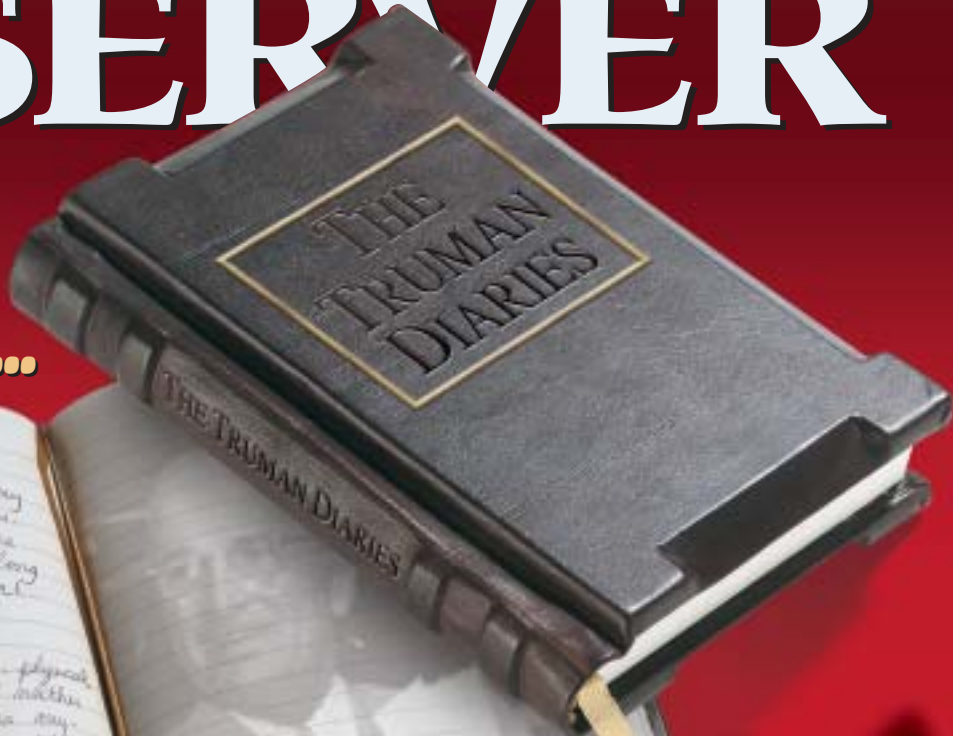


THE Jewish OBSERVER

Elul 5763 • September 2003
U.S.A. \$3.50/Foreign \$4.50 • VOL XXXVI/NO. 7

**Anti-Semitism
Yesterday, Today...**



*They care not how many
Estonians, Lithuanians, Poles,
Yugoslavs or Greeks
get killed as long as
the Jews get special
treatment.*

*When they have paid physical
financial or political tribute
Hitler and Stalin has say-
thing on them for cruelty or
mistreatment of the underlying*

...TOMORROW?



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תכלה שנה וקללותיה, תחל שנה וברכותיה

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THE TERROR CONTINUES, ר"ל ...

מה נאמר?
מה נדבר?

WHAT CAN
WE SAY?

WHAT *MUST*
WE DO?

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just when things seemed to brighten up...
just when we started to dream "maybe, just maybe"....*

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A Blow to the Heart of Jerusalem



A piece of the *Kosel* was blown up by a suicide bomber שׁ at 9 p.m. on Tuesday night, August 19 / 22 Menachem Av. At your next visit to the *Kosel*, you will look for the scars, and you won't see them. But I tell you they are there.

Earlier that evening, hundreds upon hundreds of people ascended to the foot of the *Har Habayis*, the Temple Mount, to touch the splendor of the *Shechina* that has never departed from this site, a remnant of the Wall that surrounds the area. They came there to *daven*, to beseech the Almighty for the myriad needs of *Klal Yisroel* and for themselves. And then they left, with the experience alive in their *neshamos*, taking a piece of the *Kosel*, as it were, with them.

Well over a hundred of them crowded aboard the Number Two bus, and at 9 p.m., on Rechov Shmuel Hanavi, a son of Yishmael detonated a bomb, and shattered many of these *Kosel* Jews. Every Jew is precious, and everyone who is martyred by a blood-thirsty terrorist is a *Kadosh*. We happen to know of several of these "Pieces of the *Kosel*"; as we weep for their loss, we invite the reader to stop and savor the luminosity of their personalities, and join us in

mourning for them in their absence.

- The body of Rochel Freydel Dushinsky רייזל was not brought to rest for two days, because she left no children through whom her DNA could be identified. But she left thousands of broken hearts. She and her husband, Reb Mordechai ניי – members of an old Yerushalmi family – hosted some 200 guests at each of their *Shabbos* meals every week, most of them American yeshiva *bachurim*. They ate in three shifts of 30 - 40 minutes each – *Kiddush*, full courses, *Zemiros*, a *Dvar Torah*, and *Birchas Hamazon*. At the funeral, Reb Mordechai weepingly begged his guests: Don't forget. Come this *Shabbos*. I'll put up the *cholent* (in accordance with his *Rav's* directive).

- Wife of an admired *talmid chacham*, Mrs. Schwartz רייזל, *davened* each of the three *tefillos* with a *minyán*, said *Sefer Tehillim* in its entirety every day. She was on her way home from the *Kosel* where she had spent three hours in prayer for the success of her son, who had been accepted in a new yeshiva.

- Mrs. Golda Taubenfeld רייזל and her son Shmuel רייזל, left twelve mourning children, plus the children of her late sister-in-law who joined her family, as well

as scores of people who frequented the Taubenfeld home in New Square, N.Y. for a meal and an encouraging word.

- Reb Yosef Dov Binder רייזל, a Gerer *Yungerman*, was loved for his warm personality by all who met him. He was a key member of the *Kashrus* department of the *Rabbanut*.

- Rabbi Yitzchok Ezrachi שליט"א of the Mirrer Yeshiva, testified that Rabbi Eliezer Weissfish רייזל, only forty years old, had mastered *Kol HaTorah Kulo* — the entire Torah.

- After Mrs. Lilach Karadi רייזל had lost her father, she assumed responsibility of her ailing widowed mother and her siblings. She would not entertain offers of *shidduchim* unless her two youngest siblings would be included. She leaves her husband, *Dayan* Karadi שליט"א, of *Chacham Yosef's Bet Din*, with one son, bereft of his wife with their expected next child.

The *Yesod VeShoresh Avoda* says that the last *mitzva* a person was engaged in before passing away characterizes that person's lifetime. These *kedoshim*, and the others with them, carried the *Kosel* with them... and we all surely share in mourning the loss of each and every one of those pure *neshamos*. N.W.

YES, WE ARE DIFFERENT

AS IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN

Our every brush with anti-Semitism, our every exposure to its virulent expression is painful. But it never comes as a surprise. Whether the recent disclosure of President Harry Truman's diary and its revelation of his anti-Semitic attitudes, the rejection of the rights of Israel [read: Jews] in the U.N., its echoes in elite college campuses across the U.S.A., or the obvious bias against Israel in the media, it is a prejudice that has been our constant companion through the millennia.

Close to 80 years ago, the Brisker Rav (Rabbi Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik) זצ"ל visited the Chofetz Chaim when he was on a stopover in Warsaw. The Chofetz Chaim told him of an incident that had just occurred to him.

Already in his 90's, he decided to apply for an exit permit to go to Eretz Yisroel. [He never made the trip.] The responsible ministry told him that before they would grant him the permit he would either have to produce a birth certificate (which were not even issued when he was born) or bring two witnesses to testify to the date and place of his birth. The Chofetz Chaim replied that the witnesses would have to be over 100 years old, which made finding them an impossibility.

[The Chofetz Chaim continued:] What was the rationale of the Polish minister? Don't they recognize that theirs was an impossible request? The answer is in Parshas Vayatzei when the Torah describes the confrontation between Yaakov and Lavan: When Lavan pursues and catches up with Yaakov and threatens him, Yaakov Avinu responds with a logical and passionate

Rabbi Brafman, a frequent contributor to these pages, is *menahel* of Yeshiva Derech Ayson in Far Rockaway NY.



