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## TAKING LEAVE OF GAZA

Rabbi Yonoson Rosenblum  
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ALSO: TRIBUTES TO RABBI SHLOMO WOLBE ז"ל, THE ALEI SHUR  
REMEMBERING ZAHAVA BRAUNSTEIN, צ"ה

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# THE Jewish OBSERVER

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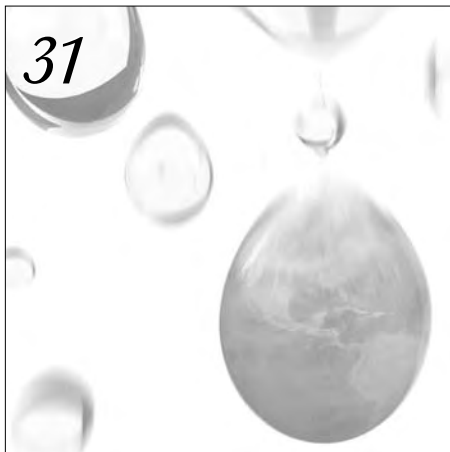
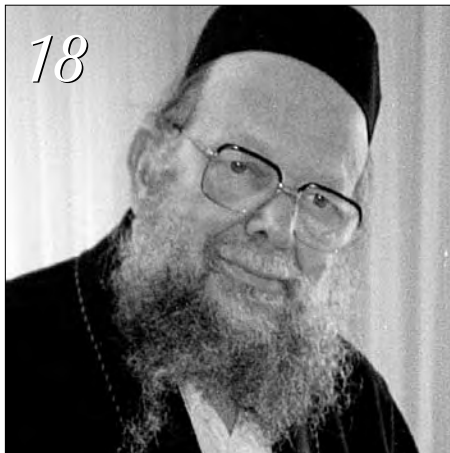
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YONOSON ROSENBLUM



# Taking Leave of Gaza

## THE TRAUMA OF WITHDRAWAL

### CHAREIDIM AND THE GAZA WITHDRAWAL

The chareidi community in *Eretz Yisroel* has assumed the role of onlookers to the unfolding drama surrounding the Gaza withdrawal. Though United Torah Judaism has been part of the governing coalition in recent months, the party's participation was by no means crucial to the process. Once he brought Labor into his coalition, a determined Prime Minister Sharon had numerous options to secure Knesset approval for the Gaza withdrawal without UTJ's presence in the government.

United Torah Judaism's decision not to join the anti-disengagement forces reflects the strong preference of the Torah leadership to avoid casting the decisive vote on matters of national security, and especially not against the will of the majority of Israeli citizens.

The great Torah leaders of *Eretz Yisroel* have been almost completely

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silent on the Gaza withdrawal. The most that can be said with confidence about their views is that they do not view the withdrawal from Gaza, or other parts of *Eretz Yisroel*, to be halachically forbidden. If they did, UTJ could never have joined the government. In addition, the Torah leaders do not feel that the security/diplomatic calculus is so clear-cut as to render the withdrawal halachically forbidden on grounds of *pikuach nefesh*.

### THE CHAREIDIM: BY NO MEANS INDIFFERENT

Though the chareidi community has played only a minor role in the political process, it would be wrong to describe the community as indifferent to what is taking place in Gaza. Most of the chareidi press has been replete with coverage of the disengagement, including photo features about the plight of those about to be evicted from their homes and news items raising questions about the security threats posed by the withdrawal from Gaza. In my own Har Nof neighborhood, orange ribbons (symbol of the anti-disengagement forces) proliferate, and not just on

cars and apartments belonging to those who identify with the national religious world.

Rarely in history has a democratic government willfully inflicted such deep harm on a certain segment of the population as that befalling the Jewish residents of the Gaza Strip. The vast majority of residents of the tight-knit Gaza communities will not be able to relocate together. Neighbors and extended families, some of whom have lived together for three decades, will be separated.

It is almost impossible to imagine that the lush, verdant Gaza communities were wrested from sand dunes since 1967. It is even harder to imagine them being rebuilt elsewhere.

Those residing in 400-square-meter homes, surrounded by yards and gardens, will find themselves living in trailer homes one-quarter that size after the withdrawal, if they are lucky enough to have a temporary home at all. Meanwhile, their possessions will be stored in a maximum of two containers on Negev IDF bases where the heat inside the containers will rise to nearly 200 degrees Fahrenheit.

The Gaza growers, who presently produce 12% of Israel's agricultural output, will lose two growing seasons,

and many of the farmers say that they no longer have the strength to rebuild what they did twenty or thirty years ago. Equally troubling to the chareidi community is the specter of 26 shuls and yeshivos slated for destruction.

A recent statement of Agudath Israel of America, published after consultation with its *Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah*, calls on all Jews "to pause and share in the pain of our Jewish brethren in Gaza." The statement goes on to describe the vast majority of Gaza settlers as "idealistic, dedicated Jews, [who] are being forced by circumstances entirely beyond their control to give up their homes, their yeshivos, their shuls and their cemeteries, to be relocated abruptly to new surroundings." That statement pretty much sums up the feelings of most of the Israeli chareidi community as well.

#### NOT UNIVERSALLY NEUTRAL

At the same time, the Agudah statement maintains a studied neutrality as to whether the "imminent withdrawal" is "politically or militarily correct." Chareidim – even those who entertain grave doubts about the wisdom of the Gaza withdrawal on security grounds – have been notably absent from demonstration against the withdrawal. (They were better represented at the massive prayer gathering at the *Kosel* just before Tisha B'Av.)

For all their sympathy with those being removed from their homes in Gaza, most chareidim are still deeply ambivalent about the settlement enterprise. From the beginning, Rav Elazar Menachem Man Shach, זצ"ל, opposed settlements, especially in areas heavily populated with Arabs, as only likely to arouse the animosity of the nations.

That attitude was derided by the national religious world as reflective of a *galus* mentality. And indeed it is. For unlike the national religious world, the Torah leadership never doubted that even in the State of Israel Jews

Upon consultation with its rabbinic leadership, Agudath Israel of America has issued the following statement:

#### A CALL TO SHARE THE PAIN OF ACHEINU BAIS YISROEL

These are terribly trying times for *Klal Yisroel* in *Eretz Yisroel*. And it behooves us all, no matter our opinions on the wisdom of the imminent Israeli withdrawal from parts of our Holy Land, to pause and share in the pain and anguish of our Jewish brethren in Gaza.

Those residents are, overwhelmingly, idealistic, dedicated Jews. They are being forced by circumstances entirely beyond their control to give up their homes, their yeshivos, their shuls and their cemeteries, to be relocated abruptly to new surroundings. Whether or not the decision necessitating that relocation is politically or militarily correct, its effects are, unarguably, a deep personal tragedy for many thousands.

And so, during these days of Jewish mourning over the destruction of the *Batei Mikdash*, it is only proper that we include in our hearts and in our tefillos all those precious Jewish souls who are scheduled to be uprooted from the land to which they have been attached for many years. May *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* see fit to return His

remain in *galus*, and that the world is still a very dangerous place, filled with many sworn enemies. The great Torah leaders always feared that the continual emphasis of the national religious world on Jewish military strength, and the glorification of military service as the highest calling, could veer dangerously close to an attitude of *kochi ve'otzem yadi*.

The swagger of settlers, with a gun inevitably attached to their belts, has always been faintly unnerving to those for whom the term *galus* Jew is no insult. Admittedly, no one would travel the roads of Judea and Samaria without a gun at hand. But to the chareidim, the insistence on exposing oneself, not to mention one's wife and children, to mortal danger on a daily basis, has always seemed vaguely fanatical.

The recent killing of four Israeli Arabs by a nineteen-year-old AWOL soldier, whose mother had repeatedly warned the army that he was armed and dangerous, and the killing of another four Palestinian workers by a 38-year-old father of two from the West Bank settlement of Shvut Rachel, on the first day of the Gaza evacuation, will only heighten the wariness of the chareidi world.

It would be grossly unfair to tar the entire national religious world with their actions. Those actions are anathema to nearly the entire national religious community, and only suc-

ceeded in robbing the community of all remaining shreds of public sympathy.

But neither can the national religious community completely wash its hands of them. Shehzak Tanweer, one of the July 7 suicide bombers in London, may have been until recently a cricket-playing young Englishman. But he blew himself up as an Islamic fanatic. Similarly, the young soldier may have been raised in a secular family in Petach Tikvah, before recently connecting to a Kach group in Tapuach through the Internet. But he killed with a yarmulke on his head. And the Shvut Rachel resident was a long-time member of the community, with no known extreme political views. Their actions will provide chareidi Jews with one more reason to steer a wide berth around a strain of thought that they have always rejected.

