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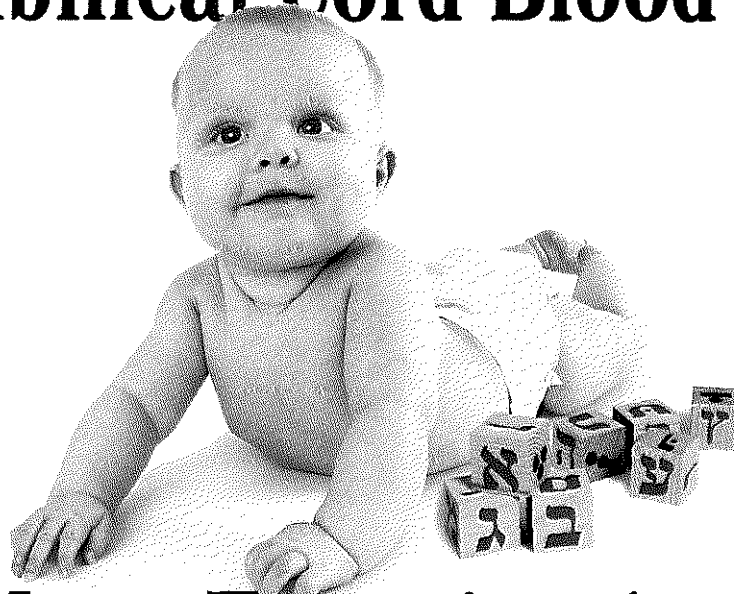
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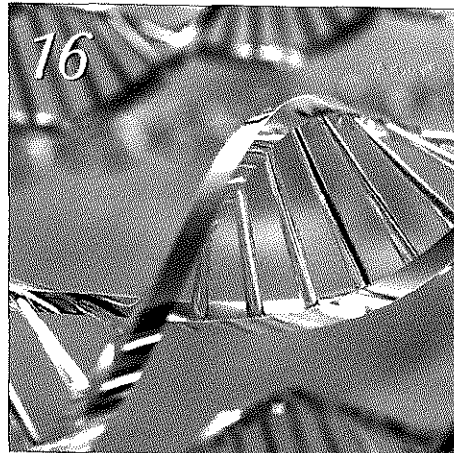
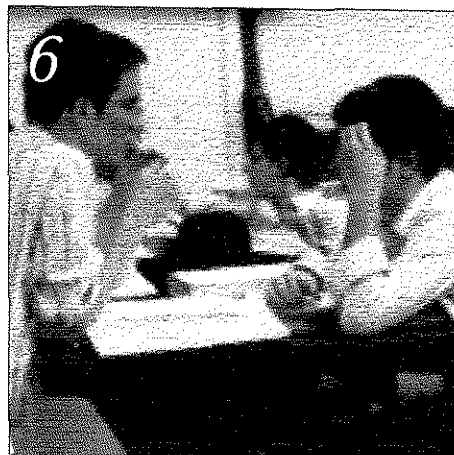
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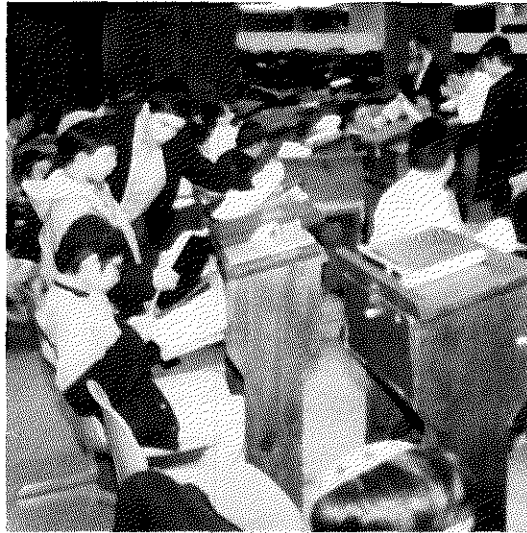
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RABBI MATIS ROBERTS



Struggling With Success

GROWING PAINS IN THE YESHIVA WORLD

As everyone knows, the yeshiva world is undergoing very difficult times. Many of the ills that pervade society around us have found their way – albeit on a much smaller scale – into our homes and institutions, and the results are catastrophic.

People often focus on specific aspects of the problem, dwelling on who is to blame for a particular issue and how it could be resolved if only this or that were done differently. But such approaches take things out of context, for they ignore the general framework in which all of these problems exist. The truth is that the difficult conditions we face are integral to the times in which we live. Current circumstances virtually guarantee an ongoing wave of crises and conflicts. They are not grounds for condemnation, and we need not react defensively to suggestions for change. But we must explore and tackle the big picture if we hope to resolve these problems effectively.

RABBI ROBERTS IS THE MASHGIACH RUCHANI OF YESHIVA SHAAR HaTORAH - GRODNO OF QUEENS. HIS ESSAY, "FROM YOU TO YOU - THE ROAD TO MEANINGFUL PRAYER," WAS FEATURED IN JO, SEPT. '00.

THE ARK AND THE TABERNACLE

To a great extent, the difficulties facing the yeshiva world are the products of its astonishing success. Rabbi Yitzchok Hutner זצ"ל noted that the Torah deals with the construction of two very different edifices. One is the ark of Noah, which was built as a sanctuary for survival. The other is the *Mishkan* – the tabernacle erected by the Jewish nation in order to “house” the Divine Presence.

The great bastions of Torah that illuminated European Jewry for generations were modeled after the *Mishkan*. The foundation upon which they were erected is the loftiest of all human endeavors, Torah *lishma* – the study of Torah for its own sake. These institutions were designed primarily to serve the elite, to mold a select few into the Torah leaders of the next generation. Students accepted into the major yeshivos had already shown outstanding scholastic ability. They were highly motivated to study Torah diligently, requiring little encouragement or supervision.

The structure of yeshiva learning reflected these realities. Most educational systems offer a broad-based curriculum, providing familiarity with many different subjects and fostering a basic

level of competence in all of them. Not so the yeshivos. Students were expected to master the functional disciplines on their own. The heart and soul of yeshiva life was the study and analysis of Gemara and its commentators. That is what occupied the bulk of a student's time, energy, and interest. The *shiurim* (lectures) were geared accordingly, challenging them to ever higher levels of academic excellence. The schedule, too, was extremely rigorous. Intensive Torah study filled nearly every waking moment.

FACING THE CHALLENGES

Today's yeshivos are the successors to their European counterparts. Their core function continues to be the noble enterprise of Torah *lishma*, and their primary products are the outstanding scholars who will provide Torah leadership and transmit the Torah's teachings to the next generation of Jews. But America is not – by any stretch of the imagination – pre-World War II Eastern Europe. Transplanted in the American spiritual wasteland, the yeshivos have assumed an additional role. Here, they must also replicate Noah's ark, serving as sanctuaries for survival amidst the roaring sea of alien

values. And if we try to copy the yeshivos of Europe in every detail, we will lose the essence of all that they achieved.

In its early years, the American yeshiva world comprised a new elite – the few individuals who heard the echoes of Sinai above the din of American materialism. But over time, what began as a system for the few mushroomed into a mass movement, far exceeding anyone's most optimistic predictions. This incredible reality is the legitimate source of a great deal of pride. In a remarkably short period of time, the yeshiva world has radically broadened the Torah horizons of vast segments of American Jewry. Torah scholarship at its highest levels – once considered a hopeless dream on this continent – is now commonplace throughout the land. Within a large segment of American Jewry, yeshiva life has become the norm – upon finishing eighth grade, every boy goes to yeshiva high school. Countless laymen are involved in daily, substantive Torah study in shuls and yeshivos across the country, while many more are tuned in to *shiurim* on tape, on the telephone, and over the airways. Once again – as was true throughout our exile, but was once very rare on this side of the Atlantic – the fondest hope of many Jewish parents is that their sons develop into true *talmidei chachamim* and their daughters marry the same. And the pursuit of that dream, which used to bring only scorn and derision, has become the accepted standard among the many thousands studying in yeshivos and Bais Yaakovs.

But new realities – even spectacular ones – bring new challenges. Instead of the ridicule that once hampered the growth of many American *b'nei yeshiva*, they now face the opposite pitfall of complacency. Today's yeshiva *bachur* has no need to validate his decision to stay in learning: "Everybody is doing it." Consequently, many never undergo the intense soul searching that once preceded such a decision and the solemn commitment it involved. Accordingly, they also do not experience the ascent to true greatness that such commitment produces.

Furthermore, the needs of outstand-

ing scholars often do not coincide with the requirements of the masses. A *shiur* that demands the pursuit of excellence is likely to overwhelm and discourage those who are average or weaker. A curriculum that is broadly inclusive will not impel the highly gifted to push themselves to their limits. Yet the yeshivos must somehow meet the educational needs of all of these different students.

DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS, ONE APPROACH?

.....

Then there are the different backgrounds from which young men come to yeshiva. Some are sons of *roshei yeshiva*; others come from lay families. Some grew up in intensely religious *kehillos*, others in smaller Jewish communities of various sizes and with varied religious environments. Still others were raised in homes that were not religious at all.

And these differences in background are just the tip of the iceberg. The variables mentioned, among many others, create some very substantive disparities that greatly affect a child's preparation for yeshiva life.

Given the affluent society in which we live, our concepts of a viable life-style are very different from those of previous generations. Nevertheless, some homes still subscribe to the ideal of limited materialism, and raise their children to be satisfied with that which in our world is considered simple living. The pursuit of excellency is reserved for the goals and ideals that really matter. Such children enter the gates of yeshiva fueled by the ideals of devotion and dedication.

Others, however, have fully bought in to the American Dream, and live a life of ongoing self-indulgence. No convenience is too extravagant, and no luxury too outlandish. Along with this standard of living comes a mentality that is completely foreign to Torah values. Leisure and recreational activities are viewed as the highlights of life, while moral endeavors are relegated to the realm of "should" and "shouldn't," "must" and "must not." Children from such homes are often protected from hardship and

disappointment whenever possible, robbing them of the chance to learn how to cope with adversity. And when they enter yeshiva, they are likely to be more concerned with the quality of their food and accommodations than with the caliber of their learning and *avodas Hashem*.

Yet, the products of all of these homes are viewed as essentially similar; they are all considered budding *b'nei Torah*. And the yeshivos are expected to cater to their varied – and conflicting – needs effectively, and to cultivate in all of them the same devotion to Torah growth and development.

CONFRONTING THE WORLD AROUND US

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Our situation is further aggravated by the problem of exposure to the outside world. The effects of a society steeped in corruption, depravity, and moral relativism are clearly not conducive to producing Torah life and values. Thus, we have been forced to raise barriers from within, to build artificial walls that insulate us and our children from general society and its values. But we live in a world where distances and natural boundaries have been neutralized by modern technology. There is no escape from the world around, no avoiding its influence. And even minimal contact can provoke a strong desire to partake of the forbidden fruits outside – fruits that are readily accessible to all who seek them.

With total seclusion unattainable, there are different views as to what is the proper degree of insulation. Should we isolate ourselves as much as possible, shutting out the influences around us to the greatest extent possible? Or do we need to seek a more delicate balance between the protection we desire and the exposure that cannot be avoided?

Both of these approaches have their advantages as well as their risks, their successes as well as their failures. Controlled exposure is a very appealing idea – at least in theory. But temptation and confusion are powerful forces that often upset the equilibrium, and their impact is much

more compelling once the door has been slightly opened.

On the other hand, total seclusion breeds fierce hostility to the outside world and a negative view of all that it includes. This makes it very hard for the many who must eventually confront that world to do so in an appropriate manner. In addition, those who are raised to view other life-styles with total disdain do not always distinguish between that which is immoral and that which is merely different. This often creates tragic barriers of distrust between various groups of Jews who are fully committed to Torah living.

In any event, here we have another factor that generates significant variations in outlook and life-style among those who enroll in the same yeshivos. And, once again, *All of the rivers flow into the sea* – the yeshivos must meet all of their different needs within the same general structure.

SEEKING SOLUTIONS

So what can be done about this situation? Some contend that the time has come to restore the European model. Let the exalted title “Yeshiva” be reserved for those institutions that are wholly dedicated to producing first-rate Torah scholars. Beyond that, let us build an educational system to produce Torah lay-

men – deeply infused with Torah and its values, but well prepared for interaction with the world beyond.

This approach, however, is fraught with grave danger. The age of entry into yeshiva is no longer the cutoff point between those who do and do not succeed. Many outstanding students blossom only after several years in yeshiva, sometimes well after graduating high school. The approach in question would exclude all such individuals from the upper echelons of Torah scholarship.

Furthermore, we cannot ignore the track record of the past half century. Countless individuals who would never have gone to yeshiva in Europe have developed into exemplary *b’nei Torah*. They may not all be towering giants of erudition, but their lives are governed by the Torah – its laws, its values, and its priorities – and they are regularly engaged in serious Torah study. What’s more, many of them have profoundly influenced congregations, schools, and even entire communities across the country. How much of this would be lost if we were to split our educational system?

Another important point is the pitfalls that a new setup would create. For many, the pride that comes with the title *ben Torah* – or *yeshiva bachur* – is what gives them the strength to prevail. How many youths would resist the endless temptations around them and devote

themselves to serious Torah study – at any level – without the reinforcement provided by that pride? Surely, many would lose even the sanctuary that yeshiva life provides, let alone the chance for significant Torah growth.

Nor can we disregard the realities of parental vanity. Even now, there are many parents who refuse to recognize their children’s limitations. Instead, they insist on placing them into scholastic settings that exceed their capabilities and offer them little chance for success. How much more prevalent would this be if there were a clearly defined line dividing “real” yeshivos from other institutions of Torah learning?

Clearly, then, there are no simple, sweeping solutions that will eradicate the problems we face. Any apparent alternative to the system that has developed is likely to create more problems than it would solve. Instead, we need to deal with the difficulties within our system as it exists.

ONE SIZE FITS ALL?

The issues we’ve discussed open up a vast array of pressing questions – questions that pertain to anyone enrolled in a yeshiva. What is the best possible balance between cultural isolation from the outside world and controlled exposure to its influences? How much time should a yeshiva student leave himself for rest and recreation? How much – if at all – should he be involved in other activities for the sake of personal development? What type of lifestyle is appropriate for him – what constitutes too much materialism and what is an unrealistic level of self-denial? At what point should he consider steps to prepare for a livelihood? What about *bein ha’ze-manim* – vacation? Should he spend all his free time learning; should he use it to expand his experiences by working or teaching; or should he just take a break?