A History of Being Dismissed

presentation of his dedication to Lavan beyond the call of duty, and his mistreatment at the hands of Lavan and his sons. Lavan does not respond to Yaakov's argument. He merely says, "Your wives are mine and your sheep are mine." Lavan does not even consider Yaakov an adversary worthy to deal with.

[Said the Chofetz Chaim:] "If Yidden would be considered a normal people in

the eyes of the Poles, we could argue with them over the way they treat us. But they do not give us any standing or consider us a people at all. Thus there is nothing to even talk about." (from the Brisker Haggada)

And so it has always been. Leaf through *Chumash* and *Nach* and note how, for example, the *Sar Hamashkim* (Chief Cup-bearer) informed Pharaoh that Yosef interprets dreams, describing him dismissively as "a Hebrew youth, a slave of the Chief of the Butchers"... Balak sent emissaries to engage Bilaam to curse "A people who has gone out of Egypt," without even mentioning the Jews by name... on through the ages, conferring neither honor nor dignity to the Jews.

World War II abounds with cases in point. For example, early in the war, Jewish organizations pleaded with the U.S. Government to make a strong statement condemning atrocities against the Jews, and to threaten the perpetrators with punishment. European powers and the U.S. Government refused to do so.

In 1944, with Germany clearly headed for defeat, when such threats would carry weight, the War Refugee Board once again asked President Roosevelt to issue such a declaration. A statement was prepared, but when Roosevelt finally released it on March 24th, 1944, the emphasis on Jews was moved from the first paragraph to the fourth.

In September, 1944, retreating Germans started killing surviving camp inmates. General Eisenhower warned the Germans not to "molest, harm, or persecute the concentration camp inmates, no matter what their religion or nationality may be." Again specific mention of the Jews was omitted. The excuse that mentioning Jews would only invite more retaliation is rather lame.

Even today, when the Palestinians are allegedly reaching out to the Israelis in an attempt to achieve peaceful coexistence, they do not even allow the word “Israel” to be used in the Road Map agreement.

Indeed, consult the *Chumash* again. Bilam summed it up well when he described the Jews thus: “Behold, it is a nation that will dwell alone in solitude and will not be reckoned among the nations — *u’bagoyim lo yis’chashav*” (*Bamidbar* 23, 9). There is another explanation of this prophecy, interpreting the expression “*lo yis’chashav*” to mean that we will not be accorded any “*chashivus*” — neither respect nor legitimacy — by the nations of the world. We can at times attempt to ignore the fact, but now it is becoming rather impossible.

UNDERSTANDING THE UNREASONABLE

To understand why we have been subject to this unreasonable treatment, we need only turn to the seminal confrontation between Yaakov Avinu and the *Sar Shel Eisav* — Eisav’s Ministering Angel — as Yaakov prepared to cross the Jabbok Ford to enter the Land of Canaan. The Torah says, “And Yaakov was left alone, and a man wrestled with him to the break of dawn” (*Bereishis* 32, 25).

The Midrash comments, “Just as the Prophet said, ‘On that day *Hashem* will be alone — *יניגב השם לבדו*’ (*Yeshayahu* 2, 17) so too is Yaakov destined to remain alone.”

As the representatives of *Hashem* on this world, we are designated to bear His message to the peoples of the world. We are the conscience of mankind, we testify that might is not the ultimate source of power, that unbridled expression of passion is not a meaningful, productive lifestyle, and that man is answerable to G-d for his conduct. But the world does not want to hear this message. That is one of the explanations of the *Chazal* — that Mount “Sinai” refers to the *sina* — hatred — that emanated from the revelation at Sinai, the hatred

the nations developed towards us in response to our assignment at Sinai (*Shabbos* 89a).

A PATTERN OF SPIRITUAL CAUSE AND EFFECT

The Books of Judges, and then later, the Book of Kings, recounts how, time and again, whenever the Jews were attracted by the culture and form of worship of neighboring nations, and strayed from adhering to

One thing should be clear to all; the dream of creating another secular state aping Western culture with all its decadence, as a means of bringing peace or security, will not work.

G-d’s commands, they were persecuted by these very nations. A prophet (or judge) was given the task of calling the people to *teshuva*, and, as a result of their positive response, they succeeded in overthrowing their occupiers.

This pattern is repeated numerous times. One thing clearly emerges from the many events in *Nach*: the safety and security of *Eretz Yisroel* is dependent on the Jews’ conforming to the will of G-d. Today, we have no *Navi* to tell us the specifics as to why we suffer and what corrective measures we should embark on. But if we see the entire world

lining up against us, obviously something is wrong with our spiritual status. And we do have the Torah to guide us.

And so we find ourselves once again at a major juncture in our history. On the one hand, there is an almost unprecedented amount of Torah learning and keeping of *mitzvos* in *Eretz Yisroel*, as well as an extraordinary amount of *chessed* being done by the Jews living there. This could be heralding the *geula* we are waiting for. On the other hand (it is no longer even disguised), there are those who want to do battle with G-d, His Torah and with the upholders of Torah — which does not portend a period of peace and security for us. The outcome of the internal battle will ultimately determine the outcome of the external one.

One thing should be clear to all; the dream of creating another secular state aping Western culture with all its decadence, as a means of bringing peace or security, will not work.

What, then, can protect us from recurring anti-Semitism? Political and social efforts do not yield positive results by any conventional formula. In fact, results are often counter intuitive. Leaders and opinion makers respond unpredictably to our efforts. As the *passuk* says: “Like streams of water is the heart of a king in the hands of *Hashem*. As He wishes, so does He direct it.” Yes, this *passuk* explains how Harry Truman — whose newly-found diary reveals him to have harbored strong anti-Semitic feelings — spoke out on behalf of the Jews during World War II and recognized Israel against the objections of the State Department, while other heads of state since, who are considered to be genuine friends, put pressure on Israel to accept proposals that would spell disaster to its future existence.

Obviously, in those days it was a matter of simple survival, and we were *zocheh le’nissim* — *Hashem* granted us miracles. Today, more is demanded of us. A positive outcome to current crises is contingent on our personal and national conduct, and surely not on the thrust of political pressures and economic contingencies.

"NO PEACE WITHOUT INNER PEACE"

The Navi Yeshaya quotes the *Ribbono Shel Olam*, "For the sake of Zion I will not be silent, and for the sake of Yerushalayim I will not be still, until her righteousness emanates like a bright light and her salvation glows like a torch."

The *Targum* explains this to mean: "Until there is a redemption for Zion, I will not give any rest to the nations; and until there is a consolation and comfort in Jerusalem, there will not be peace among the nations."

Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer Dessler in several places in the *Michtav Me'elياهو* (I, pg. 68; III, pp. 97 and 163) explains it on a yet deeper level. That until *Moshiach* comes and the focus of mankind can be elevated to a higher spiritual level, emanating from Zion, there cannot be peace. For if all of man's strivings are for more physical pleasures and the amassing of material mementos, there will always be strife and competitiveness among both individuals and nations.

Thus, from every criterion, we are at a great crossroad — for us Jews as well as for the entire world. The unrest in all areas of the world is not separate from what is happening to us in *Eretz Yisroel*. The outcome will depend on the degree of *ruchnius* we bring into our lives and into the lives of the world population.

A recently published book, titled *Heaven on Earth*, is a collection of essays by *baalei teshuva* about their life-changing experiences. There is an article by a holocaust survivor who is now a psychotherapist. She describes how, when the war broke out in Poland, her family started to flee and make their way towards Romania.

On the way we ran out of gas, so we hired a horse and buggy and continued. We crossed a big river and it was very scary. Finally we stood at the bottom of a hill, seeing the border of Romania halfway up. At that point, my mother turned to my father and said, "But honey, what about our Persian rugs and

our silver and our paintings? We can't just walk away from it all."