#### THE SCHISM WITHIN

Ever since Prime Minister Ariel Sharon unveiled his proposal for unilateral Israeli withdrawal from Gaza, the plan has served to both reveal a deep schism in Israeli society between the secular and national religious communities and to deepen that schism. The general public has been infuriated by the invocation of Holocaust imagery – yellow stars, prison camp uniforms, comparisons of soldiers involved in the

evacuation to Hitler's S.S. – by opponents of disengagement.

Those opposed to disengagement are regularly portrayed as dangerous religious fanatics answerable only to the word of G-d, as interpreted by them, who pose a mortal threat to Israeli democracy. The civil disobedience campaign advocated by many opponents is widely perceived as a denial of the sovereignty of Israel and a denial of legitimacy of Israeli democracy.

Secular Israelis appear shocked to discover that the ultimate loyalty of religious Jews is to the Divine commandments. And they have been free with their imprecations against the "messianic rabbis" and their followers. As long as that messianism was confined to proclaiming the State of Israel to be "the first flowering of the Redemption" and imbuing it with the status of *Malchus Beis David*, secular Israel had no problems. But now that the state and the settlers and their rabbis are in conflict, all has changed.

Even the pretrial imprisonment of three young teenage girls for more than a month for relatively minor offenses failed to raise an outcry in the secular world. The girls' incarceration became in the eyes of many secular Israelis only further proof of the fanaticism of their parents, who refused to ensure that their

children would not engage in further illegal demonstrations.

Calls upon religious soldiers to refuse orders to participate in the uprooting of the Jewish settlements have raised grave suspicions about the loyalty of national religious soldiers both within the Israel Defense Forces and among the general public. Ideologically homogenous units of *hesder* yeshiva students are being reevaluated. Yet, any changes in the *hesder* system would make it difficult for many national religious youths to serve in the IDF, in which they constitute a very high proportion of the junior officer corps today.

### A SENSE OF BETRAYAL

For its part, the national religious community views the secular community as having betrayed it, and of having lost its attachment to the Land, which once bound secular and religious Zionists. The secular world, in the eyes of the national religious, has shown itself to be dead to all Jewish history and experience. In a *Ha'aretz* interview, Rabbi Yaakov Meidan, one of the leading figures in the national religious world, charged the secular elites, with whom the national religious world forged "an alliance based on love for this land [and] the desire for revival of the State," with having "plunged a

knife in our back."

"For the secular elites, breaking religious Zionism is the goal," said Rabbi Meidan.

The uprooting, when it came, brought with it the end to a certain naivete about the support of "the nation" that religious Zionism had always claimed for itself, and the discovery that it was not just a matter of a few narrow secular elites thwarting the will of the people. Ari Shavit, a secular journalist who calls the Gaza settlement effort "pointless" but is filled with sympathy and admiration for the settlers, captures their bewilderment well. The Gaza settlers, he writes, "built a model Zionism in the sand... a Zionism that is beyond time and place, which protects itself with reckless abandon and buries its dead with deep devotion." The settlers maintained "on the dunes of Gaza beach a form of lost Israeli soul," only to discover that "Israel itself is already foreign [to that soul]. Israel no longer wants it."

The withdrawal has occasioned a good deal of soul-searching within the national religious world. On the one hand, criticism is heard of exclusive focus since 1967 on settlement, and the cutting off from the mainstream of Israeli society. On the other hand, there are questions being raised about the intense identification with the state and army as ultimate religious values, especially as the army is now viewed as an "army of uprooting." Again Shavit: "The soil-bound Israelis of Gush Katif could not believe that the digital Israelis of Tel Aviv... would send against them the army in which they believed so much; would send into their homes the people in uniform whom they so loved...."

### A NEW DIVIDING LINE

If, formerly, many in the national religious world saw the fundamental dividing line in Israeli society as between those who serve in the army and those who do not, today many see the dividing line as between those who

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are committed to Torah and mitzvos and those who are not. As Sarah Bedein, a resident of the Jerusalem suburb of Efrat, acknowledged, the bridge that the national religious world sought to build to the broader society appears to have run only one way. The national religious drew close to the secular culture – humming its tunes, following its TV shows and sports teams – but the latter drew no closer to an authentically Jewish culture.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Bedein admitted, the national religious never joined forces with the chareidi community on its great issues – *chillul Shabbos*, autopsies, protection of Jewish graves – preferring the “ways of peace” with the secular community. With the abandonment of those ways of peace over the Gaza withdrawal, wrote Mrs. Bedein, the question must now be faced: “Could it be that in our community Greater Israel takes precedence over *kavod HaTorah*?”

That such questions are now being asked suggests potential for a further drawing close of elements of the national religious world and the chareidi world, as a result of the trauma inflicted upon the former. Rabbi Meidan held out such a hope in his *Ha'aretz* interview when he termed the national religious world's decision to forge an alliance with secular elites at the expense of “our more natural alliance with the chareidi public” a historical mistake.

## WHITHER ISRAEL?

Of course, it would be wrong to view the debate over the Gaza withdrawal as only one between those who identify themselves primarily as Jews and those who identify as Israelis. There is a parallel debate about the short and long-range security implications of the withdrawal that does not break down along secular and religious lines. The recently retired chief of staff, Moshe “Boogie” Yaalon, for instance, predicted that the withdrawal will only lead to a major increase in ter-

rorist attacks. And Uzi Dayan, a former deputy chief of staff, criticized the decision to abandon the northern Gazan settlements and thereby put Ashkelon's oil refineries and port within easy range of Palestinian missiles. Neither can be suspected of deep religious sentiment.

Opponents of withdrawal on purely security grounds, like Daniel Pipes, can easily construct a nightmare scenario for the future. Every poll of the Palestinians shows that they overwhelmingly view the withdrawal as a victory for the strategy of terror

– a message that Hamas is drilling home at every opportunity. Both the Palestinian Authority and Hamas are preparing mass demonstrations. Their chant is: Gaza today, tomorrow the West Bank, and on to Jerusalem.

So the Palestinians have been emboldened. At the same time, their operational capacities will increase greatly. Israel has agreed to the reopening of Gaza airport and the building of a seaport. In addition, it appears almost certain that responsibility for preventing arms smuggling from Egypt

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### THE WEDDING

- For typical families, only 400 invited guests may be seated at the *chasuna seuda*. (The Guidelines make provision for exceptional circumstances - see full text.)
- The *kabbolas panim* smorgasbord should be limited to basic cakes, fruit platters, a modest buffet, and the caterer's standard chicken or meat hot dishes.

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

- No Viennese table and no bar.

### THE MUSIC

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

### FLOWERS & CHUPA DECOR

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via the Philadelphi Corridor, which was porous enough even under Israeli control, will be handed over to Egypt. In short, the types of advanced armaments that the Palestinians once had to smuggle in on the Karine A will now

finding itself in the same position as South Africa under apartheid – a pariah state faced with a European Union economic boycott. Hillel Halkin states the case for this viewpoint concisely. What, he asks, should Israel do with the two

Gush Katif and later from Ofra or Beit El, but they cannot withdraw from the world in which they live. . . . There will be no end to Israel's vigilant existence. With or without diplomatic progress, the country will live by its wits and by its nerves."

Not surprisingly, Peretz does not conclude by urging readers of *The New Republic* to turn to *Hashem* in prayer. But, as we contemplate the dangers surrounding the nearly five million Jewish citizens of Israel on all sides, we must recognize that just like our ancestors at the *Yam*, we have nowhere to turn other than towards our Father in Heaven.

And we should contemplate as well what we can do both as individuals and collectively to make ourselves more worthy of the Land. At the beginning of the Oslo process, one of the great *ba'alei hashkafa* of *Eretz Yisroel* said, "The problem is not that we are giving away the Land, but rather that *Hashem* is taking it."

That is even clearer today. Often times, Divine Providence manifests itself most clearly in the way that *Hashem* directs the hearts of leaders: "Like streams of water is the heart of a king in the hand of *Hashem*, wherever He wished, so He directs it" (*Mishlei* 21,1).

If today we witness the father of the Gaza settlement movement, a man who less than two years ago declared the Gaza settlement of Netzarim to be an eternal part of Israel, now leading the retreat from that same Netzarim, we can assume that we are being judged and found wanting.

The words of Rabbi Shamshon Raphael Hirsch haunt us. He writes: "From time to time in the course of the centuries, G-d allowed His people to touch the Land again. He put them to the test to see whether the miracle of their existence through centuries of exile had at last taught them to utterly despise the gods of the earth and had eradicated their stiff-necked refusal to acknowledge the Divine word."

