

# THE Jewish OBSERVER

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## **Economic Assault on the Torah Superstructure**

**Also in this Issue:**  
*Teaching Churban Europa to our Children*

**CLICK HERE  
FOR TABLE OF  
CONTENTS**



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

FACING THE CURRENT CHALLENGES IN ISRAEL

- 4** **A Spiritual Perspective, Rabbi Nissan Wolpin**
- 6** **Economic Assault on the Torah Superstructure, Rabbi Moshe Schapiro**
- 10** **Teaching Churban Europa to our Children, Rabbi Yaakov Feitman**
- 15** **Survivors, Debby Friedman**
- 17** **Shavuos and the Megilla of Chessed, Rabbi Ahron Rapps**

FOCUS ON TEFILLA

- 21** **Chazoras HaShatz – When the Chazan Repeats the Shemoneh Esrei: An Invaluable Opportunity, Rabbi Moshe Halberstadt**
- 26** **Torah in Germany? Rabbi Moshe M. Eisemann**
- 28** **Something to Think About, Rabbi Yisroel Rutman**

READER'S FORUM

- 32** **Terrorism, Sugar Cubes... and Sharing the Pain**

BOOKS-IN-REVIEW

- 38** **A Torah Perspective for Our Challenging Times, by Rabbi Moshe Meir Weiss, reviewed by Rabbi Labish Becker**
- 40** **Letters-to-the-Editor**
- 46** **Triple Pain, Triple Gain, a poem by Chana Rochel Stern**

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# A Spiritual Perspective



It is almost a cliché, but it must be said anyway: We are living through extraordinary times. On just about every front, the Jews in *Eretz Yisroel* are beset with crises: In the area of diplomacy – yes, one *does* endeavor to make peace with adversaries, but after Oslo and Camp David, followed by vicious attacks of terror and suicide bombings, is there any basis to trusting Arab declarations, agreements and assurances, or political roadmaps proposed by “disinterested” world powers?

Yes, the workforce in Israel is intelligent, sophisticated, and reliable ... but tourism is moribund, the economy is ailing, unemployment is at an all-time high, and the *shekel* is near its all-time low.

As for security, the army is well-equipped, vigilantly on the guard, quick to retaliate with precision. But it is made up primarily of reservists – their stamina is not limitless.

What can keep us going?

According to Prime Minister Sharon, in a speech he delivered on Martyrs' Memorial Day, one of the lessons of Holocaust is that “security and peace can only be achieved for the Jews through strength.”

The Holocaust as a point of reference for this admonition is, of course, ridiculous. Was Jewish military strength, or lack thereof, a factor in

■

**W**e have an overriding obligation to avoid the pitfall of taking credit for our successes...

■

the annihilation of six million Jews?

Germany was defeated by the combined strength of the Allied powers – America, the USSR and Great Britain – after some five years of desperate, relentless struggle, painfully costly in lives, exorbitantly expensive in dollars. Could any degree of strength had made a difference to the Jews of Europe, reducing their loss of lives at the hands of the Germans?

Apply this meaningless message to our current situation, and one wonders how we are to find guidance in Sharon's words. We certainly owe a boundless debt of gratitude to the members of *Tzahal* for risking life and limb to protect us over the decades. But is it anything less than a miracle

that the *yishuv* in *Eretz Yisroel* continues to survive, surrounded as it is by a hundred million hostile, hate-filled enemies? Shouldn't we focus on the source of this miracle and reinforce it, if feasible, instead of glorying in our military strength?

## THE RUCHNIYUS FACTOR

Thirty years ago, after the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War (September '73), Rabbi Moshe Feinstein זצ"ל addressed the national convention of Agudath Israel of America. He emphasized:

*“Especially in this era of Ikvasa diMoshicha, when we are on the very threshold of Moshiach's arrival, we have an overriding obligation to avoid the pitfall of taking credit for our successes, attributing them to 'kochi ve'otzem yadi – my might and my power.' The final Mishna in Sota describes this era as a time when the honor of Torah will suffer, many economic and material problems will beset us, the young will not respect elders, and there will be no one to rely upon except our Father in Heaven. That is, after suffering material and spiritual deprivation, we will come to realize that all the underpinnings that appear to support our many endeavors – ranging from basic human decency and the reliability of governments, to general sobriety and the solvency of the national currency – these will prove to be totally unreliable, simply worthless.*

*“So, then, on whom can we depend? We can only rely on Avinu she'ba'Shamayim –*



our heavenly Father.

"All the suffering we endure is designed to bring us to this ultimate realization, and the sooner we fathom it, the sooner will we be spared further suffering. On the other hand, if we do not grasp this concept, Hashem may well find it necessary to repeat the message with increased severity, stressing the futility of relying on diplomacy, on the basic decency of other nations, or on our military might. And then, perhaps we will recognize the import of the events. After all, [Reb Moshe pointed out,] during the War of '67, we were exposed to the Hand of G-d. Had we all been fully aware of what we had witnessed and the impact of all the stories we had heard, we would not have needed this more recent war to awaken us."

Once again, we are being called upon to study our current situation.... Must the futility of relying on the decency of others and on our own military prowess be exposed further? "We have no one to rely on but our Father in Heaven." Isn't it obvious?

#### INVOKING HASHEM'S INVOLVEMENT

The primary protection from the suffering of *Ikvesa deMashica*, we have been told, is through engaging in *chessed* and Torah study. While this can be seen as a mandate for each of us to enhance the spiritual content of our lives on an individual basis, it is also the formula for intensifying our national security in *Eretz Yisroel*.

Time and again, *Chazal* have underscored how our ability to prevail in battle depends on those who are involved in Torah study. (See *Makkos* 10a.)\*

The Talmud relates:

*Rabbi Shimon ben Yochai taught, 'If you have seen cities uprooted in Eretz Yisroel, you should know that [this occurred]\*\* because they did not maintain the salaries of the teachers of Scripture and Mishna [to the children]. What is the source? "Why did the land perish and become parched like the desert, without a passerby? Hashem has said, 'Because of their forsaking My Torah that I put before them.'" (Yir-*

*miyahu* 9, 11-12)

*Rabbi Yehuda the Nasi sent Rav Chiya, Rav Assi, and Rav Ami to travel through the cities of the Land of Israel [to establish teachers of Scripture and Mishna for the children there]. They entered a particular city and found no teachers at all.*

*They said [to the leaders of the city]: "Bring before us the guardians of the city." They brought the centurions (armed guards).*

*Said the rabbis: "These are the guardians of the city? They are nothing but the destroyers of the city!"*

*The leaders asked, "Then who are the guardians of the city?"*

*They replied, "The teachers of*

■  
If we do  
... not grasp  
this concept,  
Hashem may well  
find it necessary  
to repeat the  
message  
■

*Scripture and Mishna, as is written (in Tehillim 127,1): 'If Hashem will not build the house, in vain do its builders labor on it; if Hashem will not guard the city, in vain is the watchman vigilant...' (Yerushalmi, Chagiga ch. 1, hal. 7).*

The message of the rabbinical delegation's response is clear: If the people of a city invest their trust in the military guards, and ignore the Torah needs of the populace, that misplaced trust will be the cause of the city's destruction.

