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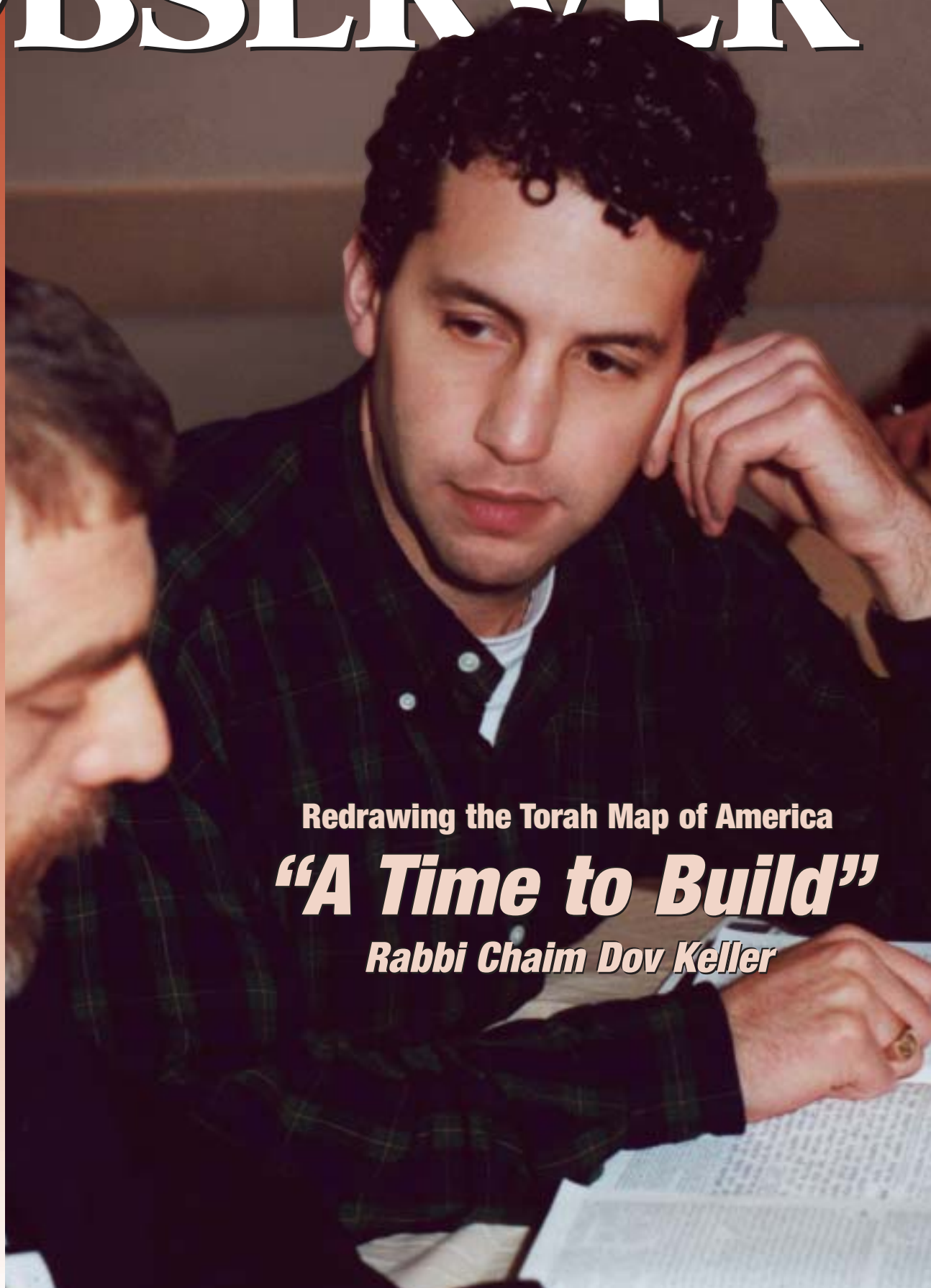
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Redrawing the Torah Map of America  
***“A Time to Build”***  
*Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller*

