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In The Light
of Chanuka...

...נעשה נס
...לשוננים.



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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. Click on the box at the end of each article to come back to this page. Or navigate using your browser's menu and other options.

- 8 We Are Different, Rabbi Aaron Brafman**
- 10 A Statement from the Rabbinic Leadership of Agudath Israel of America**
- 18 Chanuka: The Search for True Beauty, Rabbi Shimon Pinkus זצ"ל**
- 24 How Many American Jews Are There? 5,300,000? 2,300,000?**
Rabbi Mordechai Plaut
- 30 Let My People Know! Rabbi Avrohom Birnbaum**
- 38 Redefining "Kids at Risk," Malky Lowinger**

FOCUS ON TEFILLA

- 42 Be a Better Baal Tefilla, Rabbi Pinchos Jung**

POSTSCRIPT

- 45 Thoughts From a Shelter, Yisroel M. Muller**

BOOKS IN REVIEW

- 48 These Children Are Mine, by Rabbi Dov B. Lederman,**
a review article by Rabbi Moshe M. Eisemann
- 50 Defining Humanity, by Rabbi Berish Ganz,**
reviewed by Rabbi Gershon Brafman

- 52 Stringing Pearls, a poem by Bracha Goetz**

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We Are Different



In the introduction to the *Mesillas Yesharim*, Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzatto writes: “I have not written this work to teach people what they do not know, but rather to remind them of what they already know and what are widely acknowledged principles. But to the extent that they are well known and their truths self-evident, so are they commonly forgotten or ignored.”

RASHI AND THE RAMBAM ON THE JEWISH ROLE

There is a basic Torah principle that particularly now, when Jews are under attack all over the world, must be re-emphasized and strengthened; and that is our special role and relationship to the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, for contemporary attacks on Jews are attacks on G-d and His Torah.

Rashi points this out in his explanation of the *passuk* that we say when taking out the *Sefer Torah* from its ark (*Bamidbar* 10,35):

ויהי בנסוע הארון ויאמר משה... וינסו משנאך מפניך
“When the Ark would travel, Moshe would say... Let Your enemies flee from You.” – “משנאך – Your enemies” – refers to the enemies of Israel, but whoever

Rabbi Brafman, *menahel* of Yeshiva Derech Ayson of Far Rockaway, NY, is a contributing editor to *The Jewish Observer*. His most recent essay in JO was “Freedom vs. Limits,” Jan. ’00.

hates Jews really hates the One who created the world.”

The *Rambam* in *Iggeres Taiman*, written to encourage the Jews of Yemen who were victims of Muslim persecution, describes the history of Jewish suffering in all its forms, inflicted by various nations. (Written approximately 1175 A.D., the list has tragically become much larger since then.) He writes that from the time we received the Torah on *Sinai*, through which the Creator separated us from the rest of the world, the nations have been jealous of us (or angry with us); they desire to do battle with G-d (perhaps because we serve the world as a conscience) by destroying us and our Torah. The *Rambam* analyzes this in great detail, and states several times that their attempts will not succeed. All of those nations and their religions – however much they persecute us – will eventually be lost and gone: “Even if they seem to achieve success for a time, it will not last, and we will survive.”

Before receiving the Torah, *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* said to us: “You shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” As Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch explains, not only are we commanded to lead a life of purity and sanctity, we are also charged to be a light unto the nations of the world. As Jews, we are different, and despite the long *galus*, and the layers of dust that have set-

tled on us, courtesy of the myriad cultures we have traveled through, we still are unique and have a mission of our own. But we must become more aware of our specialness and what it implies, so we can protect our uniqueness from the onslaught of contemporary Western culture.

EVERYDAY DIFFERENCES IN ENDS...AND MEANS

It is not only in our manner of response to major crises that we are at odds with the host culture; even our everyday behavior and interaction among people is meant to be different. We are expected to exercise care in what we speak about and how we converse with one another, and we attempt to develop *middos tovos* (fine character) in ourselves and our children, which should help us become more sensitive to others and concerned over their physical and emotional well-being. Yet these very areas are frequently neglected or assaulted by the media and our political leaders. Most of the news in the economic and political sphere is built on *lashon hora*, *shekker*, being *malbin p’nei chaveiro b’rabbim*, or *miskabeid b’klon chaveiro* (malicious speech, negative statements – both true and false – about others, embarrassing others, or maligning them for one’s self-aggrandize-

ment). In the Torah's view, these are terrible sins with dire consequences.

The entire election process on the political scene resonates with falsehood and self-aggrandizement, the opposite of *anava* (humility) and avoiding honors – modes of behavior that we consider ideal. By contrast, note how *Gedolei Yisroel* were selected and what their attributes were – beginning from our earliest history, with Moshe *Rabbeinu*. Moshe did not want to assume leadership of the Jewish people until *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* in effect coerced him. And Moshe is described as “the most humble of men.” This has been the paradigm for *Gedolei Yisroel* for all time.

The greatest of our *manhigim* shun the public spotlight, and assume leadership only when *Klal Yisroel* forces it upon them. Can you imagine the *Chofetz Chaim* or the *Chazon Ish* electioneering and boasting about his record of achievement, and predicting what he expects to accomplish?

Yet many of these *middos tovos* have been undermined in our private and public dealings. The arrogance and stridency that characterize so much American public discourse have crept into many of our own organizational public relations and are fostered by our own media. While it is in place to occasionally take stock of our accomplishments, much of it runs counter to what the *Navi Micha* conveys, expressing what G-d wants from us: “To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your G-d” (6,8) – that our charity, justice, and good deeds should be done quietly and unobtrusively. Indeed, there is a fine line between publicizing the performance of good deeds to inspire others, and boasting about them in public relations releases. Perhaps there is much too much tooting our own horns and stridency in many of our publications.

GENTLE IN PEACE, RESTRAINED IN WAR

Our way of talking to people is also supposed to be different. Note how the *Rambam*

describes how a Jew was to relate to his *eved* (heathen slave), who occupied the lowest level of economic and social status: “One is permitted to work an *eved* arduously; nevertheless a more appropriate and wiser way [for the master] is to be compassionate and just, not seeking to place a heavy yoke on his slave; he should not be made to feel oppressed; he should be provided with all necessary food and drink.... The master should not embarrass him phys-

Jews is that “they are merciful, modest, and generous” (*Yevamos* 79a). This is part of any Jewish *neshama* and is clearly visible even today. That is why Western powers can attack Afghanistan and drop 20,000 lb. bombs on their terrain with only token concern for collateral damage, while Israeli soldiers fight house to house at great personal peril rather than bomb the homes. Apparently there is a streak common among some that seems to relish war, finding

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ically or verbally. The Torah allows you to use him for work, not to shame him. Do not shout or talk in anger to him, but rather calmly and pleasantly, and listen to his complaints Cruelty and aggression are found among non-Jewish idolaters, but the descendants of Abraham – the Jewish people to whom G-d has beneficently given the Torah with its just and righteous statutes and laws – are merciful to all. In this manner we emulate G-d's attributes – as it says: ‘And His mercy is on all His works’ (*Tehillim* 145,9).”

Amazing! How different we are expected to be from the norms established by the media, from the banter of talk-show hosts, comedy routines, and general public discourse. Consider how lack of respect for the individual has become part of the attitude of society and has crept into our world, as well.

Chazal tell us that the hallmark of

a macho thrill in blasting the enemy to smithereens, as armies have been doing for generations, whereas deep in the Jewish *neshama* is an abhorrence of bloodshed. We fight for survival, but do not glory in the battle.

