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## NEW VISTAS ON THE ISRAELI SCENE

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# THE Jewish OBSERVER

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CHANAN (ANTONY) GORDON

# The Most Unique Demographic Kiruv Opportunity in Decades



## TAKING ADVANTAGE OF A DEMOGRAPHIC ABERRATION

Some fascinating demographic trends in *Eretz Yisroel* have recently been published, which give our brothers and sisters in the chareidi community there both a unique opportunity and a responsibility pertaining to *kiruv rechokim*.

Today, the chareidi community counts for approximately 12%<sup>1</sup> of Israel's Jewish population. While, as one would expect, my research of recent socio-economic developments within the chareidi ranks did yield some areas of concern,<sup>2</sup> on the positive side, it also became patently clear that the chareidi community in *Eretz Yisroel*, over the next several years, has a most unique opportunity to have a significant impact on the

*chiloni* (non-religious) population. This opportunity to expose hundreds of thousands of secular Israelis to the beauty of our Torah and rich heritage is partially due to a "demographic time bomb" resulting from a single almost unbelievable statistical fact: more than 50% of the chareidi population – a population with a birth rate that averages 7.6 children per woman – is below the age of 8 years old.<sup>3</sup>

Thankfully, as ambiguous and confusing as the Council of Jewish Federation's NJPS 2000 was in America,<sup>4</sup> the Louis Guttman Israel Institute of Applied Research's Survey<sup>5</sup> ("The Guttman Survey") of the same year was clear and succinct. Read together with the exploding chareidi "baby boom" alluded to above, it seems clear to me –

especially after hearing the words of some of our *Gedolim* first hand<sup>6</sup> – that we are obligated to capitalize on this situation.

## ISRAELI SOCIETY: A STRONG TRADITIONAL BENT

In many ways, The Guttman Survey, to date the most comprehensive research ever conducted on the religious behavior of Israeli Jews, dispelled the myth that the liberal media has been at pains to create, i.e., that the majority of Israelis would want nothing more than to ensure that Israel evolved into just another secular country. According to The Guttman Survey:

**The rhetoric of the secular and religious polarization generally used**

course of my research, brought to my attention some of the demographic trends and statistics cited in this article.

<sup>4</sup> The Guttman Survey was commissioned by the *Avi Chai Foundation*, involving a national sample of 2,466 respondents from all over Israel with a maximum sampling error of 3%. The Highlights were published in June, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> See author's article on the topic, JO Oct. '03.

<sup>6</sup> Including meetings with the likes of Rabbi Michel Yehuda Lefkowitz, שליט"א, Rosh Yeshiva of the Ponevezeh Yeshiva in Bnei Brak, last year

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<sup>1</sup> Unless explicitly noted to the contrary, the basic source of the data cited in this article is the *Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, Machon Yerushalayim*.

<sup>2</sup> 47% of the chareidi population lives below the poverty line (i.e., approximately 600,000 people out of the 1.16 million Israeli citizens that currently live below the poverty line falls within the chareidi population).

<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Professor Joseph Bodenheimer, President of The Jerusalem College of Technology, which runs a specific chareidi Program. Professor Bodenheimer, whom I spoke to in person in the

to characterize Israeli society is highly misleading. It would be more accurate to say that Israeli society has a strong traditional bent, and, as far as religious practice is concerned, that there is a continuum from the "strictly observant" to the "non-observant," rather than a great divide between the religious minority and secular majority.

Some of the findings of The Guttman Survey are worthy of note:<sup>7</sup>

98% of Israeli Jews who define themselves as "totally non-observant" have a mezuzah on their front doors;

79% of the men among them own a pair of *tefillin*;

77% of them say that marking *Shabbos* in some way is an important principle in their lives;

86% of Israeli Jews believe in G-d, with 55% believing that the Torah was given to Moshe on Mount Sinai.

The responsibility to ensure that no more Israeli Jews become self-defined "non-observant" Jews lies with us.

#### THE KEY FACTOR: IGNORANCE

Obviously, intermarriage in *Eretz Yisroel* is not the key cause for the majority of Israeli Jews to part from our *mesorah*; ignorance is. There is only one way to dispel erroneous myths about Torah observance – address ignorance head on. As all our *Gedolim* have been saying in recent years, the answer is *education*.

Note: one third of the non-observant respondents in The Guttman Survey said that they would like to be "somewhat more" or "much more" observant than they presently are. No chareidi Jew in *Eretz Yisroel* should ignore the cry coming from the non-observant community, 50% of whom said they would prefer their children to be "somewhat observant."

The responsibility to heed these cries

<sup>7</sup> The reader should also refer to a recent article by Sara Yoheved Rigler in *Mishpacha* (July 21, 2004) for more detailed comments relating to The Guttman Survey, germane to the premise of this article.

falls on our chareidi communities in *Eretz Yisroel* and there has never been a better time than now

The hundreds of thousands of chareidi Jews who in the years to come will become a more statistically significant part of Israeli society have to be taught now, during their formative years, that "non-observant" Jews living in *Eretz Yisroel* should be embraced, taught and unconditionally loved. All indications are – whether we rely on the findings of The

### NO CHAREIDI JEW IN *ERETZ YISROEL* SHOULD IGNORE THE CRY COMING FROM THE NON-OBSERVANT COMMUNITY, 50% OF WHOM SAID THEY WOULD PREFER THEIR CHILDREN TO BE "SOMEWHAT OBSERVANT."

Guttman Survey or the huge amount of anecdotal evidence being compiled by the likes of *Lev L'Achim*, *Aish Hatorah* and many others spearheading the charge – that this time, the overtures to "come back home" will not fall on deaf ears.

#### THE UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY

In *Chomas Hadas*, written in the early 1920s, the *Chofetz Chaim* emphasized the tremendous obligation on *each and every Torah-observant Jew* to reach out to non-observant Jews, and the severity of neglecting this charge. As the *Chofetz Chaim* was at pains to point out, "*Ve'ahavta lerei'acha kamocha*," "*Lo saamod al dam rei'echa*," "*Hoche'ach tochi'ach*," and *kiddush Hashem* mean that *every Jew* should spare no effort in safeguarding the spiritual well-being of a fellow Jew. The responsibility, the *Chofetz Chaim* made clear, cannot be left to outreach organizations and a few *askanim* (activists). The task is too large, and the opportunity is too great, to rely on a few "outreach generals" in the war against assimilation. We must mobilize our entire "army."

The stirring "call to action" issued by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, זצ"ל in 1973 to

Orthodox Jews to "*maaser*" their time for outreach efforts was directed at *bnei Torah*, not *kiruv* organizations. (See JO, June '73.) Similarly, the well-known "*Kol Korei*" ("The voices of our brothers are calling to you"), addressing the Torah communities in *Eretz Yisroel* at the time to help facilitate non-observant Jews to return to Torah observance, was signed by such leaders as Rabbi Elazar Schach, the Steipler Gaon, and Rabbi Chaim Shmuelevitz זצ"ל.

Even those whose dedication to the calling of *Torasam umenasam* (a 24-hour-a-day Torah scholar) limits their availability for *kiruv* will find ways of reaching out in the suggestions that follow.

#### MOBILIZING THE "GROUND TROOPS"

The only question, then, is, *lemaaseh*, what can you, your friends, relatives and family in *Eretz Yisroel* do to heed the call?

