

# THE Jewish OBSERVER

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## KABBALAS' OL MALCHUS SHAMAYIM

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# The Essence of KABBALAS OL MALCHUS SHAMAYIM

Facilitating Avodas Hashem

Based on an address by **Rabbi Matisyahu Salomon שליט"א**, *Mashgiach Ruchani* of Beth Medrash Govoha, Lakewood NJ, translated and adapted for publication by **Avrohom Birnbaum**

Every time we recite *Krias Shema*, we are *mekabel ol Malchus Shamayim*. The simple translation of these words is "accepting upon oneself the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven." Without *ol Malchus Sham-ayim*, mitzvos have no meaning, and one has totally missed his calling as a Jew. The term *ol Malchus Shamayim*, however, is commonly misunderstood to mean a great burden, the crushing weight of *Malchus Shamayim*. This weight may be important, even critical, so the thinking goes, but it is heavy and difficult to carry, nonetheless.

In fact, we conjure up an image of a heavy, onerous load, visualizing being

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

weighed down by a burdensome weight strapped to one's back.

This is not the case at all.

*Ol* means yoke. It is decidedly not a *massa*, which denotes weight. It is rather an instrument, a medium by which one enables himself to easily perform Torah and mitzvos.

*Ol Malchus Shamayim*, explains the *Zohar* (cited in *Nefesh HaChaim*), is akin to the standard *ol* – the yoke of an ox. The yoke itself is not heavy at all. Rather, it is something fashioned to conform to the shape of the animal's shoulders and to fit comfortably, allowing it to pull a great load with ease and with a minimum of strain. If the load is attached by being strapped to the body of the animal without a yoke, the animal can pull almost nothing. With it, it can pull a great deal.

*Ol Malchus Shamayim* is the same. It is the means by which a person enables himself to use his natural strengths and abilities in the service of the Creator, with a maximum of ease and a minimum of difficulty.

Thus, *ol Malchus Shamayim* is, in and

of itself, not a weight nor a hindrance. It is rather a facilitator, which enables a Jew to perform his obligations with happiness and enthusiasm.

*Kabbalas ol Malchus Shamayim* is finding the instrument, the incentive that makes it more comfortable and more enjoyable to bear and fully observe Torah u'mitzvos.

This definition of *ol Malchus Shamayim* as being the requisite, personalized incentive of every Jew is described by the *Rambam* in his Commentary on *Mishnayos*. No one, the *Rambam* explains, learns Torah and performs mitzvos by natural instinct. When a child begins to learn, he does not immediately experience the sweetness of Torah. He needs incentives to motivate him to learn..." You promise him sweets and delicacies when he is young, to motivate him to learn. As one gets older, the incentives are adjusted accordingly, first with new clothes, then money, then honor, etc... choosing the optimum way to educate a child in Torah (*lechat'chila*)."

This, the *Rambam* explains, is what *Chazal* mean when they say, “*Le’olam ya’asok adam beTorah ubemitzvos afilu shelo lishma shemitoch shelo lishma ba lishma* – A person should always engage in Torah study, even if his motives aren’t pure, for from this he will eventually study with pure motives.” The emphasis is on the word *le’olam* – always, because there is always a need for incentive to learn. The incentives could and should change over a person’s lifetime, but an incentive is needed to ensure *limud Hatorah* and mitzvah observance with joy and enthusiasm. One cannot attain the level of performing Torah and mitzvos *lishma* without first traversing the exigencies of *shelo lishma*.

These *shelo lishma* incentives mentioned by the *Rambam* are precisely the yoke, the *ol*, of *Malchus Shamayim*. As an *ol* is something designed to make our *avodas Hashem* easier and more enjoyable, proper incentives perform that very function.

Clearly, the ultimate goal is that one’s *ol Malchus Shamayim* is composed of his pure *yiras Shamayim*. But first and foremost, the *ol* must be something that makes it easier to fulfill our obligations to *Hashem*. *Shelo lishma* incentives are just that.

#### THE SHELO LISHMA IMPERATIVE

The *Zohar* (*Parashas Lech Lecha*, cited in *Tzror Hamor Parshas Vayeira*) powerfully illustrates this point:

A person came to Rav Yochanan and asked to join his yeshiva and learn Torah on the condition that he will become rich. Rav Yochanan accepted him into the yeshiva on that premise and instructed all his *talmidim* to call him “Rav Yosi, the Wealthy.” He studied Torah, learned well and succeeded. He did not, however, become wealthy. He came to Rav Yochanan and complained that although he had the title, “Rav Yosi, the Wealthy,” the wealth did not materialize, he was not getting rich.

[The *Zohar* continues,] One day, a wealthy man came to Rav Yochanan saying, “My father passed away and left

me a large inheritance. I never had the opportunity to learn and I would like to give the beautiful, expensive items and clothing to *talmidei chachamim*.” Rav Yochanan gave the entire fortune to his *talmid*, “Rav Yosi the Wealthy.” From then on, he was called “Rav Yosi ben Pazi (*paz* means gold).”

After Rav Yosi received the riches, he engaged in learning Torah *be’simcha*, with joy. He completely immersed himself in the depth of the Torah, progressing to increasingly higher levels of knowledge.

After discovering that the beauty and wealth of Torah was far greater than glittering gold and silver, Rav Yosi ben Pazi was overcome by a feeling of profound regret. “Woe is to me,” he said, “that I disregarded eternal life in favor of temporal life.” He went to Rav Yochanan and said, “I do not want to engage in Torah study in order to attain riches. I only want to learn to glorify the name of *Hashem*!”

Rav Yosi then took all of the riches that he had received and distributed them to the poor. He now recognized the truth. This is why he is called Rav Yosi ben Pazi throughout the Talmud.

[The *Zohar* concludes,] And this is what *Chazal* mean when it says that one should always engage in Torah *shelo lishma, shemitoch shelo lishma, ba lishma*.

This story demonstrates most vividly that the most important thing initially is that one *must* be able to learn, *daven* and fulfill the mitzvos with joy. If cerebral knowledge and *yiras Shamayim* alone cannot enable a person to attain the *simcha* and sense of fulfillment that what one is doing is the greatest thing in the world, then we *must* provide enticements. We must continue providing incentives to our – yes – childlike selves until *avodas Hashem* becomes so pleasurable on its own, that those incentives are no longer needed.

Clearly, the person of whom we speak, who performs mitzvos *shelo lishma*, still desires to do the will of *Hashem*. He just would not have the strength of character to engage in *avodas Hashem* without an external incentive. Rav Yosi *did* want

to learn Torah when he originally approached Rav Yochanan. Nevertheless, he – and Rav Yochanan – recognized that he was a human being with human weaknesses who needed incentives, a “yoke” to make it easier for him, to properly bind the “load” of Torah and mitzvos to him, to make it enjoyable and pleasant. From there, he progressed from one level to the next, until he finally attained true *yiras Hashem*, wanting to fulfill *Hashem*’s desire with no ulterior motive.

