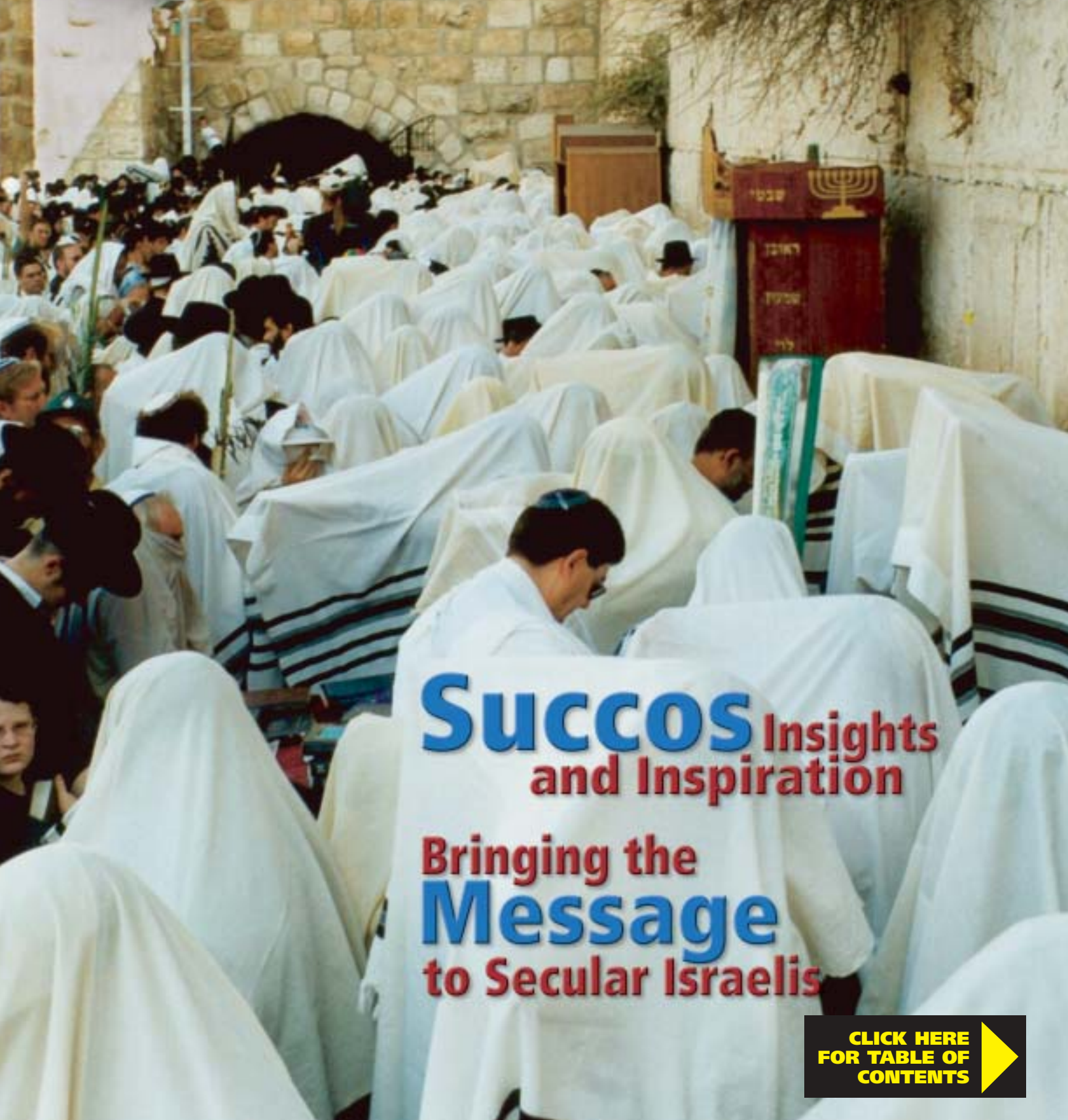



# THE Jewish OBSERVER

Tishrei 5764 • October 2003  
U.S.A. \$3.50/Foreign \$4.50 • VOL XXXVI/NO. 8



**Succos** Insights  
and Inspiration

Bringing the  
**Message**  
to Secular Israelis

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# SECU

## THE TERRIBLE, UNANTICIPATED BLOW

The August 19 suicide bombing on a number 2 bus taking worshippers from the *Kosel* to the chareidi neighborhoods of Jerusalem was perhaps the most shattering blow ever to strike the chareidi community in *Eretz Yisroel*. Every subgroup within the community was hit – Chassidic and Lithuanian, Ashkenazi and Sephardi, *frum* from birth and *ba'alei teshuva*, visitors from abroad and native Israelis were numbered among the 23 killed and more than a hundred injured.

Few in the chareidi community of *Eretz Yisroel* were not somehow connected to someone on the bus. The night of the blast, before the names of the victims were known, a friend remarked that he was afraid to go to *shul* the next morning for fear of hearing the names of people he knew.

Most every chareidi family in Jerusalem uses the number 2 bus, which wends its way through most of the chareidi neighborhoods before ending its route at the *Kosel*. Many harbored the illusion that somehow this line was safer than others – either because of its holy destination, or, on a more practical level, because a suicide bomber

would be so easily identified traveling on this line. A friend visiting this summer from the States told me that his family refused to take any buses, except the number 2 bus from the *Kosel*.

As the individual stories of those so cruelly murdered began to emerge, the pain only deepened. The entire community could identify with the reasons that had brought them to the *Kosel*: one woman, in her eighth month of pregnancy, to *daven* for a healthy baby; another to *daven* that her son beginning yeshiva that day should have a successful *z'man*. Many of the victims were regulars at the *Kosel*.

## MEDIA WINDOW INTO A WAY OF LIFE

The Jerusalem bus bombing was the chareidi community's Dolphinarium. Just as the Dolphinarium suicide bombing transformed the Russian immigrants in the eyes of Israeli society from an anonymous mass into individuals with life stories, so the "chareidi blast" transformed the chareidi community from an ominous sea of black into human beings.

Predictably, the chareidi media was filled with biographies of the victims. Less predictably, the same stories of righteous men and women appeared in the secular press, without a trace of the cynicism that would normally accompany such articles. Secular Israelis gained a glimpse into the private lives

of chareidim. They "met" for the first time people like Goldie Taubenfeld, a 43-year-old mother of 13 from New Square. Just before her murder, Taubenfeld offered to donate a kidney to a complete stranger. She raised her sister-in-law's orphaned children as her own, and regularly offered hot meals and a place to sleep to mentally ill people who had no place else to go.

Mrs. Nava Zagari went to the *Kosel* on the day that the first of the drastic cuts in child allowances was to go into effect to *daven* that she should nevertheless merit a seventh child. Instead, her sixth, a baby boy less than a year old, was killed as he slept in her arms. Another victim, Mrs. Lilach Kardi, lost both of her parents by the time she was 16, and was left to raise her eight-year-old brother by herself. In her eighth month of pregnancy, she had gone to the *Kosel* prior to the anticipated birth of her second child.

All these stories and more the Israeli public devoured. The *Jerusalem Post* printed the tender remembrance by a modern Orthodox woman from Efrat of the Mattersdorf *mikveh* lady, Mrs. Rochel Weitz, who after being widowed in her thirties raised eight children to adulthood.

Israel radio and TV rushed to interview the usual chareidi talking heads, this author included, on the community's reaction. But far more powerful and eloquent were the simple, unrehearsed conversations with the friends and relatives of those killed and with the sur-

Rabbi Rosenblum, who lives in Jerusalem, is a contributing editor to *The Jewish Observer*. He is also director of the Israeli division of Am Echad, the Agudath Israel-inspired educational outreach effort and media resource.

# LAR ISRAEL

## Takes a New Look at the Chareidim

vivors themselves.

Bracha Toporowitch, whose three-year-old granddaughter was burned beyond recognition while asleep in her mother's arms, was asked whether she felt any anger towards the suicide bomber. She appeared surprised by the question. *Who had time to think about him at all?* she wondered. "What is the message for us? What do we need to change to become a better person? How do we reach out to people? How do we connect more closely to G-d?" These were the only questions, she insisted.

These conversations served to dispel one of the most enduring anti-chareidi stereotypes of Israeli life – that of chareidim as hypocrites. No play has been so frequently translated into Hebrew and placed in an Israeli context as Moliere's *Tartuffe, or the Hypocrite*. *Tartuffe* is one of the standard metaphors for chareidi Jews in Israel. As Professor Dan Urian of the Tel Aviv University theatre department puts it, "All those dark clothes are just a costume hiding the real person underneath, who is a hypocrite, self-aggrandizing, holier-than-thou fanatic. That is how Moliere sees *Tartuffe*, and that is how many Israelis see the ultra-Orthodox."

