

# THE **Jewish** OBSERVER

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## ***Kiruv*** **Today in the USA**

Rabbi Yitzchok Lowenbraun  
Kenneth Chaim Brodo  
Chanan Gordon and Richard M. Horowitz

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE  
*ERETZ YISROEL:*  
*SHARING THE PAIN*

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*Cover Photo: A J.E.P. volunteer from Queens escorts two Jewish public school children to release-hour religious instruction.*

Photo Credit: Shimon Golding

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# Kiruv Today: Now or Never

**A report from the front lines of the struggle  
to save the majority of American Jews  
from being lost to Klal Yisroel**

## MEET THE BERNSTEINS

I'd like to introduce you to a young Jewish family, circa 2003. This is the family of Jeff and Bonnie Bernstein, and their two children. Jeff, forty years old, grew up in a suburb of Philadelphia. Jeff's family belonged to a Conservative Temple, though they only attended services on Yom Kippur, and usually on the first day of Rosh Hashana. Jeff's parents wanted him to be a proud Jew, so they sent him to Sunday school until he was eleven. The twice-a-week after-school Hebrew classes seemed to be more than what was necessary for a child's Jewish education, and besides, by the time sixth grade rolled around, Jeff had basketball practice after school. Jeff's father, Mort, is a successful attorney, an avid sports fan, and a voracious reader of the *Wall Street Journal*, who works out at the JCC. Jeff's parents hoped their son

would excel in athletics, attend an Ivy League school, have a distinguished career, and raise a nice family. For the most part, Jeff followed the plan, and it was at Yale that Jeff met Bonnie, his future wife.

Bonnie was active at the Hillel house on the Yale campus, and came from a family with a strong Jewish identity. Her father was a Federation board member, and had once been the president of their Reform Temple. Her mother was active in the Sisterhood. Bonnie's father was converted by the Temple rabbi a year after he and his wife were married. Everyone in Bonnie's family held their rabbi in the highest regard; she was not only a scholar, but someone who was deeply devoted to her congregants. Bonnie was a well-educated, proud, and active Jew—perhaps even a future communal leader.

Today, Jeff and Bonnie live in a beautiful home in the Cleveland suburb of Wandering Hills. They have two children – Adam, who is fourteen, and Sarah who is twelve. The public school

they attend is about thirty percent Jewish, and of the Jewish kids in the school, about half have one non-Jewish parent. Both children attend Sunday school, and both are members of the Temple youth group. The Rabbi said that Adam did a beautiful job at his Bar Mitzva; the theme of his party was football heroes. Sarah is looking forward to her Bat Mitzva when she turns thirteen, and already knows her *Haftora* by heart. The theme of her Bat Mitzva party will be Harry Potter.

Without a doubt, Jeff and Bonnie's parents have all the *nachas* Jewish parents and grandparents could hope for, but here's the real question: Jeff and Bonnie's parents are thrilled. Are you? Ask yourself: what are the chances that Jeff and Bonnie will keep *Shabbos* – even once? For that matter, what are the chances that they will ever be invited to a *frum* home for a *Shabbos* meal – even once? What are the chances that they will ever keep *taharas hamishpacha*, or fast on Tisha B'av? What are the chances their children will marry Jews?

Rabbi Lowenbraun is the National Director of The Association for Jewish Outreach Programs (AJOP).

## HOW MANY JEWS WILL GREET MOSHIACH?

**W**e all believe in *biyas haMoshiach* – the ultimate coming of the Messiah – bringing an end to this long, dark *galus*. The question is this: Of the Jews who are alive today, how many will have the privilege to still be a part of *Klal Yisroel* when the *Geula* comes, and how many will be left behind in the spiritual wasteland of history?

The word “crisis” has been used for some time now by people from various circles and perspectives when looking at American Jewry. As someone who is in touch with hundreds of people working in all areas of *kiruv* across America, there is no question in my mind that we are not dealing with a potential crisis, a looming crisis, or an imminent crisis, but rather, a tidal wave of crisis that has already crashed down all around us. I have little doubt that seven out of ten Jews who marry in America, marry non-Jews, and that, *b’derech ha-teva* – in the normal course of events – the vast majority of American Jews will be forever lost to the oblivion of assimilation. Without a seismic change in the course of events, America is destined to become not only the final resting-place for millions of Jewish bodies, but also a vast spiritual graveyard for millions of Jewish *neshamos*. This is not what I think *may* happen, but this is exactly what is taking place at an ever-quickenning pace, and with each passing day. And so, I believe that with regards to American Jewry, the all-too-horrific question has become: *Must we just do whatever we can to grab a few life preservers for ourselves and our families while a huge ship filled with millions of Jews goes under? Or is it still possible to right the vessel of American Jewry, and enable not just five or ten percent to be a part of the Jewish future, but sixty, seventy, or even a hundred percent?*

### KIRUV: A DECADE OF SUCCESS

**T**hough there are no definitive statistics, one can safely say that since 1990, 20-30,000 Jews in America

who were not raised in *Shomer Shabbos* homes have become *Shomer Shabbos*. Beyond their own personal commitment to a life of *mitzvos*, it’s hard to find an Orthodox *shul* or school today that does not have numerous *baalei teshuva* among its active congregants. Additionally, in day schools across the country, there are many wonderful *rebbe'im* and *moros* who were not raised in Orthodox homes, not to mention the dozens of *baalei teshuva* who are deeply

■

If this were a state of the union address, I would have to say, *Baruch Hashem*, the state of *kiruv* is strong. Unfortunately, the bigger and truer picture is one of a very dark cloud with just the slightest bit of silver lining.