#### GROWTH THROUGH MOTIVATORS

What this means for us in practical terms is that when we accept upon ourselves *ol Malchus Shamayim*, we must invest effort in thinking of motivations and incentives that would make it easier and more enjoyable for us to serve *Hashem*.

In truth, many of us understand this concept when it comes to educating our children. Clearly, a child needs an incentive to learn. With regard to ourselves, however, we often act as if we think that we have already reached the exalted spiritual level whereby we do not require motivation to engage in *avodas Hashem*. But the reality is that virtually all of us must think of ways to encourage ourselves to turn our *avodas Hashem* into an involvement that we look forward to, not a burden that we must bear.

A person should never feel discouraged for not having a desire to learn, *daven* or serve *Hashem*. He should not feel in any way inferior because of this. He was not created with these positive desires. What he *should* do is accept upon himself the yoke of Heaven by finding *eitzos* – strategies – that will make his *avodas Hashem* easier.

If one does not do this, one almost certainly will not be able to go the distance. It is simply impossible to force oneself to go against one’s natural inclinations day after day, week after week, year after year. One who does not enjoy his *avodas Hashem* will not be able to sustain it at the requisite level. Either his nerves will fray or his *yiras Shamayim* will simply erode. This crit-

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ical error is made by so many well-meaning people. The importance of making *avodas Hashem* enjoyable by including incentives in our daily lives cannot be overstated.

*Rashi*, in the beginning of *Shir Hashirim*, tells us that *Shir Hashirim* is "kodesh kadashim," the holiest of all *sifrei kodesh* (sacred literature). Why? *Rashi* cites *Chazal*: "Because it is comprised of total *yiras Shamayim* and acceptance of *ol Malchus Shamayim*."

There is a profound lesson here. *Chazal* classify "holy of holies" to be "*yiras Shamayim* and acceptance of the yoke of Heaven," and assert that the greatest spiritual level one can attain is accepting the yoke of Heaven.

We frequently hear "experts" say that "you cannot pressure people." But they don't really believe that. Everybody knows that in every area, be it the world of business, sports or entertainment, the only ones who succeed are the ones who pressure themselves, the ones who relentlessly pursue whatever it is that they view as success. The key, however, is that they motivate themselves with incentives

that make those pressures enjoyable.

Many people do not desire to accept the yoke of Heaven because they do not wish to be placed in a position where they will have no choice but to engage in the "work" that the *Ribbono Shel Olam* desires of them.

The critical proof that somebody truly desires to do *Hashem's* will is one's acceptance of being connected to that *ol*; to go peacefully and dutifully, and put oneself into a situation where – albeit with incentives – he will be committed to work, and the yoke itself will restrain him from shirking his duties. Seeking to avoid those incentives, then, is properly called *prikas ol*, removing the medium, the facilitator for *avodas Hashem*.

Our commitment to *Hashem* is called *kabbalas ol*. *Kabbalas ol* means accepting the yoke by joyfully putting oneself in a situation where one will not shirk one's obligations to *Hashem*. Although the enjoyment makes it easier, it still requires a commitment.

That is *kabbalas ol Malchus Shamayim*. ■

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## NOT JUST "A BAD HABIT"

Our community has a real problem. A number of adolescent yeshiva *bachurim*, age 13 to 18, are starting to smoke. This is nothing new. There have always been smokers in the yeshivos. We have always accepted it as an unfortunate fact of life. "What can we do?" "How can we prevent it when so many adults in their yeshiva world smoke?" "It is not *assur* according to *halacha*." "There is no way to stop boys from doing what their peers do."

The tragic reality is that most of these boys will not be able to stop smoking. Is there really nothing we can do to stop our precious young boys from becoming chronic smokers for the rest of their lives? It is time to take a different look at the nature of this problem.

Until recently, the association of tobacco and illness was only vague. There were even people who felt that it was good for the lungs. When researchers in the 1960's first began to show evidence that smoking was causing lung cancer, and the Surgeon General's Report confirmed it in 1964, the medical world started looking more closely at the population of smokers.

Since that time, new medical information has piled up year by year. It is now known that smoking dramatically increases the risk for heart attacks, stroke, cancer of the lungs, mouth, throat, and bladder, pneumonia, bronchitis, emphysema, and asthma. The risks of breathing second hand smoke have also been demonstrated.

The most startling medical revelation is just becoming com-

Dr. S. Schulman, a pediatrician, and Dr. R. Schulman (author of the sidebar on page 24), an endocrinologist, maintain their medical practice in the Boro Park section of Brooklyn. Their patients are primarily of the yeshiva- and general-Orthodox population.

# Smoking Addiction

## A NEW PERSPECTIVE

mon knowledge. That is, that smoking is an ADDICTION. Although the tobacco companies have been aware of this, they concealed the information for decades. It became public knowledge only recently during the legal confrontations between tobacco victims and the companies.

We now understand why it is so hard for a smoker to stop, even when told that his life depends on it. We now understand why so many fathers and husbands spend the last few minutes before *Shabbos* standing outside or sitting in their cars smoking and inhaling deeply. We now know why a perfectly normal man will go out of his office building on a miserable wet, windy day to stand huddled together with all types of people with whom he has nothing else in common. It's the addiction.

Smoking, then, is not just a "bad habit" like nail biting. It is different in a very basic way. Habits can be broken with some behavior modification. Addictions are changes in the "hardwiring" of the brain.

In smoking addiction, the drug, nicotine, is the major component. The smoker's brain develops a dependency on the drug as it affects his feelings and sense of comfort. The urge to smoke is generated by a discomfort associated with withdrawal of the drug. The smoker needs to smoke to take away the discomfort. Without it, he feels edgy, restless, irritable and sometimes anxious and depressed. Satisfying this need is so important that the smoking addict will sacrifice his own money, health and wellbeing to achieve it.

Breaking the addiction is extremely difficult. All *frum* smokers stop for *Shabbos*, but they usually hurry to light up immediately after *Maariv*.

Even when the smoker manages

to stop smoking, the urges have to be dealt with for many years to come. This addiction is now considered a medical illness by insurance companies and medical experts.

#### FROM SOCIAL ISSUE... TO GETTING HOOKED

The fact of the matter is that most smokers wish they could stop. Many have tried repeatedly and failed. When a study was done of attitudes of people purchasing cases of cigarettes at a discount depot, 85% of them answered No to the question "Are you happy to be a smoker?" and the same percentage answered Yes to the question "Would you stop smoking if you could?"

With so much now known about the bad consequences of smoking, why do our *bachurim* start smoking? Most boys will report that they were first introduced to cigarettes in yeshiva. Some started on Purim or with *chassan* cigarettes. Others started when an older *bachur* gave them a cigarette and showed them how to inhale.

Even nowadays, when some yeshivos have become stricter about smoking, the boys in each school can easily show you the stairwell or rooftop where the smokers go to smoke. The adolescent boys feel that it is socially desirable to smoke because it makes them feel grown up and important. They look up to smoking rabbis and older, cool boys who are their role models.