From earliest times to the present, people glorify violent heroes in war and conquest. Even American folklore boasts the likes of Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett; note how video games, T.V., entertainment, and movies are full of violence. These are the hands of *Eisav*, whose very essence is: “You shall live by the sword.”

By contrast, we are called upon to fulfill our role as the descendants of the paradigm of “The voice is the voice of Yaakov” – articulating Torah and *tefilla*. Even our warriors – *David Hamelech*, for example – are not glorified as such. David is revered by us as the author of *Tehillim*. Thus *Hashem* tells him (in *Divrei Hayamim* 22,8) that he cannot

build the *Beis Hamikdash* because he has shed much blood – even though he waged wars of *mitzva*.

The *Metzudas David* explains that, just as we cannot use metal to make the *Mizbei'ach* (holy altar), so too could David not be designated to build the *Mikdash*.

This restriction itself is a compelling lesson that again serves to ingrain within us remarkable attitudes and sensitivities. On the *passuk* at the end of *Yisro* that forbids the use of metal in the construction of the *Mizbe'ach*, *Rashi* quotes

Chazal: “Since the *Mizbe'ach* is designed to lengthen a person’s life (by granting him forgiveness) and metal shortens a person’s life (as an instrument of war), it is not appropriate to use a metal tool in fashioning the *Mizbe'ach*. Also, the *Mizbe'ach* creates peace between Israel and its Father in Heaven; an instrument of destruction should not be used in its creation.”

A Mossad agent in Israel posed a query to Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach זצ"ל: He was being asked to take on an assignment to go undercover inside Arab territory. It

might entail chillul Shabbos – could he assume the task? Reb Shlomo Zalman answered that one could perhaps permit the assignment if it were absolutely necessary – as far as the issue of Shabbos was concerned. However, “the assignment might entail killing people in cold blood – which would turn you into a murderer. That I can’t be *mattir* (permit).”

The *Ribbono Shel Olam* gives a special promise (in *Parshas Re'ay*) that when we carry out the *mitzva* of destroying an *ir hanidachas* (a totally corrupt city, all of whose inhabitants worship idols), “*Hashem* will endow you with mercy, and be merciful to you” (*Devarim* 13,18). It is only due to Divine intervention that we do not become affected by the military actions in which we engage.

A LONG-TERM LEGACY

Those traits of being merciful, modest, and generous are part of our legacy, and can therefore be found even among those Jews who unfortunately have drifted away from Torah. Rabbi Dessler explains this phenomenon with an analogy to material wealth:

A man amasses a fortune, and upon his death his children inherit it. If they handle it wisely, the fortune will grow, or at least continue to provide material benefit to future generations. If, however, the sons neglect their holdings, they may be able to live off its proceeds and even bequeath some money to their children, but by the third or fourth generation, the legacy will be gone. So too with our spiritual legacy. Even those who have forsaken Torah can draw from its value system for several generations... until it ultimately dries up. Thus even irreligious Jews from parents, or at least grandparents, who were *frum* have absorbed the penchant for *chessed*. They are *rachmanim* (merciful) – which is why so many social welfare initiatives and charitable organizations in America can be traced to Jewish founders; why so many hospitals were built with Jewish money, and so much of the liberal civil rights activism involved Jews.

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And this is why Golda Meir could say after the Six Day War, "I cannot forgive Nasser for making our boys into killers."

But this does not last in perpetuity. Eventually, later generations corrupt or lose their sense of value and purpose, and become self-indulgent and self-oriented, or they distort the attribute of *rachamim* and worry more about the aspirations and frustrations of Palestinians or the fate of endangered whales than the lot of their fellow Jews.

It is only nurtured by Jews loyal to Torah, who constantly recharge their spiritual core, maintain and increase their *chesed* from generation to generation, as witnessed by the unbelievable number of *chesed* organizations sponsored by the contemporary Torah community, which deals with every imaginable need.

YESTERDAY'S CHALLENGE ... AND TODAY'S

Until the recent past, Torah Jews have always lived with an awareness of their unique status. And despite the long *galus* of oppression and persecution, of pogroms and Holocaust, they never lost sight of this. They drew pride from being a *Yid*.

In Moshe Prager's book *Sparks of Glory* (an English translation of the Hebrew *נצוצי גבורה*, a collection of stories of spiritual heroism displayed by Jews during the Holocaust), he tells of Rabbi Shem of Cracow, a *Rebbe* whose advice was sought by many, and who worked his whole life to perfect the *mitzva* of "Love your friend and neighbor as yourself." During his imprisonment in a camp outside of Cracow, he continued to help and give *chizzuk* to suffering fellow Jews. Despite being tortured and beaten like the rest, he remained a source of inspiration to others until the Nazis decided to kill him. As he was being led away to be hanged, he spoke to the Jews surrounding him:

"What can I say, my fellow Jews? You want me to tell you how I am able to bear this burden? Very simple, friends. Each morning when I say the

blessing, 'Who did not create me a heathen,' a miraculous power is renewed within me to bear everything. Never before did I utter this blessing with my whole being, for I did not know exactly what 'heathen' meant. Truly, now we Jews know full well why we have to thank and praise and extol the Almighty for 'not having made us like the heathens, or like the families of the earth, not having given us a portion like theirs, and not having cast our lot with all their multitude.' I need not console you, my dear friends. The blessing 'Who did not create me a heathen' should be sufficient to comfort every suffering Jew.

"Let us consider the matter." Rabbi Shem grew excited and began to stand up on his shaky feet. It was not his own strength enabling him to stand, but the strength of the Jews around him, who were animated by his words. "I have a serious question to ask you, my dear Jews! Think about it carefully before you answer it. I ask you, who of you

would be willing to trade his share in this world – yes, yes, in this world – for the share of these accursed villains, whose good fortune is smiling upon them at this moment? If each one of us were given the choice at this moment to be the victim or the victimizer, what would he choose, even here, in this hell? Who would dare stand up and say that he is envious of the lowly murderers and would like to be like one of them? By all means, let him get up and say so. Who?"

A hush fell upon the listeners. No one spoke.

Rabbi Shem felt the heartbeats of the Jews in his own heart, and he went on.

"*Gevalt!* Master of the Universe! Is there one Jew who would like You to turn him into a murderous heathen?"

Rabbi Dessler in *Michtav M'Eliyahu* (pg. 347) described, in a letter to his son, the end of the Talmud Torah-Yeshiva of Kelm, after pointing out to him the exalted nature of that institution,

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steeped in Torah and *Mussar*, which produced many *gedolim* and people of lofty stature. He reminded him how on Simchas Torah all the *bachurim* would at one point go into the streets and dance through the town singing with tremendous joy and exuberance “*Ashreinu, ma tov chelkeinu* – we are fortunate, how good is our portion, how pleasant is our lot, how beautiful is our heritage” (Morning Prayers).

Many years later, he pointed out, the Nazis herded all the *talmidim*, the *Roshei Yeshiva* and their families into the

Yeshiva, and a tremendous sound of *tefilla* emanated from the *beis midrash*. However, the time came and they saw that the *middas hadin* (Divine justice) was prevailing. The Nazis came to take them to the forest to be shot. Once again, they all danced through the streets – despite being beaten – singing, with the same exuberance and joy as on *Simchas Torah*: “*Ashreinu, ma tov chelkeinu*.... How good is our portion, how pleasant is our lot and how beautiful is our heritage.”