■

involved in *kiruv*. From national *kiruv* organizations like Ohr Somayach, Aish HaTorah, NCSY, JEP, NJOP, Gateways, and Partners in Torah, to numerous local organizations like the Jewish Learning Connection in Cleveland, Etz Chaim in Baltimore, Machon L'Torah in Detroit, JLE and Ashreinu in Los Angeles, the Jewish Renaissance Center in New York, and many, many others, a devoted cadre of *kiruv-mechanchim* are having a dramatic impact on thousands of lives.

In addition to those who have become *shomer mitzvos*, 2-300,000 have been touched in various ways by these

devoted *mekarvim* (outreach activists). They have attended classes, *Shabbatonim*, beginners' *minyanim*, Hebrew-reading crash courses, seminars, and have been hosted by *frum* families for *Shabbos* meals. Many are now self-motivated to continue regular Torah learning, thousands have kashered their homes, many regularly have some type of a Friday night *Shabbos* meal in their homes—homes that had never before even heard of *Kiddush*—and many are now committed to only marrying a Jew, and to giving their children a Jewish education.

Today, in cities like Cincinnati, Memphis, Columbus, Dallas, Palo Alto, Houston, Phoenix, Milwaukee, Vancouver, and others, there are over forty *kollelim* that have *kiruv* as a significant aspect of their mandate. A decade or so ago, there were only a handful. In Denver, LaJolla, Toronto, Atlanta, Baltimore, Norfolk, and elsewhere, there are *shuls* that are structured specifically as *kiruv-oriented shuls*. Even in Las Vegas, the board of Young Israel has made *kiruv* one of its central focuses. Gateways and Discovery regularly attract hundreds to their seminars that address *ikkarim* (basic principles of faith) like *Torah Min Hashamayim*. Over a hundred Lakewood *avreichim* (married scholars) are learning with non-*frum* Jews through the Geshet program, and Partners in Torah has over two thousand sets of *chavrusa* learning all across the country. In addition to all this, *Ner L'elef* is training hundreds of *kollel yungeleit* in *Eretz Yisroel* to do *kiruv* in America and around the world, while Aish HaTorah is making its expertise available to outreach *kollelim*, and others.

If this were a state of the union address, I would have to say, *Baruch Hashem*, the state of *kiruv* is strong. *Kiruv* has grown to the point where hundreds of devoted, and highly skilled and professional *kiruv* workers are reaching, and having impact on thousands and thousands of *Acheinu Beis Yisroel* who otherwise would have virtually no chance of being part of the ultimate destiny of *Klal Yisroel*.

AND NOW FOR THE BAD NEWS

Everything that I just said is true, and then some. Unfortunately, the bigger and truer picture is one of a very dark cloud with just the slightest bit of silver lining. Consider the following: According to the recently released American Jewish Identity Survey, over the last decade, 775,000 Jews in America have converted, and adopted other religions.<sup>1</sup> Did that number register? Seven hundred and seventy-five thousand!! Also in the last decade, the

number of Jews who practice Buddhism, while at the same time maintaining “strong Jewish identities,” has become so large that a whole new term has been coined—Bu-Jews! In addition, there are 1,400,000 other Jews who identify themselves as Jewish, but who also say that they don’t have *any religion at all!*<sup>2</sup> Not Catholicism, not Humanistic Judaism, not Bu-Jew Judaism. Nothing!

There is a story told about how the Chofetz Chaim fainted the first time he saw a Jew being *mechalleh Shabbos* (desecrate the Sabbath). Today, we are vast-

ly outnumbered by Jews who have never even heard of *Shabbos*, and who go through their entire lives without ever sitting down to a kosher meal. What was once heartbreaking to so many *ehrlicha* (observant) *Yidden* has become accepted as a fact-of-life about which little can be done.

The same is now the case with intermarriage. The most accurate numbers we have measuring intermarriage<sup>3</sup> say that between five and six of every ten Jews who marry, marry a non-Jew. When you consider the fact that these numbers are almost fifteen years old, and that they don’t consider a marriage in which one of the spouses had a non-halachic conversion to be an intermarriage, then—as they say—you do the math. In Norfolk, Virginia, according to a Federation study, despite a 63% affiliation rate, intermarriage is 90%. This past June, a major study of incoming college freshman in America was released.<sup>4</sup> I spoke with the author of the study, and she was confident that 40% of incoming Jewish college freshman in America today have only one Jewish parent. And again, that includes halachically non-Jewish “Jewish” parents.

This fall, the *Baltimore Jewish Times* ran a cover story that captured how completely normative intermarriage is today. The cover of the newspaper had a photo of a young couple with the caption, “Should a love of one’s Judaism be shared with a non-Jewish partner?” Think about those words. They are saying that people today do not consider a love of Judaism and intermarriage to be contradictory. “What’s the problem?” people genuinely ask. “Why can’t you be married to a non-Jew and still have a strong Jewish identity, still love your Judaism?” Everyone in *kiruv* will tell you, most Jews today do not have the faintest idea why they should only consider Jews as potential spouses for themselves, or their children; even Jews who strongly identify as Jews do not see intermarriage as being at odds with their Judaism.