Starting to smoke requires effort and determination. When a boy first tries a cigarette, it makes him cough and gag. He feels a little lightheaded and nauseated. He decides to keep trying until the choking stops and he can enjoy the good feeling. "If everyone else can learn to do it, I can too." By the time he gets used to the smoking, he is starting to feel the pull for the next cigarette.

The most important point is that this whole process starts for social reasons. None of these boys starts by needing to smoke. They start by needing the social acceptance of their peers. They end up with an addiction and a peck of trouble.

One thing is sure. Peer pressure is so important to adolescent boys, that if a *bachur* knows that smoking would make him a social outcast, he will think twice before starting to smoke. How do we know that this is true? Look at the girls in our society. Not one girl in the social mainstream would even think of starting to smoke. It would ruin her socially. So the girls do not smoke at all.

Why is it true that a smoking girl is not considered "fine and good," while a smoking boy can still be the "best *bachur* in the yeshiva"? This doesn't seem

reasonable at all. We should hold the boys to the same standard as the girls. It could save their lives.

The obvious solution is: We must change the social acceptance standard in our society that allows a boy to be considered socially desirable even if he smokes.

Young people have a tendency to think of themselves as being immune to consequences. They tend to see themselves as invincible. We know better. That is why we, as parents and teachers, have to set guidelines and restrictions when it

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comes to adolescent behavior.

We give them dress codes and behavior codes that have to be followed to maintain their social status as *good* and *acceptable*. We must include *not smoking* as one of the standards of acceptable adolescent behavior. We simply must not stand by and allow these kids to make a mistake that will have a negative impact on the rest of their lives!

#### STEPS WE CAN TAKE

Since the problem starts as a social issue, it needs a social solution. I would suggest several things that we can do to cause the necessary change in attitude.

##### 1. The Smoking Adult

The fear of causing shame to adult smokers who are learned and respected role models in our Orthodox community has been a real concern in dealing with this matter. Because of this, no effective actions have been taken to solve this problem.

The fact is, the adults who smoke can be a major force in preventing *bachurim*

from starting to smoke. We must ask these fine people who are also addicted to smoking to look upon themselves and the example they are setting. They must always be aware that merely by smoking in front of children, they could be responsible for attracting them to starting to smoke. These adults could tell the children how sorry they are to be stuck with this terrible burden. What an impact it would have on the students if a *rebbe* looked at them directly, and said, "Beloved *bachurim*, I was young when I first started smoking. I never dreamed I would not be able to stop. I didn't know it would cause addiction. No one knew it in those days. It was the biggest mistake I ever made. I want to stop. I am still trying, but it is so very hard! Please forgive me for setting such a bad example. Don't make the same mistake I did!"

We must look upon these men with sympathy and concern, not disrespect.

##### 2. Prevention is the Cure

You, as parents, must talk to your boys before age 10, long before they are offered a cigarette. Tell them about all of the neg-

ative facts regarding smoking, including how addictive it is. Tell them you will be very disappointed if they ever start to smoke. Repeat this often throughout adolescence. Your words will remain with them and give them strength to resist.

Explain that many wonderful people smoke, but that they wish they had never started. We must respect them, but we must also feel sorry for their affliction. When you see a young *frum* person smoking, say, "That person doesn't look cool. He looks like someone who is making a big mistake. He thinks he is holding that cigarette but he is wrong. The cigarette is holding him!"

##### 3. Shidduchim

Consider smoking as a very serious issue when looking for a *shidduch* for your daughter. Not smoking should be included on her list of desired characteristics. By age 45, the smoker could very likely have real medical problems. Your daughter has a right to have a healthy husband and father for her children after 20 years of marriage.

The girls should be made aware of all of the important facts regarding smok-

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**W**e must include *not smoking* as one of the standards of acceptable adolescent behavior. We simply must not stand by and allow these kids to make a mistake that will have a negative impact on the rest of their lives!

■

ing, even though they don't smoke. It is only fair that they know about the medical illness of addiction and all of the consequences of smoking.

They should know that if a boy says, "I will stop smoking as soon as we get engaged," it is probably not true. He may well be an addict. She should say, "If you can stop smoking, you should do it immediately, and if you are successful, you may call me after 6 months of being 'clean.'" If a boy hears this often enough and decides to really stop, the pain of this rejection could save his life. If the girls collectively refuse to marry smokers, the boys will be much less inclined to smoke.

#### 4. The New Rules

A new atmosphere should prevail in yeshivos, wherein the first cigarette should be *treiff* for a yeshiva *bachur*. Ideally, elementary and high schools should expel a student who is seen anywhere, anytime, smoking. Not smoking should be included in the formal rules of dress and behavior that allows a boy to be included as a student of the yeshiva.

Additionally, the adult faculty and employees of the yeshiva, including *Rebbeim*, teachers, administrators, and even maintenance crew, should never smoke in front of the students, even outside the school setting.

#### 5. The Smoking *Bachur*

Your sons, your nephews, and your neighbors who are among the unfortunate young *bachurim* who have already started smoking must be helped to stop. The sooner, the better. Even though at times it may be difficult, it can be done.

They must stop because they will soon realize that their whole future really depends on it, socially and medically. Some people are helped with a combination of medication and therapy. (See sidebar.)

This will not only save these *bachurim*, it will have a major impact on the problem. If there are no older *bachurim* smoking and no role models who smoke, the younger generation of boys will not even be tempted to try smoking.

**W**e now know that this is a different type of problem than we ever dreamed about. Until our community wakes up and takes the social actions needed to discourage children from starting to smoke, every child who picks up smoking from now on is our responsibility. We cannot throw up our hands and give up on our sons. We owe it to them to get this problem under control before more lives are ruined. We, as a community, as parents, as teachers and as *rabbanim*, have it in our power to do it. The fact is, we *must* do it. ■

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For many years, cigarette smoking (as a means of relaxing, unwinding, and clearing the mind) has been a common feature of the yeshiva world. In fact, Roshei Yeshiva and maggidei shiur often smoked. Even though medical evidence has demonstrated unequivocally that it is a hazardous practice, there is still a vestige of acceptability in regard to smoking in some parts of the Torah community. It is important that – in addition to the warnings expressed in the other article on the topic in these pages – serious attention be given to methods for the individual smoker to gain control and abandon this habit completely. The following article by **Dr. Robert Schulman** addresses this topic:

## The Treatment of Smoking Addiction

Everyone knows that smoking is bad for one's health; yet, there are still many intelligent, decent, upstanding people still smoking in our society today. What can be done to help them break the grip that smoking has on their lives?

The vast majority of smokers are addicted to the drug nicotine. This addiction is also accompanied by behaviors (such as always lighting up when drinking coffee or driving) that are considered habits. The combination of addiction and habit is very hard to overcome.

I have patients, smokers in their forties, who have spent weeks in the ICU with complications of a heart attack. They are clearly aware that they must stop smoking. Unfortunately, they cannot stop even though they know that their lives depend on it. This is a powerful addiction. The withdrawal symptoms are so uncomfortable that they do not have the strength to tolerate them. Even when they do stop, they often relapse. They think about smoking every day, and when they are with a smoking person or are in a vulnerable moment, the temptation is too strong.