Now, at least, the depth and sincerity of chareidi belief could no longer be questioned.

The chareidi community received not only the sympathy of the nation but

unprecedented admiration for the way it responded to a tragedy of such scope. Reporters could not get over the fact that at more than twenty funerals there were no calls for "Revenge" or "Death to the Arabs." *Yediot Aharonot* described how anxious relatives of those who might have been on the bus organized themselves into *minyanim* and recited *Tehillim* as they waited patiently for many hours at the Abu Kabir National Forensic Institute.

Chemi Shalev wrote in *Maariv* of how "the restrained response of the chareidi public inspired general admiration and considerable envy among the large secular majority." And Hayuta Deutsch wondered in *Yediot*, "Why don't we do this?" while observing that "there is something to be learned from the haredi humility."

Most poignant was novelist Yoram Kaniuk's tribute in *Ha'Aretz* (which deserves to be read in full):

The chareidim do not believe that calamities occur at random. G-d runs the world and He knows what He is doing. His knowledge is not the same as human knowledge, and a believer submits himself to G-d and lives within the Torah.

When I saw how they stood and prayed over their own blood, with terrible grief and restrained horror, begging G-d to forgive them, I could only be envious that my forefathers were like them....

[T]heir strength to withstand curs-

es, terror and calamities is a strength that we, with all our learning, do not know. We disparage them, but they pity us.

### EMERGING FROM "AN ANTI-CHAREIDI BUBBLE"

In the wake of a new positive attitude toward the chareidi community, many wrote to repent of their former anti-chareidi attitudes. A doctor from Ramat Gan wrote to *Maariv* describing his emergence for the first time from "an anti-chareidi bubble, in which everything was so clear and predictable, and that provided easy answers to virtually every problem facing the country – social, economic, security – answers dripping with hatred and alienation [from chareidim]."

Radio host Shelly Yechimovitz, one of the four or five broadcast journalists who determines the daily media agenda in Israel, penned a veritable "J'Accuse" entitled "The New Anti-Semites." She began:

The day will come when historians will investigate a fascinating phenomenon: How in the State of Israel, which was the gathering place for the remnants saved from anti-Semitic persecution and mass killings, how in the State of Israel, which is perceived by the majority of its Jewish citizens as a "Jewish state," how specifically in this place of refuge, a new type of anti-

Semitism has arisen. The victims of this anti-Semitism are chareidi Jews. The perpetrators are secular Jews....

The arsenal of phrases and cartoons employed against them could have been copied straight from *Der Sturmer*, and are enough to turn the stomach.

But the secular Israeli response went far beyond a willingness to acknowledge the sincerity of chareidi belief. There was a renewed interest in the content of that belief as well. If secular Israelis were not yet prepared to make the faith of chareidim their own, many wished they could and were prepared to learn more.

Anat Davidoff, for instance, devoted 15 minutes of her midday radio show to a discussion of how a believing Jew wrestles with tragedy with chareidi publicist Dudi Zilbershlag. Davidoff's questions could be read as challenges in the form of "How could anyone continue to believe in a benevolent G-d in the face of the deaths of so many infants and children without sin?" But her insistent, probing tone could also be understood as reflecting a certain personal urgency and the hope that she might find the answer to her question.

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In any event, she turned over the microphone to Zilbershlag, who has lost two children to disease. He not only described the general chareidi approach to issues of theodicy, but talked powerfully of the questions his surviving children had asked and how he answered them. The show elicited hundreds of responses from secular Israelis profoundly moved by his words.

#### PART OF A HISTORICAL CONTINUUM

Secular Israelis saw chareidi faith as the source of level of strength that they lack and feel desperately in need of. Along with the lives claimed and families destroyed, the August 19 bus bombing killed whatever hopes still remained for the so-called Roadmap. Israelis once again found themselves staring another fifty years of warfare in the face. Israeli politicians no longer even offer the pretense of knowing the way out. No political nostrums—"If only we had done this"; "If only we would do that"—were heard after the bus blast.

In this situation, many Israelis would like to tap into the stoic faith of the chareidim, which allows them to continue forward no matter what the adversity. One of the sources of that strength is the acute historical consciousness with which chareidim live. *Churban*, the Chelminicki Massacres, the

Holocaust are still alive for us. As a consequence, we know that however bad things may look today, the Jewish people have faced worse and survived.

Part of the reason that questions raised by the suffering of great *tzaddikim* and children without sin do not threaten chareidi faith is that we have lived with them so long. Those same questions are an inescapable part of all the aforementioned tragedies of Jewish history. Indeed, *Moshe Rabbeinu* himself asked the question of the "suffering of the righteous and the peace of evil-doers," and *Hashem* denied even him the answer.

And yet, as Dudi Zilbershlag pointed to Anat Davidoff, in one of the most widely quoted segments of the interview, the chareidi acknowledgment of the limits of human knowledge is the very source of their determination and ability to continue in the face of tragedy. Indeed, over the generations, we have integrated our faith so deeply that, even as we suffer, we do not waver.

Western man has grown intoxicated with the expansion of scientific knowledge. He lives with the illusion that soon all will be understood and subject to his control. In the face of cataclysmic events totally beyond his control, he is left suddenly rudderless and afraid, with no means of coping with the tragedy. Raised with an acute awareness of the inherently limited understanding available to finite Man of an infinite Creator, chareidim are spared that particular terror.

Secular Israelis were not put off by the chareidi insistence on the limits of human knowledge. Quite the contrary: the only negative reactions in the media in the week after the bombing came when a few rabbis seemed to profess too great a knowledge of *Hashem's* ways by assigning specific reasons to the tragedy.

In this, the sensitivities of secular public may have been on target. Absent prophecy, the *Chazon Ish* said, we lack the ability to explain the specific reasons for the tragedies that strike the community as a whole. At most, we can understand the general rules of Divine Providence, writes the *Ramchal*, but not their application to specific cases.

Saying that we cannot fully under-

#### The Community Center for Bucharim-Geula

under the direction of Rabbi Yaakov Fertig,  
and with the *haskama* of Rav Elyashiv,

Mourns the loss of the holy members of our community who were murdered in the Kosel bus bombing.

Avraham Bar-On  
Faiga Dushinsky  
Lieba Schwarz

Binyomin Bergman  
Lilach Kardi  
Shmuel Zargari

HaRav Yaakov Binder  
Menachem Leibet

Local families from the poverty stricken Yerushalayim neighborhood of Bucharim are suffering tremendously. Mothers and fathers were taken, leaving orphans. Husbands and wives lost spouses. Parents lost children, one as young as 11 months.

In one family, the mother was finally released from the hospital but remains bedridden. In addition to mourning the loss of one of her children who was killed in the bombing, she must care for her 5 children who were witnesses to the deaths and horror on the bus. Several of them suffered from medical problems prior to the bombing, and their problems were worsened by the bombing. Another remains hospitalized with wounds from the bombing itself. The family lives in a tiny, cramped apartment with tremendous financial strain, and now have medical bills to pay and physical and emotional wounds to repair.

Please help this family, as well as the orphans and widows of the families who desperately need your help

by sending a donation to The Community Center of Bucharim-Geula  
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stand events, however, does not mean that they are, *chas veshalom*, random. Indeed, when they strike so close to home, it would be nothing less than a denial of *Hashem* to think or act as if nothing were demanded of us. That determination to extract purpose from the horror of the bus bombing was, in fact, part of what awed secular Israelis about the chareidi response.

Secular Jews grasped the distinction between exhortations of individual and communal improvement and attempts to pinpoint the precise cause of the tragedy. And they were impressed by, even envious of, the chareidi determination to salvage something positive from even the darkest events, and not succumb to despair.

#### OUR LESSONS FROM THEIR RESPONSE

The response of secular Israel to the “chareidi bus bombing” does not mean that long-entrenched attitudes towards the chareidi public have been reversed overnight. They have not. But in that response, a glimmer of hope can be discerned. It is incumbent upon us to extract the lessons from that brief moment during which the barriers cutting off the Torah community from secular Israelis were lowered. Most important, the secular response gives lie to the common attitude that the stance of secular Jews towards chareidim and Torah are immutable – that they hate us because they must hate us. (Tens of thousands of *ba’alei teshuva* should long ago have conclusively refuted this attitude, and the hostility to efforts to change secular perceptions that derives from it.)

When secular Israelis have a chance to actually meet the real people who comprise the chareidi community – as opposed to those they see on TV – they are often impressed. Which brings us to the second lesson: the high, albeit unavoidable, price paid for the intertwined relationship of religion and politics in Israel. After all, we are part of the body politic, and without involvement in the political process, we would be denied many entitlements. As a result, attempts to discuss Torah with secular

Israelis are too frequently met with an insistence on prior discussion of a host of political issues involving the chareidi community. Too often, those discussions never proceed past the first stage.