Perhaps in our recent spurt of

affluence (before 9/11, the intifada, and the rise of anti-Semitism in so many parts of the world), this point has been neglected. Perhaps some of the social problems facing families and children in recent years stem in part from the lack of appreciation of what it is to be a *Yid*. Perhaps despite all our advances in the quantity and quality of what is being learned, and despite the increase in the external performance and ease with which we can live as Torah Jews, we have lost sight of this defining joy, and have failed to implant it in ourselves and our children. We have absorbed so much of the secular culture and lifestyle (albeit with a *hechsher*), that as Jews we have lost sight of the essential idea that we are different and have a special relationship with *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*, which should be the core of our very being and the pulse-beat of our every activity.

ULTIMATE EDUCATIONAL GOALS

Rabbi Chaim Siegel זצ"ל (late *Menahel* of Mesivta Yeshiva Chaim Berlin) once asked Rabbi Hutner זצ"ל (the *Rosh Yeshiva* of Chaim Berlin), “I am fully aware of educational goals and curriculum, but what should be the ultimate goal and bottom line of what we are to accomplish?”

The *Rosh Yeshiva* answered, “To impart and implant in the *talmidim* the knowledge and awareness of ‘*Atta vechartanu mi’kal ha’amim*.’”

Perhaps we take for granted that this is understood implicitly, but that is not the case. In the American atmosphere of everything and everyone being equal, to the point of elevating animal rights to the human level, this concept of *Am Yisroel's* distinctive identity is being eroded. If we, as a nation, are under attack for being Jews, then this core, fundamental idea must be reinforced, both in our homes and our *yeshivos*.

Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon has spoken on several occasions (in our yeshiva, this past June) about the



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meaning and lessons to be learned through the *Birchas HaTorah*, which we say every day. He explained the *beracha* “*Asher bachar banu mi’kal ha’amim*,” by adding the insight of the *Bach* – that this is a time to remember the actual giving of the Torah on Sinai. There is a *mitzva* to remember, and not forget, the events of Sinai, and to make them known to our children and grandchildren. This is the place and vehicle for remembering it. For all of our Torah is predicated on that awesome experience, which all of *Klal Yisroel* experienced together.

The *Rambam* in *Iggeres Taiman*, after listing the many empires that had tried to destroy us, and reassuring Yemenite Jewry that no one will be successful in destroying us, for our foes will ultimately vanish from the world arena, writes,

“Remember the experience of Sinai, which *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* commanded us to remember, and bade us to teach to our children, so they should grow up with this knowledge.... It is fitting, my brothers, that you should raise your children on that great event and talk about it in your congregations... because that is the foundation of our faith.”

Perhaps this is a missing ingredient in Jewish life today. We are so caught up in the daily pressures of life and perform so many of the necessary externals of *Yiddishkeit*, that we rarely stop to reflect and teach our children the nature of our essence. If we, as adults, and certainly our children, could be made to feel special – not because of any grade or other achievement, but because of who they and we are in essence – many of our problem areas would be easier to tackle. If we would understand what it means when *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* says “*Am zu yatzarti...* I created this nation for Me, that they may relate My praise” – what an awesome privilege and responsibility it is, our lives would be immeasurably more exalted, refined and purposeful. Perhaps now – as we approach what may very well be the end of time – it is time to live it as it is supposed to be.

NEW FROM THE JUDAICA PRESS



FACING THE MUSIC

A novel by Eva Vogiel, author of *Invisible Chains* and *Friend or Foe*

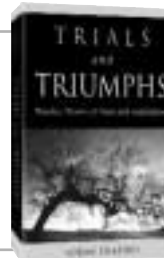
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"A LIGHT UNTO NATIONS"

The current climate may well be part of the process of preparing the world to return to G-d completely when *Moshiach* comes.

In our long, bitter *galus*, in which we have suffered so much at the hands of other nations, we have forgotten that we ultimately are meant to be a light unto the nations. On Rosh Hashana, we pray primarily for *Malchus Shamayim* (*Hashem's* dominion) to be accepted by the entire world.

Note how a true *gadol* viewed his role and what his attitude was. (I heard this story years ago from Rabbi Yechiel Perr. It is now printed in the 1st volume of the recent biographical works of the Chofetz Chaim *במאיר עיני ישראל*.)

The *Ponovezher Rav* used to travel to South Africa to raise funds for his *yeshiva*. Once, upon his return, he visited the Chofetz Chaim, who asked him. "What is the situation of the blacks in South Africa?"

After relating some of his observations, the *Ponovezher Rav* asked the Chofetz

We are so caught up in the daily pressures of life and perform so many of the necessary externals of *Yiddishkeit*, that we rarely stop to reflect and teach our children the nature of our essence.

Chaim. "Why is the Rebbe so concerned about the blacks in South Africa?"

To which the Chofetz Chaim responded, "First, they are also people. Secondly, it says that eventually the entire world will be filled with the knowledge of G-d, which includes everyone, so shouldn't I be concerned with their welfare?"

This is perhaps the effect of September 11th on the spiritual state of the world.

The *Navi Yeshaya* speaks many times about our role to be "ohr lagoyim – a light unto the nations." In Ch. 2, where he talks about the End of Days, he says:

"Many peoples will go and say, 'Come, let us go up to the Mountain of *Hashem*, to the Temple of G-d of Jacob, and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths.' For from Zion will the Torah come forth, and the word of *Hashem* from Jerusalem."

The simple meaning of this passage, according to the commentaries, is that the Torah and Jews will be the teachers and guides for all of mankind.

When all idolatries, which includes all the "isms," will prove to be meaningless and empty (as we have witnessed) as a way of life; when false religions will become discredited and lose their appeal; as mankind sinks more and more into meaningless hedonism and violence, they will turn back to G-d and seeks His ways through Torah, as we say in "*Aleinu*": "*Ve'al kein nekaveh lecha...* And therefore we put our hope in You... to remove detestable idolatry from the earth... to perfect the universe through the Almighty's sovereignty."

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CHANUKA

The Search for True Beauty

ADAPTED FOR PUBLICATION BY AVROHOM BIRNBAUM

THE SACRED CYCLE OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

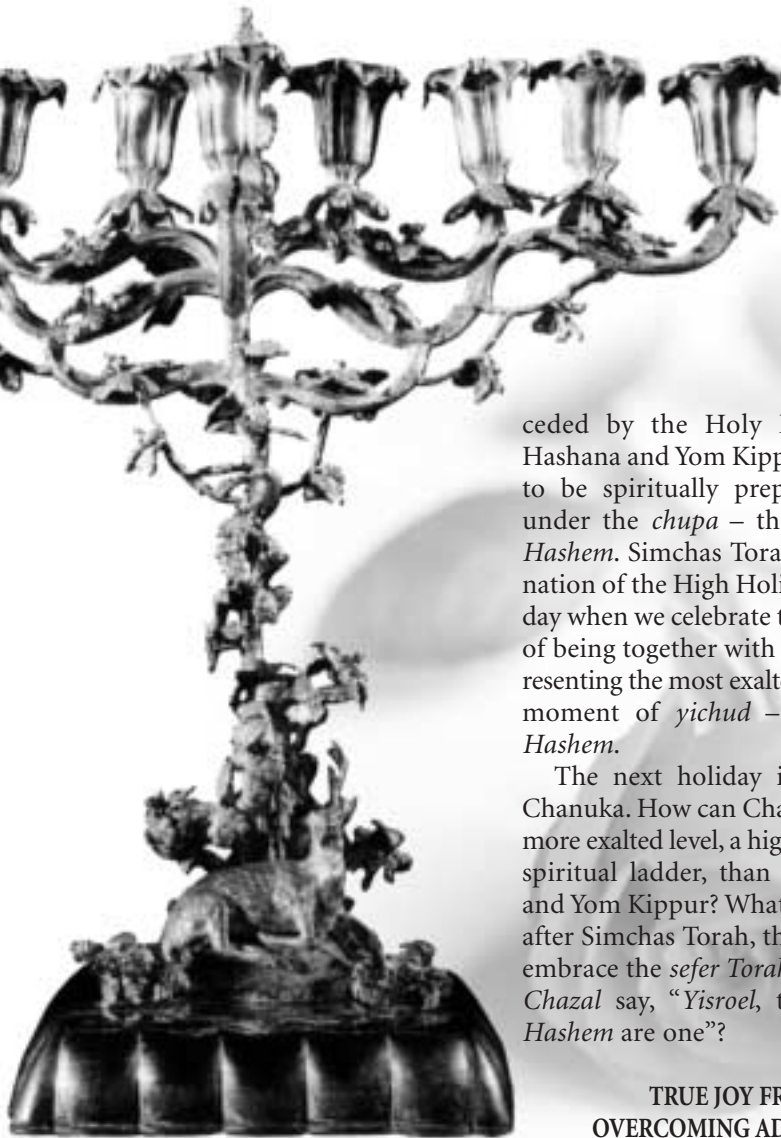
Our festivals follow a pattern, beginning with Pesach and culminating in Chanuka and Purim. This cycle represents the sustained and ongoing growth of *Am Yisroel*, the Jewish nation. Let us explore the place of Chanuka in this annual cycle. (Purim will wait for another occasion.)

