

THE **Jewish** OBSERVER

Adar II 5763 • March 2003
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Repairing Hashem's Family

MAKING ISRAEL'S PAIN OUR OWN

Also:
Purim Reflections

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This is the full Table of Contents of the print edition of the Jewish Observer. The web edition contains only a selection of articles (indicated in color). Click on the title to go to the beginning of that article. Navigate using your browser's menu and other options.

6 *Repairing Hashem's Family, Yaakov Salomon*

PURIM REFLECTIONS

12 *Unmasking the Megilla, Rabbi Yosef Levinson*

17 *Shoshanas Yaakov, a poem by Ploni Almoni*

19 *"Gather in the Children," Dovid Freund*

26 *Conversation at a Bar Mitzva, Sara Shapiro*

33 *"Ivri Anochi" – I am a Jew," Rabbi Aryeh Z. Ginzberg*

SECOND LOOKS

37 *Communication... a Rising or Receding Art?, Yosef Gesser*

39 *Sounds of Snow, Dr. Meir Wikler*

41 *Scan,... Analyze, and Apply*

BOOKS IN REVIEW

42 *Rabbi Avigdor Miller Speaks – Vol. I, compiled by Rabbi*

Simcha Bunim Cohen, reviewed by Yisroel Yehuda Pollak

44 *Priceless Integrity, by Rabbi Daniel Travis, reviewed by Rabbi*

Moshe Schapiro

45 *Letters-to-the-Editor*

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Over the past several months, *The Jewish Observer* has been featuring articles that explored ways in which the readers could identify with our brothers and sisters in *Eretz Yisroel* and share their pain, as well as attempt to alleviate their crises on all levels – national, communal, and individual.

Among the suggestions offered were: Deny yourself some comfort or luxury in empathy¹; at least cry for them or write to them²; improve and enhance our *tefillos*³; arrange for American communities and *shuls* to adopt a family of survivors in Israel⁴.

We could – and probably will – continue with more explorations and suggestions, but at this juncture we might ask ourselves: Why isn't this kind of empathy and level of response automatic? Why must we be prodded to feel, think and react? At the recent National Convention of Agudath Israel of America, **Yaakov Salomon** offered some valuable insights on the topic. The following article is based on that presentation.

REPAIRING HASHEM'S FAMILY

Making Israel's Pain Our Own

Some years ago, Rabbi Chaim Mintz, *mashgiach ruchani* of the Yeshiva of Staten Island, was rushing to another location and had inadvertently left his wristwatch behind. Uncharacteristically, he asked a *bachur* if he wouldn't mind retrieving it for him. "I wouldn't trouble you if I wasn't so short on time," he explained.

Yaakov Salomon, CSW, is a psychotherapist in private practice in Brooklyn. He is a frequent contributor to these pages, most recently with "Time to Move On" (June '01).

¹ "Reflections on Guidelines for Weddings," by Dr. Aaron Twerski, June '02, and "Terrorism, Sugar Cubes and Filet Mignon," by Rabbi Aryeh Z. Ginzberg, June '02

² Rabbi Ginzberg's above article, as well as "The Fifth Item on the List," by Rabbi Boruch Leff, and "Breaking Down the Walls," by Debbie Shapiro, Jan. '03

³ "Tefilla and Teshuva in Response to Today's Troubled Times," by Rabbi Heshy Kleinman, April '02; Be a Better *Baal Tefilla*," by Rabbi Pinchos Jung, Nov. '02; Bringing our Prayers to a Higher Level," by Rabbi Heshy Kleinman, Dec. '02; and "A Modest Proposal," by Rabbi Avi Shafran, Jan. '03

⁴ "PostScript: A Call to Arms," by Rabbi Aryeh Z. Ginzberg, Oct. '02

The *bachur* was all too willing to fulfill the simple mission.

Upon his return, the *bachur* questioned his *Rebbe*. "Excuse me for prying," he said, "but I couldn't help noticing that the *Rebbe's* watch has the incorrect time even though it seems to be working. Shall I correct it?"

"No, no," replied Rabbi Mintz. "You see, the time on my watch is actually precisely seven hours ahead of New York City time. I always keep it set to Israeli time so I can keep a constant reminder for myself about the *matzav* (situation) in *Eretz Yisroel*."

Years before, there had been a terrorist attack in *Yerushalayim*. Many lives were lost and Rabbi Mintz wanted to be certain that he never forgot it.

No. Keeping them in mind is not necessarily automatic.

A Personal Story....

It happened about a year and a half ago. It was about 10 PM on a Tuesday night, and I had just finished

davening Ma'ariv at Rabbi Landau's famous *Beis Midrash* in Flatbush.

On my way out, a note, posted on the lobby wall, caught my eye. It read: "*Shmuel G. is sitting shiva at _____.* His wife was the only American fatality in the *S'barro's* bombing in *Yerushalayim*."

My friend, Shimon, read the note along with me. Neither of us recognized the name. Both of us exited in silence.... How tragic.

I joined Shimon for the short ride home. As I bid him good-night, he asked me, "So, when shall I pick you up?"

"Pick me up for what?" I responded. (I was unaware of any previously made plans.)

"Well, for the *shiva* visit, of course," came the reply.

"The *shiva*?" I pondered innocently. "I don't really know the fellow and hadn't planned to go. Do you know him?"

"No," he said, "but how can we *not* go?"

Never had a lump appeared so quickly in my larynx. It was the lump of shame. The contrast was oh, so clear... and painful. To Shimon, visiting and consoling this grieving survivor was instinctively mandatory and thoroughly obvious – his unfamiliarity notwithstanding. To me, it was never even a consideration. Why would I visit someone I don't know?

But the story does not end there. Lesson learned, I asked Shimon to pick me up at 9 A.M. the next morning. He did. We arrived at the *bais avel* and awkwardly ventured in. In a feeble attempt at *teshuva*, I led the way. To my surprise, the *avel* greeted me immediately. “*Yaakov Salomon, so nice of you to come.*”

I recognized Shmuel immediately as a *Shabbos* guest of the past, who had graced our table several times. His name had eluded my failing memory. Shmuel then turned his attention to Shimon, our hero, and asked, “*And who are you?*”

We sat down – me, with my oversized lump; Shimon, with studied compassion. People trickled in. And as each one arrived, he was greeted by Shmuel with the same refrain, “*And who are you? Did you know my wife?*”

Within ten minutes or so, we were joined by about a dozen people. In a display of startling irony, the only person that Shmuel knew in that room was me! The rest were, like Shimon, just wonderful compassionate Jews – demonstrating their kinship and concern. *Mi ki'amcha Yisroel.*

So, perhaps many of us DO feel their pain, but many of us... I included.... seem to be lacking.

We Are Not Helpless...

Some may argue that “remembering” their travails and their pain doesn't accomplish very much. “They don't need us to cry for them,” goes the refrain, “They need the madness – the terror, the funerals, the grief – to STOP.”

But might that not exactly be the point? Is it so farfetched to posit that the crying we do for them, and the resulting *tefillas* that are sure to emerge,

■
C ouldn't the simple manifestation of our genuine concern be the precise unwritten prescription to cure this ghastly decree?
■

may just be the solution as well? Couldn't the simple manifestation of our genuine concern be the precise unwritten prescription to cure this ghastly decree?