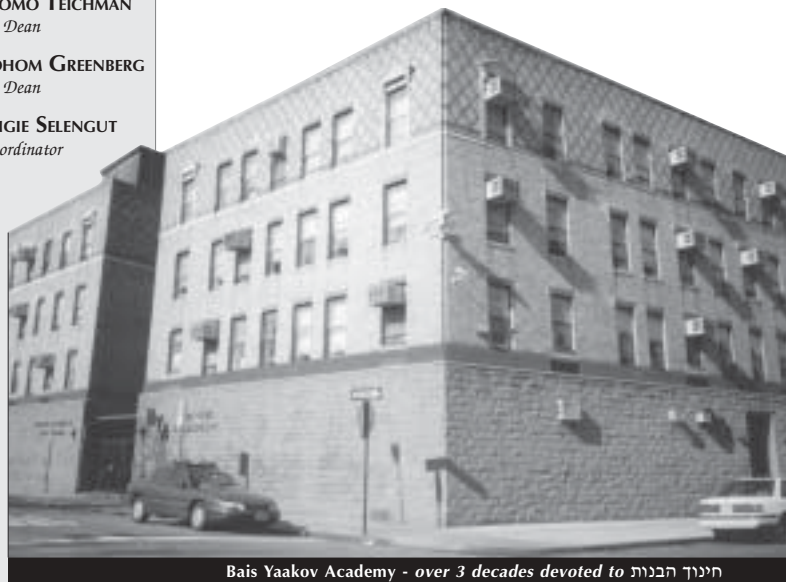
Bottom line? Though the men and women who have devoted themselves to *kiruv* across the country are getting more and more life preservers to more and

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more individuals, whole decks of Jewish passengers are being washed away, while the ship seems to be listing hopelessly in the cold waters of a very warm *galus* called America.

#### KIRUV AND BOBOV

To my mind, the greatest *mekarev* (outreach activist) I have ever met was the previous Bobover Rebbe זצ"ל. I believe that he also provides us with a model for how *Klal Yisroel* is capable of confronting the ominous specter of a sinking ship.

The Bobov that I grew up in is part of the post-World War II American saga that grew out of the ashes of the European *Churban*. When I started first grade in the Bobover Yeshiva Bnai Tzion in Crown Heights, there were at most seventy students in the Yeshiva. That was a time when the viability of Torah Judaism on the shores of America seemed anything but a sure thing. The *Zeitgeist* was that of the great "melting pot"; cultural diversity and ethnic pride were considered anti-American. "Fitting in" was the order of the day. Couple that with the unspoken, yet all-pervasive sense of catastrophic loss, along with the struggle to eke out a living in a strange new environment that was often hostile to *Shomer Shabbos* employees, and the prospects for a Torah community in America seemed unlikely indeed.

Yet, despite what seemed to be daunting odds—in fact, what many considered to be impossible odds—all you have to do is look at Bobov, or any other part of the Orthodox community today, to know that when it comes to Torah, and *Klal Yisroel*, there is no such thing as impossible odds. Samuel G. Freedman, an associate dean of the Columbia University School of Journalism and author of *Jew vs. Jew: The Struggle for the Soul of American Jewry*, recently wrote, "While the Orthodox comprise less than one-tenth of the American Jewish population, they cast a disproportionate and largely positive influence on what is otherwise a community beset by intermarriage, assim-

## The *Mitzrayim* Template

**C**hazal tell us that the experience of *Galus Mitzrayim* (the exile in Egypt) is a spiritual template for understanding both our current *galus*, and the *geula* (redemption) we all long for. In terms of American Jewry, still the largest community of Jews in the world, I believe that the *Mitzrayim* experience has a great deal to say to us about our current situation, and contains profound implications for how we relate to *kiruv*.

When Yaakov Avinu was on his way to *Mitzrayim*, Hashem appeared to him and said, "Do not be afraid of descending to Egypt for I will make you into a great nation there. I will descend with you into Egypt, and it is certain that I will also bring you up...." The *Netziv*<sup>i</sup> explains that Yaakov was afraid that his family would become assimilated into the Egyptian population. And so, Hashem promised Yaakov, "*Ki l'goi gadol a'simcha sham*," that the Jews would not only maintain their distinct identity, but they would become a great nation, and eventually leave *Mitzrayim* on an even loftier *madreiga* (stratum) than when they arrived<sup>ii</sup>. Clearly, this reassuring *havtacha* (vow) addressed the heart of Yaakov's concern. There seems, however, to be a troubling dissonance between this promise, and what actually happened to the Jews in *Mitzrayim*.

In *Mitzrayim*, Jews could be found attending all the cultural events of the day<sup>iii</sup>, stopped the practice of *bris milla* in order to be indistinguishable from their Egyptian neighbors<sup>iv</sup>, and fell as far as one can into the world of *tuma* (depravity) – to the "forty-ninth gate of *tuma*." Then, when the time for *geula* finally arrived, only twenty percent of the people were redeemed<sup>v</sup> while the remaining eighty-percent died during *makkos choshech* (the Plague of Darkness), and were severed from the future of *Klal Yisroel*. As sweet as *Yetzias Mitzrayim* was, it was also bittersweet for so many Jewish *neshamos*; so many *doros* (generations) of Jewish children, and grandchildren; so many future *tzaddikim* and *tzidkanios*—so much potential—was lost forever.

In light of this bittersweet nature of *Geulas Mitzrayim*, one can't help but ask, "What happened to Hashem's promises to Yaakov?" It is to this question that the *Netziv*<sup>vi</sup> gives an answer that contains a chilling message for our time. Hashem's promise that *Klal Yisroel* would not assimilate in *Mitzrayim* was ironclad; nonetheless, it still remained a matter of *bechira* (free choice) for each individual Jew whether or not to assimilate. *Geula* was a promise, but who and how many would ultimately be a part of that *geula* was an entirely different matter. ■

<sup>i</sup> *Ha'emek Davar, Bereishis 46,3*

<sup>ii</sup> *Ha'emek Davar, Bereishis 46,4*

<sup>iii</sup> *Tanchuma, Shemos 1,7*

<sup>iv</sup> *Rashi, Shemos*

<sup>v</sup> *Shemos Rabba 81*

<sup>vi</sup> *Ha'emek Davar, Bereishis 46,4 / Shemos 3,14*

ilation, and the erosion of what was a once-vibrant style of secular, cultural Jewish identity. More than any other part of Judaism, Orthodoxy has met the challenge of modernity, sustaining meaningful communal life in an age of atomized individuality."<sup>5</sup>

The Bobover Rebbe זצ"ל, and those of his era, were *zocheh* to see their enormous *hishtadlus* (efforts), coupled with endless *siyata d'Shmaya* (Heavenly assistance), produce miraculous fruits.