Every Torah-observant Jew either knows a non-observant Jew or, at the very least, comes into contact with estranged Jews on a bus or taxi, at the market, or on a plane trip. Today, unlike in previous generations, even the most insulated communities cannot be said to live in a vacuum.

Allow me to list some "lay *kiruv* weapons of choice" that have been tried and tested, and can be utilized by anyone in our "Torah army" with minimal time or cost:

- *Purim mishloach manos* – Purim is not far off ... send *mishloach manos* to a non-observant Jew with a simple note wishing him or her a happy Purim. In my experience, almost every recipient of such an unexpected gift will be deeply

touched; it's a small gesture that just might hit the spot.

• *Bikur cholim* – Every major hospital in *Eretz Yisroel* (and America) welcomes volunteers and permits access to non-critical patients during specified

that as long as people sincerely teach and not preach, the *emes* will resonate on some level.

• *The transcendental beauty of Torah "sells itself"* – Invitations to non-observant Jews to join one's family for a tra-

changing spark of inspiration. In the rat race oriented and often impersonal world in which most non-observant Jews live, the stark contrast of displaying genuine care, in and of itself, makes a huge impression. Recall Onkelos,<sup>9</sup> whose single act of kissing a mezuzah, then responding with sincerity to a question posed, resulted in thousands of soldiers converting to Judaism. The potential eternal consequences of a single small act!

# THE SIMPLE DNA OF THE YIDDISHE NESHAMAH IS SUCH THAT AS LONG AS PEOPLE SINCERELY TEACH AND NOT PREACH, THE EMES WILL RESONATE ON SOME LEVEL.

hours. Which Torah-observant Jew can honestly say that he cannot spare fifteen minutes every four weeks to spend with a non-observant fellow Jew who is bed-ridden? The many true stories of relationships that were forged when a person was not well and feeling vulnerable, resulting in life-changing decisions, bear testimony to this.


• *Partners In Torah* – Spending time with a fellow, less-Torah-educated Jew, either in person or over the telephone, has been the catalyst for literally thousands reevaluating and upgrading their commitment to *Yiddishkeit*. As our rabbis tell us "*devarim hayotzim min haleiv nichnasim el haleiv*,"<sup>8</sup> – The simple DNA of the *Yiddishe neshama* is such

ditional *Shabbos seuda*, a *Pesach seder*, an *upsheren*, a *siyum* and the like will be gladly embraced. No sensitive Jew is impervious to the *varmkeit* and *ruchniyus* emanating from any traditional function in keeping with our *mesorah*. The seeds planted in a Jewish soul privy to any of these events may take months or years to germinate, but every *Yiddishe neshama* has its season.

This is not the forum to enumerate an exhaustive laundry list of successful "*kiruv* techniques for the layperson." At the end of the day, it is usually a small magnanimous gesture that ignites the dormant spark within. More often than not, a simple smile or "giving a fellow Jew the time of day" becomes a life-

## CONCLUSION – BACK TO THE NUMBERS ...

As Rabbi Shmuel Bloom, Executive Vice President of Agudath Israel, pointed out at the opening of the recent 82nd National Convention – after citing some of our research – notwithstanding the scary prognosis of Jewish demographics in America, "... now is the time that these Jews can still be saved. A generation from now will, for so many, be too late. Obviously, that realization demands that we help all the fine organizations that are involved in *kiruv*. But organizations and *kiruv* professionals can only reach a small percentage of Jews. Once and for all, each and every one of us has to realize that he or she has the personal responsibility to the *Ribbono shel Olam* to save His children.... If we love *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* and we take our *Yiddishkeit* seriously, we must realize that He is, *kevayachol*, crying in pain that so many of His children have drifted from home. We, and only we, have the ability to bring them back...."

Rabbi Bloom's words must be echoed to *Eretz Yisroel* with as much vigor. The data is in ... the demographic wave clearly points to a unique opportunity for the Torah-observant community in *Eretz Yisroel* to become an ambassador of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in the decades ahead.... Our *Gedolim* have spoken.... Our chareidi brothers and sisters in *Eretz Yisroel* should be ready to embrace this opportunity with the passion that it deserves. 

<sup>8</sup> *Sefer Shivas Yisroel*, Rabbi Moshe Ibn Ezra

<sup>9</sup> *Bavli, Avoda Zora* 11a

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## Farewell to Rabbi Eliezer Geldzahler זצ"ל

Rabbi Eliezer Geldzahler, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshiva Ohr Yisroel in Canarsie, passed away on 9 Kislev (November 22). He died as a result of severe head injuries sustained in a bus accident in Israel ten months before, when he seized the steering wheel of the bus carrying his *talmidim*, in an attempt to avoid a devastating collision with a truck. He is survived by his parents, Rabbi Yehoshua Geldzhaler (founding Rosh Yeshiva and dean of Yeshiva and Mesivta Ohr Yisroel in Forest Hills, NY, for over forty years) and his Rebbetzin (daughter of Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler זצ"ל), his wife and his thirteen children, the youngest of whom is 2 1/2 months old.

His concern for others and grasp of Torah were rare and profound, as were his zest for life and his love of *Hashem*. His loss is mourned by tens of thousands throughout the world.

This article is based on the eulogy delivered by his father-in-law, **Rabbi Michel Twerski**, at Congregation Beth Jehudah in Milwaukee on 19 Kislev. It was transcribed by **Nachum Abrams** and edited for publication by **Dr. Ayton Grinell**, a member of the *kehilla*.

### I. FACING THE CHALLENGE

Perhaps one of the most profound challenges of the last ten months, and even more so now with Reb Eliezer's passing, is trying to understand how the Master of the Universe runs His world. It is evident from people's questions and comments that they are struggling, as we are ourselves, to extract

meaning, to make sense of this dreadful event. Over the last half century, very few people have had so many fervent *tefillot* said on their behalf as did my son-in-law. Throughout our travels in America, Europe and Israel, we found people petitioning the Almighty, reciting *Tehillim*, giving charity, and making deeper and more extensive commitments to *shemiras hamitzvos* in the merit of his

hoped-for recovery. Wherever we went, we were stopped with the question, "How is Reb Eliezer doing?"

Indeed, what did happen to our prayers? Can it be that G-d ignored so many heartfelt petitions?

Another problem: There is an abiding sense of apprehension, of fear. We find ourselves wrestling with strange, undefined anxieties. What is happening to us?

Most importantly, we are all desperate for consolation. What can we do to assuage our grief? Let's begin with our feelings of rejection. Are they justified?