In the article that follows, we will focus on how we have experienced a phenomenal growth in Torah study and scholarship in *Eretz Yisroel* in the past few decades, and how this is now being threatened. As will be pointed out, this

growth is the product of many factors – among them, financial support from the Israeli government. The fact that this support is going to be radically reduced may at first be shocking. Considering, however, that the Chareidi community is but a minority, and taking into account the virulently hostile attitude toward Torah and *mitzva* observance harbored by the secular parties in control of the government, this shock may simply be a jolt that wakes us up to a long-standing reality (as has been discussed at length in recent issues of JO). The government's long-term support of Torah over the years may have had its political motivations, but their largesse cannot be guaranteed forever.

Our purpose in spelling this out once again, then, is to sound an alarm, and – at the same time – to wake us up to a deeper reality. The details in the article that follows will make it apparent that both the *neschama* and the body of *Klal Yisroel* – its spiritual status and its physical security – are under enormous threat.

We are truly helpless without Hashem's divine intervention – all the pride and confidence broadcast by Israel's military and political leadership notwithstanding. And investing our hope in the "Centurions" instead of in the "Torah Guardians of the City" is not only folly, it can be catastrophic.

We can only depend on *Avinu she'ba'Shamayim*. And He in turn is looking to us to continue to engage in Torah study and to promote its spread. How do we increase our own awareness of this deeper reality? And how do we spread this awareness among the multitudes of Israeli citizens – many of them open to our message?

Bear these thoughts in mind, as you read the pages that follow. ■

\* Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said, "What is the meaning of: 'Our feet were standing in your gates, Jerusalem?' (*Tehillim* 122,2) Who caused us to prevail in battle? The gates of Jerusalem – wherever they were engaged in the study of Torah." *Makkos* 10a.

\*\* Bracketed explanations are from the commentary *Korban Ha'eida*.

## I. OF GROWTH AND THREAT

In the last twenty-five years, Torah study has flourished in *Eretz Yisroel* to an unprecedented degree. As a result, we now are living in a golden age of Torah erudition and widespread religious observance. Never since the times of the Second *Beis Hamikdash* have so many Jews in so many different parts of the country lived their lives in accordance with the precepts of Torah and *halacha*. Never have so many dedicated so much of their time to full-time Torah study. Never have so many religiously alienated Jews returned to a Torah way of life.

Twenty years from now, if all turns out well, we will realize that that which we have been witnessing is actually history in the making. But at this particular moment, the future looks bleak, since there is a strong danger that everything that has been achieved in the past two decades will be destroyed.

I am referring to a set of drastic economic measures being legislated at this very moment by the Israeli government, which will make it impossible for many of the people who are to a large extent responsible for this religious revolution to continue their work. The direct result will be  $\text{החל}^{\text{ה}}$  the end of the flowering of Torah in *Eretz Yisroel*.

Are members of the Torah community the only residents of this country who will be negatively affected by the current economic measures? No, that is not the case. But whether by design or coincidence, the plan happens to severely and disproportionately incapacitate every single important pillar upon which the Torah community stands. And every member of the family unit will feel the effects.

Kollel families lead a precarious existence as it is, but most manage to get by. The wives usually work, and togeth-

Moshe Schapiro is a journalist who lives in Jerusalem. His byline appears in a number of English-language publications around the globe including the English language *Yated Ne'eman*, where he is a regular columnist. A frequent contributor to these pages, he was last represented by "Our Generation's *Tzaddik* of Jerusalem: Rabbi Refoel Binyamin Levine,  $\text{רצ"ל}$ " (May '02).

# Economic Assault



# on the Torah Superstructure

er with the husbands' kollel stipend and after-hours odd jobs, plus the monthly child allowance payments from *Bituach Leumi*, they make ends meet.

Housing is still a problem for young couples, but until now, most young couples could take out a heavily subsidized government mortgage and buy a decent apartment in a new development area.

Sometimes the refrigerator is not

bursting with surplus food, but all in all, if they live intelligently and prudently, a young couple can remain part of the kollel scene for many years.

## The Dynamo Behind the Revolution

This institution called "the kollel way of life" is the dynamo that is running Israel's religious revolution. Kollel-men-volunteers are the life-force of such *kiruv* organizations as Lev L'Achim and Arachim. They are the teachers, the tutors, the big brothers.

The young kollel wives are the faculty members who staff Chinuch Atzmai schools across the country side and who teach the secular children enrolled by Lev L'Achim how to say *Krias Shema*. If these kollel wives didn't exist, someone would have to invent them, because they and their husbands are the prime resources for strength, determination, and sheer *Yiras Hashem* needed to educate tough secular children and turn them into *mentschen*.

Without those teachers, there would not be any Chinuch Atzmai *kiruv* schools, and without those *kiruv* schools, there would not be any enrollment drives, and without the enrollment drives, there would not be the many fresh *baalei teshuva* coming into the Torah world.

## The New Economic Strangulation

It is undeniable that the State of Israel is in economic crisis and that the country's bloated budget must be slashed. The Chareidi community accepts that reality. But when one sees where the cuts are directed and how cruel they are, one must question the motives of the slashers.

As a result of the government's drastic economic measures, Chinuch Atzmai's allotment of teaching hours has been cut by ten percent – an overwhelming total of \$10 million. The Torah school network will have no choice but to lay off 700 teachers.

The ripple effect of this one economic

sanction alone is staggering. For one, it means that at a time when the Chinuch Atzmai network is in a growth pattern, it must ask: "Where will all those new thousands of secular children be enrolled? What will secular parents who are seriously considering enrolling their kids into Chinuch Atzmai schools think when they discover that in order to contend with the cut in teachers, different grades will have to be combined into one class, and on some days children will be dismissed from school at 11:00 in the morning? And what will happen to the *teshuva* movement when secular parents stop enrolling their children into Torah schools?"

Exactly.

It will sputter and die.