Far more than they hate chareidim or are uninterested in Torah, secular Israelis fear and resent chareidi political power. Shachar Ilan, Israel’s most carping critic of the chareidi community, was not completely wrong when he suggested that the great openness to the chareidi community expressed after

the bus bombing was partly a function of the fact that there are no chareidi parties currently in the government coalition or positions of power.

After August 19, chareidim were not called upon to discuss budgets or defend the draft deferment for yeshiva students, but to talk about that which is most important to them: their faith in G-d. Our challenge is to find other, less tragic, ways to increase that type of discussion with our secular Jewish brothers. ■

## 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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*We the rabbinical signatories — barring familial obligations — and unusual and extraordinary circumstances — will not participate in or attend a wedding celebration that disregards these guidelines. (Rabbinical Listing in formation)*

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#### Rabbi Shmuel Kaminetzky

Rosh Hayeshiva, Yeshiva Gedola of Philadelphia

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Roshei HaYeshiva, Yeshiva Ohr Somayach

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Rosh Hayeshiva, Beth Medrash Govoha, Lakewood

#### Rabbi Yisroel Tzvi Neuman

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Rosh Hayeshiva, Mesivta Meor Yitzchok

# SILVER LININGS



## CLOUDS OVER THE LANDSCAPE

By all accounts, the situation facing the *Am Hashocheh b'Tzion*, our brethren living in *Eretz Yisroel*, is far from optimistic. The human tragedy to which *Klal Yisroel* has been exposed over the past two years, the families that have been destroyed, the psychological pain that has been inflicted, is beyond contemplation. Torah Judaism has suffered damage on the political and economic fronts in ways that have become increasingly more acute over the past several months.

Disparate budget cuts that have recently been implemented push many Orthodox families well below the poverty level, and make it almost impossible for *mosdos haTorah* to stay fiscally afloat. In addition, by normal course of events, every Israeli secular Jew should despise the Jewish religion and everything to do with Torah. From the cradle, they are inculcated with an extremely negative, stereotypical picture of the religious community. It would therefore only be natural for the religious and their lifestyle to be complete anathema to any sane, secular Israeli.

The picture is grim, indeed, and by no means should it be minimized. Nevertheless, anybody venturing into the heart of *Eretz Yisroel* cannot help but see the many radiant silver linings, which may very well relegate the dark clouds

Rabbi Birnbaum, an educator in Lakewood, NJ, and a regular columnist for *Hamodia*, is a frequent contributor to these pages.

of foreboding to the background. Inexplicably, a tidal wave of secular Israelis are returning to their religion by the thousands. Just speak to the *bnai Torah* who are Lev L'Achim outreach volunteers, the educators who work in the Shuvu Network of Schools, the many people associated with the Keren Nesivos Moshe Network of Schools, the Shas Network, Chesed L'Avraham, Shaarei Tzion or the many other effective organizations that are involved in bringing Torah to the secular public. Their stories defy logic. They are the amazing stories of the Jewish *neshama* overcoming adversity in order to cling to *Hashem*.

## HEAVENLY GUESTS

Perhaps the words of the renowned Rebbetzin B. Kanievsky, wife of Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky שליט"א and daughter of Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv שליט"א, sum it up most succinctly. Anybody familiar with the Bnei Brak apartment of Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, packed with men waiting to receive advice and *beracha* from the venerated sage, has seen the outer room packed with an equiva-

lent number of women, waiting to speak with the Rebbetzin. With wisdom, empathy and the sheer power of her *tefillos*, the Rebbetzin dispenses sage advice and *berachos*, and yes, even cries with the many women who seek her counsel daily. Although chareidi women represent the majority, women from all walks of life, including many national religious and even non-religious women, come and sit for hours in her sparsely furnished anteroom on Rechov Rashbam, waiting to speak with her.

One picture tells it all: A still secular father walking his son to Yeshiva



On the opposite side of Rechov Rashbam lives a woman named Mrs. Batya Bink. In addition to being the wife of a *Rosh Kollel* and mother of a large family, Mrs. Bink is also one of Lev L'Achim's most successful, devoted outreach volunteers. Whenever her neighbor, the Rebbetzin, discerns the *pintele Yid* waiting to be ignited in the eyes or words of a non-religious woman or group of non-religious students, she goes over to the open window and calls out in her distinctive Yerushalmi *Yiddish*, "*Batya'le, se iz doh orchim*. (Batya, there are guests here.)" Batya, whose kitchen window faces the Kanievsky's home, drops everything to go down and meet the women as they exit and introduces them to *Yiddishkeit*. Scores of Jewish women and girls have come closer to *Yiddishkeit* through the caring and empathetic "teamwork" of Rebbetzin Kanievsky and Batya Bink.

In truth, the Rebbetzin's words could not be more appropriate. "*Se iz doh orchim*," there are so many guests out there waiting for us, waiting for people who really care, to reach out to them. These "guests," these secular Jews, despite all odds, are seeking to return to a Torah way of life.

Although we cannot begin to comprehend the exalted Master plan that the *Ribbono Shel Olam* has designed, one thing is clear. The veritable earthquake that is taking place in *Eretz Yisroel*, producing a mixture of seeming contradictions in an almost surreal battle between *kodesh* and *chol* – the sacred and the profane – between the *emmes* (truth) of Yaakov and the *shekker* (falseness) of Eisav, between Yitzchak and Yishmael, completely defies nature. Indeed, it is a battle and a battlefield. And it is taking place, as Rabbi Pam predicted in the last months of his life, not in the West Bank, Gaza, or anywhere else, but in the classrooms.

#### IT HAPPENED IN RECHASIM

**T**he *nisyonos*, the spiritual tests that the average secular Israelis must overcome, the painful decisions they must make on their path back to

Torah, should humble the average *frum-from-birth* Jew and make him swell with pride at the amazing resilience of the Jewish *neshama* that seems to scream "*Netzach Yisroel lo yishaker*."

Reb Aharon B., one of the Lev L'Achim representatives in the North, related:

*On one of my many trips to the Or Chadash School in Rechasim, near Haifa, I noticed a woman dressed in an army officer's uniform pacing the halls of the school, peering anxiously into the classrooms and apparently trying to hear what was going on inside. Walking over to her, I asked if I could be of any assistance.*

"No, no," she answered, "I just want to listen."

*(Reb Aharon, a seasoned outreach professional who has seen enough in his kiruv career to write several books of his own, left the women to her own devices for several minutes before approaching her again.) "Tell me the truth," I gently prodded, "I see that you are grappling with an inner conflict. I would like to help you."*

*Finally, the woman dropped the façade of the confident army officer and explained. "I come from the village of Yokna (an upscale community near Rechasim) and am seeking a school for my daughter."*

"Why would you come here?" I inquired.

"Well," the woman responded, "in my neighborhood, there is a secular family similar to ours that recently began sending their children to this school. What can I say? I see that their children now behave differently. They respect their elders and are not violent and selfish. I have one older son whom I have already lost to drugs. I do not even know where he is anymore. I want something better for my daughter than the state school system has to offer."

*The woman, who was non-religious, was very nervous that the school would force its beliefs on her. I reassured her, however, that there is no coercion in the school. "On the contrary," I explained, "we teach by example, not by force." Soon after this conversation, the woman enrolled her daughter.*

*(Reb Aharon continued: In many of the schools where we enroll children, the administration periodically arranges evenings when the parents are invited to come participate in a lecture or a party, or*

*other similar function. These evenings offer the school's faculty the opportunity to educate the parents so that they can grow together with their children. A few months after the above incident, the school organized a Chanuka gathering for the parent body. At one point, a woman with a tichel completely covering her hair came over to me, "Harav B., Shalom, Shalom." Not knowing who she was, I looked at her blankly and responded, "Shalom."*

*"You don't recognize me," she said, "I am the army officer, and this," pointing to a sweet girl standing at her side, "is my daughter."*

*While I was walking around in that same school, I noticed a small, studious-looking child standing in a corner of the yard during recess. While all the other children were romping in the playground, he was studying from a Mishnayos. I asked Rabbi Yehuda Tenami, who runs the school, about the boy.*

*"You might not believe this," Reb Yehuda said, "but just last year, his entire family knew nothing about Yiddishkeit. After one of our people started visiting, the family began to come closer and closer to Yiddishkeit. The ultimate watershed in their lives came when they enrolled their son in our school this year. The father, seeing his son's newfound intense love for learning, decided that he must also begin to learn. He is a simple laborer who leaves for work each day at 5 am and does not return until 6 pm, which made it difficult for him to fit learning into his schedule. Nevertheless, he manages. Upon his return home each night, he eats a quick supper, and then goes to a local kollel where he learns with chavrusos until 10 pm, when he almost collapses from exhaustion. Is it any wonder that his son has already completed several mesechtos of Mishnayos and wants nothing more than to use his recess to review Mishnayos?"*

The story behind the opening of another school, the school in Rechasim, is a clear example of the perfectly synchronized cooperation between the numerous *kiruv* organizations and the individual functions which they serve. When P'eylim/Lev L'Achim in the Rechasim area realized that many parents were interested in a Torani school,

The following is a brief summary of the activities of the most established organizations and school networks in Israel mentioned in the adjoining article.