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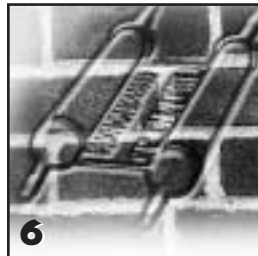
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## REPORT FROM DALLAS

# “You’re the Beracha”

Dallas, Texas, is quite a location for a community *kollel*. It is a major hub for the Southern Baptist Convention, Jews for J, the Mormons, and so-called Messianic Synagogues. It is near the buckle of the “Bible Belt.” It is also a very modern, hi-tech city, with all the baggage you might expect from that description. Still, there are about 50,000 Jews living in Dallas, myself and family included. Why did *Hashem* put us out here, instead of in Boro Park, or Monsey? I do not know. But what I do know is that by living and trying to build Torah in Dallas, we qualify as an “out-of-town” community. Understand, as someone new to the ways of Agudah Conventions and *Yated Neeman* reporting, until about 1995, when my wife and I together became *baalei teshuva*, “out-of-town” meant anything North of the Red River, dividing Texas from Oklahoma. When I think of that phrase now, and look back over the last seven years of spiritual discovery, it seems to me that until we all make it back to *Yerushalayim*, we’re all from “out-of-town.”

Mr. Broodo, an attorney, is a partner in the Labor and Employment section of Gardere Wynne Sewell LLP, in Dallas. This article is based on his speech at the 79<sup>th</sup> Annual National Convention of Agudath Israel of America where he addressed the theme “Redrawing the Map: Creating Torah Communities Across the USA”.

<sup>1</sup>This includes Rabbi Aaron Schechter (*Rosh Hayeshiva* of Mesivta Rabbi Chaim Berlin) and Rabbi Hillel David, who each pre-reviewed and approved this presentation in its original form.

## BAAL TESHUVA STORY NO. 6,372

Fearing the reaction of a seasoned, Torah-observant audience, the last thing I wanted was to present *Baal Teshuva* story number 6,372, describing the same rise from the ashes of secular life, with the same challenges, miracles, innocent gaffs, and happy end-of-the-beginning. On the other hand, every rabbi that I consulted said that none of us have heard enough *baal teshuva* stories.<sup>1</sup> Their advice was reassuring, and I would venture to add that, until the number is somewhere around 9,006,372, none of us have heard enough *baal teshuva* stories yet.

So, let me give you a few images. The first is of my office on the 27<sup>th</sup> floor of Thanksgiving Tower in downtown Dallas, where I was working feverishly as a labor and employment lawyer at an old-line Dallas firm. Someone told me that a Rabbi Becher was going to speak in our boardroom for a lunch-and-learn session. So I went, but all I noticed were four guys dressed in dark suits, and black hats, and – smiling amiably. I sat through the talk, found it interesting, and got back to my billable hours.

## NO COINCIDENCE

At the lunch talk, they managed to get my address, which put me on the mailing list of DATA – the Dallas Area Torah Association – our community *kollel*. Six months

later, my wife and I received a flier in the mail about a DATA Purim seminar, but what we walked into had no semblance to a seminar. It was a room at the local JCC, filled with several large round tables, and there they were: the same bunch of guys in black hats and dark suits, only now, there were more of them. No longer smiling amiably, they were sitting there arguing and carrying on, each group at their own table.

They showed us a list of topics by table, and I chose *The Hidden Mask of Nature*. At that table, Rabbi Aryeh Feigenbaum informed us that in the *Book of Esther*, you never find explicit mention of *Hashem*’s name. He explained the long series of coincidents in *Megillas Esther*, which in their totality *eliminated the possibility of coincidence*. I understand now that this concept is probably not news to most observant Jews, but it was *news* to me. I became so excited that I “helped” Rabbi Feigenbaum teach the rest of the group. It is fair to say that from that moment, we recognized that we would get to know each other.

I needed some time with this Rabbi. I had questions to ask him. *Where are you from? What are you doing in Dallas. How do you explain the Holocaust?* I wanted him to help me see with Jewish eyes. So, we met at his house. We went to lunch, and talked on the phone. He would call just to say hello.