#### KIRUV: TIME FOR ANOTHER MIRACLE

I believe that the Torah community in America possesses the potential for actualizing a second miracle on the shores of this great land, and that the essential ingredients that drove the Bobover *Rebbe*, and others, are precisely the ingredients that are again required. They are: *Ahavas* (love of...) Hashem, *Ahavas HaTorah*, and *Ahavas Yisroel*. My *Rebbe* was successful because

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his *Ahavas Hashem* was what the *Rambam* describes in the *Sefer Hamitzvos*, namely, "Included in genuine *Ahavas Hashem* is the fact that such a person will call out to others to come and serve *Hashem*..." There simply is no more meaningful way to express one's love of *Hashem* than to draw others to partake in that same relationship, that same love—which brings us to *Ahavas HaTorah*.

Again, in the *Sefer Hamitzvos* on *Ahavas Hashem*, the *Rambam* brings the well-known *Chazal* that Talmud Torah is the vehicle *par excellence* for bringing a Jew to *Ahavas Hashem*. Those who built the Torah community in America knew well that, for a Jew, Torah, and only Torah, is the *sam ha'chayim*, the elixir of life, and only Torah, has the ability to breathe life into a lifeless community.

And then there is *Ahavas Yisroel*. To me, the *Bobover Rebbe* was a *Gaon* in *Ahavas Yisroel*. Any and every Jew, regardless of background, affiliation, age, or level of observance knew that when he was with the *Rebbe*, he was with someone who genuinely, and unconditionally loved him. *Ahavas Yisroel* is both a driving force behind *kiruv*—it is *why* we so deeply want to share the rich beauty of *Yiddishkeit* with our fellow Jews—and it is also critical to success in *kiruv*. When people know that you are teaching them, and trying to reach them because you care about them—and love them like the brothers and sisters that they are—then they will naturally be open to what you have to say.

Today in America, it seems that we are

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staring into a *Mitzrayim*-like *galus*, (see Sidebar on page seven) a *galus* that we know will eventually culminate in a magnificent *geula*, but that in all likelihood will end with only a tiny fraction of American Jews being a part of it. If things continue as they are in the Jewish world, at least 90% of *Hashem's* children will be lost.

There is, however, another possibility. If you ask people in *kiruv* why the great successes they are achieving pale in comparison to the numbers of Jews that are literally disappearing before our eyes, their answer will always be the same—manpower. Four or five or six hundred people in *kiruv* simply can not reach four or five or six million Jews. All of us in *kiruv*, however, are convinced that if the thousands, and tens of thousands of *frum* Jews would join in the battle to save the other 90% of American Jews, then we could actually save not only individuals, but the whole sinking ship. This does not mean that everyone has to drop what they are doing and devote themselves full time to *kiruv*, but it does mean that each of us must resolve never to let

an opportunity for *kiruv* slip through our fingers. I would like to suggest that, at the very least, we view every encounter with a non-*frum* Jew as a moment of clear *Hashgacha Prattis*. We need to view our meetings with our fellow Jews, wherever they may occur, as meetings arranged by *Hashem* Himself. And we need to be prepared for those meetings. You may not be trained in *kiruv per se*, but that doesn't mean that you can't invite someone for a *Shabbos* meal, or for a *Chol Hamoed* visit to your *Succa*. It does not mean that you can't tell them about a *kiruv* organization in your area, or give them a *kiruv*-oriented book as a kind gesture or volunteer for Partners in Torah. And it certainly does not mean that you cannot look at the Jews you meet as long-lost family members, and find a way—any way—to develop a genuine friendship.

Like *Yaakov Avinu*, we have a *havtacha* (assurance) from *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*. One day, *Hashem* will redeem the family of Israel; that's a promise. How many Jews will be left in that family when the day arrives? That's another question entirely.

Will there just be bits and pieces of the family left, or will it be all of us? If *Galus Mitzrayim* is the template for our *galus*, then we must know that while *geula* is in *Hashem's* hands, the question of who and how many will be left to experience the *geula*, that is very much in our hands. There is no way any one of us should sleep comfortably in view of this pending spiritual tragedy of colossal proportions, unless we—each of us—make reaching out to others a matter of personal priority.

May we be *zocheh*, together with all—all—of *Acheinu Bnai Yisroel*, to be *mekabel Moshiaich tzidkaynu bimheira veyomeinu*. ■

<sup>1</sup> The American Jewish Identity Survey was directed and authored by Egon Mayer, director of the Center for Jewish Studies at the City University of New York's Graduate Center.

<sup>2</sup> The American Jewish Identity Survey.

<sup>3</sup> The 1990 National Jewish Population Study reported a 52% rate of intermarriage.

<sup>4</sup> *America's Jewish Freshman*: A study sponsored by Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, and conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute of UCLA.

<sup>5</sup> *The Jerusalem Report*, Dec. 16, '02

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# How Many Orthodox Jews Can There Be?