### Attacking the Kollel System

Other serious economic sanctions are severely affecting the Torah community. The proposed budget would have a disproportionately negative impact on *yeshivos* and seminaries, as compared with other educational institutions. University students' tuition stipends were increased by 17% last year and will remain the same under the new economic plan. But religious institutions' grants, which were cut by 10% last year, will be cut *an additional* 10% this year – as part of an across-the-board downsizing of ministries, including the Religious Affairs Ministry – if the plan is enacted. What is more, the budget proposal includes a further 10% cut in all allotments provided in the form of the grants that go toward the salaries of religious institutions.

The budget proposal would also cancel all government support for *yeshivos* and religious high schools with fewer than 100 students – eliminating nearly one third of Israel's *yeshivos* from the assistance rolls. So-called "senior" *yeshiva* students (those above the age of 23) would see their monthly stipends cut in half; stipends to those over 27 would be *eliminated entirely*. In other words, the scholars with the potential for Torah greatness will be cut off, period.

Another new edict cancels funding for

*yeshiva* and kollel students with foreign citizenship. There are currently 16,000 foreign students studying in *yeshivos* and seminaries. It's not difficult to imagine how this will affect *yeshivos* such as Mir-Yerushalayim, whose enrollment includes some six hundred young men answering to this criterion. (Don't the designers of this edict realize – or care – that foreign students and their visiting relatives are responsible for a steady flow of foreign currencies to Israel, in a measure that compensates for the expense of subsidizing their education? Future economic studies will doubtless list this as a classic case of cutting off the nose to spite the face. Is there a better way to explain this shortsightedness than to say that the secularists are ready to make this sacrifice in order to win the battle against the growth of the Torah *yishuv*?)

In the short-term, many *kollelim* could be forced to shut down. And unless a solution can be found for the continuing expansion of Chinuch Atzmai's *kiruv* schools, the *teshuva* movement could go into a state of suspended animation – or sharp decline.

If this worst-case scenario materializes, it could well change the face of *Eretz Yisroel* for the worse in a very significant way. Learning full-time could cease to be a viable choice for young couples, and could come to be regarded as something reserved for *yechidei segula* (the chosen few) who have rich parents willing to support them, or the exclusive domain of those with an other-worldly dedication that has roots in 19<sup>th</sup> century Eastern Europe, but is not common in this time and place.

This could be the beginning of the end for the golden era of Torah study in *Eretz Yisroel*. Unless, that is, the world Torah community – but primarily the American community, whose generosity dwarfs that of all the other Torah communities in the world – undertakes to do something about it right now. But even these resources would be inadequate for the scores of millions of dollars needed. At the very least, this could prove to be the way for a broad cross section of Torah Jews in America – and Europe too – to acquire a significant

## Facts and Figures

Total government funds budgeted for all Torah *mosdos* as of Jan. 2002: NIS 1.2 billion. With cuts, government support will go down to NIS250 million. Cut of app. 80%.

Total number of recognized Torah *mosdos* as of today: 2,000. After 100-student minimum requirement for funding, only 500 will remain.

Total number of *avreichim* (kollel fellows) today: 43,000-45,000. Of those, 23,000-26,000 will lose all funding because they are over 27 years of age. An additional 15,000-17,000 between the ages 23-27 will lose half of their funding. Only some 6,000 *avreichim*, under the age of 23, will receive full funding.

Total number of foreign students in *kollels*, *yeshivos* and seminaries: 16,000. Funding for all of them has already been canceled altogether.

Funding for 120,000 students enrolled in *yeshivos ketanos*, *yeshivos tichoni'im*, *mesivtos* and some seminaries: cancelled altogether. Not a single penny remains. Out of 30 seminaries, only 8 will continue to receive funding.

Seminaries and *Ulpanot*: 66,778 students currently funded, will go down to 11,741.

Total students in all *mosdos* of Torah, including *kollelim*, funded before the cuts: 216,000. After cuts, 79,687.

portion of *Toras Eretz Yisroel*.

Or unless some serious, protracted negotiations take place between spokesmen for the Torah community and government leaders.

## II. THE HUMAN DIMENSION

We recognize Torah study as central to our national identity and crucial to our people's security. While we might expect the *chiloni* leadership to respect our involvement and dedication to Torah as being a national treasure, or as a precious legacy from the past, we cannot rely on them to extend themselves financially to keep Torah afloat. The bias against

Torah scholars as compared to university students (noted above) is obvious, but it is not unexpected. There is, however, a human dimension to this situation that we must make note of, and which should shake up the *chiloni'im* as well, no matter what their ideological orientation.

The fact that Chinuch Atzmai will be forced to lay off 700 teachers means that 700 households have now been plunged into an economically impossible situation, because the main wage earner has suddenly found out that he or she has joined the ranks of Israel's 300,000 unemployed in an economy where there are virtually no jobs to be had.

The drastic reduction of *kollelim*, the proposed ceiling of age 27 for recognized kollel members, the disqualification of *kollelim* of less than 100 members, and other such arbitrary cuts boil down to thousands of kollel students in their late 20s, whose wives may very well be among the 700 teachers laid off by Chinuch Atzmai, suddenly discovering that they are no

longer eligible to receive kollel stipends. That makes two strikes in very rapid succession.

To this, add the 75 percent reduction in *Bituach Leumi's Kitzvat Yeladim* payment to needy families with more than four children. For a family with six children\*, for example, that would amount to losing approximately \$1,000 from their monthly income. Bear in mind that this is all happening simultaneously. At this point the readers are invited to put themselves in their shoes: *Yesterday you were managing, today you're facing financial ruin. And your friends, relatives, and neighbors are no better off.*

For young couples who married recently, the government has another surprise in store: the cancellation of subsidized mortgages for young couples. Suddenly housing is a whole new consideration. Even if the yeshiva boy and Bais Yaakov girl who just got married somehow raise enough money for the down payment on their apartment in a development area, how can they possibly

pay the mortgage when there are no job opportunities for her, and his days in *kollel* are numbered?

When they have children, how will they feed and clothe them without *Bituach Leumi*? How will they send them to school, now that the government has cancelled transportation subsidies for students commuting to schools outside of their immediate neighborhood? (This is another hardship, not mentioned earlier.)

What is paralyzing about these economic sanctions is that they are being legislated simultaneously. Each one alone is serious in its own right, but the effect of getting hit by all of them together is simply overwhelming, certainly a completely new reality.

The immediate result will be thousands of kollel families being plunged into a state of abject poverty – this means hunger and homelessness, not just an overdraft in the bank – even if both spouses start immediately looking for jobs – which don't exist, anyway.

