, he may not be looked at as doing anything wrong. Here, such a thing can get a boy kicked out of yeshiva. In *Eretz Yisroel*, if a yeshiva *bachur* shows up to *shul* in a blue shirt, he's not normal. If he goes roller-blading, he has a serious problem.” When American youth exhibit behavior or interests that are frowned upon by Israeli chareidi culture, they are looked at as different, second-class. This often leads to low self-esteem, and disenchantment with the system in general, causing the child to live

**During the past two-and-a-half years, families that made weddings conforming to the Guidelines, saved many thousands of dollars in unnecessary expenses.**

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## Simcha Guidelines

### THE VORT

- The *Vort* celebration is to be discontinued. The *L'chaim* (held at the time that the engagement is announced) should also not turn into a *Vort*.

### THE WEDDING

- For typical families, only 400 invited guests may be seated at the *chasuna seuda*. (The Guidelines make provision for exceptional circumstances - see full text.)
- The *kabbolas panim smorgasbord* should be limited to basic cakes, fruit platters, a modest buffet, and the caterer's standard chicken or meat hot dishes.

- The menu for the *seuda* is limited to 3 courses followed by a regular dessert.

- No Viennese table and no bar.

### THE MUSIC

- 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.

### FLOWERS & CHUPA DECOR

- The total cost of these items for the entire wedding should not exceed \$1,800.

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up to the negative image that has been placed upon him.

Rabbi Yaakov Hopfer of Congregation She'aris Yisroel in Baltimore is well aware of the challenges facing American families making *aliya*: "Thousands of people are struggling with these issues. Not hundreds – thousands! I would say that 50% of the kids who make *aliya* are getting married and settling back in America." Rabbi Hopfer offers families making *aliya* the same advice that *mechanchim* in *Eretz Yisroel* are prescribing: conform.

"I am a *shtark* chareidi Zionist," Rabbi Hopfer states proudly. "I truly love *Eretz Yisroel* and I have a deep desire to live there one day. Nevertheless, you have to think about the children. If moving to *Eretz Yisroel* is not going to be beneficial for the *ruchnius* of your family, or if it will have a negative effect on the well-being or stability of your children, then it is not the right thing to do. People don't have the right to fulfill their dreams at the expense of other, more important priorities."

#### AMERICAN CHINUCH IN ERETZ YISROEL – A SOLUTION?

Many American *olim* may want to mainstream their children into the chareidi system, but since they don't subscribe to all of the standards that the chareidi society sets for both students and parents, the chareidi schools simply don't want them. The non-chareidi schools, on the other hand, don't match the religious

standards and ideals that these families want to ingrain in their children.

In recent years, a number of schools, both for boys and girls, have opened up that cater to American families who are looking for an alternative to the Israeli chareidi system. Whether an American-style school is a help or a hindrance to integrating children into Israeli society is a controversial topic among educators. On the one hand, having other Americans to socialize with helps children adjust by softening the blow of coming to a new country, and a school that is designed for *olim* is naturally better equipped to provide the extra help that is needed to get American kids on par with the system. On the other hand, many feel that being in school with so many Americans can leave a child without any incentive or necessity to integrate, and that in such an environment, children are likely to always remain "American *olim*."

Many are skeptical of the whole idea of perpetuating American *chinuch* in *Eretz Yisroel*. They are quick to point out that similar attempts in the past claimed many casualties. They fear that children who grow up in an American sub-culture in *Eretz Yisroel* will never fit into the society, and that they will suffer from a lack of religious and social identity. Rabbi Avraham Stern, *Rav* of Ohel Torah, the English-speaking *shul* in Betar, reports that when the idea of opening a school for *olim* was brought up in his community, he consulted his *Rebbeim*. "Both Rabbi Bulman זצ"ל and רבי"ל Rabbi

Mendel Weinbach (of Ohr Someach) told me not to do it. 'Children have to be integrated,' they said."

All educators agree that *olim* must do a lot of homework before choosing schools for their children. Ironing out all of the issues and figuring out where each child is most likely to succeed is no easy task. "Treat it like a *shidduch*," Rabbi Chaim Zev Malinowitz of Congregation Beis Tefilah, an American *balebatish shul* in Ramat Beit Shemesh, advises. "Make hundreds of phone calls."

When dealing with older children, educators advise involving the kids in the decision. Dr. Tobin recommends that children be brought along on a pilot trip and introduced to their new schools before making *aliya*. The more familiar children are with their new environment and the less surprises they encounter, the more likely are they to make a successful adjustment.

#### MAKING ALIYA TO SOLVE PROBLEMS

"Make sure to tell people that you shouldn't make *aliya* to solve your problems." This comment was the advice of a mother who is currently struggling with one of her children since making *aliya* four years ago. Her son's lack of success in school in America prompted the family to leave the US, placing their hopes in the *chinuch* of *Eretz Yisroel*. "We thought that everything would get better when we came to *Eretz Yisroel*. But it only got worse."

According to Rebbetzin Rena Orlowek, of Project Tvunot, this family is not alone. "Many families are making *aliya* in an effort to resolve some kind of difficulty – issues of *shalom bayis* or a child that's not doing well. 'Meshaneh makom meshaneh mazal,' they say, and they pick up their families and come here. Many of them end up in my office, searching for solutions to new problems."

Rabbi Orlowek concurs: "If a family truly feels need for a change," he says, "there are plenty of wonderful communities they can move to in the United States. Moving to *Eretz Yisroel* might only serve to exacerbate the situation."

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For many families, the simpler, more affordable life-style in *Eretz Yisroel* is an appealing alternative to running a household in the US. In some cases, this can be legitimate. Occasionally, however, families who are struggling to make it in America envision *aliya* as a magical escape from their financial burdens. Some even come with the resolve that it's easier to be poor in *Eretz Yisroel* than in America. Rabbi Avrohom Stern (Betar) cautions against unrealistic expectations. Finding a means of *parnassa* in *Eretz Yisroel* is no easy task, he warns, and financial strain doesn't just disappear when you enter the Holy Land. "Many men are unable to find proper jobs here, and they end up in menial, low-paying positions. This is a big problem. Although it's true that many Israeli families live on *kollel* stipends alone and never work, the Israeli way of getting by financially just doesn't work for the Anglos. Families who try to pull this off sometimes end up with tremendous debts."

Some families relieve themselves of the problem by the fathers' holding on to a job in the States even after making *aliya*, commuting regularly to America, often spending up to half of every year away from their families. *Rabbanim* take issue with this recent phenomenon, finding that it often has detrimental effects on the family.

### KOLLEL YUNGELEIT

Although there is no model for the successfully adjusted family, *kollel yungeleit* who make *aliya* within the first few years of marriage seem to be integrating into Israeli chareidi society with relative ease. Generally, either the husband or wife has attended a yeshiva or seminary in *Eretz Yisroel*, acquainting them with the Israeli mentality. They want to live a spiritually-oriented lifestyle, and find the atmosphere of *Eretz Yisroel's* chareidi neighborhoods conducive to achieving this goal. These couples are not questioning or fighting the Israeli system. On

the contrary, they are impressed with all of its spiritual advantages. They encourage their own children to become part of this system. Families that follow this formula are considered genuine assets to their communities. By blending in with the society at large, they circumvent many of the bumps on the road to *aliya* that others encounter.