Did I have any idea that he was learning in *kollel* 8-10 hours a day? That he and the others had packed up and left centers of Torah such as Yeshiva Chaim Berlin and Lakewood—to come to Dallas? No. All I knew was that he seemed to be open to a relationship, and that no questions were foolish questions. So for the next three years, I sat at his dining table every Thursday night, and asked questions. We did not learn a *sefer*. We just talked.

Once I trusted him, I was able to tell him about things, the things that I was doing that I knew were wrong. In turn, he showed his quality, telling me that he was proud to know me, and helping me make things right again.

#### TOAST FOR SHABBOS

We got to a point where I was ready to take on some *mitzvos*, so I told Rabbi Feigenbaum that I wanted to start with “something easy, like *davening*,” that I needed my Saturdays, and that *Shabbos* would have to wait. So he told me, “Let’s start with *Shabbos*.” He taught us to make *Kiddush* before going to the movies on Friday night, and to make *Havdala* when we got home from an outing on Saturday evening. We started spending *Shabbos* in his home from time to time. On the first Friday night we were there, I reached for the basket of *challa*, and lifted it directly over the *Shabbos* candles, setting on fire the napkin that lined the basket, and engulfing the *challa* in flames. It was humiliating, but they just smiled and told me to let them know in advance, next time, if I wanted toast for *Shabbos*.

After years of a marriage that began with a Reform ceremony, I asked the Rabbi if we were married according to Jewish law. We had no children. He asked me how many rings we used, and what kind of witnesses we had. The Rabbi pulled down a *Rambam* from his bookshelf, leaving no room for my lawyerly arguments about statutes of limitations. My wife and I were remarried in the Rabbi’s backyard. We moved near a *shomer Shabbos shul*. Then,

something extraordinary happened, when Rabbi Feigenbaum took eight of us *balabattim* on a trip to New York. I was the only one on the trip who was not *shomer Shabbos*. We went because we wanted to see the Yeshiva world. We wanted to visit the “planet” that these rabbis came from.

#### WE ARE ONE

Our first stop in New York was the national headquarters of Agudath Israel of America, where Rabbi Moshe Sherer, זצ”ל, told us that, unlike other places, money does not dictate Jewish policy, that the *Rabbanim* do that. He counseled us to live a life of Torah and *chessed*. He invited us to unite Jews by learning together. He urged us that we must act, because as a people, we are vanishing.

Then we went to visit the Novominsker *Rebbe*, where we cried over the stories he told of *mesiras nefesh*, of Jews trying to keep *Shabbos* in earlier times. He repeatedly told us that in returning to Torah, the bigger the struggle to *shteig*, the greater the reward. He told us to adopt teachers we could trust, and to appreciate that every person is unique, that no two are the same, and that there are no strict rules for bringing others close to *Hashem*, including our children. He told us that as difficult as our efforts in Dallas might seem, that “a little bit of light dispels a lot of darkness.”

Over *Shabbos* we spent time with Rabbi Hillel David and with Mr. Abraham Fruchthandler. Many of us in Dallas have been privileged to establish a *kesher* (bond) with these Torah leaders. We attended a *seuda* at Mr. Fruchthandler’s *Shabbos* table, and I had forgotten that between “*Al n’tilas yadayim*” and “*Hamotzi*” we should not interrupt with any unnecessary talk. I washed, and was the last one back to the table. Mr. Fruchthandler was in the middle of making *Hamotzi* when I called to my friend across the room to ask a question. That’s when I looked up and saw Mr. Fruchthandler’s knife in the *challa*. In front of all those religious people, I felt judged, and convicted of a crime.



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Finally, I got up out of my chair, walked to the end of the table, and said, "Mr. Fruchthandler, I'm sorry that I interrupted your *beracha*." He grabbed my hands, looked me in the eye, and said, "Listen: You're the *beracha*."

On Sunday, we met with Rabbi Aaron Schechter at Yeshiva Chaim Berlin. When we first saw him, he smiled and said, "We are one. We are one." He told us that Torah is the source of life; that it is the *neshama* of *Klal Yisroel*; that it is not a step in itself, but the source of all the steps we take in growing as Jews.

When we got home from that trip, there was one more *Shomer Shabbos Yid* living in Dallas, Texas.