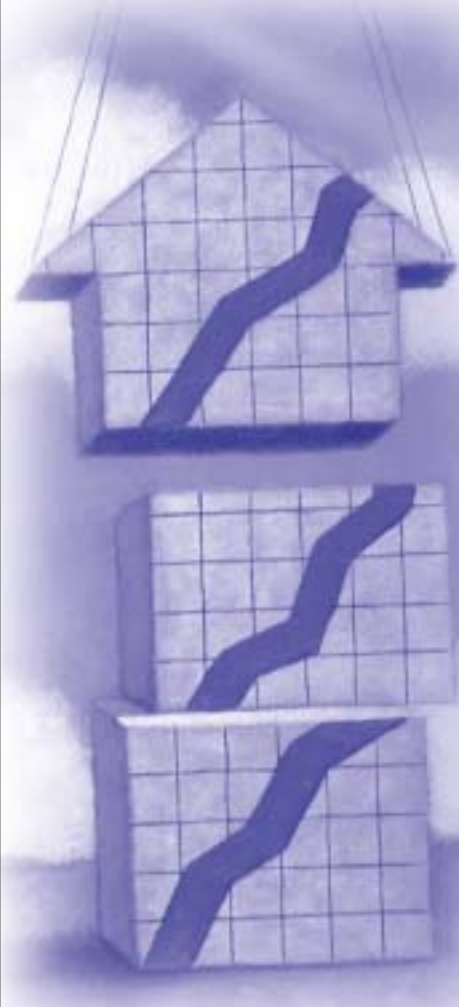
The article by Rabbi Moredechai Plaut in the November edition of *The Jewish Observer* served as a catalyst for us to highlight some important points relating to Jewish demographics generally, and specifically to what we, as Torah observant Jews, can do to have a positive impact in answering the question posed by Rabbi Plaut i.e. *How Many American Jews Are There?*

We all know the oft cited *Gemora (Avoda Zora)* that states, “*Kol bi’yedei Shamayim chutz mitsinim u’pacham...* – Everything is in G-d’s hands, except for colds and fevers.” Among the many interpretations of this rabbinical statement, is a fundamental truism that basically everything is controlled, monitored and overseen by the Almighty. Nevertheless, we can be blamed for our negligence or lack of common sense, and cannot vindicate our responsibilities by declaring the battle cry of the naysayer that “It’s all up to Him anyway. What

Chanan (Antony) Gordon is a Sir Abe Bailey Scholar (1988), Fulbright Scholar (1989), and graduate of Harvard Law School (1990). Mr. Gordon has co-authored and authored several articles in the *JO* including “Numbers Speak Louder Than Words” (1997) and “From Harvard To Har Nof” (1998). Together with Richard M. Horowitz, Mr. Gordon co-authored, “Will Your Grandchild Be Jewish?,” which included the oft-cited demographic chart illustrating the consequences of people’s affiliation to the various denominations, three generations henceforth. That article has been translated in whole/part into over five languages, and has appeared in numerous publications word wide. Mr. Gordon is involved in numerous outreach projects including being the co-founder of Partners In Torah (Los Angeles) and the producer of the annual *Yom Iyun* in LA. He is a *Managing Director* of a boutique merchant and investment bank in Beverly Hills.

Richard M. Horowitz graduated with an MBA from Pepperdine University. Mr. Horowitz is the President of Management Brokers Insurance Agency, Leviathan Computers and Dial 800 L.P. He is also President of *Aish Hatorah* for North America and is extensively involved with outreach and Jewish education. Together with Mr. Gordon, Mr. Horowitz co-authored “Will Your Grandchild Be Jewish?” as well as “Numbers Speak Louder Than Words,” which appeared in the *JO* (1997).

good can my little effort make?” Simply put, we are expected to use our common sense and make a pro-active *hishtadlus* (effort). Just as it would be unconscionable to walk outside with a thin



T-shirt in sub-zero temperatures, and then look Heavenward when one finds oneself nursing a cold, similarly we cannot shrug our shoulders with inertia and then wonder why 49% of 5.5 million American Jews do not identify themselves as Jews religiously.<sup>1</sup>

## FACTORS IN POPULATION GROWTH

Before translating this philosophical maxim into the demographic realities of contemporary Amer-

ica, a few preliminary comments should be made:

The number of “card-carrying members” of the Orthodox denomination in America in the future will be dependent largely on four variables: (i) the percentage of those who marry, as well as their age at the time of the marriage, (ii) family size, (iii) stemming the tied of hemorrhaging in our own ranks, and (iv) the success of the *baal teshuva* movement.

As to point (i), our research has indicated that intermarriage amongst the Orthodox denomination is not statistically significant,<sup>2</sup> and even the rate of intermarriage of those raised Orthodox, but who *lo aleinu* leave the fold, seems to be less than 10%. On the other hand, unfortunately, over the past 20 years, the number of Orthodox Jews who never get married לְרַב has been slowly rising, as has the average category age of Orthodox couples at their time of marriage. Point (ii) falls largely into the category of *kol bi’yedei Shamayim* (in the Hands of Heaven)<sup>3</sup>. Regarding point (iii), there have been a plethora of articles from writers more qualified than the authors discussing the proverbial “kids at risk” issues. Accordingly, we would like to focus the reader’s attention on point (iv) above, i.e. the success of the *baal teshuva* movement.

According to the raw data gathered from the National Jewish Population Study of 1990<sup>4</sup>, between 25% to 30% of the growth in the Orthodox denomi-

<sup>1</sup> Center for Jewish Studies at the CUNY Graduate Center, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Extrapolating from the raw data supplied by the *North American Jewish Data Bank* obtained during the NJPS 1990, we used a 3% intermarriage rate in the Orthodox denomination.

<sup>3</sup> The fact that the average family size in the Orthodox community in Israel is higher than their counterparts in America would seem noteworthy.

<sup>4</sup> At this time, detailed findings and the raw data of the NJPS 2000-2001 have not yet been released. Nevertheless, the information that has been released to date indicates that the facts outlined in this article will be borne out by the detailed findings of the NJPS 2000-2001.

nation in the core age cohort between 18 to 30 is directly attributed to *baalei teshuva* and children of *baalei teshuva*. The exponential “dividends” from a pure demographic point of view of a single Jew recommitting himself or herself to a Torah life is statistically significant. By virtue of the fact that the Orthodox denomination is the only group that has a negligible intermarriage rate and, in addition, is the only denomination that exceeds the ZPG (zero population growth) threshold<sup>5</sup>, the compounding effect of introducing “new Orthodox *neshamos*” into the fold is profound.