Even for families like these, however, there are a number of considerations to keep in mind. Rabbi Meir Kessler, *Mara D'asra* of Kiryat Sefer counsels such *kollel* families, that in addition to "conforming to the Israeli way – even if these *hashkafos* occasionally run contrary to the way they are used to thinking," they should recognize: "In America, someone who spends his first years of married life in *kollel* may eventually go into *chinuch*, or look for a conventional job. In *Eretz Yisroel*, a young married man does not necessarily anticipate ever leaving *kollel*. When the financial situation gets tough, he finds a way to get by. The Israelis grow up with this idea, and are able to live this way. For American's couple, it's not so easy. An American woman may not be ready to live in a tiny apartment on a meager income. The husband might like to work after some years, but remains in *kollel* because of social pressure, or simply because he does not have any good options for earning a livelihood. It can be very difficult for an

American to gain a *chinuch* position in *Eretz Yisroel*, or to find employment in the work sector. These issues can be a source of great stress. Families must seek guidance before taking the plunge into the Israeli *kollel* world."

Rabbi Kessler addresses another issue: Some children, he says, adapt to Israeli culture much faster than adults. Parents who are still thinking and acting like Americans can have trouble understanding their now-Israeli children. Often these children are street-smart, and get into trouble without the parents having a clue to what's going on. Taking advantage of their parents' American *temimus* (innocence), they cover up their delinquent activities. By the time the parents pick up on what's going on, it is often too late, and their children have drifted away. Rabbi Kessler warns that American parents must get to know the Israeli culture in which their children are growing up, and understand their children's ways of communicating to them.

### SUPPORT FOR OLIM

Considering the myriad of issues facing *olim*, finding support and guidance within their new community is a binding condition for American families. One organization that is involved in helping Americans successfully acclimate to life in *Eretz Yisroel*

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is Project Tvunot, established four years ago by Rebbetzins Rena Orlowek and Rivka Friedlander as an address for English-speaking families with family or educational issues. Since its inception, Tvunot has become a center for support and guidance for Americans throughout

Israeli religious communities.

In addition, some chareidi neighborhoods contain their own supportive structure to help new families. Welcoming committees, organized *shiurim*, social events and information hotlines are some of the channels by which Americans become acclimated socially into their new environments, and find the resources that they need. In communities like Betar and Ramat Beit Shemesh, a new family can find a supportive *kehilla*, guidance for *olim*, and structured programs geared towards helping Anglos integrate into Israeli society.

#### THE GEDOLIM'S ADVICE

When asked for their comments regarding the subject of American *olim*, both Rabbi Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg שליט"א and Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe שליט"א offered the same reply. "Speak to the *mechanchim* who are dealing with these issues," they said. "They are the authority on the matter." [I did.] Rabbi Scheinberg did insist, however, that it is imperative for fami-

lies to do a lot of research before deciding to make *aliya*. He also stressed that *olim* must give their financial situation strong consideration, warning that families who come to *Eretz Yisroel* without significant financial resources are likely to run into trouble.

#### IN CONCLUSION

We are living in a unique era of Jewish history, when the mitzvah of *yishuv Eretz Yisroel* is within our grasp. The many issues and challenges involved in *aliya* and integration into Israeli society, however, can make moving to Israel a difficult task. Being aware of the risks and difficulties that *aliya* entails can help parents make an educated decision and plan a successful *aliya* for their family. The road to *aliya* may be a bumpy one, but it is a road that can be traveled successfully; by following the advice and guidelines of the people who are experienced and knowledgeable in the area, a family can ensure themselves a smoother, more comfortable ride. ■

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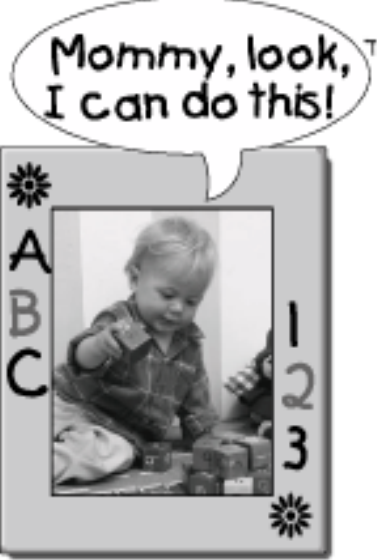
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# DOING IT RIGHT

## The Story\* of a Successful *Aliya*

Menashe and Miriam Levy made *aliya* six years ago with their five children – ages 11, 9, 7, 5, and 2. Menashe had spent a number of years as a *bachur* in a yeshiva in *Eretz Yisroel*, and Miriam had attended a seminary in Yerushalayim. Both had always dreamed of returning to *Eretz Yisroel* and raising a family there. In their first year in *Eretz Yisroel*, the Levys met with challenges and difficulties getting acclimated, but Menashe had a secure position in the administration of an established baal teshuva yeshiva, and they were well equipped to deal with the trials and tribulations.

“Our family was our main focus the first year. This was far more time-consuming than we had imagined. There were so many issues to work out – schools, transportation, camps – everything was new. It took the entire year just to get our feet on the ground.”

The Levys initially moved to a community with a high percentage of Americans. “We wanted to make it easier for our children to adjust by starting out in a place where they could readily make friends. We also sent the boys to an American-type *cheder*. For girls, there was no American option, so we sent our 11-year-old daughter to the Israeli Bais Yaakov. She had difficulty adjusting at first, but now she is the most Israeli of all the kids.

“A lot of time and resources went into getting the children adjusted into the school system. First of all, we had to break the language barrier. Secondly, the Israelis are ahead in knowledge and skills, and our kids had to catch up. We spent a lot of time speaking to teachers and principals, making sure that our children were being brought up to par, and that they were placed in the right classes. And we spent a ton of money on private tutors. If you’re

coming with children, make sure you have the money to provide them with tutors. It’s also a good idea for the children, and the parents for that matter, to get as much Hebrew language as possible before coming, as well as once they’re here. For the children, it’s crucial, and for parents, it’s important for communicating with their children’s teachers.”

The Levys did everything possible to make *aliya* into a positive experience. “We really stretched our budget in order to rent a large apartment, so the kids wouldn’t feel cramped. We went on family trips around the country. And we constantly spoke in our home about the *zechus* of living in *Eretz Yisroel*. Our children were making sacrifices, and we wanted them to appreciate that it is worth the sacrifice.”