Pesach commemorates the birth of the Jewish nation. Pesach's special diet of *matza* is analogous to an infant who must have special food so as not to harm his delicate digestive system. Pesach is the infancy of the Jewish nation.

Shavuot represents the time when the nation reached maturity in its relationship with *Hashem*, realized Succos with acceptance of Torah and *mitzvos*.

And then there is Succos – the *chasuna*, the marriage of the Jewish peo-

Rabbi Pinkus lived in Ashkelon where he served as Rav. He, was a revered teacher in *hashkafa* (Torah philosophy) and a leading figure in *kiruv* in Israel, until his untimely death two years ago. Rabbi Birnbaum, of Lakewood NJ, is a frequent contributor to these pages.



ple to *Hashem*. Prior to the wedding, however, it is necessary for the bride and groom to purify themselves through *teshuva*. Succos is thus pre-

ceded by the Holy Days of Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, enabling us to be spiritually prepared to stand under the *chupa* – the *succa* – with *Hashem*. Simchas Torah is the culmination of the High Holiday season, the day when we celebrate the ultimate joy of being together with the Torah, representing the most exalted moment, the moment of *yichud* – oneness with *Hashem*.

The next holiday in the cycle is Chanuka. How can Chanuka achieve a more exalted level, a higher rung on the spiritual ladder, than Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur? What is there to add after Simchas Torah, the day when we embrace the *sefer Torah*, joining us, as Chazal say, “*Yisroel*, the Torah and *Hashem* are one”?

TRUE JOY FROM OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

The *passuk* in *Shir Hashirim* (3,11) refers to “*Yom chasunaso, u’beyom simchas libo* – the day of his wedding, the day of the

gladness of his heart.” When a mature *chassan* and *kalla* stand together under the *chupa*, it is clear that although it is *yom chasunaso*, it is not yet *yom simchas libom*, the day of true joy, because in the back of their minds, there is still much uncertainty. They do not know how their new life together will turn out. Until this point, everything has been carefully scripted. On the day of the *chasuna* and even continuing through the *Sheva Brachos*, life is beautiful, with everybody playing their part to the utmost. A *chassan* and *kalla* who are intelligent and mature, however, understand that the period of courtship through marriage is not an accurate reflection of how their future together will be. How will they react under stress? What will happen when they have a disagreement? True happiness only comes after their first really serious argument. After they overcome that hurdle, resolve their differences and make up, that is truly the day of “*simchas libom*, true happiness.”

This is the role of Chanuka. Yes, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur and Succos are all beautiful, exalted times, but they are like the *chasuna*. Everything is scripted. We are on our best behavior. What happens, however, after these holy days pass? We return to our mundane, ordinary lives. In these everyday activities, we are exposed to and encounter Greek culture, at almost every turn. *Chazal* say, “Greek culture is darkness.” How do we pull ourselves out of that pervasive darkness and still show fidelity to *Hashem*?

Chanuka is the candle – the light – that enables the Jew to dispel the surrounding cultural darkness and thereby find closeness to *Hashem*. Chanuka represents the permanence of the relationship of the Jewish nation with *Hashem* through thick and thin, even during the most mundane of times. Thus Chanuka fits into the cycle of holidays in the Jewish calendar.

Still, if the holidays are an upward spiral, how is Chanuka on a higher spiritual level than all of the holidays beginning with Pesach?

THE ETERNAL STRUGGLE

Some 3,500 years ago there was a wrestling match that changed the course of world history forever. This was the fight between our forefather Yaakov and the *Sar* (ministering angel) of Eisav. *Chazal* relate that the dust that they kicked up as they wrestled rose up to the Heavenly throne. The *passuk* relates that they fought until *alos hashachar*, daybreak. Commentators explain that contained within that fight were all of the wars until the end of time, until the new dawn of *Moshiach*. The Torah tells us that even though Yaakov *Avinu* was victorious, Eisav slightly wounded him. “He dislocated Yaakov’s hip socket and Yaakov limped that night until the sun rose and healed him.”

Indeed, in that fight, Yaakov ultimately proved himself more powerful than all of the evil in the world. Nevertheless, he did not escape unharmed and he limped until the morning. Only with

the arrival of the time of *Moshiach* will he be healed. The Kabbalists explain that the *Sar* of Eisav temporarily took away from Yaakov, from the Jewish nation, one of the seven attributes of *Hashem* called *hod* – beauty. Perhaps we can give a simple explanation to this cryptic statement of the Kabbalists.

THE BEAUTY OF GREECE

Deep in our heart of hearts, we all know good from evil. Still, we can be distracted and confused by the manifestation of external beauty. Is it good? Is it bad? Or, perhaps, is it a bit of both?

Yes, we are impressed with beauty and knowledge. When a handsome person walk into a room impeccably dressed in a well-tailored suit, starched shirt, with a matching tie and glossy shoes, we are immediately impressed. He makes a positive impression. While cerebrally we may

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recognize that beneath the façade may lie a thief or an evil person, his appearance blurs that knowledge.

Chazal tell us that *Yavan* – Greece – was a grandson of Yefes, one of Noah's sons. Yefes, as his name

implies*, co-opted beauty in our world. When the *Sar* of Eisav struck Yaakov, he captured the concept of beauty on behalf of other nations. Of course, Yaakov remained with truth, with Torah, and we Jews do not attach much significance to beauty. Still, if one is seeking a life of beauty, of captivating, shining lights, he must turn to Yefes, to the Greek influence.

Beauty does have a function in Judaism. It is a necessary element when it comes to acquiring Torah, too. This is analogous to an apple. While the flesh of the apple is the main part, where the nutrients and the texture are, the beautiful flaming red peel, the shell, is what attracts a person to the apple. In order to appreciate the Torah, we sometimes need to be attracted to it by external beauty. And after we have absorbed Torah, the esthetic element can make the experience that much more pleasing.

In light of this, we can gain insight into a fascinating *Gemora*. The *Gemora* tells us that when the Torah was translated into Greek, darkness descended on the world for three days and three nights. Why? Was it not a positive phenomenon that more people would have access to the Torah? The answer is *yes*; unfortunately *yes*. Now that the Jews were already exposed to Greek culture, there was no choice other than to endow the Torah with an outer shell of *Yavan*/Greece so as to attract people to its inner truths.