**WHAT IT'S SUPPOSED TO SOUND LIKE**

Please excuse the Texas slang, but through all of these experiences, in trying to find my way back to where I knew I was supposed to be, I often told Rabbi Yerachmiel Fried, the *Rosh Kollel* of DATA, that I felt like a "pig on roller skates." When I was informed that my convention talk was scheduled for a plenary session and not a round table discussion (as I had thought when I originally agreed to do it), I told him that I felt like a "deer in the headlights." He said, "Well, at least we've moved up to a kosher animal." In Dallas, Texas, that's *kiruv*.

Early in 1999, we started a new *shul* in Dallas, Congregation Ohr HaTorah, affiliated with Agudath Israel. Somehow, through no choice of ours, it was started in our living room. For two years before this, my wife and I had been trying to have children, only to face surgeries, drugs, and repeated heartbreak. The *Shabbos* before the *shul* started, Rabbi Dovid Goldwasser was in town for a DATA *Shabbaton*. He *benched* us that we should have children within the year in the merit of the *shul's* inauguration in our home. Rabbi Fried gave us a similar *beracha*.

The first *minyán* of Congregation Ohr HaTorah was *Mincha* on 14 Shevat, 5759. One year later to the day, on 14 Shevat, 5760, *Hashem* blessed us with Rachel and Leah Esther, healthy twin

girls (*kein ayin hara*). They're 2-years-old now, and if you ask them, "When do we get to have cake?" they'll tell you, *Shabbos Kodesh*. And the *shul*? It's grown from 20 families to 125 families since that same 14 Shevat.

In Dallas, right now, thanks to the *kollel*, we have a *makom Torah*. There is not adequate space allotted here to describe the conferences, seminars, retreats, courses, *shiurim*, *chavrusas*, the tape library, the *Shabbos* fax, the magazine, the radio show. Besides, DATA is more than all that. The rabbis and their wives save Jewish marriages and foster new ones. They teach us how to raise our children. They counsel us on every kind of personal and business problem imaginable. They can do this, *because they have the Torah*.

Most of us in Dallas do not have the depth of background in Torah that you would wish for us. For myself, I'm both pleased and somewhat embarrassed to say that 3 *Shabbos*s before the Agudath Israel Convention, I made my first *siyum*, on *Mesechta Megilla*, after learning through it with a *chavrusa* for a year and a half, struggling through the Aramaic and arguing through every last Artscroll footnote.

But perhaps what you need to know from Dallas, and all places out of town, is that what we are missing in our learning, we make up—in our desire for it. You have probably heard the saying, "I may not know how to play the piano, but I know what it's supposed to sound like." I think for most Jews who are lost to Torah—which is most of us—you could say the same thing. We just need someone to come, who knows how to play.

#### WHAT WILL YOU TELL THEM?

Ever since September 11<sup>th</sup>, there has been a lot of talk to the effect that *Hashem* is shaking up our comfort zone in America, to encourage us to better our ways, and to prepare us to return to *Eretz Yisroel*. As an official out-of-towner, let me pose a question to those who are learned in Torah: *Are you planning on taking the rest of us along with you?*

When I first read the biography of

Mike Tress, זצ"ל, and other books dealing with the history of the Holocaust, I was in shocked disbelief that the Reform and Zionists, and others would put anything above saving their brothers' lives. Forgive me if this is a *chutzpa*, but it seems to me that now the tables are turned. According to published statistics, in America thousands of Jews every year become lost to their heritage in different ways, and yet, there is an army of Torah encamped in New York and New Jersey alone. What will history say about us, who live today? When your children

who are learned in Torah call you to say that they have been given an opportunity to join the community *kollel* in Topeka, Kansas, what will you tell them? Most Jews in America are living *bli Torah*. What's going to be with them? We cannot expect them to love something that they do not know anything about. What can only one person do? From every Jew that has yet to know a *Megillas Esther* from a *Mesechta Megilla*, to every Jew who knows and loves them well, let me suggest an answer: "Listen: You're the *beracha*." ■

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# An Open Miracle And the Rains Came

My wife and I have been involved in teaching Family Purity to engaged couples in the Sephardic community in Brooklyn, NY for many years. One couple – not the typical Sephardic community members – stands out in particular.