After a year, the Levys realized that “being in a highly American community was ultimately not good for our children. We saw that living in Israel as American chareidim just doesn’t work. It’s very hard to keep that middle ground, picking and choosing what you consider to be the best aspects of the Israeli system, without losing the advantages of the American approach. We noticed that when children see their parents doing this, they learn that it’s okay to pick and choose, and then they often pick and choose in ways that their parents don’t approve. This was happening to many families, and we didn’t want it to happen to ours. So we moved to Betar, determined to do our best to become a part of Israeli chareidi society.

“Meshing with the Israeli chareidim often means conforming to things that we’re not entirely comfortable with. Sometimes it means not squawking at rules or *hashkofos* that seem outlandish. When my 9-year-old son came home from his first day of *cheder* telling me that, today, the

rebbe taught them that soccer is *avoda zara*. In Toronto he had been in a very *frum cheder* and the rebbis played soccer with the kids. My son was shocked! When my 7-year-old son got in trouble for wearing shorts (outside of school!), I was taken totally by surprise. In Toronto, my daughter could ride her bike outside on the streets. Here, girls don’t ride bikes.”

According to the Levys, such situations are moments of truth for many *olim*. “How people react is so crucial in terms of determining their children’s success. We have learned to just roll with the punches, to support the system, and give our children the clear message that this is what we do (and don’t do). Kids here have to know which camp they are in, they need a clear identity. Parents who knock the camp that they are putting their kids into are confusing their children. They are trying to place them into a world that doesn’t exist here. We know many families who, as their children reach their teenage years, found their kids wanting to go back to America. In some cases, the children begin dressing in more modern styles. They need to identify with someone. They figure, *If I’m not chareidi, maybe I’m modern*. Unfortunately, this identity crisis sometimes leads kids – even from yeshivish homes – totally away from *Yiddishkeit*. It is essential that parents accept their children’s community as a complete package, and that they act in accordance with the accepted practices of that community, even in the privacy of their homes.”

The Levys’ five children are today fully acclimated to Israeli society, and are happy to be living in *Eretz Yisroel*. The Levys attribute much of their success to the fact that “We made sure to ask *she’eilos* and get *eitzos* all the time. It’s a vital part of the process.”

\*Every detail is authentic. Only the names have been changed.

# Mrs. Fruma Leah Mandel ע"ה

When we think of pioneers in girls' Torah *chinuch* in America, names such as Rebbetzin Vichna Kaplan and Rebbetzin Basya Bender ז"ל immediately come to mind — and for good reason. These two *nashim tzidkaniyos* founded the first all-day Bais Yaakov high school in America.

A lesser-known name, one which bears mention, is Mrs. Fruma Leah Mandel, who actually initiated the concept of organized Torah education for girls on these shores.

## A pioneer of girls' *chinuch* in America

### FROM KOPICHNITZ TO NEW YORK

She was born on *Rosh Chodesh* Shevat 5642 (1882) in Kopichnitz, a small town in Galicia, Poland. Her father, Reb Avraham Menachem Mendel Pollack, a *talmid chacham*, was outstanding in his *yiras Shamayim*, and a devoted *chassid* of Rabbi Yitzchok Meir Heschel ז"ל, the Kopichnitzer Rebbe.

Little Fruma Leah could often be found in the Rebbe's home where that rarified environment profoundly influenced her. The *Rebbs* of Kopichnitz were outstanding in their *ahavas chessed* and *ahavas Yisroel*, qualities for which Mrs. Mandel was well known.

*Reb Yitzchok Meir's son and successor, Rabbi Avrohom Yehoshua Heschel ז"ל, once said, "Do you think that the mitzvah of Ve'ahavta lere'acha kamocho (Love your fellow Jew as yourself) means to love the Ponovezher Rav (Rabbi Yosef Shlomo*

*Kahaneman)? Of course not! How can one not love the Ponovezher Rav? Rather, the command tells us to love the Jew who is difficult to deal with, the one who might not earn our love naturally. That is what ahavas Yisroel means."*

She learned *ahavas Yisroel* in her own home, as well. Her father's carpentry skills provided the family with all their needs, but once a week, they ate stale bread, to experience the difficulties of poverty and better feel the plight of the poor.

In the tradition of her mother, Fruma Leah would stand outside the door, listening as her brothers studied Torah. At a time when girls did not receive any formal Torah education, she developed a heightened love and appreciation for its sacred teachings.

### THE WORKINGS OF PROVIDENCE

Her mother died when she was sixteen. As an only daughter and the oldest of four<sup>1</sup>, she cared for her mother during her final illness with great devotion. At one point, her mother told her, "If I will live, I will do whatever I can for you, and if, *chas veshalom*, I will not live, I will break down iron

(Heavenly) gates for your sake." In the years that followed, Fruma Leah's mother appeared to her in dreams on a number of occasions, and offered her direction that provided for her safety and success.

After her mother's death, Fruma Leah took over the running of the household, and cared for her brothers, ages fourteen, six and three. When the oldest brother, Volf, turned seventeen, he was eligible for conscription into the Polish Army, which posed a grave spiritual danger to any Torah-observant young man. This is why many yeshiva *bachurim* in Russia and Poland went to great lengths to avoid being drafted. Some starved themselves to appear ill at the time of their physical examination, while others actually inflicted permanent wounds on themselves so that they would be disqualified from army service.

Volf's father, Reb Avraham Menachem Mendel, advised him to flee across the border. He did, and made his way to England, eventually taking up residence in London. By that time, Reb Avraham Menachem Mendel had remarried, and his new wife was caring for his two young sons. He therefore

Rabbi Finkelman, a *rebbe* in Yeshiva Darchei Torah, Far Rockaway, NY, is a frequent contributor to these pages, most recently, "... With Kindness and Respect" (March '04). He is the author of several biographies published by ArtScroll Mesorah Publications. The above article is based on the research of Mrs. Rochel Feder, a granddaughter of Mrs. Mandel.

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asked Fruma Leah, nineteen, to travel to England so that her brother would not be alone.

In 1901, she arrived in England, and two years later she and her brother journeyed to America. In 1907, she became engaged to Reb Zev Kehas Moshe Mandel, who had also arrived in America without his parents. His father, Reb Shimshon Mandel, was a Torah scholar and a son-in-law of the *gabbai* of Reb Mordechai Shraga of Husyatyn, a son of the Chassidic master, Reb Yisroel of Rizhin.

The two fathers discussed the proposed match in Europe, and then sent their blessings across the Atlantic. Reb Shimshon sent his future daughter-in-law a message (in Yiddish): "My child, I don't know you, but I have heard very nice things about you. There is but one thing that I wish to tell you: don't look at the *Rav's* daughter or the *dayan's* (rabbinical judge's) daughter. Conduct yourself in the way of a sincerely religious Jewish daughter." Reb Shimshon was well aware that many of the Jewish immigrants to America – even from the finest, most prestigious families – had abandoned mitzvah observance as soon as

they arrived on these shores. There were women who mentioned with pride that "*in der alter heim*" (i.e., back home in Europe), their father had been a *rav* or

■

She spoke softly but convincingly about the importance of not compromising an iota regarding *Shabbos* observance, *tzenius*, *kashrus* and other areas...

