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# THE BENJAMIN AND ROSE BERGER TORAH TO-GO®

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בזמן הזה

## Jewish Outreach

### IN THOSE DAYS AND IN OUR TIMES

**Dedicated by Dr. David and Barbara Hurwitz  
in honor of their children and grandchildren**



ישיבת רבנו יצחק אלהן

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This issue is sponsored in memory of  
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And grandchildren Shlomo Cohen, Chani (z"l) and Guy Nussbaum, Avi Cohen, Sheri and Eli Brazil,  
Terri and Yitzi Karasick, Jennifer and Benjamin Hooper, Michelle and Steven Farbman,  
Dalia and Evan Silver, and Alison Silver and great grandchildren



## BRINGING THE MENORAH OUTSIDE

**W**hen Aharon HaKohen presided over the dedication of the Mishkan, he experienced profoundly conflicting emotions. On the one hand, he stood ambitious and proud at the prospect of embracing the open and manifest presence of G-d himself, within the limited and physical parameters of the Mishkan. An unprecedented notion — that G-d's transcendence would somehow be sensed and experienced by all those who entered the Mishkan of Hashem. Yet for some reason, at this most celebratory and regal moment, Aharon was relegated to a more administrative role, excluded from the procession of sacrifices that inaugurated this most auspicious occasion:

שכשראה אהרן חנוכת הנשיאים, חלשה דעתו, שלא היה עמהם בחנוכה, לא הוא ולא שבטו. אמר לו הקב"ה: חייך, שלך גדולה משלהם, שאתה מדליק ומטיב את הנרות.

*When Aharon saw the dedication of the princes, he became despondent that he was not included in the dedication, not him and not his tribe. The Holy One Blessed Be He said to him, "Don't worry, yours is greater than theirs because you light and prepare the candles."*

**Rashi, Bamidbar 8:2**

Somehow, the privilege of igniting the flames of the Menorah are to compensate for this awkward moment of dissonance. The Rishonim struggle to comprehend: in what manner is the mitzvah of Menorah a replacement for the exciting experience that comes with initiating the Mishkan? This

question is answered by the Rambam (*Bias Mikdash* 9:7):

וכן הדלקת הנרות כשירה בזרים לפיכך אם הטיב הכהן את הנרות והוציאן לחוץ מותר לזר להדליקן.

*The lighting of the candles is permissible by a non-Kohen. Therefore, if a Kohen prepares the candles and brings them outside, a non-Kohen may light them.*

The Menorah may, in fact, be lit by a "zar" — a non-Kohen Jew. If, in fact, even a standard Jew may light the Menorah, then how is this sanctified activity something unique and precious that can restore the confidence of Aharon?

Upon granting license to the zar to light the Menorah, the Rambam also addresses the logistical quandary

of how a Jew can even reach the Menorah, when it is located in a section of the Mishkan that is prohibited to anyone who is not a Kohen. The Rambam tells us that the Kohen brings it outside. Even when the *zar* lights, the Kohen plays an integral role. It is the Kohen who brings the Menorah outside the Mikdash presenting it to the *zar*, who can then ignite its flame, and the Kohen who returns it to its proper place.

Aharon HaKohen looked at the other leaders, all contributing to the communal experience of inaugurating the Mishkan. His anxiety was rooted in a fear that with the construction of the Mishkan he was no longer going to be a “man of the people”; he would instead be relegated to the sanctity of G-d’s house. His entire focus of leading the nation from “within” — of being an *ohev shalom* and *rodef shalom* — lover of peace and pursuer of peace, would have been undermined by this new role.

G-d then comes to Aharon and tells him: “Yours is greater than theirs because you light and prepare the candles.”

Your role is not to administrate the Mishkan. Your role here is to uplift and inspire those who come to the Mishkan. Your role is to bring the light of Judaism outside the confining walls of the Sanctuary and empower others to ignite their spark. To be present in a Mikdash is to direct and concentrate the light of our faith outward.