There are many observations and “post publication” analyses that we have been involved in since our multi-generational chart, entitled “Will Your Grandchild Be Jewish?” was first published<sup>6</sup>. Couched in the negative, it is obviously shocking to note that of every 1000 non-Orthodox Jewish children today, there will be only 150 Jewish descendants in three generations. Tragically, this 15% survival rate is allowing for a non-halachic definition of “converts” as well as factoring in patrilineal descent. On a more positive note for future projections is the ability to increase the so-called “interdenominational shift” through *kiruv rechokim* – outreach.

#### THE OUTREACH IMPERATIVE: ITS DIMENSIONS

The importance of prioritizing *kiruv rechokim* in these auspicious times has been underscored by many of our *Gedolim*. So much so that the Rosh Agudath Israel, the Noviminsker *Rebbe*, has gone on record to note that “this (*kiruv rechokim*) is, I believe, the underlying mission of our generation.”<sup>7</sup> In a recent meeting with Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe שליט”א Vaad, Rabbi Wolbe noted that “...reaching out to others who are not yet observant is very important ... it is a great obligation for all Jews! Clearly, not just *avreichim* learning in *Kollel* should be doing this. Working people who keep Torah and the commandments must also spend time bringing close people who

are more distant from observance.”<sup>8</sup>

There are various divergent approaches to *kiruv*. We have both had interaction with many of the different *kiruv* movements ... Aish Hatorah, Arachim, Lev L’achim, Ohr Somayach, Mechon Shlomo, Shapell’s, Dvar, Ner L’Elef etc. One of the clear conclusions that can be made is that “lost souls” are not of one genre. What works for one type of person may not work for another.

*The purpose of this article is not to debate the approaches to kiruv but rather to underscore the demographic realities of facilitating a fellow Jew’s journey back into the so-called Orthodox fold.* All of our research points to one clear conclusion: Ensuring Jewish continuity can only be achieved by assisting a person to make the “interdenominational shift” into the Orthodox camp, which can, as a general rule, ensure that such a person will have not only Jewish great-grandchildren, but – chances are – Torah-observant Jewish great-grandchildren.

This truism does not hold for people who do make a shift closer to our heritage, but fall short of embracing a true Torah lifestyle. To be more specific, we have seen no research that would indicate that so-called secular Jews who become members of the Reform or Conservative denomination increase their odds in any real statistical way of having recognizable Jewish great-grandchildren three generations henceforth.

*In other words, for one couple to embrace a true Torah lifestyle will likely have more profound dividends for the Jewish people demographically than twenty couples whose interdenomina-*

<sup>5</sup> Only the Orthodox denomination has an average family size greater than 2.2, the national zero population growth (“ZPG”) rate. Amongst the non-Orthodox denominations, the average number of children per household is 1.72.

<sup>6</sup> See JO, May ’97. The article was first published in *Jewish Spectator* (Fall ’96) and *Moment* magazine (Dec. ’96).

<sup>7</sup> November 6, ’01, addressing an AJOP Conference.

<sup>8</sup> Notes from Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe שליט”א’s Vaad, December 11, ’02, Jerusalem.

*tional shift stops at the so-called Conservative column.*

The consequences of this observation is extremely important in terms of investing resources, both in terms of money and time, for the future of the Jewish people.

We would be remiss if we did not note that even amongst our own *daled amos*, *kiruv lekrovim* programs that encourage the correct questions to be asked in *hashkafa* and the like, such as Aish Hatorah’s Project Chazon, has had tremendous success in 159 *yeshivos* and Beis Yaakovs over the past four years. Over 535 programs run by Project Chazon, which has been shown to reinforce students’ commitments to Torah and *mitzvos*, have touched over 45,000 Orthodox high school children.

There are 24 *pesukim* in the Torah that explicitly state that the Jewish People will never disappear. The only question that remains is whether the reader wants to be part of the solution. ■

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# Breaking Down the Walls

On a hot June day in 1944, my mother dragged her starving and emaciated body toward one of the many electrified fences in Auschwitz. A lifetime ago, it seemed, she and her family had stood face to face with Mengele, *yemach sh'mo v'zichro le'olam*. His cursed finger had pointed my mother's family to the left and to death. She had been sent to the right, to slave labor and, *bechadsai Shamayim*, to life. Now, on this hot and soul-numbing June day, she found herself near one of the fences dividing two parts of the Auschwitz camp, longing to be with her family, yet still clinging to life.

A girl standing on the other side of the fence noticed her and called out in Czech.

Turning her head, my mother saw a young girl of about 16 who stood shivering in fear and quaking from emotion. "Please, tell me, do you speak Czech or German?" the girl asked.

"I speak Czech," my mother answered.

"And are you Jewish?" the young girl asked.

"Yes, of course I am," my mother replied.

Mrs. Friedman lives with her husband and ten children in Kiryat Kaminetz, which is in Neve Yaakov, Jerusalem. She teaches in the Bais Yaakov Tiferes Rivka High School, located in the same neighborhood. Her article, "Kiddush Hashem? That's Easy!" appeared in JO Dec. '01.

"Do you, perhaps, also know how to pray?" the girl continued.

"Certainly, but why are you asking all these questions?" asked my mother.

Visibly relieved, the girl explained: "I heard that we are being taken to the gas chambers tonight. I'm Jewish but I was never taught how to pray. I am terrified. If this camp is empty tomorrow morning, you will know that I'm no longer alive. If that happens, please pray for my soul. My name is Anichka."

Her heart breaking for this child just three years younger than herself, my mother reassured her and promised that should Anichka's camp be empty, she would *daven* for her.