Fortunately, medical science has recently made real advances in assisting the cessation of smoking. A physician, usually a Primary Care Physician or Psychiatrist, should monitor the whole process of smoking cessation. The patient must look for a physician who is experienced and interested in helping with this particular problem.

This physician will start the quitting process, prescribe the necessary medication, follow the progress of the withdrawal, watch for drug related complications, and provide guidance and encouragement through this difficult experience.

There are three helpful modalities that can be used once the smoker is really motivated to stop.

**1) Behavior modification.** These techniques work on the habits and the addiction of smoking. The first step is a clear commitment to stop smoking. The smoker must set a quit date and tell friends and relatives about it and ask them for support. He must then clean the house and the car and remove smoking odors and all reminders of the habit. This includes taking ashtrays away, moving furniture to change the place of a desk or favorite smoking chair, and removing all cigarettes that are stored anywhere. There are many additional methods that can be applied, from hypnosis to Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to group support like "Smoke Enders."

**2) Nicotine replacement devices.** These are nicotine patches, nicotine inhalers, lozenges, and gum. They reduce the cravings experienced during withdrawal from the nicotine in the cigarettes. When the smoker quits, the dose used is high, and eventually lowered gradually so the nicotine can be stopped with fewer, more tolerable withdrawal symptoms.

**3) Oral medication/Antidepressants.** These drugs work on depression, but they also work on the same region of the brain that is effected by the nicotine. When this modality is used, it can be started one week before the quit date.

If a smoker tries any of these and fails to stop, or starts again, there is a new approach that has a better chance of success. That is, to use all three simultaneously.

None of these methods make smoking cessation easy, cheap and convenient.

Nicotine replacement is expensive, costing about three dollars a day, and is not covered by insurance. It has recently been shown that higher doses and more prolonged usage of these devices (than are currently recommended) might be necessary to prevent relapse. The money saved every day by not buying cigarettes offsets this expense.

The antidepressant, Zyban, is FDA approved for this purpose but many insurance companies will not pay for it. They will, however, pay for the antidepressant Bupropion (Wellbutrin), which is the same drug.

Behavior modification can sometimes be done by the smoker himself with the guidance of the prescribing physician, but often needs a therapist or a group to be effectively implemented.

Despite all of the intervention described, many smokers take more than one "try" to stop smoking permanently. They must be encouraged to keep trying if they fall back into the habit. Success is still possible.

Although stopping smoking can be inconvenient, uncomfortable, and somewhat costly, it is worth every bit of the effort and expense. It will definitely improve the quality of life for the smoker and the people in his life. It will add years to his life expectancy as well. ■

# PostScript



**D**r. Schulman's passionate appeal in "Smoking Addiction – A New Perspective" needs little embellishment and few additions.

As someone who has spent forty years in the treatment of a variety of addictions, I can attest to the fact that cigarette addiction is one of the most dangerous and resistant addictions. True, some people have been able to stop smoking on their own, but countless people have tried unsuccessfully to break the addiction. *When a person knows that what he is doing is harmful but cannot refrain from doing it, that is an addiction.*

I have had patients who were able to overcome their addiction to drugs, but could not stop smoking. I have had patients who stopped using heroin but died from the effects of cigarettes.

The dependence on the chemical effect of nicotine can be intense, and for many people, stopping to smoke results in very distressful symptoms. These can be eased with certain medications such as bupropion and clonidine patches, but one must make a determined commitment to stop smoking.

## *Worse than cancer*

**N**o one today is ignorant of the harmful effects of cigarettes on many parts of the body.

Rabbi Dr. Twerski is founder and medical director of the Gateway Rehabilitation Center of Pittsburgh, and author of many works on both psychiatry and Torah subjects.

Ironically, lung cancer is not the worst of the consequences, because cancer mercifully kills. What is far worse is *emphysema*, a living death. Smoking destroys the elasticity of the lung, so that breathing becomes so labored that all the oxygen gained in a breath is used up just to exhale.

I sat with the Steipler Gaon as he cut a cigarette into fourths and said, "This is a curse I cannot get rid of." I have spoken with a number of *poskim* who said that the reason they have not pronounced an *issur* is because just as it is a mitzvah to tell someone something which he may obey, so it is a mitzvah to refrain from saying something which will not be obeyed.

However, there is universal agreement that one should not introduce oneself to a harmful condition from which one may be unable to escape. It is, therefore, unthinkable that young boys should be allowed to start this terribly destructive habit. Whatever people in authority can do to prevent young people from smoking is a sacred obligation upon them.

The following words are harsh, but they are not mine. "Whoever has the capability to prevent someone from doing wrong and does not exercise it, is responsible for that person's act" (*Shabbos* 54b). If *roshei yeshiva* and *rabbanim* are unable to prevent adolescents from starting to smoke, then they are not culpable. If, however, anyone who does have the ability to stop youngsters from smoking does not exercise it, he bears a truly grave responsibility.

Some progress has been made. Years ago, one could cut the smoke in the *beis midrash* with a knife. Today, in many yeshiva buildings, smoking is forbidden. That is certainly a step in the right direction, but it falls short of saving the lives of youngsters who smoke outside the building.

Dr. Schulman is correct in stating that smoking begins as a social phenomenon, and the steps that she has outlined can be very effective in curtailing this practice. It is high time that we address smoking as a *pikuach nefesh* issue. ■

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# Lost and Found

## Poignant Encounters



Your first impulse is to laugh. A well-known Jewish actor is asked what being Jewish means to him, and he says it means a lot, although “I don’t go to *Shabbat* on Friday or put on *tefillin* before I go to bed or anything like that.”

Or perhaps your impulse is to shake your head in despair at the deep ignorance that plagues American Jewry – even among those who claim to have a strong Jewish identity.

But perhaps the most useful response is awe and wonder. Imagine the power of a spark that stays alive even after it’s buried under a heap of ashes. Imagine going to the trouble of sheltering this frail, glowing ember when you have no idea what it needs or what it’s for.

The fact that there are millions of Jews throughout America who claim their identity with pride is indeed an object of wonder. One might wonder: what connects them? From where do they derive any joy or satisfaction in their spiritual

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

lives? Without *Shabbos*, without learning, without the skills to speak the words of *tefilla* and *Tehillim*, theirs is a spark that burns on nothing. It’s a Jewish *neshama* gasping for air.

### ALL THE WRONG PLACES

For reasons only *Hashem* can understand, when these Jews look for meaning in their Judaism, they seldom consult the Torah and its authentic *mesora*. Educated and erudite in hundreds of other ways, they feel confident that there’s nothing in the old-fashioned Judaism of their grandparents that holds any relevance for them. They innovate in ways that drive the Orthodox world into despair, dismay or, sometimes, disgust.