One suspects that we are facing the same test today. ☐

**THE WORDS OF RABBI SHAMSHON RAPHAEL HIRSCH HAUNT US. HE WRITES: "FROM TIME TO TIME IN THE COURSE OF THE CENTURIES, G-D ALLOWED HIS PEOPLE TO TOUCH THE LAND AGAIN. HE PUT THEM TO THE TEST TO SEE WHETHER THE MIRACLE OF THEIR EXISTENCE THROUGH CENTURIES OF EXILE HAD AT LAST TAUGHT THEM TO UTTERLY DESPISE THE GODS OF THE EARTH AND HAD ERADICATED THEIR STIFF-NECKED REFUSAL TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE DIVINE WORD."**

enter freely. And given Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice's insistence on "connectivity" between Gaza and the West Bank, those arms will sooner or later wend their way to the latter as well. In the process, Israel's densely populated coastal region will come more and more into range of Palestinian missiles.

Here's the prediction of *New Republic* publisher Martin Peretz: "The morning after the Israeli pullout from Gaza, the terrorism against Israel will intensify. . . . Palestinian well-wishers in the world will soon embark on the financing and construction of a modern port and the reconstruction of a modern airport. That's where the trouble really starts. It is the beginning of a real weapons industry, weapons that will not be kept in storage."

And Peretz is a supporter of withdrawal.

**TO EACH HIS OWN NIGHTMARE**

**T**he nightmare of opponents of withdrawal is both plausible and frightening. But proponents of withdrawal have their own nightmare scenario, no less plausible and no less frightening. That nightmare is of Israel

million Arabs presently under its control: (1) expel them and face universal condemnation; (2) retain control, while granting them no political rights, and come to be viewed in the eyes of the vast majority of the world as an apartheid state; or (3) grant them political rights and sign the death warrant on Israel as a majority Jewish state?

The only alternative to each of these untenable scenarios, argues Halkin, is to separate ourselves from them entirely on the best possible terms. Halkin and other security-minded supporters of the withdrawal place their faith in the belief that Prime Minister Sharon has worked out a deal with President Bush, and that the United States, at least as long as Bush is president, will countenance a very forceful Israeli response to Palestinian terror after withdrawal. As Sharon explained to *Yediot Acharonot* on the eve of withdrawal: "I've reached a deal with the Americans. I prefer a deal with the Americans to a deal with the Arabs."

The bottom line is that Israel continues to face major dangers whichever course it pursues. Peretz puts it succinctly. After predicting that Israel will soon be back in Gaza, he continues, "[Israelis] will be doomed to live dangerously. They can withdraw from

An era of *Mussar* dating back to pre-War Europe came to an end with the passing of the *Mashgiach* Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe ז"ל in *Yerushalayim* this past 17 Nissan (April 26). In the pages that follow, we are presenting several articles that recount his impact on our generation from the perspectives of a *talmid*, a dedicated student of his classic work, *Alei Shur*, and a member of his family.

RABBI YEHUDA MENDELSON



## The Inner Dimension

“Do not eulogize me in any fashion or in any place! Know that words of eulogy will cause me to have a harsher judgment in the True World!” (from his ethical will)

The above words limit us in our attempt to describe something of the essence of *Moreinu Hamashgiach*, Rabbi Shlomo Wolbe ז"ל. Indeed, a true student of the *Mashgiach* ז"ל would intuitively agree that there is little point in talking about him. Rather, he would ask himself: “What have I learned from him?” Therefore, it would be preferable to reflect on his unique life and his influence on our generation through his own words – all of which emanated

RABBI MENDELSON SERVES AS THE MENAHEL OF THE C.M. LEHMANN BEIS HAMUSSAR IN YERUSHALAYIM, AS WELL AS MENAHEL RUCHANI OF YEHIVAS MISHKENOS YEDIDYA (YESHIVAS GIVAT SHAUL), BOTH FOUNDED BY RABBI S. WOLBE.

from his personal *avodas Hashem*.

Once, when speaking to a group of former *talmidim*, he asked them: “What, in essence, did you learn in yeshiva?” After hearing their thoughts, he sealed the debate: “What we learned is that *ruchniyus* (spirituality) is a reality – indeed, the essential reality!”

The mathematicians tell us that even though our physical world consists of only three dimensions, it is possible to construct multi-dimensional worlds with different laws of nature which are beyond our intuitive grasp. Similarly, through the *Mashgiach*, we came to recognize and actualize an unknown dimension: our own *penimiyus* – the inner existence of man, which naturally senses and lives in the inner spiritual world of *Hakadosh Baruch Hu*.

“Man discovers within himself new depths and heights of which

he was unaware and which now become his place of spiritual residence. He now sees the depths of Torah, of our wondrous world, and wishes to live a deep and elevated life. He has become a different man, revealing a new inner dimension, and his Torah and *penimiyus* merge within this dimension.” (*Alei Shur*, preface)

“One is helped from Above to move forward on the path he has chosen.” It should be noted that the *Mashgiach* ז"ל merited many acts of Divine Providence in all of the stages of his life, and while we cannot give details, it is clear that his sincere dedication and desire to uncover the inner world of Torah and *penimiyus* were assisted by the Almighty.

Let us briefly trace his life’s journey, highlighting the tests and travails that he encountered in his tireless search

for the “inner dimension” that became the focus of his life and inspiration to so many others.

## IN THE BEGINNING

From early childhood, an inner longing for spirituality began to develop. He was wont to walk the streets of his birthplace, Berlin, and wonder: “Who created all of this?” Like many German Jews in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, his family was distant from *Yiddishkeit*, but he quickly found his path to the Almighty, and was yearning for a deeper connection to Torah and mitzvos by his bar mitzva.

He soon moved on to the Frankfurt Yeshiva, headed by Rabbi Yitzchak Breuer זצ”ל, whom he considered one of his important *rabbe’im* and often praised. Two years later, he moved on to the yeshiva in Montreux, Switzerland.

It should be noted that every step forward was accompanied with resistance and incomprehension from his home. But he persevered successfully. As he wrote to a youth many decades later:

“Know, dear..., that children will always win over their parents if their will and resolution are strong. But never, G-d forbid, battle parents with *chutzpa*, rather with pleasantness and respect. It has never happened that a parent who sees that his son has carefully and thoughtfully chosen his future path will refuse to acquiesce to his choice.”

## TURNING POINT

**A** *shmuess* by a Novaradoker passing through Montreux brought the *Mashgiach* to the Mir Yeshiva. A visiting Mirrer *bachur*, Yaakov Dovid Cohen ז”ה, saw that Shlomo Wolbe was a “*shomei’a*,” had a “listening ear,” and that he was deeply affected by the *shmuess*. Recognizing that “Wolbe” was material for the Mir, he urged him to study there and learn

under the Mirrer *Mashgiach*, Rabbi Yerucham Levovitz זצ”ל, the towering *mussar* figure. “Imagine,” said Yaakov Dovid, “the greatest physical pleasures – for example, having an ice cream or cold drink on a hot summer day, or walking through a beautiful, quiet landscape. None of these compares to the pure physical pleasure of Reb Yerucham’s *shmuessen!*”

And so the “Berliner” headed for the backwater called Mir.

His coming to Mir was the pivotal point in his life. The Mir Yeshiva had 400 students, each great in Torah. The *Mashgiach* said that 100 of them were *already* great *roshei yeshiva!* This is his description of this period in his preface to *Alei Shur*:

“The author of this book – while still a youth – was carried by a great whirlwind into the presence of that great among giants, *Admor*, the light of our eyes, reviver of the dead with his lessons, *Rabbeinu Yerucham HaLevi Levovitz זצ”ל*, at the holy Mirrer Yeshiva. The author was small when he came, and small he remained, never attaining the status of *Admor’s* students, true *geonim*. But even he was *transformed*, and personally experienced the life-giving dew of the Torah and the life of a true ‘man.’ From then on, he has continually strived to rejuvenate the uplifting emotions of awe, joy, and inner holy enthusiasm that he experienced in *Admor’s* presence, and with his great students.”

He never left his *Rav’s* presence, delving further into his Torah, and transmitting it to a new generation through public study of his works, private classes of unpublished works, and his classic study of Reb Yerucham’s life and thought, *Ha’adam Bikar*, which the title page tells us was written “by one not fit to be called his disciple.”