When *Hashem* permitted the Torah be translated, it was a regrettable, albeit necessary accommodation. It was necessary because the perceived beauty of the foreign Greek language would attract more people to learn the eternal truth of Torah. Still, despite – and possibly because of – its necessity, *Chazal* considered it a profound tragedy that the Jewish nation had sunk so deep in exile that they required the shell – the “beauty” – of Greece to attract them to the eternal truth of Torah. Thus it was perceived as the descent of darkness on the world.

*“*Yofi*” means beauty

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TRUE JEWISH BEAUTY

In truth, however, despite the fact that Eisav struck Yaakov, he did not gain a monopoly over all the beauty in the world. There was one place where Jewish beauty shone through, without any Greek influence – Yerushalayim. The *passuk* describes Yerushalayim as “*kelilas Yofi*.” We cannot even fathom the profound, yet simple beauty of Yerushalayim.

Chazal tell us that the *Menora* was hammered out of an immense block of pure gold, which was purified and melted down repeatedly until all that remained was a *kikar* (150 lb. block) of the purest solid gold, which *Chazal* tell us shone like the sun and the stars! Even more beautiful than the *Menora* was the *Kohein Gadol* who, when dressed in his special raiments, appeared as striking and pure as a heavenly angel.

This manifestation of Jewish beauty irked *Yavan*. The Jewish People was encroaching on his territory. “Beauty is mine!” he claimed. “You have truth and Torah, but not my beauty.” For this reason, during the Chanuka era, the focus of the war between the *Yevanim* and the Jews was the *Beis Hamikdash* and the *Kohanim*.

And this is why we sing in *Maoz Tzur* “*na’aseh nes lashoshanim* – a miracle was performed for the roses.” The Jewish people during the Chanuka struggle are referred to as “roses.” The beauty of roses is completely superficial, and this is what disturbed *Yavan*. He argued, “You can have the inner beauty, the truth, the Torah. But the roses are ours!”

On Chanuka, the *Chashmonaim* fought to demonstrate that Torah is not only true and worthy, but also possesses an esthetic beauty. We do not have to turn to Greece to experience beauty. We have our own.

THE STRUGGLE OF CHANUKA: CO-EXISTENCE

This battle over beauty between *Bnei Yisroel* and *Yavan* has its source in the confrontation between Yaakov and Lavan. When

Yaakov clandestinely escaped from Lavan’s house, Lavan pursued him for three days. When he ultimately caught up with him, Yaakov asked, “What is my sin? What is my transgression that you have pursued me?” (*Bereishis* 31, 36)

To this, Lavan responded very sharply, “The daughters are my daughters, the children are my children. Everything you have belongs to me.” Lavan in essence was saying: “Why are you running away? Let us live together. We can co-exist. Your sons and daughters can also be mine.”

The *Yevanim* pursued the same goal. They did not wish to destroy the *Beis Hamikdash*. When Antiochus came in to the *Beis Hamikdash* and wanted to bring a *chazir* (pig) for a sacrifice, he quoted the *passuk* (*Isaiah* 56,7): “For Yerushalayim will be a house of prayer for *all nations*.” He claimed that the *Beis Hamikdash* is not exclusively for Jews. “You bring your sheep on the *Mizbei’ach*, and I will bring my pig. We can live together,” he said. “You have knowledge, I have beauty. Let us co-exist.”

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Rachel and Leah, however, responded to Lavan with a sentiment that serves as the paradigm for true Jewish mothers throughout the generations: "Are we not considered by him [Lavan] as strangers?" In essence they were saying, "We want nothing to do with him. We cannot live together with him. Co-existence is beyond consideration!"

The dialogue between Yaakov and Lavan continued, and Lavan urged Yaakov to join him in a covenant. The Torah tells us, "They took a pile of stones, which Yaakov called [in *Lashon Kodesh*] 'Gal ed.'" Lavan, however, chose a different name: the Aramaic words "Yegar sahadusa." Both mean a "pile of stones," but Lavan's choice connoted that there would one day be a co-existence between the nation of *Hashem* and those who speak a foreign language. The word *yegar* has the numerical value of 213, says the *Megaleh Amukos*. He explains that the Chanuka episode took place during the 213th year after the building of the Second *Beis Hamikdash*. Lavan was saying, "Yes, for now you can be alone and separate from me. There will be a time, however, 213 years after the building of the *Beis Hamikdash*, when our cultures will mix together." That is why he specifically called it by its Aramaic, not Jewish name.

Yaakov, however, retorted that the name was "Gal ed." The *passuk* in *V'Zos Habracha* says, "And *Hashem* showed Moshe *Gilad*." The *Gemora* tells us, "*Gilad* is the *Beis Hamikdash*." Yaakov was in effect saying, "No! *Lashon Hakodesh* will prevail. In the *Beis Hamikdash*, that holiest of places, there will be no Greek influence. Even the beauty that is contained in the *Beis Hamikdash* will be a uniquely Jewish beauty, without any non-Jewish influence."

That is the essence of Chanuka. Chanuka is the time when a Jew must realize that Torah and *mitzvos* are not only the ultimate truth, but they are the ultimate beauty.

Chazal teach us that Torah is not only true, but it is also sweet and beautiful. Every day during the *Shacharis* prayers after *Shema*, we say the *tefilla* of "*Emes Veyatziv*." In it there are fifteen expressions



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of how dear the Torah is. It is “true, certain, fair,” and so on. The final description on the list is “*va’yafeh* – beautiful.” We do not have to turn to *Yavan* in order to procure beauty. Our own Torah is exquisitely beautiful, Jewishly beautiful. It possesses a unique Jewish beauty.

CULTIVATING A TASTE FOR JEWISH BEAUTY

Can we access, appreciate and achieve that unique beauty? How can we find the “roses” in *Yiddishkeit* without feeling that we have to turn to *Yavan*?

It is not easy. We live in a world permeated by – even saturated with – the darkness of *Yavan*. We have become so addicted to *Yavan* that we sometimes fail to realize how it has crept into our own psyche. We teach our children Torah, we send them to the best schools because we know that the Torah contains the truth. When we have to entertain them, however, we feel that in order for them to be “healthy children,” we must stimulate them with the latest distractions and decadence from *Yavan*.

Contemporary society is steeped in the beauty of *Yavan*. Its effect on us is analogous to somebody who sits down to a traditional Israeli Oriental *Shabbos* meal, and is given the sharp Oriental dip called *charif* to put on his *challa*. The uninitiated will dig deeply, bite generously and immediately experience such a burning sensation in his mouth that no matter how sweet and delectable the fish, the *kugel*, and any other food that follows, it will all taste like more of the hot *charif*. His mouth cannot respond to any other taste sensation. The same can be said with regard to the Hellenistic culture that surrounds us. The more we expose ourselves to it, the less chance we have of fully understanding and experiencing true Jewish beauty.

If one wants to sample the Torah’s delights, he simply cannot fill up his “mouth” with spicy, tongue-tickling condiments – that non-Jewish culture – no matter how intriguing it might look. Heed this cautionary note, and you will then see true beauty. You will rel-

ish the beauty of a *blatt Gemara*, you will see and feel the beauty of a *mitzva* or a Chassidic tale. You will understand how beautiful your *neshama* could be, how beautiful your children can be. Truly beautiful.

Let us remember the words of the Ibn Ezra: “Do not turn to the wisdom of *Yavan*, because they have no fruit, only flowers.” Chanuka tells us that not only is the fruit ours, the flowers, the beauty also belongs to us. Our own literature, our own music, our own legal system, have a symmetry and beauty of their

own. And they all bear fruit.