■

*dayan*, though they themselves were non-observant. R' Shimshon did not want his daughter-in-law to fall prey to such influences. Little did he dream that his daugh-

ter-in-law would play a pivotal role in keeping other Jewish daughters from straying off the path.

The new couple took up residence on the outskirts of Williamsburg, and later moved to Woodridge in upstate New York.<sup>2</sup>

BNOS YAAKOV

In October of 1923, the Mandels moved from Woodridge back to Brooklyn, this time, taking up residence in Brownsville, which at that time had a thriving Orthodox community. Some three years later, the Mandels' daughter, Esther, came home from public high school (there was no Bais Yaakov) and said that the school would be holding a prom, which included mixed dancing. Moreover, the boys and girls who would be attending were almost all either gentiles or non-observant Jews. Mrs. Mandel was understandably distressed.

Many parents considered themselves helpless in such situations. Mrs. Mandel took action. She knew that her daughter might not survive the peer pressure to socialize as long as she felt that she

was alone in her struggle. She needed to feel that she belonged to a special "sorority," one that cherished the religious principles with which she had been raised, and shunned compromise, spiritual weakness, and assimilation.

She wrote letters to the Brownsville *rabbanim*, apprising them of the situation, and requesting their support in her planned endeavor. Then, she sent postcards to ten girls who were her daughter's age, inviting them to her house on Friday night. "Bring a friend," she wrote.

That first *Shabbos*, fifteen girls came.

Excited and happy after an enjoyable, uplifting evening, they decided to form weekly classes. At these classes, *halacha*, *parsha*, *Pirkei Avos*, *tefilla* and *Menoras Hamaor* were taught. Mrs. Mandel recruited instructors, and drew on her own knowledge of Torah law and lore, which, along with her warm, caring personality, made her a much beloved pedagogue.

She spoke softly but convincingly about the importance of not compromising an iota regarding *Shabbos* observance, *tzenius*, *kashrus* and other areas

where too many had grown lax after arriving in America. The girls felt drawn to this kindhearted woman who understood their needs and empathized with their difficulties.

Within a short time, some two hundred girls were attending her weekly Bnos Yaakov groups, which were organized according to age. "Buds" were her youngest charges, ages five to seven. The oldest group, known as *Shomrei HaDas* (Keepers of the Faith), consisted of young, married women.

Mrs. Mandel was not physically strong, and was in poor health for much of her adult life. But "those who hope to *Hashem* will have renewed strength."<sup>3</sup> Her success in saving so many girls from spiritual dangers invigorated her, and with time, she introduced her Bnos groups to other neighborhoods.

#### TO WILLAMSBURG AND BEYOND

Her sons, who were studying at Mesivta Torah Vodaath in Williamsburg, became friendly with a G-d-fearing butcher, Reb Moshe Mintz. Mrs. Mandel was introduced to Mr. Mintz's sister, Malka (later Mrs. Malka Puretz), and the first Bnos Yaakov group in Williamsburg was founded.

Mr. Mintz's wife, Bracha, was the daughter of Rabbi Yehuda Levenberg, *Rosh Yeshiva* of the Yeshiva of New Haven.<sup>4</sup> With her involvement, a group was founded in New Haven. After meeting Rabbi Elazar Mayer Preil, father-in-law of the late Rabbi Pinchas Mordechai Teitz (*Rav* of Elizabeth, New Jersey), Mrs. Mandel founded a Bnos group in Elizabeth.

Mrs. Mandel placed an ad in the "community news" column of the *Yiddish Morgen Journal* daily, inviting girls to attend existing Bnos groups or to found new ones in their neighborhoods. A girl from the Bronx decided to make the trip to Williamsburg for a Bnos *melava malka*. She got off the train at the wrong stop and walked three miles to reach her destination. After meeting this girl, Mrs. Mandel contacted the Vaad HaRabbanim of the Bronx and obtained a list of the neighborhood's observant

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families. She then wrote some thirty letters in which she described the Bnos groups and urged parents to send their daughters to a group that was then being formed in their neighborhood. The girl whose *Motza'ei Shabbos* journey had initiated this effort organized the group, and Shoshana Eidelman – later, Rebbetzin Soloveitchik of Monsey<sup>5</sup> – was its first leader.



The girls felt drawn to this kindhearted woman who understood their needs and empathized with their difficulties.



#### THE FIRST SCHOOL

Yeshiva Torah Vodaath, founded in 1917, was Williamsburg's first Torah day school. But by the early 1930s, America had yet to see its first all-day Torah school for girls.

In Rabbi Yonoson Rosenblum's definitive biography of Rabbi Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz, founder of Mesivta Torah Vodaath, we read:

*In 1924, Reb Shraga Feivel and his close friend Reb Binyamin Wilhelm opened an afternoon Talmud Torah for girls in Williamsburg called Beth Jacob Hebrew School. One of the few places where an Orthodox girl could gain some familiarity with Torah was in one of the handful of informal Shabbos groups that Mrs. Fruma Leah Mandel of Brownsville began organizing in her neighborhood in the late 1920s. After moving to Williamsburg in the early '30s, Mrs. Mandel organized groups there as well. The Mendlowitz girls were among her first Williamsburg recruits.*

*Not until 1935 did the first elementary school for girls in the Bais Yaakov model open in Williamsburg.*

That school was originally named "Bais Rochel," and was founded by Mrs. Mandel. Convincing parents to enroll their children was a formidable task.

In his diary, Reb Binyomin Wilhelm describes the resistance he met when he founded Torah Vodaath.

*"Do you really intend to turn these boys into Torah students and tzadikim?" the parents had asked skeptically. "The years have taught us that*

*there is nothing to be done. This is America – all is lost." Reb Binyomin convinced them that all was not lost, and his dream was realized.*

Mrs. Mandel faced a different sort of opposition. In the 1920s, Sara Schenirer had founded the Bais Yaakov movement in Poland, but its concept had not yet reached these shores. In America, Orthodox Jews were resigned to having their daughters attend public school. That a Jewish girl needed a Torah education to shield her from the winds of assimilation was a new idea that most were not

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ready to accept. "Mrs. Mandel, do you want to make my daughter into a *rebbetzin*?" they challenged.

Not one to be put off easily, she countered, "*Ver vellen zein di mamas?* (Who will be the mothers?)" If a woman was strong in her faith and appreciation of Torah and mitzvos, then there could be real hope that she would raise her children to be committed Torah Jews even in the "land of opportunity" where Orthodox Jews could climb the ladder of professional success. If a woman was ignorant of Torah, however, and shaky in her beliefs, there could be little hope that her children would survive the temptations of American life. To hope that the hundreds of Orthodox girls attending American public schools would all continue in the traditions of their forbears was unrealistic and dangerous.

Another problem was that many observant girls attended Talmud Torah classes in the afternoon, after public school. Sadly, some of the Talmud Torah teachers were not fully observant and were a harmful influence.