Anyone familiar with Reb Yerucham’s thought who carefully delves into *Alei Shur* will see that it is mainly based on the *rebbe’s derech*, tailored to a new generation of students. A great scholar related to me that in his youth, he did not truly grasp the lectures of the

Ponevezh *Rosh Yeshiva*, Rabbi Dovid Povarsky זצ”ל, one of Reb Yerucham’s greatest *talmidim*, and he was better able to understand only after a period of hearing and digesting the *Mashgiach’s shmuessen*.

Thus, he became the bridge for articulating the deep internal spirituality of a previous era to *bnei Torah* that only one or two generations later were surrounded by materialism and hedonism.

## THE SWEDISH CRUCIBLE

**T**he gathering storm of World War II swept him to neutral Sweden, then dominated by an antagonistic Reform establishment and boasting only a handful of *shomrei mitzvos*. There were no yeshiva scholars in Sweden at that time, and it was a far cry from the atmosphere of Mir. The *Mashgiach* was 24 years old and alone.

Upon arrival, even before finding lodgings, he rented a room and put up a sign which declared: “*Beis Hamussar* – Institute for Jewish Studies.” This became his *beis midrash*. *Mussar* was the internal compass – to keep the spiritual “north” in all of life’s various challenges – not to lose direction while developing new capabilities. He often publicly declared: “The environment in Sweden destroyed even *ehrliche rabbanim*. If I had not learned *mussar* there every day, I would not be standing here today.”

It is amazing that these eight years of forced solitude became a great spiritual asset, deepening his *penimiyus* and powers of thought. He once related that he committed to writing a certain *shmuess* of Reb Yerucham when he felt he understood it, six years after hearing it.

Divine Providence placed him in the position to save lives through neutral Sweden, where he worked tirelessly throughout the war as a conduit to funnel funds from the American Vaad ha-Hatzala to refugees in Europe, Russia and China. At the War’s end, thousands of sick and

downtrodden camp survivors reached Sweden. The *Mashgiach* spent days and nights aiding and encouraging them, and for many, he was the first religious Jew they had met in six years. These efforts culminated in the establishment by Rabbi Wolbe, together with Rabbi Wolf Jacobson and his Rebbetzin, of the famous Lidinga Girls School.

One year, he spent Rosh Hashana, with 400 deathly ill patients at a tuberculosis sanatorium. This, he said, was his greatest Rosh Hashana. This

is testimony of how, even when faced with extremely difficult circumstances, a strong living *penimiyus* brings a person even closer to the *Ribbono shel Olam*.

The years in Sweden formed the basis for developing the *Mashgiach's midda* of *נושא בעול עם חברו*, bearing another's burden, and for his acute sense of the various needs of *Klal Yisroel*, and the responsibility to fulfill them. This would become a major theme in his teaching and is the basis of the fourth section of *Alei Shur*.

**ERETZ YISROEL**

Upon arriving in *Eretz Yisroel* in 1947, he returned to his beloved studies at the Lomza Yeshiva, which, in those years, was home to the greatest European scholars. After a short time, he married his *rebbetzin* רחמי, the daughter of Rabbi Avraham Grodzinsky זצ"ל, the last *Mashgiach* of the Slabodka Yeshiva.

In the year 1949, upon the advice of the *Chazon Ish*, with whom he was very close, he opened Yeshivas Be'er Yaakov. Together with the *Gaon* Rabbi Moshe Shmuel Shapiro, they headed the yeshiva for over thirty years. The first years were extremely difficult, and the yeshiva and its families suffered from dire poverty. The fruits of their labor, however, were great, and the yeshiva transformed hundreds of *bachurim* into great *talmidei chachamim* and *yerei Shamayim* dedicated to the needs of *Klal Yisroel*.

It is hard to describe the special atmosphere of tranquility, peace of mind, and total immersion in spiritual striving that prevailed at Yeshivas Be'er Yaakov. *Bachurim* came from out of town (no small feat in those days) to hear the *shmuessen*, many coming for the whole month of Elul to seek the "inner dimension," which was especially palpable in the yeshiva.

During these years, while the *Mashgiach* became a famous educator and mentor, he remained a "student," always seeking to serve *talmidei chachamim*. Even while remaining an active disciple of Reb Yerucham, he became close and sought the advice of the *Chazon Ish*, the Brisker *Rav*, Rabbi Eliyahu Lopian, the Steipler, and *Rav Shach*, and actively studied under Rabbi Yechezkel Levenstein, Rabbi E.E. Dessler, the *Rebbe* of Ozorov, Rabbi Yoel Klufft, and Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner זצ"ל. Until his last years, the *Mashgiach* continued to learn from and seek counsel from great *talmidei chachamim*.

Indeed, he used to say that those who study *mussar* remain "young," not resting on their laurels, but continually recognizing the new challenges, new



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opportunities, and new responsibilities of their changing lives.

## ALEI SHUR

The work with his students in the early years gave birth to the classic *Alei Shur*, which was thirteen years in the writing. The book is a “guide for those wishing to enter the world of Torah and elevate themselves,” by endeavoring to give a portrait of “the man of Torah.... Join me, dear friend.... Let us study the periods of his life and his *avoda* which are described in this *sefer*” (preface).

Though published anonymously in 1966, the author quickly became well known. The clarity and depth of exposition of Torah principles, dissection of *middos*, and paths of *avoda* have made *Alei Shur* the guide book for serious yeshiva students and *yungeleit* seeking to discover the inner dimension of Torah and mitzvos. Though never sold commercially, tens of thousands of copies have been bought by those thirsty for guidance.<sup>1</sup>

## CHINUCH

The *Mashgiach* was first and foremost a *mechaneich* (pedagogue). He believed in the power of *chinuch*. *Chinuch* is not just for children, but a way of life for one who strives for perfection. The *Alter* of Kelm understood the famous dictum: הנהגת הנוער על פי דרכו as follows – Educate the youth according to his way, then, even when mature, he will continue to educate himself.” Thus, *chinuch* is a *process* which the *Mashgiach* described as “planting and building” the *mentsch*. (See – *Planting and Building*, Feldheim, Ch. 1, and *Alei Shur* Vol. II, p. 338.)

A young *mashgiach* once asked him what he should teach his students. The *Mashgiach* answered: “You can only influence your students through what influenced you when you were young!” Similarly, he believed that one

could influence young people only if he remembered his own youthful difficulties!

Throughout his life, he was a major catalyst in many areas of Torah education. Together with his colleague, the Slonimer Rebbe זצ”ל, he was an active member of Chinuch Atzmai’s *Vaad Ruchani* (Spiritual Advisory Board), guiding it in its early stages. He organized regular

**HE SAW THE NEED FOR SPECIAL YESHIVOS  
FOR BAALEI TESHUVA WHEN THERE WAS  
BUT A TRICKLE OF RETURNEES. WHEN  
QUERIED ABOUT THIS, HE SAID: “YOU SEE  
ONLY A FEW, BUT I SEE THOUSANDS.  
PERHAPS TODAY THEY ARE STILL IN INDIA,  
BUT SOON YOU WILL ALSO SEE THEM!”**

conferences for yeshiva *mashgichim* to refresh their commitment and discuss critical current issues and trials that yeshiva students face. According to the *Mashgiach*, the true *yarei Shamayim* cannot bury his head in the sand and hope for the best! Rather, he must find the *תבלין* תורה, the proper “Torah antidote” that is appropriate for his time and place.

Principals, teachers, *mashgichim*, counselors – all came to receive a clear Torah view on today’s questions and issues. *Moreinu* Rabbi Elyashiv שליט”א directed inquiries concerning *chinuch* to “*Harav Wolbe*.” Individuals with doubts about major decisions or crushing personal problems knew his address. For those too far away, he wrote thousands of carefully crafted letters, many in response to *bachurim* who needed personal guidance or *chizuk*.

## THE WORLD OF TESHUVA

The *Mashgiach* was one of the “fathers” of the Israeli *teshuva* movement. He sensed the change in atmosphere in the wake of the Six Day War that opened new possibilities of reaching estranged hearts. He traveled to army bases, kibbutzim, and secular academic institutions to deliver thought-provoking lectures on

*emuna*, which had a wide influence.<sup>2</sup>

He was an advisor to the pioneers in this field and saw the need for special yeshivos for *baalei teshuva* when there was but a trickle of returnees. When queried about this, he said: “You see only a few, but I see thousands. Perhaps today they are still in India, but soon you will also see them!” In addition, he dedicated many hours to the thorny issues of *baalei teshuva*’s integration into the mainstream of *frum* society, as well as other unique issues facing returnees (many of

<sup>1</sup> The *Mashgiach*’s other published works were meant to address perceived needs for guidance on today’s important and difficult issues. Such was the *Hadracha for Chassanim*, which broke new ground, *Or Lashav* for *baalei teshuva*, and *Planting and Building* for parents. These are not handbooks; rather, they clarify the important issues that face us and provide road signs for our own personal growth.