The approach to these and similar questions tends to develop communally. Whatever standards take hold exert

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a very strong pressure – placing people's pride and prestige very much on the line. For those who can meet such standards, this can be very constructive. As Chazal tell us: *Envy of scholars increases wisdom*, for it provides the motivation to persevere in the face of difficult challenges.

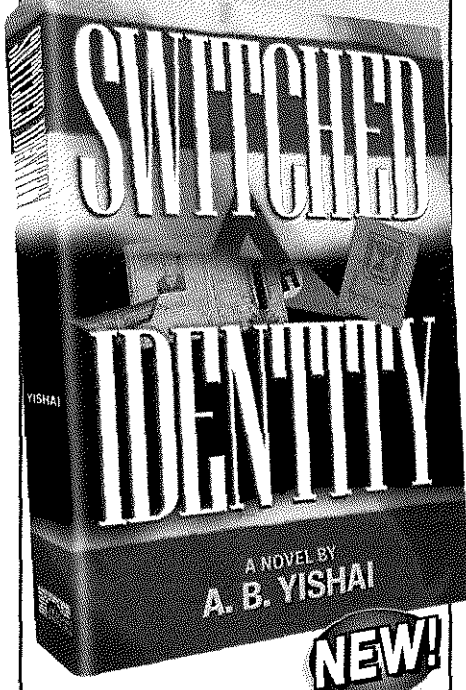
But the larger our society grows, the more different types of people it includes. And the same dynamic that so benefits some is extremely harmful to others. It pressures them to pursue inappropriate goals and to set for

themselves impossible standards. Worse yet, it affects their acceptance by others. People who are comfortable with the existing structure can be very critical of those who do not fit in. They expect everyone to conform to the prevailing lifestyle in all of its aspects – even facets that are not really essential. Failure to do so often brings censure and disdain – sometimes even outright rejection. Ultimately, this pushes people into all kinds of predicaments that they are not equipped to handle.

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בפיקוח הרה"ג ר' ראובן פיינשטיין שליט"א

The truth is that all such questions need to be resolved on an individual basis. They depend greatly on each person's particular strengths and limitations. *What is his background? How well prepared is he for the challenges before him? How intense and consistent is his diligence? How idealistic is he – how committed to personal growth? How suited is he to the world of chinuch, and what are his vocational options beyond that?*

And then there are issues of character. *How susceptible is this person to the effects of negative influences? Conversely, how likely is he to succumb to the pitfalls of extreme insulation? Is he emotionally steady, or subject to frequent ups and downs? How well does he deal with adversity – both practical and emotional?* These are just a few of the variables that affect the answers to the questions mentioned earlier.

But someone devoted to an ideal does not give up easily on his dreams. The investment of pride, energy, and commitment is very great and can eas-

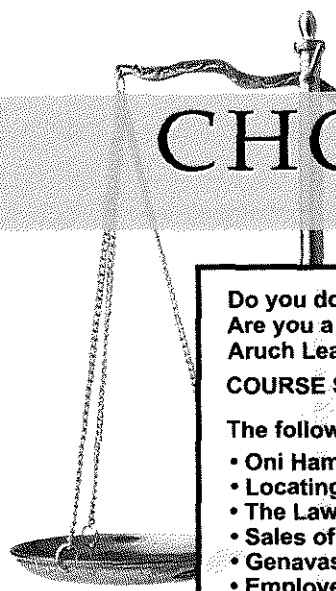
ily distort his judgment. Nor should we underestimate the influence of status and prestige. No one wants to be considered second-rate, especially among those who share his values. Thus, all too often, those who set out to seek what is most noble end up pursuing that which is most gratifying.

But to live by the Torah, we have to apply it to the reality that is, not to the way we wish things would be. Thus, it is vital for every *ben yeshiva* to have a *rebbe* whose judgment he really trusts, a mentor who knows and understands him well and is willing to face *his* reality – whatever that may be – and guide him accordingly. Such a *rebbe* will encourage him and help him to reach the limits of his abilities, while steering him clear of waters too deep for him to tread. But others, too, must respect that process. They need to recognize that we cannot all fit into the exact same mold, and that the proper approach to the issues we've mentioned can vary widely among different people..

SUMMARY

Ultimately, our objective is quite ambitious. We seek to enable every child to find his proper place in the yeshiva world, and to fill that place successfully. But for that to occur, we have to make some serious adjustments. Within our communities, we need to allow more breathing space to accommodate the rising numbers of distinct personalities our society has come to include. In the yeshivos themselves, students need to be taught the vital necessity of having a *rebbe* – in the fullest sense of the word. And within our homes, we must work harder to align our values and priorities with those that foster a life devoted to Torah.

As individuals, each of us can help those whose lives we touch by applying these principles. And if we can weave these ideas into the fabric of our communities, we will radically improve the ability of our youth to integrate themselves into the Torah world, and the world of Torah into their lives. □



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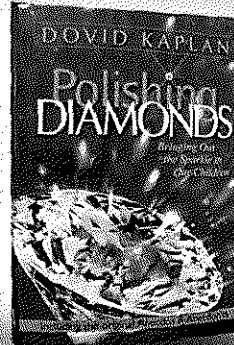
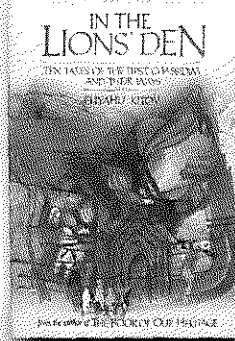
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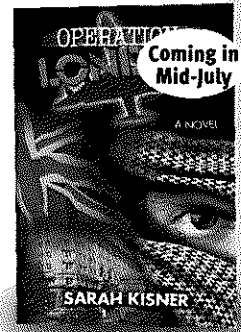


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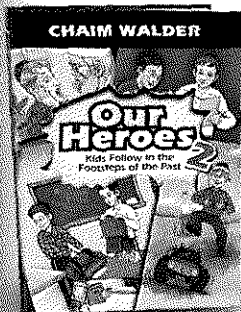
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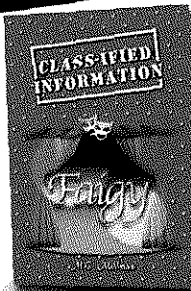
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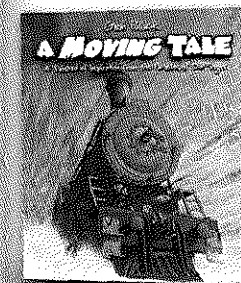
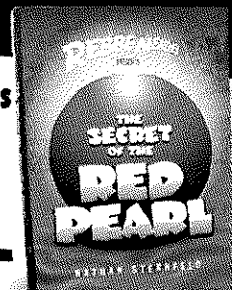
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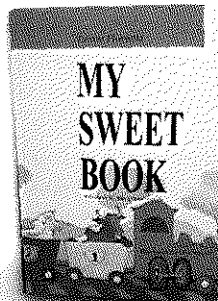
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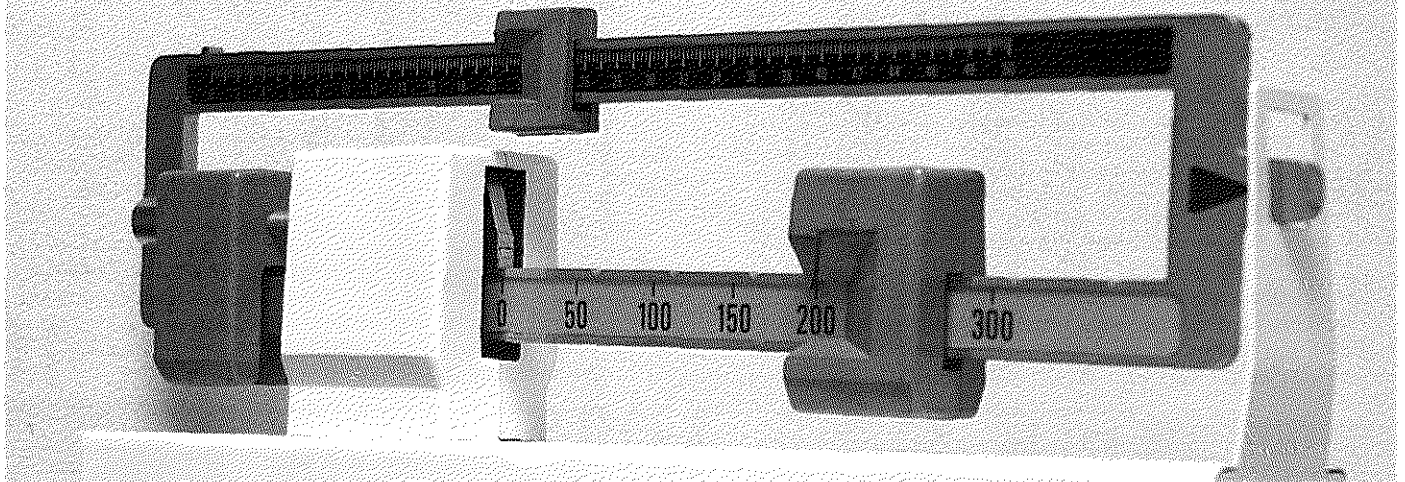
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DR. DON ZWICKLER



We Eat to Live

THE TORAH VIEW OF GLUTTONY: A DEAD END

A few years ago, I spent *Shabbos* in Lakewood, and had the *zechus* to meet Rabbi Chaim Kreiswirth זצ"ל. During the course of our conversation, I mentioned my profession as an endocrinologist, and he in turn informed me that he was struggling with Type 2 diabetes. We discussed various options for treating his ailment, and as our discussion drew to a close, Rabbi Kreiswirth remarked that his diabetes had taught him a practical lesson in helping him overcome his desire for sweet foods. This disorder brought home to him the Torah's message that gluttony is dangerous—not only to the spiritual wellbeing of a person, but to his physical health, as well.

The Torah is very clear about this. To be sure, temptation is all around us; that cannot be denied. But one cannot hide behind the excuse of "I simply can't resist." As Torah Jews, we are often warned

to guard ourselves against gluttony. According to one interpretation, even the "Al Cheit" of "*maachal umishteh* (food and drink)" in *Viduy* (the Yom Kippur confessional) can refer to overeating. We not only confess transgressions such as mistakenly eating food with an unreliable *hechsher* or accidentally eating milk products before meat was fully digested, we also confess to the sin of eating for absolutely no reason at all. For the times when we ate a four-course *seuda* followed by dessert, and then visited a neighbor who offered a plate of goodies that appeared irresistible, we have to ask forgiveness. This applies to the scene at a shul *kiddush* as well: People devour *kugel* and *cholent* and cake, only to eat an identical, if not more elaborate, meal upon arriving home from shul twenty minutes later. The Torah's view is ages old. It is far more advanced than modern science, emphasizing the importance of moderation, and the dangers, both physical and spiritual, that overindulgence causes.

We are meant to enjoy this world, not drown ourselves in its pleasures. Imagine a winged insect buzzing above a honey dish. He dips to the edge of the

jar for a little lick of its sweetness. But if he flies too low, he'll fall into the depths and become mired in the sticky substance. As soon as he realizes he's in a death trap, the honey loses its sweetness and takes on the bitter taste of doom. Indeed, too much of a good thing is not good at all.

The incident of *Kivros Hataava* in the *Midbar* (desert) is another illustration of the Torah perspective on eating. In the *Midbar*, Hashem provided *Bnei Yisroel* with the manna so they could focus on spiritual pursuits rather than struggle to feed themselves. Each family gathered their portion of manna and discovered that, despite efforts to add or subtract from their share, they always returned home with the exact amount Hashem had commanded them to take—no more, no less. Hashem knew precisely what each person needed to satisfy his physical hunger. That should have been clear proof to *Bnei Yisroel* that their physical needs were being attended to. However, they craved meat, which represents the carnal appetite of a human being. They did not feel that the manna was sufficient, even though, according to the Gemara (*Yoma* 75b), they could

DR. ZWICKLER, WHO LIVES IN MONSEY, IS AN ENDOCRINOLOGIST IN ROCKLAND COUNTY. HE IS A MUSMACH OF RABBI BEREL WEIN.

conjure up any food they craved and the manna would adopt that taste. They wanted meat, and complained to Moshe, asking *Hashem* to send it to them. They rejoiced upon seeing the *slav* (a type of fowl) rain from the sky, and stuffed themselves to a sickening degree. Their overindulgence was punished, and their *taava* (desire) for *bassar*, which was a *taava* of the *guf*, the physical body, led to their demise at *Kivros Hataava*.

Surprisingly, in *Parashas Re'ei*, *Bnei Yisroel* are encouraged to indulge in what is referred to as *bessar taava* after entering the *Eretz Yisroel*. In fact, the *passuk* states: "*Bechol avas nafshecha tochal bassar* – Eat meat to your heart's content." What distinguishes the *bassar taava* in *Eretz Yisroel* from the *slav* (*taavas bassar*) in the *Midbar*? The answer is that in *Parashas Re'ei*, the word *taava* is always coupled with the word *nefesh*, teaching us the importance of eating to sustain our *nefesh* so that we may engage more easily in the service of our Creator – that is, eating to live. By contrast, the *pesukim* about the *slav* in the *Midbar* do not mention the word *nefesh*. There, the intent was clearly to live for the sake of eating, an inappropriate habit which only led to burial in the cemeteries of *taavas haguf* (physical indulgence).

The Torah states in *Parashas Eikev* (8,10): "*Ve'achalta vesavata uveirachta* – And you will eat and you will be satisfied and you shall bless the Creator." The *Kli Yakkar* asks: How do we reconcile this Torah mandate with the *passuk* that follows (8,12): "*Pen tochal vesavata uvatim tovim tivneh veyashavta* – lest you will eat and be satisfied and build fine houses and dwell (in them)." The latter *passuk* appears to strongly discourage and criticize those who eat to the limits of satisfaction. The *Kli Yakkar* explains that in the latter *passuk*, there is a change in form from the word "*tochal* – you will eat" in the future tense, to the word "*vesavata* – in the past tense. The Torah is cautioning: lest you will eat after you were already satisfied with a full meal. That is gluttony, and is contemptuous.