It is inconceivable that any other segment of the population would be so summarily, drastically and precipitously disenfranchised, with neither warning, gradualism, nor some kind of cushion or safety net to soften the blow. It stretches credibility to say that the designers of these cuts were unaware of their far-reaching implications. They knew! Such indifference spells callousness and cruelty, which are simply alien to the Jewish psyche.

Yet, in keeping with the *Chazal*, "Hatred distorts one's line of reasoning," their often articulated hostility to Torah has apparently blinded them to the human dimension of these targeted financial cutbacks, which are totally out of line when compared to financial reductions in any other areas of the State's budget.

\*There are currently 1.16 million Israeli citizens living below the poverty line, and government researchers estimate that the budget cuts under consideration will add an additional 20,000 people – leaving 661,000 children destitute. A family with four children will receive nearly 9,000 shekels less per year than in the past; and larger families – which more often than not are already facing serious financial pressures – stand to lose much more: a family with eight children, more than 37,000 shekels annually; one with ten children, nearly 60,000 shekels.

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## Other Ramifications

One wonders how the designers of these draconian cuts could be unaware of other ramifications of their projected cuts targeted against the *Chareidim*. Do they truly want to force the exile of Torah study from *Eretz Yisroel*, and to compel serious students of Torah to transfer their pursuit of Torah knowledge to other countries?

Do they really wish to formalize the split between the Torah community and the secularists, and to put the State of Israel firmly on one side of the divide? Is an all-out, no-holds-barred fight against Torah their real agenda?

Are they ready to surrender to the Israeli-Arab population explosion, and permit *Bnei Yishmael* to determine the demographic character of the State in the next generation? (Or do they expect to maintain a "Jewish" majority through non-Jewish Russian immigration, as, indeed, Prime Minister Sharon implied in a recent *Jerusalem Post* interview?)

Torah concerns are of top priority to us. Even if one or another crisis area will be ameliorated, the total picture of threat to Torah viability in Israel looms large. Hopefully, these issues should be recognized as legitimate, and be met by those in control of current government – if not for sharing common cause with us, then at least on the basis of enlightened self-interest. ■

### Digest of Meforshim לקוטי בתר לקוטי

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# Simcha Guidelines

## THE VORT

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

## THE WEDDING

- Only 400 invited guests may be seated at the *chassuna seuda*.
- The *kabbolas panim* smorgasbord should be limited to basic cakes, fruit platters, a modest buffet, and the caterer's standard chicken or meat hot dishes.

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

- No Viennese table and no bar.

## THE MUSIC

- A band may consist of a maximum of 5 musicians (one of the musicians may act as a vocalist) or four musicians and one additional vocalist.

- A one-man band is recommended.

## FLOWERS & CHUPA DECOR

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

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**Rabbi Shmuel Birnbaum**

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### Why it must be done now

In two years, the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz will be commemorated. It will be a bitter-sweet occasion. The pain is still fresh, the wound unhealed and gaping. But we have more than survived as a nation. We are, thank G-d, flourishing and the Nazis are gone. And yet, we must now grapple with the question: who will be left to commemorate it at all?

Let's do the math. If someone was, let us say, ten years old at liberation – arguably the youngest to have meaningful memories – they will be seventy in time for the anniversary. Most of the survivors, however, are much older. Or gone. My parents זצ"ל are no longer here, nor are most of their generation. To be sure, others can – and very soon will have to – tell the story. But there is nothing like the tale of a survivor. Nothing can match the passion, the pathos, the horror, the immediacy, and – most importantly – the credibility of a survivor.

They are perhaps the most endan-  
 Rabbi Feitman, Rav of Kehillas Bais Yehuda in Cedarhurst, N.Y., a well-known lecturer and author, is a frequent contributor to these pages. He teaches, among other courses, "Churban Europa – the Holocaust" at Reenas Bais Yaakov High School in Hewlitt, N.Y.

gered species on the face of the earth. And there is tragically nothing we can do about it. We can treasure them, nurture them, and pray for them. But above all, strange though it sounds, we must use them. We have but one more short generation when we can teach Churban Europa with the great moral authority of people with numbers on their arms. Yes, many of them have been recorded on videotape, but tapes cannot answers questions and they cannot refute deniers.

### I. WHAT HAS TAKEN SO LONG?

For nearly a generation, very little was written or spoken about this Churban in Klal Yisroel. And then the floodgates opened. Why the silence then, why the torrent of words now? Our Gedolim have given a number of answers. Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, the Novominsker Rebbe, שליט"א has taught us that the *manhigei hador* (leaders of the generation) immediately after the Churban felt that explanations, *hashkafa* and interpretations of the Churban were a part of the rule of "Hanistaros LaHashem Elokeinu. The secrets of G-d must remain with Him." (*Devarim* 29.28) These answers will in truth not be known until *Moshiach* arrives. There-

fore, the mandate of that generation was to concentrate on the things that fall under the rubric of "*Haniglos lanu ule'vaneinu* – That which has been revealed and given to man."<sup>1</sup>

It was a time to rebuild, to start families, to engage in LIFE. And so, the *zekeinim* did not engage in theology or explication. They simply allowed the present to become the future without dwelling upon the painful past. In their wisdom, the *Gedolim* knew that too much preoccupation with death and the past would paralyze the colossal task which had to be undertaken – literally the recreation of the Jewish world. *Chazal* tell us that "there is a Heavenly decree that one forgets about the tragedy of a death so that life can go on."<sup>2</sup> It is clear from our sages that without a special divine edict, man could be emotionally crippled by the catastrophe of a death

<sup>1</sup> See "Teaching Churban Europa to Our Children," edited by Rabbi Joseph Elias, page 5. This important booklet published by Torah Umesorah, includes the entire text of the Novominsker Rebbe's address on Rosh Chodesh Av 5760, setting forth the philosophy of a curriculum for teaching Churban Europa. All of the quotes from the Rebbe in this article are taken from that speech but this presentation incorporates other approaches as well.

<sup>2</sup> See *Bereishis Rabba* 84,19 and *Rashi, Bereishis* 37,35.

in the family. Multiply this by the cataclysmic results of Churban Europa, and one must indeed marvel at the miracle of rebirth and revival.