This appreciation of true *Yiddishe* beauty, the beauty that one can only experience through rejection of superficial Greek beauty that seeks to contaminate us, will bring the *Alos Hashachar*, the dawn of a new era when Eisav’s dominion will forever be expunged, and the Jewish nation will once again experience the profound beauty of the *Beis Hamikdash* and the *Kohein Gadol* with the advent of *Moshiach*. ■

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Most of us consider our children to be robust and healthy. *Baruch Hashem*. They're growing nicely, learning well, and have an active social environment. That's really wonderful. But maybe it's not good enough.

Consider, for a moment, what goes on inside their bodies on a typical school day. After breakfast of sugar-coated cere-

Mrs. Lowinger, of Brooklyn, is a popular journalist who covers a wide range of Jewish issues. Her byline appears in various publications, including *Yated Ne'eman*, *Horizons*, and *Kashrus Magazine*. Her article, "Developing Leaders For the Immigrant Community," was featured in *JO*, Feb. '99.

al, your son (or daughter) makes a mad dash out the door. He catches the bus on the corner and reminds himself that he hasn't had time for a drink.

He pulls out a sweetened drink-box from his knapsack, and, while he's at it, a bag of chips. Two hours later, he shares greasy donuts with his friends. Two hours after that, he devours a school lunch consisting of fried fish sticks and pasta. He's basically remained sedentary all day. Recess is indoors because the Yeshiva school yard is undergoing construction. By late afternoon, he is back on the bus and on his way home. By now, he's famished and he wants to know what's for dinner. But you have a *simcha* tonight, so you left some money on the counter and told the kids to order pizza. Again.

Now consider this, taken from an editorial which appeared on June 1st in the *Diabetes Forecast*. "As recently as ten years ago," writes Pamela Hardy, FNP, CDE, "physicians rarely saw a child with Type II diabetes. Today, approximately forty percent of children with newly diagnosed diabetes have Type II. Why?

American children are exercising less and eating more, a combination that leads directly to childhood obesity."

And childhood obesity can lead to a wide range of health issues that we can certainly do without. Conditions such as cardiovascular disease, hypertension, elevated cholesterol levels and more. Even orthopedic problems can develop simply because children are carrying around too much weight.

Not the least of all these is the risk of diabetes. Ms. Hardy is calling it an epidemic. So are the doctors and medical experts in our own community, who are seeing the very same alarming increase in Type II diabetes as in the general population. They've seen the numbers and they've watched the statistics rise. And they're keenly aware that the risk factors within the Yeshiva community are startlingly high.

WHAT IS TYPE II DIABETES?

Type II Diabetes is a condition that affects the blood sugar levels. When the body produces insulin

but doesn't use it efficiently, this can result in consistent high blood sugar levels. If left untreated, it can eventually lead to significant health complications. Seventeen million Americans currently suffer from diabetes. Ten percent of them have Type I Diabetes, which is controlled with insulin. The vast majority have non-insulin dependent Type II. Type II used to be called "adult onset diabetes," because most of those who were diagnosed with it were over 40. They do not call it that anymore because the condition is now occurring in much younger people.

Type II is caused largely by environmental factors. The irony is that it's so easily preventable. With a ten percent decrease in weight and a slight increase in exercise, the risks are vastly reduced. Since there's no actual cure for diabetes, prevention seems to be the most obvious way to battle the spreading of this condition.

How does it get diagnosed? There are currently 5.9 million people walking around with diabetes who don't even know it. They could have had it for years. Anyone who seems to be developing an unhealthy lifestyle is potentially at risk. The Jewish Diabetes Association is currently involved in implementing diabetes screenings within our community. If your child is unusually sedentary or overweight, speak to a doctor or a registered nutritionist. That will give you a head start on preventing the condition before it occurs.

WHAT HAS CHANGED?

Skeptics among us may wonder what all the fuss is about. Haven't children been nashing on sweets since the beginning of time? Weren't we all brought up on the quintessential high-fat Jewish diet of kugel and chulent? And didn't we turn out okay? Hasn't every Jewish mother since time immemorial urged her children to "ess, tataleh, ess"?

Maybe our diets have changed over the years, maybe not. But our lifestyle certainly has changed. And the conveniences that we enjoy today simply did

not exist in previous generations. As it turns out, they are a mixed blessing. The prevalence of reliable *hechsherim* on every conceivable type of snack means that we can always find a kosher bag of pretzels at any Seven-Eleven. But it also means we can purchase that snack anytime we feel like it.

Years ago, we were forced to brown-bag it every time we left the house. Otherwise, we'd go hungry. These days, it seems like there's a pizza store around the corner from every yeshiva. And a fast food restaurant in virtually every budding Jewish community. The challenge of "what to eat" has been virtually eliminated for the American Jewish population.

So has the challenge of exercise. Do you know anybody who walks to school these days? Probably not. The yeshiva bus will pick up your son even if he lives around the corner. And if not, then the car pool probably will. When he gets to school, your son will probably remain sedentary most of the day. And so will you, now that you're in the habit of sitting at the computer or driving to the grocery, even if it's only two blocks away.

Dr. Susan Schulman spoke passionately about the lack of exercise in our community at a recent conference for *mechanchim* sponsored by the Jewish Diabetes Association: "Our children have zero energy output from morning

till night. They don't walk to school, and they barely even walk up a flight of steps. *Hashem* made children active for a reason. Muscles develop properly when they're being used. When they're not, they atrophy and don't develop at all. A child's body was created to climb, to run, to move around. He needs that activity in order for his muscles, his frame, and his respiratory system to develop. It's part of his nature."

According to Dr. Schulman, "In the old days, kids walked a mile back and forth to school. They did chores around the house. Exercise was part of their life, whether they went to a gym or not. If we take away the exercise, then they are stressed and the calories are not being burned. We're not producing healthy individuals with healthy lifestyles for the future. They're becoming sedentary adults and sedentary parents. We complain that they're obese and out of shape. But we do not feed them right and do not give them the time to exercise. It's time we paid more attention to our healthy children."

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

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the first place to start," writes Ms. Harding. "For the best results, the entire family must embrace healthy lifestyle changes."

Say the word "diet" and most people cringe. That is why it is important to recognize that this has nothing to do with "dieting" and everything to do with "lifestyle changes." Subtle changes, creative changes, will increase our children's health and well-being while not drastically complicating their life.

Dr. Rebecca Unger, pediatrician at

Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago, says small changes in a children's diet can make a big difference. "If we can catch a three-year-old who's still on a bottle, drinks tons of juice and goes to fast-food restaurants five times a week, let's stop the bottle, cut out the juice, and eat out only twice a week. You will see a tremendous difference in growth pattern."

"It doesn't take much to become a candidate for diabetes," warns Dr. Reza Yavari of the Yale University School of Medicine. "Just eat 100

calories a day more than you expend — that's about half a candy bar — and in ten years you will gain 100 extra pounds." The antidote? A recent survey by the Department of Health and Human Services tested over 3,000 high-risk participants. The study clearly showed that even simple lifestyle changes such as eating less fat and exercising two and a half hours a week made a dramatic difference. In fact, it was almost twice as effective as drug intervention. Practically speaking, what does this mean? For starters, it means taking brisk thirty-minute walks, reading the labels on snacks, consuming smaller quantities of high-fat foods, and drinking lots of water. It means substituting fish for beef, herbal tea for soda, and anything rather than those sugary sweetened breakfast cereals.

The JDA, under the direction of Mrs. Nechama Cohen, publishes "Connection to Healthy Living," a magazine filled with advice on just how to make those lifestyle changes. Some of their suggestions seem like common sense. So why haven't we implemented them?