Mrs. Mandel persevered and opened her all-day school with approximately fifteen students. It started with a first, second, fourth and fifth grade. The girls, ages six to eleven, sat around a long table in a *shul* as the teachers made their way around the table, teaching each group according to its level.

About a year later, Mrs. Mandel set her sights on starting an evening high school and seminary. As she often did, she sought guidance from Reb Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz. He directed her to Rebbetzin Basya Magnes, whose husband was a *Rav* in North Bergen, New Jersey.

Rebbetzin Magnes was well-versed in *Tanach* and Torah *hashkafa*, and was a gifted and inspiring speaker.

One evening, in the midst of a snowstorm, Mrs. Mandel, accompanied by two of her sons, traveled from Brooklyn to North Bergen. Mrs. Mandel got straight to the point: "Rebbetzin Magnes, you must save Jewish daughters from spiritual annihilation!" She pleaded her case convincingly, with the result being that the Magnes relocated to Williamsburg so that the Rebbetzin could head the new school. *Beis Medrash L'Moros Bnos Yaakov*, an evening high school and seminary, opened its door in 1936.

The following year, Rebbetzin Vichna Kaplan arrived in America. She founded the first all-day Bais Yaakov high school and seminary, and eventually, Mrs. Mandel's school merged with that of Rebbetzin Kaplan.

\*\*\*

At Mrs. Mandel's funeral, one of her frequent guests commented that he had never felt that he was on the receiving end. This was her style of *chessed*; she had a knack for making a recipient feel at ease and often unaware of any efforts being expended on his behalf. And whatever she did was accomplished discreetly, in the quiet, modest tradition of Jewish daughters.

She never sought, nor desired, recognition for all that she accomplished on behalf of *bnos Yisroel*. We, however, should take note of her efforts and be inspired to do what we can to spiritually assist our fellow Jews. ■

<sup>1</sup> A fifth child, a boy, died at age three.

<sup>2</sup> They were blessed with five children: Reb Reuven Dovid Mandel has served Yeshiva of Brooklyn with integrity and great devotion for decades. Reb Pinchas Mandel has for many decades been involved with *chessed shel emes*, burial arrangements, especially in *Eretz Yisroel*, for the American Torah community. Rebbetzin Esther Mindel Katz is the widow of the legendary Rabbi Chaim Mordechai Katz, a founding *Rosh Yeshiva* of the Telshe Yeshiva in Cleveland. Rabbi Nachman Mandel has been a beloved primary *rebbe* for over half a century and has been serving in that capacity at the Yeshiva Toras Emes

of Los Angeles for the past twenty years. Rabbi Menachem Manis Mandel has for many decades been the *Menahel* and inspiration of Yeshiva of Brooklyn, with a combined enrollment in the boys' and girls' divisions of well over one thousand students. Their father, Reb Moshe, passed away on 25 Tishrei, 5704 (1943).

<sup>3</sup> *Yeshaya* 40:31

<sup>4</sup> See "Torah Shines Froth from New Haven... and Cleveland," by Ari Z. Zivotofsky, *JO*, Dec. '03.

<sup>5</sup> See "A Principal of Principle: Rebbetzin Soloveitchik ז"ל," by Mrs. Sarah Cohen, *JO*, Dec. '00.

# An Exercise in Avodas HaShem

**T**ake a walk. That's what my doctor told me. I should take a walk every day for at least half an hour.

I have joined the ranks of the millions for whom diet-and-exercise is a medical prescription. We subtract sugar and salt from our diet. We add regular exercise in the form of swimming, bicycling or walking. I have chosen walking, a brisk outing every morning.

On my daily course, I pass others who are also out for exercise, looking very much like me. I wonder what they are thinking. With head down or gaze fixed on some distant point, do they brood over glucose and triglycerides? Do they dream of "a slimmer me"? And am I the same? Or is there something more to this daily constitutional than the mere maintenance of a physical body? For a Jew, the most mundane activity should be an exercise in *avodas Hashem*. What follows are some of my thoughts on the subject – ten, to be exact:

## Their Walk... And Mine

**T**he most obvious difference between my walking and theirs is that the activity is for me a mitzvah of "*venishmartem me'od lenafshoseichem*," freely translated as "you shall

Rabbi Rutman teaches *Gemora* to beginners in Yeshivas Ohr Yaakov, which is located in Zichron Yaakov, in *Eretz Yisroel*. His article, "Junk Genes – In the Eye of the Beholder," was featured in *JO*, March '04.

guard your health." Even if I would wish to be irresponsible, and opt for a life that is short and sweet, indulging my taste for cake and ice cream and never mind the consequences, I cannot do so. "Our bodies, ourselves" is not a Jewish motto. It is *not* my body. I am just a caretaker for the physiological marvel which has been placed in my trust by the *Borei Olam*, to be used in the fulfillment of His will. My morning walk has become almost as much a part of my obligatory routine as *tallis* and *tefillin*.

Of course, there is always an element of *she'lo lishma*. A svelter me would be an undeniable source of pleasure. Also, I do enjoy my morning walk, and I feel stronger and more energetic because of it. So I can't claim that I do it purely for the mitzvah. Nevertheless, the fact remains that I only broke out of my totally sedentary routine on doctor's orders.

Saying the *passuk* "*venishmartem*" over to myself when I take off each day helps to keep the mitzvah in mind.

## Visionary Control

**I**nherent to going out to do a mitzvah is the risk of doing an *aveira* on the way. Indeed, as soon as one steps outside, he enters a world of flagrant immodesty. As Rabbi Schach, זצ"ל once said: "Today, it's impossible to walk out the door." (from opening remarks to *Yarchei Kalla*, *Ponevezh*, 5753/1993)

And the stakes are high. There are four

negative commandments involved.<sup>1</sup>

As Rabbi Elyakim Getzel, the *Maggid* of Bialystock, observed, it is no accident that tears issue from the eyes, for they are the source of so much trouble (quoted by Rabbi Mordechai Potash in *Sefer Histaklus Behalacha*).

But the reward is correspondingly great for those who make the required effort. The *Navi Yeshayahu* (33,15-16) praises the one who "hears no evil, sees no evil. He will dwell in the heights..." As the *Yalkut Shimoni* (439) says, one who so guards his senses will merit to see the *Shechina*, as implied by the subsequent verse in the *Navi*, "Your eyes will gaze upon the King in His beauty..." (the "King" being a reference to *Hashem*).

Nevertheless, life makes its demands. We must leave the sanctity of our homes for health reasons or to go to the *beis hamidrash*, the *beis haknessess*, the workplace, or the market. Even if it means traversing a street where it is inevitable we will encounter forbidden sights, it is permissible if it is unavoidable, or if a more roundabout route will entail significant inconvenience (*Igros Moshe, Even Ha'Ezer*, Vol. 1:56).