This triumph over death is actually a dual one. In the late 1940's, my *Rebbe*, Rabbi Hutner זצ"ל, once greeted a recently arrived survivor by standing up and declaring, "If you lived through the war and the camps and you still cover your head, you are truly a great *tzaddik*." The miracle of Jewish renewal after the Holocaust reflects the fact that we survived physically, but also the amazing spiritual resilience of the Jewish people. Our faith also survived, and that is both a tribute to the Jewish people and something for which to be grateful to G-d. Rabbi Dessler teaches that when the *Tochacha* ends with the words "Despite all this..., I will not find you abominable to destroy you," this refers to our spiritual state as well. G-d has always made sure to preserve our spiritual status as well as guarding the actual existence of Israel.<sup>3</sup>

At the most recent convention of Agudath Israel of America, Rabbi Chaim Dov Keller, *Rosh HaYeshiva* of Telshe Chicago, recounted eloquently the herculean labors of Rabbi Aharon Kotler, Rabbi Eliyahu Meir Bloch, Rabbi Shraga Feivel Mendlowitz and the other great builders of Torah, who miraculously did spiritual CPR upon a gasping nation. This could not have been done while wearing shrouds in a graveyard, with but *Kaddish* on their lips. The events of the *Churban* had to be set aside – temporarily, but decisively – so the Jewish world could be rebuilt. This is one explanation for the silence of the post-*Churban* generation.

### The Silencing Factor of Pain

I believe that another answer is based upon an insight taught to us by Rabbi Mordechai Gifter זצ"ל, the Telzer *Rosh HaYeshiva*. The *Midrash*<sup>4</sup> records that Rabbi Yehuda Hanassi

<sup>3</sup> See *Michtav M'Eliyahu*, Vol. I, p. 233; II, p. 100, 148; III, p. 47; IV, p. 26

<sup>4</sup> *Eicha Rabba*, Ch. III, section 4 (Wagshall ed., p. 117).

explained a certain verse in *Eicha* twenty-four different ways. Just one generation later, Rabbi Yochanan was able to explain the same verse in sixty ways. Why the discrepancy? Our sages explain that *Rebbe*, who was one generation closer to the *Churban*, was only able to discuss the tragedy intellectually until he had derived twenty-four interpretations. He would then break down and weep. Rabbi Yochanan, just a generation

<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Mordechai Gifter, "A Path Through the Ashes," in *A Path Through the Ashes*, edited by Rabbi Nisson Wolpin, ArtScroll, 1986, p. 57

later, was that much more removed from the sensations of the event and was able to discuss and analyze the same verse without such emotional upheaval.

Rabbi Gifter used this Midrash to criticize the "emotional bankruptcy" that permits us to speak so casually about the *Churban Europa*.<sup>5</sup> This Midrash, however, may also help us understand the relative silence of our *Gedolim* during the two decades or so after the Holocaust. Their quiescence resulted from a profound state of *aveilus* for a lost world and the spiritual grandeur that disap-

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peared with it. Aharon's response to the tragic death of his sons was silence (*Vayikra* 10,3), and *Yechezkel* (24,17) was commanded to "be silent from groaning" upon the sorrowful passing of his wife. Sometimes silence is the most eloquent of elegies.

*Time to Rebuild: An Overriding Priority*

We may conclude that the silence of a generation, far from a precedent, was a life-affirming imperative. That silence was both therapeutic and psychologically

indispensable. I remember attending annual *hazkaros* (memorial gatherings) with my parent in the 1950s for their decimated cities of Chust, Czechoslovakia, and Strzemiashitz, Poland. There were a few of us – the Second Generation – because families were small. Most of us didn't know it at the time, but we were the New Children, the Substitute Children, the Children on Earth. Our parents – older than that typical American parents – reminisced about *der heim*, recalled the world that was, and invariably returned rapidly to the present. To dwell on the past was painful, but

more importantly, no one could remain sane, smile, laugh, and be a normal parent with images of smokestacks and crematoria in front of their eyes. The *mitzva* was to rebuild, to grow families, to triumph over death and the icy hand of Amalek that threatened to destroy them even now from the grave. Therefore, there was no Holocaust talk on the way home. There was no follow-up on the *hazkara* except to lament that Reb Yossel had passed away, or how well Mrs. Goldberg looked today. Then back to life.

That heroic and gallant generation has done its job. They rebuilt upon the still smoldering ashes, and produced children who today are attending their own grandchildren's *simchos*. But the time has finally come to confront the issues and educate future generations about what happened and – of course, here is the challenge – why it happened, to the extent that we are capable of extracting this terrifying secret of Churban Europa.

I recall one Torah Umesorah convention at the annual session when we were privileged to ask Rabbi Yaakov Kaminetzky זצ"ל our *hashkafa* questions. One principal rose and inquired, "Rebbe, how do we explain the Holocaust to our children?" Reb Yaakov responded sharply with a query of his own: "Und ihr farshkeit yeh? (And you yourself do understand?)" Reb Yaakov, in his wisdom, picked up on a psychological crutch upon which we often lean. When something is beyond our comprehension but uncomfortable to explore, we make it a "Chinuch question." Let's put it on the children. In truth, that principal merely reflected the reality that twenty-five years ago, this was a subject rarely explored or properly elucidated.

II. THE MANDATE TO TEACH – NOW

*Dealing with Anti-Semitism*

One of the most crucial reasons to teach about Churban Europa at the present time relates to the dangerous new trend in world anti-

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Semitism. Organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith and the Wiesenthal Center have been marshalling alarming statistics indicating the rapid proliferation of anti-Jewish incidents around the globe. Radical Islam has proven itself to be the source of deadly attacks against the Jews in general, not just the State of Israel. Anti-Semitic tracts such as *Mein Kampf* and *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* have become best sellers and beguiled a new generation of compliant readers. Our children need to understand these phenomena in the ancient context of "Halacha b'yadua sheEisav sonei l'Yaakov – It is the Law that Eisav hates Yaakov."<sup>6</sup> And Yishmael is an eager partner.

They adopt new guises from generation to generation and from setting to setting. They may call it Pan-Arabism or anti-colonialism. They may be campus liberals or Bible-belt reactionaries. Their target, under whatever banner, is Jews, and we must learn to accept it as part of our destiny as the children of Yaakov. Most importantly, the metastasizing of anti-Semitism should be an impetus to *teshuvah*, if we have the wisdom and courage to recognize what is happening before our eyes.

But there are other reasons to begin teaching Churban Europa now. The Holocaust deniers are growing in strength and numbers<sup>7</sup> and those who misinterpret, distort and pervert its meaning and message are publishing and publicizing their dangerous fabrications at every opportunity.