My father began pacing back and forth thinking. Finally he said, "This is the 20th century. It's the Western World. We are educated. I'm a lawyer. I have plenty of influence. What could happen?"

He turned to my mother and said, "You are right. Let's go back." So we turned around and went back.

We were so close. Of the 182,000 Jews in my hometown, only 184 survived. My parents did not.

The story is moving in itself. But it can also serve as a metaphor for our current situation, as well. We are all living in momentous times. Let us rise to the challenges and not be destroyed by the distraction from all the trinkets vying for our attention. Let us focus on the spiritual core of our peoplehood, the essence of our mission, the thrust of our goals for the future. Growth in Torah, spiritual improvement, pursuit of justice, love of *chesed*. These should be our distinguishing features, our message to the world. ■

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THE TRUMAN DIARIES

in Retrospect

I. THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The recently published excerpts from President Harry S. Truman's personal diaries serve as a useful reminder of how much America has changed over the last half century. Fifty or sixty years ago, negative stereotypes about Jews were pervasive and discrimination was widespread.

In the decade prior to Pearl Harbor, anti-Semitic firebrand Father Charles Coughlin commanded a weekly radio audience of 3.5 million listeners. A wealth of poll data from the period reveals widespread anti-Semitic stereotypes.

In one series of polls between 1938-1946, over one-half of those asked described Jews as greedy and dishonest and one-third felt they were overly aggressive. Between one-third and one-half perceived Jews as wielding too much power, in another set of polls. Most shocking was another group of polls showing that 15% of Americans would have actively supported an anti-Jewish movement and another 20-25% would have been sympathetic.

Anti-Semitic stereotypes were far

from harmless. Negative feelings about Jews doubtless had a great deal to do with American immigration policy throughout World War II. During the War years, polls consistently showed 71-85% of Americans opposed to any increase in immigration quotas. Even a proposal to bring 20,000 Jewish children to America over a two-year period was opposed by 60% of those polled. The overwhelming opposition to any relaxation of immigrant quotas partly explains the reluctance of the Roosevelt administration to commit any resources to the rescue of Jews throughout the War.

The murder of Jews elicited no outpouring of sympathy. Audiences, in one study, reacted with seven times more revulsion to stories of Nazi atrocities when the Jewish identity of the victims was hidden. That apathy to the slaughter of Jews was fully reflected in the media. When the State Department confirmed in late 1942 that the Nazis had already murdered 2,000,000 Jews, only five papers in the entire country placed the story on page one, and none prominently. Two years later, a report that 400,000 Hungarian Jews had already been deported to the extermination camps at Auschwitz and another 350,000 were slated for deportation merited only page 12 coverage in the *New York Times*.

II. DETACHMENT FROM REALITY

The foregoing serves as the historical context for President Truman's now famous outburst about Jewish selfishness after a phone call from former Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr. Morgenthau sought Truman's intervention with the British to secure permission for a ship carrying over 4,000 survivors of the European inferno to unload its human cargo in Palestine.

That humanitarian request moved Truman to rage against the selfishness of Jews: "They care not how many Estonians, Latvians, Finns, Poles, Yugoslavs or Greeks get killed as DPs as long as the Jews get special treatment." Having worked himself into a fine lather, he proceeded to compare Jews to the two worst mass murderers in history: "When [Jews] have power, physical, financial or political neither Hitler nor Stalin has anything on them for cruelty or mistreatment of the underdog."

There is no mitigating these comments. Truman's dislike of Jews was such that it left the President completely detached from reality and stifled all the normal human sympathy that the plight of the desperate survivors should have elicited. Such

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.

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remarks, for Truman, were neither a one-time event nor the sort of fleeting, private thoughts that most of us have from time to time and which would leave us mortified were they known to others. In a letter to his wife from Miami, he once remarked on the surfeit of “Hebrews” to be found there.

The accusations of Jewish cruelty to society’s underdogs and his comparison to butchers who wantonly murdered millions of innocents Stalin are made doubly ugly by their lack of any basis in reality. In Truman’s day, as today, Jews were the group most likely to take up the cause of society’s downtrodden, long after they themselves had left the category of “underdogs.”

Morganthau did not seek special treatment for Jews, only that Truman should acknowledge the unique nature of their situation. The Jews alone among the post-War refugees had no place to go. The doors of America and Western Europe remained closed for all but a lucky few. Most had no desire to return to their former homes in places drenched in the blood of their loved ones, and those who did often found themselves the victims of pogroms at the hands of those who had appropriated their homes.

Far from discriminating in favor of Jews, the Allies had systematically discriminated against them in all rescue and relief efforts during the War. In the entire course of the War, not one Allied ship was ever made available to transport Jews to safety, even where that was possible and troop ships were returning to America empty. Yet, notes historian David Wyman, “transportation somehow materialized to move 100,000 [non-Jewish Yugoslavs, Poles, and Greeks] to dozens of refugee camps that sprang into existence.” The British refused to allow foodstuffs to be sent to Jews in Polish ghettos on the grounds that the food might help the Nazi war effort. Yet the Allies chartered ships to move tens of millions of dollars of food to Greeks under Nazi occupation, even though their average caloric intake was 50% higher than that of the Jews in ghettos.

III. TYPOLOGIES OF ANTI-SEMITISM

President Truman’s anti-Semitism was both real and ugly. Yet it is still important to distinguish it from older, more virulent strands of the disease. There is no evidence, for instance, that distaste for Jews played any central role in his worldview, as in the case of those who blame the Jews for all the world’s problems.

Nor was Truman’s anti-Semitism immutable or impervious to all evidence. For Truman, negative stereotypes about Jews were no more than rebuttable presumptions. His first business partner was a Jewish army buddy by the name of Eddie Jacobson. Their friendship long outlasted their failed haberdashery. At Jacobson’s request, Truman agreed to meet with Israel’s first president Chaim Weizmann, two months before the United States became the first country to recognize Israel. In 1955, shortly before Jacobson’s death, Truman wrote to his old friend expressing his intention to visit Israel and suggested that they go together. He once called Jacobson “as fine a man as ever walked.”

Nor is there much evidence of a distaste for Jews overriding Truman’s estimation of either the national interest or his own personal interest. He ignored a threat from his Secretary of State General George Marshall to resign if he recognized Israel, though as Sidney Zion has pointed out, that decision may have owed more to shrewd political calculation than to anything else. As an unpopular incumbent approaching the 1948 election, Truman felt he could not afford to lose the traditionally Democratic Jewish vote in New York, if he were to have any chance to defeat New York Governor Thomas Dewey, who had already strongly endorsed statehood for Israel.¹

Finally, there were always counter-

¹ Richard Nixon was another president whose own personal anti-Semitism did not overcome his estimation of the national interest. The Watergate tapes are filled with almost paranoid rantings about the Jews. Nevertheless, Nixon overruled his Jewish Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, to resupply Israel in the first dark days of the Yom Kippur War.

vailing factors present within American society that limited the impact of anti-Semitism, and are reflected in Truman's overall behavior to Jews. Among those factors was the constitutional guarantee of religious equality – the protection of the “free exercise” of religion by private individuals, on the one hand, and the protection against the establishment of any particular religion by the state, on the other hand. The general egalitarianism of American society and idea that each man should be judged as an individual also mitigated the force of American anti-Semitism.

Truman's anti-Semitism, then, must be distinguished from older forms of what might be labeled theological anti-Semitism.² For the theological anti-Semite there is nothing casual about his hatred of Jews. All his thoughts revolve around that hatred, and it shapes every aspect of his worldview. The Jew is the Other, the denier of the central values of society.

For the theological anti-Semite hatred of Jews is not a distraction from his life goals, it is the goal. Hitler, though not a believing Christian, inherited the mindset of theological anti-Semitism that once characterized the Catholic Church and later Martin Luther. The extermination of the Jews was for him not a byproduct of world conquest; rather world conquest was the means for removing the stain of the Jews from mankind. That is why the Nazis continued to divert badly needed military supplies to the extermination camps in the final year of the War.