On *Shabbos*, we're advised to put a fresh salad on the table, lean towards vegetable *kugels*, reconsider that extra slice of *challa*, and go easy on dessert. During the week, we're told to send fresh fruit to school for snack, encourage the kids to ride their bikes more often, and walk — not drive — to the Avenue whenever we can.

Schools are being encouraged to join families in helping to bring about lifestyle changes.

Some have been remarkably successful in their efforts. One school has reportedly implemented a new recess rule. All snacks must be of the "ha'eitz" or "ha'adama" variety.

Sounds radical, but considering the variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, nuts and raisins and salads, it does not have to be limiting. You just have to use your imagination. Another Bais Yaakov school developed an after-school program that includes aerobics and exercise activities for its eighth grade students. And yet another school



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... AND THEN THERE ARE THE BOYS

It will be more challenging, of course, to make changes in the *yeshivos*, where every moment of time is already strictly accounted for. But a recent study at Maimonides Medical Center reveals that bone density in fifteen-to-nineteen-year-old Chassidic males in the community is startlingly low. It will not take major modifications to bring those numbers up. But it will take the respectful commitment of the parent body.

"Five minutes of jumping jacks can make a difference," commented one local physician.

A basketball hoop erected in the yard and sponsored, perhaps, by the PTA can do wonders for posture, respiration, and coordination. Learning programs that include an hour of gym are the perfect antidote for long *Motza'ei Shabbosos* in winter. In the springtime, coordinating ball playing in the park will make the longer Friday afternoons more productive.

Awareness is the key to any successful change. Children who are better educated will make better choices. Adults who are well informed can steer their children in the right direction. The

proper attitude is very important. So is the proper training. "If children are taught when they're young that a tomato is a snack," observes one nutrition expert, "then that's what they'll crave."

P.S. DEALING WITH DIABETES

It may be shocking, even devastating, to discover that you have diabetes. But it's not the end of the world. About sixteen million Americans suffer from diabetes. That's up nearly forty percent in the past decade. So those who have this condition certainly are not alone.

For the Jewish diabetic, the challenges are somewhat increased. We are a community that clings to our traditions throughout the calendar year. Many of these traditions are coming straight out of the kitchen. The Jewish Diabetes Association can help. It provides information that will help a diabetic overcome the challenge of fasting on Yom Kippur and drinking the *araba kosos* on Pesach. It also offers suggestions on how to handle a family *simcha* successfully and how to survive the *Shabbos kiddush* in *shul*.

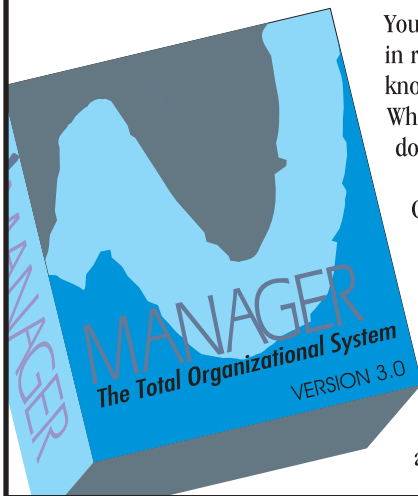
Children with diabetes need to be treated with sensitivity and respect. They also need our guidance and

tutelage. *Mechanchim* and educators are learning how to deal with this condition in their students, in case of unforeseen emergency. Their wisdom and judgment can make all the difference in the world, especially when dealing with an eight-year-old who wishes he could share birthday cake with his classmates or a fifth grader who suddenly feels faint during a class trip. Parents are being urged to "come clean" and discuss the issue openly with teachers and principals. It's difficult enough to learn to control your blood sugar when you are twelve years old. It's even harder when you cannot even tell your best friend about your condition.

This is what Nechama Cohen has to say about kids and diabetes: "Imagine the typical young child. Think about the things that he craves the most. If he's like most kids, he probably craves candies. Now think about who he probably fears the most. Chances are that he's really scared of the doctor's needle. Now imagine telling this child that he'll have to limit the things that he craves the most while he will be subjecting himself continuously to that which he fears the most. Sounds awful? Now imagine telling him that this is how he will have to live for the rest of his life."

And you begin to understand what it's like to be a child with diabetes. ■

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T houghts From a Shelter

*What can be done
for today's youth?*

A teenager's perspective.

Why Are They Leaving?

Another cliché article about kids at risk.... After all the talk has died down, and people are walking away concerned, despondent, thoughtful, and weary of the subject, one lone voice is still speaking. One person just hasn't realized that the conversation is over.

Because it's not.

As mentioned in the title, I'm speaking from within the safest place there is during this time of war – a bomb shelter. There isn't enough protection at home and there is none on the street, but *baruch Hashem* I am here. Although, even when I am inside, I hear the explosions and I feel the vibrations and I know that I am not yet safe: because nothing is foolproof.

No matter where I am, my ever-pres-

Yisroel M. Muller, who learns in the Beis Midrash of the Yeshiva of Far Rockaway (NY), was represented in *The Jewish Observer* by "Walking Home" (Dec. 99).

ent shadow is fear. Especially now, with the enemy fire intensifying every second. Can we make the situation any safer? Can we protect our lives and the lives of others in any way? The mind races as a nearby explosion shakes the very walls of the building, and the heart pounds as yet another wounded friend staggers in from outside. These shelters are all we have, is there any way to make them stronger?

Fortunately, we have *gedolim* to tell us which of these lifesaving shelters need improvement:

Because of the extraordinary growth of the Torah community, schools are overcrowded, and not every child receives the attention he or she requires to develop properly. Many children do not realize their potential, and some simply fall through the cracks. (Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetzky שליט"א JO, Nov. '99)

A JEP boy once asked me why it was that, now that he was in yeshiva, he

hated learning Torah. "Everyone in my class also hates it," he said to me, "but you'd think that I'd be different because I've been deprived of Torah for so long." What could I say to him? As long as he had merely been in JEP he had been learning one-on-one with a vibrant teenager and the lessons had been tailored solely for him. Now that he was in yeshiva, he had been reduced to being one in twenty five; Torah had lost its life for him and was לר"ב becoming a hated burden.

It has been pointed out that "Never before as a people have we had so many individuals coming close to Torah, while at the same time, others are abandoning a Torah life. The remarkable *baal teshuva* movement is growing every day. Paradoxically, the number of people growing up in religious homes who are walking away into emptiness is also increasing," (Rabbi Ahron Kaufman, *ibid.*) It may do us well to note that *baalei teshuva* are educated as individ-

uals, while those growing up in religious homes are not.

The Third Alternative

Many are acutely aware of the desperate need for a better *rebbe/talmid* ratio, and efforts are being made in the right direction. However, there is no need to leave the fate of thousands to this wearying struggle between conscience and apathy. There is a third alternative. The world has forgotten a group of talented individuals who may be their most powerful allies.

On the basis of “talking in learning” with students of the Ponevezher Yeshiva, the Chazon Ish came to the conclusion that many younger *bachurim* were getting lost there and felt despondently alone and helpless. He requested Rabbi Yaakov Eidelstein, then studying in Ponevezh, to organize the older *bachurim* to learn with younger ones. (Rabbi Zvi Yabrov, *ibid.*)

There is a sleeping giant, a sleeping gigantic army: the older *bachurim*. Let’s pull them away from their radios and basketball courts, their stereos and computers, and their lethargy and boredom; let’s push them to dedicate their energies to their younger brothers and their potential younger brothers. With their hearts beating strong with the ener-

gies of youth and their natural position as role models, with their closeness to the culture of their younger peers and the time they have that they’re able to give, they can succeed where all else is falling short.