#### Sharing the Pain

Another reason to study the *Churban* is to teach children to be *mitzta'er b'tzarasam shel Yisroel* – to share the pain and suffering of *Klal Yisroel*. The *Rambam (Hilchos Teshuva 3,11)* writes severely of those who

<sup>6</sup> *Sifri, Beha'alos'cha 9:10; Rashi Bereishis 33,4.*

<sup>7</sup> See Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (N.Y.: Plume Publishing); Ted Gottfried, *Deniers of the Holocaust: Who they are, what they do, why they do it* (Connecticut: Brookfield); Werner Cohn, *Partners in Hate: Noam Chomsky and the Holocaust Deniers?*

"abandon the ways of the congregation of Israel," including in this category those who do not feel the anguish of the community. Our children have become disconnected from this catastrophic event and we must help them become aware of the scope of the tragedy, which befell us so recently, yet seems so distant to a generation largely unmoved by what is now known as the Holocaust. I have seen young people complete a Holocaust Museum tour without a tear or even a shudder. A Torah curriculum on this matter would include the mandate to share, at least retrospectively, the profound pain of those who were there.

#### Refuting the Falsehoods

One must add at this point a somewhat parenthetical note, which carries an urgency of its own. It is well known that a virtual Holocaust Industry has been created by this latest *Churban*. Thousands of books, numerous films, museums, lectures and experts vie for the attention of those who do express interest in this subject.

From the Torah standpoint, a great deal of this media onslaught is based upon ignorance, heresy and often driven by various agendas, which lead to misunderstanding of one of the most seminal events of Jewish history and cer-

tainly of our time. Now that *Gedolei Yisroel* have indeed granted us insights into the *Churban*, a vehicle must be created to allow this generation to study and absorb their words.

#### To Bear Witness, and Let Others Explain

And here we come to one of the more sensitive issues regarding this curriculum. On the one hand, as we have seen, the survivors are the key to establishing the credibility and emotional impact of the *Churban*. Yet, paradoxically, they are often not the best ones to determine the guidelines, approaches and *hashkafos* we must teach to our children. The very authority and impact that survivors alone can offer is often their disqualifying factor, as well.

It is well known – certainly to speakers who have had the misfortune of saying the wrong thing to the wrong audience – that survivors abhor any exposition of the Holocaust even remotely using the terminology of reward and punishment, certainly considered cornerstones of Torah philosophy. The reason for this abhorrence is that, of course, such talk hurts. We are not talking of someone who was killed in 1096, 1492 or 1648. We *seem* to be indicting someone's mother, husband or child.

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### The Individual and the Greater Nation

In truth, we are doing no such thing, for even the approaches to the *Churban* that speak of retribution, or *Hashem's* rescuing us from spiritual extinction, do not indict any individual. On the contrary, all Torah perspectives recognize that "when the Angel of Death is given free reign, he makes no distinction between the righteous and the wicked" (*Bava Kamma* 60a). Understandably, however, to a survivor, this is often not enough. Such talk feels like an attack, which requires a response. The discussion deteriorates into recriminations and misunderstandings, and sadly all dialogue becomes impossible.

Nevertheless, such approaches and issues *must* be discussed; otherwise we rob the *Churban* of all meaning and cheat the *kedoshim* of one of the most significant and meaningful aspects of their martyrdom – our ability to learn from this event. As Rabbi Dessler has taught us, "The ways of G-d's Providence

are beyond our understanding, and only this we know – that the ways of G-d are just. On the other hand, they require study to know our duties that the ways of His governance come to teach us."<sup>8</sup>

Our *Gedolim* have taught us that *Klal Yisroel* "was meant to go through world history and keep alive the teachings of *Hakadosh Boruch Hu*... When we fall short... the *middas hadin* of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* enters the scene to recall us to our noble task and make us rectify our failings." They have referred to the "indisputable decline" in *Klal Yisroel's* spiritual stature since the advent of the *Haskala* movement, and the prediction of its consequences in writings such as the *Meshech Chachma* and the *Ramchal*. The details of this analysis of Jewish history are certainly beyond the scope of this limited article. Suffice it to say that our *Gedolim* have taught us that accepting some sense of responsibility for our fate in major events is unavoidable for the believing Jew. A more thorough

<sup>8</sup> See *Michtav M'Eliyahu*, Vol. III, p. 133.

exploration of this accountability actually forms the most essential part of the *hashkafa* portion of the Holocaust curriculum itself.

### A Context for Fundamental Teachings

Studying *Churban* Europe in depth with a teacher properly trained in this sensitive subject provides many opportunities to disseminate fundamental teachings of Judaism in a context that can be replicated in many areas of Torah *hashkafa*. In this article, we can only touch upon these essentials, for indeed their detailed analysis is reserved for the curriculum itself.

*Tzidduk Hadin* – teaching children the elemental lesson of accepting the will of G-d. This applies both to personal events and to a decree upon *Klal Yisroel*. Stressing this topic inculcates in children the paramount instruction that whatever *Hashem* does is purposeful and for the best. Understanding and incorporating this teaching alone would justify such a curriculum.

The interconnection of all of Jewish history – Learning that what had happened during World War II was not an isolated phenomenon or singular event, but part of the pattern of Jewish history is one of the most important lessons of Torah *hashkafa*.

*Appreciating the loss* – A Torah-true Holocaust curriculum details the horrific tragedy of losing a thousand-year tradition of *yeshivos*, *kehillos*, *minhagim* and family structure. Only intensive study of this lost world can help us appreciate the incredible parameters of the tragedy.

*Spiritual heroism* – While no one denigrates those who resisted the Nazis with whatever methods available, the world has until recently totally ignored the astonishing courage demonstrated by those who blew *shofar* in Auschwitz, lit Chanuka candles in Bergen-Belsen, and all those who maintained their faith in that purgatory. There are lessons here in *Kiddush Hashem* for a lifetime.

*Disappointment in the gentiles* – Rabbi Hutner זצ"ל taught us that one of the prime lessons of Jewish history is

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learning not to be enamored of the gentiles and their ways by recognizing their unreliability throughout the ages. The *Churban* is certainly an eloquent template to discover and study the failure of western civilization to contain or even resist the Nazi genocide.

**The difference Torah makes** – The sad saga of traditional American Jewish organizations and their apathy compared with the heroic story of the Vaad Hahatzolah and Agudas Yisroel teaches that Torah study does not merely create scholars but, when necessary, cultivates the most successful activism the world has even known.

**Ashreichem** – Rabbi Pam ל"ז insisted that study of the Holocaust end on the positive note of the greatness of *Klal Yisroel*. The astounding rebirth of Torah after the *Churban*, the miraculous and heartening resurgence of the *She'eiris Hapeleita* (the community of Survivors), the heroism of Rabbi Aharon Kotler and others in rebuilding is a story worthy of inspiring all future generation, but must be told in the context of the *Churban*.