## REJECTION IN CONTEXT

Over the last ten months, we all poured our hearts out to our Maker. We asked the Master of the Universe to heal Eliezer in spite of his terrible injuries. We refused to believe the doctors who told us it was hopeless, because we believe in a G-d who can do anything. And we believed that if there was anyone who

could stand on his feet again and light up the world in spite of his injuries, it was Eliezer. It didn't happen! G-d, assumedly, wasn't listening to us. Deep down, we felt rejected and disdained. Even now that the *shiva* has passed and we should have achieved perspective and clarity, we continue to feel a sense of humiliation. *Was G-d listening?*

Stop and reflect. During these ten months, there were in excess of three hundred million *tefillos* addressed by *Klal Yisroel* to *Hashem*. Not just for Reb Eliezer! We davened three times every day for ourselves, for our loved ones, for Jews everywhere. We told G-d that we appre-

ciate what He does for us, and we implored Him for our *parnassa* (livelihood), our health, our children, our families, understanding, and a legion of other needs. Virtually without exception, *Hashem* gave us what we wanted, hundreds of millions of affirmative replies. Amongst the multitude of requests to which *Hashem* said "Yes," there was one exclusion to which He resolutely said "No": the prayer for Reb Eliezer. We cannot, in all honesty, in the context of such vast responsiveness, legitimately contend that He rejected our prayers. But there is more than rejection. We feel troubled and confused. We are anguished because there is more going on beneath the surface. I believe the issue we need to explore is that of "control."

## CONTROL... AND VULNERABILITY

We live in an age of control. Science and technology have placed at our disposal exceptional dominion over our physical universe, and our culture has inculcated us with the arrogance of power. The crowning touch to our contemporary conceit is the advent of the computer. We order, it obeys; we demand, it delivers. With pernicious stealth, the computer has become the operational paradigm of our relationship with the Divine.

Over the past ten months, we pushed all the appropriate keys; we entered all the relevant information, the *Tehillim*, our mitzvos, our charity... — and our Heavenly computer was not forthcoming. We were inexplicably unnerved and indignant. *How could this be?* If we examine the contours of our emotions, we will discover beneath the grief a sense of terror emanating from the ugly realization that we are not in total control of our lives. Reb Eliezer's *petira* (passing) has forced us to step back from our arrogance and acknowledge that a greater Wisdom and Power is Sovereign over our fate. Unaccustomed as we are to such vulnerability, we are justifiably overcome by our new awareness of the fragility of life... and we are frightened.

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## FAITH IN THE SHADOW OF SILENCE

Finally, the loss of my son-in-law forces us to stand next to *Avraham Avinu* at the moment of the *Akeida* (the Binding of Yitzchak), where there is nothing left but pure, absolute, boundless faith. When *Avraham Avinu* prepared to put the knife to his son's throat, the world as a comprehensible entity ceased to exist. It is no less so now. When a man of Reb Eliezer's stature is taken from us—a young father, a son, a husband, an inspiring teacher and Torah scholar—we are shaken and crushed. We find ourselves suspended where there is nothing but the awesome silence awaiting our faith and trust. In the shadow of that faith, there are no questions, and we can be at peace; beyond that shadow, we learn that there are no answers, and we are condemned to unrelenting pain and grief. Reb Eliezer was a paragon of consummate faith, maintaining in times of grave crisis his signature "*Gevaldik!*"—an ever-present affirmation that the *Ribono shel Olam* is in charge and all is well. Our readiness to be inspired by his example at this critical juncture is at once a gesture of great merit to his *neshama*, and a testimony to his supreme triumph as our teacher.

## II. REB ELIEZER – A BLAZING FIRE

Reb Eliezer was full of such effervescence and vitality that we can only call him a blaze of fire; someone so passionate and imposing, that we were compelled to be his students. We felt drawn to him and were eager to be in his company. What about Reb Eliezer had this effect on us? I believe that it was because he elevated everyone everywhere he went. This was true not only of his *talmidim*, who venerated him, and to whom his every word of encouragement meant so much, but to everyone who crossed his path, young and old, close or distant. His presence was infectious and uplifting. When he would enter a large public gathering, clusters of people vying for his

attention and advice would surround him. When he would join a group of dancers at a wedding, an electric charge would surge through the circle, carrying the dancers to new levels of excitement and fervor. His capacity to ignite his surroundings was unsurpassed.

There is a key to this ability and this magnetism, and in paying tribute to my son-in-law, it is essential that we understand it thoroughly. Permit me to reflect on the world's fascination with heroes. Why is it that we so strongly identify with heroes? I believe it goes to the predilection most people have towards complacency. While the majority of us entertain worthy ambitions, and dream grandiose dreams, we seem peculiarly unable to translate these aspirations into reality. The reason is as simple as it is obvious.

## HIS QUEST FOR EXCELLENCE

Excellence of any meaningful sort necessitates industry and perseverance, and we don't like hard work. Ineluctably, we sink into mediocrity, and in mediocrity we realize that we have betrayed the fulfillment of our excellence and failed our personal promise. The resultant self-contempt is unbearable; for relief, we turn to heroes. Identifying with heroes provides us with vicarious excellence. We live through the distinction and glory of oth-

ers, and take the easy way out of mediocrity and self-reproach. In a very fundamental way, my son-in-law's life mission and career represented an unspoken declaration of war on mediocrity, and an impassioned outspoken crusade to promulgate each individual's obligation to strive for personal excellence.

My son-in-law was an authentic Torah hero, a *gadol* in all three pillars: Torah, *avoda* and *gemillas chassadim*. He might have used his brilliance to focus on himself, to promote his personal stature, and by extension, the adulation of his peers and *talmidim*. Instead, he chose to dedicate his prodigious gifts to stimulate the quest for excellence in all who sought his tutelage or advice, and turn them into heroes of their own accord. A brief overview of his history reveals the way this principle was manifest in his life.

## OF PERSISTENCE, RESOLVE, AND JOY

From his earliest years, Reb Eliezer demonstrated an aversion to coasting on his gifted *kishronos* (talents). By age 13, he had mastered and diligently memorized *Mesechta Zevachim* in its entirety. While yet in yeshiva, he would commonly learn for six consecutive hours with



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unbroken concentration and song, take a brief respite, and return for another six-hour stretch. At night, he would line up three *shtenders* and lean on them so that he would not fall asleep while learning. When, on occasion, he would nod off, the *shtenders* would fall down and he would get up and learn some more.

Reb Eliezer intuitively grasped even then that, aptitude notwithstanding, his

As Reb Eliezer grew, he turned this perspective and force on others. Ultimately, he became the quintessential mentor, teaching hundreds of *talmidim* to renounce their mediocrity in favor of pursuing their full promise. My son-in-law had an ability, an inspired sense, to recognize the unique endowments of each of his charges, and urged that image upon them until it

**HE INSISTED ON TEACHING NINTH GRADE  
INSTEAD OF A HIGHER LEVEL, SO HE COULD  
GET TO KNOW HIS TALMIDIM FROM THE  
BEGINNING, THE BETTER TO GUIDE  
THEIR CONSTANT ASCENT.**

potential could only be addressed with tireless persistence and resolve. He also intuited another crucial element, the indispensability of joy and passion. Reb Eliezer managed to find and expose in every possible moment and precinct of life the *simcha* and exhilaration which that moment held. Throughout his young life, my son-in-law's industry and *simcha* transformed him from a dreamer of great dreams to a maker of great realities. How else could he have completed *Shas* with *mefarshim* in depth by his thirty-fifth birthday?

burned in the forefront of their minds. For that reason, he insisted on teaching ninth grade instead of a higher level, so he could get to know his *talmidim* from the beginning, the better to guide their constant ascent. Reb Eliezer demanded, encouraged, exhorted and pushed until *hashalheves ala mei'eileha* – until his students were ignited with a vision of their achievable potential. He set a new bar of excellence for *Chassidische* yeshivos, as Ohr Yisroel's *talmidim* attained the forefront of accomplishment in Gemara, *halacha* and *sifrei mussar*. Reb

Eliezer's very presence made an implicit demand upon his surroundings: "*Vechazakta vehayisa le'ish* – stand up for yourself and be the very strongest person you can be!"