On a shopping expedition in Manhattan, my wife was introduced to the owner and designer of a women's clothing company, Aaron Abadi, a Syrian Jew, born in Curacao, then residing in Manhattan. Curacao is a small island under Dutch control, just north of Venezuela. During this visit, someone mentioned to Aaron that my wife, Carol, and I were teachers of Family Purity in our community, and that since Aaron was engaged, he might like to attend our classes.

Aaron politely, but emphatically, declined the offer, but he did mention it to his fiancée, Laurie, who had recently returned from two years in a seminary in Israel where she became a *baalat teshuva*. Laurie immediately accepted the opportunity for the classes. Aaron's friends were also getting married at the same time, and had readily agreed to attend the classes with their future brides. So he and Laurie also joined.

Mr. Haber lives in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn. This is his first appearance in these pages.

Although Aaron had a limited Hebrew background, he was very honest, and by the end of the sessions he was convinced that this was the only formula for himself and Laurie to follow in their married life. After their marriage, Aaron and Laurie – who had become our friends – decided to close the business in New York, and move to Curacao, where Aaron's father had a large retail business.

The first question that came up was what to do about a *mikva* on Curacao. Although the first synagogue in the western world was built in Curacao in 1664, with a *mikva* on premises, it had not been used in many years. In fact the synagogue was now a museum, run by Reconstructionist Jews.

Yes, the ocean could be used as a *mikva*. Nonetheless, we blessed Aaron and Laurie that they should eventually build a kosher *mikva* on the island.

Upon their arrival, Aaron and Laurie took a very active role in the religious activities on the island. Shortly thereafter, Aaron decided to build a home there. He had plans meticulously drawn up, including a wing with a *mikva* and dressing room. Construction of the *mikva* would be supervised by Aaron with constant contact with Rabbi Isaac Trieger, an expert in the field. The

Abadis were very excited to have such a worthwhile addition to their home; in fact, the first part of the foundation to be poured was specifically for the *mikva* wing.

Construction on the island is a long, drawn-out affair. The mentality on the island is that "*manyana*" (tomorrow) is just as good as today. Approximately two-and-a-half years later, the home was ready to be moved into, although the *mikva* was not ready. People were already teasing Aaron, "Why do we need a *mikva* on the island? How many people are going to use it in a month? Three? Are you so religious that you should have a *mikva* in your home?" The project seemed to be floundering, but with a little encouragement it got back on track.

In the summer of 1999, Rabbi Maleh was sent from Mexico City to examine the *mikva*, and give approval so water could be gathered in the *borot* (storage chambers). Although the construction was fine, the rabbi found a leak in the *mikva* (not very common) and until the problem was solved, the *mikva* was not kosher. Aaron began looking for the right material to seal the leak in the pool.

It is important to know that although

Curacao is very close to the equator, and there are breezes on the island, it could be described as having a desert climate. In fact, over the past ten years, the average rainfall during the rainy season (November through March) was less than an inch per year. All drinking water on the island comes from a desalinization plant. When flying over the island, everything looks brown instead of the green one might expect.

When Laurie and Aaron moved into their home everybody asked them, "Why are there gutters and downspouts on the roof? It barely rains here!" The answer was, "We have a *mikva* wing, and the gutters are to collect the rainwater to have a kosher *mikva*." This response always drew a chuckle and the reply, "It will take 20 years before you will be able to collect enough water to fill a *mikva*!" In the meantime Aaron was working with Rabbi Trieger to find a material to seal the leak, but even he was experiencing doubts about the project by now, "Will this project ever end? – And, of

course, what about the water?"

To add insult to injury, 1999 was a year of drought. In November, 1999, there was a brief rain spell on the island. Friends called in excitement asking Aaron, "Are you getting rain for the *mikva*?" When he explained about the spout being stopped up and that he couldn't even begin to accumulate the water until the rabbi gave him permission, it was too much for anyone to understand. "That's ridiculous! If you lose the opportunity, you will not get more rain till next year, and anyway, it will take many years to fill."

Finally, Aaron found a building material that worked perfectly to seal the *mikva*. But was it halachically suitable? In December, 1999, as Aaron was leaving on a business trip, Rabbi Trieger gave him the O.K. to unplug the downspout and wait for the rains to fill the *borot*. Aaron called Laurie and gave her instructions on how to do this.