It is to accomplish these goals and many more that Torah Umesorah created the Zechor Yemos Olam Program. Under the leadership of Rabbi Joseph Elias, the historic work of training teachers to present *Churban Europa* has begun. As Rabbi Elias, the Educational Director, has written, "There is a great deal of caution needed in proceeding with these studies," but on the other hand, "studying *Churban Europa* can be a potential source of *beracha* and revival of Torah." As one who is privileged to have presented some of the pioneering lectures in this new era of teacher training, I can attest to the tremendous interest in this curriculum and the thirst for guidance in presenting the *hashkafa* of this *Churban*.

The *Gedolim* have spoken and given their enthusiastic endorsement to this important new Torah endeavor. It is now up to *yeshivos*, Day Schools and parents to implement a program that Rabbi Pam promised can bring great blessing to all of *Klal Yisroel*. ■

# SURVIVORS

Debby Friedman

There I was, a little girl of five, sitting on my mother's lap. The *Shabbos* candles had been lit. Mommy's tears, still shimmering on her gentle face, framed her smile to me.

"Come, Bruchele," she said. "Let me tell you about my Mamma and sisters and brother, and also about Bobba Esther and Zaida Elya and...." The list would continue. A long list of beloved relatives gassed in Auschwitz. A list of people I knew only by name. People who would have loved me so much and whom I would have loved had they survived as my mother did. A sole survivor from a family in Auschwitz.

And then I was eight and I was very skinny and we learned about rickets and my classmates started to point at me and tease me. "You have rickets! You have rickets!" I cried and I ran home to Mommy and I told her, "I have rickets!" She laughed and said, "You're skinny, but you don't have rickets." And then she hugged me and gave me chocolate milk and smoothed my hair and as she laughed and hugged me and comforted me.

I wondered who laughed with and hugged and comforted her when she was scared – this sole survivor from a family in Auschwitz.

And then I was ten and a new girl came to our class and everyone made fun of her

because she had a funny name and she wore funny clothes and they said that no one should be her friend. So she sat all alone and played all alone and walked all alone. Then I saw that she was nice so I sat with her and played with her and walked with her, too. And then my classmates said no one should play with *me* and I cried and I ran home and told my Mommy what had happened and Mommy soothed me and said she was proud of me and that I made *Hashem* happy.

As she caressed me and hugged me and comforted me, I wondered who caressed and hugged and comforted my Mommy when she was hurt – this sole survivor from a family in Auschwitz.

And then I was 16 and I was watching a film about the Holocaust and I saw pictures of starving Jews and pictures of dying Jews and I saw children crying and mothers crying and I saw piles of clothes and piles of shoes and piles of bones and so many trains, so many tracks and barbed wire fences and barking dogs and barking Nazis. And I saw eyes that were dead and then, for a split second, I saw myself there in Auschwitz.

Then I knew I was there and I ran to my Mommy and I hugged her and I caressed her and I comforted her – me, a soul survivor from a family in Auschwitz.

Mrs. Friedman teaches in the Bais Yaakov Tiferes Rivka High School, located in Neve Yaakov, Jerusalem. Her most recent article, "Breaking Down the Walls," appeared in JO Jan. '03. The author is named after one of her would-be aunts who was killed in Auschwitz at the age of 16.

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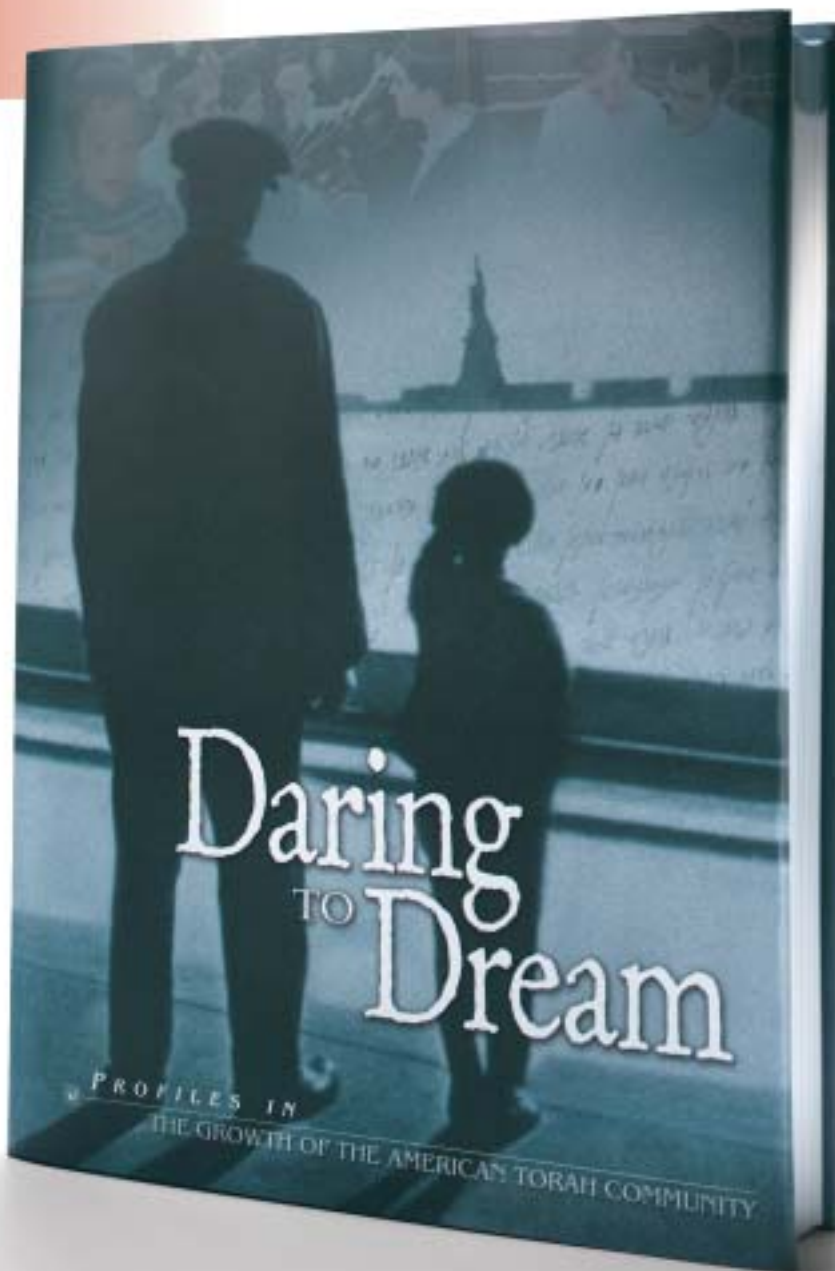
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# TORAH IN GERMANY?