The message to glean from these words is clear. One who eats, not to the point of gluttony, but rather to satisfy

his hunger, has the opportunity to thank *Hashem*. Unlike one who can never fully satisfy his cravings, he who eats to sustain himself for the service of *Hashem* recognizes that *Hashem* provides his every need, and will feel a gratitude that expresses itself in thanking *Hashem*.

Indeed, the latest breakthrough in recent health studies leads researchers to conclude that overeating is a dangerous habit. Articles speculating the effect that overeating has on metabolic functions exhort the general population to control their urge to overeat. These articles, which are currently the popular columns in leading health and fitness magazines, indicate that obesity is no longer an unsightly problem; it is downright fatal.

MORE THAN A MATTER OF "POOR BODY IMAGE"

Though obesity certainly lends itself to a poor body image, the dangerous aspect of obesity is the high risk of medical complications linked to overeating. The most notorious aspect of obesity is metabolic syndrome, as the majority of the obese population is more susceptible to this metabolic disorder than individuals of normal body weight. Also known as Syndrome X or the Insulin Resistance Syndrome (IRS), this dangerous syndrome is a major risk factor for diabetes and atherosclerotic heart disease. In fact, for those with metabolic syndrome, risk of developing diabetes is almost forty percent, and nearly sixty percent are at risk of developing early heart disease. Indeed, Type 2 diabetes is so often associated with weight control that it justifiably warrants its nickname "diabetes."

Included in the overwhelming array of health complications attributed to the syndrome are the problems of infertility, stroke, cancers, and high blood pressure. Researchers report that escalating blood pressure in the obese population can often be attributed to the internal fat deposits that increase insulin resistance in the body. The Harvard School of Public Health researchers also discovered that mental impairment was 50% worse in those who had Type 2 diabetes

for at least 15 years.

The metabolic syndrome is a condition of insulin resistance or insensitivity, which essentially means that fat cells, liver cells, and muscle cells are not adequately responsive to their own insulin. This results in high insulin levels, intolerance to glucose, and other abnormalities, such as high triglycerides, low HDL (good cholesterol) and high LDL (bad cholesterol) levels, which can eventually lead to heart disease. Furthermore, the subtypes of HDL and LDL in this syndrome are more atherogenic (leading to coronary heart disease), leading to a greater incidence of clogging of the arteries than in the normal population. Other symptoms of the metabolic syndrome include centripetal or truncal obesity, also known as "apple obesity," which means that fat in adipose tissue settles around the person's waistline and excess fat is deposited around the liver. The insulin resistance also triggers oxidants that are toxic to the endothelium (blood vessel wall lining) to circulate in the blood stream.

The statistics concerning the metabolic syndrome are staggering. To date, it is estimated that nearly 30 million people in the United States are genetically susceptible to the metabolic syndrome. In the Ashkenazi Jewish community, the occurrence of obesity has tripled from less than ten percent to a more than thirty percent rate in the last 10 years alone. The cases of Type 2 diabetes have rapidly increased from less than three percent to more than five percent, perhaps a direct proportionate result of the increased rate of obesity. In fact, one in four people with the metabolic syndrome will develop Type 2 diabetes.

THE BODY FAT FACTOR

The number of those with metabolic syndrome can reach the rank of 140 million adults and another 10 million children because the syndrome is directly linked to excess body fat and inactivity. Genetics play a role, but the full-scale syndrome is mostly the result of too many pounds and insufficient exercise.

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Given the primary cause of the metabolic syndrome, which is body fat, the most effective treatment is diet and exercise. Dropping just 5-7% of body weight can improve insulin sensitivity, meaning that the cells regain their ability to follow insulin's signals. Also, the hormonal imbalances of obesity that often contribute to infertility can be corrected by losing just 5% of body weight. Such weight loss can significantly improve chances of conceiving. New research at Cornell University has also found that overweight women produce less of the hormone prolactin in response to their nursing babies. Low prolactin production in overweight women can often cause trouble nursing, while generous prolactin levels help ease the flow of milk.

Studies reveal that the most effective insulin-sensitizing weight loss plans maintain a low and steady blood sugar and are packed with produce and low-fat dairy products. Reduce the carbohydrate intake, and such a diet can also be beneficial in lowering the cardiovascular risk factors of this syndrome. In a large controlled study that compared a low-fat diet to a low-carbohydrate diet, there was a significant reduction in blood sugar and triglycerides in the group on low carbs. In addition, the HDL increased significantly in this group. No considerable difference in weight loss (approximately 5-7%) between the two groups was noted. However, in the case of patients who already have the metabolic syndrome, most physicians recommend a low-carbohydrate diet to boost the body's response to insulin.

INACTIVITY SEALS THE SYNDROME

Body fat is not the only problem, though. Inactivity exacerbates the syndrome. Without exercise, the body relies even more on insulin and insulin receptors to transport sugar into cells. And in the case of metabolic syndrome, the insulin is being resisted; it's not doing its job. Therefore, exercise proves to have dramatic benefit for these patients. Several studies indicate that patients who exercise 4

to 5 times weekly for 30 to 45 minutes reduce their risk of developing diabetes or cardiac disease. This holds true even for people who are genetically susceptible to developing diabetes, because insulin sensitivity, too, improves with exercise. In fact, if symptoms are diagnosed as the metabolic syndrome in their early stages, then even patients with a genetic syndrome can reduce their chance of developing diabetes by up to seventy percent.

Researchers are struggling to devise tests that can detect the early signs of metabolic syndrome. In the interim, they propose detailed diet and exercise plans to address the needs of the escalating number of metabolic syndrome patients. Although effective in many cases, crash diets often backfire, resulting in boomerang weight gain. An overweight person who goes on a diet to lose about ten percent of his body weight will find that his metabolic rate slows tremendously because his body automatically tries to conserve fat. If he reaches his target loss and then reverts to his former eating habits, the lost weight will return, and perhaps bring an additional couple of pounds with it. This failure of the diet, though, can be prevented if the person follows with a maintenance diet that's consistently lower-calorie.

A recent Hong Kong study of overweight and obese preadolescents ages 9 to 12 proves that extra pounds — long known to damage adult arteries — attack children's blood vessels, too, resulting in stiff arteries. When these children ate a low-calorie diet for 6 weeks, their arteries grew more flexible, cutting the risk for high blood pressure and, ultimately, heart failure, heart attack, and stroke. Those who also exercised twice a week saw the biggest improvements. However, only the children who continued exercising (just once a week for a year) maintained this supple-artery advantage; among those who stopped their fitness regimen, stiffness returned regardless of diet.

The real eye opener in new metabolic syndrome studies is that it is possible to be obese on the inside but not on the outside. This study shows that normal-weight women may be headed for obe-

sity-related health problems due to an unhealthy lifestyle — the increasingly common metabolic syndrome. Clinical investigators indicate that these women are metabolically obese, despite their young age and normal body mass index (BMI, a measure of weight in relation to height used to indicate body fat). Those who showed no signs of outward obesity, but are termed "metabolically obese," had high percentages of body fat, less muscle, lower physical activity levels, lower peak oxygen uptake (meaning a lower level of cardiovascular fitness), and higher cholesterol levels. In addition, the metabolically obese, normal-weight women were less preoccupied with restraining or monitoring what foods they ate — the notorious habit associated with metabolic syndrome.

THE ONLY LONG-TERM SOLUTION: A RE-EVALUATION

A joint diet and exercise plan can help treat and sometimes prevent the metabolic syndrome. The only long-term solution to this widespread problem of obesity, however, is a complete re-evaluation of lifestyle. We must ask ourselves the following provoking question: *Do we eat to live, or do we live to eat?*

Bear in mind that the Torah's instructions to guard against gluttony do not, by default, condone deprivation. The Torah's disapproval of overeating is not a license to "undereat." "*Venishmartem*

me'od lenafshoseichem" is a precept that instructs us to protect the bodies that Hashem entrusted to us. Just as obesity is a threat to one's health, statistics about anorexia nervosa indicate that starving oneself is decidedly dangerous, as well. General estimates suggest that as many as 10 to 15 percent of eating disorders, such as anorexia, are fatal for those affected. The Torah teaches us the guidelines of *moderation*; neither excessiveness nor deprivation is the right approach. Everything, especially food, should be in good measure.

The phrase "Eat to live, don't live to eat" should be our mantra, aiding us in the struggle to maintain a healthy lifestyle. The medical risks that accompany obesity and the metabolic syndrome should urge each individual to examine his eating habits and overall lifestyle choices. From a Torah perspective, the damage that overindulgence can inflict upon people should be considered carefully, as well, as it could lead a person to overlook the fact that Hashem knows exactly what we need, and in what quantity we need it, in order to live.

Our increased self-control in all areas of our lives will help usher in the era of *Moshiach*, a time of healing, and a time when there is no longer a crazed hunger for food, only an insatiable appetite for *devar Hashem*. As the Prophet said: "*Lo raav lalecham ve'lo tzamma lamayim ki im lishmoa eis divrei Hashem* — Not a hunger for bread, nor a thirst for water, but to hear the words of Hashem" (*Amos 8,11*). □

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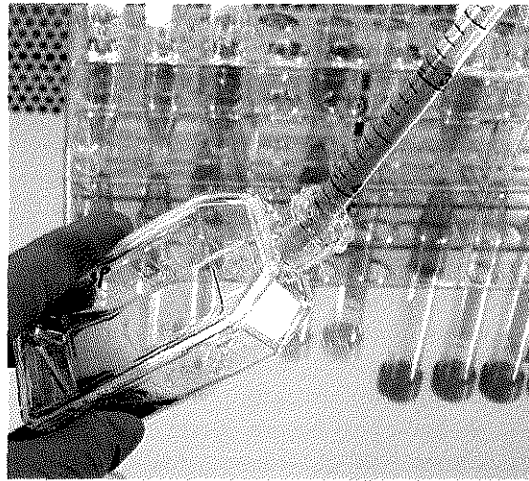
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SHIA MARKOWITZ



Genetic Testing: A Blessing or a Curse?

A plethora of premarital, prenatal and newborn genetic testing has become a standard service offered by medical professionals, social service organizations and government agencies to their constituencies. The purpose of this article is to help readers familiarize themselves with the potential benefits and serious concerns associated with these tests as they relate to the Torah-abiding community.

Ask a medical professional about the importance and benefits of genetic testing and you will probably receive the following reply: It depends. Is the testing to be done prior to marriage or after marriage? During pregnancy or on newborns? Also, what types of tests are being performed? Are they reliable? How will the results of the tests be presented to the patient? And, finally, how will the patient deal with the information received?

If you are, like most of us, uninformed in the science of genetics, this response will probably make your head spin. Because medical professionals are increasingly availing themselves of genetic testing, it is important for observant Jews to have at least a superficial understanding of the subject and

SHIA MARKOWITZ OF MONSEY, NY, A PARTNER OF THE GOLDMARK GROUP, WHICH HAS BEEN DESIGNING THE JEWISH OBSERVER AND PREPARING IT FOR PUBLICATION FOR OVER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS, IS ACTIVE IN COMMUNAL AFFAIRS.

how it can impact on families within our community.

WHAT ARE GENES?

Genes are specific pieces of information in the DNA, or genetic material, which we inherit from our parents. They tell our bodies how to develop and function. It is estimated, according to some scientists, that each person has as many as 100,000 genes. They are contained on 23 pairs of chromosomes and make up our genetic profile. When a change occurs to the information contained within a gene, the gene might not function properly. This type of change is called a mutation.

HOW GENES INFLUENCE RECESSIVE DISEASES

Genes come in pairs, with one copy inherited from each parent. As we have two copies of each gene, if only one of

the genes inherited by an individual is defective (i.e. a person is a carrier for the genetic disease), there is no impact on the health of the individual because the other gene contains the information needed for the body to function normally. For a person to be affected by a recessively inherited condition, such as Tay Sachs, Cystic Fibrosis (CF) or Familial Dysautonomia, he/she must inherit a particular mutated gene from both parents. Thus, if only one of the parents is a carrier of a mutated gene for a recessive condition, although that parent might pass the recessive gene to a child, the child will not be affected with that condition.

WHAT IS GENETIC TESTING?

Normally, a blood sample is taken and a genetics lab performs special tests that analyze the individual's genetic material by looking for genetic mutations. Though there has been an increase over the past decade in the number of dis-

eases that an individual can be tested for, genetic tests are only available for a fraction of the many genetic conditions we see today.

PREMARITAL TESTING AND THE CONCERN OF GENETIC LABELING

The ability of genetic researchers to identify specific mutated genes that cause particular diseases has produced a sort of conundrum for medical professionals. Though such research helps spawn the possibility of new cures and treatments for those already affected by disease, the information generated by such tests can stigmatize individuals who are only carriers and create unnecessary concern about one's responsibility for passing the disease on to future generations.

Halachic and medical literature are in agreement regarding the problem of stigmatizing carriers, and advise that, whenever possible, an individual not be labeled as a carrier of a particular mutation. Scientific research clearly indicates that it can be traumatic to individuals to learn that they are carriers of a genetic mutation. To address this issue, Dor Yeshorim (DY), an organization dedicated to preventing Jewish recessive genetic diseases, has made confidentiality the cornerstone of its program and has received endorsements from leading rabbinic and medical authorities worldwide. Because of its success over the past two decades, nearly 200,000 young adults entering marriageable age have been tested and have no knowledge of, or concern about, their carrier status. A simple phone call to the DY office at the time of a proposed *shidduch* informs the potential couple whether their match is genetically compatible. The organization has informed over 700 couples who were considering each other as potential *shidduchim* that their match had significant risk of producing children with severely debilitating fatal genetic diseases.

For those very few individuals who choose not to test at all and rely on the dictum of "*Shomeir pesa'im Hashem – Hashem protects the simple*" (*Tehillim*

EXCERPT OF A LETTER FROM AN EXPECTANT MOTHER

The voice on the other end sounded extremely tense. Before I could recognize who was on the line, Dr. G. bluntly said, "Your blood test came back positive for Gaucher Disease (GD). It's a fatal disease that is caused by a fatty substance that collects around the kidney and stops it from functioning. You have a chance of passing it on to your children. In order to confirm this, we must test your husband as soon as possible!"