## I. SCHOOL NETWORKS

**Chinuch Atzmai:** Schools, *chadorim* and Bais Yaakovs, primarily for chareidi children, but in many areas of the country also for *kiruv* children. Chinuch Atzmai presided over the founding of many schools and their development. It serves as the basic government funding framework for the Shuvu, Nesivos Moshe and Shaarei Zion networks.

In the 1980's, when government funding reached its highest levels, Chinuch Atzmai focused on being the representative of religious schools (including the chareidi *yeshivos* and Bais Yaakov schools of those communities who accept government funding), ensuring that when the education pie was portioned out, Torah schools would get their share. Chinuch Atzmai was also involved in funding new schools with enrollments too small to qualify for government backing, sponsoring *sha'os nosafos* (extended hours of religious instruction) in most schools, as well as transportation for students living at a distance from Torah schools. The needs of development towns and other locations without a Torah school, and recruitment among various immigrant populations was also assumed by Chinuch Atzmai, but there was more yet to be done in this field.

In the 1990's, Shuvu and Nesivos Moshe school networks were established for founding of completely new Torah schools in areas far from the Chareidi population centers, which calls for raising seed money – not forthcoming from the government.

**Shuvu:** Kindergartens, elementary schools and several high schools for Russian immigrant boys and girls.

The wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union brought with it a tremendous challenge. Rabbi Pam זצ"ל was convinced that only an independent entity – Torah schools specially geared for the Russian population – would provide the undiluted focus necessary to save the Russian Jewish children from getting lost in the sea of secularism.

**Nesivos Moshe:** Kindergartens and elementary schools for *kiruv* children. Performs the *kiruv* functions that Chinuch Atzmai effectively addressed at the outset, and still does to a degree.

In some cases, like the **Keren Nesivos Moshe** schools, money is provided just to get a school started. The Keren does not maintain an independent educational staff but after underwriting the cost of creating the new schools, Chinuch

Atzmai steps in to supply a principal and teachers. As soon as the school reaches the point of eligibility for government funding, Chinuch Atzmai assumes the role of financial administration as well, completely absorbing the Keren schools to allow the Keren to direct its resources toward developing other new schools. Unfortunately, cuts in Israeli government funding have forced the Keren to continue to shoulder the burden of their schools, even though many have experienced phenomenal growth and are way beyond the point of being considered "new schools."

In other instances, small independent networks, consisting of but a few schools, were started to service particular areas. Both the acquisition of seed money and the educational burden were borne by them. These groups ultimately received government funding through the conduit of Chinuch Atzmai when they grew to eligibility, but maintained their independent names.

The largest of these is **Shaarei Zion**, which has kindergartens and elementary schools for Bucharian boys and girls.

**Ma'ayan Hachinuch Hatorani-Shas**, for Sephardic children, is parallel to Chinuch Atzmai.

The arrival of Shas on the political scene facilitated the establishment of the **Ma'ayan HaChinuch** network. As a unifying force for the Sephardic community, Shas absorbed many of the aforementioned independent groups, and many new schools were opened. The Shas schools deal directly with the government and are not connected to Chinuch Atzmai in any way.

## II. P'EYLIM / LEV L'ACHIM OUTREACH

**Rishum** – Over the past six years placed tens of thousands of children who would otherwise have attended *mamlachti* (public) schools and *mamlachti-dati* (religious public) schools in over 700 Torah schools and kindergartens of all types, leading their families to *teshuva*.

**"Door-To-Door"** – Almost three thousand Kollel fellows and Kollel wives learn one evening each week with non-observant Israelis in their homes. Extensive follow-up with these families is assumed by the other relevant divisions of Lev L'Achim.

**Midrashot** – Originally established as night *Kollelim* in more than thirty cities, the presence and availability of devoted mentors on a constant basis has developed into **"Project Avreichim."**

**Midrashot Shalhevet** – Centers in thirty cities for teenage and post-high school girls from secular homes. Close to two thousand young women are on their way back to Judaism.

they began an ambitious building project. Although the school is independently run, its seed money came from Keren Nesivos Moshe with money for day-to-day school expenses funneled through Chinuch Atzmai. Amazingly, the building was built in a matter of months. On the first day of school, due to the energetic efforts of *P'eylim*, 180 boys showed up. At that point, most of them were not even wearing *kippos*. After *kippos* were distributed, Reb

Aharon B. proceeded to lead the children in the recitation of *Shema*. The tough Rabbi B., the head of operations in the North, could not contain his emotion, and simply broke down in tears after the words "*Shema Yisroel*." He could not finish the *passuk* (passage), and neither could the kids, because they didn't even know the first *passuk* of *Shema*.

Today, just several months later, they are learning *Mishnayos*.

Indeed, Reb Aharon recalls how a

number of months ago, he had the merit to take Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky, שליט"א, *Rosh Yeshiva* of the Philadelphia Yeshiva, on a trip to the northern region. As soon as they pulled up to that very school in Rechasim, the *Rosh Yeshiva* jumped out of the car and bounded up the steps. When he caught up with the *Rosh Yeshiva*, the huffing and puffing Reb Aharon respectfully asked the *Rosh Yeshiva* why he was rushing so. Rabbi Kamenetsky replied, "I just

can't wait to see another beautiful *Yiddishe kindt*, another beautiful Jewish child!"

This is the attitude of our *gedolim* when they observe the miraculous accomplishments of the *kiruv* organizations as they facilitate the return to *Hashem* of hundreds of children.

#### HEAVENLY TRANSPORTATION

Perhaps one of the most amazing things about the *kiruv* movement in *Eretz Yisroel* is the absolute dedication of its unsung heroes. Whether they are volunteers or they work for a minimal stipend, the drive and initiative that they bring to the field staggers the imagination. Rabbi Nachum Gutterman, one of the most successful outreach coordinators in the Tzefas area, enrolled dozens of children from outlying *moshavim* (agricultural settlements) in a Torani school in Tzefas. Early every morning, the buses would come to pick up the children from their *moshavim* and bring them to school. With the recent government budget cuts, however, the government no longer pays for long-distance bussing. No amount of intervention, even by Knesset members, was successful in rescinding the decree. In this case, the results could have been disastrous. Without public bussing, nor the means to afford private transportation, the children would be forced to return to the secular, state-run schools. That did not deter Rabbi Gutterman. Early every morning, he makes the 40-minute trip to the outlying *moshavim* in his old jalopy van that runs more on miracles than on anything else, to personally pick up the children and bring them to school. He is not paid for his time, nor even reimbursed for his gas.

Then there is Yaakov P. of Haifa, who recently founded a Torani school there. Setting up the school is one step, enrolling children is another. Throughout its years of experience, Lev L'Achim has come to recognize that the only way to ensure a family's uniform spiritual growth and the ultimate success of the education of their children enrolled in

Torah schools, is through personal, ongoing relationships with the entire family. In cities such as Haifa, many of the families most receptive to Jewish values live in outlying suburbs and settlements, and are therefore not easily accessible. Reb Yaakov's problem was that he did not possess a car, nor the funds to buy one, and was therefore unable to go meet with the children and their parents. He called Rabbi Eliezer Sorotzkin, the national director of Lev L'Achim, who agonizes over these types of decisions daily. Rabbi Sorotzkin explained in as sensitive a way as possible, that the organization simply could not afford to buy cars for its activists. Yaakov, however, was undeterred. He ran to Reb Aharon B., practically crying, "What



should I do? I could reach so many more people if I had transportation to them."

Reb Aharon replied, "I will make a deal with you. I will supply 3,000 *shekel* from my own personal funds and you supply 3,000 *shekel* of your own. With 6,000 *shekel*, you should be able to buy an old, used car."

Reb Yaakov, who spends his mornings learning in *kollel* and did not possess 3,000 *shekel*, promptly ran to a *gemach* (free loan fund), where he borrowed 3,000 *shekel*. Problem solved. He was in business.

These people truly are the backbone and heroes of the *kiruv* revolution. They serve as the greatest role models and inspiration to the children, their parents and the members of the Torah-observant

communities who see them in action.