Sadly, our current predicament is hardly unfamiliar to us. Our storied history is sated with tribulations that seem to always threaten our very existence. “*Zechor yemos olam,*” the Torah implores. We must keep our eyes on our history. There is much to learn. Guidance may be lurking in those yellowed pages.

Rabbi Elchanan Wasserman דברי, in his classic *Kovetz Ma'amarim*, provides some of that guidance. He classifies the perils that we have constantly confronted into two categories – threats to our physical existence (such as the Purim saga) and threats to our spiritual existence (as in the Chanuka era). And our responses to those dangers must serve as guideposts for all of time.

“Threats to our spiritual survival,” writes Reb Elchanan, “are best met by our willingness to take military action. This is best exemplified by our battles, and improbable ensuing victories against the *Yevanim* (Syrian-Greeks). And the frightening specters of physical annihilation must be answered by clarion calls of *teshuva*, *tefilla*, and *zedakka*. Nowhere in *Megillas Esther* is the notion of a military campaign against Haman suggested.

And so, I humbly offer the suggestions that follow. With over 700 *neshamos* gone and many thousands more crippled and injured – both physically and emotionally – the illogic of a military solution should, by now, be

painfully obvious. So the proposals presented here have a decidedly spiritual bent – with an inclination toward the concept that truly feeling their pain, and showing it, may be a road to resolution – not just to compassion.

The exhortation by the *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah* to recite chapters of *Tehillim* daily – particularly 83, 130, and 142 – should, of course, be a given for every caring Jew. *Tehillim* has, is, and always will be our first mode of action in times of crisis.

But What Else Can We Do?

To enhance our sensitivity and strengthen our identification with our family members in *Eretz Yisroel*, we must begin somewhere. We need something as a daily reminder, besides the demoralizing news reports and accompanying grisly photos. And what better daily reminder than our daily *tefilla*? Consider, if you will, the following little-known opinion in *halacha*.

The *Rama* (*Orach Chaim* 113:1) explains that we are not free to bow down wherever we desire in *Shemoneh Esrei*. Bowing is only permissible in the specific places decreed by the *Chachamim*. But the *Mishneh Berura* quotes a *Maharil* who opines that we should bow down at the beginning or the end of the *beracha* of “*V'leyerushalayim ircha,*” when we entreat *Hashem* to rebuild Jerusalem. And the *Magen Avraham* adds that perhaps a slight deferential bowing would be appropriate.

We do not *pasken* like the *Maharil*. Fine. We need not follow the *Magen*

Avraham. Well enough. But here we have a highly respected *halacha* authority, "suggesting" that we bow down during the *beracha* of "V'leyerushalayim ircha"! None of the other 12 *berachos* of the *bakasha* section (where we make requests) of *Shemoneh Esrei* appears to qualify for that special consideration. Doesn't that mean something? Shouldn't that propel us to have at least a bit extra *kavana* (concentration) during that *beracha*? Prostration? Maybe not. But concentration? Definitely! This is our chance to connect our own thoughts with a genuine yearning for "v'chisei David meheira l'socha tachin – may You speedily establish the throne of Your servant David within it." At the very least, it guarantees that we think of them three times a day. "Baruch atta Hashem Bonei Yerushalayim – Blessed are You, Hashem, the Builder of Jerusalem." A perfect start for everyone searching for an opening of awareness in his or her heart.

But let us not stop there. Why not make a beginning attempt at the fine plan that was outlined in these pages* by Rabbi Aryeh Zev Ginzberg. Rabbi Ginzberg has spearheaded a marvelous and most compassionate movement to get every *shul* in America to "adopt" an Israeli family who has suffered a recent loss in the reign of terror.

Besides the tremendous *s'char* (Divine reward) involved, I can guarantee, psychologically, that adopting a grieving family as part of your own is nothing short of a magical formula for setting your life's priorities in proper order. And the message it communicates to your children is one that could never be taught in a classroom or communicated from a book. Can you think of a more important goal? I can't.

The above mentioned strategies may not be necessary for those readers who possess a true appreciation and deep respect for the hundreds of thousands of families for whom everyday

terror has become an overwhelming feature of everyday life.

You understand that it is not only important and proper and a *chiyuv* (obligation) to make their pain your pain, but you have an inkling... a conviction, that feeling their anguish and their grief could actually be a significant ingredient in the formula for helping it vanish. You have grown tired of listening to the news, and weary of worn-out and hackneyed military, political, or strategic solutions that have never worked and never will. You don't doubt that, painful as it is to admit, the *Ribbono Shel Olam* is sending all of us a harsh, horrific and glaring message that something is very wrong in our camp. And that His very specially selected family needs a major spiritual overhaul.

Needless to say, I am certainly not privy to the incomprehensible workings of the *Ribbono Shel Olam*. But one observation, if you will allow.

* Oct. '02, as mentioned in the Introduction.

My dear brothers and sisters,

This page is stained by the tears of my orphaned son, his orphaned sister, and the tears of their weeping father – which flow from my eyes. It is now twelve years since their mother *נרצחה* passed away. I was fortunate to remarry; my second wife had three children of her own, since joined by two more of our ours. More children to care for, more *simchos* to anticipate. I succeeded in bringing two of my children and one stepdaughter to the *chupa* without resorting to appeals such as this. Then one more son married last year, partly on money raised from an appeal in these pages, partly from borrowed money.

One engaged daughter and another in the wings are afraid that their hopes for a *chupa* of their own will remain an unrealized dream *נרצחה*. The anticipated financial load is in the six figures and I have absolutely no means for covering these expenses. Those who come to the aid of bringing *yesomim* – orphaned children – to their moment of joy will surely be blessed by the Father to take care of His special children.

Is it too much to expect three thousand warm-hearted Jews to each extend \$50 (or more) for this sacred purpose? Checks made out to **Cong. Ohavei Torah – Kallah Fund (tax deductible)** (for checks in Br. £, write: **Charity B.F.O.O.B.**) will put your contribution to immediate use, and bring happiness and security to orphaned children in Jerusalem, and Hashem's choicest blessings to you.

With deep appreciation

Zvi Malov

Letters of approbation and blessing from leading rabbinical personalities:

Hagaon Rabbi Moshe Halberstam שליט"א, *Rosh Hayeshiva Divrei Chaim, Jerusalem*: "It is well known that many wonderful people were helped by Rabbi Malov's blessings and tefillos."

Hagaon Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv שליט"א: "I join Rabbi Halberstam in his endorsement of Rabbi Malov's cause. All who respond to this plea should be blessed with all of the best!"

Hagaon Rabbi Yosef Moshe Schneerson שליט"א, *Rosh Yeshiva Chevron/Jerusalem*: "My late father *נרצחה* never issued letters of approbation. A notable exception was the four letters that Rabbi Zvi Malov merited to receive from him."