I called my husband immediately and he rushed out of his office to be tested the same day. Our long wait for results seemed like it would never end. The torture we experienced every day is indescribable. At night, I lay awake haunted by the thoughts of giving birth to a sick child and seeing his condition deteriorate. My husband's and my appetite became poorer day by day. I almost couldn't swallow anything at all. I felt myself disconnecting with reality and falling into a new world – one full of fear. I cried, my husband cried, and it seemed like the entire world was crying along with me. My *Tehillim* became soggy from the tears that *Hashem* must have known came from the depths of my heart.

After two stressful and traumatic weeks, the doctor called back and informed us that my husband was also a carrier for this disease. I com-

pletely fell apart. I pleaded with the doctor to give me a more detailed description of the disease and possible remedies. At this point, the doctor explained that he really was not familiar with the details of the disease and recommended that I see a genetic counselor. A friend of mine suggested that I call Dor Yeshorim and tell them about my story. Rabbi (Yoseif) Ekstein (Dor Yeshorim's founder and current Director) listened with compassion and explained in detail what the disease is all about and how mild some of the symptoms usually are. He also informed me that many individuals live their entire lives without realizing that they are affected with GD. Even in those rare instances where the disease takes on a more aggressive nature, treatment has been developed that helps these individuals carry on their life in a normal fashion. He further noted that his office was receiving many similar calls each week.

Author's Note: The NIH (National Institute of Health) Technology Assessment Conference determined that widespread application of genetic screening to detect Gaucher Disease is not appropriate at this time and that the medical value for such testing has not been established. (The Journal of the American Medical Association, February 21, 1996.)

11,5), they, too, have no knowledge of their specific carrier status.

POST-MARITAL TESTING AND THE BURDEN OF KNOWLEDGE

We have recently entered an era of increasing prenatal genetic testing and enhanced sonogram imagery. This has presented physicians with an entire menu of moral challenges and responsibilities. In theory, this increase of knowledge should translate into addition-

al practitioner hours devoted to analyzing and checking test results, as well as more time devoted to patient interface and follow-up. The reality of the situation, however, is often the opposite. As more of the physician's client base turns to HMOs for insurance, he/she finds himself in the unenviable position of receiving little or no reimbursement for spending a disproportionate amount of time with certain patients. With more patients to see and less time to spend with each one, most doctors are usually unable or unwilling to take the time

necessary to thoroughly explain the testing process and results. Patients like expectant mothers, who are particularly vulnerable, and who need effective communication with, and the support of, their physician, are too often left feeling apprehensive and unnecessarily stressed. Far too many expectant mothers are leaving medical facilities confused, and are ill prepared to cope with the news that they are carriers for a debilitating recessive genetic disease. (See sidebar, page 17)

An article questioning the virtues of "just plowing ahead," regarding specific areas of prenatal genetic testing, appears in the *Journal of Ultrasound in Medicine*, authored by Dr. Roy Filly. The title of the published article, "Obstetrical Sonography: The Best Way to Terrify a Pregnant Woman," tells most of the story. The author's statements tell the rest:

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February 28, 2005

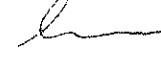
Shia Markowitz
Chairman, Executive Board of Dor Yeshorim

Dear Mr. Markowitz,

I am in receipt of your packet. Prenatal testing is creating a great deal of unnecessary anxiety and anguish for expectant mothers and it is a problem I deal with all the time. It is imperative that the rabbonim become aware of how severe this problem is, and educate themselves regarding this issue, so that they themselves can deal with it when approached with shaalos and perhaps also help educate prospective parents. My time is limited but I will lend all the support I can.

I sincerely regret not being able to grab the opportunity of getting more involved in this Avodas Hakodesh as my schedule is already severely overextended. On behalf of the entire frum community, I want to thank you for your work. May the Rebono Shel Olam bench you.

Sincerely,



Reuvain A. Shanik, M.D.

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From my vantage point, the identification of certain "abnormalities" in low-risk women has crossed the

line of "more harm than good." For the tiny residual number of Down Syndrome fetuses that may potentially come to light, by chasing down every last "marker," we put at least 10% of all pregnant women with perfectly healthy fetuses through a great deal of worry.

This is written by a doctor who does not share Torah values and whose patients have the choice of terminating a pregnancy if the child will not be perfectly healthy. Even this doctor questions whether the potential gains for the few are worth the price of months of anxiety for the many. What should we, who are restrained by halacha from terminating such a pregnancy, say when we have nothing possible to gain?

Over the more than twenty years of my involvement with the prevention of Jewish genetic diseases, I have found that any contemplated testing and medical procedure should meet these criteria: it must be helpful in preventing or helping find a cure for a disease, and must always do so without creating collateral damage to the person and family tested. Many times, as the record has proven, the rush to bring a specific genetic test to the public created greater problems than it solved. Dr. Lainie Friedman Ross, a pediatrician and medical ethicist at the University of Chicago, questioned the performance of certain genetic testing, and said, "We don't know what to do with the information. Reporting test data, for which there are no systems in place for follow-up testing and treatment..., is patient abandonment!"

PRACTICAL AND HASHKAFAT REASONS TO SAY "NO" TO PRENATAL GENETIC TESTING.

It is now commonplace for obstetricians to order an array of genetic tests for expectant mothers. Many physicians do this without informing the patient of their intentions to test for certain genetic diseases. While their concern for the health of the fetus is laudable, many

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physicians fail to realize two important facts that relate to Jewish patients.

1) An overwhelming majority of patients from the Orthodox Jewish community have already been tested for recessive genetic diseases through their participation with the Dor Yeshorim premarital testing program. Over the past two decades, Dor Yeshorim has added diseases to be tested for, as reliable genetic tests have become available to the public. Thus, for the couples that have been determined to be compatible, there is no risk of having a child with the disease that the parents were previously tested for. (It is still possible, however, that the fetus will be a *carrier* for the mutated gene.)

It is likely, however, that certain patients have not been tested for the complete menu of genetic tests that are available today. This is because certain genetic tests were not yet available to the public at the time that they were tested. The obstetrician might consider telling these patients that they are candidates for only these genetic tests. Though this group of patients *does* remain at risk for these untested genetic diseases, they still should not be tested because of the following second fact:

2) In almost all instances, halacha forbids the termination of a pregnancy even if the fetus will suffer from a debilitating genetic condition. It thus would serve no purpose to test the expectant mother – regardless whether she tested previously for potential genetic diseases – when the mother will surely not terminate the pregnancy. At this juncture, our *poskim* agree – with the exception of extraordinary situations – we should follow the words of our *Chazal*, “*Shomeir pesa'im Hashem.*”

Because of concern for the patient and the child's well being and/or potential malpractice complaints, the physician might press the patient to accept a proposed series of genetic testing. In such a case, the patient should request to sign a waiver for these tests or ask for time to consult with a *rav* to determine whether genetic testing is warranted, based on her situation.

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- The *Vort* celebration is to be discontinued. The *L'chaim* (held at the time that the engagement is announced) should also not turn into a *Vort*.

THE WEDDING

- 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

- The total cost of these items for the entire wedding should not exceed \$1,800.

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THE CONSEQUENCES OF NEONATAL SCREENING

Adding more confusion to the mix is the mandate from both the New York and the New Jersey State Departments of

Health to test all newborns for cystic fibrosis. It is beyond the scope of this article to explain the potential benefits, if any, which may exist for this type of testing. Suffice it to say that the distinguished publication, *Journal of Medical Screening*

(2001; 8:51), reports that there is "insufficient evidence that neo-natal screening for Cystic Fibrosis (CF) is worthwhile." What is significant is the hysteria that can be created when conveying results of CF testing (see sidebar).

LETTER FROM A NEW MOTHER

Baruch Hashem, three months ago, I gave birth to my child. Everything was perfectly OK, or so I thought. On Wednesday, I got a call from Staten Island Hospital, where my baby was delivered, asking if I received the letter concerning my newborn's screening results. Since I had just moved and the mail had not been forwarded, I said, "No, I didn't receive any mail." The nurse became hysterical and practically ordered me to get in touch with my doctor immediately. I begged her to tell me what the problem was, but she told me, "Sorry, this is against the rules and regulations." I pressed her and she finally told me that something in the results came back abnormal and I should see my pediatrician ASAP! The next day, I received the letter from the hospital by FedEx Overnight, stating that the results came back abnormal and that it was urgent that I see my doctor.

Since I was panic-stricken and I hadn't decided on a doctor for my baby yet, I randomly chose Dr. D of the Health Center. The nurse weighed my baby while the doctor looked at the results. I saw his face changing colors as he asked the nurse to leave the room. I burst out crying, begging the doctor to explain to me what was wrong with my baby. He said that he sees a very high reading for CF. After imploring him to explain the reading to me, he told me some symptoms. I recognized that some of these were noticeable in my baby. He told me to make an appointment for a "Sweat Test," as this will determine if my baby is healthy or not. Before departing, he

recommended that I shouldn't read anything regarding CF until they confirm the diagnosis because it would be too terrifying.

I left his office in a state of shock. I cried on the street, overwhelmed with the thought that I would have very little time to spend with my baby. I held her so tight all of the time - as though, by not letting go, I could save her precious life. I walked toward my parents' house and met my father outside. Upon seeing that I could barely speak, he took me home and there I finally expressed the emotions that lay so deep inside, all the while still sobbing. In short time, my entire family joined me in my distress.

Erev Yom Kippur found me sitting with my husband and baby in the hospital waiting room. The room was filled with sick children, each suffering from different diseases. I tried pushing away troubling thoughts. Perhaps our child will look like these sick children in a few months from now. My husband must have been thinking something along the same lines as he burst into tears watching the scene in front of him. Together we prayed to *Hashem* to spare the life of our precious little girl. After a few more hours of apprehension and agony, the doctor reported that everything was *Baruch Hashem* fine! The child is simply a *carrier* for CF!!! Now both my husband and I cried again, but this time it was a cry thanking *Hashem* for the *chessed* He did for us. The aftereffects of these three unforgettable days left me

traumatized for a long time.

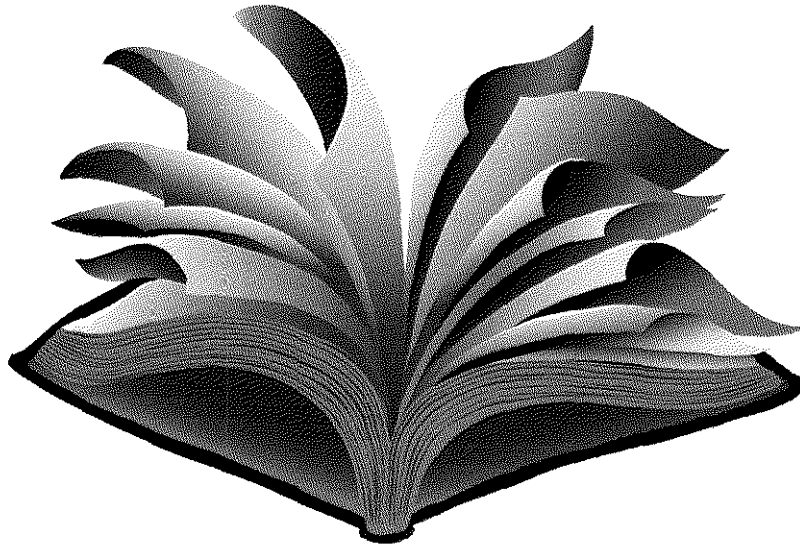
The following day was *Yom Kippur*, and I kept vomiting, since I had not eaten any solids in the past several days. And for what reason? Because a doctor couldn't or didn't have the time to accurately explain the initial test results! I decided to call *Dor Yeshorim* to ask if I could have children, since I wasn't sure exactly what being a carrier meant. The *DY* representative spent time with me and explained in detail that a carrier is perfectly healthy and that I could look forward to raising a healthy *mishpacha* in the future.

Please publicize my letter so that the public will not go through what I did. May *Hashem* help that you spare parents-to-be the agony that I went through.

Sincerely yours,
Mrs. T.

To fully appreciate the situation, the reader must know certain facts. Only 85% of CF mutations have been identified for the general world population. Since a DNA test cannot assure that the child is not carrying one of the unrecognized mutations, a "Sweat Test" is usually required, even though it is not always reliable, to help rule out the possibility that the newborn has the CF disease. This is in contrast with Ashkenazic Jews, where all known CF mutations have been identified. Consequentially, DNA tests for this group are far more reliable than a "Sweat Test." Hence, when a child born to an Ashkenazic Jewish family is tested via the DNA process at the time of birth and the results come back that the child is only a carrier, no more testing is necessary. Why would anyone feel the necessity to perform a completely pointless "Sweat Test" on the newborn at this time? It simply shows that some of the medical professionals involved lack the fundamental understanding of basic genetic testing, and therefore apply the same testing standard to all ethnic groups. - SM

YONOSON ROSENBLUM



Anatomy of a Slander

..... APOLOGY UNDELIVERED

In early May 2000, shocking headlines appeared in some of the most widely read media outlets in the world: “Book Blasts WWII Rabbis” (Associated Press); “New Book Slams US Orthodox WWII Rescue Efforts” (*Jerusalem Post*). Those blaring headlines were followed in each case by an almost identical lead paragraph.

The leader in the AP story sent to thousands of media outlets worldwide captures the flavor: “During the Holocaust, *ultra-Orthodox American rabbis* focused on saving several hundred Talmudic scholars, *ignoring the suffering of millions of other Jews who were even-*

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. THE AUTHOR WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS HIS APPRECIATION TO DR. DAVID KRANZLER, WHO HAS DEDICATED HIS LIFE TO CHRONICLING ORTHODOX RESCUE WORK DURING THE HOLOCAUST, FOR MUCH OF THE INFORMATION AND INSIGHTS ON WHICH THIS ARTICLE IS BASED.

tually murdered by the Nazis, a new book charges” (emphasis added).

The rabbinic founders of the Vaad ha-Hatzala (the Vaad) were further accused of “bucking the general Jewish communal framework that was equally devoted to rescue” and hurting the efforts of mainstream American groups “working to rescue as many Jews as possible and to influence reluctant American politicians to take action” (AP).

No more damning accusation has ever been hurled against Torah Judaism than that leaders of the Vaad – such towering figures as Rabbi Aharon Kotler, Rabbi Eliezer Silver, and Rabbi Avrohom Kalmanowitz – acted with “disregard for other endangered Jews” (*Jerusalem Post*).