#### HEAVENLY DRAMA

What is it that propels these wonderful *avreichim* (young married scholars) and women who work on the front lines to dedicate themselves so selflessly? Perhaps it is stories like the following that encourage them to forge ahead despite all hardships:

*A young man who works in the Tzefas area had enrolled the children of a certain family in a Torah school. As is often the case, a short time later, five completely irreligious parents of neighboring children approached the young man and said, "We want our children to behave like those of our neighbor."*

*Several months later, there was a "drama evening" in the school. The girls put on a performance and, of course, the parents were invited. "I came to the school," relates the *avreich*, "and there were five new mothers whom I didn't immediately recognize. They were dressed modestly and their hair was completely covered. Several minutes later, I realized that it was those very same parents. I had the temerity to ask them what had prompted such a dramatic change, a change that totally overturned their social lives, their relationships with long-time friends and neighbors. One mother told me, 'It was my nine-year-old daughter. She kept begging me, crying, 'I want you to dress yafeh, nice, just like my Morah!'"*

*"Another mother said something that moved me to tears of joy. She said, 'I was wondering how I could possibly pay you back for changing our lives, for bringing light and meaning to our home, and giving us such nachat from our children. We are not rich, and cannot afford much more than a token donation to your organization. After thinking it over, I realized that although I cannot pay you with kesef, money, I can certainly pay you with hakarat hatov, by showing my appreciation. I realized that the most profound expression of my heartfelt appreciation and thanks would be by putting on a head*



American-born Rabbi Menachem Gold, Lev L'Achim's enrollment officer in Afula, maintains his close relationship with the children he has registered to the Keren Nesivos Moshe school, through constant follow up.

covering so that I could be just like you!”

#### HEAVENLY INTERVENTION

The story of the founding of the Keren Nesivos Moshe School in Chadera is a microcosm of the special *siyata diShmaya* showered on those who work in this field. The fascinating story also attests to the seamless cooperation and collaboration between organizations like Lev L'Achim that create the groundswell of interest amongst the parents, and Keren Nesivos Moshe, which runs and administers the school.

When the Lev L'Achim people working in the Chadera area realized that there was some degree of interest in traditional Jewish *chinuch* among the local populace, they immediately began scouting the neighborhood for a suitable facility. One person noticed a dilapidated, run-down building, to which nobody would give a second thought. To him, however, the building seemed perfect for a potential school, a place that could revolutionize the lives of untold numbers. After some research, it was discovered that the building belonged to the city government, and had once been a museum showcasing the history of the agricultural settlement of Chadera (originally begun by *shomrei Torah u'mitzvos*), which ultimately became the city of Chadera.

Soon after the seeds for the new

Chadera Keren Nesivos Moshe school were planted, the Chadera branch of Lev L'Achim made a *chanukas habayis* (dedication ceremony) for their new facility in the city. The event was attended by Rabbi Aharon Leib Steinman שליט"א. The mayor of Chadera, a totally irreligious Israeli educated by the anti-religious Shomer Hatzair, was also in attendance, and afterwards could not stop talking about the profound impression that the “great rabbi from Bnei Brak” had made on him. He was so impressed that, to this day, he travels on occasion to Bnei Brak to consult with Rabbi Steinman.

At a subsequent Bar Mitzva that both the mayor and Rabbi Steinman attended, Rabbi Steinman broached the subject of the unused building owned by the city that would meet the needs of the burgeoning school. The mayor immediately began working on transferring the building, then in a state of disrepair, to Keren Nesivos Moshe. Not only that, he had the building renovated and painted, with a fence erected around the building, all at the city's expense. As the school year approached, the only remaining problem was the lack of furniture. The staff of the school was left with no choice other than to start with folding chairs and no desks. The school year was slated to begin on Sunday. On the preceding *Erev Shabbos*, Rabbi Bentzi Nordman, a prominent activist

in town, who was instrumental in enrolling many of the attendees, got a telephone call. It was the head of a local public school telling him that due to the dearth of enrollment, his school would not be opening for the coming school year and the furniture was available for the new school. After writing down the school's address, Rabbi Nordman gathered together some other *yungeleit* and spent the entire Friday afternoon transporting desks and furniture to the new school.

At the Chadera school, it is heartwarming to see the children playing in the playground during recess and then gather around the principal as she brings a box full of apples to distribute. As they take the apples in hand, they recite a *beracha*, unprompted. I approached the principal to comment on the beauty of seeing these children making *berachos* without being reminded. She then related an incident that had taken place several days earlier. “A mother came to me with a complaint. When she was in the kitchen taking something to eat, her daughter piped up, ‘It is *gezzel*, stealing.’ The mother was flabbergasted, ‘Are you accusing me of stealing in my own home?!’ Her daughter answered in all innocence, ‘But I learned in school that all food belongs to *Hashem* until you make a *beracha!*’

“When I heard this,” the principal continued, “I made sure to explain to the child, and indeed to all the children, the *mitzva* of *kibbud av va'eim* and that one is never allowed to tell her mother that she is stealing. I must admit, however, that I was extremely gratified to see that the lessons taught in our school are absorbed and internalized with such passion.”

#### HEAVENLY BATTLES

The ultimate paradox is: What can possibly be the cause for the phenomenal success of *kiruv* organizations despite the hatred spewed by the Israeli government, educational system and media? In truth, as any of the P'eylim activists will tell you, it is because they are not fighting their own

war. It is not they who are causing the revolution. It is Hashem's revolution and they are but His soldiers.

In addition to the actual volunteers and *P'eylim*, thousands of volunteer *bnei Torah* and kollel wives, following the directions of the *Gedolim*, have thrown themselves into *kiruv* work. Whether it is the busloads of volunteers who travel one night each week from Bnei Brak, Yerushalayim and Kiryat Sefer to outlying *moshavim*, or the small, but steady monetary donations of young families who themselves have a difficult time putting food on the table, these individuals uphold and support the organizations, thereby assisting those on the actual "battlefront." Rabbi Sorotzkin tells an enthralling story that encapsulates why the success of the organization is beyond the realm of the ordinary.

*I was driving my car when the cell phone began to ring. "Hello?" I answered.*

*"Rabbi Sorotzkin?" came the hesitant voice on the line.*

*"Yes?"*

*The voice went on to explain that he was learning in a kollel in Bnei Brak and had an arrangement with Lev L'Achim, whereby \$10.00 was transferred automatically from his checking account each month to Lev L'Achim. "I would like to change that now," he said.*

*After assuring him that it would not be a problem, I asked him how he would like it changed.*

*"I would like to increase my donation by \$1.00 each month."*

*By this time [recounts Rabbi Sorotzkin,] "I was curious. Why would somebody take the time and trouble to obtain my cell phone number and call for the purpose of increasing his donation by \$1.00? He answered my query with the utmost simplicity. "A few months ago we were blessed with a baby. Both before and after the child's birth, I had to be available to help at home during the evening hours and was therefore not eligible for the \$10.00 monthly bonus for perfect attendance at my night kollel. Now, however, mother and child are doing fine and I am able to be on time. I therefore have one dollar more of maaser money available each month to give Lev L'Achim."*

*When I told this story to Rabbi Stein-*



*man, [related Rabbi Sorotzkin,] he broke down and began to cry. "It's because of the sacrifice of these avreichim," he said, "it is that \$1.00 a month and others like it that are instrumental in ensuring the supernatural success of the kiruv performed by Lev L'Achim. One Jew being moser nefesh for another in the most pure way is extremely beloved to Hashem."*

#### HEAVENLY ATONEMENT

**I**t was Erev Yom Kippur in the sparsely furnished apartment of Rabbi Aharon Leib Steinman. The awe and seriousness of the impending Day of Atonement was clearly evident, practically tangible throughout the house. The face and frail frame of the venerated Rosh Yeshiva seemed to shoulder the entire burden of Klal Yisroel as he sat at his table, already dressed in white. Rabbi Eliezer Sorotzkin walked in, wanting to ask the Rosh Yeshiva's forgiveness for taking so much of his time throughout the year when seeking counsel and answers to the myriad questions that constantly face him. Rabbi Steinman, the fear of din etched on his face, said, "Reb Leizer, with what will I come before Hashem this Yom Kippur? I am an old man. You know how hard it is for me to learn, to daven and to serve Hashem."

Rabbi Steinman then pulled out a massive book that resembled a telephone book, which had recently been presented

to him upon the culmination of that year's Torah school enrollment campaign. "This," he said "is our 'Sefer Hachayim.'"