The following rabbis affiliated with Gur in Jerusalem also affixed their signatures to this letter:

Rabbi Meir Zilberstein שליט"א,
Rabbi Chaim Bunim Shatz שליט"א,
Rabbi Chanoch Kaminer שליט"א,
Rabbi Dov Landau שליט"א,
Rabbi Moshe Mendelson שליט"א

Also Rabbi Naftoli Nussbaum שליט"א
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To be mailed to:

Rabbi Nisson Wolpin
305 Avenue F
Brooklyn, NY 11218
USA

Rabbi A. Pollak
2 Parkside Avenue
Salford M7 4HB
Lancs, England
Tel: 44-161-740-5645

Zvi Malov
33 Sorotzkin
Jerusalem,
Israel
Tel: (02) 538-6217

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The At-Risk Connection...

Our communities, here and abroad, have, for the past years, been suffering with another overwhelmingly excruciating crisis. It is the one that has been termed “Kids at Risk” – the shocking and agonizing process of watching some of our most talented and engaging youngsters abandon the *derech Yisroel sabba* (sacred traditions of our forebears) for the scourge of aberrant behaviors. And while much is being done to attempt to ameliorate the situation, the battle rages on. It is still very, very painful.

And we wonder, and maybe we always will wonder, why do kids leave the *derech ha'emes* – the tried and true path? Why do they veer from a life that can bring them enormous satisfaction? Why do great kids from great, loving families reject nearly everything they are taught? And why do we suffer from this devastating plague, more than any previous generation?

Perhaps... just maybe... *Hashem* wants us to feel His pain, *kaveyachol* (so to speak). Let us for a moment compare His family with our families – in the “at-risk” category.

No one can minimize the heart-breaking and tragic pain of watching, or living with, a youngster on the fringe. Each and every *neshama* is so very dear and cherished. But despite the disheartening at-risk numbers, it is somehow rare that more than one child per family suffers this terrible malady. The collective family pain of having even one such child seems almost too much to bear. It does happen, but it is uncommon.

But *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* also has a family. He is *Avinu Malkeinu*, our Father; we are His children, *bannim attem laShem Elokeichem*. Let us look at His family. How are they doing? Not nearly as well as our families. You see, in His family, it's not one child who is off the *derech*. He doesn't have two children who are at-risk. In *Hakadosh Baruch Hu's* family – known as *Knesses Yisroel* – nine out of ten of his children do not know how to say *Kriyas Shma* (or

Modeh Ani), have never shaken a *lulav*, have never braided a *challa*, and have never even heard of the Chofetz Chaim!

Let the numbers startle you! Nine out of ten of *His* children are lost to apathy, ignorance, intermarriage and assimilation...and the numbers grow as you read this.

Be honest. Do we feel His pain? And could the agony and anguish that we experience with our at-risk kids be a message to us to feel His pain?

Imagine for just a moment (more

than that would be too painful for us). How would one of us actually feel if nine out of ten of *our* children, *Hashem yishmereinu*, knew nothing about *Yahadus*? Would we just choose to focus on the positive?

“Oh, at least I have one child who is *shomer Shabbos*, learns a little, married Jewish – Baruch Hashem for that. The other nine? Well, what can you do? At least we tried. I guess you can't win them all. Pass the pretzels, please.” Or, more than likely, would we total-

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

- Only 400 invited guests may be seated at the *chassuna seuda*.
- 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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Rosh Hayeshiva, Mesivta Meor Yitzchok

ly fall apart from grief and heartbreak and never sleep well again?

Maybe, only maybe, *Hashem* feels that we need to experience at least a fraction of that heartbreak.

But if that is so, or even if it's only partially true, then the *kiruv* efforts of this advanced group can be a resounding message to our Father that we do care about the family, after all. And that it is *not* acceptable to us that 90% of our family members never said a *beracha* in their entire lives, and define their Jewishness by opposing prayer in public schools and voting (or not voting) for Joe Lieberman.

And similarly, when we experience over 29 months of constant terror, and we know that our response must be a spiritual one, then the *kiruv* efforts of this group can announce to the *Borei Olam* that there IS *arvus* (unity) in *Klal Yisroel*. And yes we *truly* do care about every single *Yid* – even those that seem so different from us, or so far from us.

Is that *really* what *Hashem* is truly

waiting for? I don't know. No one knows. But if 90% of *your* family had drifted away, what would *you* want to see?

And according to the *Chasam Sofer* (*Toras Moshe, Vayikra* 19), performing acts of *kiruv rechokim* is actually the essence of the great *mitzva* of *ve'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocha* – love your neighbor as yourself. The *din* of *chayecha kodmin* – your own life takes precedence over another's – says the *Chasam Sofer*, only applies to *inyonei olam hazeh*, material or physical pursuits.

"However, in matters of spirituality, meaning Torah study, we are obligated to learn with others even at the expense of forgoing our own learning!... which is why Rabbi Akiva describes this mitzva as a 'Klal gadol baTorah.' Specifically 'in Torah,' we must love our neighbor as we do ourselves."

When it comes to *limud Torah*, that is when teaching your brother or sister comes first.

That's what *kiruv* is all about.

It's about using your valuable learning time to learn with others – through Partners in Torah or Aish Hatorah or other programs.

It's about seeking out your neighbor – on the block, at work, on a plane or wherever, and befriending him – inviting him for *Shabbos* or just to shmooze.

It's about telling them about a class or a seminar or a fabulous weekend and then going with them!

It's about giving them a book or a tape or a website... or a hug or a smile.

It's about overcoming your fears of rejection and exposure, and demonstrating to the *Ribbono Shel Olam* that we can no longer bear to watch the family...*His* family...*our* family...go from "at-risk" to disintegration.

That's what Jews who are sensitive, who care, and who respond can do.

That's what *all* of us can do to help put an end to the tragedies and devastation. We can demonstrate *real ahavas Yisroel*, genuine care and love.

Ve'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocha. He is waiting. ■

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CONVERSATION AT A BAR MITZVA

As one of the Arab waiters removes our dinner plates, the bar mitzva boy's aristocratic-looking and elegant grandmother, seated to my right, makes some comment under her breath about not throwing food away. This poignantly evokes for me a memory of my mother, which elicits a memory of her mother, a question, an answer, then another question, which leads to the cattle car in which she had been deported to Siberia.

I ask, tentatively, how long she was in a cattle car. She says six weeks. She and her mother and brother had been sent to a Russian labor camp.

"How old were you?"

"Oh...in 1941. I was ten. Eleven."

"So you didn't have to work, too, did you?"

"Of course, I did," she says, shrugging. "My brother, too. The Russians took us even though we were underage. That was the only way we could get a food ration." I ask why, and she explains that their mother wasn't eligible because she was too weak to cut down trees; there'd been an accident on board the train, and in the camp she fell ill in one of the typhus epidemics.

"What accident?"

She says the woman sitting next to

Mrs. Shapiro of Jerusalem is a frequent contributor to these pages, most recently with "That I Can Survive" (Oct. '02). Her most recent book is *A Gift Passed Along: A Woman Looks at the World Around Her* – ArtScroll.

them in the cattle car had brought along a kerosene primus and was trying to get it lit when it got knocked over and exploded in her mother's face. "My mother was on fire – her face, her hair, everything. It was like a nightmare. Somebody threw a blanket on her — that probably saved her life. And after a while somebody moved over and let her sit where there was some air coming in. From one of those openings. You know what cattle cars look like."