That night a storm appeared and it started to rain. After two days of con-

stant rain, Laurie went to see what was going on in the *mikva*. Both *borot* were overflowing and the water had actually spilled over into the main *mikva*, which by this time was already half full. Miraculously, it continued to rain until the entire island turned green. It rained so much that there were many places on the island where lack of adequate drainage caused small lakes of accumulated water. The local government decided to put guppies (small fish) in all these "lakes" to control the mosquitoes, which were starting to accumulate around the stagnant water. There was nothing on record to compare to this.

In January, we received a phone call from Aaron and Laurie, "Our *borot* are full. Please come down to Curacao to verify that the *mikva* is kosher, and to teach our friends about Family Purity."

We were overjoyed to make the trip and see a beautiful *mikva*, with a separate main entrance, a beautiful dressing room... By the way, when we flew over the island, it was really green – with promise and hope. ■

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# Is it Time to Celebrate?

## Head in the Sand?

I was a recent speaker at the Hineni Tuesday night lecture. The Rebbitzin started this class a few years ago with a half dozen women in her home. Last Tuesday there were fifteen hundred people, all with *Chumash* in hand. Aish Hatorah, Ohr Somayach, Machon Shlomo, and hundreds of other outreach institutions all started with a handful of students; now there isn't one of us who doesn't know a friend or relative who hasn't been through their doors.

So is it time to celebrate? Only if you believe we have done all that we can to bring about this Torah revolution. And if you believe that, then you are truly living with your head firmly embedded in the sand. While the growth of those returning to Torah has been remarkable, we have not kept up with those we lose every day — intermarriage by intermarriage, lousy afternoon Hebrew school by lousy Hebrew school, college dorm by college dorm. We are losing more than we are saving, and I can't believe that is *Hashem's* desire. Who will serve as the *shaliach* for *Hashem* in returning His children home? We in the *frum* world, that's who. We who know the beauty of a life of Torah will be held accountable.

I live on Manhattan's Upper West Side. While I believe it is the most wonderful community of Jews I have ever known and I am humbled by the generosity and hospitality I have seen families there show to people new to Torah, I am also deeply disappointed at the number of *frum* people who are not reaching out.

I am *frum* today, because *frum* fam-

Robert J. Kurtz is a former writer for several prime time television sit-coms. This is his first appearance in these pages.

ilies welcomed me into their homes and showed me what a Jewish life is all about. All the seminars in the world don't equal one good *Shabbos* table, trust me. Welcome an unknowing Jew into your home, let them see your *Shabbos* table, the glow of your candles, the sound of your *Kiddush*. Let them hear your eight- and ten-year olds give their *d'var Torah* while trying nervously not to look at their homework sheets. Let them talk to your 14-year-old son who's the first teenage *mentsch* they've ever met.

Don't be afraid that they'll be a bad influence on your children, instead realize that their coming to your home to observe and learn from you and your family is the greatest endorsement of the values you have taught your children that you could possibly have. Your children will realize that these adults are coming to learn from them.

Yes, it's possible that a young lady might come to your home carrying her pocketbook, or that a young man might not be wearing a *yarmalka*. But instead of these young Jews being in a bar or at a movie, they are in your home experiencing *Shabbat*, and for that, I truly believe *Hashem* will take care of your family, because you have taken care of His.

## The Joy of Watching Them Grow

The joy of watching these people grow into the beautiful Jewish *neshamos* they didn't even know they had, is indescribable. I have sat at weddings so many times watching a *chatan* in his *kittel davening* under his *chuppa*, remembering the first time he came to me or my friend's home for *Shabbat*. He knew nothing then, had never washed for bread, didn't know every Jew builds their own *sukka*, had never heard of the *Mish-*

*na*, didn't know *Yaakov Aveinu* was Abraham's grandson — but he *wanted* to know, and that's all we needed.