Contained within the pages of the book, in tiny writing, were thousands of names. Each page contained scores of names. Names of children. Children who had enrolled in a Torani school. Each and every one of those children had originally been educated in the kefira of the secular Israeli school system. Each and every one of those neshamos was now being taught Torah. As Rabbi Steinman flipped through the pages, his face lit up and the sad lines on his face turned up, forming a smile. "You need not apologize for anything. On the contrary, I must thank you for having the opportunity to help in some small way. With this 'Sefer Hachayim,' with this Book of Life, I can approach the *Ribbono shel Olam* on Yom Kippur." ■

## Gitty Pinter

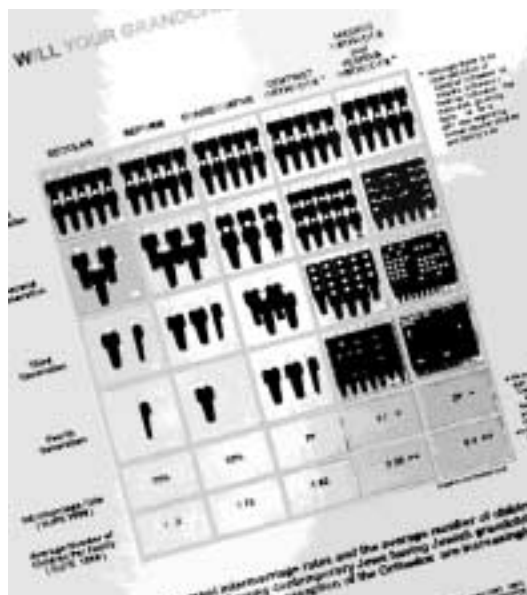
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Ten years ago, the first National Jewish Population Survey (1990-91) was released by the United Jewish Communities (UJC – the national umbrella organization for local Jewish Federations). It reported alarming rates of intermarriage (52%) and assimilation, which triggered much reassessment of priorities as well as editorial hand-wringing. Understandably, the data would have reaching implications regarding how to



invest in community activities, education and outreach. Among the various analyses that it prompted was a widely-quoted projection of the future of American Jewry by Antony (Chanan) Gordon and Richard M. Horowitz.

A second survey was taken in 2000-2001, with the findings just released this past September. We present below a preliminary response by the authors of the earlier projection.

# The Future of American Jewry Revisited

## A Preview

It's hard to believe that almost ten years have passed since our journey began to capture, in the most graphic and vivid manner, the consequences that follow from a Jewish couple's decision to embrace a more or less Torah-observant lifestyle. Our now well-known demographic chart entitled "Will Your Grandchild Be Jewish?"<sup>1</sup> illustrated the profound and far-reaching consequences for Jewish continuity that is borne out by the choice to affiliate with any denomination other than Orthodox Judaism. In fact, it was in this very publication more than six years ago<sup>2</sup> that we responded to the afore-

Chanan (Antony) Gordon is a Fulbright Scholar and graduate of the Harvard Law School. Mr. Gordon has co-authored and authored several articles that have previously appeared in the *JO*. Mr. Gordon is the Coordinator of the Los Angeles Kiruv Chabura and is a Managing Director of a boutique investment bank in Beverly Hills.

Richard M. Horowitz graduated with an MBA from Pepperdine University. Mr. Horowitz is the President of Management Brokers Insurance, Leviathan Computers as Dial 800 L.P., and is currently the President of *Aish Hatorah* for North America.

mentioned question as follows:

"Based on current intermarriage rates and the average number of children per family, the chances of young contemporary Jews having Jewish grandchildren and great-grandchildren, with the exception of the Orthodox, are increasingly remote."

With the recent release<sup>3</sup> of the National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) 2000-2001, we will naturally pose the same question. This "preview" article was submitted on the same day<sup>4</sup> that the North American Jewish Data Bank first made the raw data available to us. Nevertheless, at this juncture, we can highlight various macro-demographic trends by comparing the NJPS 2000 with its namesake of 1990.

### The "Big Two" Variables for Jewish Continuity – Cause for Concern

The two central variables that directly have a bearing on the continuity of the Jewish people are the average size of Jewish families and

the rate of *intermarriage*. On both counts, the NJPS 2000 indicated unequivocally that the majority of American Jewry are continuing to move off the "demographic radar screen."

Zero Population Growth ("ZPG") in America is 2.1. In other words, in order to simply maintain the *status quo*, a family needs to have at least 2.1 children to replace the current levels of mortality. The NJPS 2000, as was the case with the NJPS 1990, reported the average number of children born to Jewish women to be less than the fertility number. This figure will of course be even lower amongst the non-Orthodox.

Accordingly, even if the intermarriage rate were zero, the current statistics on Jewish fertility would rapidly contribute to a declining Jewish population in America.

### "Solving" The "50% Threshold Problem"

The most shocking statistic of the NJPS 1990 was the intermarriage rate reported to be

52%. Apparently the fact that the reported intermarriage rate broke the so-called “50% threshold” stunned even non-Orthodox Jews. As Rabbi Avi Shafran so aptly pointed out in his recent piece entitled *Our Most Basic Birthright*, “It’s little short of tragic that a Jewish newspaper like *The Forward* can editorially exult, as it recently did, over the fact that the American Jewish intermarriage rate is a mere 43%, rejoicing in the fact that “most Jews still marry Jews.”

The NJPS 2000 apparently “solved the 50% threshold problem” by leaving the least committed portion of American Jewry out of the survey. Doing so, as the official publicly released summary of NJPS 2000 released by the *UJC* was at pains to point out, retroactively reduced the intermarriage rate of NJPS 1990 to 43%. By utilizing this “reclassification strategy,” the NJPS 2000 was able to report that “the intermarriage rate for Jews who have married since 1996 is 47%,” and accordingly falls short of the 50% threshold. The NJPS 2000 admits that the intermarriage rate among a group comparable to those in the NJPS 1990 has risen to 54%.

*Interdenominational Comparative  
– Jury is still out*

The NJPS 2000 report disseminated to the public did not indicate a direct correlation between denominational affiliation and the likelihood of becoming an “assimilation statistic.” Nevertheless, the report did note that there was a direct correlation between level of education on the one hand, and a very

<sup>1</sup> First published in 1996.

<sup>2</sup> *JO*, May 1997.

<sup>3</sup> The *United Jewish Communities* officially released the findings of the NJPS 2000-2001 on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2003.

<sup>4</sup> September 15<sup>th</sup>, 2003

<sup>5</sup> A more detailed analysis of the apparent increases amongst Orthodox Jews and the fall-out of the decrease in other denominations will be part of the subject of a more detailed follow-up article by the authors.

low rate of intermarriage on the other. Those respondents who had a Jewish Day School/Yeshiva education reported a 7% intermarriage rate. It is important to note, however, that we will need to delve into the raw data in detail to understand the UJC’s definition of Jewish Day School as well as what the UJC considered an adequate longevity of Day School, before being able to make any accurate extrapolations from the statistics cited by the NJPS 2000.

Finally, the NJPS 2000 indicated a

6.7% decrease among non-Orthodox Jews. In contrast to this, the number of Orthodox Jews appears to have increased to 11.1%<sup>5</sup>. We look forward to making extensive comments after reviewing the raw data together with many of the professional statisticians, demographers and sociologists with whom we will be working. We have already begun this process, and *be’ezras Hashem*, our findings will be the topic of an extensive research piece, which will be submitted as soon as possible. ■

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# Kiruv... And Then What?

## A MENU... FOR HOW TO LUNCH

Imagine a new family moves onto the block. To be friendly, the next-door neighbor invites the family for a *Shabbos* lunch. *Shabbos* arrives, and as the guests walk through the door, the hostess gently says, “You know, it’s customary to send a little gift along before *Shabbos* when you’re invited out.”

A while later, one of the guests’ young children announces that he hates the gefilte fish. It doesn’t taste like Mommy’s. So the hostess helpfully informs the guest that her child has bad manners and should be taught how to refuse food politely. Then she instructs her own child not to learn from this young visitor. “Nothing personal, you know,” she tells the guest. “We just don’t want him to pick up any bad habits.”

After the meal, the conversation flows in various directions. The father of the visiting family – an avid follower of local politics – brings up the recent school-board elections. The host inter-

Mrs. Nestlebaum is the editorial director for Oorah Kiruv Rechokim, Lakewood, NJ

rupts quickly to enlighten the guest: “This isn’t really an appropriate topic for the *Shabbos* table,” he softly advises.

## WELCOME TO THE FAMILY

If the guests pursued this relationship any further, it would be a remarkable testimony to the power of forgiveness. The scenario seems unthinkable. But putting oneself in the guests’ place is instructive; it conveys the feeling that frequently rises in the heart of a newly religious person who is entering the religious world.

To its credit, the religious community has opened its eyes to the rolling wreckage of Jewish demographics. People are beginning to understand that assimilation is no longer the problem; disappearance is. There are thousands of gentile Cohens and Goldsteins out there. Thousands of people think they are “half-Jewish.” Thousands born of gentile mothers think they’re 100 percent Jewish. In one town, an effort by the Torah community to open a Hebrew school for public school children drew

a class that was at least half non-Jewish according to *halacha*.

“The more Jewish the name, the less likely the kids were to actually be Jews,” said one person involved in the effort. “If the father was Jewish and they had his name, chances were good that the mother was not Jewish.”

Then, of course, there are the thousands of halachically Jewish people with names that evoke the counties of Ireland, the provinces of Italy or the deck of the Mayflower. *Kiruv*, as everyone can clearly see, is now an emergency room procedure.