**CANDLES IN THE DARK**  
.....

Let me close with an image. During the summer months, Ohr Yisroel moved its program to the Catskills. At least once every year during this period, the Rebbetzin and I would travel to the country to visit with our children and grandchildren, an interlude of particular delight. Typically, at the third meal on *Shabbos*, the lights would go out, as is the practice at *Shalosh Seudos* in many Chassidic circles, and it would become impenetrably dark in the dining room. Two hundred students sat together with Reb Eliezer at their head, and they would sing *zemiros* of yearning and *deveikus*. Sometimes they would sing for an hour or more, invariably with passion and gusto. It was paradise. Then it would become quiet, and Reb Eliezer would speak. He would urge the boys to live completely; he would move them forward to themselves. He filled them with his fire, and infused them with his temerity. In the dark, he was a voice that called them to their greatness. Then, long after *Shabbos* had ended, a little boy would bring two candles and set them down in front of Reb Eliezer. Just his face would be lit and visible.

We find ourselves now in a very dark place where we can no longer see Reb Eliezer's face. But we can hear his voice as he calls out to us, "Don't live in the dungeons of idle dreams. Don't be paralyzed by complacency and mediocrity. Live what G-d has given you to the fullest. Live with the passion of your bright futures. Live with song and joy. Live with love and concern for each other. And dedicate all of these things to the *Ribbono shel Olam*."

May *Moshiach tzidkeinu* set the candles before us that will light up the world, and in that light, we will see Reb Eliezer again with his radiant smile, urging us to even greater life. □

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# HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR MARRIAGE

A REVIEW ARTICLE BY RABBI MORDECHAI BISER

The Gemara (*Berachos* 32b) teaches us that four things require constant effort and *chizuk* (reinforcement). Included in the list are *maasim tovim* (good deeds) and *derech erez* (proper conduct). Surely included in those categories is *chizuk* for *shalom bayis*, improving our marital relationship.<sup>1</sup> But in our hectic and often harried lives, where do we find meaningful inspiration and realistic, practical advice to enable us to work at improving our marriage, and how do we find the time to put such advice into practice?

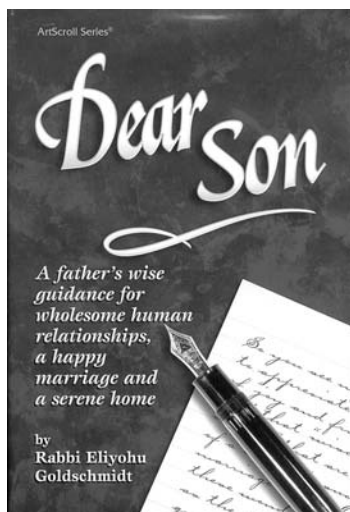
There are, fortunately, quite a number of books (and some tape series) that present the Torah perspective on this vital topic. Learning any of these is a good place to start; what follows is a brief review of a few of the more recently-released works. Following the reviews are some suggestions as how to best provide young couples with advice on *shalom bayis* in a way that will have a lasting impact on their marriages.<sup>2</sup>

**Dear Son**, by Rabbi Eliyohu Goldschmidt (Mesorah Publications, Brooklyn, NY, 2004)

Rabbi Boruch Eliyohu Goldschmidt זצ"ל, former *Mashgiach* of the Yeshiva of South Fallsburg, for many years conducted weekly *vaadim* (discussion groups)

**RABBI BISER** IS ASSOCIATE GENERAL COUNSEL OF AGUDATH ISRAEL OF AMERICA. HIS FIRST ARTICLE IN JO WAS "SHALOM BAYIS: THE NEED FOR FORMAL HADRACHA." SUMMER '01. HE IS STILL TRYING TO BE A GOOD HUSBAND.

with young married men in Lakewood on *shalom bayis* matters. Based in large part on these *vaadim*, he wrote *שכל טוב* – a beautiful *sefer* for *chassanim* to learn during *shana rishona* (first year of



marriage) and beyond. Rabbi Goldschmidt then wrote *Dear Daughter*,<sup>3</sup> which presents Torah wisdom and advice to about-to-be-married and newly married young women on how to achieve and maintain *shalom bayis*.

When he was *niftar* (passed away) four years ago, Rabbi Goldschmidt was in the

process of writing *Dear Son*, a book for young men similar to *Dear Daughter*. Based on the manuscript he left, and the material in *שכל טוב*, his family completed the book and it has just been published.

The book is written in the form of short letters "from the heart" from a father to his newly married son, and in this fashion it very pleasantly and gently presents the *chassan* with a wealth of guidance. Based firmly on the teachings of *Chazal*, and illustrated with marvelous stories and anecdotes drawn largely from the author's own life experiences, *Dear Son* takes the reader through many topics essential to building *shalom bayis*. The secular vs. the Torah view of love, the importance of viewing one's spouse positively, how to speak with your wife, learning her language, how to apologize, how to resolve differences, how to avoid anger, and much more are all discussed with warmth and wisdom, and spiced with wit and humor. What is particularly special about *Dear Son* is that the advice is presented in a style that is so caring and pleasant that the reader won't feel he is being lectured to—*divrei chachamim benachas nishma'im*—but he will feel inspired to listen to the author's advice

<sup>1</sup> Heard from Rabbi Yisroel Rokowsky

<sup>2</sup> This article is a review only of those books and tapes that were presented to the author to review for the *Jewish Observer*. It is far from a comprehensive survey of the Torah literature in English on marriage, and should not be taken as indicating a preference for the books reviewed as opposed to the other books in the field. Indeed, there are a number of other excellent works on the topic, including

Rabbi Aharon Feldman's *The River, the Kettle, and the Bird*; Rabbi Ezriel Tauber's *To Become One*; Rabbi Zelig Pliskin's *Marriage*; Rabbi Shmuel Eisenblatt's *Fulfillment in Marriage*; Rabbi Yirmiyahu and Tehilla Abramov's *Two Halves of a Whole*; Malka Kaganoff's *Dear Kallah*; Atara Malach's *You Owe it to Yourself*, and many more.

<sup>3</sup> This book was reviewed in these pages by Mrs. Devorah Biser in June '01.

and attempt to implement it.

But don't be misled by the title; *Dear Son* applies equally to husbands of all ages. It is never too late to change even years of bad habits and improve one's marriage. The book includes the story of a doctor who once told Rabbi Goldschmidt about the *niflaos haBorei* (Divine miracles) that are evidenced in the amazing ability of the human liver to regenerate itself after an operation. Years later, this doctor came to Rabbi Goldschmidt for advice about his rebellious son, and it came out that the obvious cause of the son's leaving home was the years of marital discord between the doctor and his wife. "If you want your son back, you have to fix your marriage," said Rabbi Goldschmidt.

"But rabbi, the chance of love in our marriage is dead," responded the doctor. "We've learned to live together after a fashion... But love? Serenity? Harmony?"