Have you ever had the wonderful experience of going to a *chatuna* where the *kalla*, who until a few years ago, never experienced a single *Shabbat*, who didn't know that the Jewish women saved the Jews in Egypt, had never learned that Sarah, Rivka, Rachel and Leah had all guided the Jewish people through wisdom and their kindness. And now this *kalla*, a model of *tzenius*, is renowned for her knowledge of new kosher products, and teaches young women how to have *Shabbos* in their home. I have seen such a *kalla*; she walked around me seven times under our *chuppa*.

## The Miracle of Our Times

This is clearly the miracle of our times and it is yours to take part in. Let me ask one crucial question to help us understand how important *kiruv* is to the Almighty: Why did *Hashem* choose Abraham to be the first Jew, and that all blessing would come through *his* offspring? Some think it's because he discovered *Hashem*. But we know that can't be true because *Hashem* had a substantial relationship with Noah. The Commentators tell us that Noah was a good man, who did what *Hashem* told him to but did not try hard enough to change the world around him. Abraham, on the other hand, tried to reach out to all of mankind, even trying to save Sodom from destruction. Because Abraham reached out, because he cared, he became the first Jew, *Hashem's* source of blessing in this world.

The Torah is clear on what *Hashem* wants from us. The question is, will we respond? ■





# Foundation of the World

I was entering a neighborhood perhaps not more than one mile square, but it could just as well have been a whole city and, at that, on an entirely different continent (which, in fact, it was). How well and how casually it shielded itself. A row of two-story stone-faced houses runs along the entire length of Bezalel Street. Who is to guess that anything lies behind them? It never even entered my mind to ask.

My daughter, though, assured me that the most charming neighborhood in all of Jerusalem lay behind the houses of Bezalel Street. She knows, she is a resident of the Faithful City. It took her expert eyes to point out a small opening between two of the homes; no doubt, I had walked or driven up and down this street hundreds of times and never noticed. Nachla'ot, she called the area, and, of course, it rang a bell.

I passed through the small opening. Within a few steps I had left the busy traffic and steep grade of Bezalel Street. All was quiet, empty and inviting. These lanes were so narrow that on most of them no cars could pass. Some homes were old, weather-beaten, small, the poverty wafting from their insides. Bent and crooked window bars protected ineffectively against would-be criminals. The stains on discolored stones fell together in no discernible pattern. Incongruous, bright red flowers and dark green leaves on window sills recast the mix. Suddenly, three floors of

new, straight, unstained and lovely pink stoned-faced apartments rose, with nary a centimeter between them and the old homes. Neither psychological nor physical transition found a place in the juxtapositions of Nachla'ot.

I was lost, and pleased. We were heading to a well-known address, but happy for the distractions. These lanes, some so narrow that not even two bicycles could pass at once, arranged themselves according to logic. Everywhere we turned, a new surprise awaited us: a park of green, a broken playground, a very small auto somehow squeezing its way along, a run-down shop with elegant, cut-glass menoras inside. Occasionally a placid eucalyptus spread its branches, moving almost imperceptibly in a slight wind. Soon, we were no longer in Nachla'ot; I had left that behind a block or so earlier. This was Shomron Street, near or in Mishkenot, a neighborhood even smaller than Nachla'ot. Here, in Mishkenot, the *tzaddik* of Jerusalem, Reb Aryeh Levine, had lived until his passing in 1969. Here, in a structure that might as well be a broken kaleidoscope, the yeshiva on the second floor, over his former home, now stood. The winding stairs, asymmetrical archways, oddly leveled apartments, tiny study houses, corrugated roofs, outdoor privies and artless metal solar heaters bore no resemblance to any plan one might imagine. Here, the unassuming *tzaddik* of Jerusalem and his saintly wife had

raised their family of many children in a single room. Here, he said he didn't even need a soap dish; if the soap rested on the floor of his shower, that was just fine. The radiance of Jerusalem was more than enough for him. Here his recently departed son, Reb Refoel Binyomin Levine, zt"l "received the public" – 20 to 40 people, mostly strangers – for a few hours each afternoon. This visit took place several months ago, before his sudden passing.