But most often, they are not motivated by a desire to rebel. They’re driven by their awareness of the spark within and its demand for some kind of nourishment. Without a Torah background, they have nothing but junk food to feed it. It’s a brand of Torah that is sugar coat-

ed, ready-to-eat and demands no real effort. Eventually, however, the false feeling of satiation subsides, and the *neshama* is left hungrier than ever.

“Back in the late Sixties and early Seventies, I belonged to my temple’s youth group,” recalls Shulamis. “And you know what? We were very passionate about Judaism. If someone would have exposed us to the real depths of Torah, we would have eaten it up. But instead, we were always trying to ‘make Judaism relevant.’ I remember working with a committee on the youth Yom Kippur services. We inserted all kinds of stuff – lyrics from a Bob Dylan song, poems, anti-war messages. It was all geared at finding ways of making it more meaningful. We wanted meaning.”

“Once a year, we used to have an all-night program and then walk to the lake, which was not far from the temple, and have a sunrise *Shacharis*. I guess that was some kind of Shavuot program, but I have no memory of the holiday being mentioned. Sunday mornings, we had what they called ‘T&T,’ which was ‘*Tallis*

and *Tefillin*, followed by a bagel breakfast. In those days, the *tallis* and *tefillin* were still for boys only. My friend and I used to go to the kosher bakery a few doors down and get the goodies. There were also loads of Shabbatons, but we called them ‘conventions.’”

What was the result of all this active engagement with this form of Judaism? “I don’t have statistics, but I know that quite a few of the kids ended up intermarrying,” Shulamis reports. “One of the most active members of the group became a Jew for J. When she told me about it, she explained that she wanted a religion that had some guidelines about right and wrong! There were at least two others that ended up becoming what they called ‘completed Jews.’”

“As far as I know, I’m the only one who became completely observant. Maybe a few others keep kosher homes. It makes me sad to think of what all these people would have today – what *Klal Yisroel* would have had today – if someone had just fed us the right information. We were an inspired bunch of kids. I don’t know if my own children going to yeshiva and Bais Yaakov are as inspired as we were.”

#### THE RIGHT PLACE

With the blossoming of the *kiruv* movement, real sustenance for hungry souls has become available in hundreds of venues. If a person searches a Jewish newspaper, the Web or even the phone book, he has a good chance of encountering a reliable source of authentic Torah learning.

The Web, in particular, has opened many new doors. Recently, Oorah Kiruv Rechokim, which has been doing door-to-door *kiruv* in the New York-New Jersey area for the past 30 years, branched out into cyberspace. The original purpose was not so much to net Jewish cybersearchers as it was to provide a comfort level to those being contacted in person. Naturally, people are reluctant to open their doors to strangers, so when *kiruv* volunteers come knocking, they are sometimes greeted with a suspicious “Who are you?” and sent on their way.

Until recently, the volunteers’ only tool to overcome that suspicion was to keep trying in a very low-key, yet persistent, manner over the course of time.

Websites provide another tool. Door-to-door *kiruv* volunteers can leave behind a card inviting the family to log on to an appropriate site. Oorah’s site, gottorah.com, offers a gentle introduction to the concept of Torah learning and Torah education for children. Without traveling into unknown territory, site visitors have a chance to see videotaped interviews with *kiruv* rabbis, parents who have transferred their children into day school and others who have begun adopting Torah observance.

There are many other sites as well. Some, like aish.com, torah.org, ou.org and shemayisrael.com, offer a stimulating variety of articles, *halacha* information, *hashkafa* and simple facts like candle-lighting times, all in user-friendly language that speaks to a secular public in terms that are familiar and comfortable. Needless to say, however, a website alone won’t ferry a Jew all the way from agnosticism to religious devotion. Real, live people have to be there to help transform intellectual interest into spiritual growth. But once a comfort level is established, the next visit from a *kiruv* volunteer will often elicit a whole new response. Often, the family is a lot less suspicious and a lot more willing to talk.

#### THE RIGHT TIMING

A presence on the World Wide Web vastly expands *kiruv*’s reach beyond the frontiers of established religious communities. Hawaii, Ecuador, Portland, Oregon, and dozens of other spots across the country and the globe have been starting points for the spiritual return of long-lost Jews making contact through the Web.

One contact asked for advice on her choice of wedding date. She wanted to know if it coincided with any Jewish holiday. Upon checking the 2005 date, Oorah’s *kiruv* director discovered that it fell on a *Shabbos*, and on the eighth of Av. “I don’t know what she’ll do with that information, but I gave it to her,” he said.

“It’s interesting that *Shabbos* wasn’t even on her radar screen, yet she had it in her to contact us and ask a question,” he said.

A woman from Hawaii was given a telephone *chavrusa*, who has been guiding her toward *Shabbos* observance. “I appreciate the fact that she doesn’t push,” the woman reports. “In fact, she tries to slow me down when she feels I’m taking on too much at once. I feel so fortunate to have her in my life.”

In Ecuador, a recently widowed father of two boys utilized the Web to find some spiritual sustenance to give his children. Now he is learning with a *chavrusa*, and has been provided with *tefillin*, *sefarim* and Spanish-language Jewish books for his children.

Upon receiving the *tefillin*, he wrote, “I want to thank you for the *tefillin* you sent me. It’s the most important gift I’ve ever received in my life. Now I will be able to teach my kids to put on *tefillin* when they are bar mitzvah. Thank you very much – I am really happy.”

#### OUR OWN BACKYARD

Closer to home, gottorah.com is having a gradual, but real, impact on the non-religious Jews who abound in the towns surrounding Lakewood, NJ. To anyone who has ever crossed Lakewood’s borders, the black-hatted yeshiva contingent is a familiar sight. But to most, it’s not a very comforting sight, for the community seems exotic, if not downright eccentric, to those looking in from the outside. The religious community sponsors dozens of learning venues for non-religious Jews, but the percentage of them who venture within is painfully small.

*Kiruv* volunteers try to break down the barriers. They arrive at the door of a Jewish home with a gift, a website business card, and a smile. If the family wants nothing to do with them, they just leave the gift and the card behind, hoping that the family, if left to its own devices, might begin to reconsider. Perhaps they will log onto the website. Perhaps they’ll be a little less hostile the next time.

In about one of ten instances, how-

# Eternal Fire

Shira LaLev

I often watch the men  
dance  
on Simchas Torah.  
I love to watch the fire  
when  
the men dance,  
to see it bursting through  
their souls,  
flames leaping among  
clenched hands  
encircling them  
As they cry out  
"Ashreichem Yisroel"  
and I feel the pride of my  
nation.  
As they beg their Creator  
"Ve'taher Libeinu"

and I know there is nothing  
as pure  
as their heartstrings  
entwined around the  
Torah,  
bound tightly to their  
 chests.  
And when they sing  
"Heiliger Bashefer,  
Du host unz zeir leeb"  
I feel the fire in my own  
soul.  
For now, I know why,  
Though many have tried to  
smother that flame,  
this fire will not dwindle  
this fire will not die.

Shira LaLev lives in Brooklyn. This is her first appearance in these pages.