Chanukah, more than any other holiday, is about our lighting a flame on the inside of our homes and projecting it outside. The very mitzvah of *pirsumei nissah* (publicizing

**Chanukah is about recognizing the vast world of Jews beyond the orbit of our community, to position the light of our menorahs in a manner that can inspire them.**

the miracles), the regulation of *ad shetichleh regel min hashuk* (the mitzvah lasts until the traffic clears from the marketplace), entails a sense of connection — between the concentrated sanctity of the home, and shining that light outward.

This issue of *Torah To-Go* focuses on assimilation; those Jewish people who move daily throughout the “*shuk*,” unaware of the greatness of their heritage and identity. So much of our religious life is focused on cultivating and nurturing the spiritual standing and commitment of ourselves and our families. Chanukah is about recognizing the vast world of Jews beyond the orbit of our community. The majority of our people lack any sense of meaningful connection to the greatness of Torah. Our community is uniquely positioned to educate and inspire the broader Jewish world. Chanukah is about taking a moment to appreciate the Jews walking down the street and position the light of our menorahs in a manner that can inspire them: To take the Torah outside the Mikdash and bring it to the people.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Yaakov Glasser'.



Find more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Yaakov Glasser at <https://www.yutorah.org/Rabbi-Yaakov-Glasser>

# RIETS PRACTICAL HALACHAH: CHANUKAH

**BY RABBI ARYEH LEBOWITZ**

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## THE HAPPILY HOMELESS ON CHANUKAH

**Question:** A young couple is planning to get married on Chanukah. The wedding is called for 4 p.m. on Sunday afternoon. While this is an especially wonderful and appropriate time to celebrate a simcha, the young couple has a very basic question: Where should they light? When the Gemara, *Shabbos* 21b, formulates the fundamental mitzvah of ner Chanukah, there are three elements to the formulation: *ner, ish, u'beiso* (a candle, a man, and his home). It would seem that the bride and groom, who are planning on staying at a hotel on their wedding night, do not really have a home. They have already moved out of their parents' home and have not yet moved into their new joint home. **Where should they light the menorah?** The problem is exacerbated by the fact that, due to potential fire hazards, most hotels have a strict policy against lighting candles in the hotel room.

**B**efore getting to the opinion of our roshei yeshiva shlit"a, we will outline no less than five other approaches in poskim. It is important to note here that some of the answers reflect cultural differences between the American practice of the chosson and kallah staying at a hotel and the Israeli practice of staying at their new home.

First, the sefer *Beis Chasanim* (15:4) records that Rav Yosef Shalom Elyashiv held that if the chuppah takes place after the proper time of lighting, the chosson and kallah are able to fulfill the mitzvah through the lighting of their parents, since they are still members of their parents' household until the chuppah. This

solution, though, is highly impractical, considering that in all likelihood their parents will only be able to light after the wedding (since family normally arrives at the wedding very early for pictures).

If the chuppah will be before the earliest time to light, Rav Elyashiv held that the chosson should light in his new house (as he seems to assume they aren't staying at a hotel that night).

Second, Rav Benzion Abba Shaul (quoted in *Yemei Hallel V'hoda'ah* ch. 35 note 21) says that if a person has a hard time getting home, he can appoint a *shaliach* to light for him in his new home. This is difficult on both a practical and halachic level.

Practically, it may be challenging to find someone who will light in your home when all of your family and friends are at your wedding. Additionally, it is dangerous to leave candles unattended, so the person lighting would have to stay with the candles the entire time. Halachically, this is a difficult solution because if the couple has not lived in the apartment for a single day, it may not yet be considered their home.

Third, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (quoted in *Yemei Hallel V'hoda'ah* ibid) offers another highly impractical suggestion — the bride and groom should go home after the chuppah, have a small meal to establish their home, light, and then return to the

wedding hall for the festive meal.

Fourth, Rav Moshe Shternbuch, *Teshuvos V'Hanhagos* 3:215 (10), suggests that the bride and groom can still fulfill the mitzvah through lighting at their parents' house regardless of the timing of the chuppah, because they are not considered to have moved out of their parents' home until they move into their new home. This, too, is difficult, considering that the couple never plan on living in their parents' home again.