<sup>2</sup> These were subsequently published in *Olam Hayedidus*.

issues facing returnees (many of which are discussed in the work of a *talmid*, לדעת בארץ דרך).

The *Mashgiach* spoke many times, especially in the *Beis Hamussar*, about the obligation of every Jew to dedicate time to *kiruv*. He was the “living spirit” of Lev L’Achim’s program to send out *avreichim* one night a week for this purpose, and he regularly attended their confer-

ences, even at a very advanced age, in order to spread this message.

**THE MUSSAR IMPERATIVE**

**R**etiring from Be’er Yaakov in 1982, he moved to Givat Shaul in *Yerushalayim*. He was already saying regular *shmuessen* in the Mir Yeshiva, and soon after his arrival, he

gave weekly *shmuessen* in Yeshivas Kol Torah. He continued these talks for over twenty years.

But his main objective was to open a *Beis Hamussar* dedicated to spreading mussar education and awareness to a wide audience. “*Vaadim*,” *shiurim* on *Chumash* and *mussar* and *hashkafa* classics, and *mussar* study highlighted and actualized unfortunately neglected areas of *avodas Hashem* such as *tefilla*, *middos*, *yiras Shamayim*, and *בין אדם לחברו* (interpersonal relations). The *Mashgiach* used to say: “You have come to *Beis Hamussar* to hear things that otherwise would not be discussed.”

Hundreds felt important changes in their lives through *mussar* study at the *Beis Hamussar*. *Mussar*, indeed, is about *change*: changing long-held perspectives and entrenched priorities in an ongoing fashion. The ability to change is the hallmark of a *baal mussar* – he is free of the chains of habitual performance.

The *Mashgiach* often commented that he failed to understand how *tefilla* could become rote. A person is always changing, as does his relationship with the *Ribbono shel Olam*. Hence, no two *tefillas* are alike. He once told a student that he avoided *Mincha Ketana* because of its proximity to *Maariv*. What would be new in the second *tefilla* right after the first?

At the age of 80, he still felt new obligations, and decided to open a yeshiva – Yeshivas Givat Shaul (now renamed *Mishkenos Yedidya* in his memory: “*Yedidya*” = *Shlomo*, see *Menachos* 53a) to renew his connection with a new, young generation, and to educate them towards an elevated Torah life. For over ten years, he worked tirelessly with *bachurim* to find for themselves, through Torah, *tefilla* and *mussar*, their inner dimension.

What defines a great man? A great man brings out the greatness of those in his proximity. This was true of the *Mashgiach* זצ”ל. His *petira* brings to an end an era of *mussar*, but has also sparked a renewed interest in *mussar* study throughout *Eretz Yisroel*. Just as a wave lifts up the water in concentric rings, so his influence continues to spread through *Klal Yisroel*. □



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TAHARAS HANIFTAR SHOULD NEVER BE COMMERCIALIZED

What are middle-class parents to do when they are blessed with four – or seven – or ten children, and the annual tuitions tend to be in excess of \$5,000 per student – and, in some schools, more than \$10,000 for each?

Two Orthodox laymen in Lawrence, Long Island – an upper-middle-class suburb in the Five Towns – explored several creative possibilities of reducing their tuition load, and their ideas proved newsworthy in the Jewish media. One of the men commented, “When it comes down to it, instead of \$40,000 a year, [my bill] could be \$9,000.”\*

Their initial plan simply called for a small number of Orthodox students to enroll in public schools, and then rent space after hours where they would receive religious instruction from privately hired teachers.

When the public expressed interest in these ideas, they proposed a bolder plan – to have students study Jewish topics for half of the day at their private schools, and then be bussed to the public schools for the remainder of the day’s instruction in a special track. Another suggestion would have public school teachers brought into the Jewish schools to provide secular instruction during the second half of the day.

While the proposals were conceived as a progressive design for money-saving use of available resources, it struck some people as a regressive, precipitous plunge into the quagmire of Jewish education along the lines of the afternoon Talmud Torah schools in the early-and mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. But a desperate need for creative action does exist.

RABBI ARYEH ZEV GINZBERG

# Collective Tears

## THE PULSEBEAT OF JEWRY

It is not often that a local news item captures the attention of the Jewish media throughout the country. A story in the community newspaper in the Five Towns area recently stirred even people who have never responded in writing before to take pen in hand and tell the world at large how deeply they feel about this matter.

RABBI GINZBERG, FOUNDING RAV OF OHR MOSHE TORAH INSTITUTE IN HILLCREST, NY, IS CURRENTLY RAV OF THE CHOFETZ CHAIM TORAH CENTER OF CEDARHURST (LONG ISLAND), NEW YORK. HE IS A FREQUENT CONTRIBUTOR TO THESE PAGES.

The issue, of course, is an explosive one. Several parents, overwhelmed by the rising cost of yeshiva tuition, have suggested a possible alternative of providing their children with public school education while supplementing their religious instruction in some patched-on format. The reactions range from complete shock to one of resigned agreement. In truth, the worst reaction of all would be one of indifference.

At the first *Knessia Gedolah* (International Congress of Agudath Israel), held in Vienna in 1923, the opening session, attended by *Gedolei Hador* of that era, met to deter-

\* quoted in the *Forward*, July 29, '05.

mine what the primary focus of the *Knessia* should be, in view of the myriad problems facing the community at large.

After several suggestions were made, the saintly *Chofetz Chaim* ל"צ א"ה arose to speak. He began with a parable: A person was in a serious accident and was severely wounded in many places. He was brought to the hospital, and a team of doctors was trying to decide what to treat first. A senior doctor interrupted, “The first thing we have to do is check his pulse. If it’s beating, we can proceed. But if there is no pulse, there’s really no point in deliberating at all.”

The *Chofetz Chaim* continued, “The *chinuch* of our children is the very pulse of *Klal Yisroel*. We have to check that first. If it’s stable and strong, then we can worry about everything else. But if that’s no good, then there’s really nothing else to talk about.”

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Consequently, the majority of the resolutions that emerged from that conclave dealt with *chinuch*.

A correspondent once asked Rabbi Shlomo Zalman Auerbach זצ"ל, “Why are yeshivos called ‘yeshivos?’” The person himself offered, “Maybe because Torah is generally learned when one is *yosheiv* – in a sitting position. Hence – yeshivos.”

Reb Shlomo Zalman rejected that explanation, and instead suggested, “It’s called ‘yeshiva’ because it is ‘*Ikar yishuvo shel olam* – the primary force in developing the world.’ All else is subservient to it” (heard from his son, Rabbi Shmuel Auerbach שליט"א).

And so if we have a problem, a crisis – and we *do* have one – that concerns the heartbeat of *Klal Yisroel*, and “*yishuvo shel olam*,” then, everyone must surely stop and reflect on what can be done to resolve the problem.

**A TIME FOR NEITHER SHRUGGING SHOULDERS NOR JOY**

In discussing this development with some colleagues, I was indeed disturbed to hear some of their reactions. One said, “It’s only a few individuals, a small minority. Let them go.” In contrast to this shoulder-shrug-

ging, defeatist attitude was the response of Rabbi Ahron Leib Shteinman שליט"א to a particular crisis last year at a Lev L’Achim-sponsored school in Israel.

Seven girls from non-religious homes had registered in a religious school for the coming year, and then, all pulled out, just days before school was to begin. After frantic calls and visits from dedicated field workers, six of the seven girls agreed to rejoin the religious school for the fall semester. A Lev L’Achim activist joyfully reported this success to Rabbi Shteinman. To the visitor’s surprise, Rabbi Shteinman broke down in tears. “How can you celebrate the success of six girls’ return when the seventh has been lost to us?” he cried bitterly.

Even if this group represents a small minority of our community, noting the loss of *Yiddishe kinder* from the holy walls of our yeshivos – even just one – is reason for all of us to shed a collective tear.

**MAKING ENDS MEET?**

First, the problem. The rising cost of tuition is indeed one of the most distressing problems facing our communities today. The pressure on families to meet tuition costs is truly overwhelming. Like most *rabbanim* serving younger communities, my evenings are often dedicated to meeting with couples with serious *shalom bayis* issues; often (though not exclusively), it has to do with dealing with the pressure of making ends meet. Equally disturbing is the increasing number of young couples who come to discuss options of family planning, and highlight the fact that they just can’t perceive bringing another child into the world, to be faced with yet another tuition on top of what they already pay.