Rabbi Goldschmidt reminded him of their conversation years earlier about the liver, and explained that a Jewish marriage "is also a regenerative organ. No matter how badly it is damaged, it can be brought back to life. That is how the Creator made it. He blessed it with deep, inexhaustible wellsprings of love and joy. If you dig down far enough, you will find them, and your marriage will become once again like a rose in full bloom, fragrant and beautiful to behold." The doctor listened, and saved his marriage and his son.

Rabbi Goldschmidt explains:

Every Friday night, we say "*Lecha dodi likras kalla*. Let us go, my beloved, to greet the bride." We welcome every *Shabbos* as a *kalla*, a bride, not a wife. Reb Tzaddok explains that every *Shabbos* must be viewed as a renewal of holiness, and it must be greeted with renewed feelings in our hearts.

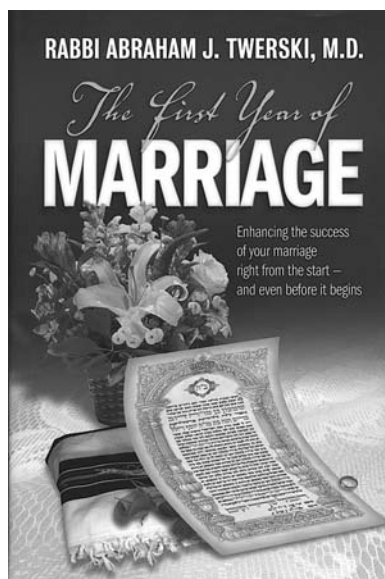
It is the same with marriage. You must always look at your wife as a bride, and you must keep your feelings for her fresh and vigorous. For the rest of your life, you must continue doing and saying things that will

revitalize your love — even when you will both be in your nineties.<sup>4</sup>

*Dear Son* tells husbands just what "things" to do and say — and what not to — to keep our marriages in full bloom.

**The First Year of Marriage**, by Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D. (Mesorah Publications, Brooklyn, NY, 2004)

Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D., a prolific author who has given us many books filled with wisdom and practical advice for living, has just written *The First Year of Marriage*. Appropriately subtitled "Enhancing the success of your mar-



riage right from the start—and even before it begins," this book belongs at the top of the required reading list for all engaged and newly married couples. Rabbi Twerski says he wrote the book because "young people are woefully unprepared for marriage"; in many families, "more time is spent on the arrangements for the wedding, which will last only a few hours, than for the couple's relationship, which should last a lifetime." The purpose of *The First Year of Marriage* is to enable couples to understand most of the common sources of misunderstanding and potential conflict that often arise during *shana rishona*, and to give them practical advice as to how to handle them.

Why do we need such a book, or indeed, any of the books and tapes

reviewed in this article? Rabbi Twerski explains that

[O]ne of the side effects of modern life has been that patience and willingness to work things out are often in short supply. Technology has eroded our tolerance for endurance. Jet planes, fax machines, instant foods and microwave ovens have habituated us to want and expect results immediately.... Science and technology have eliminated so many sources of discomfort that our predecessors experienced that many people think there should be no discomfort in life, and if someone is uncomfortable, there must be a pill to relieve it.<sup>5</sup>

But the reality is that there will be discomfort in building a marital relationship, and couples who read this book will know in advance not only that such problems are normal and to be expected, but also how to deal with them and grow from them. *The First Year of Marriage* is a sort of road map and instruction manual for *shana rishona*, a set of directions that points out in advance the obstacles, pitfalls, challenges, and opportunities for growth that couples are likely to encounter as they enter married life. Based largely on Torah wisdom, and spiced with the author's insights into human nature drawn from his psychiatric training and years of counseling experience, Rabbi Twerski's book should help many achieve a successful and harmonious *shana rishona*—which in turn will establish the solid foundation for a lifetime.

Rabbi Twerski starts by showing us how many of a young couple's preconceptions about what their married relationship should be like or how their home should operate come from their own upbringing, and this knowledge alone will help the young couple better adapt to the differences they encounter in each other. He then deals with great wisdom with such issues as how and when to criticize and how to react to criticism, dealing with low self-esteem, avoiding controlling behavior, anger, stress, mood changes, raising children, in-law relationships, and much, much more.

<sup>4</sup> *Dear Son*, p. 80



While this is an eclectic work, containing both Chassidic stories and quotes from contemporary non-Jewish authors, inspiring *divrei Torah* and practical hands-on marriage counseling advice, the message is always one that is firmly grounded in a Torah *hashkafa*.

Interestingly, the book ends with a Part II—several chapters of advice for those entering second marriages. But if every newly married couple were to follow Rabbi Twerski's advice and read, and then from time to time reread, Part I of *The First Year of Marriage*, there would be

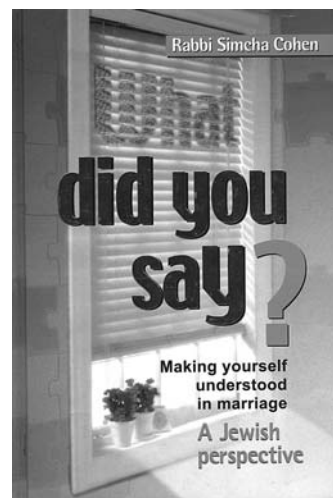
many fewer people who would ever need to read Part II.

**What Did You Say? (Making Yourself Understood in Marriage)**, by Rabbi Simcha Cohen (Simcha Cohen, 2000)

Good marriages are built upon good marital communication in particular. What information can we acquire that will give us the concrete, practical knowledge to improve our daily interactions and avoid negativity and destructive criticism? Rabbi Simcha

Cohen's *What Did You Say?: Making Yourself Understood in Marriage* provides us with that knowledge. It is based on the author's *Habayit Hayehudi*, a book widely popular in Israel. Rabbi Cohen, an acclaimed lecturer and marriage counselor, delves deeply into classic Torah sources in every chapter, and then presents the application of those timeless lessons for married couples. Indeed, *What Did You Say?* is a fascinating combination of gently presented but powerful *mussar* together with down-to-earth advice, drawn from the author's many years of experience in counseling couples.

Starting with sound advice for dating and *shidduchim*, Rabbi Cohen then



takes us step-by-step through the challenges and pitfalls of marital communication. He shows us dramatically, through Torah sources and real-life examples, why giving compliments is sometimes so difficult and, yet, why bestowing the right type of compliment is so vital to a relationship. When and how to criticize, understanding our spouse's needs, how to understand and talk your spouse's language, how to apologize, and how and what to talk about are some of the many other topics addressed in this valuable book. As we read through the examples, we often can see and hear ourselves, which helps open us up to the author's advice as to how we can, and should, change the way we communicate with our spouses.