Although we may no choice but to be in such places, that doesn't grant us a license to "gaze at random." On the contrary, the *hetter* is only valid on condition that we make every effort to turn our focus away from what should not be seen.<sup>2</sup> That is why G-d gave us lids,

<sup>1</sup> "And do not stray after your hearts and your eyes" (*Bamidbar* 15,39), "And keep yourself from all evil" (*Devarim* 23,10), "Every man unto all flesh do not draw close to reveal nakedness" (*Vayikra* 18,6), and "I have made a covenant with the eyes" (*Iyov* 31,1).

<sup>2</sup> This does not mean one has to go blindfolded; you have to watch where you're going. It is important to note, however, that the prohibition does not apply to a situation arising from an immodestly dressed person happening to enter your field of vision as you watch for the traffic light to turn green; rather, what is forbidden is fixing your gaze upon that person. In other words, the problem is not seeing, it's looking. It is recorded in the *Beis Yoseif* (*Ohr Hachayim*, 229) that it was asked of the *Rosh*: "How is it possible to make a blessing upon seeing a rainbow, when it is said that the eyes of one who looks at a rainbow are dimmed?" He answered that seeing (*re'iya*) is not the same as looking (*histaklus*), which is more intensive. The *Tur* applies this distinction to seeing (or looking at) an immodest scene.

unique to the eyes: so that they could be used for a quick cover-up (*Chovos Halevavos, Sha'ar Habechina*).

Rabbi David Klein of Tzefas, an old friend of mine, once told me, "If you're thinking about a *Tosafos*, you just don't see a lot of the things that are out there." This is in line with the *Rambam's* counsel: "One should turn himself and his thoughts to *divrei Torah* and expand his mind with wisdom, because illicit thoughts only prevail over a heart vacant of wisdom" (*Hilchos Issurei Bi'a*, 22:21).

### Company of Choice

To that end, we are well-advised by the wisest of men, *Shlomo Hamelech* who writes in *Mishlei* (13,20) that one who "walks with the sages will become wise." Rabbi Avigdor Miller pointed out that it was as a result of tagging along after the great Reb Zundel that Rabbi Yisroel of Salant became who he was. One day, Reb Zundel noticed that he was being shadowed, turned around, and said: "Come here, Yisroel... if you want to become a *yerei Shamayim*, learn *mussar*." The rest is history.

I know people who made it their business to walk with (or travel with, or drive for) various *roshei yeshivos*. A common frustration among *talmidim* is the inaccessibility of the eminent men who head their *yeshivos* and *kollelim*. All too often, it seems that getting close to them is the province of the smartest and most aggressive students. Others get left behind. And even those who do manage to cultivate a relationship with an *adam gadol* (great Torah personality) sometimes find that their intimacy with him is confined to hurried, two-minute exchanges after *shiur*. But the person who drives or accompanies him to his next appointment can revel in his presence for much longer and develop a far more meaningful relationship.

Also, one has to be on the lookout for opportunities. When I was a *bachur*, I went on a trek one *Isru Chag* with my then-*Rosh Yeshiva*, Rabbi Osher Reich. He had committed *Taryag Mitzvos* (613 commandments) to memory, the idea

being that a sincere servant of *Hashem* has to know the commandments of his Master, as a soldier must know his orders. The trip turned into a dazzling *shiur* in *Sefer Hachinuch*, as he proceeded to recite them for us as we walked. I think he was well into the 300s by the time we arrived at our destination.

The next best thing to an in-the-flesh *talmid chacham* striding in the next lane is being accompanied by one of his *shiurim* (lectures) on tape. There are thousands of Torah tapes available on every conceivable subject. Just be sure that the headset is not so loud that it blocks out the traffic sounds around you.

### A Walking Kiddush Hashem

Walking presents many opportunities for *chesed* (kindness), as well as *chachma* (wisdom). A cheerful "Good morning!" should be as much a part of the paraphernalia of the peripatetic *ben Torah* as his sweat suit and walking shoes. *Midrash Rus* tells us that Boaz and his *beis din* decreed that *Hashem's* Name could be used in mundane greetings in order to counteract the forgetting of *Hashem* and the tendency to sin in that generation. All the more so in ours.

On a more practical level, I've been able to help others on my walks by giving directions to passing motorists. The Israeli secular-religious divide notwithstanding, Israeli travelers of the most secular appearance, sporting long pony tails and hip-hop blaring from their car speakers, will stop to ask directions from a chareidi person. The interaction may seem small, but the pleasant thank you it usually elicits from the driver is evidence enough that the notorious divide has been momentarily surmounted by personal kindness. He cannot deny that at least that one chareidi who gave him directions seems like a nice guy. A *kiddush Hashem* has been effected.

When somebody stops me on *Shabbos*, however, it is a problem. On the one hand, giving directions could reduce the amount of his driving. On the other hand, one does not want to give the

impression that it's acceptable to drive on *Shabbos*. Therefore, it may be preferable to respond politely that you would like to help, but you can't, because it's *Shabbos*. (I did this several times, and it was almost always taken in the right spirit.) Or simply smile and shrug, to let him think you don't know the way. Or first register a polite protest, and then direct him. (See *Tsitz Eliezer*, Vol. 15:18,19. After considering the options, he recommends refraining from giving directions.)

One of the reasons I do not go for my walk on *Shabbos* or *Yom Tov* is because each of these alternatives has its drawbacks. There is another halachic obstacle as well, since exercise for health is generally prohibited on those days (although running and jumping for fun is allowed). The brisk walking that I do, which is an identifiable form of exercise, and not just a stroll, is disallowed on *Shabbos*. (*Mishna Berura* 301:7)<sup>3</sup>

### Reflect the Sunshine

Rabbi Yisroel Salanter was known to take great pleasure from the fact that sunshine is such a universally accessible blessing, enjoyed by so many people. Although reflecting on the vast multitudes who are sharing my rays at that very moment might seem an easy enough way to enhance my walk, I have

<sup>3</sup> Some *poskim* also rule out mere strolling, if the intention is for exercise (ibid).

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consigned it to the long list of things that are easier said than done. I suppose it takes a greater *ba'al chessed* than me to derive pleasure from such a thought, even though I realize that it's certainly no ray off my nose, and even though I don't begrudge those other people their place in the sun, either.

### Footing the Habit

The word "*reggel*" means foot. But it is also the root for *hergel*, habit. Unless I make walking a firmly-established habit, it will be of little use. The difficulty lies in the lack of visible or measurable results in the first few outings. Only over time will there be appreciable benefit. But knowing that I have accomplished a mitzvah with every step generates encouragement to persevere in overcoming my natural laziness. So it is with every *midda*. Even though personality improvement is a long-term venture, the initial effort alone is deserving of reward.

### Closer to the Heights

Some time ago, I read an article about walking that offered advice on how to do it: One should, it said, walk upright, not slouching, chest out, arms swinging gently forward and back, hands open. I follow the advice of the walking experts, and indeed, I am never more upright than when walking. I may hunch over my *sefarim*, crouch over my victuals, slouch through the little *nisyonos* of daily life, but walking is an upright thing to do.