Not just *rabbanim*, but community leaders of all ages and stripes should take this issue extremely seriously. The tuition burden on our parents is overwhelming, and getting worse, while at the same time, the financial situation

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of our yeshivos is tenuous, at best.

Parents are demanding fiscal responsibility, and improvement may well be needed in this area. As every successful company knows full well, the crucial ingredient for financial stability is having an experienced, creative C.F.O. (Chief Financial Officer), whose role is to carefully scrutinize the budget. Often, yeshivos rely on their boards of directors to oversee this area, but not every butcher, baker and candlestick maker is qualified to do so. Recently, a wonderful yeshiva in our community that had suffered from a high deficit for years turned its books over to an experienced money manager, and in a relatively short period of time, the yeshiva became debt-free. This surely is a step in the right direction.

#### HASHEM'S AGENTS

But there is something even more significant that our communities need to focus on. Yeshivos are our lifeline, and the *rebbe'im* at the helm are not only our *sheluchim* (agents) to be *mechanech* our children, they also are "*sheluchi deRachmana*" – Divine messengers: they represent Torah itself, and must be accorded all the dignity and *kavod* due to Torah. Our *sifrei Torah* are adorned with silver crowns and are stored in an *aron hakodesh* of marble or Jerusalem stone. Should the "*nosei ol haTorah*" – those who carry the burden of teaching Torah – be treated with anything less?

Yet, we do have our priorities backwards. The *Chofetz Chaim* used to lament even in his time the misguided priorities of people donating huge sums to yeshivos to erect buildings with their names emblazoned on them (which is a wonderful thing), while completely ignoring the needs of the *talmidei chachamim* who make up the heart and soul of the yeshiva (which is tragic).

Rabbi Dovid Soloveitchik שליט"א (quoted in *Sefer Uvdos Le'beis Brisk*)

says, "People are willing to donate thousands upon thousands toward a yeshiva building, but they give only small amounts towards the monthly support of those who learn Torah – to put food on their tables. In truth, it should be the other way around. It's obvious that the *yeitzer hara* is working here, as well, and causes us to focus on the frills rather than on the main objective."

This is an idea that is worth pursuing. If the pillars of our community would concentrate on caring for

the *rebbe'im* through establishing some form of communal fund to cover salaries, it would help to alleviate the yeshivos' financial burdens, which translate into escalating tuition costs.

#### AN ABSURD TRADE-OFF

Having said that, and with full recognition of the problems that do exist, the very idea of replacing the atmosphere absorbed when receiving

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a yeshiva education with that of a public school borders on the absurd, and betrays a complete lack of understanding and appreciation of what a yeshiva truly is.

A yeshiva is not just a setting for gaining information in Torah subjects. It defines who we are as Torah Jews. No teachers, no matter how qualified... no computer program, no matter how sophisticated... can replace the *kedusha* and the purity that is transmitted from *rebbe* or *mora* to the student.

A *gadol* (leading Torah sage) once commented on the *Mishna* in *Bava Metzia* that teaches that returning a lost object to a *rebbe* takes priority over returning a lost object to one's own father, because a parent brings a child to *Olam Hazeh* (This World), while a *rebbe* brings the child to *Olam Habba* (The World to Come).

He insightfully commented that it doesn't say a *rebbe* brings him to *Olam Habba*, it says a *rebbe* brings him to "*chayei Olam Habba* – the life of The World to Come." That is, he makes *this* world and *this* life more meaningful, more spiritual, with a closer connection to *Shamayim* and the transcendental

world of the spirit.

Is it possible to have a child, any child from any home, sitting in a public school setting, feeling that connection to *Shamayim*? The influences, subtle or overt, the foul language, the topics of conversation of today's youth, the becoming aware of every lifestyle foreign to a Torah way of life – could that be a possibility for even the most spiritually detached amongst us? The entire community must rise up in collective protest against this proposal, while shedding collective tears over the realization that it has come to this.

**FROM LEARNING TO EXPERIENCING TORAH**

**T**hose at the helm of our wonderful yeshivos have an important task ahead of them. The community at large must use its collective talents and energies to resolve the skyrocketing tuition costs; the yeshivos must re-educate the community and teach them that they are not just teaching Torah to

our children; they are providing them with living examples of what *Hashem's* Torah is all about.

*When Rabbi Yaakov Kamenetzky זצ"ל served as rav in Toronto, one of his communal responsibilities was to help select the new rebbe'im for the local yeshiva ketana. Once, Reb Yaakov and the school principal observed a model lesson from a new, prospective rebbi. The principal was duly impressed and said so after the lesson; Reb Yaakov, however, disagreed. During his very dynamic presentation, the candidate had his elbows resting on top of the Gemara. This type of lesson is unacceptable for our children's chinuch.*

A *rebbe* is not only meant to serve as a medium for teaching Torah, but must be a means for allowing our children, from the earliest age, to experience Torah, as well. How ludicrous to think even for a moment that experiencing Torah can be done any place other than in a yeshiva! We all must work together to embrace these parents, open up our hearts to them and – most important – let them see our collective tears. ☞

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# Zahava Braunstein ע"ה Quintessential Keeper of the Bayis

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## FIRST AND FOREMOST A MOTHER

**T**here is an ache in our hearts and a void in our lives. Our beloved teacher, mentor and friend, Rebbetzin Zahava Braunstein, is gone.

Her life was a song of Tiferres- a symphony of beauty, balance and harmony. The contrasting notes and nuances of her multi-faceted personality merged into a joyous melody of Kavod Shamayim. Mind and heart. Family and Klal. Royal dignity and refreshing informality. Soaring idealism and down-to-earth realism. Non-judgmental love and uncompromising chinuch.

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MRS. REISMAN, OF BROOKLYN, NY, TEACHES AT THE BAIS YAAKOV ACADEMY AND AT BEIT YAAKOV ATERET TORAH. SHE SERVES AS A LEARNING DIRECTOR OF CAMP Bnos AGUDAS YISROEL IN LIBERTY, NY.

She exuded a passion and intensity of purpose, and yet she brimmed with laughter. Her eyes expressed the deepest empathy, yet never lost their mischievous twinkle. She was involved in a multitude of projects, each with its pressures and deadlines, which did not detract from the joy and menuchas hanefesh that made it so delightful to be in her presence. She taught us to strive for greatness. She taught us how to be human. There was not a false note in the exquisite balance that she maintained. She was a towering figure of greatness. She was the ultimate normal person.

Rebbetzin Zahava Braunstein was given a precious gift. The power of speech. We were uplifted by her words of encouragement as she enabled us to appreciate our potential as Bnos Yisroel. Who else understood us so well and validated our struggles? How often did we wonder as she depicted scenarios that were all too painfully familiar. "How did she know?" "Was she in my house?" We laughed and we cried as she illuminated our minds and touched our neshamos

The power of her speech was not mere eloquence. It was an expression of da'as. She had the wisdom of knowing what to say and how to say it. To a person in crisis or to a diverse audience of thousands, she would find precisely the right words to reach the heart. Invariably, after listening to her healing words, one felt closer to Hashem.

Her personality had a magnetic power. People were drawn to her. They trusted her. She had the ability to infuse the minutest interaction with warmth and love. Her capacity for friendship seemed boundless. She shared deeply in the joys and sorrows of a multitude of people. The thoughtful gesture, the timely phone call, the uplifting compliment flowed so naturally. She made it seem almost effortless.

At that heartbreaking yet inspiring levaya, as the breathtaking panorama of her life was held up before us, we were awed beyond words. How could one person accomplish so much? How could one heart have room for so many others? How could a person of such

public leadership retain, as she did, the depth and modesty of the *bas melech penima* (inner royalty)? How could a person of larger-than-life stature always remain the “lady next door,” that friend and neighbor in whose presence one felt totally at ease? And the most important question of all: How was she able to extend herself on behalf of multitudes without compromising her loving involvement and total devotion to her husband and family?

“The crown that she wore most proudly,” testified her son, Rabbi Mendel Braunstein, “was the crown that said ‘mother.’” She was first and foremost an *eim beYisroel*. It was obvious from her entire demeanor and attitude that she derived enormous satisfaction and fulfillment from being a Jewish wife and mother. The fact that a woman of unusual self-confidence, intelligence and charisma radiated such deep contentment and happiness in this role had an enormous impact on so many women who were searching for greater clarity in their lives.