Here I arrived, with my youngest son and daughter, not knowing quite what to expect. I had met *tzaddikim* of Jerusalem years ago and alas, most of them were now in the World of Truth. I had pored over the book about Reb Refoel Binyamin Levine's father until its pages turned gray and tattered. I knew his father as well as one ever could, not ever having met him. And, of course, no one could live up to his father's reputation; at the same time, what a privilege it would be to see his reflection in the visage of his son. In truth, I had stumbled through the winding streets and over the bending, broken, twisted fences leading to his son's home in nearby Machane Yehuda some 25 years earlier, on one of the intermediate days of Sukkos. I had wanted my children to meet the son of the *tzaddik* and knocked on the door. He received us then as if we were long-lost relatives. Then, he was large, with a full,

round face, black beard and warm eyes. That is how I remembered him.

Waiting in line to see him, standing alongside us, were married women in their fifties, single girls just out of high school, yeshiva students young and old, Sephardi and Ashkenazi. Many came to Reb Refoel Binyamin Levine in straits: sickness, defeat, financial disaster, family quarrels. Many waiting in line carried themselves with a heavy mien or downcast visage. I had come just to see this person who, in the intervening quarter century since I had last seen him, had acquired an outsized reputation as a unique spiritual resource for advice and blessing. I had wanted my youngest children to meet him. The day was chilly and cloudy, with an occasional drizzle and occasional burst of sun through the clouds. Having arrived a little early, I took advantage of the time to *daven Mincha* – to pray the afternoon service – in his yeshiva. The one-room study hall was filled with books, about fifteen men studying Torah, and very worn, smooth wooden tables. A rather small, graying man prayed inconspicuously in the back corner. This, I guessed, was Reb Refoel Binyamin.

After the services, all left as the rabbi prepared himself for his daily visits; perhaps he ate a little lunch. As our turn to enter his plain abode finally came, we saw a curtain stretched across the back third of the yeshiva to allow a modicum of privacy. The floor was hard, as were a couple of plain wooden chairs. Reb Refoel Binyamin was sitting. I reminded him of our previous visit and of my devotion to the book and inspiration of his father. He responded immediately: My father loved every person, and every person loved him.

Very quickly, within a minute or two, my entire mental set changed. This man was not only the son of his father, not merely his reflection. This was not someone who would merely recall his father, but resummon his light in all its splendor. Making no effort to make a point, entirely naturally, Reb Refoel Binyamin, projected the warmth, deep spirituality and wisdom that the book ascribed to his father. In this room I witnessed not his-

tory, but living Torah. A *tzaddik* in his own right. Very quickly, the encounter became humbling, awe-inducing, uplifting. Such utter, simple, childlike joy emanated from his face. These were moments I wanted to hold onto. I knew it would be a sin to extend our visit one moment beyond what was necessary, given the long line and heavy burdens awaiting their own turn with this man who “received the public” day in and day out, without taking a penny for himself (one did leave whatever sum one wanted for him to distribute to *tzeddaka*).

Underneath ceilings that were peeling, alongside an effective gas heater, just inside a patchwork of steep stairs, rusted railings, crooked porches and windows, was this man, gentle, penetrating, unassuming, indescribably sweet, and reputedly wise in the ways of the world. It was worth the entire trip from one continent to another for just these few minutes, trading a few ideas and introducing my youngest children to Reb Refoel Binyamin Levine. He was not only the son of the *tzaddik* of Jerusalem, but a light, a foundation of the world, himself. ■

**Alas! A terrible story is unfolding before our very eyes!  
We dare not be oblivious to it.**

**A little boy has Lukemia!**

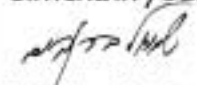
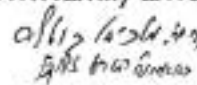
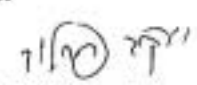
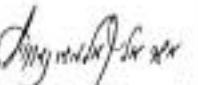
This past August, a six-year-old little boy was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Lukemia. **He is undergoing intense treatment at Schneider Children's Medical Center.**

The father, a cherished Yeshiva Rebbe was forced to give up his job. The medical costs involved are astronomic. **The family finds itself in a dangerous & precarious situation!**

Their financial situation is unbearable and is reaching critical proportions!  
**They must be helped immediately!**

**Act today before it is too late!**

May you and your loved ones enjoy only good health and Simcha in your own family always.

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