Fifth, and finally, Rav Shmuel Kamenetsky shlit" a, *Kovetz Halachos* 12:22 and note 22, suggests that the chosson and kallah can light in the wedding hall (whether they will go to a hotel or to their apartment after the wedding). He offers several suggestions as to why lighting at the wedding hall would suffice. First, while the *Taz* 677:2, says that somebody who is *so'ed etzel chavairo b'akrai* (eating at a friend on a temporary basis) doesn't light where he eats, the wedding hall seems to be much more permanent due to the size and significance of the meal. Second, the chosson and kallah aren't just eating there, but dressing, grooming, taking pictures, dancing etc., thus rendering the wedding hall a home for them. Third, the chosson and kallah are essentially homeless, and it would seem clear that a homeless person should light where he eats. Even if you sleep in one place and eat in another (neither of which are your home) you would light in the place that you eat. [Interestingly,

Rav Moshe Feinstein (*Iggeros Moshe, Yoreh Deah* 3:14) indicates that a homeless person simply does not have an obligation to light *ner Chanukah*.] Rav Shmuel rejects the possibility of lighting in the hotel, as he considers it to be an "*achsaniah kelusha me'od*," an extremely weak form of lodging because it is almost like a rest stop on the road. In the *Piskei Teshuvos* 677:5, the author suggests another proof that it is permissible to light at the wedding hall from *Teshuvos Maharsham* 4:146, who says that you can light on a train since you pay for your room on the train. The same would seem to be true of a wedding hall that was paid for. [This comparison, though, is difficult to understand, since we could argue that people would sleep in a private cabin on a train, making it much more like a temporary home.]

Our roshei yeshiva shlit" a take a different approach to this issue. Moreinu HaRav Schachter shlit" a was initially unsure what the appropriate course of action would be, and encouraged people to get married before Chanukah in order to avoid this question and the many other questions of lighting that inevitably come up with wedding guests. But given that people will be getting married on Chanukah, Rav Schachter rules that the real obligation is to light in the place that they will be sleeping on the wedding night. However, if the hotel does not allow lighting in the room, it would constitute an act of theft to light in the hotel, thereby making it impossible to do

the mitzvah properly. As far as what to do given this reality, the two most likely possibilities, according to Rav Schachter, are to light an electric light in the hotel, which is where the real obligation is, or to say that since it is impossible to light in the hotel, the place of eating becomes the chosson's home and he can light at the wedding. If one chooses either of these options, he should be careful not to recite a beracha.

When a talmid suggested lighting a flashlight with a bulb and a battery in the hotel room (assuming the major problem with electric lights is that there isn't a half hour worth of fuel in them — see *Har Tzvi* 2:114 and *Tzitz Eliezer* 1:20 (12) — which isn't a problem when there is a battery), Rav Schachter wasn't sure this works because it is not *domeh L'Menorah shel Mikdash* — sufficiently similar to the lighting of the menorah to qualify as a proper fulfillment of the mitzvah.

Moreinu HaRav Mordechai Willig shlit" a had a different approach. Rav Willig suggested that the hotel is not so worried about a single properly guarded candle, they just don't trust people to practice proper safety. But if it is done extremely carefully, Rav Willig said to light a single candle in the hotel room and watch it for half an hour. If this were expressly prohibited by the hotel, it would be problematic. If possible, it is preferable for the chosson and kallah to sleep in their own apartment on their wedding night, and to light there.



Find more shiurim and articles from Rabbi Aryeh Lebowitz at <https://www.yutorah.org/Rabbi-Aryeh-Lebowitz>

# An Israeli Journalist's Perspective on CHANUKAH

Mrs. Sivan Rahav-Meir

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As an Israeli journalist, I had the privilege of hearing this Chanukah story from the hero himself; it's a story about the furthest Jews who are actually the closest, a story that more people should hear.

I heard this story from Knesset Speaker Yuli Edelstein, who told it during a visit to a small classroom at the Zion Brina school in Beitar Illit.

Edelstein described the events of December 19, 1984, the day he was sentenced to three years in prison in a Soviet labor camp in southern Siberia. The charge was "drug possession," but the real reason was his Zionist and Jewish activity.