It reminds me of the *Mahara's* insight that, unlike quadrupeds, whose heads are turned downward, human posture is erect because we are designed to contemplate the Creator above us. Being a biped is not just a matter of anatomy; it's a spiritual condition. That is why the dancing bear is a circus oddity, comical in its upright mass, displaying the incongruity of the brute in a spiritual stance. For the human being, on the other hand, it is torture to be forced to be on all fours for very long. It goes against our instinctive reach for higher realms.

### Walk the Prayer

"Hashem meichin mitsadei gever – G-d prepares mankind's footsteps."<sup>4</sup> It is not just a vestigial paranoia from my days growing up in New York City that makes me watchful for menace. Even in the relatively secure part of northern Israel where I live, I can not escape thoughts of snipers in the hills overlooking my route. And it was not so long ago that one of my neighbors was crossing the street from a bus stop in a nearby town when a bomb went off on the other side of the street. A car parked between him and the blast saved him. Would it be adding piety to paranoia to say *Tefilas Haderech* – The Traveler's Prayer – (without *Hashem's* Name) before going out for my walk? I'm not sure.

### The Path is Mine

Every *dalet amos* (four cubits – 6 to 8 feet) that you walk in *Eretz Yisroel* is a mitzvah. As I tread the sacred ground in the neighborhood in which I live, I am reminded of the time when my wife and I thought about leaving and returning to America. We weighed the pros and cons with our *rebbe'im*, and the complexities of the decision were such that, as Rabbi Nachman Bulman זצ"ל so aptly put it, "This is a case for autonomous decision-making." We had worked out the practicalities of uprooting ourselves, we had a feasible plan, and it began to look more and more that such would be our autonomous decision. As I walked about outside, however, pondering (or hesitating) one more time the momentous turn we were about to take, I stopped and gazed around at the fields at my feet and the hills of the Galil in the distance. I realized that I simply couldn't leave. It made no sense to go back to America. These fields and hills, the scraggly grass at my feet, the gnarled olive trees in front of me, the faintly perceptible line of Mediterranean blue on the horizon – this was my home, and I

<sup>4</sup> From the daily morning blessings, based on *Tehillim* 37,23.

couldn't leave it. My wife agreed, and so we stayed.

Some time later, I came across a passage in the *Sefas Emes* that confirmed my feelings. In *Parshas Balak* (23,9), commenting on Bilaam's intention to curse "a people that celebrates three pilgrimages," he says, "that envisioned prophetically that every rock and hilltop in *Eretz Yisroel* [was created] exclusively for *Bnei Yisroel*. 'Ki meirosh tsurim er'ennu, umi'gevaos ashurennu – Because from the heads of rocks I see it, and from the hilltops I behold it.'" The *Sefas Emes* concludes, saying that "every clod of dirt from *Eretz Yisroel* is special to the individual *nefashos* of *Yisroel*." I felt confirmed that my feeling – that I had found my portion, that particular, sacred agglomeration of earth and sky that speaks to me in a way that no other place on earth, even in *Eretz Yisroel*, can – was more than just sentiment. It was part of the suprahistorical attachment of the Jewish people to our homeland. (I felt, so to speak, on solid ground.) Staying where we were was elemental to our Jewishness, and so we stayed.

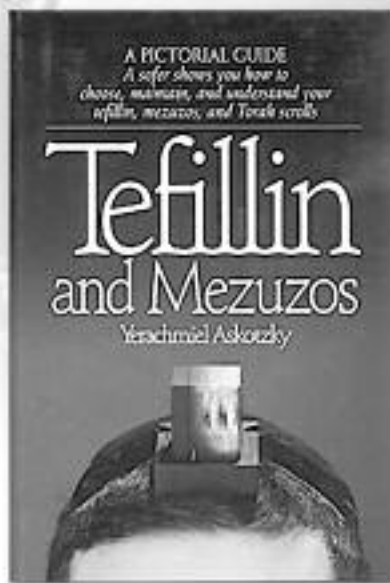
### Soulful Footwork

There are days when I would rather not walk. I have other things to do, I have a headache, it's raining, it's too hot, too cold. The walking seems like a bitter pill, a punishment. And I wonder what I have done to deserve this enforced movement, this new life-long regimen of step-after-step.

I reason to myself that Hashem's punishments are always *midda kenegged midda*, measure for measure, and this, too, surely conforms to the rule. There is little doubt in my mind that this prolonged expense of energy comes to atone for my sloth in mitzvah performance over the years. It is a *tikkun* for the times I failed to hasten to do a mitzvah. Now my mitzvah is precisely that – to hasten; brisk walking is the doctor's prescription.

Indeed, I am often more than brisk. I am fast, barreling along, and on a good day I feel like I am flying. Pure *zerizus!* A *tikkun* not only for the body, but for the *neshama*, too! ■

# Tefillin and Mezuzos



*Tefillin and Mezuzos*, by Rabbi Yerachmiel Askotsky (Published by Targum Press)

**C**hazal (*Menachos*, 43b) tell us that there are three mitzvos that particularly represent the great love *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* has for the Jewish people. “*Tefillin* on their heads and on their arms, *tzitzis* on the four corners of their garments, and a *mezuzah* on their doorways. Concerning these mitzvos, *David Hamelech* said ‘Seven times a day have praised You for Your righteous ordinances.’”

*Rashi* comments us that the seven mitzvos that *David Hamelech* alludes to are the two *tefillin* boxes, on the head and the arm, the four *tzitzis* fringes on the corner of the garment and the *mezuzah* on the door. Just as on a cold day one wraps himself with a warm coat, so too can we be insulated by these mitzvos and protected through them from the blandishments of the *yeitzer hara*. The spiritual advantages of these mitzvos are immense, and, indeed, *Chazal* inform us that “*Reb Elazar Ben Yaakov* said that whoever has *tefillin* on his head and on his arm, *tzitzis* on his garment, *mezuzos* on his doors, is assured that he will not sin, as it is stated, ‘And a three-ply cord is not easily severed.’”

Rabbi Becker is Associate Executive Director of Agudath Israel of America.

There is, however, one important caveat to all of the above. The *Gemora* (*Rosh Hashana* 19) tells us of the “*karkafta shelo manach tefillin*,” the head that was never crowned with *tefillin*. For *tefillin*, *mezuzos* and *sifrei Torah* to be effective, they must be kosher. To wear *tefillin* with the wrong number of *parshios* or that were made incorrectly, to affix to our doorpost a *mezuzah* that was written incorrectly, or to don *tzitzis* that do not have the right number of strings is not at all a fulfillment of the mitzvah in question.

To remedy this situation (as least as far as *tefillin* and *mezuzah* is concerned), an excellent new guide has been written by Rabbi Yerachmiel Askotsky of *Eretz Yisroel* entitled “*Tefillin and Mezuzos – A Pictorial Guide: a sefer* tells you how to choose, maintain and understand your *Tefillin, Mezuzos* and *Torah Scrolls*.” The author writes in his preface that the need for such a book was born of his first-hand experience of the dearth of consumer

savvy regarding mitzvah-items. It was written in consultation with many *sofrim*, *battim* professionals, wholesalers, retailers and *poskim*. Rabbi Askotsky writes, “It is my hope that by raising consumer awareness, Rabbis community leaders, layman and *bnei Torah* alike will demand higher standards for *STaM* (*Sifrei Torah Tefillin and Mezuzos*) and will impress upon family, friends, students and congregants to do the same. This pressure will arouse the *sofrim*, examiners and retailers to meet the demand effecting a higher standard in *STaM*.”