The instigator of these charges has consistently refused to correct the huge damage done by the quoted news stories. It is clear from his own book, and by implication from his own public statements, that he knows the quoted statements to be gross distortions. And yet, his consistent response, including as recently as last year, to all efforts to gain a retraction of the vile claim that great rabbinic figures were indifferent to the fate of the vast mass of European Jewry

has been to renew his invective and to sneer at the efforts of chareidi hagiographers to whitewash the record.

..... I. THE ACCUSER

The book referred to in the above-quoted news stories is *The Response of Orthodox Jewry in the United States to the Holocaust: The Activities of the Vaad ha-Hatzala Rescue Committee 1939-1945*, by Dr. Efraim Zuroff, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Israel. The fact that Zuroff wears a yarmulke and his book was published by Yeshiva University’s KTAV Publishing House gave added credibility to his charges.

The nearly identical language in the lead paragraphs of the most prominent news stories points to an orchestrated campaign to market Zuroff’s book. And, indeed, quotes from Zuroff were laced throughout the stories.

It is questionable whether the writers of the news stories had even read Zuroff’s book, which does not support the charge of Orthodox indifference. In his *Afterward*, for instance, Zuroff describes the Vaad’s most lasting lega-

cy to the Jewish people as its "dedication to the saving of Jewish lives," and credits a group of foreign-born, non-English speaking rabbis with having led the efforts to unite American Jewry around rescue work. The rabbis referred to were, of course, the same ones accused in the sensational news stories.¹

CHAREIDI BAITING

Zuroff showed a considerable animus towards the chareidi community to complement his flair for dramatic accusations. (He has consistently refused to acknowledge that most of the rabbinic members, if not the leadership, of the Vaad were identified with Mizrachi.) Extrapolating from his alleged "findings," Zuroff offered the *Jerusalem Post's* Marilyn Henry a blistering critique of today's chareidi world and rabbinic leadership. "[The chareidim] are plagued by this sectarianism and particularism that infects everything they do," he said. He contrasted that approach with that of the Zionists, who "did not leave or undermine the communal framework."

In addition, Zuroff accused European *roshei yeshiva* of having passed up opportunities to get visas for their students and of having been literally dragged by their students to safety in Lithuania. He speculated that chareidim in Israel today refuse to observe Yom Hashoah because it is "difficult for them [to admit] the historical mistakes that were made by Orthodox leaders, people who are deferred to in almost

¹ *The Response of Orthodox Jewry* further undercuts Zuroff's public accusations in a number of ways. He shows, for instance, why an independent organization like the Vaad was necessary for any effort to rescue *roshei yeshiva* and yeshiva students. Though the Joint Distribution Committee provided assistance to the yeshiva students who found temporary refuge in Vilna, and subsequently contributed part of their transportation costs to Shanghai (the bulk of the monies were collected by Orthodox activists like Irving Bunim on *Shabbos*), the leaders of the JDC were primarily drawn from the German-Jewish aristocracy, and as such, had little feeling for yeshiva students or their needs. The leaders of the JDC and other mainstream organizations were very concerned with anti-Semitism in America, and feared an influx of Eastern European Orthodox Jews incapable of being assimilated.

godly fashion."

As a marketing ploy, if not as history, these condemnations of chareidim were doubtless a success.

II. THE COUNTEROFFENSIVE

The Orthodox world did not take the *chillul Hashem* lying down. Dr. David Kranzler, Joseph Friedenson, and I responded to the charges being used to sell Zuroff's book in a wide variety of venues, and he and I debated publicly.²

The responses focused on Zuroff's two main points: (1) the Orthodox were indifferent to the fate of the mass of European Jewry; and (2) the Orthodox departed from a communal framework dedicated to rescuing as many Jews as possible.

ORTHODOX INDIFFERENCE REBUTTED

The attitude of the Orthodox leadership towards the rescue of European Jewry was expressed by Rabbi Aharon Kotler, one of the driving forces behind the Vaad. Those who met Reb Aharon shortly after his arrival in America found him with a map of Europe in front of him. His constant refrain was, "*Mir darfen ratevven Yidden* - We must save Jews." When he was challenged for his readiness to join forces with Reform leader Stephen Wise for rescue, Reb Aharon replied, "I would work with the Pope if it would save even the fingernail of one Jewish child." And when the Swiss Jewish press criticized Isaac and Recha Sternbuch for negotiating through fascist intermediaries for the release of 1200 prisoners from Theresienstadt, and dismissed those released as "*meshumadim*," Reb Aharon said, "A Jew is a Jew is a Jew."

That attitude to the rescue of Jews was manifested in the actions of the

² Only as the debate was about to begin was I informed by the sponsor, Emunah Women, that Zuroff would speak twice while I would be limited to one speech. I need not have worried. In his final speech, the most telling point Zuroff raised was to correct my pronunciation of Curacao (second "c" is soft).

Orthodox community throughout the war. One example would be the reaction to a telegram from Rabbi Michael Ber

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Weissmandl in Slovakia that reached New York on a *Shabbos* morning in November, 1943. Rabbi Weissmandl wrote that it was possible to bring Jews

hiding in Polish forests over the border into Hungary for \$250 a person. In response, the yeshivos and seminaries were closed for three days as young boys

and girls fanned out across New York City collecting. There is no example of any other Jewish group showing a comparable sense of urgency. On more than one occasion, leading Orthodox Jews, including prominent rabbis, publicly violated *Shabbos* to collect money for urgent ransom schemes.

A DEVIANT DEBATER'S TRICK

The lie that Orthodox rabbis and laymen alike focused exclusively on the rescue of yeshiva students and *roshei yeshiva* is based on a cheap debater's trick: the equation of the activity of the Vaad between 1939 and 1941 with all Orthodox rescue work. True, the Vaad was initially formed in 1939 for the purpose of rescuing 3,000 yeshiva students trapped in Vilna. But the efforts of the Vaad were only one small part of the panoply of Orthodox relief and rescue efforts, a fact which Zuroff has repeatedly refused to acknowledge. Many of those other efforts were led by the same rabbis who headed the Vaad.

After the German occupation of Poland, Agudah-affiliated groups were the only ones to defy a British embargo on sending food parcels to trapped Jews. The services of Agudah were available to any Jew who wished to send a food package.

Moreover, between 1939 and 1941, the same years the Vaad was involved in the rescue of *roshei yeshiva* and yeshiva students, Zeirei Agudath Israel was busy almost around the clock procuring visas for Jews in Europe. Again, Zeirei's services were available to all Jews. In that period, Zeirei's visa office provided advice and assistance to 7,500 people. Between 50 and 60 cables reached the office per day. Unpaid young volunteers laboriously filled out visa forms that were four feet long and had to be filled out manually in sextuplet. Louis Septimus and other Zeirei members gathered hundreds of affidavits of financial support from clients, friends, and even complete strangers. Mike Tress, the head of Zeirei, traveled to Washington, D.C. weekly to argue appeals of those whose visa requests had been turned down. He succeeded in reversing the consular decisions

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Most important, the Vaad's efforts to procure visas for the leading European rabbis were not at the expense of efforts to save other Jews. The Vaad sought to bring those rabbis and *roshei yeshiva* into the United States on Special Emergency Visitors Visas, an initiative pioneered by the Jewish Labor Committee. Since these visas were above quota, and reserved only for persons of exceptional distinction, they did not take away from visas available to other Jews.

Moreover, only a very small percentage of the Special Emergency Visitors Visas went to *roshei yeshiva*. Eventually, 2,000 artists and intellectuals entered the country on such visas compared to no more than 40 Torah scholars. Why, one wonders, does Zuroff only condemn Orthodox particularism when every Jewish group was availing itself of the program in the same way and trying to save those most closely affiliated with it?³

III. AN APATHETIC AND DIVIDED MAINSTREAM LEADERSHIP

Far from being dedicated to rescue, as the news stories surrounding publication of Zuroff's book claimed, the mainstream Jewish organizations were characterized by "complete paralysis," in the words of Raul Hilberg, author of the classic *The Destruction of Europe's Jews*. Mainstream leaders were unable to break out of their business-as-usual approach, according to David Wyman, the foremost authority on American responses to the Holocaust.

On August 28, 1942, Stephen Wise, the most prominent American Jewish leader of the time, received a telegram from Gerhart Riegner of the World Jewish Congress describing Hitler's plan to wipe out all European Jewry. Wise had previously received similar information of the extermination of Polish Jewry from

³ No faction was more guilty of particularism than the Zionists. With nearly 70,000 Palestine certificates in its control, the Jewish Agency did not issue a single one to the 3,000 Torah scholars stranded in Vilna.

Bundist sources. He did nothing other than send the cables to the State Department for confirmation.

Only when Jacob Rosenheim, head of World Agudath Israel, received a similar cable from Isaac Sternbuch in Switzerland (through the Polish government-in-exile diplomatic pouches, which only the Orthodox were willing to use to evade State Department censorship), did things begin to move. Rosenheim and Rabbi Avrohom Kalmanowitz pressured Wise to call a meeting of all Jewish groups. At that September 6 meeting, Wise accused the Orthodox of spreading "atrocious tales" and made all participants swear secrecy so as not to embarrass the president.

The September 6 meeting eventu-

stance of the Riegner and Sternbuch cables, the major resolutions passed all dealt with Reform leader Abba Hillel Silver's call for the creation of a Jewish state. Rescue was mentioned in only the most general terms.

Not only did the leading figures of American Jewry respond apathetically to all rescue efforts, the internecine fighting between various Zionist groups significantly undermined whatever efforts were made. In March, 1943, the Revisionist Zionists mounted a pageant, entitled "We Will Never Die," to dramatize the plight of European Jewry. Starring Edward G. Robinson and Paul Muni, it drew a record crowd of 40,000 to Madison Square Garden, and subsequent productions drew 60,000 viewers

NOT ONLY DID THE LEADING FIGURES OF AMERICAN JEWRY RESPOND APATHETICALLY TO ALL RESCUE EFFORTS, THE INTERNECINE FIGHTING BETWEEN VARIOUS ZIONIST GROUPS SIGNIFICANTLY UNDERMINED WHATEVER EFFORTS WERE MADE.

ally led to the creation of the Jewish Emergency Committee, but after a December meeting with FDR, in which the president regaled the Jewish leaders for most of the time and not one concrete rescue proposal was advanced, Wise disbanded the JEC. By the time the Pittsburgh Conference of Jewish Organizations took place the next month, rescue was again on the backburner. The original invitation spoke only of "the post-War status of Jews and the building of a Jewish Palestine." Only Orthodox protests succeeded in placing rescue on the agenda at all.

At the American Jewish Conference at the end of August, 1943, nearly a year after Roosevelt had confirmed the sub-

stance of the Riegner and Sternbuch cables, the major resolutions passed all dealt with Reform leader Abba Hillel Silver's call for the creation of a Jewish state. Rescue was mentioned in only the most general terms.

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Zionism (the best organized segment of American Jewry) concentrated its major force on the drive for a future Jewish state in Palestine. It consigned rescue to a distinctly secondary position."

The only allies the Revisionists found in their battle to arouse the American public and push the Rescue Resolution were the Orthodox rabbis. Four hundred Orthodox rabbis marched in Washington, D.C. on October 6, 1943, as a dramatic prelude to the introduction of the Rescue Resolution. To avert passage of the Rescue Resolution, FDR agreed to create the War Refugee Board (WRB). Wyman estimates that the WRB saved between 100,000 and 200,000 Jewish lives.

Those same rabbis who headed the Vaad played a major role in continually pushing the WRB to act more forcefully in the face of State Department obstructionism. Rabbi Avrohom Kalmanowitz (the "old rabbi in the white beard") was credited with turning Treasury Secretary Morgenthau into the most ardent supporter of rescue in the Roosevelt administration. Morgenthau wrote in his diary how Rabbi Kalmanowitz "wept and wept and wept" in his office. And it was Treasury Department officials who had worked under Morgenthau who took the lead role in the WRB.

DID THE ROSHEI YESHIVA ERR?

In his interviews and to some extent in his book, Zuroff criticized some of the major Lithuanian *roshei yeshiva* for not having taken greater advantage of the "end" visas to Dutch-held Curacao issued by the honorary Dutch consul in Kovno, which played a crucial role in the flight of the Mirrer Yeshiva to Shanghai. (The potential of the "end" visas was discovered by Nathan Gutwirth, a Telshe Yeshiva student from Holland.) But the Curacao "end" visas were only of use in conjunction with Japanese transit visas issued by the temporary Japanese consul in Kovno against explicit orders. As Zuroff notes in his book, it did not take long for the Japanese to discover that the Curacao "end" visas were invalid, and to stop honoring them. In the end, only

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2,000 of the 3,500 Curacao "end" visas issued were ever utilized. Thus, there is no reason to believe that this route could have been exploited further.

Nor is the hesitancy of the *roshei yeshiva* hard to fathom, even with the benefit of 20/20 hindsight. They knew of the brutal suppression of religion under Stalin and were afraid of being caught in his web. At the outset of the war, thousands of Jews in Lemberg opted to return to Nazi-occupied territory, rather than remain under Russian control, so intense were the fears of Stalin. Further, the *roshei yeshiva* were afraid that they would be treated as enemies of the Soviet state and possibly executed for seeking to leave the Soviet Union. They knew, as Zuroff mentions in his book, that the NKVD had been busy photographing those applying for visas in Kovno.

Finally, Zuroff confuses *daas Torah* with prophecy, something no one has ever claimed for *gedolei Torah*. At the beginning of the war, a young man asked Rabbi Elchonon Wasserman ז"ל which of two courses of action he should take. Reb Elchonon was not embarrassed to reply that he had no clarity on the matter.

IV. THE PUBLIC EXCHANGE

The debate over Zuroff's charges lay relatively dormant until 2002, when *Jewish Action* published a lengthy refutation by Dr. David Kranzler, the leading expert on Orthodox rescue work during the Holocaust. Dr. Kranzler raised ten specific points.