The next day, the camp on the other side of the fence was eerily, irrevocably silent. Not one person remained. My mother tearfully fulfilled young Anichka's last request. Though Anichka had no idea how to pray, she knew that a Jewish soul is eternally linked to the concept of *tefilla*, and perhaps she went somewhat "easier" to her death knowing that her *Yiddishe neshama* would indeed be prayed for.

\*\*\*

In the "Peace for Galilee" campaign in 1980, Israel sent forces into Lebanon to destroy the terrorist infrastructure there. One soldier from

the anti-religious Hashomer Hatzair movement found himself serving in a tank unit together with religious soldiers. War being war, one's likes, dislikes and religious affiliations become irrelevant in the body of a two-ton moving piece of metal – a prime target for enemy fire.

The soldier and his comrades-in-arms moved deeper into enemy territory, encapsulated in their tank. Too late, it became obvious that they were sitting ducks for terrorists who were just waiting for an Israeli tank to approach their position. As the soldiers desperately attempted to avert the ambush, the religious crew members started *davening* and saying *Tehillim* out loud, begging *Hashem* for salvation. Terrorist shells flew at them from all sides. It would be only seconds before one would make a direct hit and finish off the tank and its crew.

In the midst of the deafening noise that resulted from the tank's mechanical apparatus, the shrieking shells and the crying soldiers, a soul-wrenching scream was heard: "*Shema Yisroel!* I don't know the rest! *Shema Yisroel!* I don't know the rest!"

And moments later, an enormous "hook" from the Israeli side caught the trapped tank and yanked it to safety.

I wasn't there, but I get the chills when I think of the helplessness of that

irreligious soldier whose ideology prevented him from knowing the words that should be etched in the heart of every Jew. And I get even more chills when I think of the power of the *Yiddische neshama* latching onto *tefilla* when one's back is against the wall ... even if he doesn't know the words.

\*\*\*

Colonel Dror Weinberg, **ד"ר**, was one of the first casualties in the Friday-night Hebron massacre that took place not long ago. As *mispallelim* made their way home after praying at the *Me'aras Hamachpeila* (Tomb of Patriarchs) Palestinian gunmen lured the guards who protected them into an ambush. Israeli army personnel and home guard civilians ran to return fire and were also trapped by terrorist fire.

Colonel Weinberg, a much beloved and respected officer, was one of the first to arrive and, sorrowfully, one of the first to be murdered. As other soldiers rushed to pull his body out of the firing range, his medic, an irreligious Jew, cried bitterly to another man on the emergency staff: "You're religious! Let's say something so that G-d won't take Dror! Tell me what to say! Please, tell me what to say!"

The heart twists inside at the desperation of this soldier who loved his commanding officer so much, but could only cry and beg another Jew to tell him how to talk to *Hashem* because he didn't know how. And yet ... he did know enough to ask.

\*\*\*

No matter how far a *Yiddische neshama* strays from its Source, when push comes to shove, a Jew knows that *davening* does something. Somehow, a Jew in desperate straits instinctively reaches out to his Father in Heaven instead of looking for other avenues of salvation.

It is perhaps stories and thoughts like these that keep me calm as I live and raise my family in Yerushalayim. Having lived in *Eretz Yisroel* for the past 25 years, through the Gulf War, the constant terrorist threats, the suicide bombing attacks, **ל"ג** and the very real possibility of yet another war, *chas v'shalom*, I am calmed by the knowledge that not only do I know how to *daven* with all my heart and strength; my brothers and sisters who have strayed very far from "home" also know they must call out so our *Tatteh* (Father) will answer: "Here I am, *kinderlach!* Come home!"

Terrorism's threat is no longer confined to *Eretz Yisroel*. Around the world, our people face dangers they have never known before. Our Father in Heaven is present in every place, in every crisis, waiting for us to turn to Him with heartfelt *tefilla*. We who know the power of *tefilla* must grab onto its hammering strength and break down the walls that separate us from *Hashem* and His loving embrace, so that day may come when everyone acknowledges that there is no one to rely on but *Avinu She'baShamayim*. ■

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# A Modest Proposal

## Merits Great And Small

It is a powerful tribute to *Klal Yisroel* in these trying times that so many Jews are so ardently seeking ways to merit the safety of our brothers and sisters in *Eretz Yisroel* and around the world. The scourge of hatred for Jews and the murderous determination of so many to prevent us from living in peace on our ancestral land have evoked an equal and opposite determination on the part of the *Am Hashem* to earn His protection.

Many of the efforts we can effectively make have been delineated by our *Gedolim* and *Rabbanim* who have addressed us over the past many months. And our *tefillos* can be more heartfelt, our Torah-study can be intensified, our acts of *chesed* increased; we can better demonstrate honor for our places of Torah and *tefilla*, and for each other; we can wean ourselves from our addictions to luxuries; and we can empathize with our fellow Jews in deeper, more heartfelt ways.

And then there are smaller *zechuyos* (sources of merit) that many have undertaken, from special care in particular *mitzvos* to expressions of anguish in the form of personal acts of self-deprivation.

The path to a goal, though, is often multifaceted; and when it is, reaching the end-point entails what the *Ramch"al*, in *Mesillas Yesharim*, calls "*kibbutz kol ha'emtzo'iyos* – accessing all of the various means," the seemingly less signifi-

Rabbi Shafran serves as Agudath Israel of America's Director of Public Affairs and as the American director of Am Echad, the Agudath Israel-inspired educational outreach effort and media resource.

cant ones no less than those that are more obvious.

It is in that spirit that I offer a small idea for consideration by anyone with whom it may happen to resonate.

## Appreciating The Words We Have

Suggestions have been made to incorporate new *tefillos* or *Mi Sheberachs* into our *seder haTefilla*. Some feel that a special acknowledgment of the Israel Defense Forces is proper; others, that those who are

immersed in Torah study should be recognized with special mention; others still, that Jews in particularly dangerous areas of *Eretz Yisroel* should be a particular focus during the course of our *davening*, not only in personal *tefillos* – when we are always free to express what our hearts feel – but in some public way during *tefillas tzibbur*.