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ever, the family will be receptive. They may not even open the door at first, but they'll accept the gift, converse a little and perhaps ask the volunteers to come back again at a later date. Sometimes they will open the door, and open their ears and hearts, and reach out for the spiritual lifeline they are being handed.

In one recent case, volunteers approached a young couple in Howell, just north of Lakewood, who had recently had their first baby. The husband had been turned off to religious education as a child, but now that he was a father, he was ready to reconsider. When one of the *kiruv* volunteers asked him what he would be equipped to give his child as a spiritual inheritance, he knew the answer. Both he and his wife have begun learning with *chavrusos*.

In another case, the college-aged daughter in one household became interested in learning. She was set up with a *chavrusa*, who ended up serving more as a mentor and guide than teacher. Through her, the young woman began to find friends and a welcome in many Lakewood homes, and gradually has taken on religious observance.

It's there, in every Jewish heart – the *pintele Yid* – the spark of holiness that somehow, even in the midst of the most secular lifestyle, still insists on being heeded. As long as a Jew maintains a Jewish identity in some form, that spark is combustible. The urgent task of *kiruv* is to uncover the spark wherever it can be found, and then feed it with the pure truth of Torah. It might taste strange at first, but the Jewish soul knows what's good. ■

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# A DONKEY IN MANHATTAN

We were sitting next to each other on the #2 bus and started talking. It emerged in conversation that Batsheva worked as a tutor at one of the *baal teshuva* women's seminars.

Did she have time to tutor me? I asked. She seemed a little taken aback – after all, we were both grandmothers. But yes, she said, she'd be happy to. What would you like to learn?

*Chumash* with *Rashi*, I answered. From the ground up.

She was suggesting various ways to approach this when something occurred to me: Could we just learn "Balak"?

You mean, that one *parsha*?

I nodded. In any case, it would take me forever, or even longer.

Fine, she replied. No problem.

After a few moments she said, Do you mind telling me, though – I'm just curious – why "Balak"? Any special reason?

Well...I began...

Once upon a time...

\*\*\*

It was the end of summer and the whole world was new. In Connecticut, the dogwood trees slumbered. Daisies and dandelions nodded in the grass. Clouds drifted sweetly across a tender blue sea.

My sister's birthday party was tonight. She'd been on the planet for

*Mrs. Shapiro* of Jerusalem is a frequent contributor to these pages, including "On Missing the Earthquake" (May, '04). Her most recent book is *A Gift Passed Along: A Woman Looks at the World Around Her*, published by ArtScroll.

twenty four years – just a few more than I – but 24 sounded ominous. She was getting right up there into the outer edges of lower middle age, which meant that I, too, should have turned into an adult by now, with a job, and a roommate. I was still just a child, though, invisible and shy. An unknowing child, in spite of my high heels.

I took the train into Manhattan and called her from Grand Central Station. No answer. I dialed again.

Where was she?

There in the dark old wooden phone booth, I sat there wondering, listening to the phone ringing in her apartment, then tried again. What to do? The family was meeting for the birthday at 8 – seven hours from now. I had come in early, hoping for some time alone with her before the party.

Walking along through the echoing, shadowy dimness of high-ceilinged Grand Central toward the exits, my heels made a quick, loud clickity-click on all the cool marble floors, as if I were a real person. I pushed through a dark door, emerging into the sudden muggy brightness of 42nd St.

Honking, speeding taxis, and cars darting in and out of traffic. Big roaring buses. A million people hurrying everywhere, and gray concrete skyscrapers towering up into a hidden sky.

The dense, leaden air hung down thickly over everything, trapping the city under a dirty overturned cup of heat, and the sidewalk was a rushing river of humanity. I started meandering slowly against the flow, upstream. All different colors. A thousand different worlds

streaming past, this way and that.

At 43rd, I crossed Fifth Avenue and found myself on the flowery, shady pathways alongside The New York Public Library. Where should I go? The question seemed to be darkening, and expanding, until it was asking something else altogether.

*Where should I go?*

Approaching the wide stone stairway with its two majestic stone lions standing guard in the midday sun, one on either side of the entrance, I paused.

Suddenly, some kind of atonal Eastern music seemed to burst upon the scene; a group of dancing people in lemon-colored Indian saris materialized as if out of nowhere, and right before me on the path — with a bony shaved skull and long silky orange robes – a skinny young man appeared, spinning and swaying, with the round dot of a Hindu painted low on his forehead, eyes ecstatically upturned. Two pale, skinny arms were circling, stretched out long, and his long fingers rattled and tapped and drummed on a tambourine held over his head. Bangles and looped necklaces of tiny stones, pink and green and blue, twinkling and sparkling. Tiny bells sewn all along his saffron hem. His sad mouth was emitting some moaning chant to an arrhythmic beat.

I stood there, struck dumb by the sight, for even I, who had searched and never found...searched and searched without knowing I searched, searched and searched without knowing what I was searching for...could spot a pitiful, lost child when I saw one, and a nameless terror took hold of me. I was



repulsed, to the core. Inside the Indian costume, inside the shaved head and the ecstatic eyes, I knew all too well that here before me was an American kid in flight from something in Kansas, or Cleveland, or Chicago, a boy on his way to something I didn't want to know about, prancing and dancing madly on thin air.

It was at that moment that a thought went through my mind which had never gone through my mind before, in all my short life. Vividly and distinctly, as if the words were uttered aloud, I thought: I wish I believed in something.

Then I turned, and went looking for a phone booth.

\*\*\*

**A**t 43rd and Sixth, I pulled shut the glass door and dialed my sister again. No answer. My heart sank. Then my mother, back home in Connecticut. No answer there either. Where was everybody?

My sister's number again. Then my father's office. His secretary said he was in a meeting and to call back in an hour.

The sun was glaring at me through the glass. I tried my sister again and yippee!

The line was busy! I kept dialing.

It was too hot in there. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw that someone was waiting for the phone. The person tapped insistently now on the door and I was about to say, "Please stop it! This is an important call!" when I found myself looking at a tiny little olive-skinned man in a meticulous black suit and a white beard and a black hat. Black aggressive eyes full of brightness and darkness. Something obscurely familiar about him.

"Nu?" he was saying. What did that mean? I'd heard it somewhere. He made some odd questioning gesture of impatience. I pushed open the door. Something about him I didn't like, and something else, that caught my attention. To my own slight surprise, I said, abruptly: "You're Jewish, right?"

He gave a quick nod. Those eyes cut me up sharply. He said: "You? A Jewish?"

I smiled, yes, as if I were doing him a favor.

"What you doing?"

There was no answer to that one.

"Ach! Come! You have something to eat!"

I shriveled inwardly with distaste.

"No, thank you."

"Come!" He started walking off, very fast. I stood still. He looked back over his shoulder. "Come!" What in the world made me follow? He kept looking at his watch, and glancing back at me through the next four blocks to see if I was still there. On 47th Street, he darted to the right, and suddenly we were surrounded by people like him.

He went into a big store full of Jews and diamonds, everyone talking. I didn't like it. He scurried up a flight of stairs to a luncheonette, muttered something to the waitress. She looked at me. He sat down.