<sup>5</sup> *The First Year of Marriage*, pp. 18, 54

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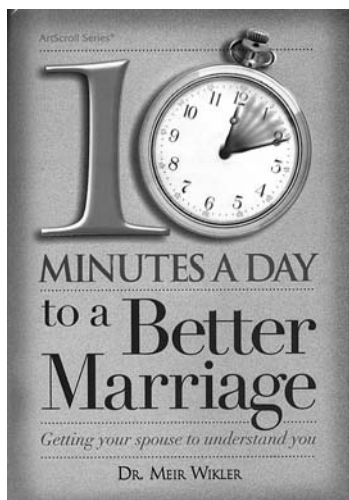
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**Ten Minutes a Day to a Better Marriage**,  
by Dr. Meir Wikler (Mesorah Publications, Brooklyn, NY, 2003)

For a *kollel* couple approaching *shana rishona* in proper fashion, there should be plenty of time for both husband and wife to work on building their relationship. For the rest of us, when do we do it? We can be inspired by *Dear Son* or *Dear Daughter*, absorb the wealth of knowledge contained in *What Did You Say?* or any of the other Torah-based guides to successful marriage, and resolve that we are going to change. But how, in the midst of our busy days and lives, can we actually change our normal routine in such a way that we apply that

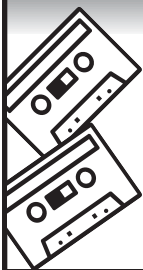


inspiration and that knowledge, put our marriage on a path toward improvement, and start transforming our relationship with our spouse for the better?

Dr. Meir Wikler's *Ten Minutes a Day To a Better Marriage* provides an answer. Drawing on his over 20 years of experience as a family counselor, the advice of his colleagues, and the wisdom of the Torah, Dr. Wikler presents a simple but extraordinarily effective plan for helping our marriages fulfill their great potential.

Dr. Wikler, in this well-thought-out and well-written book that uses actual case histories from his practice to illustrate his advice, begins by presenting the "ground rules" for all marital communication. He explains how to express negative feelings constructively, listen to negative feelings non-defensively, express positive feelings properly, and lis-

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ten to positive feelings without awkwardness. He then advances the seemingly simple idea that no matter how busy your daily schedule, everyone can (and must) find ten minutes each day for a private appointment with one's spouse, devoted solely to genuine communication—for talking about something that matters to you or listening to something that matters to your spouse.

Many of our daily conversations with our spouse in reality consist of little more than a discussion of plans, errands, instructions, relaying of messages, and the like; this is not what Dr. Wikler means by communication. The bulk of his book consists of describing in detail exactly what those 10 minutes of daily communication should, and should not, consist of.

Dr. Wikler demonstrates with examples from the dialogues of actual couples how, following his 10-minute-a-day plan and his guidelines for effective speaking and listening, husbands and wives can resolve even long-standing, deep-seated disputes and differences. For example, by seeing how Hadassah and Mutty resolved their disagreement over where to go on vacation, and how Sam and Nava worked out a solution to their after-*shul* plans for *Shabbos* mornings, we see not only that peaceful resolution of disagreements is possible, but we also learn how to achieve it.

In addition to counseling us on the importance of good communication with one's spouse, Dr. Wikler's book contains chapters on constructive criticism, gaining control over one's own anger and dealing with your spouse's anger, how to shield children from marital conflict,

conflict resolution techniques that really work, and building closeness and creating emotional intimacy.

One of the things that strikes the reader is how many of the arguments and misunderstandings expressed by the couples in Dr. Wikler's case studies are about seemingly "little things" that take on major importance. But in truth, it is in dealing with all the seemingly small things that marital relationships can either deteriorate or grow stronger.

#### HADRACHA FOR THE ABOUT-TO-BE AND NEWLY MARRIED

As all those involved in counseling couples urge, it is vital to provide newly engaged couples with the Torah information and tools to help them start their relationship out properly and guide them through the opportunities and obstacles of *shana rishona*.<sup>6</sup> As Rabbi Simcha Cohen writes:

In recent years, engaged couples take lessons not only in the laws of family purity, but also in the art of living together harmoniously. This is a very welcome development. As experienced marriage counselors can testify, practically all problems that arise in married life are ultimately caused not by the couple's differences in character, but by their inability to deal with these differences. Each partner should learn as much as possible about building marital harmony beforehand, rather than learning it the hard way afterwards. Whether through courses, seminars, books by Torah scholars, or tapes of

their lectures, men and women can learn much about how to communicate with their spouses. . . .

Imagine that a conflict arises between a newly married couple. Because of their premarital study, they . . . recognize the underlying problem, and realize it is the sort of thing liable to happen in any marriage. As a result, they can sit down together calmly and try to work out the difficulty.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, realistically, in the hectic but exciting days between the *lechayim* and the *chassuna*, what *chassan* or *kalla* is going to read one, or several, books on *shalom bayis*? How, then, do we reach our *chassanim* and *kallos*, and help them build their *bayis ne'eman* right from the start?

In this author's humble opinion, a vehicle already exists to help teach *chassanim* and *kallos* about *shalom bayis*: *chassan* and *kalla* classes. Every *chassan* and every *kalla* in our community attends a number of sessions—usually individually with a private instructor—for instruction in *taharas hamishpacha* and other halachic aspects of married life. If those teaching them were to add on to each session the essential basics for success in *shalom bayis*, the young couple would begin married life with at least an understanding of the issues they are likely to confront.<sup>8</sup> A number of American yeshivos, including Lakewood, are now providing *chassanim* with a series of *shiurim* on this aspect of marriage, in recognition of the fact that the standard one-time *chassan shmues* by the *Mashgiach* is no longer sufficient.<sup>9</sup> We would be well advised to urge

<sup>6</sup> As discussed previously in these pages in "Shalom Bayis: The Need for Formal Hadracha," Summer '01

<sup>7</sup> *What Did You Say?*, pp. 63-64

<sup>8</sup> For example, I was told by someone prominent in our community that he still remembers Rabbi Label Katz (author of *Ohel Aryei*, a sefer on *hilchos nidda* for *chassanim*) telling them that they should expect their wives to be late for almost every *chassuna* they would attend throughout their married life. Rather than express annoyance, Rabbi Katz told them, they should remember each time that she is delayed by dressing up and putting on make-up to look good for you. This individual

told me that he has remembered this advice every time he and his wife have been running late for a *chassuna*, and it has saved him from getting annoyed literally hundreds of times over the past thirty years.

<sup>9</sup> For this purpose, I have prepared, under the guidance of Rabbi Chaim Morgenstern, a brief outline for *chassan* teachers in English, based largely on the *kuntreisim* for *chassanim* of Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe and Rabbi Chaim Friedlander. Complete with sources and anecdotes, it presents the basics for *shalom bayis* in five sessions. *Chassan* teachers interested in obtaining this outline should contact me directly at 212-797-9000.

<sup>10</sup> Imagine the impact if *Roshei Yeshiva* and *rabbanim*, as a condition of agreeing to serve as *mesadeir kiddushin*, were to insist that the couple receive instruction in *shalom bayis*.

<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, I strongly recommend that engaged *bachurim* in yeshiva at least make an effort to learn Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe's *מאמרי הדרכה לחתנים* and/or Rabbi Chaim Friedlander's *וידעת כי שלום אהלך*. Rabbi Chaim Morgenstern (952-314-4116 or cfmorgen@mosesnet.net) can direct callers as to how to obtain these *kuntreisim* (pamphlets).