IV. WANING ANTI-SEMITISM

The once pervasive cultural anti-Semitism has largely disappeared in America today. Most Jews have never neither been physically attacked nor discriminated against by anti-Semites. Even the old anti-Semit-

² That is not to deny that some of Truman's attitudes towards Jews had their roots in his Southern Baptist upbringing. He once remarked a cabinet meeting, “If J. could not satisfy these people, how am I supposed to?” But in general, his feelings about Jews were more social than theological.

ic epithets are more likely to be used by friends as a form of ethnic identification than as expressions of hatred.

True, American Jews continue to rate resurgent anti-Semitism high on their list of concerns, but this has little to do with their own life experiences. In one survey of Jews in Northern California, one-third expressed the view that non-Jews would not vote for a Jewish candidate for Congress. At that time, all three congressmen in the area were Jewish. One suspects that fears of renewed anti-Semitism express a psychological need rather than a reading of reality. Anti-Semites, even imagined ones, provide confirmation that one is a good Jew, linked to all those other Jews throughout history.³

No one will wax nostalgic about the waning of American anti-Semitism. For those denied the societal benefits that their abilities and ambitions should have won them, the discrimination of the past was a bitter pill. Jews were subject to rigid quotas in admissions to Ivy League colleges and to medical schools,

³ Perhaps the only places in America today where Jews are likely to confront blatant anti-Semitism are the college campuses. The rabid anti-Israel sentiment on many elite campuses has an intimidating effect on many Jewish students. Reluctant to be identified as co-religionists with the colonial oppressors in Israel, they shy away from anything Jewish or too frequently join in the condemnations of Israel.

cut out of professions like banking, excluded from social clubs, and rejected by the old WASP law firms.

Yet America also offered Jews the ability to mitigate the impact of that discrimination. Denied admissions to the Ivy League, ambitious Jewish students turned CCNY into the most intellectually alive campus in America. Cut out of banking, Jews came to dominate investment banking and built Hollywood. Denied places in blue-blood law firms, they formed their own and, in time, competed on equal terms with those that had closed the door on them.

Missing: The Flip Side of Rejection

At the same time, the passing of the older forms of discrimination has not been without its costs. The discomfort that gentiles once felt in the presence of Jews reflected a metaphysical reality – Jews and gentiles are different. That discomfort is akin to the natural discomfort an *am ha'arets* feels in the presence of a *talmid chacham*.

Cultural anti-Semitism served as a useful reminder that Jews are different, are meant to be different. The flip side of anti-Semitism was far greater Jewish pride than exists today. Shunned by gentiles, Jews were far stronger in their Jewish identity. They were more likely to live in Jewish neighborhoods and to asso-

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ciate primarily with other Jews. Jewishness was a far more crucial component to their self-identity than today, and the fate of other Jews around the world more central to their concerns. Jews of that era naturally assumed that they

would marry other Jews.

Today the old social barriers have fallen. Gentiles are no more likely to oppose their son or daughter marrying a Jew than Jewish parents are to oppose their child marrying a non-Jew. The old prejudices

are harder to sustain precisely because so little distinguishes the lives of most American Jews from their gentile neighbors.

Does that mean that anti-Semitism will not reappear? Not if the patterns of Jewish history hold true. Rapid assimilation into the host culture has often preceded outbreaks of vicious anti-Semitism. The hundred years of assimilation by German Jews prior to Hitler's rise to power is but the most horrible example.

The *Beis Halevi* traces this pattern to our very birth as a people in Egypt. Amidst praises enumerating all that *Hashem* did for our ancestors in Egypt, the Psalmist includes, "He turned [the Egyptians'] heart to hate His people, to conspire against His servants" (*Tehillim* 105, 25). Why should the hatred we suffered at the hands of the Egyptians be considered one of *Hashem's* kindnesses? asks the *Beis Halevi*.

After the death of *Yosef HaTzaddik*, the *Beis Halevi* explains, the Jews in Egypt began to fear the onset of the 400 years of enslavement foretold to Avraham. They sought to prevent this by removing the most visible sign of their difference from the Egyptians: the *bris* of Avraham. The removal of that sign of Jewish distinctiveness led, for a period of time, to greater intermingling between Jews and Egyptians. At that point, says the *Beis Halevi*, *Hashem* protected His people from being absorbed into Egyptian society by causing them to become disgusting in the eyes of the Egyptians.

Throughout history, writes the *Beis Halevi*, that pattern has repeated itself: "To the extent that Jews decrease the distinction between themselves and the nations based on their observance of Torah and *mitzvos*, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* increases the hatred of the Jews by their hosts." Viewed from this perspective, the old social barriers, which prevented Jews and gentiles from drawing too close together, served to protect Jews from the worst anti-Semitic excesses.

In sum, we may one day come to view the diminution of older forms of social discrimination, in the same way the *Baal HaTanya* viewed Napoleon's emancipation: Good for individual Jews, but not necessarily good for the Jewish people or Judaism. ■

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MESSAGE ON THE LABEL

Thoughts of consequence can sometimes arise from the most mundane experiences. Even from something as unremarkable as a headache.

Opening the medicine cabinet one day in search of relief, I was struck by a sticker on a prescription container. I had seen both the container and the sticker countless times, but the full implication of the message on the latter had somehow always escaped me.

“Not for use by pregnant women,” the caveat read.

“And why not?” a part of my aching but still functioning head wondered.

Because, another part answered, a fetus is so much more sensitive to the effects of chemicals than a more developed person. Partly, of course, because of its very tinniness, but more importantly, because it is an explosively, relentlessly *developing* thing. When things undergo a process of development – especially as furious a process as a single cell growing to a many-billions-of-unbelievably-variegated-cells organism in a matter of mere months – they are easily and greatly affected by even



the most subtle stimuli.

Which thought led, slowly but inexorably, to others, about *b'rias olam* – the creation of the world – and Rosh Hashana.

THE SENSITIVE LAUNCHING STAGE

The *Maharal* notes that the trajectory of a projectile – or, we might similarly note, the outcome of a series of mathematical computations – can be affected to a sometimes astounding degree by a very small change near the start of the process. A diversion of a single degree of arc where

the arrow leaves the bow – or an error of a single digit at the first step in a long calculation – can yield a difference of miles, or millions, in the end. Modern scientific terminology has given the concept both the unwieldy name “sensitive dependence on initial conditions” and the playful one “the butterfly effect,” the latter after the influence that the flapping of a butterfly’s wings halfway around the world could presumably have on tomorrow’s local weather.

The most striking butterfly effects take place during *formative* stages, when much is transpiring with particular rapidity. Thus, the label on the medication: the gestation of a fetus, that single cell’s incredible journey toward personhood, is strikingly responsive to so much of what its mother does, eats

and drinks. The developing child is exquisitely sensitive to even the most otherwise innocent chemicals because beginnings are formative, hence crucial, times.

Leaving the realm of the microcosm, our world itself, too, had a gestation period, six days’ worth. Interestingly, just as the initial developmental stage of a child takes place beyond our observation, so did that of the world itself. The event and processes of those days are entirely hidden from us, the Torah supplying only the most inscrutable generalities about what actually took place then. Thus *Chazal* apply the *passuk* “The honor of *Hashem* is the concealment of

Rabbi Shafran serves as Agudath Israel of America’s Director of Public Affairs and as the American director of Am Echad, the Agudath Israel-inspired educational outreach effort and media resource.

things” (*Mishlei* 25,2) to the days of Creation. Honest scientists admit the same. E.A. Milne, a celebrated British astronomer, wrote: “In the divine act of creation, G-d is unobserved and unWitnessed.” The physicist Richard Feynman once remarked about quantum mechanics, the physical system underlying matter, “I think it is safe to say that no one understands [it].”

Despite our inability, however, to truly *know* anything about the happening of the creation week, to think of those days as a gestational time is powerfully enlightening. It may even help explain the apparent discrepancy between what we know from the Torah is the true age of the earth and what the geological and paleontological evidence seem to say.