"Sit!"

I sat.

A slice of pound cake was set down before me. I was on a diet.

"Tea?" he said.

"Coffee." A cup of coffee appeared.

"Nu?" He asked me to tell him about myself. Strange, to be someone's focus like that.

He pointed to the cake. "Eat, eat."

"No, thank you."

"You like it. It's good." He gave me a quizzical look like a knife, with eyes from some ancient place where I knew I'd never been. For some reason,

I filled with shame. He asked about my family.

"You have to honor your parents."

Honor my parents? What an old-fashioned expression.

I looked all around at the people in the restaurant. I'd never seen Jews like these before. The women wore long sleeves and long dresses. It was strange. It bothered me.

He tipped his head towards the two girls sitting at the counter to our left and said, "They are Orthodox." He asked some more questions, then took out a pen. On the back of the restaurant bill, he started writing something. He was leaning over the table, scrunched up in intense concentration, mouthing something to himself, erasing, rewriting. Ten minutes or so later, he handed me the paper, on which he had written, with the childlike,

scrawled awkwardness that made it obvious the English alphabet was not his own, a list of some sort of sentences, in carefully executed capital letters. The first one went as follows:

"BARUCH ATAH HASHEM ELO-KENU MELECH HAOLAM, BOREI MINEI MIZENOT."

He explained that these were blessings in Hebrew to be made over all food, and told me what kind of food each one was for.

He told me how to light two candles every Friday night for Shabbat. I'd always liked candles. I was surprised we Jews did something so aesthetically appealing. What was Shabbat? He said that's how Jews celebrate the creation of the world every week. What a beautiful idea — I'd never heard such a thing. He told me I should continue living with my parents, and to work for my father in his office.

He wrote down his name. I saw that he was a rabbi. "Call me if you need help!"

He motioned to the waitress and in another language - Hebrew, I gathered - ordered something else. She returned with what I would learn later was poppy-seed cake.

"Don't be scared," he said. "Say this." He pointed to the first line. I read it out loud, and was about to say something when he pressed a finger to his lips. "Ssshhhh! Eat!"

It was good.

\*\*\*

A few years later, my first week in Israel, a rabbi at the table spoke about the *parsha*. There was a donkey, he said, whose eyes were opened by G-d. She saw an angel and couldn't speak at first.

I felt at home in Jerusalem, so I stayed, and married, and G-d gave me children, and grandchildren. But from that first *Shabbos* on, through all the unceasing changes that were to come, one of the things that endured for me was "Balak." It drew me inexplicably, and spoke for me. It was the *parsha* I always loved most and looked forward to, increasingly, year by year.

One day a quarter-century after my *aliya*, a friend showed me a program on her computer that computed Gregorian and Hebrew dates. I wanted to know the *parsha* of my *bas mitzvah*. I typed in my birth date, pressed a few keys, and...

"Don't tell me..." said Batsheva. "Yes."

"Hmm. You know, there's one *parsha* I was always drawn to, too. *Vayeira*. I wonder.... It's the one I've always especially liked teaching. Maybe I'll ask my husband to check."

The phone was ringing when I got home. It was Batsheva, saying, "You're not going to believe this." ■

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# Haolam.



23K. It's a window seat. It's my seat. Flight 012; El Al. The local time must be around 7 or 8 or 9 a.m. and, according to the map on my screen, we are somewhere between Halifax and Lisbon, I guess. It doesn't really matter.

I have just completed *davening Shacharis* (my morning prayers). Nothing unusual about that. It's something I've done every day for the past... er... many years. Of course, I'm usually 38,000 feet closer to the ground and in a *shul* when I *daven*, but the words are very much the same.

I like *tefilla*, and I'll tell you why.

First of all, there's something special about speaking to *Hashem*. It's a chance to check in with my Manufacturer and get a sense of what, if any, repairs are necessary. Maybe all I need is to review the operator's manual and see if I am faithful to the instructions. Periodically, a major tune-up is indicated. So it's good to stop in and open the hood.

Second, life today, as you know, is incredibly hectic. I needn't explain why. And prayer time is a preset regimen for needed breaks from whatever it is in. What a when we begin and end activities with a heart and also smack in the our day to do



# HEAVENLY PRAYER

Third, I enjoy the *shul*. Men are directed to *daven* with a *minyan*, a quorum of ten, whenever possible, and I take pleasure in the camaraderie and unity that the setting provides. My occasional visit to the *amud* (pulpit) to lead the service is a little bonus.

I wish it weren't so, but frankly, *tefilla* is not always invigorating. It can become stale and hackneyed – bereft of meaning or purpose. In fact, it often does. Keeping one's *davening* fresh and evocative, given the sheer frequency of this most holy pursuit, is a constant challenge faced by every man, woman, and child. There are no easy solutions.

## The Sky-High Advantage

But *davening* on a 747, of course, presents a whole array of different challenges. Remembering to put your *Siddur* in your carry-on, choosing the appropriate time and space to *daven*, when, whether, and how

to stand, and (for men) donning *tallis* and *tefillin* while crouched under an overhead bin are all complications and potential impediments to a meaningful and dynamic prayer experience. And depending on who your seat mate happens to be, you may have a little explaining to do when you're done.

But, like nearly everything in life, even these clouds of hardships in *tefilla* contain silver linings.

As I return my *Siddur* to the seat-pocket in front of

me, I reflect on the *tefillas*, just completed. And to my utter surprise, I am left with a good feeling. Despite the aforementioned inconveniences, a strange – almost elevated – mood has wafted over me.

"Where did it come from?" I wonder.

Well, to begin with, Plane Prayer (PP) has two huge advantages over *Shul* Prayer (SP) – you can't come late and you can't leave early. How often are we seen huffing and puffing, even when *davening* at home, trying to catch the runaway *Shacharis* train or ducking out early to catch the runaway commuter train. With no fixed starting time and certainly nowhere to go when you're finished, PP affords you the rare opportunity to actually *daven* at any pace you like. It goes without saying that SP, with its power of a *tzibbur* (congregation), has other clear-cut advantages.

An added bonus to this most unusual experience (PP) is that you are not forced to "keep up" with the rest of the

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congregants or the *shaliach tzibbur*. If you want to spend more time on a particular section, such as *Sh'ma* or the *Amida*, you are free to do so.

And so I did.

I began by focusing some extra few moments on the oft attention-starved fifteen blessings that open *Shacharis*<sup>1</sup>. Our Sages teach that as one experiences the phenomena of the new day, he should bless G-d for providing them.

One example occurred when I came to blessing #9 – *Blessed are You, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who*

*spreads out the earth upon the waters*<sup>2</sup>. Had I ever stopped to contemplate an appreciation for *Hashem's* having formed a hard crust over the planet's interior – made up of water, gasses, and molten metals? Ordinarily, my eyes are still sealed shut and my lips are on cruise control until 20 – 30% of the *davening* has passed.