Most of those points dealt with ways in which the Orthodox had departed from the petty legalisms of other Jewish groups, including the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), and, unlike these other groups, elevated the imperative of *pikuach nefesh* (saving lives) above all else. One example given by Dr. Kranzler was the purchase of false Latin American passports for Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe. The utility of these passports was discovered by Recha and Isaac Sternbuch in Switzerland, and these passports eventually saved tens of thousands of lives. As a matter of high principle,

Saly Mayer, the JDC representative in Switzerland, refused to provide money for these fake passports.⁴

In his lengthy response to Dr. Kranzler, Zuroff did not so much as mention one of Kranzler's ten points about Orthodox rescue efforts. Rather, he largely confined himself to a recitation of the history of the founding of the Vaad in 1939, and the dismay of the JDC with the Vaad's insistence on running separate fundraising campaigns.

Yet, as Zuroff makes clear in his book, the amount of money raised by the Vaad from non-Orthodox sources, including the Federations, was a miniscule \$22,000. From the outset, he has been challenged repeatedly to show how lives were lost because of lack of funds, especially in the first period of Vaad activity from 1939-1941, which constitutes the primary focus of his book. He has never picked up the gauntlet.

V. NEW EVIDENCE

AN IMPLICIT CONCESSION

The overwhelming evidence refuting the negative portrayal of Orthodox rescue activities that Zuroff offered gullible reporters has been well-known for decades. Recent developments – in particular, tacit, if unacknowledged, admissions by Zuroff himself – have discredited his charges.

The first of these developments was the publication in 2003 of *Race Against Death: Peter Bergson, America, and the Holocaust*. The bulk of the book consists of two interviews with Hillel Kook (alias Peter Bergson) conducted by non-Jewish scholar David Wyman. Kook, a Revisionist Zionist from Palestine and the nephew of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook, organized the Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, and was one of the great unsung heroes of Holocaust rescue.

⁴ Mayer's legalism knew no bounds. At the beginning of the war, he even informed Swiss gendarmes of illegal Jewish refugees, leading to their deportation.

Zuroff reviewed the book effusively in *The Jerusalem Post*, and fully concurred with Kook's bitter indictment of the mainstream and Zionist leadership of American Jewry.

He wrote:

"[T]he leaders of the major Jewish organizations..., and particularly Zionist leaders Stephen Wise and Nahum Goldmann, invested considerable time and resources in undermining [the Emergency Committee's] activities. For the most part, they behaved as if large-scale rescue operations by the American government were either impossible or doomed to failure."

All this, as Zuroff noted in his review, has been well known since the 1984 publication of Wyman's monumental work, *The Abandonment of the Jews*.

So much for the description of an American Jewish leadership united around rescue and pressuring recalcitrant politicians.

Of course, there was more in *Race Against Death*. As Kook makes clear, the same rabbis who headed the Vaad were the Bergsonites' closest allies and the most determined proponents of rescue in the organized Jewish community. The Orthodox rabbis, explains Kook, were "more courageous.... [They] were simply more responsive, more – more Jewish, in a sense. They were more sensitive to the issue, and less affected by the environment." Specifically discussing his close relationship with Vaad ha-Hatzala, Kook comments, "They operated on the old Jewish theological concept of 'He who saves one soul, saves the whole world.'"

Needless to say, Zuroff made no mention in his review of Kook's Orthodox allies.

ANOTHER MAJOR RETREAT

An even more astounding concession from Zuroff was yet to come. In a letter to me after one of our many duels in print, Zuroff writes, "*My major criticism of the activities of the Vaad ha-Hatzala relates not to the efforts to rescue the leading roshei yeshiva, which took place primarily during the years 1939-1941, but*

rather to their decision to continue funding the educational activities of rabbis and yeshiva students in Shanghai and Central Asia (who were not in danger of imminent murder by the Nazis and were simultaneously receiving help from other Jewish relief organizations) after

the news of the Final Solution became public and they themselves had devised a means of sending funds into Nazi-occupied Europe where money was being used to save lives” (emphasis added).

Zuroff’s statement that his primary objection to the Vaad has little to do with

its initial efforts to save *roshei yeshiva* and yeshiva students is truly shocking.⁵ Each of the news stories generated by his book focused on the formation of the Vaad in 1939 to rescue *roshei yeshiva* and yeshiva students, and those efforts were cited as the primary proof of rabbinic indifference to the fate of other Jews. And in his lengthy response to Dr. Kranzler in *Jewish Action*, Zuroff again concentrated almost exclusively on the efforts of the Vaad between 1939 and 1941 to rescue yeshiva students from Vilna, following his usual *modus operandi* of equating the Vaad’s efforts with the totality of Orthodox rescue efforts and then criticizing those efforts for their particularism. Only towards the very end of his response does he mention Vaad monies sent to Shanghai and Central Asia in 1944.

WHY DIDN'T THEY CLOSE THEIR GEMAROS?

In our public debate, Zuroff fairly shouted, “Why didn’t they close their Gemaros in Shanghai?” And that, it now appears, is what it all comes down to, as far as he is concerned.

In 1944, the Vaad sent \$265,000 to yeshiva students in Shanghai and Central Asia. That same year, the UJA sent \$10,000,000 to agricultural settlements in Palestine, the Jewish Labor Committee spent \$500,000 on combating anti-Semitism in America, and the World Jewish Congress an equal amount vainly trying to secure a congressional resolution in favor of a post-war Jewish state in Palestine. Neither Jews in Palestine nor Jews in America were in immediate physical danger in 1944, yet these vast sums of money do not bother Zuroff one whit. Just the money sent to Torah scholars. Why?

Nor was the problem in Europe pri-

⁵ Zuroff’s letter to me contains another crucial admission. He acknowledges that it was Orthodox rescue activists in the United States and Europe who “devised” means for getting crucial funds to Europe. And it was Orthodox activists in Europe who were behind almost every major ransom and rescue scheme. So the Orthodox are condemned for not doing more of what mainstream groups refused to do because of their concern with legal niceties and refusal to negotiate with the Nazis.

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marily one of a lack of funds. The JDC raised approximately \$16 million dollars in 1944. Saly Mayer, the JDC representative in Switzerland, had access to far more money than the Vaad spent in Shanghai. He continually stymied a host of ransom initiatives and rescue schemes hatched by Orthodox activists, like the Sternbuchs and Rabbi Michael Ber Weismandl. The timidity and the petty legalism of those controlling the money, not the lack of money itself, was the primary problem. Moreover, the tiny Orthodox community, through the Vaad, raised more money in 1944 for rescue and relief than any group besides the JDC. The vast majority of that money was spent on Orthodox-generated rescue schemes in Europe.

Finally, let us consider the situation of those Torah scholars. Their story is one of unparalleled spiritual heroism. The refugees in Shanghai were herded into a ghetto. Avitaminosis and dysentery were rampant, and the rations were near starvation levels. Allied bombing and the possibility that the Japanese would adopt the policies of their Nazi allies were constant threats. Most of the Torah scholars had lost their entire families. And their financial situation was far worse than that of most of the refugees. Unlike the German and Austrian refugees who had fled with some of their possessions, the yeshiva students escaped with only the shirts on their backs. And despite all this, they continued to learn 14 to 18 hours a day.

And what would they have done if they had closed their Gemaras? Stared at the walls and gone insane? These schol-

ars, as Zuroff admits in his book, played an indispensable role in the rebuilding of the entire world of Torah learning in the post-War period. Anything the Vaad did to ensure their survival and ability to continue to learn Torah should be a point of pride to every Torah Jew.⁶

THE FINAL PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

The appearance of Dr. Alex Grobman's *Battling for Souls: The Vaad Hatzala Rescue Committee in Post-War Europe* served to fill in some further details of the story. Grobman chronicles the vast differences in outlook between the Vaad activists and the leadership of the JDC, both during the wartime period and in the post-war period. From his account, it is clear that, but for the formation of the Vaad, few of the 3,000 yeshiva students who fled to Vilna at the outset of the war would have ever been saved. They were simply not a high enough priority in the eyes of the primarily secular leadership of the JDC. Zuroff also concedes this point in his book.

In the post-war period as well, the spiritual resuscitation of the survivors was well down on the Joint's list of priorities. The cry of a Jew: "It is not enough to remain alive — I want to remain a Jew!" was not one easily comprehended by the leaders of the Joint. Kosher food was in often in short supply for the survivors. Joint employees were required to work on *Shabbos*, and many cultural events in the Displaced Persons camps were scheduled on *Shabbos*.

Dr. Koppel Pinson, the JDC educational director in Germany and Austria, sought to make the JDC an active force "in making Jewish life richer, broader, and more tolerant." He viewed traditional Jewish education as "harping on the gruesome experience of the past years, on ideas of revenge, on fanatical contempt for the rest of the world, and an unrealistic feeling of complete self-sufficiency against the rest of the world." And he was far more concerned with "every poet, painter, musician, scholar or scientist salvaged from the wrecks of European Jewry" than with the potential *talmidei chachamim*.

This is not so much a criticism of the JDC as an acknowledgment of the different perspectives of the JDC and the leaders of the Vaad. The Joint saw itself as serving all the survivors, and religious rehabilitation was only one of many items on its agenda, and by no means the top priority. In time, the JDC would provide the primary financial support for most of the yeshivos and seminaries in the Allied Occupied Zones. A number of the representatives sent by the Joint to Europe to attend to the needs of religious survivors were men of exceptionally high caliber, including Rabbi Alexander Rosenberg, Dr. Samuel Schmidt, and Rabbi Michael Munk. These emissaries were hampered, however, by a lack of staff caused by the Joint's preference for using social workers with years of experience, even though they might have little knowledge of European Jewish history and culture, and little ability to communicate with the survivors.

Rabbi Aharon Kotler summarized the difference between the perspective of the Joint and the Vaad:

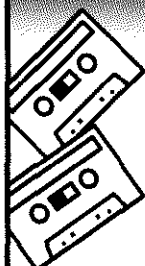
"Yiddishkeit and ministering to religious needs is only one phase and a rather small one in a large and extensive program [of the Joint]... The JDC will not initiate the establishment of yeshivos, kosher kitchens, *mikvaos*, and other religious needs. It will only answer a specific request and only within the realms of their budget and other considerations. Not so with the Vaad haHatzala. The Vaad haHatzala was created to answer the specific religious needs of our people."

All that remains to be answered is the question: Why? Why has Zuroff persisted in portraying the work of the Vaad from 1939-41 as if it were the totality of American Orthodoxy's response to events in Europe, while ignoring the other Orthodox efforts on behalf of the masses of European Jewry? Why does he condemn the Vaad's success in procuring 40 Special Visitors Visas for *roshei yeshiva* as proof of chareidi particularism, but not the use of the same Special Visitors Visas by secular Jewish groups to save

⁶ Moreover, Zuroff omits a crucial point: It was only due to the Vaad that the JDC was able to transfer any money at all to Shanghai in 1944. After Pearl Harbor, the JDC stopped all money transfers to Shanghai and Central Asia. Even when the Treasury Department broadly hinted to JDC representatives that they would not object to money transfers, the excessively legalistic JDC would not do so. By late 1943, Laura Margolies, the JDC representative in Shanghai, could no longer even borrow locally against the promise of future payments.

Meanwhile, the Vaad never stopped transferring monies to Shanghai. And it was Orthodox activists who eventually secured the explicit permission to transfer funds to Shanghai that the JDC required, and who showed the JDC how monies could be gotten to refugees in Central Asia.

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2,000 artists and intellectuals? Why is he obsessed with \$265,000 sent to starving yeshiva students in Shanghai and Central Asia in 1944, but not with the millions wasted by mainstream groups on futile congressional resolutions or sent to farmers in Palestine? Surely, the desire to sell more books cannot have been his sole motivation.

Ultimately, the only one who can answer these questions is Efraim Zuroff himself.⁷

As for us, we must never lose sight of the vast gulf between the response of Orthodox Jews, raised on the imperative of *pikuach nefesh*, to the news of the annihilation of their fellow Jews in Europe, and that of the secular Jewish leadership. □

⁷ Here, too, Dr. Grobman's book may offer at least a partial clue. The last two chapters of his book are devoted to the Central Orthodox Committee (COC), brought into existence in 1947 by the JDC, at least in part to destroy the Vaad. Using its massive financial clout, the Joint prevailed upon other Orthodox groups to join together to form the COC, which would serve as an advisory committee to the JDC on the needs of religious survivors.

The COC representative in Europe from March, 1948 was Samuel Sar, a dean at Yeshiva University. Sar was a bitter critic of the Vaad. Though he left for Europe filled with enthusiasm for the task of helping religious survivors, his experience was not a happy one on two accounts. First, he was not very successful in persuading the JDC to devote larger resources to the religious needs of survivors, even though a COC rabbinic fact-finding committee at the end of 1947 found that the kosher kitchens in almost every DP camp were inadequate to service the demand.

And secondly, as Dr. Grobman noted, he had difficulty establishing relationships with the survivors. Three years after the end of the war, they were not interested in hearing from an American, newly arrived on the scene, what they should do. On one occasion, Sar convened a conference of all Talmud Torah teachers, at which 100 rabbis were expected to attend. But in the end, the conference was boycotted because of Sar's failure to consult in advance with the local Agudath Harabbonim. At a June meeting with the rabbis in Munich, the rabbis "stressed that it was undesirable under the existing setup of the COC to turn over any of the work of the Vaad Hatzala to the COC...." Sar returned to the States shortly thereafter, his health severely impaired and broken in spirit.

As a professional historian, Zuroff should have mentioned that Samuel Sar was his grandfather, and how that fact may have colored his attitude towards the Vaad.

READERS' FORUM



Under the theme "New Vistas on the Israeli Scene," The Jewish Observer (March '05) featured an article, "Buying Jewish Souls," by Mayaan Pase-Jaffe, which reported on how Evangelical Christians offer substantial financial support and food for impoverished Israelis, while their underlying motive is to convert their beneficiaries to Christianity. The article focused on the role of Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein and the organization he heads, the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, and how the bridges of understanding and support that he has built between the two religious groups has also provided an opening for the Evangelicals to attempt to proselytize their Jewish recipients of help. The letters that follow respond to this article.

PROTESTS "DISTORTIONS... AND DOWNRIGHT LIES"

To the Editor:

I am writing in response to your article, "Buying Jewish Souls" (March '05), by Maayan Pase-Jaffe. In addition to containing numerous distortions and inaccuracies, the article did not include anything from my interview with the writer. She also chose not to contact any of the numerous (Orthodox) rabbis who support our work, and she gave voice *only* to our most extreme critics.

Ms. Pase-Jaffe, in addition, blindly accepted information without cross-checking her sources' accounts, let alone seeking a response from us. Further, she presented her own opinions and those of others – including downright lies – as facts.