"No, not really."

"Well, those cars were made for animals, you know, and there were these little openings on top, so she sat like this —" Mrs. S. tips back her head and closes her eyes. "To get the air. She was in torment. It was horrendous. She told us the air helped. For some reason she had brought along a little bottle of oil in her suitcase and she said 'Hurry, get me the oil,' and she kept applying it to the burns. She said it helped."

One question after another.... My curiosity feels akin to greed. She says forty-five or forty-six strangers were crowded together in the dark. "There was such confusion. Such chaos, I can't tell you. Everyone was so terrified. So bewildered. There was one bucket for everybody. Somebody tried to hang up something for privacy. It was horrendous. There was one woman

crushed up against my mother who kept pushing against her, saying she had to have more room. She was pushing against her with her feet, so I told my mother I'd move over and sit on the suitcases – everyone's baggage was piled up high in the corner of the car. My mother said 'No, you stay here,' but I crawled over and climbed up on top. I don't know how long I was there – I fell asleep – when all of a sudden, boom!" She touches her nose. "A heavy suitcase – it must have been a trunk – it slipped and fell down on me. I think I still have the scar."

"So did you go back and sit next to your mother?"

"No, no."

"Did you tell her what happened?"

"No, no." She gives a dismissive little wave of her hand. "We were so hardened already. We had never experienced such things...never imagined.... People were so terrified. We had no idea where they were taking us. Can you imagine?" She pauses and peers at me suddenly. "Can you imagine that? Not knowing where you're going?"

I'm momentarily taken aback. She really seems to be asking me, and of course I can't. I can imagine none of it.

"My mother thought we were being sent to England, because that's where she had told the Russian authorities we wanted to go. But it turned out that everyone in the car had been told something different. Some thought we

were going to Palestine. Some to America... Canada.... Wherever people had said they wanted to go, the Russians said, 'Get on board, we're sending you there now.'"

"Why did your mother say 'England'?"

"Look, in the summer of 1939, there were rumors of war. The same way they are talking now of war with Iraq, they were talking then of war with Germany. My brother – he was seventeen then — was due back in September at his boarding school in London, but on account of all the rumors, and because of all the anti-Semitism that was going on, my mother was afraid to let him travel alone. So on August 30th, my father left with him for England. On September 1st, war broke out and all the borders were closed. We didn't see them again for seven years.

"Every once in a while on the train, my mother got a glimpse outside and could see that we were going deeper and deeper into a forest. After a long time she started seeing signs in Russian, but until the last stop of the train, we didn't know where we were going. When they let us out, that was when we found out we were prisoners in a labor camp."

Surely she'd have a better time at her grandson's bar mitzva if I wouldn't ask now what it was like there.

"What was it like?"

"The days were very short in Siberia, and there was very little daylight. How many people got lost in that forest! If you tried to find blueberries, or some of those cones with those little nuts in them – what were they called —"

"Pine nuts?"

"Yes, yes, pine nuts." She smiles. "They were delicious. We'd look in the forest for something to eat but always made sure never to step one foot too far. People would always say, 'Don't take one step into the forest without seeing light through the trees, otherwise you are lost.' And we would peel off little strips of pine bark and inside the hut we would light them and hold them in our hands, to have a little light. Like this." She demonstrates how they held up the

strips of burning bark before their eyes. "I can't describe the cold in Siberia; anything that was exposed – even one hair — it turned instantly to ice. My eyelids were always with ice. The mouth would be frozen, the fingers. You cannot imagine how freezing cold it was."

How long were they there? Two and a half years. "I thought we would be there forever, but when the Russians made an amnesty with the West, we suddenly became semi-free to travel. The Russians didn't want the prisoners to find their way out of Siberia. It was hard for them to give up the free labor. There was a goy with a horse and buggy and he was taking people to the river, but you had to give him something for it, and we had nothing. Nothing at all. We had nothing in Siberia except two things: my grandfather's pocket watch and my brother's fountain pen.

"That watch was the only thing she had of her father and she couldn't part with it. She couldn't, but she did. The pocket watch got us as far as the river, and from there we took a raft to the train station. It saved our lives.

"My brother's fountain pen got us from the last train station in Siberia to Uzbekistan. From there – this was 1943 — we went by boat across the Caspian Sea to Teheran. We had one sack with our belongings. People were on top of people, we were packed together like sardines, and everybody was sick with dysentery. After all those years of being deprived, the minute we got a little food, peoples' bodies couldn't take it. People were dying left and right. They would wrap the body in a blanket and throw it overboard. Oh, it was horrendous. There was a doctor among us — among the people there was always a doctor, always somebody trying to help somebody else – and he was trying to get through everybody to somebody who was dying. He said 'Move your sack!' But where was I supposed to put it? So somebody threw it overboard."

I give a little gasp.

"No, no. You think we mourned for it? What was he supposed to do? It wasn't malicious. He was trying to get to somebody dying. In Teheran, I became

a maid for a gentile family. The wife was German, the husband Russian. They were very good to me."

Iask if her mother ever recovered from her burns. "Recover? Look, I'll tell you. My mother was a beautiful woman. Very beautiful. After the accident she prayed always to the *Abershter*, 'Please, *Hashem*, that I should be the same as before, for when I am reunited with my husband.' And it was like a miracle, by the end of the war, when we were reunited with my father, almost all the scars were gone. And after a few years, she did heal, completely. It was amazing. Almost as if it had never happened. But her beauty was inside and out. She was good to everyone, Jew and non-Jew. She used to say, 'If someone comes and holds out his hand, he doesn't do it for pleasure. He needs it. You should always help.'

After the war, when we had no money, my mother got an idea. She proposed to various people who had some money that they should provide her with ingredients for baking and she would bake them beautiful cakes. In return, they would give her their good used clothing, and cover the cost of postage, and she would send the clothes to Jews in Palestine. For years she was sending those packages. I once asked her, 'How do you know how to make such cakes?' and she told me her cooks had taught her.

"Before the war, the Jewish beggars used to go from door to door in the wealthy neighborhoods. Many of them were women with children, and some would be carrying their babies. Now, it wasn't as if my parents didn't give the beggars money, they always gave – they were so generous, to individuals, all kinds of people, and to organizations – but when she saw the children being schlepped around like that, she'd say, 'Look, why not leave the children here and when you finish you can come back for them.' She'd tell the maids to bathe the children and give them something to eat, and she'd give them clean clothes. The children would be in the house with us though the day. Some of

the neighbors, and even some of her friends, they used to say, 'Are you crazy? How can you take such children into your home? How do you even know those children are really theirs? Maybe it's a fake.' They'd say things like, 'It's not just that they're poor — it's that some of them don't have a conscience.' But my mother didn't care, she stood her ground. She loved the children. My father used to say, 'Watch out, one day one of those women is going to leave a child behind and then what will you do? You'll be stuck.' But my mother refused to believe such a thing. It went against her instincts. She refused to believe any mother would abandon her child. One time a mother didn't come back when she said she would. It got dark. Still she didn't come. So my mother sat the child down to eat with us. It got later and later and still the mother didn't come. So my mother put the child to bed. My father was muttering, 'You see! I told you so!' but my mother stuck to her guns, and

said, 'Just wait, she'll be back,' and sure enough, late at night, when everybo—"

One of her other grandsons, around seven, appears at Mrs. S.'s side with a toothsome inquiry as to whether she wants dessert, and her face blooms in smiles. Taking his face in her hands, she asks, "What do they have?" whereupon he runs off in a flash.