**SPREADING HER WINGS**

Rebbetzin Braunstein, born in 1944, was named Golda Perel Zwiebel. (One of her teachers

Hebraicized her name – Golda became “Zahava,” and so it remained.) Her parents, Galician Jews who married in Poland in 1939, reached the United States shortly thereafter, settling in the Bronx, N.Y. Mrs. Menucha Zwiebel, nee Hager, was a descendant of the illustrious Kossover dynasty. A *talmid chacham* and *masmid*, Mr. Yaakov Zwiebel was a quiet, unassuming *ish emes*, who supported his family by selling dry goods in his shop on the Lower East Side. He was deeply involved in rescue efforts during the war years.

As a ten-year-old, Zahava volunteered to tell a story at a campfire at Camp Emunah; she had the entire camp mesmerized, and from that time on, became the official storyteller. At Yeshiva University High School for Girls, her talent and leadership abilities did not go unrecognized. “Whenever I went to try out for a club,” recalled former schoolmate, Mrs. Zlata Press, “be it drama, newspaper or debating, Gladys Zwiebel was involved. Yet, she stood out in more than talent. She was exemplary in the kindness and warmth that she extended to her classmates and younger schoolmates.” She was part of a group of friends who commanded enormous respect from their peers because of their sincerity and high religious standards. “And then, she and her small group of friends did

a radical thing. They chose to attend Bais Yaakov Seminary. We didn’t know what to make of this. It was totally out of our frame of reference.”

At Bais Yaakov, she was profoundly affected by Rebbetzin Kaplan ע"ה, who recognized the outstanding qualities of heart and mind that she possessed. It was due to the passionate teachings of Rabbi Godlevsky זצ"ל that she began to rethink her career plans of becoming a journalist. She remained forever grateful for his influence. From Rebbetzin Bender ע"ה she would absorb the foundations of *kedushas habayis* (sanctity of the Jewish home) that she would ultimately transmit to so many others. Rebbetzin Bruria David תל"ה became her mentor and guide. For the rest of her life, she maintained and cherished that relationship.

She married Rabbi Shlomo Braunstein, today the *menahel* of Mesivta Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, and they became part of an outstanding *chabura* of aspiring and idealistic *kollel* couples. The towering leadership of the *Rosh Yeshiva*, Rabbi Yitzchak Hutner זצ"ל, was a powerful influence in determining the direction of their lives and the caliber of their Torah and *avoda*. Her deep rootedness in this world endowed her teaching with an authoritative Torah *hashkafa*.

Within her first year of teaching at Bais Yaakov Academy, her charisma, caring and *chein* made her someone her students wanted to emulate. “The revolution that she created at B.Y.A.,” declared Rabbi Shlomo Teichman, “was as great as the subsequent revolution that she would create at Ateret.” Because they admired her, many young women were inspired to follow her example. They, too, would marry *b’nei Torah*.

“I remember her sparkling enthusiasm,” recalled one student from that era. “I remember how her face would light up as she would say, ‘Girls, I would like to share this beautiful *Kli Yakkar* with you!’”

“I remember how warm and gentle she was,” recalled another. “She cared about us like a loving mother.”

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She continued to spend her summers at Camp Gila, which was affiliated with the *Kehilla* of Bobov. The daughters of Rabbi Shlomo Halberstam זצ"ל, who was then the Bobover Rebbe, recalled the powerful impression that she made: "All through the winter, the name 'Zahava' echoed in our home. We remembered her songs and her unforgettable lessons."

Rebbetzin Sarah Meisels described the staff meetings held at Camp Gila. "Rebbetzin Braunstein would be running the meeting while holding a baby on her lap. And while she spoke to us, she would be hugging and kissing the baby. What a beautiful example she set for us!"

At this time, she began to teach *kalla* classes, conveying the halachos of *kedushas habayis* to young women who were about to establish their own homes in a manner that gave us joy and self-confidence. In the words of Rebbetzin Ruthy Assaf, "I always wanted my daughters to go to her *kalla* classes. She conveyed the halachos in a way that was lucid and precise. But even more so, she gave the message of the beauty, the warmth and the merit of building a *mikdash me'at* (miniature sanctuary)." She never accepted remuneration for teaching these classes, using this opportunity to raise money for *hachnasas kalla* and other causes that were dear to her heart.

FOCUS ON FAMILY

These were hectic, exhilarating years. She was tending her growing family, while teaching, serving as program director, and continuing to give *kalla* classes. People were beginning to turn to her for guidance and counsel. She was being called upon to speak publicly. Sometimes she accepted, often she declined, not wanting to take away from the love and care that she lavished upon her children. It was challenging to balance all of her responsibilities, yet she did it with grace and humor and an overflowing *simchas hachayim*.

Her home reverberated with warmth, love and laughter. "If you want the *Shechina* to dwell in your home," she would say, "get a little tape recorder and put on some music. It sounds like such a little thing, but it is so important!"

"When we were kids," one of her daughters reminisced, "there was a song for everything. There was a song for going to sleep and a song for getting up and a song for putting on the right shoe first."

In a *shiur* entitled "Happiness in the Home," Rebbetzin Braunstein once shared, "Sometimes when my children were young, I would do a little dance in the kitchen and my daughters would roll their eyes and say 'Oh, Mommy!' But now that they are raising families of their own, I hope that they understand."

Her warm smile and special welcome were extended to all who crossed her threshold. Many people became members of the household for extended periods of time. "She literally saved my life," sobbed one woman during the *shiva*. "I was going through an emotional crisis, and she took me into her home for several months, caring for me as a daughter, until I was able to stand on my own feet. The *shalom bayis* and the *ahavas Torah* made a powerful impression on

me. But it was seeing the normalcy, the realness, her ability to laugh at her own foibles and to put life's little mishaps into perspective, that helped me more than anything else."

THE SYRIAN OPENING

Then came Rabbi Yosef Harari-Rafal, with his dream of a Torah renaissance for Syrian Jewry. He was teaching young men in that community, inspiring them with the beauty of Torah and uncompromising fidelity to halacha. They were thirsty and eager, and responding to his call. Yet, their wives were being left behind. Who could teach them? Who could inspire them? Who but Rebbetzin Zahava Braunstein!

"Twenty-five years ago," writes Mrs. Bonnie Mansour, a member of that original class, "we were blessed to welcome a teacher who would, with her soft words and loving heart, show us what it really meant to be a fulfilled Jewish woman. When she first came to teach us, I think that she was surprised by our appearance. She truly didn't know where to begin. So she began from the beginning. She taught us about the *parasha*. She brought in a washing cup and taught us about *netilat yadayim*.

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“She gave us such pride in our heritage that we very gradually and very naturally made changes in our lifestyles to reflect that pride. Because of those changes, the community at large started to get used to women holding higher standards in *kashrut* and *Shabbat*, dressing more modestly

family, to mold the spirit of the camp, creating an atmosphere of wholesome summer fun, infused with a spirit of *kedusha*. Her Friday night talks were the highlight of the summer. “When she stood before us on Friday nights,” said one former camper, “I used to think that she was the *Shabbos* Queen.”

**“SHE HAD SUCH JOY AND FULFILLMENT IN THE BAYIS THAT SHE CREATED,” SAID RABBI BRAUNSTEIN, “AND SHE HAD SUCH A LOVING HEART, THAT SHE WANTED TO STRETCH THAT BAYIS TO INCLUDE MORE AND MORE PEOPLE.**

and even encouraging their husbands to learn Torah. These things became not only acceptable, but admired.

“What was her secret?” asked Mrs. Mansour. “How did she literally change the lives of so many of our women and thousands of others? Was it her brilliance? Her talent? Her charm? Her charisma? They all certainly helped. But the real answer was that she loved us – and we knew it. She would never let an encounter go by without her warm, radiant smile speaking volumes about the joy she felt to be in our presence. She loved each one of us in a special way for our unique qualities. Each of us felt that we were her favorite – and I am sure that it was somehow true.

“Other teachers tiptoed around issues. They were afraid that we might become turned off and not come back. Not Mrs. Braunstein. She was uncompromising, but so loving and gentle that we were able to accept everything that she taught.”

#### SUMMERS IN CAMP

To supplement the family income, she continued to spend her summers at Camp Gila, and later at Camp Shira. At Camp Shira, she had the opportunity, along with the Rosenberg

As much as she loved camp, it was not easy to go back, summer after summer. “After all,” said Rabbi Braunstein, “at a certain age, one gets tired of color war. But she did it, along with all of her other jobs, so that her husband and children could continue learning with *menuchas hanefesh* (tranquility). And she did it *besimcha!*”

Even as a *menahelet* (principal), she never lost that effervescence and vivacious sense of humor. Her students knew that as much as she held them to a high standard of conduct, she had not forgotten what it was like to be young, and that she understood their struggles.