Consider: what would happen if the age of an adult human *since his conception* were being inferred by a scientist from Alpha Centauri, a hypothetical intelligent creature with no familiarity whatsoever with our biological world, using only knowledge it has of the human’s present rate of growth and development? In other words, if our alien professor knew only that the individual standing before it developed from a single cell, and saw only the relatively plodding rate and wholly unimpressive degree of change in its subject, it would have no choice but to conclude that the 30-year-old human was, in truth, fantastically old. What the Alpha Centaurion is missing, of course, is an awareness of the specialized nature of the gestational stage of life, the poignantly pregnant period before birth, with its rapid, astounding and unparalleled rate of development.

If we recognize that a similar gestational stage existed for the world as a whole at its creation – and the Torah tells us to do precisely that – then it is only reasonable to expect that formative stage to evidence a similarly accelerated rate of development, with the results on the

first *Shabbos* seeming in every *detectable* way to reflect millions of years of development, years that never actually *were*, eons that occurred entirely within the six days of the world’s explosive, embryonic growth.

Which leads to Rosh Hashana: “The birthday of the world.” That, at least, is how the first day of the Jewish year is etched in many a Jew’s mind, the yield of the phrase *hayom haras olam* on our lips as the *shofar* echoes in our ears.

WHEN THE NEW YEAR IS ABOUT TO BE BORN

The word *haras*, however, is rooted not in *leida*, the Hebrew word for birth, but in *hirayon*, a word that means the process of conception /gestation. Annually, at the start of the Jewish year, it seems we relive the gestational days of creation. But more: those days are formative ones, the development period *for the year that is to follow*. Beginning with the “conception-day” of Rosh Hashana itself, and continuing with the “gestational days” leading to Yom Kippur, the period of the early new Jewish year is to each year what the Creation-week was to the world of our experience: a formative stage.

All of which may well lend some insight into a puzzling *halacha*. We are instructed by the *Shulchan Aruch* to conduct ourselves in a particularly exemplary manner at the start of a new Jewish year. For each year’s first ten days, we are to avoid eating even technically kosher foods that present other, less serious, problems, and to generally conduct ourselves in a more careful manner than during the rest of the year.*

Rosh Hashana itself, according to Jewish custom, is even more strictly responsive to our actions. On the year’s first day, it is recommended that a Jew avoid sleep, that we utilize the entire day to the fullest and squander not a moment.

Indeed, so sensitive is Rosh Hashana to what we do that even seemingly pointless and often baffling practices take on sudden importance for that day. For instance, the foods we eat for sheer

pun value – their names reflective of hoped-for blessings; they become suddenly valuable in an almost solemn way. These *simanim* would hardly seem substantive means of ensuring good fortune, and are not suggested for any other time of the year, yet on Rosh Hashana they suddenly enjoy great prominence.

Could it be that the reason things not greatly significant under normal circumstances suddenly take on pointed importance during *Aseres Y’mei Teshuva* is because those days have their analogue in the concept of gestation? That those days are so incredibly sensitive to minor influences because they are the *days from which the entire year will develop*? And that, therefore, the first day of the year – the *hayom haras olam*, the conception-day itself – is the most sensitive of all?

While *mitzvos* and good conduct are always in season, they have particular power during the Ten Days of *Teshuva*. And while *simanim* may not be of great concern to us over the course of the year, on Rosh Hashana itself they are to be cherished for their substantial, if momentary, power.

And so, it is with the very same vigilance and care an expectant mother has for the rapidly developing, exquisitely sensitive being within her that we must all approach our own recurrent gestation-times, the flap of the figurative butterfly-wings that is the start of a new Jewish year. ■

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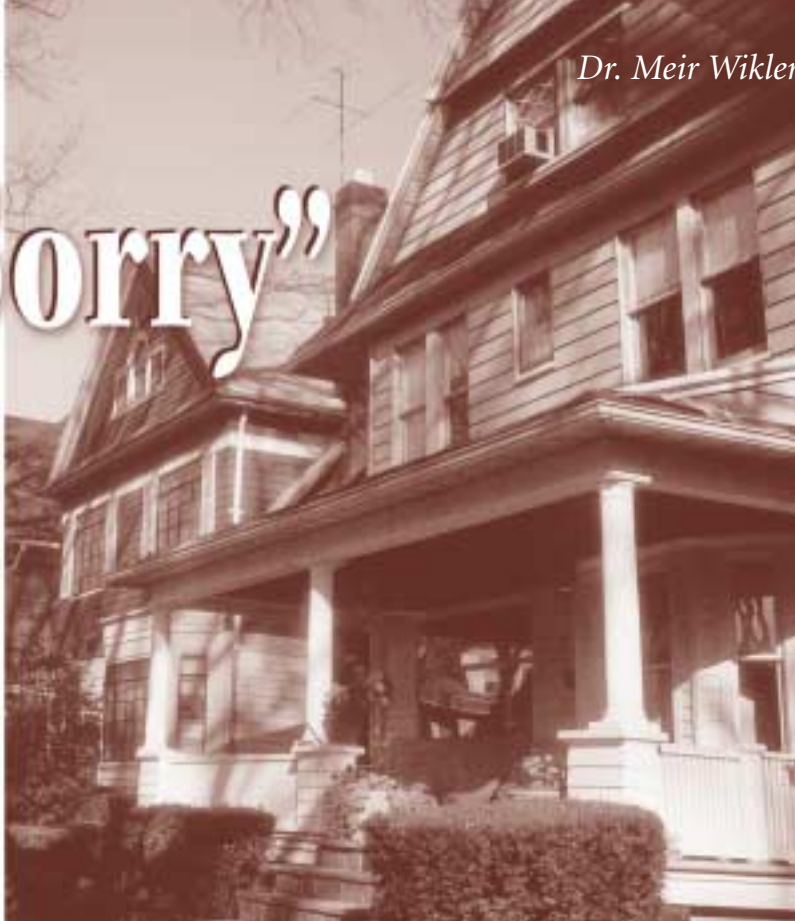
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* For example, the prohibition against eating *pas palter* – bread baked by non-Jews on a commercial basis – which is an optional *chumra*, but to be avoided during the Ten Days of Penitence.

“I’m Sorry”

Teshuva Begins at Home



I. THE ELEMENTS OF ATONEMENT

Not all sins are absolved on Yom Kippur. As the *Mishna* states, “Yom Kippur does not atone for transgressions between man and man unless one [first] appeases his friend.” (*Yoma* 8:9) The *Gemora* explains the extent of our obligation to ask others for forgiveness. “Rabbi Yitzchok said, ‘Whoever annoys his friend – even if only with words – is obligated to appease him.’” (*Yoma* 87a)

The *Shulchan Aruch* also includes this requirement and goes one step further. “Transgressions between man and man are not atoned for by *Yom Kippur* unless he [the transgressor] appeases him [the victim]. Even if he only provoked him verbally, he must still appease him. *And if he is not appeased with the first [attempt], he should return and go [to him] a second time and a third time.*” (*Orach Chaim, Hilchos Yom Hakippurim* 600:1) [Emphasis added.]

Clearly, then, we are halachically obli-

gated to apologize whenever we have hurt someone in any way. And the ones we are most likely to hurt are those with whom we live – our spouses. *Teshuva* for *aveiros bein adam l’chaveiro* – interpersonal sins – must therefore begin at home.

What is the best method to “appease” your spouse? Why are some apologies accepted, allowing couples “to move on,” while other apologies tend to provoke even more hostility than they were originally designed to diffuse? This article will address these and other practical questions about healing wounds inflicted in marriage.

The Three Most Important Words in Marriage

Often, when speaking publicly on husband/wife relationships, I pose the following question to the audience: “What are the three most important words in marriage?”

After a brief pause, I continue. “Now, I know what you are thinking. The first word is ‘I,’ but the third word is *not* ‘you.’”

Puzzled, even worried looks appear. Then I relieve the suspense. “The three

most important words in marriage are, ‘I was wrong.’”