"Such a wonderful boy." She shakes her head, marveling. "Such a wonderful boy. I am so blessed."

"The mother came back?"

"Oh, yes." Mrs. S. sits silently a moment or two, thinking, then she says: "My brother was thirteen when the Germans invaded, and he was very bitter. Very angry. You see, before the war, we had a very nice, comfortable life. My father was a lamdan, and a successful businessman, and my mother came from a very wealthy family in Silesia — the town was surrounded by beautiful

mountains — and my grandfather was a distinguished *talmid chacham*, and was extremely successful in business. We always had maids, and a nanny for the children, and lived in a big house surrounded by gardens. So, my brother could not accept what had happened to us. Conditions had changed. Our lives changed. That's life."

"The two of you cut down trees?"

"Yes, and it was our job to cut up the logs and put them into cubic meters. We weren't so tall, so we were cutting like this." She leans her head back, and reaching upwards with both arms held straight and parallel, demonstrates a back-and-forth sawing motion. "I'll tell you something." She leans toward me slightly and gives a confidential little smirk. "If I had to support myself with logging today, I could make a very nice living. I was so good with an ax, it got so I could cut the wood exactly. You know, you can't cut through the knot. I learned how to cut exactly around the knot. And we knew how to cut off the branches. We made good logs together, my brother and I. But my mother was too delicate. The very first time she swung an ax, she got a double hernia. It's as if you took a princess and set her down in the forest and gave her an ax and commanded her, 'Cut down this tree!' Would she be able to? She was too delicate for logging and the Russians knew it. I remember one time, one of the overseers saw her working and he pointed to a tree stump and he said, 'You sit down, Mrs. B.'"

"She did other work in the camp, believe me, she did everything she could to help us. In the summer — in the summer it was bright at night — she raised vegetables in back of our hut. The soil was black and wonderful in Siberia. We grew peas and carrots, all kinds of vegetables. We had a rose garden.

I thought we would be there forev-

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er. When we left Siberia, we left it all— all the vegetables, all my mother's roses — to the Russians. But it was a pleasure.

"My mother washed, she scrubbed. She made our hut as livable as possible. We lived in a one-room log cabin — of wood there was always enough — and we had a wood stove. We shared the hut with another family. Their bed was on one side of the hut, ours on the other.

"All our clothes were always crawling with lice. There were lice in the seams. My mother would take all the clothes out behind the hut and scrub until they were completely clean. We'd put them on and an hour later they'd be crawling with lice again. And the walls of the hut were always covered with bed bugs, teeming with bed bugs. They were polka-dot walls, winter and summer."

The grandson reappears, grinning. He reports that there's green jell-o and yellow jell-o. Chocolate mousse, pink ice-cream, white cake with whipped cream, fruit cup, and pears colored red.

"I'll have the ice-cream," says Mrs. S., whereupon he vanishes.

Mrs. S. takes a slice of bread and lays it upon the hotel's white tablecloth, between our water glasses. "Each day the Russians gave us each a piece of bread, like this." She takes her knife and cuts the bread in half, then examines it and trims it again, into a somewhat smaller rectangle. "Like that. That was the food ration. My mother used to say to my brother and me, 'Here, here's another piece for you,' and I used to say, 'Where's yours?' and she'd say, 'It's in my mouth! See?' and she'd smile and go like this." Mrs. S. makes big, distinct chewing movements and smiles smugly as if she's eating something utterly delightful.

"Until today, I cannot throw away bread. I'll make it into crumbs. I'll toast it when it gets old. But I just can't bring myself to throw it away.

"There was a kosher butcher among the people there, and one time he got hold of a calf and killed it. Everyone was so excited, it was like a holiday. Everybody got a piece and put it under the roof of the house to keep it frozen. But my mother wouldn't take any. So the

butcher said to her, 'Mrs. B., I killed it, you don't have to worry.' And she said, 'You're a butcher, not a *shochet*.' He insisted he knew how to do it, but she wouldn't eat it."

"Did she let you and your brother eat it?"

"We wouldn't have stood for it if she hadn't."

"**Y**ou were saying, about your brother being bi—" At this moment the sound of an ambulance appears, swells, and shrieks past in a flash. Will this be followed at once by another?

I sense Mrs. S. watching me. "It doesn't have to be terrorism," she says. "It could be something normal. Somebody sick, may they have a *refua shleima*. Maybe a mother giving birth."

I'm mentally bolting through the checklist of the various members of my family. Where are they all?

Thirty or so seconds pass without any sirens. I ask about her brother being bitter.

"But of course, it was understandable. Before the Germans invaded Poland, he had been enjoying his life. His school, his friends. And my mother and father were wonderful parents. Just wonderful. He liked everything about his life, and all of a sudden, to be pulled out of his life like that and set

down into — I don't know how to begin...how to describe it. I remember, after the war, saying to someone, 'I am so happy to be human again.' In Siberia he and I used to lie on the bed — it was a board covered with straw — with our mother lying sick between us, she wasn't able to walk anymore, and we'd watch the rats running back and forth across our feet. It was like an entertainment for us. We used to joke. 'There goes the father! Look, the mother! Here come the kids!'

"He was always saying to my mother, 'It's not fair! They have no right to do this to us!' And she would press a finger to her lips, like this, and say, '*Sindig nischt! Sindig nischt!* Don't sin! Don't sin! Thank G-d for what is! And just pray that it shouldn't be worse!' So he'd say, 'Yeah, sure, and how could it be worse? How?' and she'd say, 'Shhhhhush! It could be worse! It shouldn't be worse! Don't test G-d to punish us. *Hashem* shouldn't test us, G-d forbid! Be happy for what is!' That's what she was always saying, to be grateful for what is and to

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pray it shouldn't be worse, but I was praying for *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* to please, please take us out of our lives sooner rather than later. I was just a child, but I felt sure we were all going to die – people were dying left and right – so I'd pray, 'Please, please let us die fast, so we don't have to suffer so much.' During one period when there was nothing at all to eat, Yom Kippur came and I remember saying, 'At least I'm fasting for a reason.'

"But my mother – she never lost hope, never. She always had faith. She never let us fall. She used to say, 'All this will pass. We will all be together again,' and, 'Baruch Hashem, Baruch Hashem', and 'Just wait, everything's going to be all right, don't worry, you'll see. This won't last forever.' She always tried to keep up our spirits. She always had hope

that my father would come to get us. And in the end, he did. They spent the next thirty-five years together. My mother always had a lot of faith and that's why I have a lot of faith. That whatever is, is not of my doing. It has to do with *Hashem*.

Miracles happen all the time.

"You know, at one point in the camp, I got malaria and died."

My face must register my surprise.