Rabbi Yitzchok Frankel, the *Rav* of Agudath Israel of Cedarhurst, told me that he responded to a request by some of his congregants for the institution of a special *Mi Sheberach* by pointing out

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to them that it might be preferable to better utilize the *tefillos* we already have than to endeavor to add new ones. The *Tachanun* we recite on Mondays and Thursdays, he cited as an example, is replete with references to *Eretz Yisroel* and Jewish suffering, yet if there has been any campaign to embrace that *tefilla* with more deliberation or intensified *kavvana*, it has not been widely evident.

I thought it was a very worthy thought, and it led me to consider another neglected, and quite prominent, part of our *seder hatefilla*.

### The Defense is Overruled

Until one of my daughters shared her personal exasperation over the fact, I had thought that I was perhaps the only person who had found it impossible to complete "*Aleinu*" in *shul* in the time allotted by the *ba'al tefilla*. Granted, one can always complete the *tefilla* after the *Kaddish* that generally follows it, but what most often happens instead is that, at least for most people, "*Aleinu*" – or at least its second paragraph, "*Al Kein*" – is effectively oblit-

erated (or at least mercilessly shrunk).

The problem seems to exist in a variety of *shuls* and *minyanim*, both on weekdays and on *Shabbos*, and it seems to have no connection to any particular *nusach* or to the sort of headcovering the men present wear. For some reason, *kavana* in the words of "*Al Kein*" – indeed its very recitation, to a large degree – seems to have fallen into a *beis haknesses* black hole.

To be sure, like the problem of conversations during *davening*, the slurring of *Aleinu* might originate with the comfort Jews feel in *shul*. We are so "at home" there that we all too easily fall into treating our *mekomos tefilla* (houses of worship) as if they were our living rooms – and some of our *tefillos* as if they were simple conversations... clipped, garbled, mumbled. But of course, that doesn't make it right; familiarity, in both instances, may explain, but in neither is it a defense.

And so the thought occurs: Might we be able to access a special merit were more of us to endeavor to say *Aleinu* in its entirety, and with more *kavana*?

### Holy Paragraphs... Approaching Footsteps

*Aleinu*, after all, is no minor part of the *seder tefilla*. It was composed, according to many early sources, by Yehoshua; its opening sentences, moreover, were the death-declaration of countless Jews throughout history, the words with which they defiantly refused to succumb to the tortures and threats of others bent on uprooting devotion to the Torah. It is even part of our *Mussaf Amida* on the *Yom Hadin* (Day of Judgment, i.e. Rosh Hashana).

And the appended "*Al Kein*" paragraph is, according to our *mesora*, the expression of *teshuva* composed by Achan (the first letter of each of its first three words spell his name), in the wake of his sin of misappropriating valuables from the spoils of the conquered city of Yericho, and his repentance thereon.

In a time of evil decrees against Jews, it would only seem appropriate that we make an effort to better connect to those words of sincere regret and recognition.

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And the words themselves! They are powerfully pertinent to our times, times that have been reasonably portrayed by great men as the period of history *Chazal* described as the *Ikvesa d'Meshicha*, the time when the "footsteps of *Moshiach*" can be heard in the distance.

### The Jewish Plot

None with any sense at all of history could possibly ignore the confluence of events in *Eretz Yisroel* today with what is transpiring on the larger geopolitical scene. All of the pundits' nervous disassociation of Islamic terrorism from anti-Semitism might well be taken with a truckful of salt. Even were it true that Osama Bin Laden's ultimate enemy is really Western culture, and that he only hatefully harps on "Zionists" – read "Jews" – in order to enhance his credibility within the Arab world, is it not most disturbingly meaningful that credibility in that large, imposing and violent world is enhanced in that way? Or that a high-ranking official of the country from which nearly all the September 11 mass-murderers emerged has publicly blamed the attack on Jews?

Once again, and perhaps more than ever before, the small fraction of one percent of the world's population known as *Klal Yisroel* is, astoundingly, the focus of myriad forces of unbridled evil. Nations like Iran and Iraq, or like Saudi Arabia and Syria, that have in the past had only visceral hate for one another have found common cause in venting their accumulated animus in one familiar direction. The sound of footsteps is growing louder.

The haters like to say that there is a Jewish Plot. And they're right, of course. It's more of a plan, though, than a plot; there's only one – or, better, One – Planner. And His plan is unfolding

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Once again, the small fraction of one percent of the world's population known as *Klal Yisroel* is, astoundingly, the focus of myriad forces of unbridled evil.

before our eyes. The fear is there, the threats are there.

### On That Day

Our own role in the plan is to do what we have been charged to do: be better Jews in every way we can. And to recognize that all the usual roads to hope – diplomatic, military, political – are absolute dead ends, by any logical measure. To recognize, in other words, that "there is no one on

whom to rely other than our Father in Heaven."

May we be *zocheh* to merit that this recognition serve to be a prelude to the *ge'ula* in our day, to the era of global recognition of *Hashem* and His truth that, our *Nevi'im* have told us, will follow, described in the words of "*Al Kein*":

*"And therefore we put our hope in You, Hashem, that we may soon see Your mighty splendor, to remove detestable idolatry from the earth, and false gods will be utterly cut off, to perfect the universe through the Almighty's sovereignty.*

*"Then all humanity will call upon Your Name, to turn all the earth's wicked toward You. All the world's inhabitants will recognize and know that to You every knee should bend... and to the glory of Your Name they will render homage, and they will all accept upon themselves the yoke of Your kingship... on that day Hashem will be One and His name will be One."*

And then:

*"Yisgadel v'yiskadesh Sh'mei rabba..."*

\*"May His great name be exalted and sanctified..."

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