The book contains three sections. The first is a consumer’s guide to *STaM*; the second is a compendium of the basic *halachos*; and the third is a practical guide to wearing and caring for *mezuzos*, *tefillin* and *sifrei Torah*. It is lavishly illustrated to better convey what the author is writing about, facilitating its use as a resource. The *sefer* is written in a large type with a format that is easy on the eyes.

The consumer’s guide section provides an understanding of how *battim*, *retzuos*, and *parshios* are constructed and explains the appearance of the *battim*, their sewing and shape. It also describes how the *klafis* prepared for writing, and about the *tagim*, margins and other details. The second section, “The Requirements of a *Mezuzah*,” tells us all about the proper placement of a



SALOMON'S ESSENCE  
– REACHING FOR THE CLOUDS

To the Editor:

Having had articles on *tefilla* appear in two issues of JO earlier this year, I was particularly appreciative of Rabbi Yaakov Salomon's "Heavenly Prayer" (Oct. '04). Hopefully, others will be stirred to take the time to focus on and derive more inspiration from what they're saying. However, the article unintentionally may have given some readers the impression that *davening* at home is perfectly okay. While Rabbi Salomon *does* point out that *davening* in shul, "with its power of a *tzibbur*, has... clear-cut advantages," he casually refers to *davening* at home several times in the article as though it were a completely acceptable alternative to *davening* in shul. Rabbi Salomon doubtlessly was describing occasions of illness or other extenuating circumstances, but it would have been helpful if he had made it more clear. Again, a *yeyasher kochacha* to Rabbi Salomon for an uplifting article.

OVADYA HERTZBERG  
Jerusalem

MY POSEIK,  
HARAV TUVIA GOLDSTEIN זצ"ל

To the Editor:

As I read Mrs. Mermelstein's heartwarming article (May '04) about her father, the *Rosh Hayeshiva* זצ"ל, I began reminiscing about my own experiences with Rabbi Tuvia Goldstein. I vividly remember him saying, "How can you sleep at night with such a difficult *kashya* bothering you?" Or he would amusedly bless me after my persistent questioning, "*Du zolst lebben biz Moshiach!*" *Tzaddik gozeir veHakadosh Baruch Hu mekayeim* – I really believe that I am going to live until *Moshiach*, since I set a record for receiving the most *berachos* from the *Rosh Hayeshiva*, when I would ask him questions in the middle of his *shiur*. He would clearly enjoy the lively exchanges that would take place between the *talmidim* or *mispallelim* during his *halacha shiurim*. It was *taam Gan Eiden, mei'ein Olam*

*Habba* – an other-worldly delight – for him to debate in learning with his beloved *talmidim* and *baalei baattim*.

Mrs. Mermelstein mentioned how her father was called by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל to discuss an important decision about a kidney transplant. Reb Moshe apologized to the *Rosh Hayeshiva* for having possibly woken him up in the middle of the night. However, he had noticed a light on in his apartment, so he figured that he might be still up. Reb Tuvia said that any other person would not have hesitated to knock on anyone's door at that late hour with such an emergency *she'eila*, and yet, Reb Moshe still asked *mechilla* in case Reb Tuvia might have been sleeping.

The *Rosh Hayeshiva* enjoyed retelling how, when he was eating in the *sukka* together with Reb Moshe and his son-in-law, Rabbi Shisgal זצ"ל, the two were arguing about where a certain *Tosafos* was. Reb Tuvia sided with Rabbi Shisgal, and Reb Moshe seemed to be a little agitated. He was afraid that if he were starting to forget his learning, he could not go on *paskening she'eilos* for *Klal Yisroel*. He *bentched*, and left quickly to go up to his apartment in order to see where the *Tosafos* actually was. After discovering that he was right after all, he came back to the *sukka* to wish them a good *Yom Tov*, and wished them that "*der Eibershter zol aich bentchen az ihr zolt kein mol nisht fargessen!*"

The saddest time I ever saw the *Rosh Hayeshiva* was when I broke the tragic news to him that his beloved rebbi and *poseik hador*, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל, had been *niftar, zechuso yagein aleinu*. The happiest time I ever witnessed was when I gave him a new *sefer*, containing *Shiurim Kelalli'im* on *Chullin* from Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman, רה"ד, a *masechta* that Reb Tuvia remembered learning when he was in yeshiva in Baranovitch.

The last *Erev Shabbos* of his life, I visited him in the hospital, where he spoke to me in a very weak voice. To my surprise, he asked me to give him a *beracha*. I was completely caught off guard, and later regretted that I didn't wish him, "*Ihr zolt lebben biz Moshiach!*"

RABBI MOSHE SHOCHET  
Brooklyn, NY

*mezuzah*, what to do when moving, transferring, upgrading or reaffixing *mezuzos*, as well as the proper placement of *tefillin* and laws pertaining to the *retzuos*. The final section talks about the practicalities of buying *STaM*, having them checked, caring for *tefillin*, and tips about *mezuzah* and *sefer Torah* maintenance.

The importance of regularly checking one's *tefillin* and *mezuzos*, the author notes, becomes apparent after seeing how easily something can go wrong. There are 304,805 letters in a *sefer Torah*, 3,188 in a pair of *tefillin* and 713 in a *mezuzah*. If even one is missing or not written properly, the entire Torah, *tefillin* or *mezuzah* is *pasul*. "Keeping this in mind will certainly ensure that we are careful to choose the proper *sofer* and have our *STaM* properly examined."

A series of very useful appendices are added to the book. Essays from Rabbi Pesach Winston and Rabbi Yochanan Zweig provide important insights into the philosophical implications of *tefillin* and *mezuzos*. Finally, there is a very useful section to help one keep a record of when his *tefillin* were purchased and when they need checking, as well as a guide to adjusting the knots on the head *tefillin*.

Reading this book, I gained a far deeper understanding of the *halachos* and reasons for many of the things we do on a daily basis when we put on our *tefillin* or affix a *mezuzah* to our doors. As with everything in the Torah, the more we delve into the *halachos* and their meaning the greater our appreciation of commitment to proper fulfillment of the mitzvah.

*Tefillin and Mezuzos* is a highly useful guide for anyone who wishes to ensure that he will not be included in the category of *karkafta shelo monach tefillin* and lose the phenomenal *shmira* provided by the *mezuzah*. It strikes me that this would be a wonderful bar mitzvah present, not one to just end up gathering dust on a book shelf, but one that will actually be read and studied by the bar mitzvah boy, not to mention his father and his grandfather. ■