"Yes. Nowadays they call it being clinically dead. I saw my body from up above, lying on the bed, and saw the people standing around me. Then all of a sudden I was being pulled away to another world. It was like a big magnet drawing me, drawing me. My grandfather was coming towards me. I was on my way to join him. I was so happy. It was so beautiful. So beautiful there, I cannot tell you. It felt so good. Then all of a sudden, it hit me: 'No! I can't leave my mother!' and the next thing I knew, I was back in myself. When I opened my eyes, it was a great shock for the people there. They thought it was *techiyas hameisim* (revival of the dead). They told me later I had had no heartbeat. My breathing had stopped entirely.

"From then on, I was no longer scared of death. I saw that death is something wonderful. Until today, I'm not scared of dying. Not at all. I know something good is waiting for me."

The grandson enthusiastically plops a bright pink dessert down before her, along with a dish holding two pears tinted red and a piece of layer cake topped with whipped-cream. She again takes his face in her hands, thanking him profusely. Radiant, shining, he disappears.

"What a wonderful boy. Just wonderful. Such a wonderful boy." She takes a small taste of the pink stuff.

She pauses, sets down the spoon, disconcerted. "What is this?" she murmurs. "It's not ice cream."

She makes a half-gesture as if to push away the dish, but her hand stops, returning uncomfortably to her lap. Then she brightens. "Would you like to have this, maybe?"

I decline, saying I think I'll go get some chocolate mousse, then find myself inexplicably possessed by a sudden childish zeal...like the grandson's...to be the one to serve her. "Would you like some, too?"

"Well, maybe some tea." She rises from her chair.

She's tall, statuesque. I wouldn't mind having higher heels at a time like this. Off we set across the dining hall, towards the big, happy, noisy crowd surrounding the buffet.

Back at the table, I finish my mousse, and Mrs. S is looking around now with a pleasant expression, hands folded on her lap. She says, "Here I am now at this wonderful *simcha*. Thank G-d. Look, I am here with all my loved ones.

"I went today to their graves on *Har Hazeisim* – my mother and my father. I invited them to come here to the bar mitzva.

"I hope they came.

"When my husband and I were in New York after the war – this was about thirty-five years ago – we had Jonathan's bar mitzva and my parents came from London for the *simcha*. All the time I kept pinching myself and pinching myself – I am here with my parents and my husband and my chil-

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dren! I kept going all the time back and forth in my mind, back and forth. I could not believe it. It was like a dream. Can you understand that? We never thought we would ever come out of the camp, and I have the *zechus* to be with my parents and my husband and children at our son's bar mitzva? I was all the time pinching, pinching, pinching myself. Is it true or am I dreaming? Is it true or am I dreaming?"

Her cheeks are all at once shining with tears. She takes a napkin and wipes her eyes.

"It was such a *zechus* to experience this wonderful thing – to have a family. I lived to have children.

"I had a very happy childhood. I am so grateful, I cannot tell you – so grateful – that I had such good parents.

"It wasn't easy in Siberia. Many, many suffered. Many died. If it is meant for you to die, you die. Whatever happens is *min haShamayim*. Hashem does things the way He thinks it should be and we cannot argue.

"Things changed. Nothing lasts forever. It's like circles going around. Nothing stays the same in life. Nothing. All things in life pass. The bad things, and unfortunately, the good things, too.

"I'm a very fortunate person. I had a wonderful youth. It was a wonderful life. Even though I went through a lot and there were a lot of obstacles, I am very grateful for every day because Hashem has always been so good to me. Bad things happen. Life is life. Do you think it's supposed to be smooth sailing all along?"

"We thought that being sent to Siberia was our biggest misfortune, that nothing worse could happen. But it turned out to be our luck. Our good fortune. We were the ones who were better off. We weren't sent to concentration camps.

"After I arrived here from New York on Monday, I went to the *Kotel*. I was sitting there outside the *Kotel* and I heard two women talking in Yiddish. One of them was telling the other that when *Shlomo HaMelech* was building the Temple, he prayed that when the *goyim* came to pray, He should grant them their wish,

but when the Jews came to pray, He should give them what's good for them." She shakes her head, smiling. "Isn't that something? That I should hear that? The woman who was talking kept repeating to the other one, 'It's written. It's written.'

"I'm so grateful to have the *zechus* to be here with my family, I can't begin to tell you. It's such a special, special, special *zechus*.

"It's amazing what you can go through, and that you can accept it and go on. I don't have any hard feelings. I can die very peacefully. I have a very clear conscience. I did everything I could in

life. And when I didn't do something right it was just because I didn't know better. For example, the way I forced my children to eat! Oh, I really tortured them about food. Years later when I looked back, I realized I had been out of my mind, forcing them like that to eat, and I asked their forgiveness."

She tips back her head and laughs heartily. "And when I said I was sorry, Jonathan said to me, 'What are you talking about? You didn't force me to eat.'

"I am so grateful. I am overwhelmed. G-d is so good to me. My birthday is every day." ■

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A Lesson To Be Learnt

“OURS IS NOT TO REASON...”
– OR IS IT?

It was Sunday morning, the day after the tragedy of the loss of the Columbia, that I received a phone call from the principal of one of the local elementary schools. He requested that I address the student body on Monday morning at a special assembly. When I asked him what the theme of the assembly was, he responded, “Understanding the Why of Tragedies.” I politely declined.

Later that evening, I received a phone call from a different principal of another yeshiva in the community and was asked the very same request, “Would you be available to address the students at an assembly on Monday morning?” Again, I asked what the theme of the assembly was, and he responded, “Lessons to be Learnt From Tragedies.” I readily accepted.

The inevitable third call came late Monday night when the first principal Rabbi Ginzberg, founding Rav of our Ohr Moshe Torah, Institute in Hillcrest, NY, is currently Rav of the Chofetz Chaim Torah Center of Cedarhurst (Long Island), New York. He is a frequent contributor to JO, most recently with “A Call to Arms” (Oct. '02).

called me back asking incredulously why I declined his request, only to accept a request from another school for the very same time slot.

My response was simple: “It’s all in the title.” I explained my decision with an insight of Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, לוצ”ל, on the *passuk* in *Tehillim* “*Keili, Keili lama azavatni*” (My G-d, Why did You forsake me)? He said, “Don’t read it *Lama* (Why), but rather ‘*L’ma*’ (For what purpose) did You forsake me?” We have neither the ability nor the right to attempt to answer the “Why” of the tragedy; however, the ability and the responsibility to ask “For what purpose (for what message) and/or what can we learn from it?” is our obligation. The topic of his assembly was “Why,” and I am not an authority on why Hashem does things. The title of the second assembly was “The Lessons to be Learnt,” and I felt that I could humbly share some thoughts that I had heard from my great *Rebbe’im* over the years.

Allow me to share briefly some of those thoughts.

The Brisker Rav, לוצ”ל, once greeted an American visitor who had come to speak with him at his home in Yerushalayim. He asked him, “What is your

occupation?” and he replied, “I am a lawyer.” The Brisker Rav criticized his response, and explained, “In Sefer Yona, as the ship is about to capsize and Yona steps forward, he is asked ‘Ma melachtecha – (What is your profession)?’ Yona responds ‘Ivri anochi, va’es Elokei haShamayim ani yorei – I am a Jew, and I fear G-d in heaven.’