Invariably, many members of the audience nod their heads in knowing approval. It is almost impossible to live with someone, anyone – roommate or relative – without offending him once in a while. To heal the wound that you inflicted, whether willfully or not, you must apologize. Your spouse’s acceptance depends in large measure on how well you apologized. A successful apology will clear the air, diffuse your spouse’s angry feelings and soothe the injury. A failed attempt, on the other hand, will generate more pain, disappointment and resentment.

To properly elucidate this aspect of marital communication, I will present two thoroughly disguised case examples from my practice, one of failure and one of success. While the apologizers in both of these cases happen to have been the husbands, in general, wives need to ask forgiveness no less than their husbands.

II. MUTTY AND LIEBA

For Mutty, the most important goal in life was to be respected and honored by others. And for Mutty,

Dr. Wikler, a psychotherapist and family counselor in private practice, lives in Brooklyn, NY. This article was adapted from his forthcoming book, *Ten Minutes a Day to a Better Marriage*, to be published by ArtScroll/Mesorah Publications.

the quickest and most direct route was to amass as much wealth as possible.

Although Mutty was making a comfortable living as an executive in a real estate management firm, he was not earning a salary close to what he hoped to be earning after seventeen years of marriage. As many of his friends and neighbors were purchasing or building new homes, Mutty felt pressure "to keep up with the Cohens," but could not even redecorate his modest home.

Mutty then withdrew all his family's savings to invest in "high tech" stocks which were soaring at the time. To increase his potential profits, he purchased the stocks "on margin," which meant that he was actually buying on credit. When the stock market crashed, Mutty's entire house of cards collapsed and Mutty was forced to declare personal bankruptcy. Mutty and Lieba's home and cars were seized and they moved into a small apartment.

Lieba was openly angry: "How could you have taken such a risk? Why didn't you tell me about this before we lost our home?"

"You were not interested," Mutty shot back defensively. "You never asked about our finances."

Fast forward four years. Mutty and Lieba are now living in a new neighborhood in a private, but simple home. Mutty is working as the Chief Financial Officer of a junior college and reestablished their credit rating. Mutty would like to cash in his life insurance to invest in real estate, but needs Lieba's approval to cancel the insurance policy.

"Do you think I'm crazy?" Lieba explodes. "I'm not ready to lose our assets again on another get-rich-quick scheme!"

"But, Lieba, this is different. I am not hiding anything from you. The real estate market is booming now. Trust me."

"How can I trust you? You kept me completely in the dark last time."

"I was different four years ago. Can't you forgive me?"

"You want me to forgive you? In the past four years, you have never once apologized."

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“O.K., Lieba, you’re right. I should apologize for what happened. I’m sorry I got into that mess. But I was under a lot of pressure at the time. Could you please forgive me now and let me cash in the insurance? This is a great opportunity now for both of us.”

Even though Mutty was brought to tears by her refusal, Lieba remained steadfast.

III. WHAT WENT WRONG?

Why was Lieba so unforgiving? Where did Mutty go wrong? And was there another way Mutty could have apologized, which might have been more effective?

Mutty did not understand that the purpose of any apology is to heal the wound inflicted by the perpetrator on the victim. The victim is emotionally hurt, and is frightened that (s)he may be hurt again. The apology, therefore, is supposed to provide the victim with reassurance that the same injury will not be repeated.

Mutty viewed an apology as a means to escape punishment or other negative consequences of his misdeeds, and as a tactic to get Lieba to agree to release his life insurance policy for him to invest. Failing to understand the purpose of an apology, he delivered his in a most ineffective manner.

Many people share Mutty’s misunderstanding of asking for forgiveness, and their apologies are as ineffective as Mutty’s was.

For an apology to be effective, the following guidelines should be followed:

1. Do Not End Any Apology With “But...”

If you follow your apology with a long list of excuses, rationalizations or justifications – valid as they may be – you will severely water down its effectiveness.

Mutty included a “but” in his apology, inflaming Lieba’s anger at him. It signaled that he was more interested in defending himself and escaping her wrath than he was in accepting responsibility for the consequences of his behavior.

2. Acknowledge Your Wrongdoing.

To be effective, your apology must include a statement of exactly what you are apologizing for. Saying only “I’m sorry” leaves it doubtful in your spouse’s mind as to what you are regretting. Are you sorry you got caught? Are you sorry your spouse is angry at you? Or are you sorry for what you did?

Usually, a hurtful episode includes multiple statements and/or actions. Not all of them were equally offensive to your spouse. You must, therefore, spell out exactly which statements and/or which actions you now regret.

Had Mutty apologized for using

poor judgment in taking such a huge risk, his apology would have been more effective. More importantly, however, Mutty should have included his deceiving Lieba, violating her trust in him, as well.

3. Acknowledge the Damage.

A complete apology should include a list of the damages that the victim suffered. It is not enough to say you were at fault for going through the red light, for example. You must also mention to the owner of the car you hit that you are responsible for bending his fender and cracking his headlight.

If you do not realize on your own, then by all means ask your spouse how you hurt him or her. If you already know, however, then definitely inform your spouse that you comprehend exactly how (s)he was inconvenienced, insulted or worse.

Mutty should have said, “I know I was responsible for our house and cars being repossessed. I caused you and the children to be embarrassed and forced out of our home. And I gave you good reason to be distrustful of me for a long time afterwards.”

4. Acknowledge Your Spouse’s Feelings.

The purpose of your apology is to convince your spouse that you fully understand the gravity of your error. If you have any idea how your spouse felt about what you did or said, then mention it. This will communicate your full appreciation of the consequences of your actions. The purpose of your apology is to convince your spouse that you fully comprehend the severity of your offense. Clear reference to the negative feelings your words and/or deeds triggered in your spouse will increase the effectiveness of your apology.

If you are not clear about how your spouse felt, then certainly ask. At least that way, you will demonstrate concern for his or her feelings.

Mutty could have told Lieba that he understands now how shocked she had been. He could have acknowledged how disappointed and angry she must have felt towards him. Finally, he could have

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indicated that he recognized how much the financial debacle must have made her feel alienated and distant from him.

5. Spell Out Your Resolution.

You are convinced that you will never repeat the same mistake again. But your spouse is not as certain about this as you are. To reassure him or her, disclose the steps you will take or have already taken to prevent a recurrence.

If you have made a personal promise to yourself, let your spouse know about it. If you have a plan that will prevent you from making the same mistake again, spell it out. If you have resolved to handle similar circumstances in a more constructive fashion in the future, then, by all means, let your spouse in on it.

Had Mutty decided that he would make full financial disclosures to Lieba in the future, or that he would never take high financial risks at all, sharing these commitments with Lieba would have gone a long way towards reassuring her that the previous catastrophe would not be repeated.

6. Ask For Forgiveness.

Only after you have completed steps 1-5 are you ready to say you are sorry and ask your spouse to pardon your wrongdoing. To seek absolution before you complete steps 1-5, makes it appear as if you are only seeking to avoid suffering any consequences. Your goal in apologizing should be to make restitution for your offense and to reassure your spouse that the misdeed will not be repeated.

For four years, Mutty never apologized to Lieba for his misconduct. He did not acknowledge his error or the damage he caused. When, after four years he did ask Lieba to forgive him, the reason was transparently clear. He wanted Lieba to give him permission to cash in his life insurance policy.

You might wonder whether it really mattered how Mutty worded his apology. After all, Lieba was so hurt by his deceit and high risk taking that no apology would have earned him a complete pardon. Nevertheless, it would have gone a long way toward healing the wound inflicted by his actions.

IV. LABEL AND BLIMA

Longstanding open wounds can be healed. The healing, however, is not an event, but a process which only begins with an effective apology. To enable the reader to fully appreciate the dynamics of this healing process, I present another in-depth case example:

Before Label and Blima got married, they discussed every detail of their *chassuna*. Label, for example, wanted his Rabbi, who would officiate as *mesader kiddushin*, to address the couple under the *chupa*, as was the *minhag* in his family. Blima was not too thrilled about this, for her relatives and friends are not accustomed to this practice. As a concession to Label, however, she consented.