Efforts are underway across the country and around the world to stop the hemorrhage. While much obviously remains to be done, the Torah community is beginning to understand that it cannot just blithely watch its brethren drown in ignorance and fade from memory. Organizations, speakers, outreach programs, schools, websites, publications, seminars – they’re all out there, drawing Jews back to Torah one by one.

But what happens then? What hap-

pens after someone decides, "Yes, this is what I want for my life"?

Often, he is the "guest at the table" depicted in the opening story. His life-long habits are suddenly wrong. His frame of reference is different from that of everyone else in his new world. He and his children, brought up on American popular culture, are deemed bad influences who, "nothing personal," are not welcomed in many *yeshivos* and many communities.

### PROTECTING THE WEALTH

While this dynamic plays out in a way that is often uncomfortable and sometimes outright painful for a newly religious Jew, it flows from a source that is well supported throughout the Torah. Jews have an obligation to keep themselves apart from the culture and ways of the gentiles.

Throughout most of the Orthodox world, the term "religious" is at least partly measured by the degree to which a person shuns the styles, entertainment and lingo of the secular world. Most *yeshivos* discourage or prohibit television, secular music and movies, which are the bread-and-butter of secular culture. Families do their best to keep their children from absorbing the values that pervade American society – a

world that holds up wealth and pleasure as the true indicators of a life well lived.

So, what is the well-meaning observant Jew to do? If he lets secularly oriented children into his child's school, he takes a chance on exposing the child – right there within the walls of the *yeshiva* – to exactly the influences he is trying to exclude. Yet if he doesn't embrace the newly religious child, he is essentially sending the child back into the loving arms of the public school.

To say the child can come –but he had better not mention anything about television or hum any Disney soundtracks – demands of the child an exhausting level of vigilance and self-control. The child will probably also need to develop a tolerance for rejection; he can expect that some of his new classmates will not be allowed to come play at his house.

Once the *kiruv* world is finished applauding a person's transformation ("He cut off his ponytail and put on a *yarmulka*...He took out his nose ring and threw out his television...She gave all her pants away to charity and put on a *sheitel*..."), the business of real life and its real complications begins.

And that is when unglamorous day-to-day work of *kiruv* begins. "You have to be there not just for Shabbos, but for *erev Shabbos*, when you're busy and

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someone needs to talk,” says a long-time volunteer for Oorah Rechokim, Lakewood, New Jersey. “It’s not just the first day of yeshivah – it’s the middle of the school year when there’s a problem with the teacher and the parents don’t know what to do. You have to be a whole support system to people.”

#### THE BALANCE

Welcoming *baalei teshuva* into the Torah community and learning to value what they bring to the table is as important a challenge for the observant Jewish world as is *kiruv* itself. One cannot invite the guest for lunch only to point out the error of his ways, even if the goal is help him correct them.

For all the *baal teshuva*’s gaps in

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learning and basic Torah concepts, he has one attribute that should stir awe in the heart of any “*frum-from-birth*” Jew. He has the merit of being able to say “*na’aseh v’nishma*” right here, right now, in this world. He’s not accepting the Torah because he was raised with it and cannot conceive of any other life. He is choosing it, as did every Jew at Sinai, committing to a way of life he only vaguely understands. He may not be on the educated religious Jew’s “level,” but as the Talmud points out, he stands in a place where even a *tzadik* cannot stand.

The possibility that he may negatively influence those who are raised in a religious environment is certainly a factor that needs to be considered, but it need not be a wall-to-wall principle that determines the community’s level of tolerance and acceptance. The fact is that most people who are on the road upward are trying to grow, not drag others down. They want to learn, not corrupt.

Rabbi Aaron Schechter once advised a young man who had taken up residence in Dallas to learn in the *kollel* there. The man was worried that his child’s new friendships would influence him for the worse. Rabbi Schechter told the father to observe the dynamics between the children and see who was influencing whom. Most likely, the

child brought up in a positive Torah environment will exert influence on the child with a weaker background, rather than vice versa.

“There’s nothing gained without giving up something,” said the Oorah volunteer. “What are we giving up? Maybe we can’t be as exclusive as people would like to be. But look at the gain for *Klal Yisrael*. You’re saving people who would otherwise be lost. And each of these people is the root of a new generation. From one *baal teshuva* today, you might have 50 grandchildren who will all go on to start families of their own.”

Even educating the children brought up in Torah involves some “loss.” The *rebbe* who spends his time preparing and delivering a *shiur* for 20-year-olds is losing time from his own higher-level learning. Even more intellectual growth is sacrificed by the *rebbe* who spends his time teaching Alef-Beis. Yet the gain for *Klal Yisrael* is unquestionable.

#### GOOD ADVICE

This doesn’t mean that a person should throw all caution to the winds. There are families in which some members may be more vulnerable to outside influences. There are people exploring Torah Judaism who, for a variety of reasons, have the potential to do spiritual harm. The only way to know with certainty if an individual Jew should be welcomed into one’s school or home is to discuss the situation with a Rav who knows the people involved and can make an informed judgment. A wall-to-wall “yes” is no healthier for *Klal Yisrael* than a wall-to-wall “no.”

#### THREE TALES

The director of a *kiruv* program told of one *rebbe* who consistently dismissed social pressure in order to do what he felt needed to be done for a fellow Jew. The *rebbe* made a practice of taking troubled children into his home. Some were physically disabled and others had mental deficiencies.

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His married daughter, who was expecting at the time, was warned by neighbors in this very insular community not to enter her father's house. The neighbors believed that her unborn child might be affected by the presence of the disabled children.

"I told my father that people were telling me not to go inside. He said, 'Not only will your baby not be harmed, but I'll tell you this. In the merit of helping these children, I'll have 300 grandchildren, and every one of them will be healthy. There will be no deformities and no miscarriages in our family.'"

The count, including great-grandchildren, currently stands at about 250. No miscarriages, no deformities.

The same *rebbe* owned some property, which he rented to tenants. As fuel and electric rates rose, most landlords in the community raised their rents. They pressured the *rebbe* to raise his rent as well, but he would not. He knew that any additional expense would put stress on the tenants' already tight budget, and he

determined that he could better afford to absorb the costs.

But his community was full of well-meaning advisers who called him "crazy" for his self-sacrifice. "I may be losing a little now," the *rebbe* said, "but my children and grandchildren will never have to worry about a roof over their heads."

And indeed, all the branches of his sprawling family are well provided for.

A third story demonstrates how this *rebbe's* attitude of taking risks on behalf of his fellow Jew was passed down to his children. The daughter who told the stories recalled that she had run a playgroup for a number of years. One year, a child who was from a background that was different from the rest of the community enrolled in her school. Other parents began pulling their children out. She went to her father for advice. Should she ask the child's parents to place him elsewhere?

"Keep him," the father said. "And you'll never have any more money problems." And she didn't.

## A PERSONAL GUIDE

To solidify the gains made in *kiruv*, it's essential to get the observant Jewish world thinking about the message it sends out to those who enthusiastically change their lives to join its ranks. On the other side of the equation, those in *kiruv* must be prepared to do what it takes to help their fellow Jews through the snags and pitfalls they will inevitably meet.

To be sure, this comprehensive involvement in *kiruv* is not something most individuals can undertake. But every individual can and does help to create the climate that envelops a returning Jew as he moves forward in his new life. Each individual helps determine whether that climate is warm and nurturing or cold and forbidding.

Every situation certainly has its own variables that must be examined, but those factors must be viewed under proper lighting – the light of *ahavas Yisroel*. With the right illumination, the right answers will always emerge. ■

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# Yom Tov in the Basunderlager in Bergen-Belsen

As told by Mrs. Rutie (Bernfeld) Glick, who was eight years old at the time of the experiences recounted below.

JULY 1944

My family and I, for huge sums of money, gold and jewelry, were passengers on the *Rakevet HaHatzala*, the rescue-train that would take us – the first group to be ransomed in the deal made Dr. Rudolph Kastner with the Nazi Adolph Eichmann, in which a million Hungarian Jews were to be exchanged for trucks.

But instead of arriving in neutral Spain, from where we were to embark on ships that would bring us to Palestine, we ended up in the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp. Because of the political significance of our transport, we were put into a *Basunderlager*, an autonomous camp which was administered by a board headed by Kastner's father-in-law, Dr. Fisher.

Mrs. Rosengarten, who lives in Bnei Brak, is the author of *World Apart* (Targum/Feldheim), her memoirs of growing up in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. She was last represented in these pages in "Days of Awe in Bobov: Some Personal Glimpses," in October '00. Mrs. Rutie Glick also resides in Bnei Brak.