#### THE GIFT OF LAUGHTER

In a recent talk that she gave within the Syrian community, she said, “Laughter is a wonderful thing. Yitzchak, one of the *Avos*, was named after laughter.” She continued reflectively, “As time goes on, perhaps I am getting more buffeted by the winds and the storms of time.... You know, there is a phrase in the prayers of the *Yamim Nora'im* that says that our lives are like a fleeting dream, like a passing shadow. We know that life is very temporary.... And so, I would like to ask, what is the

definition of happiness?

“*Simchat hachayim* means simply the joy of life. The joy of knowing that *Hashem* gave us life, and that there is a purpose and a meaning to our lives. That knowledge gives us tremendous joy and an inner serenity. And if it doesn’t match up with ‘Let the good times roll,’ it does match up with a person who can maintain a joyful attitude no matter what may occur to him in life. That is the definition of what we are talking about.

“How can a person have that serenity – the serenity that enabled *David Hamelech* to say

“Though I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil? It is because You, *Hashem*, are holding my hand. That is joy, to know that *Hashem* is holding our hand.”

Did her listeners comprehend the poignancy of these words, uttered during the last part of her life, as she herself was battling the final stages of a dreaded illness? For fifteen years, she had lived in the shadow of this illness. Despite many rounds of surgery, treatment and procedures, she kept her illness from the public eye.

#### CREATIVE AND PRODUCTIVE YEARS

In many ways, the last fifteen years were her most creative and productive years. It was during this time period that she became the founding principal of Bet Yaakov Ateret Torah High School. Many of her students were daughters of her original Syrian *talmidot*, and she derived much *nachas* from molding them into *neshei chayil* who proudly married *b'nei Torah* and set up homes of *kedusha*. She would wake up early in the morning to bake cakes for her beloved *talmidot*. “Baking is my therapy,” she would say.

It was during these fifteen years that she married off most of her children. She adored each son-in-law and daughter-in-law, and cherished each set of *mehutanim*. “When we built our homes,” said her son, Rabbi

Mendel Braunstein, “her level of care grew. She gave us so much direction, so much *Toras Imecha*.”

She adored each grandchild, and derived much joy from her relationship with each one of them. She advised her friends to overlook the tumult and disarray that naturally accompany these visits. “Learn to love it!” she exhorted. Her grandchildren were welcomed into her kitchen with a warm smile, a huge hug, and a tuna sandwich, even on a hectic *Erev Shabbos* or *Yom Tov*.

Her communal activities reached a new level. Her speaking engagements led her farther afield as she increased the scope of her involvements. She realized that she was considered a spokeswoman for the *klal*. “I still cringe when I see my name on those posters, but what can I do?” she shrugged. Time was short and there was so much to be done.

Her lectures on *tzenius* were requested in even more cities. Her positive approach enabled women of diverse communities to develop an appreciation of this sensitive topic. Together with her husband, she traveled to Dallas a number of times, developing a special relationship with the members of this inspiring community of *baalei teshuva*. They began to attend *Shabbatonim* of A.T.I.M.E., giving *chizuk* to couples who struggled with the painful *nisayon* of infertility. Her *shiurim* on *kedushas habayis*, sponsored by *Irgun Shiurei Torah*, had an impact on thousands of women. Tapes of her lectures continue to be treasured by women across the world.

Someone posed the question yet again: “How could she have been involved in such a multitude of activities and also have had the time to raise her family with such love and dedication?” Mrs. Suri Pinter, a close friend and family member, remarked, “You should have phrased the question differently. ‘How could she have been such a wonderful mother and

also have found time to do all of these other things?’”

In truth, the devotion that she invested in her home and family was the source of her success in all of her other endeavors.

### NOT THROUGH VERBAL REBUKE ALONE

Rabbi E.E. Dessler writes in *Michtav MeiEliyahu* that in our time, it is impossible to influence people through verbal rebuke alone. People are not capable of seeing beyond the false ideologies that have become entrenched as a result of their self-serving interests. There is only one way for people to see beyond their ideological blinders. If one is privileged to witness a relationship of true selfless giving – between husband and wife or between *rebbe* and *talmid* – the truth will penetrate one’s heart. Observing the delicate interactions of a devoted, loving family that is united in the service of *Hashem* is the most powerful *mussar* of all. That is what can open one’s heart to the truth of Torah. “The only means of influence,” writes Rabbi Dessler, “is through *sheleimus hachessed* – the power of pure giving.”<sup>1</sup>

“She had such joy and fulfillment in the *bayis* that she created,” said Rabbi Braunstein, “and she had such a loving heart, that she wanted to stretch that *bayis* to include more and more people.” All of us whose lives were changed through her personal example and through her teaching were enveloped by the power of selfless giving that she embodied.

Many women reported feeling inadequate when they heard of Rebbetzin Braunstein’s many accomplishments. Those of us who knew her well never felt this way. She made each one of us feel special. She had a tremendous appreciation for that which the average woman of average capabilities could accomplish within her own home

through nurturing her family and developing her inner relationship with *Hashem*.

It was this quality of *penimius* that enabled her to remain unaffected by the public adulation and the accolades. Rabbi Aharon Schechter, *Rosh Hayeshiva* of Yeshivas Rabbeinu Chaim Berlin, marveled at her capacity to maintain such an awesome level of *tzenius* throughout her myriad public activities. “That was a *midda* of aristocracy,” he declared in his *hesped*, “and the *shoresh* (source) of that *midda* was her great depth.” The *Rosh Yeshiva* described her capacity for being a *ba’alas yissurim* (one who endures suffering): “One who has *yissurim* has one foot in this world and one foot in the next. And through it all, she maintained such a smile, such a freshness, such a *derhoibenkeit* (loftiness). That was truly *malchus!*”

### THE KOHEIN AND THE HOUSEWIFE

On many occasions, Mrs. Braunstein compared the work of the *akerres habayis* to that of the *kohein* in the *Beis Hamikdash*. The position of the *kohein* was exalted. It was envied. It was the pinnacle of Divine service. And yet, the *kohanim* swept, slaughtered, washed and cooked. They dealt with the entrails of animals, with the physical stuff of life. The *Eishes Chayil*, too, sweeps and cooks and deals with the physical stuff of life. If she is wise, she recognizes that she, like the *kohein*, is performing Divine service of the highest order – that of creating a *Beis Hamikdash*.

She made us feel that even if we were struggling to get the dishes done or the laundry folded, we could still accomplish great things. Our daily activities were precious in her eyes, and she helped us realize their significance. She gave us the confidence that we could aspire to greatness, even if we got frazzled sometimes or lost our tempers. “The Torah wasn’t given to *malachim*,” she would say. “It was

<sup>1</sup> *Michtav MeiEliyahu* I, pp. 128,138.

given to human beings.” To one young woman who confessed to feeling overwhelmed, she advised, “ Even if you have to eat tuna fish, get some cleaning help. It is that important!” Maintaining joy and serenity in one’s home was the first priority.

In one of her classic *shiurim*, she depicted the following scenario as presented by the *Maggid* of Kelm:

In *Shamayim* they had announced, “All those interred in the *beis olam* of Kelm could come back to life for one hour!” He depicted the scene vividly. One would rush to the *beis hamidrash* and seize a Gemara. He would sit down and learn with fierce concentration. Another would run for his beloved *Tehillim*, and recite the words with great fervor. A third person would run to the hospital, looking for a precious

opportunity to do *chessed*. Their activities reached a crescendo of fevered intensity as the clock ticked loudly, marking the passage of this precious hour. With great drama, he depicted the mounting tension as the time slipped away.... And then the *Maggid* roared, “And what if we have more than one hour!” And then he intoned with haunting pathos, “And who knows if we have even one hour....”

Rebbetzin Braunstein brought this scene to life for us, as only she could do. And then, as we sat on the edge of our seats, scarcely breathing, she would smile and say, “Ladies! If I had one hour left to live, I’ll tell you exactly what I would do. I would put up a delicious hot vegetable soup. Perhaps I would bake a cake as well. And I would sit and play with my children and grandchildren.”

Several weeks before her *petira*, a former student had come in from Eretz Yisroel. She had heard that Rebbetzin Braunstein was very ill. She called and asked if she could come to visit. With trepidation, she stepped over the familiar threshold of that beloved home. She could not believe her eyes. The Braunstein family was sitting at the table. Rabbi Braunstein was enjoying a delicious hot vegetable soup, while Rebbetzin Braunstein, pale and thin, but wearing her trademark glowing smile, was sitting at his side, along with their son. She was totally involved in the game of Scrabble that was spread out across the table. She was completely absorbed in her interaction with her son, forming words and calculating the points as if it were the most important thing in the world. Because it was. ☒

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