<sup>12</sup> The tapes can be obtained directly from Rabbi Morgenstern at the number listed in the previous footnote.



every yeshiva, seminary, and *chassan* and *kalla* teacher to take immediate steps to include education for *shalom bayis* in the information they impart to *chassanim* and *kallos*.<sup>10</sup>

But until *shalom bayis* education becomes the norm rather than the exception for soon-to-be married couples, what should be done? While by no means the equivalent of personal instruction, there are now tapes available that every *chassan* and *kalla* should acquire and hear. They may not have the time to read some books or learn a *sefer*,<sup>11</sup> but they probably will have time when driving or walking to listen, for example, to Rabbi Chaim Morgenstern's excellent set of tapes on the subject. Rabbi Morgenstern, who received his *hadracha* in *shalom bayis* training and marriage counseling from Rabbi Moshe Aaron Stern, has packed into eight *shiurim* for *chassanim* and an equivalent set for *kallos* the essential wisdom and advice of *Chazal* and our *gedolim* on building a Torah marriage.<sup>12</sup> This is the ideal engagement gift, because by giving these tapes you are giving the couple the knowledge and the tools that they need for a lifetime of marital harmony. Based on *divrei Chazal* and the writings of recent Torah authorities, these lectures, spiced with real anecdotes to illustrate their points, cover the gamut of married life, including the responsibilities of a successful husband and wife, strengthening the marital bond, causes and prevention of anger, and do's and don'ts when disagreements arise. A major advantage to these tapes is that there are different tapes for the *chassan* and the *kalla*; since there are profound differences between men and women and in their obligations in marriage, the best *hadracha* must present different messages to each one. The tapes should ideally be listened to before the *chassuna*, again during *shana rishona*, and thereafter from time to time. We need constantly to remind ourselves, even years after *shana rishona*, of the wisdom contained therein.

Another tape series was just recently developed under the guidance of Rabbi

Yakov Horowitz, *menahel* of Yeshiva Darchei Noam in Monsey, and Program Director of Agudath Israel's Project Y.E.S.<sup>13</sup> Rabbi Horowitz's experience in trying to help at-risk teens, many of whom come from homes lacking in proper *shalom bayis*, inspired him to produce this series of lectures, which were delivered in Flatbush last spring. This well-thought-out series of talks from prominent experts (including *rabbanim*, a marriage counselor, a time management trainer, and a financial planner) in their respective fields will do much to

educate the couple embarking on the challenge of building a Torah home. It includes a beautiful explanation of the Torah perspective on marriage, advice on setting goals and establishing Torah values for your home, an introduction to the basic principles of time management (to help enable us to spend more time on what is really important in our lives, such as our spouses and children), guidance in the areas of marital communication and relationship building (Dr. Shlomo Schuck's "Ten Rules for Communication in Marriage" are excel-



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<sup>13</sup> These tapes, entitled the "Zichron Akiva Bayis Ne'eman Seminar," can be obtained by calling 845-426-2243 or e-mailing bayisn@rabbihorowitz.com.

lent guidelines for every couple), and direction for developing a financial plan for your family. The *Bayis Ne'eman* Seminar, in short, consists of practical, hands-on advice for couples in those areas of life that are key ingredients in building a relationship and a family. *Of course, no books or tapes can or should ever be a substitute for a Rav or Rebbe, whom every couple needs, and to whom they should turn for guidance on these matters.*

#### AFTER THE CHASSUNA

Those involved in preparing about-to-be-married couples for *shalom bayis* issues agree that, regardless of what information they manage to impart prior to the *chassuna*, the main *hadracha* ideally should take place during *shana rishona*. Issues and problems that were only theoretical before the *chuppa* suddenly become real, and it is then that the couple needs the greatest guidance. *Shana rishona* is the best time for both husband and wife to continue to receive *hadracha*

from a mentor, and set aside time to listen to some of the tapes and read some of the books discussed in this article.


But the *hadracha* shouldn't stop with the end of *shana rishona*. People change as they go through life, and as new challenges arise within each family, couples need some form of ongoing *hadracha*, or at least an occasional "tune-up." One way to help ensure that husbands in particular get this guidance is to combine *shalom bayis* classes with review *shiurim* on *Hilchos Nidda*—a concept that is already being implemented in a number of shuls.

#### THE SHALOM BAYIS VAAD

For the genuinely ambitious, yet another step could be attending a monthly "vaad" on the topic. The con-

<sup>14</sup> Rabbi Chaim Morgenstern has prepared a tape series of 12 *vaadim* for husbands and a corresponding set for wives; potential *vaad* leaders interested in starting a *vaad* in their community should contact him (see footnote 11 above) for more information.


cept is that a group gets together about once a month and hears a presentation on a particular aspect that could use strengthening in a marital relationship, and then works daily on implementing the lesson learned for the next few weeks. The idea is that "*hergel naaseh teva*"—we become habituated to proper *hanhagos* and thus make them a part of our daily lives.<sup>14</sup>


*Shalom bayis*, good marital communication, and a closer marital relationship do not come by themselves. They take much *siyata diShamaya* and serious *hishtadlus*. All married couples should resolve to set aside quality time on a fairly regular basis to work on improving their marriage and their *shalom bayis*; the books and tapes mentioned in this article are a good place to start. 

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GAVRIELLA BACHRACH



# Adar through a Fish Tank

THROUGH A GLASS,  
WITH AWE

There I was in front of a fish tank once again. My family was tanks ahead of me, but I couldn't move. One would think I had seen quite enough fish already since I grew up across the street from the New York Aquarium. Whenever we go traveling, however, my eyes are drawn to the signs and brochures advertising aquariums. This time we were visiting the one in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and I was mesmerized as I watched the fish dance and fly. It might be because it brings back childhood memories. That's true. It's mostly, though, because I've discovered an aspect about fish that I never realized before.

When I peer into a fish tank, I peer into a hidden world. In their natural habitat, fish are usually out of sight; they're underwater, hidden below eye level. *Hashem* created an entire breathtaking underwater world. Much of what we know about it today remained unknown until the late 1800s. Until man decided to dive and delve, this hidden world was left unseen.

**MRS. BACHRACH** IS A FREELANCE WRITER WHOSE POETRY HAS PREVIOUSLY APPEARED IN *THE JEWISH OBSERVER*. SHE AND HER FAMILY LIVE IN ATLANTA, GA.

And what a magnificent hidden world it is! The colors. The grace. The beauty. Just by looking at the shining lights of the bioluminescent fish, the magical camouflaging of the flounder, and the deep colors of the Atlantic blue tang, one gets a tiny taste of underwater grandeur.

Not only can we not see fish in their grand natural habitat, we cannot hear them, either. Fish are silent. Most creatures make some sort of sound. Lions roar, mosquitoes buzz, kookaburras cackle. Fish cannot speak, and yet they shout. They shout *Hashem's* majesty. They capture our attention, not by their din, but by their detail. The quiet way a triggerfish uses its second spine to lock its first spine into its upright position and secure itself in a cave's crevice screams *Hashem's* endless and intricate wisdom. When the forceps fish's false eyespot tricks its predator, and the anglerfish's false bait helps it attract and capture its meals, one cannot help but be in awe of *Hashem's* greatness.

What does all this greatness that's hidden and silent mean to us noisy humans on dry ground? What difference does it make if fish are easy to view or impossible to hear? To me it means that what is hidden has the potential to be exquisitely beautiful. From hidden and silent beauty can exude deep praises to

*Hashem*, and even, as we see in Purim, the seeds of *geula*.

THE SECRETIVE PATH  
TO THE *GEULA*

The Purim *geula* came through Esther, whose very name has the word *seiser*, secret, as its root. Esther, *Hashem's* instrument to bring the *geula*, had the qualities of silence and hiddenness, or modesty. As Mordechai instructed her, she revealed to no one the name of her nation. The *Midrash Rabba* relates that she did so in reverence to Mordechai, as well as because of her innate modesty.