Only those on the Administrative Board had contact with the Nazis. As far as we were concerned, we only saw Nazis when we had to line up twice a day to be counted by the hated Appel, the Herr Commander of the camp. We were forced to stand in straight lines, for hours at a time – either beneath a burning sun, or in rain, slush or snow, at the mercy of howling winds. Although the Nazis were not allowed to use us for forced labor, we suffered from constant hunger, as our diets consisted of just enough to keep us alive, but never enough to keep us from feeling hunger. We were the lucky ones in Bergen-Belsen – a Concentration Camp that always smelled of burning flesh, and had its inmates doing forced labor eighteen hours a day, punished by unimaginable cruelty, tortured by the most barbaric means. We were neither gassed nor burnt, nor forced to work nor tortured; we were just always hungry. Very hungry. The one thing we could never get out of our heads was food.

PREPARING FOR ROSH HASHANA

According to Father's calendar, Rosh Hashana was approaching. We each trembled in anticipation of the holy days, when the Gates of Heaven would open to accept our prayers and our tears. Everyone was so serious, as he prepared to pour out all his hurt and pain and suffering, certain that his Father in Heaven would listen and redeem His unfortunate children.... Yes, there was a sudden reawakening of hope in our *Basunderlager*. I just knew that it would be a special *Yom Tov*.

We came to realize that Mr. Shlanger, who usually sat all day saying *Tehillim*, was not the "nebish" that we took him for.... An electrician by trade, he made a secret electrical connection in our barracks to plug in Mother's iron. All the ladies in the camp were suddenly visiting us in a steady flow. When they left, their badly crumpled *Yom Tov* outfits were freshly ironed. Mr. Shlanger also

figured out a way to operate Mr. Reinus's haircut machine, and in no time it was making the rounds in the men's barracks.

With this renewal of hope, the people demanded that Dr. Fisher, the Head Administrator of our Special Camp, arrange for us to have a *shul* where we'd be able to pray together on the Days of Awe. Many of the rabbis in our group had brought along *Sifrei Torah*, but nobody had thought of taking along a *shofar* or *machzor*. Of course not! The Nazis had promised us that we'd be in Palestine by then.

Waiting his turn at the dentist, Father, holding his hand over his mouth, and grimacing in pain, told one of the Dutch POWs of our plight. "We have an extra *shofar* which we'd gladly give you," the prisoner whispered back, while coughing into his hand so the Nazi guard wouldn't notice them talking to each other, "except that it's too large to smuggle through the hole in the fence."

"Maybe," Father mused, "someone could mention it to that S.S. man who smiles... because he's the only Nazi here who seems to have a heart. Maybe he'd help us out."

Two days later, a *shofar* and five *machzorim* were suddenly discovered in the Administration Barrack. *From whom? From where?* Nobody knew!

#### SEARCH FOR SPARE PAPER

The children in the camp were sent around to collect whatever writing paper and pens were available in the barracks, and whoever could write Hebrew was drafted to copy the main Holiday prayers from the *machzorim*.

The administration granted us permission to use the infirmary as a *shul*, and Mother volunteered to sew a *paroches* (curtain for the holy ark) for the closet in which the *Sifrei Torah* would stand. Mother was very excited. As soon as we came into our barracks, she started pulling things out of all our valises, hoping to find something suitable for a *paroches*... but her search was in vain.

Suddenly, her eyes lit up. "Of course!" she announced. "Why didn't I think of

it before? Rutti, Suri, round up all your friends and go from barracks to barracks, and ask each person to give you the yellow *Magen David* that the Nazis forced him to wear in Hungary."

"Why should we collect those cursed badges of shame?" my sister Suri said in distress. "Thank G-d we don't have to wear them anymore."

They seemed to not even feel the blows of their Nazi guards.

"It's Rosh Hashana!" they shouted. "Jews are praying. They're blowing the *shofar*. G-d is still alive!"

"But Surale, just think of all the yellow-gold thread I'll find in those *Magen Davids*! We'll take each one carefully apart, and from all of the thread make one gigantic *Magen David* that we'll sew on to one of the white sheets that we took along. Suri, we'll have the most beautifully *paroches* in the whole world. And our *shul* will be a Holy of Holies."

#### ROSH HASHANA... WHEN NOTHING ELSE EXISTED

Rosh Hashana arrived. Nothing else existed. Not our gray world of dark, airless barracks, nor our sour breath, nor our bellies rumbling from hunger, nor our foul-smelling dysentery, nor the people fighting over a sliver of potato left in the soup pot, nor the S.S. Herr Commander shouting and cursing as he counted us for the

umpteenth time, nor the growling and snapping of his vicious dogs.

As the *shul* vibrated with the rabbi's cries, it suddenly became crystal clear to everyone how fortunate we were to be Jews. Though the Nazis hated us and tortured us and humiliated us and killed us, we still chose to remain Jews, G-d's children. We still chose to retain His Image. We still yearned to live, still had faith in the future, still could pray and beg for love and pity from our Father in Heaven.

Our hearts were so full, and with the rabbi's cries tugging at our souls, we were stirred to rejoice in being His Chosen People.

The *shul* was jam-packed. People were carefully following the prayers, pointing to the hand-written pages copied from the *machzorim*. Out in the yard, people were pressing together to hear the *shofar*. It called and called. Shivers ran down my spine. My skin tingled and then stood away in prickles. I shivered. I trembled. The tears fell hot on my face. And still the *shofar* called. It would not stop. People were crying and moaning, shouting and sobbing. And everyone was talking to G-d; arguing with Him, bargaining with Him, believing that their tears and prayers were not in vain, that they would reach the Kingdom on High.

The old rabbi spoke, admonished, chastised, comforted. He pleaded for the straying flock to return to the fold... to recognize the Creator, to accept His rule. He cried for mercy, for love, for life... He cried and he cried till no heart remained stubborn, till no eye remained dry.

Jews, regular inmates of Bergen-Belsen, also heard the call of our *shofar*, as they passed our camp on their way to forced labor. Suddenly, and totally unexpectedly, they broke file and ran to the fence that separated their camp from ours.

They were gasping, they were choking. The tears streamed down their faces. They seemed to not even feel the blows of their Nazi guards.

"It's Rosh Hashana!" they shouted. "Jews are praying. They're blowing the *shofar*. G-d is still alive!"

Their souls were on fire, even as their

broken bodies were dragged from the wire fence to the curses of "Filthy Jews."

Mother, as all women in our *Basunderlager*, had hoarded rations all month in preparation for the Rosh Hashana meal. The administration had arranged that we'd be given an extra portion of jam and margarine. Mother showed the women how to create a *Yom Tov* torte by whipping the jam and margarine together into a crême that, when smeared on and around thin slices of bread, really looked like a torte, even if it didn't taste like one. Potato salad was another *Yom Tov* treat that the women

had ingeniously prepared. Considering that we never stopped suffering from hunger, our *Yom Tov* feast was truly a miracle of *yeish mei'ayin* – substance from naught.

When we finished eating our "lavish" *Yom Tov* meal, we stood outside to watch the Satmar *Rebbe*, accompanied by his *Chassidim*, going to the wash-barracks where the faucets were turned on, and they all recited the *Tashlich* prayer.

#### THE MONTH MOVED ON

We greeted Yom Kippur with the full realization that we were but "clay in the hands of the Potter." The words, "Who will live and who will die; who at ripe old age and who to be plucked from the Tree of Life before his time," had never been so meaningful, and the *chazzan* couldn't go on because of the uncontrollable burst of emotions that had been aroused. He waited a long time till the deafening cries subsided, then continued on in almost a whisper: "Who in hunger and who in thirst, who in violence and who in epidemic, who will enjoy peace and who will suffer."

It was impossible to hear the *baal tefilla's* voice above the shouts of all those praying.

We reached "*Aleinu*." All the men were bowing, falling down on their knees and prostrating themselves on the

floor. Our cousin Shaul, the *chalutznik* who had come to *shul* out of respect for our father, asked him: "For this you're thanking G-d? To be captive in this jail under the rule of cruel *goyim*?"

Father smiled at Shaul with pity. "I'm thanking G-d for not making me a *goy*. Were I to have the choice of being captive or a Nazi-master, I know, without a doubt, that I'd choose to be where I am right now."

**E**rev *Succos*, the Satmar *Rebbe*, with special permission secured through the Jewish Administration, stacked one bed on top of another, hung blankets on three sides, and put a straw mattress on top of the upper bed for *s'chach*. That's where he ate, slept and learned the entire week of *Succos*.

**S**uccos ended, and winter began. As we stood on Appel's line twice a day, the rain and hail soaked through the blankets we had wrapped around ourselves. The howling winds echoed the despair in our hearts, as the Herr Commander counted us for the umpteenth time. All the while, we tried unsuccessfully to stand in straight lines, on the ground that had become a river of oozing mud. And though the Days of Awe were long over, we continued to pray. Continued to pray, in the river of yearning and faith that flowed from those Days of Awe. ■

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