“What kind of response is that to the question that was asked? After all, he was asked to state his profession.” The Brisker Rav explained, “Yona was not asked how he makes parnassa, he was asked his profession, meaning ‘Define who you are, define your essence.’ Yona’s essence was that he was a Jew. That was his definition; everything else was secondary. You,” the Brisker Rav continued, “are a Jew, and that is what defines you; being a lawyer is simply how you make your living.”

THE ASTRONAUT’S SELF-DEFINITION

Ilan Ramon was not an observant Jew. He did not keep *Shabbos* nor *Kashrus*; and in his four years in Houston, he did not even send his children to a Jewish Day School. Yet for the

entire world, he defined himself in his last sixteen days on earth – and above it – as a Jew first, “*Ivri Anoch*”; being an astronaut was just his line of work. How many millions of people around the world who have never heard of *Shabbos*, now understand that it is something very special? And millions more, who have buried the memories of the six million *kedoshim* of the Holocaust were awakened to the need to keep the memories alive, through the *Sefer Torah* he took along. How many Jews throughout this country may have learnt about

something called *Mezuza* for the first time in their lives? And how many Tommy Lapid’s in *Eretz Yisroel* spent a sleepless night after reading on the front page of *Maariv* that the “modern day hero” of Jewish recited “*Shema Yisroel*” at the sight of the majestic holy city of Yerushalayim while deep in space!

For those who can’t get past his not being a *Shomer Torah* and *mitzvos*; or that he was supposed to return on *Shabbos* day, violating the holy day; or that a *sefer Torah* was brought into space improperly, is missing the point. These

things are *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*’s domain, and His alone. What is our domain, is: *What we can learn from this tragedy?* One answer, I would suggest, is the kind of impact that can be made by proclaiming out loud for the whole world to hear, “*Ivri Anoch!*”

RESPONSES GREAT AND SMALL

One synagogue in Manhattan had the largest attendance on that *Shabbos* afternoon for *Mincha* services since Yom Kippur, by the many who came to identify with their own personal “*Ivri Anoch*.”... The Shinui party cancelled a public victory concert for their supporters that very *Shabbos* day, sparing a tremendous *chillul Shabbos* for the expected tens of thousands of people.

When Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky שליט”א, a person who counts his every word carefully, was asked if these public expressions of *Shabbos* and of *Klal Yisroel* could be considered “*Kiddush Hashem*,” he responded with great conviction, “*Bevadai, bevadai, bevadai*” (three times “Surely”).

We have no real understanding of the eternal reward of an act of *Kiddush Hashem* by any Jew at any time. The *Gemora* (*Gittin* 57a) comments on how the offspring of *Haman Harasha* taught Torah in B’nei Brak. What merit did *Haman* have to reap such *zechusim*? Yes, he was the epitome of evil, but through his evil decrees, *B’nei Yisroel* were inspired to do *teshuva*, and as a result of that *teshuva*, the miracle of Purim took place. Since indirectly he was the cause of this *Kiddush Hashem* in the eyes of the entire world, he merited to have his offspring teach Torah in B’nei Brak.

Can anyone even begin to imagine what the reward is for someone who is the direct cause of *Kiddush Hashem* in the world? No, we cannot.

The late Rosh Hayeshiva, Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner זצ”ל, entered a taxi in Yerushalayim with a student. Rabbi Hutner observed how the completely secular Israeli driver was glancing repeatedly at his passenger through the rear view mirror. He obviously noted

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Independently written and submitted
By a current Maayan Student

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that he had a very special Rabbi sitting behind him. After several minutes, he reached over to the seat next to him for his baseball cap and gently placed it onto his head. After exiting the taxicab, Rabbi Hutner, commented to his student, "Who knows how much nitzchius (eternal reward) that secular driver earned by placing a cap on his head in honor of the old rabbi in the seat behind him!"

In the same vein, who knows what special nitzchius (eternal reward) awaits this individual, who in his last days on earth proclaimed to the world "Ivri Anochi"? The words of Chazal, "Yesh koneh olamo be'shaa achas – One can acquire eternal life in a single moment," has become ever more vivid.

One final story:

When the Nazis entered the city of Krakow, one of their first acts was to gather together the men of the city in front of the big shul. They took out the sifrei Torah and unrolled them on the ground. They then ordered at gunpoint all the Jews to dance on top of the sifrei Torah. All eyes were on the elderly Rav

of the shul for direction. Having no alternative, he motioned for everyone to do as they were told, with tears rolling down his aged cheeks. And the town folk began to dance on the sifrei Torah.

One man was frozen in his tracks. It was Yossele, known in Krakow as a thief, a corrupt individual who was shunned by everyone. He just stood frozen. A Nazi soldier spotted him not joining in the desecration of the sifrei Torah, and ordered him to start dancing. He just continued to stand frozen. The Nazi raised his gun to Yossele's heart and said, "Dance, or I will kill you right now where you stand!"

Yossele ripped open his shirt with his two hands, exposing his heart, and said in a controlled rage: "Shies da, aber oif mein G-tt's Torah vell Ich nicht treten (Shoot here, but I will not trample upon my G-d's Torah)."

Yossele became the newest addition to a long list of Krakow's Jews who gave up their lives Al Kiddush Hashem.

The elderly Rav delegated the Chevra Kadisha to prepare his body for

burial, and instructed them to bury him right next to the plot that was reserved for him in the Rabbonim Section. He explained, "What an honor it would be for me to eternally rest next to someone who died Al Kiddush Hashem!"

Why this tragedy happened, or how he is viewed in the Olam Ha'emes are the wrong questions to ask. What is right, though, is to learn from his example of what a great impact a Jew can have by proclaiming for all the world to hear "Ivri Anochi!"

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<p>Rebbe Meir Baal Hanes Charities Kollel Ahavas Yisroel V'Yerushalayim <i>A proud and noble tradition, supporting thousands of needy families in the Holy Land</i></p> <p>1231 51st Street, Brooklyn, New York, 11219 718.686.1315 • Fax: 718.435.0348 All contributions are tax deductible</p>	<p>Suggested amounts (based on the exchange of 4.5 shekel to a dollar):</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$13-6 dozen eggs</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$19-1 kilo shmura matzos</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$34-1 case potatoes & onions</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$53-stipend for one person</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$76-4 kilo shmura matzos</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$103-cases fruits & vegetables for 8 days</td> </tr> <tr> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$177-stipend for small family</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/> \$355-stipend for large family (household of 5 +)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>\$ _____ Pushka amount</td> <td>\$ _____ Other</td> </tr> </table> <p>Name _____ Please charge to my card (circle)</p> <p>Address _____ Account _____</p> <p>City _____ State _____ Zip _____ Signature _____ exp. ____/____</p> <p style="text-align: right;"><small>Detach & Mail</small></p>	<input type="checkbox"/> \$13-6 dozen eggs	<input type="checkbox"/> \$19-1 kilo shmura matzos	<input type="checkbox"/> \$34-1 case potatoes & onions	<input type="checkbox"/> \$53-stipend for one person	<input type="checkbox"/> \$76-4 kilo shmura matzos	<input type="checkbox"/> \$103-cases fruits & vegetables for 8 days	<input type="checkbox"/> \$177-stipend for small family	<input type="checkbox"/> \$355-stipend for large family (household of 5 +)	\$ _____ Pushka amount	\$ _____ Other
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Communication... A Rising Or Receding Art?