Looking around me, I see so much that can be done by dedicated yeshiva teens within the framework of yeshiva. They can be encouraged to reach out to the younger boys by talking with them, inviting them for a *Shabbos* meal, or even by organizing things to do together. But though there is a place for all the above, the most crying need is for the older *bachurim* to learn with the younger ones. For the following reasons:

Some of the Reasons

The kids would be growing so much more if they would only be learning more. And with Torah in their hearts and minds, they wouldn’t fall anymore. Why is it that the child sleepwalks through life, his eyes only fluttering open to catch the passing flashes of that dangerous, immoral culture? It is only because he is not learning Torah.

He is wasting away in *shiur*. He gulps the salt-water called entertainment only in order to still his thirst, to fill the emptiness within. He wants to free himself from the relentless boredom and he’s

driven for that missing sensation of being alive. In the words of Chazal: “*Habatal-la mevia lidei zima* – Wasting time leads to immorality” (*Kesubos* 59b).

Let us remember that learning Torah is the protection against our powerful, evil desires: “So said Hashem to Yisroel, ‘My children, I’ve created the *yeitzer hara* and I’ve created for it the Torah as a cure; and if you are involved in Torah, you will not be given over into its hands... and if you are not involved in Torah, you will be given over into its hands’” (*Kiddushin* 30b). On the positive side, Torah itself is the powerful catalyst of a complete Torah life.¹ On the negative side, when a teenager is not learning....

Having said this, the other reasons why we must concentrate on *learning* are unnecessary; but they are worth mentioning nonetheless: One, being that today’s yeshiva boy has few hours not claimed by formal schooling, extracurricular activities are impractical. This project, on the other hand, can be done during school hours. Two, abandonment of *Yiddishkeit* – and rejection of productive life – is usually inversely proportionate to a boy’s *academic* success in school. The most direct benefit of such one-on-one tutoring would be the recipient’s academic ascent. And three, an older boy that succeeds as a *chavrusa* will inevitably become an older friend also, we need only emphasize *limud haTorah*; *bittul Torah* tends to happen by itself.

Every teenager I know, be he my camper, my brother, my friend or myself, would gain tremendously from

¹ “I started my *kiruv* work in Jerusalem some years ago by organizing a regular class with some of my non-religious neighbors in Romema. It was my first opportunity to learn with secular Jews and I had no idea what topics I should teach. Luckily, I knew someone who was an expert on secularism (from both sides) – Uri Zohar, the well-known *baal teshuva* and former television star, so I sought his advice. “Well,” he said, “what are you learning now in yeshiva?” “*Bava Kamma*,” I replied. “Well, teach them that.” (*Bava Kamma* deals with legalistic decisions about what happens when my ox tramples your plants, and so on.) “*Bava Kamma*?” I asked incredulously. “You don’t understand the secular mind.” He said something that still preys on my mind all my waking hours: “Yaacov, you don’t believe in the power of Torah.” (*Rabbi Yaacov Haber, JO, Feb. ’90*)

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having an older *chavrusa*. Every teenager. If he has difficulty with the material – for sure. If he is exceptionally bright – all the more. And even the middle-of-the-road, regular guy is getting nowhere compared to where he could be getting. A *sefer*, forty minutes a day, with a *Rebbe* who has the time to focus on the *talmid's* needs, answer his questions, and discuss his issues, would give him something he needs and is getting nowhere else.

Once Torah is presented in a way that's right for the *talmid* – he'll grow, he'll learn, and he'll *shteig*. I asked Rabbi Shonek, an eighth grade *Rebbe* in the Yeshiva of South Shore, if I could quote him on the powerfully positive effect an older *bachur* has by learning with a younger *bachur*; he was confused that quotes were wanted: "It's pretty obvious to anyone who looks around."

The Gain to the Giver Himself

And let's not forget the gain of the giver himself. *Chazal* tell us, "*Halomeid al m'nas lelemeid maspikin beyado lilmod ulelemeid* – One who learns with intent to teach is given the ability to both learn and teach" (*Avos* 4,5). "*Umitalmidai yoser mikulam* – And from my students I learned more than I learned from everybody else" (*Taanis* 7a). But besides this, there is perhaps an even greater *to'elles* here, specific to our generation:

Everyone has a drive – and the teenaged boy has a need – to be working on something important, to be needed. Missing a sense of being a part of *Klal Yisroel*, today's man is missing a sense of identity and a source of fulfillment, challenge, and meaning. As Hillel expressed the cry of today's teen so long ago, "*U'che'she'ani le'atzmi, mah ani* – And when I am only for myself, what am I?" (*Avos* 1,14).

If not for those who need to be helped, let us organize this for those who need to help, before they turn to emptiness for fulfillment *וְרָחֵם*. Perhaps, even more than *Klal Yisroel* needs its youth to dedicate their energies to it, its youth need to dedicate their energies to *Klal Yisroel*.

Let us follow the footsteps of R' Chiya, who would tell his young students to teach each other, and so assured the continuation of Torah.² (See *Bava Metzia* 85b.) In Slobodka, "the older *bachurim* were given a great deal of responsibility for the younger ones. At meals the older *bachurim* were assigned younger *bachurim* who had to tell them some insight in the *Gemora*. Each lodging had an older boy with two younger ones." This way, the *Alter* of Slobodka (Rabbi Nosson Tzvi Finkel זצ"ל) would say, he "was producing hundreds of *Roshei Yeshiva*"³ (Yonason Rosenblum, *Reb Yaakov*, p. 55). The recent history of Torah is striking testimony to this truth. Let's allow history to repeat itself.

Have you ever seen that simple happiness on the face of a boy who is – perhaps for the first time – really learning? Have you ever had a glimpse of that sweet moment when a shaft of light

² "Now how does this ensure that Torah will not be forgotten by *Klal Yisroel*? And why couldn't R' Chiya have taught *all* of the *Chumash* and *all* of the *Mishnayot* to *all* of the children – and not entrust their learning to those less capable than he? R' Chiya was not teaching Torah – R' Chiya was teaching Jewish children *how to teach Torah*: While his goal was that Torah not be forgotten by *Klal Yisroel*, his method was to teach others how to teach – how to recognize their responsibility to other Jewish children. Only the teaching of responsibility for others can guarantee that Torah will not be forgotten by *Klal Yisroel*." (*My Rosh Yeshiva*, Rabbi Yechiel Perr שליט"א, *JO*, Jan. '70)

shatters the walls of his prison cell, bringing life into his heart and telling him that there's hope? The eyes of this older *chavrusa* have seen that miracle; and I've, of course, grown from the experience. As my twelfth grade *Rebbe* put it last year, "The younger boys have an opportunity to learn and gain from older role models. They will relate and open up to them, providing positive peer pressure. At the same time, older *bachurim* learn and grow as they guide others... everyone gains from the situation. Done properly, this has been proven to have an overwhelming success rate." (Rabbi Ahron Kaufman, *JO*, Nov. '99)

I need not describe the powerful role Agudath Israel can play in the creation of such a movement of dedicated teens. For, besides taking care of the technical and physical needs of a new movement, it can provide what only Agudath Israel can provide, and indeed what was the reason for the creation of Agudath Israel:

The framework for uniting Jews from the whole spectrum of Torah Jewry, to work together on issues concerning *Klal Yisroel*, under the guidance of *Gedolei Yisroel*. ■

³ *Rebbi* said: "*Kamma gedolim maasei Chiya!*" Which is commonly translated as – "How great are the works of Chiya!" In light of the words of the *Alter*, it is tantalizing to interpret these words as meaning – "How many *Gedolim* are the work of Chiya!"

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