*Divine Love:  
A Force that Defies Limitation*

Can the *Ribbono Shel Olam* ever declare a principle, and then contravene it for the love of His children? We would never suggest such a scenario, put it seems that the *Malachim* did think so.

The *Gemora* reports that the *Malachim* came to G-d with a problem: He had described Himself as a judge who would never show any favoritism – “He does not show favor” (*Devarim* 10,17.) Nevertheless, He appears to have no such scruples when it comes to His beloved Jews – “May G-d show you favor,” He included in the *Kohein’s* Blessings of the Jews (*Bamidbar* 6,26). The explanation that He offers the *Malachim* is breathtaking in the sweep of its implications: “And shall I not show favoritism to them?” They go beyond the letter of the law in saying Grace when it is not

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required by *halacha*. “How could I possibly not show favoritism to Israel?” (See *Berachos* 20b.)

Note that He did not say that the *nesi’as panim*, the favoritism that He shows to Israel is somehow different from the favoritism that He is bound to eschew. He admits that what He is doing is precisely what He said He would not do. But ... My hands are, as it were, tied.

As *Bereishis Rabba* (55:8) teaches: “*Ahava mekalkelles es hashura* – Love will not allow itself to be contained by formal rules.”

I once read that the Rogotchover *Illuy’s* love for Torah was so great that even as an *aveil*, in a state of mourning, he continued to learn, in spite of the fact that this is prohibited. He claimed that he simply could not help himself. I thought that this story must be apocryphal. How could it be true? We learn Torah because that is what the *Ribbono Shel Olam* wants us to do. What sense would it make to defy the *Ribbono Shel Olam’s* wish?

In the wake of my recent experiences, which I spent visiting the Beit Midrash of Berlin, I reconsidered my skepticism. Let me explain.

We are forbidden to learn Torah in what the *Gemora* calls, *mevu’os hame-tunafos* – places through which open sewage flows. The filth and stench make these streets an inappropriate setting for Torah thoughts. In *Berachos* 24b, the *Gemora* rules that a *talmid chacham* may not even stand in such a street. It is simply impossible for him to control his thoughts. He will think in learning.

It is hard to accept. Are we not expected to discipline ourselves? There are a lot of drives that we are expected to control. Why is the urge to learn Torah different? It seems to me that we are back to the *Ribbono shel Olam* expressing favoritism to *Klal Yisroel*. The *talmid chacham* who cannot control his love for Torah is walking in the footsteps of the *Ribbono shel Olam*, Who “cannot” do otherwise than be biased toward His beloved people.

Indeed, love defies the rules.

*Overcoming the Hurdles  
of Objectionable Settings*

I can think of no area that is as defiled and odoriferous as are the pleasant, newly gentrified streets of East Berlin where the Yeshiva is located. The

stench of rotten, rotting evil, the legacy left by the Nazis and the Communists, is everywhere. It envelops the passers-by whose polite *Gut Morgen* barely hides the snarl beneath the smile. Did I say smile? Do those leering death-masks that hover just beneath the surface that has been glued over them, have anything in common with the warmth of a friendly look? Welcome to lovely, newly renovated East Berlin! Can there really be a yeshiva here?

"Yes!" says Rabbi Joshua Spinner of the Lauder Foundation. Not only *can* there be, but it is unthinkable that there should not be one. There are one hundred thousand Jews in the German Federal Republic. Can any of us face the *Ribbono Shel Olam* if we were to leave them *hefker* (abandoned)...?

The strangled cry of history screams out, "You cannot!" The *Ribbono Shel Olam*, filled with sorrow at what His children have done to themselves, answers, "How *can* I not?"

It was an unforgettable week. You just would not believe what is going on there. This is not a place where they are trying to make the best of a sorry situation. In anybody's book, this is a "*le'chat'chila*," a first choice. It is a yeshiva that need not take a backseat to any other. Not, of course, as far as measurable knowledge is concerned; the boys come in various ages and sizes, mostly without being able to read the *Siddur*. But in effort expended, in dreams dreamed, in futures mapped, and in life lived, they are an inspired and inspiring lot.

And they grow. O how they grow! With one of them who has been there a scant two years, I learned *Maseches Makkos, bechavrusa*. By the time I left, we were both struggling to understand a difficult *Rambam*. He has a little notebook in which he stores his questions in the hope that someday he will be able to find someone who can help. My visit did not turn out to be his lucky one. He stumped me when he asked for an explanation of why *הסתכל*, to observe closely, is related to *סכל*, a fool. (If any of you out there have an answer, why not visit the *Beis Midrash* of Berlin and discuss the point?)

### And Then There Are the Books

And then there are the books. On my last day there, when I was alone in the *Beis HaMidrash* for a few moments, I took a tour of the tables to see what was being studied. From the *Chovos HaLevovos* to *Reb Tzaddok HaKohein* to the *Michtav MeEliyahu* to the latest publications of (*lehavdil bein chaim le'chaim*) Rav Wolbe, there was nothing missing. I would not bet that all the subtleties contained in these profound texts were fully understood, but if *yagatti* (I expended effort) ends in *matzasi* (I succeeded), they are going to get there pretty soon.

Beit Midrash d'Berlin does not limit itself to the boys who are enrolled as full-time students. It runs programs for students who cannot devote themselves fully to learning, and are *kove'a ittim* (set specific times to study), for *ba'alei battim* who come from all over Germany for weekends of learning, practicing *bnai yeshiva*, study groups for ladies and girls, and many others, which are mentioned in their brochure, but which I had no chance to observe while I was there.

Rabbi Joshua Spinner, who runs the organization, is no spinner of idle dreams. He is a hard-headed (and soft-hearted), stubborn realist who refus-

es to live with a situation in which hundreds of thousands of *Yidden* in Germany and central Europe are left to wither on the vine. The Yeshiva has set its sights on countries outside Germany whom it would wish to service. Already there are two boys from Hungary. Soon there is to be a seminar in which Serbia, Romania and Slovakia are to be represented. We may lose some of these hundreds of thousands, but if, G-d forbid, we do, it will not be because the Beit Midrash of Berlin did not stretch out its hands to help or open its arms to embrace them.

The Yeshiva receives a generous grant from the Lauder Foundation, but otherwise has to do what we all do: rely on friends who can ferret out a good investment when they see (or read about) one.

To end off, here is a little story. When my good friend Rabbi Spinner asked me to write this article, I began wondering about a suitable title. I decided on the one you see here, "Torah in Germany?" Later, when I got to see the Yeshiva's brochure, I saw that they had chosen that exact line (question mark and all) to head their presentation. As they say: *Az men geit oif a glatten derech, treft men feine Menschen*. Embark on a straight road, and you will encounter upright people. ■

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