Today's advanced technology offers us so many alternatives by which to communicate almost anywhere in the world, and receive just about any type of information more quickly and efficiently than ever – cellular phones, e-mail, Internet, fax machines.

The Torah world has also profited; lessons and messages of inspiration of Torah have reached places far removed from Orthodox Jewish life. The CD-Rom offers Torah texts in a very convenient form. The Internet and E-mail are sources for Torah articles and halachic inquiry.

Yet, the benefits notwithstanding, one wonders to what extent these advances have improved the overall quality of our communication. A few examples will illustrate. Phone a large company and various menus are provided to connect you with the desired individual or department. But sometimes you can't help feeling that you reached your party more rapidly and with less frustration in the old days when a secretary answered and simply connected you with the appropriate extension.

E-mail and voice mail allow for entire conversations to take place without speaking with anyone.

Even a routine task such as making a bank deposit using the convenient ATM machine saves you the "bother" of a friendly *Good morning* to the

Rabbi Gesser presently resides in Mexico City, where he learns part-time in a *kollel*. A writer whose articles have appeared in various publications, he has assisted in the production of many published Torah works in English. His article, "From Slavery to Freedom... From Darkness to Great Light," was featured in *JO* March '01.



teller in the bank.

The writer of these lines is admittedly the owner of a cell phone, utilizes e-mail, and, at times, uses a telephone answering machine. Yes, there are monetary and time-saving advantages both for commerce and the individual. Yet, upon reflection, hasn't the widespread use of this technology somehow created a tear in the social fabric of life?

The cellular phone, truly a remark-

able innovation, enables us to be connected with each other better than ever. But were you ever having an interesting conversation with someone when his cell phone rang and suddenly you became invisible in deference to a person perhaps hundreds of miles away? In an engaging anecdote related by Reb Avi Shulman, an isolated farmer installed a telephone in his farmhouse. One day, as he sat and talked with a visitor, the phone rang but the farmer ignored it. His friend incredulously suggested that he take the call. The farmer replied, "I put in that phone for my convenience. Right now, it ain't convenient!"

Cell phones are a mixed blessing in other ways. The availability of a phone in every conceivable setting has removed the sense of privacy that the telephone used to offer when it was confined to the home and office. And this is not to mention the vulnerability of speaking on the phone while driving, a practice which studies show seriously

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impair one's driving ability. (Some states have passed laws requiring a hands-free device for communicating to address this problem.)

And who hasn't been taken aback by phones incongruously ringing and being answered during *davening*, in the midst of a *shiur*, during a *chupa*, or during, G-d forbid, a *levaya*? A partial – and belated – solution is for cell phone users to leave the room in order to talk, but

often this is not done. And the invasive ring is still jarring.

Certainly, communication plays a vital role in Torah living. Enhancing personal relationships, presumably an objective of better communication, is a priority, affording openings for *ahavas Yisroel* and *chessed*.

Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, זצ"ל was once leaving his yeshiva when he was approached by a needy individual for a contribution. Although he was on his way to an important meeting, he not only gave this man some coins but also spent a few minutes speaking with him. Afterwards, he explained to his talmidim that the words of friendship and encouragement meant as much to the man as the money.

Of course, a different standard applies for individuals who need to be reached at a moment's notice for urgent matters (such as Hatzola volunteers). But listening to many of these cell-phone conversations (often not through any choice of our own!) makes it clear that often this is not the case. Is it critical that one's neighbor in *shul* know that his wife could use some onion buns and cheese danish picked up on the way home? The modern miracles of communication truly constitute a blessing, but they are also a responsibility.

■

In areas of life outside the realm of formal *mitzva* involvement, where-in the Torah or *Chazal* don't comment openly, common sense and *derech erez* dictate how we should act – the widely known, seldom consulted the "Fifth Volume of the *Shulchan Aruch*."

The modern-day miracles of the "communication revolution" should be viewed not merely as an end unto themselves, but rather as a means to an end – to better the quality of our lives, and to bring us closer together. The key words – "quality" and "closer together" should not be lost in shuffle... or overruled by the buzz. ■

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Scan, Spot, Focus, Analyze, and Apply

The world is rich with messages to us. The miracles of nature, which we so take for granted, testifying to G-d's unrivaled creativity; the crises – personal, communal and national – which prod us to pray, as though we mean it; little blips on the screen that nudge us in the ribs and tell us to open our eyes, our ears, and hearts. That tell us to wake up.

When I flip through the pages of a newspaper or scan a science article, I try to learn what's happening or take note of a matter of interest. *Scan, spot, focus, analyze the find, and occasionally try to apply a lesson learned to my own life.*

Under the title "Questions That Have No Answers"¹ – a sure eye-catcher that said, *Hey, stop and see what you can focus on* – Dr. Robert Klitzman tells of a patient who had tested positive for Huntington's disease. She was the daughter of a woman who

*had died of the disease, developing psychosis and slowly losing her bodily control and mind. And because of Huntington's hereditary nature, the daughter had a 50 percent chance of carrying the gene herself.*²

The author agonizes with the patient: "Will we want to know?" And if we do find out, whom will we tell and from who will we keep the secret? And how powerful will the secret be to maintain?"

Ultimately, the patient decided: "It was harder to live with the uncertainty of having this disease hang over my head. If I had it, I could plan my life accordingly: spend more time with my kids, so they get to know me before I die. If I didn't have it, I could live scot-free. I wouldn't have to worry about it."

The uncertainty was harder than the knowledge of her fate.

So she took the test at age 42, and

proved to be a carrier. The illness would probably manifest itself in her late 40's or her 50's.

The author reports:

I asked the patient how she looked back now on her decision to be tested.

"It's the best thing I ever did," she replied. Slowly she smiled. "Because I have tools to make my life better," she said. "I now enjoy my life to the fullest."

Instead of living her life scot-free, she lived each day to the fullest. After all, how many years did she have left?

Focus and analyze:

Don't Chazal³ exhort us to "do teshuva" even on the day before we pass away? Can one really know when that day is? So many people leave the world suddenly, without a day's advance warning. What are they to do? And those who are ailing and can guess that they are on the eve of that "last day" – how convincing is their resolve to change? Can one test the commitment of a deathly ill person to lead a life faithful to Torah, graced by devotion, integrity and compassion? The battle is over before it really starts.

But, as Dr. Klitzman's patient realized, *"My days are numbered. I'll lead them as productively as possible. I'll spend quality time with my children... and enjoy my life to the fullest."*

"Productively... to the fullest." What a way to live!... Come to think of it, is there any other way to live?

Does one need a medical test, with positive results (יחי) to see the wisdom in such focusing and purposeful living? ■

¹ Science Times section of *The New York Times*, Jan. 21, p. F5

² All italicized sections are direct quotations from the *Times* article.

³ Rabbi Eliezer, in *Avos* II, 1,5

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