In short, *The Jewish Observer* engaged in the most tawdry form of *rechillus* and *motzi sheim ra barabbim*, not to mention defamatory and shoddy journalism.

Here are some facts your magazine failed to mention:

1. Over the years, hundreds of thousands of Jews in Israel and throughout the world have been helped by hundreds of thousands of our Christian donors. Indeed, The Fellowship supports over 250 projects in 93 cities in Israel (including the soup kitchen in B'nai Brak headed by the *Moetzet Harabbanim*) and throughout the former Soviet Union (through local *rabbanim*, the JDC and the Jewish Agency), helping tens of thousand of Jews daily. *At no time* has any IFCJ donor *ever* contacted even one beneficiary. Nor has there ever been even a single attempt to urge anyone to do anything in exchange for the support given to them – all contrary to your article's depiction.

2. Contrary to your article, the IFCJ and I, as its president, enjoy the overwhelming support of many important Jewish leaders in Israel and abroad, and have received the endorsement, approval and expressions of appreciation of literally dozens of Jewish groups and noted rabbis. Moreover, again contrary to your article, no rabbinical ruling against me (or against the idea of accepting IFCJ funds) was made by Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, nor is there any intention on his part to issue such a ruling. Quite the opposite – he has given his *hetter* to a number of *rabbanim* to accept our funds, which they do. These *rabbanim* have even told your editor, Rabbi Wolpin, of Rabbi Elyashiv's permission for them to accept these funds.

3. Had your reporter even bothered to call Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu's office, she would have learned that your statement regarding his ostensible ruling against IFCJ was untrue ... and yes, we have his endorsement in writing! In fact,

it was even printed in the Israeli newspaper *Hatzofeh*.

4. Numerous important rabbis support me and the work of IFCJ, including the current Chief Rabbis Shlomo Amar and Yona Metzger, former Chief Rabbis Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and Rabbi Lau, Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, Rabbi Yitzchak David Grossman, Rabbi Shear Yeshuv HaCohen and many others. Moreover, Orthodox groups and institutions – from Karlin to Chabad, and even Agudah itself, including Rabbi Porush – have received funds from IFCJ. Written endorsements from these and other individuals and groups would gladly have been provided had you bothered to request them.

5. You write: "Eckstein backs organizations in Israel that have missionary agendas" – simply untrue. I carefully choose to cooperate with Christian organizations on the basis, and condition that they do not proselytize Jews. Indeed, this has been my immutable principle for the 28 years I have been working with Christians.

6. You write: "... later, representatives from the group ... come to the door of the recipient and ask to come in and talk," suggesting that this is IFCJ's mode of conduct. But a phone call to any of the hundreds of organizations supported by IFCJ in Israel and the former Soviet Union would have exposed this as a lie. In the 22 years of our existence, this has *never* happened. *Never*.

7. You write that IFCJ provides donors with the names and addresses of the *olim* they are helping. This, too, is untrue. The IFCJ takes very strict measures to keep the identity of the participants hidden from the donors and vice versa, with the intention of avoiding exactly such unwanted outcomes. Again, though we've contributed well over 100 million dollars in recent years to help tens of thousands of Jews, not one donor knows, has ever met, or even has information on how to contact the people they helped.

8. The single quotation taken from my book was completely out of context. Had your reporter actually read that book, she would have understood it was a work of

fiction, not my personal diary. And had she read only the one page before this quotation, she would have understood my actual meaning.

9. You write: "... to those concerned about the spiritual integrity of the Jewish people, however, Eckstein's work is a curse." What incredible audacity and chutzpah! My *semicha* is from the late Rabbi Yoseph Dov Soloveitchik ז"ל. I am a *shomer mitzvot* who completed learning all of *Shas* (and I have supported my son-in-law's learning in *kollel* for three years, including at the Mir). My life's work

is for the benefit of *Klal Yisrael*. I do not expect everyone to agree with everything I say and do, but it is highly insulting to refer to me as "this so-called rabbi."

It is clear that your reporter and her editors never read the *Chofetz Chaim's* works, nor do they realize that "*hachayim vehamavet beyad halashon*." Your article violates not only every basic journalistic standard, but every moral and halachic premise as well, including "*Lo teileich rachil be'amecha*" and "*betzedek tishpot amitecha*." One would have hoped that before making a *rav* or *ben Torah treif*,

you would have done even a basic "*der-isha vachakira*" – at least as much as you would have done before *paselling* a chicken!

I am saddened by the lack of judgment, fairness and civility that produced an article like this. Casting aspersions on Christians who anonymously (and without seeking any *kavod* whatsoever) help poor Jews through difficult times without any conditions attached is nothing other than a *chillul Hashem*. Taking *ad hominem* shots at me, couching them in lies and distortion, is a violation of jour-

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nalistic integrity, at the very least, and certainly not behooving of a publication reputedly representing the *Agudah* community.

I certainly believe a retraction and apology are in order so you can set the record straight.

RABBI YECHIEL ECKSTEIN
President, International Fellowship of
Christians and Jews
Jerusalem

**"BUYING JEWISH SOULS":
A RESPONSE BY THE AUTHOR**

I was not shocked to see a critical letter to the editor by Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, referring to my article "Buying Jewish Souls," which ran in the March edition. I was, however, taken aback by his accusation of "numerous distortions and inaccuracies" in my article. The accusation is belied by documented facts.

What follows is a detailed response to the points Rabbi Eckstein raises. Rather than respond point by point to his nine numbered assertions, I will organize my response along the lines of the three broad arguments he makes: (I) Rabbi Eckstein and the IFCJ (International Fellowship of Christians and Jews) do not in any way facilitate missionary activities or work with missionary groups (Points 1, 5, 6 and 7 in his letter). (II) Many rabbinical leaders support the work of Rabbi Eckstein and the IFCJ, including some of those cited in my article as opponents (points 2, 3 and 4). (III) My citation of a passage from Rabbi Eckstein's book, *The Journey Home*, and other aspects of my article distorted his views and unfairly impugned him on a personal level (points 8 and 9). Copies of all information presented in this response are on file.

I. MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES

In my original article, I wrote that Rabbi Eckstein and the IFCJ facilitate missionary activities in at least three different ways: (1) by releasing the identities of Jewish recipients of IFCJ funding to the IFCJ's Christian donors; (2) by supporting the work of "Bridges for Peace," an organization that actively engages in missionary activities; and (3) by associ-

ating IFCJ with individual Christian leaders who repeatedly call for the missionizing of Jews. In the face of Rabbi Eckstein's protestations to the contrary, I will reiterate and elaborate each of these points.

(1) IFCJ's own facilitation of missionary activities: Despite Rabbi Eckstein's denials, IFCJ does indeed facilitate direct contact between Christian donors and Jewish recipients - at least if he honors his own representations to the donors. Example: On the IFCJ production "On Wings of Eagles," a promotional video that airs on Christian TV, Rabbi Eckstein

says that for every donation of \$350 or more the donor will receive a card with the name and address of the Jewish immigrant his donation sponsored.

Another example is the newest IFCJ video for "Isaiah 58," a program for bringing food, clothing, medical help and other aid to elderly Jews in the Former Soviet Union:

"A gift of \$50 will provide both a food box and three hot meals a week for a month to one elderly Jew.... When you call, you will receive an Isaiah 58 care packet, with pictures and information about individuals

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being helped by the program. Become a partner in Isaiah 58 now." Identification of IFCJ recipients can be documented as far back as 1996. Consider the following excerpt from one of IFCJ's 1996 *Shoresh* newsletters:

"Between now and spring, On Wings of Eagles will be working with churches and Sunday schools to sponsor a special freedom flight from Russia to Israel... Once the project is completed, participating churches will be listed in the Shoresh newsletter. In addition, the Fellowship will send each church a

thank-you card identifying the Russian-Jewish émigré(s) the church has sponsored."

There is also this postcard, sent by the IFCJ to a donor:

"Dear Ray and Joyce,
Shalom from Jerusalem!

Your generous gift to On Wings of Eagles was received and enabled Katrina Vilenski to be airlifted from Baku to Israel.

Thank you and God bless you for caring, praying and helping,
On Wings of Eagles"

(2) Rabbi Eckstein's support of

Bridges for Peace: In my original article, I wrote that Rabbi Eckstein and IFCJ support the work of a group called Bridges for Peace (BP). While Rabbi Eckstein does not deny this, he apparently believes that BP is not involved in missionary work. The indisputable facts, though, demonstrate otherwise.

BP, even more so than IFCJ, forges connections between its Jewish beneficiaries and Christian benefactors. A few examples:

The July-August, 1997 BP newsletter:

"Now through Bridges for Peace you can adopt an immigrant.... The name of your sponsored family, a family photo, names of family members, origin of the family, vocations, education, ages, talents, hobbies, etc. will be sent to you.... Be a part of Bible prophecy.... Adopt an immigrant today!!!"

In a 1998 newsletter, it reads,

"Upon receipt of your first gift, you will be sent the name and profile of your adoptee, including a photograph (if available). We encourage the exchange of letters between you and your adoptee, and we will assist in translation."

These statements can also be found in numerous other Bridges for Peace publications.

An "adoption agreement" [referred to in B above], signed by Marissa Mott, director of this BP program:

"IMMIGRANT: Larisa Andrianov

MARITAL STATUS: Divorced

ARRIVAL IN ISRAEL: Jan 21, 1999

FROM: Ornsk, Russia

ADDRESS IN ISRAEL: Maaplum 71/7, Beit Shemesh

CHILDREN: Alex -12; Ilana 4; Natan, 8

BIRTHDATES: Larisa: January 11, 1961; Alex: June 26, 1986; Ilana: September 19, 1993; Natan August 27, 1989."

The agreement goes on to tell about the family, their hopes and aspirations, and their life in Israel.

A July 21, 1998 letter from Ms. Mott to a Christian contributor from Illinois:

"If you would like to send your adopted family a letter, you may use

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the preaddressed envelope. We will be very happy to translate your letter if this is necessary.... New immigrants also enjoy receiving pictures of you, your home, your country or any other fun information that they can learn about you and your culture."

Aside from facilitating communications between individual donors and recipients, BP is also involved in more direct missionary activity, as described at some length in my original article. For example, I quoted excerpts from a letter to the American Jewish Committee written by an Israeli immigrant from Kiev, in which the immigrant describes how BP befriended his family, sending them food packages with Russian-language messianic literature and taking them on trips to Christian holy sites. In the immigrant's words, "This situation is very humiliating for me. It is as if I was bought off by these gifts to accept the Christian faith."

Further, note this letter sent to the Knesset by a new immigrant:

"When we were in the country for a short while, people from the group Bridges for Peace came to my parents. They started helping us ... with food and money.... They introduced our family to a family from America, which also started helping us.... They [the family from America] came to visit us and brought with them books about Christianity. Later, they took us ... to pray at a church. There they introduced us to many other people who started to visit and ... tell us about Christianity. Then my father, brother and sister became Christians. My mother almost converted. I feel that my family was bought.... They gave us food. But for this we had to accept their faith.... I know that our family isn't the only one to whom this has happened...."

If Rabbi Eckstein, as he claims, "carefully choose[s] to cooperate with Christian organizations on the basis of, and condition that, they do not proselytize Jews," I would respectfully suggest that he look more closely at BP. This is an organization whose agenda clearly includes missionizing.

(3) IFCJ's association with missionary leaders: In raising money for the IFCJ, Rabbi Eckstein relies heavily on Evangelical Christian leaders who are well known as ardent proponents of proselytizing. Let me focus here on two such leaders in particular – Jack Hayford and Jerry Falwell – both of whom work closely with Rabbi Eckstein in promoting IFCJ.

Jack Hayford is pastor of The Church on the Way, The First Foursquare Church of Van Nuys, California. Hayford started the church in 1969 with 18 people; it is now the largest Foursquare Church (Pentecostal) in the U.S. – about 9,000 members, with weekly attendance between 8,500 and 10,000. Hayford also runs the King's College and Seminary,

where men and women are equipped "for effective and godly leadership in the Church and community. The vision of the institution is to train mature servants who are spiritually vibrant, biblically strong, theologically balanced, Spirit-empowered, ministry-equipped, and culturally sensitive. The school seeks to integrate biblical and theological training with practical skills essential for effective witness and ministry...." ("Witnessing" is the word used by Evangelicals for proselytizing.)

Jerry Falwell is an American fundamentalist Baptist pastor, televangelist and founder of the Moral Majority. Here, in his own words, are his views regarding the Jewish People:

"The Jews are returning to their land of unbelief. They are spiritually blind and desperately in need of their Messiah and Savior" [*Listen, America!*].

On the IFCJ's most recent Isaiah 58 video, Falwell tells listeners,

"I believe that this man [Rabbi Eckstein] is doing noble work worthy of our support and understanding. I hope that every friend I have out there will make this work and this Fellowship a part of your religious budget."

There are other pro-missionary evangelical leaders as well with whom Rabbi Eckstein associates in order to gain

credibility in the Christian community to which the IFCJ's fundraising efforts are devoted. The problem is that, while Rabbi Eckstein may thereby be gaining credibility among Christians, might he at the same time be conferring credibility upon people like Hayford and Falwell, and upon their broader evangelical agenda, among spiritually vulnerable Jews?

II. THE VIEWS OF GEDOLEI YISROEL

In my article, I made reference to numerous rabbinical authorities who have come out against the work of Rabbi Eckstein and the IFCJ. Rabbi Eckstein challenges my inclusion of Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv and Rabbi Mordechai Elyahu on the list of his opponents. He also cites several *rabbanim* who affirmatively support his work. The picture he paints, though, is quite distorted.

(1) The position of Rabbi Elyashiv: It is true, as I noted in my original article, that Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashiv has not put out any statement in writing regarding the IFCJ. However, a reliable source, Rabbi Ze'ev Shtigletz – head of Lev L'Achim's anti-missionary division – has testified that Rabbi Elyashiv has, in fact, condemned the work of the IFCJ.

According to Rabbi Shtigletz, Rabbi Elyashiv has been asked three times about taking money from the IFCJ. The first time he said it was a *chillul Hashem*. The second and third times he said it is forbidden to take money from the IFCJ, and that this should be made public through the media.

Moreover, the following statement can be found in a letter from Rabbi Avraham Shapira: "As I have been told, the opinion of Rabbi Elyashiv, *shlita*, is that taking the money of Christian institutions is a *chillul Hashem*."