Who doesn't take walking on a firm surface for granted? And who could have predicted that my gratitude for this newfound pleasure would multiply just 32 hours later, when I "survived" a 2 second earthquake in Jerusalem (really) ???

Even before the blessings, I usually endow a full 25 seconds or so of SP to the holy song, "*Adon Olam*." This short masterpiece, written over 900 years ago, succinctly proclaims *Hashem's* attributes of being timeless, infinite, and omnipotent.

Today, however, during PP, I noticed that the author also included in the same song, the description, "*He is my G-d, my living Redeemer... He is my Banner...*"

I closed my eyes for just a moment and marinated in the glow that an Omnipotent Creator is also MY G-d, MY Redeemer, and MY Banner. I loved the feeling of having a real and Personal G-d; not easily discerned when driving 100 miles per hour during home or SP<sup>3</sup>.

### Letting the Engine Idle



Later, I let the engine idle while traveling through the *Baruch She'amar* prayer. Commentators record an ancient tradition that this *tefilla* was transcribed by the *Anshei Knesses Hagedola*, Men of the Great Assembly, 2400 years ago from a script that actually fell from Heaven!

And yet...usually...unfortunately...it hardly rates a reflection of any substance or even a second glance, I dare say. Today, however, I chanced upon the phrase therein that extols *Hashem*, "*Who constantly creates*."<sup>4</sup> Today, it gave me pause. Creation was not limited to a one time Big Bang-like happening. No. *Hashem* didn't just finish His project and go on vacation. Creation is ongoing...current...never-ending. And so is *Hashem's* direction, guidance, and love. Something to remember.

Now basking in the luxury of unhurried PP, I took a moment to consciously peer out my window. Usually, during home or SP, this activity is keenly discouraged during *davening*<sup>5</sup>, probably because the outside scenery on land would likely serve only as a distraction, not an enhancement of the prayer.

But today I wasn't drifting off; on the contrary. I was saying the verses:

*It is You alone, Hashem, You have made the heaven, the most exalted heaven, and all their legions, the earth and everything*

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upon it, the seas and everything in them, and You give them all life....

Excitedly, I gazed out onto the horizon. The *Navi* (prophet) was right. Having never flown in an airplane, he depicted, nonetheless, the magnificence of the celestial bodies, the expanse of the universe, the splendor of Creation. I breathed deeply. I marveled at the commanding sunlight bouncing off the plane's fuselage, I winced at the robust wind currents that shook our craft, and I felt...oh...so small. Literally and figuratively, my *tefillos* were carrying me to new heights.

I'm not sure if *davening* seven miles higher than sea level really means that the supplicant is actually *closer* to *Hashem* or not, but somehow I *felt* closer. Unperturbed by fellow congregants (who may occasionally *daven* too loud, out of sequence, or off key), crying babies, or telephones, unaffected by the boundaries of time, and impervious to all the usual distractions, I sat in my cabin of tranquility – just me, *Hashem*, and my prayer book. It was very special.

#### Uttered, But Seldom Really Said

The illuminated seat belt sign in front of me meant the *Amida* would be rendered a virtual oxymoron (I said it in my seat), but nothing could disturb this voyage of virtue. I just took my sweet time, reflecting on nearly every word; words that I had uttered tens of thousands of times, but never really said – or understood properly.

And then I made a remarkable discovery. The word that is said more than any other, in the entire *Shemoneh Esrei*, is not *Baruch*, Blessed, or *Shalom*, Peace, or *Melech*, King or even *Hashem*. It is the word, "*Atta*" – *You*: 33 times we refer to *Hashem* as "*You*." We speak to *Hashem*. And we speak with great awe and reverence. And often, in the third person. But more often, we speak to *Hashem* *directly*. We speak in the second person. We say, "*You!*"

Kings, queens, great rabbis, statesmen, even parents are often referred to in the third person. It is a sign of ultimate respect. But the composers of our holy *tefillos*, the *Anshei Knesses Hagedola* – some of them

bonafide, indisputable prophets – fashioned our most devout prayers in terminology that tells us to *converse* with *Hashem*, freely, directly, comfortably, almost...informally. It is communication without hindrance, impediment, or veneer. Incredible.

Now inspired by the comforting thought that we are encouraged to see *Hashem* as a Being we can easily relate to, I was reminded of a startling insight I once heard. One of the great mysteries of religious observance is the manner in which so many Jews sway back and forth during prayer. We call it *shockeling*.

Tourists at the *Kosel* (Western Wall), as well as less conversant observers of *tefilla* in all locales, are often perplexed or even put-off by the seemingly strange calisthenics or fanatical antics of over-enthusiastic Jews in prayer mode. But Rabbi Shimon Schwab ז"ל offered a simple yet penetrating insight.

There are two primary vehicles for Divine service – *ahava* and *yira* – love and awe. Both are necessary components of a comprehensive and satisfying relationship with Him. Love and awe can perhaps be depicted by the manner in which we address Him. When we use the third person – *He, Him, His*, in the vernacular – it

expresses awe, fear, reverence. Second person terminology – *Atta* (You) – is a more casual and direct pronoun, perhaps portraying love. The swaying, or *shockeling*, during *tefilla* is an external manifestation of both properties – we bend forward (expressing love), and then, realizing Who He is, we draw away (demonstrating fear or awe)<sup>6</sup>.

I gently pressed the button to recline 23K. I turned to the window once more. A momentary splash of turbulence stirred the weary travelers. For just a second, everyone was *shockeling* – perhaps more in fear than in love. I smiled.

I gazed out at the foreign terrain and alien bodies of water. Again, I felt small, but a good kind of small. *Tefilla* can do that. *Tefilla* should do that. PP was not something that I had looked forward to. All I had anticipated was how inconvenient and different it was going to be. Well...it was different.

In a few hours, we would land in *Eretz Yisroel*. Soon thereafter, I'll be *davening* again. I have a feeling it will be different, too. All my newly-gained insights, now augmented by the sacred setting, enhanced by the Homeland, stirred by the company of a *minyán* of like-minded Jews. Of course, it will be different. ■

<sup>1</sup> *Anshei Knesses Hagedola* (the Men of the Great Assembly) formulated our present-day specific text of *tefilla* – at the beginning of 2nd *Beis Hamikdash* Temple era. It consisted of 120 elders, among whom were many prophets.

<sup>2</sup> "*Roka haaretz al hamayim*"

<sup>3</sup> *Adon Olam* begins by recounting the unfathomable eternity and omnipotence of *Hashem*; but, as mentioned, also includes "*V'Hu Keili* – He is my G-d"

– conveying a personal relationship.

<sup>4</sup> "*Baruch oseh Bereishis* – Blessed is He Who constantly creates"... *oseh* in the present tense.

<sup>5</sup> See *Orach Chaim* 90:4, 95:2 and *Mishna Berura* there.

<sup>6</sup> Rabbi Schwab, in his *sefer* on *tefilla*, points out that there are 21 verses in *Ashrei* – in 11 we address *Hashem* in the second person, and 10 are in the third person... expressing *ahava* and *yira*.

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