The *Yalkut Me'am Loez* says that Esther was always modest; she hardly appeared in public where men were present. Mordechai hid Esther when Achashveirosh decreed that all girls must go to Heigei, the king's chamberlain, so that the king could eventually choose a new queen. Mordechai only took Esther out of hiding when Achashveirosh said anyone hiding from him would be killed. Mordechai advised Esther to mingle with the other women so she would not stand out.

Even once Esther was queen, she kept her modest ways. Rav Galico tells us that the reason she did not know about the decree to destroy the Jews until



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Mordechai appeared in sackcloth and told her was because she was modest and private. It was because of her modesty and quiet ways that she was able to privately keep mitzvos in Achashveirosh's palace without arousing suspicion. She requested a vegetarian diet so that she would be able to keep kosher. She also had a different maid for each day of the week, so that she would know which day was *Shabbos*. Esther's quiet and hidden ways praised *Hashem*, and it was through silent and modest Esther that the salvation came.

## THE SILENT SHOUT

Perhaps we can now use this insight about fish being silent and hidden and Esther being silent and hidden to understand one reason why Adar's *mazal* is fish.

All of us have times when we are out of the public's eye or out of its range of hearing, times when we are hidden from sight and sound and are "below water." Our actions and interactions at those times have the potential of being not just good, but magnificent. Esther's "below water" actions were grand. Can ours be, too?

No one sees how we act at home when we're tired or under pressure and stress. No one hears how we greet or speak to our family members. It is when we are underground and out of the public's attention that we need to remember that we have the opportunity to create a beautiful world.

Without sound and in a private place, fish are able to proclaim *Hashem's* existence in their splendid display of color, camouflages and intricacies. Through her silent and hidden ways, Esther praised *Hashem*. From our private homes and quiet interpersonal relationships, our shouting of *Hashem's* glory can resound and resonate. It may even help bring our *geula*.

Looking through those tanks at the mesmerizing, hidden and silent fish, whether in Chattanooga or New York, I get a reminder of the power we all have to make a difference when no one is watching or listening.

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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



## ON WITH THE DAF, THANKS TO TECHNOLOGY

To the Editor:

I enjoyed your recent issue about *Daf Yomi* and the *Siyum HaShas* (Feb '05). But you didn't deal with how modern technology has made *Daf Yomi* available to so many people. People like me. In the early 1990s, I gave Dial-a-Daf a try. And it was perfect for me. The *Maggidei shiur* were thorough. And there was no excuse not to do it, because all I needed was a telephone.

At first, only that day's *shiur* was available, and it started exactly on the hour. It was difficult to keep up if I needed to travel or when there was a three day *Yom Tov*. But eventually the system was automated, so I could access any *daf* in *Shas*, and start at any time. The only drawback was that it tied up the phone for an hour.

When the eleventh cycle of *Daf Yomi* began, CD-Daf was introduced. One *mesechta*, or more for the smaller *mesechtos*, on a CD-Rom. The same *shiurim* as on Dial-a-Daf, with *tzuras hadaf* on the screen. I could start anywhere, at any time. And any place where a *passuk* is quoted, I only have to click, and the entire *passuk* is displayed. And the *Rashi* on the *passuk* is available on the screen. In fact the *Tur*, *Shulchan Aruch*, and *Mishna Torah* are also available, with just a click. Some *mesechtos*, such as *Sukka*, also have illustrations available. It's portable, especially for someone with a laptop computer. No, it does not require using the Internet. And it comes with a calendar, so I always know what today's *daf* is.

Thanks to technology, many people like me are doing *Daf Yomi*. I once thought that *Daf Yomi* was beyond me, but now I'm looking forward to starting the next cycle.

SHMUEL LEBOVITZ  
Brooklyn, NY

## NOTABLE OMISSION IN MARKING THE SIYUM

To the Editor:

In your edition of October '97 you featured an article on "An Unsung Hero, Rabbi Moshe Menachem Mendel Spivak זצ"ל," originator of the *Daf Yomi* concept. Does he not deserve to be mentioned in connection with the forthcoming *Siyum HaShas*? "*Ha'omer davar beshem omro meivi ge'ula la'olam* – attributing a thought to its originator brings redemption to the world."

SHLOMO HAKOHEN KATZENSTEIN  
Antwerp, Belgium

## CARRYING THE SHAS IN HIS LEFT POCKET

To the Editor:

I finally joined the legion of *daf yomi* learners when my wife recently bought me an iPod. The deal was – learn the *daf* every day for at least a year, and the iPod is mine to keep! It's loaded with the entire *Shas* as heard on the Dial-a-Daf telephone. It goes with me almost everywhere. I call it my *Daf Yom-iPod*.

YAAKOV KOHN  
Brooklyn, NY

## CELL PHONES: INVASIVE OF PRIVATE TIME ON THE STREET

To the Editor:

I believe that Rabbi Pinchos Jung's article, "Cell Phone: Friend or Foe," in the Cheshvan issue, was very much to the point.

I would add to Rabbi Jung's examples one scenario that I have seen often: a mother is walking down the street with her children, and she is speaking on the cell phone. At that moment, her children are orphans. They are being deprived of one of the precious moments of childhood, the opportunity to be completely enveloped in their mother's love and attention. Outside of emergencies, there is no excuse for a mother to waste this precious time with her children. I can't help but think that

some day in the future, when that mother is in need of her children's attention, she will be in great danger of receiving a busy signal.

YISROEL NEUBERGER  
Lawrence, NY

## EVEN WORSE THAN THE CELL PHONE

To the Editor:

Once again, Rabbi Pinchos Jung has picked on the cell phone (Nov. '04), and even asked the JO readership to join in a campaign to free our *shuls* from this "scandalous desecration." A very worthy issue – but why not a campaign to rid our *shuls* of the *yesod* of scandalous desecration – i.e. just plain talking during *Chazaras Hashatz*, one that the *Shulchan Aruch* states "*gadol avono mi'ne'so* (too weighty a transgression to bear)"? – or talking during *laining*, which according to many is an *issur d'Orisa* (violation of Torah law)? – or just plain talking in *shul*, which the *Mishna Berura* tells us is the reason why so many *shuls* have been destroyed? Have we forgotten the *ikar* (primary concern) just to stress what is possibly just a *tafel* (secondary one)? If we conquer first things first, this second issue, I believe, will just fall by the wayside.

RABBI YAKOV PRESSMAN  
Brooklyn, NY

## A TELLING POINT IN AN HISTORIC ANECDOTE

To the Editor:

Dr. Bernard Fryshman's article, "Building Torah Together...From Afar" (*JO*, Nov. '04), began with the well-known story of how the Chofetz Chaim advised Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman to remain in Radin rather than disrupt his learning to attend his son's *bris milla*. As in most retellings of stories, an important point was omitted. Rabbi Moshe Shapiro זצ"ל mentioned in a recent talk that the Chofetz Chaim's *eitza* (counsel) was conditional: Reb Elchonon was to first contact his wife and obtain her consent. If not, his place would be by her side.

YISRAEL RUTMAN  
Zichron Yaakov