(2) The position of Rabbi Mordechai Elyahu: While it is true that Rabbi Mordechai Elyahu, former Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, originally offered a blessing to Rabbi Eckstein and the IFCJ, he later retracted his statement, stating that he had not had sufficient information. Below is a copy of Rabbi Elyahu's

most recent letter:

“Clarification – Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu, *shlita*

“I wrote a letter on 29 Nissan, 5762 (2002) ... and I thought then that the matter [of taking money from the IF CJ] was kosher. Now it becomes clear to me otherwise, and therefore I am joining Rabbi Avraham Shapira in his statements, written in Adar, 5764.

“Therefore, my words and writings from before this time are nullified, and I am joining in banning what is referred to in Rabbi Shapira’s *teshuva*.

“This is my purpose in writing.

“Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu”

(3) The view of other *rabbanim*: Following receipt of Rabbi Eckstein’s letter, the current *Rishon Letziyon*, Rabbi Shlomo Amar, was contacted regarding his alleged support of the IF CJ. In a private meeting between him, Rabbi Simcha HaCohen Kook and Jerusalem City Councilor Mina Fenton, Rabbi Amar completely denied his support for the organization. He said that Rabbi Eckstein is utilizing a form letter sent by the rabbi’s office to all those people who wrote letters of congratulations following Rabbi Amar’s appointment as Chief Rabbi.

Rabbi Amar wrote the following last

month:

“In clarifying the matter [re: my letter to Eckstein – Chicago], Eckstein’s letter was one among a group of letters of blessing I received upon being appointed Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel. The letter Eckstein received was the standard letter of blessing I sent to all in return. When I sent the letter of response, I did so without checking into the letter I received or into the rabbi who signed it.”

Similarly, Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv and former Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Israel, told this reporter that he at no time gave a bless-

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ing to Rabbi Eckstein. According to Rabbi Lau's aide, as well as his son-in-law, Rabbi Sorotzkin, the rabbi "never once met with or spoke with Yechiel Eckstein regarding the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews." They further said that the rabbi has met Eckstein at various functions to which they were both invited, and "like any good person, Rabbi Lau said hello to Eckstein, but nothing beyond that."

I do not know whether the other rabbis mentioned by Rabbi Eckstein do or do not support his work – though I confess to some degree of skepticism in light of Rabbi Eckstein's misstatements regarding Rabbi Elyashiv, Rabbi Elyahu, Rabbi Amar and Rabbi Lau. Be that as it may, the bottom line is clear that numerous *Gedolei Yisroel* and rabbinic authorities, from various circles, are strongly opposed to the work of the IFCJ, as was mentioned in the article. (This list includes Rabbi Shmuel Auerbach, Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, Rabbi Nissim Karelitz, Rabbi Dov Lior, and the six highest authorities of the rabbinical court, *Beis Din Tzedek* of the *Eida Hachareidis*, as well as others mentioned in the text of this letter.) If there are others who hold a more positive view, I wonder if they are aware of some of the facts outlined above. In any case, I would humbly suggest that their position appears to be in the minority.

III. PERSONAL MATTERS

(1) *The Journey Home*: Rabbi Eckstein criticizes my citation of an excerpt from his book, *The Journey Home*, in which the narrator states "In some respects, that is exactly what I have become... a Jew for J..." This excerpt, Rabbi Eckstein says, comes from a work of fiction, and, in any case, is taken out of context.

Here I concede that I should have identified *The Journey Home* as an ostensible work of fiction. But this is no mere novel. As Rabbi Eckstein himself admits in his introduction to the book,

The Journey Home "has its seeds in actual events and a real friendship I had with Evangelical Christian pastor Jamie Buckingham.... We

often dreamed about hiking up to Mount Sinai and hand in hand receiving God's holy word – he as a Christian, I as a Jew. This dream showed the love we shared for one another and the spiritual nourishment we drew from each other's religious traditions" [vii].

Let me be clear: I do not mean to accuse Rabbi Eckstein of being a Messianic Jew, or in any other way to challenge his personal "*chezkas kashrus*." But a book like *The Journey Home*, even if it is only a novel, should reinforce the concern that *Gedolei Yisroel* have expressed about the nature and danger of Rabbi Eckstein's work at the IFCJ.

(2) My intemperate language: Finally, Rabbi Eckstein objects to my referring to him personally as "this so-called rabbi," and to his work as "a curse." Strong language, indeed.

In retrospect, I do regret using the phrase "this so-called rabbi." Far be it from me to pass judgment on his rabbinical bona-fides; I leave that question to persons wiser and greater than myself.

Be that as it may, I have no qualms about my statement that "to those concerned about the spiritual integrity of the Jewish people, [Rabbi] Eckstein's work is a curse." I don't believe that one's inappropriate actions can be justified simply because he holds a rabbinical certificate, no matter where it is from. And what Rabbi Eckstein is doing is opening the door for missionary groups to carry out their missionary agendas. This is indeed a curse, a terrible curse.

MAYAAN PASE-JAFFE
Jerusalem

HELP FOR ISRAEL'S POOR: MISSIONARIES IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

To the Editor:

I know many people who will look at Mayaan Pase-Jaffe's article, "Buying Jewish Souls," as a slanderous attack of Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein and his International Fellowship of Christians and Jews. However, as someone who was once a Christian and converted to Orthodox Judaism 25 years ago, I believe that this

article cast an important light on an urgent problem regarding Evangelical Christians' attempt to infiltrate Israel. At last, it's been explained what the word "evangelical" means – evangelicals believe that they have a religious duty to evangelize, i.e., teach anyone and everyone about their faith and try to coax them to their point of view.

That Evangelical Christians are wearing sheeps' clothing by trying to provide economic and political relief for Israel and needy Israelis comes as no surprise to me. Their own scriptures approve of deception for the sake of proselytization*. From statements from their own scriptures, we can see that to fulfill their agenda, evangelists will say anything and do anything, and cannot be trusted to be our friends.

I understand that Israel desperately needs political allies and money from all sources. But just as Israel would not accept foreign aid if it were conditioned on letting terrorists kidnap Jews, similarly, we cannot accept aid from Christian organizations who want to kidnap Jewish *neshamos*. In my humble opinion, taking money from missionaries is sort of like letting a famous entertainer, rumored to be a pedophile, take your family on an expense-paid vacation and help you out with your medical bills, provided he gets to play with your children. Do we really need the money to take the risk of what he might do to our children? No.

BRUCE JAMES
Silver Spring, MD

(The author of the above letter converted to Judaism on 26 Shevat, 5740, in Silver Spring, Maryland. He is *gabbai sheini* at Young Israel Shomrai Emunah in Silver Spring, and just completed *Shas* for the first time as a *Daf Yomi* participant. He is an attorney for the Federal Government, in Washington, DC.)

* In *Philippians* 1:18, Paul wrote "What then? Only that in every way, whether in *pretense* or in *truth*, is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice, yes, I will rejoice." In *1 Corinthians* 9:20, Paul is even more specific about his motives and methods: "And to the Jews I become as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the Law, as under the Law, though not being myself under the Law, that I might win those who are under the Law."

THE NIGHT BEFORE

February 28:

As I look out the window at the snowflakes that are thickening by the moment, threatening to put a damper on the glorious event that will take place less than 24 hours from now, another concern gnaws at me with similar import. While meteorologists have warned that we're going to get 6-10 inches of snow during the storm that began a few hours ago, and a large number of New York Metro Area Jews worry whether the flurries bode ill for the Eleventh *Siyum HaShas* scheduled for 5:30 tomorrow night, all I can think of is whether Bruce will make it here or not.

You see, Bruce is flying in from Bakersfield, California, on a red-eye flight due to get him here tomorrow at 7:30 a.m. (if the 2-3 hour arrival delays announced at Newark don't push that time later). He'll catch a few winks at a friend's house before I pick him up to take him to Continental Arena for the *Siyum HaShas*, after which he'll catch another few winks and fly back to Bakersfield the next morning. The tempest outside threatens not only the travel plans of the tens of thousands of *siyum*-goers, but also Bruce's plans to come from the other end of the continent.

Please understand that for Bruce and me, this period of time represents more than just the culmination of my own 7 1/2 years of learning *Shas*¹ and the celebration with the rest of world Jewry of a relatively new and historic event in Jewish world history. For you see, Bruce is making a *siyum* on *Masechta Berachos*. At the pace of one hour a week over the last six years and over the phone, Bruce and I have slowly but surely edged our way through *Masechta Berachos*, line by line, week by week, life event by life event, and we stand at the summit of the *Hadran* that represents Bruce's first *siyum masechta*.

Bruce and I have Partners in Torah to thank for this glorious event, for it was they who introduced the two of us six years ago. Only then, Bruce was a phone number and an IDT calling card and a faceless voice on the other end of the receiver late on a Sunday night or a *Motza'ei Shabbos* when *Shabbos* ended early. (The three-hour time

AHARON SUBAR. A CONSULTANT ON COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY, LIVES IN MONSEY, NY, WHERE HE LEARNS AND TEACHES GEMARA.



difference allowed me to learn with Bruce when there was nothing else to interfere with my learning, much as does my 4:45 a.m. *daf shiur*. There the only obstruction to learning is the desire to remain under the covers a few more minutes – don't worry, you can overcome it!)

A few years ago, Bruce decided to come back East, where he was born, to spend a week and a half at my house, where we met for the first time. Bruce spent that time learning at Ohr Somayach with a young friend from Bakersfield that he had made *frum* and who had gone to learn at Ohr Somayach in Israel, the *second baal teshuva* from Bakersfield. And Bruce got his first *real* taste of *Shabbos* in a *frum* community, although he had done his best to improvise *Shabbos* in Bakersfield according to his

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AHARON SUBAR

understanding. He fit right into the Monsey community with his big, bushy beard and black *kippa*. But he confided to me as he left that he was not looking forward to going back to a world which knew no *Shabbos* and where he felt like an alien, after having tasted the delicious world of *Shabbos* in Monsey.

BRUCE: NOT MUCH OF A CHALLENGE

I must admit that learning with Bruce was not much of a challenge, in contrast with the situation for most Partners in Torah *chavrusos*. Bruce was the self-styled rabbi of Bakersfield, knowing far more than the Conservative and Reform officiates who claimed the title in that town. He had come through the world of "Kabbala" and had even gotten a Distance Learning *Semicha* (oy!). Still, biking was a passion and he somehow justified 50-mile bike rides on *Shabbos* as being within the spirit of *Shabbos*. A

teacher by profession, Bruce had a need to teach what he learned in Torah to others, so he arranged Friday night "dinners" at which he got together with friends to discuss the portion of the week and other Jewish philosophical ideas. Bruce was hungry to leave the abstract world of Kabbala and eat the meat-and-potatoes of Gemara, so we decided to learn *Masechta Berachos*. Bruce lapped up the learning like a thirsty man does water, and there was never a session that went by when he didn't thank me enthusiastically for learning with him, despite the fact that I may have been near-slumber rambling in those late hours (don't forget the 4:45 a.m. *shiur*). Bruce taught *me* what it meant to have a love for Torah during each one of our sessions.

The years have passed and we've both changed. Bruce has steadily solidified his commitment to and knowledge of *Yiddishkeit*, gathering around him a cadre of committed and sincere individuals who have been drawn to drink from the well of Torah learning. He has been the impetus for people to go to Israel and learn in yeshiva, and was the magnet that drew *Chabad* to Bakersfield a year or two ago. He has been a spiritual guide to wandering Jews in a place where there was no other to tell them what the Torah says, and he did his best to impart the *Mesora* as best he could. He has certainly mainstreamed, even going on to become a mentor to other neophyte Partners in Torah.

So Bruce is coming, G-d willing, if the weather allows, and he and I will participate in a worldwide Jewish event that is probably the most spectacular event short of the Coming of *Moshiach* that we may see in our lifetime, ב"ט"ד. And while for some, it is a conclusion, for Bruce and myself it is only the beginning, with *Masechta Berachos* under our belts, of what may be a lifetime partnership of Torah learning that has transformed both of our lives already, and promises to be an integral part of our lives in the years to come. (Hey, at the rate we're going, it will only take us 174 more years to finish *Shas*!) ☞

¹ My *shiur* has the unique distinction of actually having finished *Shas*, while most *shiurim* have only finished *Shas* Gemara. Rabbi Shmuel Adler's brilliant idea of learning *Mishnayot Yomi* as a supplement to the *Dafinsures* that our *shiur* has *really* finished *Shas*.

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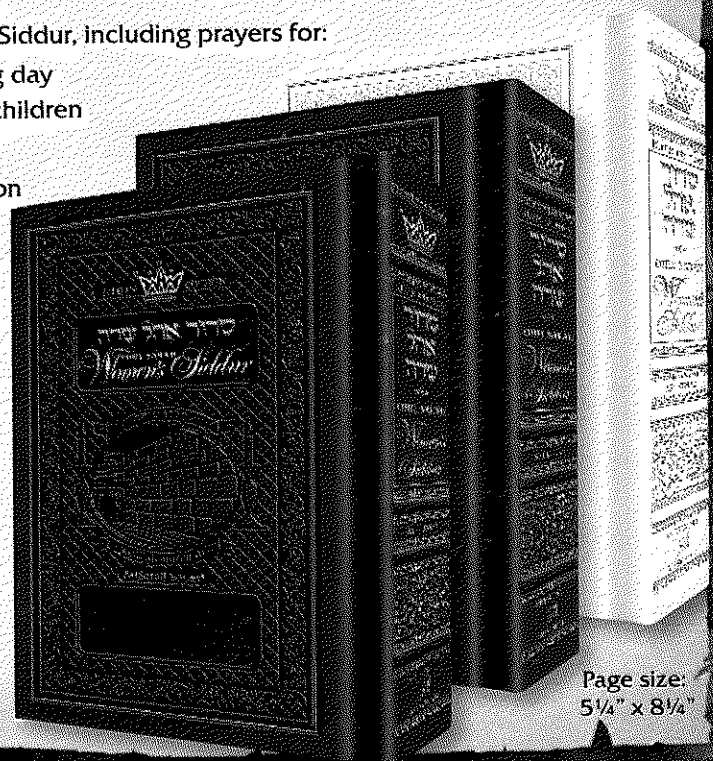
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