The Rabbi enthusiastically accepted

Label's invitation, adding that he would like to speak, briefly, during the *seuda* (meal) as well. Label took it as a matter of course that Blima would not object to a short *d'var Torah* at the dinner. He was mistaken.

"Speak twice? Is he serious?" Blima was incredulous. "People want to socialize at a *chassuna*, not listen to speeches. Once is pushing it. But twice is out of the question."

At Blima's insistence, Label agreed to go back to his Rabbi and ask if the dinner speech could be eliminated in deference to Blima.

"No speech at the *seuda*?" The Rabbi took umbrage. "It is our *minhag* to speak at the *seuda*. This is not a matter of *kavod*. It is a matter of principle."

Blima, however, would not give in. As the special day approached, Label

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assumed it would all work out. He was wrong again. The Rabbi sent messages to Blima that she would be pleasantly surprised with the brevity and warmth of his dinner speech. In the end, Blima relented. The Rabbi's *d'var Torah* was brief and extremely well received, but Blima was left with a huge reservoir of resentment. She felt that Label did not live up to his commitment.

After the *chassuna*, Label tried to minimize the incident. "We're married now. That's the main thing. Everyone had a wonderful time at our wedding."

This only poured salt on Blima's wound. "So what if everyone had a wonderful time?" Blima shot back. "Not only did you disregard my feelings, you also

renege on an agreement we had made."

Label decided to avoid the issue entirely. In time, he reasoned, Blima would let go of her resentment and forget about the entire episode. And indeed, she would have done well to take into account Label's loyalty to his Rabbi, and simply forget about the incident. But that did not happen.

Over time, whenever Label would mention the name of his Rabbi, Blima expressed a disparaging remark. Fourteen months after they were married, Label felt he could no longer tolerate Blima's sniping comments whenever his Rabbi came up in conversation. Although he had pleaded with Blima to forgive him, he never succeeded in receiving a full pardon from her.

If he ever hoped to put this issue behind them, I advised Label, he would have to offer an apology that covered all of the bases outlined above. Label was convinced that even a full apology would be useless. Once again, he was wrong.

Label brought up the subject on his own: "Blima, I want to apologize to you for something."

"What did you do now?"

"It isn't something recent. It took place fourteen months ago."

"What are you talking about?"

"Our *chassuna* and the fact that the Rabbi spoke at the *seuda*. I'm sorry it

disturbed you so much. And I'm sorry it put such a damper on our wedding for you. I know you had told me that you were opposed to any speeches at weddings and you felt embarrassed to have two. And I know that I had promised you that I would speak to the Rabbi about it before the *chassuna*. I did try to dissuade him from speaking at the dinner, but I was not successful. I realize now that you were hurt by that. And you felt betrayed by me. I really am very sorry. I'm asking you not only to forgive me, but also to tell me what I can do now that will demonstrate to you that I do realize how much I hurt you and that I am determined not to hurt you again."

"For one thing," Blima replied after catching her breath, "you have just proven to me how sincerely sorry you are. I believe your remorse is genuine. You don't need to do anything to prove it. And secondly, ... I accept your apology."

During the past year, to Label's surprise, Blima has finally let go of her anger towards him and even dropped her resentment towards his Rabbi, demonstrating that wounds that festered for fourteen months can be healed if apologies are complete, sincere and non-defensive.

Yes, Blima had been holding on too long to her grudge and she certainly could have made life easier for Label by accepting one of his earlier apologies. But sometimes you need to apologize even when your spouse is making it difficult for you.

As you approach the *Yom Hadin* this year, remember that to be absolved for the sin of hurting others, you must ask whomever you hurt for forgiveness. You must apologize.

A good place to start that *teshuva* process is at home with your spouse. Following the guidelines above can increase the chances that any apology you make will achieve your goal of appeasing your spouse and healing whatever wounds you may have inflicted. ■

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A Page From the Book of His Life

One Year Since His Passing



Rabbi Nachman Bulman was a man of vast knowledge and extraordinary passion, possessing a clear vision of truth, and a fierce dedication to it. These and other qualities of Reb Nachman, founding editor of *The Jewish Observer*, were highlighted in several articles featured in the October '02 issue of *JO*. On the occasion of his first yahrtzeit, we present several personal anecdotes by **Rabbi Yechiel Perr**, Rosh Yeshiva of Yeshivas Derech Ayson (of Far Rockaway), who had enjoyed an especially close relationship with Rabbi Bulman. This is excerpted from a more extensive appreciation delivered last year.

I often traveled by car with Rabbi Bulman, and was amazed at how he knew the roads of New York City, keenly aware of every shortcut. We'd be stuck in a traffic jam with several thousand other cars on a highway leading to the Midtown Tunnel. He would get off at the next exit and zoom down a side road while the others remained behind, sitting there on the highway. His command of the bypasses matched that of the man in a traffic helicopter. After marveling over this skill for years, I finally figured out how he knew all these shortcuts. He was invariably late for his appointments. And since he was always late, he had to compensate with the shortcuts.

Why was he always late? Had I been asked to give him a title, I would have described him as "Rav Nachman Bul-

man: The Man Who Couldn't Say No."

At that time (close to 40 years ago), Far Rockaway was blessed with a large population of young people searching for answers. Yeshiva She'ar Yashuv, for example, was a center for *ba'alei teshuva*. If someone was plagued with a question at 2 a.m., he would not hesitate to call up Rabbi Bulman for guidance. He wanted to come over and talk with him, and Rabbi Bulman would never say no.

We would be on our way out of his house to attend a meeting, and someone with a nagging problem would call him on the telephone. He would immediately pick up the phone. *He could not go to a meeting if someone had a problem.* He could not say no.

His agenda was crowded, because every need that people around him had become *his* need, and he could not say

no. He was doing so many things at once, and he refused to focus exclusively on one item. Therefore, as a result, he was usually running late.

He did not change when he moved to Israel, in 1975. I met him right after he had returned here, on one of his visits to New York. He was absolutely worn out, drained. I asked him, "Why are you so tired?"

He replied, "I was up the night before."

I asked, "Didn't you go to bed before a trip like this?!"

"You don't know what happened," he sighed, and he told me what had taken place in the previous twenty-four hours.

A young woman from Boston had gone to Paris to study art. There, in Paris, she met a non-Jewish artist. They became close, and he proposed to her. She called her parents in Boston and told them, "I met this fine fellow, and we're thinking of getting married."

They replied, "Wonderful."

"Do you object to the fact that he's not Jewish?"

"No, we don't," they responded. "Why should we object?"

"I know that in both of your families, the two of you are the only ones who married Jewish. Everyone else married non-Jews. I thought that maybe because you married each other, you'd mind if I'd marry out."

Her parents hastened to ensure her that "it happens to be a coincidence that we married Jewish, and we're not mind-

ful of the issue. You can marry whoever you want as long as you love the person. If he's a good person, what difference does it make?"

She had her parents' approval to do something that she had expected would inspire resistance. Apparently, the *Hashgacha* responded to her sincere *ehrliche* question – *Should she marry a non-Jew?* – which opened the door for further Torah explorations. From that little bit of *Yiddishkeit* came yet another thought: "Before I get married, before I make this decision for life, I really should go to Israel. I've never been there." This thought entered her mind, and it did not let go. So she told her fiancé, "I don't want to decide just yet. I feel that I should go to Israel first."

Just as she had thought that she should ask her parents before taking a precipitous step, she now decided that she should go to Israel and find out what other Jews are like. Off she went to Israel, with no clear idea of what she was going to do there. She arrived in Lod in the afternoon, and while standing in line for

immigration, she got into a conversation with someone standing next to her. She confessed, "I know it's a strange thing. But I came here, and I can't say exactly why. I just felt I had to come. I'm not certain as to what I should do next."

The person alongside her said, "You know what you should do? You should go see a person in Jerusalem. Bulman is his name, Rabbi Nachman Bulman. Go see him as soon as you can."

When they completed passport control, she got the telephone number from the party in line with her, and called him from the airport: "Rabbi Bulman, I came to Israel, and I was told I have to see you."

He said, "I'm sorry, but I'm leaving for America tomorrow."

She pleaded, "Rabbi Bulman, please! I came to Israel, I guess, to see you. Otherwise, I don't know why I came. Please, Rabbi Bulman, don't say no."

So, characteristically, he said, "OK, come over."

He gave her instructions as to how to reach him, and she arrived on his

doorstep that evening. She spent several hours in discussion with him. Before he left for the U.S., she was already registered in a seminary for *ba'alos teshuva*.

That's what came from his inability to say "no." ■

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The Day the Lights Went Out

The lights went out at 4:11 p.m. on Thursday, August 14, and fifty million people sweated, stumbled in the dark, got stranded in high-rise buildings and subway trains, on top of ferris wheels and on unlit streets far away from home. Discomfort, uncertainty, pain, enormous financial loss, and deep-seated fear played against one another, as the dynamo of America's Northeast jolted to a stop.

We are told that while a storm in the Rockies, a revolt in Liberia, or a massacre in Jakarta may sound remote, each event is in truth a message, and the message is meant for us. How much more immediate must the message be when it is conveyed through an overwhelming experience that shook up major population areas in the Western world, home to millions of Jews. There may be people who can divine the lessons to be gleaned from Blackout of 2003. Until they — or he or she — share them with us, we offer several of our own.

I. AS REB YAAKOV SAW IT

When Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky זצ"ל arrived in America, he had heard that "the skyscrapers block out the heavens." He had assumed that this expression was a description of the city landscape that affords little exposure to nature. Later, he appreciated it as a metaphor for the way in which all technology, as well as human achievements, form a barrier

between man and nature, making one insensitive to the Creator's constant presence and involvement in our lives. This hit home when he was engaged in a lengthy conversation with an acquaintance in the man's office. Suddenly his host pulled out his watch and commented, "We had better daven Mincha. It's getting late."

In contrast to the European shtetl where Reb Yaakov was ever aware of the afternoon's lengthening shadows and the approach of twilight, in this brightly-lit Manhattan office, he was unaware of the hour for Mincha slipping away. It could have been night, and he would have been oblivious to the dark outside.

In simpler times, our comfort, well-being and focus of activity were directly tied to the change of the seasons — especially in agrarian societies. No less the shifts in temperature and illumination around the clock. Exposure to the wonders, beauty and bounty of nature, as well as the pain, suffering and desolation experienced from being deprived of nature's gifts, served to make us all the more aware of our dependence on "Melech ha'alam, yotzer ohr uvorei choshech oseh shalom uvoreh es hakol — King of the universe, Who forms light and creates darkness, makes peace and creates all" — as we say in our daily morning prayer. And it inspires our gratitude to "Melech... hazon es ha'alam kulo betuvo — the King... who nourishes the entire world in His goodness" — the words with which we begin our Grace After Meals.

Living in a natural world makes the Creator and His caring for our every need that much more imminent.

A far cry from our contemporary world, where — in our high-tech, world-sweeping sense of control of events and occurrences — we have a sense of being impervious to the vagaries of nature. A crop failure in the peach orchards of Georgia? No problem. Peaches can be imported from New Zealand — even in February, if you wish. Extremes of temperature effect us only in our passage from our climate-controlled homes into similarly controlled vehicles, and then again, from car/train/bus to the office. Distances between people and countries disappear through instant communication. Medical needs from pesky illnesses to devastating plagues — some are neutralized and quickly cured; others must still wait for the ever-growing reach of scientific research and expertise. No, not yet controlled, but not out of reach.

Suddenly, at 4:11 Thursday, a 48th floor in a Manhattan tower offers not a commanding view, but a humbling challenge. The oppressive heat of the city's streets is unavoidable, and the miles between workplace and home were to be counted shuffling one stride at a time. Paying tribute to "Melech ha'alam hameichin mitzadei gaver — King of the universe who prepares [and makes firm] man's footsteps" — part of the morning's blessings — is experienced not

just from the bedroom to the kitchen to the garage, but again and again and again, through agonizing repetition, from appreciation to prayer. And the need for relief from the hot, unforgiving, dehydrating sun with a tongue-and-throat-wetting, thirst-quenching glass of water... Ah, "*Shehakol nihiyeh bid'varo* — all comes into existence through His word." Will it ever again just be a mumbled, verbal crossing of the barrier between parched mouth and welcome drink? Hopefully not.

Yes, from anticipated need, through articulated blessing, to bonding with the Creator. The illusion of man in control of his circumstances and destiny is only that — an illusion. Perhaps — just perhaps — in the days ahead, one will reinforce the deep sense of total dependency and intimate closeness with G-d through daily repetition: making blessings, and articulating expressions of hope and gratitude.

Puny, vulnerable man has the capacity to connect with the ultimate Source of Energy.

II. WE ARE ALL CONNECTED

The lights went out in America's Northeast — on a recent Thursday. Was it terrorist violence? A tree that fell over power cables in Ohio? A weak link in the power grid of the mas-

sive Northeast? Whichever, one seemingly random jolt threw fifty million people into darkness and heat, with a legacy of discomfort, pain, and disorientation, and a tremendous blow to the economy.

Little things can make a big difference — not only through the unleashing of natural and technological forces, but in the realms of the spirit as well. And they can work for the positive, too, through the seemingly insignificant but truly potent acts and words of every individual.

An empty moment during carpool from home in Baltimore to the office in the Belt. A passenger mutters to his companion how ridiculously slow the baal tefilla was in shul that morning. "Just because it's Rosh Chodesh and he's up to Hallel, does that make him Yossele Rosenblatt?"

A chance remark in an isolated setting. Yet Chazal say that, as a result, Galus for Jews worldwide has just become a lot longer and more painful.

The bell rings. Another meshulach at the door — No. Another two meshulachim. Those poor fellows, shlepping through the hot deserted city, so far from home, thinks the man of the house. "Come in and sit down, and have a drink. Then tell me what I can do for you."

An act of *chesed* that reverberates around the globe, generating hope and relief for far more than two dusty, tired Jews.

Seemingly small, isolated acts and insignificant words reach the Heavens and reverberate around the globe, raining down blessings or destruction in ways we cannot fathom.

Yes, they can make the world a much better place:

A man alone, sitting at his desk, poring over a difficult *Tosafos*; a *minyán* of Jews praying in earnest, listening carefully to each word of the *Chazoras HaShatz*; a young woman in a hurry, stopping to help a wandering old lady gain her bearings; an off-duty teacher staying in during lunch break to give guidance, friendship and comfort to a discouraged tenth grader who is being scorned — or worse, ignored — by her friends; a desperate father entrusting his ailing child to a team of surgeons, and then opening his *Tehillim* to pour out his heart and his tears to the Chief of all surgeons, "*Rofei cholei amo Yisroel* — Who heals the sick of His people Israel." The cures, the blessings, the bounty come as a result.

And careless gestures and remarks can be destructive, beyond reckoning. For example, in his Introduction to the *Sefer Chofetz Chaim*, the Chofetz Chaim cites a quotation from the *Zohar*, "A spirit rises from those who speak *lashon hara*. When they provoke others with their speech... an evil, impure cloud is aroused above, called '*Sich'sucheh*.' It hovers over the tale-bearers... and causes death, sword, and violence in the world." One might have dismissed this as poetic abstraction, mystical intimations... until a nuclear meltdown in Chernobyl caused death, and violent illness in far-flung corners of the earth with the destructive radioactivity that rained down in Brussels, Kiev and points east.

We may tend to gloss over the dynamic reach of potential spiritual forces. We then need to be reminded through physical, material or technological occurrences that can serve as compelling metaphors for the very real world of spiritual cause and effect... The lamps flicker and go out, and we begin to see the light.

We have much to learn.

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