"After spending three months in a dungeon, I came to court to hear the sentence," Edelstein told the students. "The hall was filled with police and security personnel. In a regular trial, relatives are allowed to come, but the government had filled all the seats with security guards so that there

would be no room for my family members. Only my wife and mother managed to get in."

After the sentence, 26-year-old Edelstein was surrounded by many police officers who were about to return him to the detention cell. On the way out, he somehow managed to push his head through the security detail. He had one question for his wife, who he had not seen for three months, and who he would not see again for years. And what was he inspired to shout at that moment? It was this: "Tanya, what candle is it today?"

Russian security officials thought the prisoner, who had just heard his harsh sentence, was going mad. The truth was that, for the first time, his wife thought so too. She didn't understand what he was talking about. So again he shouted, "What candle is it today?" Only after his third attempt did she understand and immediately shout back, "Tonight we

light the second candle!" Yes, it was the Sunday morning of Chanukah 5745. Yuli Edelstein did not have a calendar in the dungeon, but as he was sentenced, he heard the secular date and calculated that this must be the time for Chanukah. It was important for him to know how many candles to light.

That evening, not in a prisoner's dungeon, but in a cell of prisoners already tried, prisoner Yuli Edelstein, a member of an assimilated family who discovered Judaism and repented, somehow got a hold of two matches. He stood in front of the bars in the window and lit the two matches "And so," he told the younger students in Beitar-Illit, "I stood there in front of the window for a few seconds until the matches really scorched my fingers. It was perhaps the shortest candle lit in history. I don't even know if I fulfilled the mitzvah, but for me, that night, a little light rejected a lot of darkness."



## CHANUKAH AND THE MIRACLE OF JEWISH CONTINUITY

It is often the middle child that feels overlooked and poorly understood and yet understandably carries a badge of resilience and optimism. The “middle child” of ner chanuka observance is no different. There are three different levels at which we can perform the mitzvah: the basic mitzvah, *mehadrin*, and *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. Or, in modern terms: economy, business class, and first class. The basic mitzvah is *ner ish uveiso*, one candle per household. *Mehadrin*, or business class, is one candle corresponding to each member of the house. *Mehadrin min hamehadrin*, or first class, which is universally practiced, is that the number of candles increases each day of Chanukah.

We can understand the message behind the basic mitzvah: Each home should publicize the miracle. We can also understand the message behind the first class *mehadrin min hamehadrin* option: The increasing candles represent the increasing accomplishments of the miracles, the increasing investment in the miracles, and the increasing potential of our efforts.

How do we understand the *mehadrin*, business class, model? It is not just an opportunity for each person in the house to light their own candle. In fact, the Rambam writes:

כמה נרות הוא מדליק בחנוכה. מצותה שיהיה כל בית ובית מדליק נר אחד בין שהיו אנשי הבית מרובין בין שלא היה בו אלא אדם אחד.

והמהדר את המצוה מדליק נרות כמנין אנשי הבית נר לכל אחד ואחד בין אנשים בין נשים.

*How many candles does one light on Chanukah? The [basic] mitzvah is to have one person light in each house one candle whether there are many people in the house, or whether there is only one person. If one wants to enhance the mitzvah, one should light based on the number of people in the house, one candle for each person, both men and women.*

### **Rambam, Hilchos Chanukah 4:1**

According to the Rambam, the head of the household (or someone else) lights all of the candles; he just does so based on the number of people in the home. What does that commemorate? Why does it enhance the mitzvah if one home has four candles and one has six?

I carried this question with me ever since I studied the *sugya*, the Tosfos and the Rambam. It was not until I came across a story from one of our darkest moments that I may have found an approach to the mandate of our sages. In the Bergen Belsen concentration camp, Chanukah arrived and the Jews of the camp gathered together to light the first light out of a makeshift candle. The wick was made out of thread from a camp uniform, the oil was shoe polish, and a shoe was the receptacle. Rav Yisrael Spira, the Bluzhever Rebbe, was chosen to light the candle and recite the berachos. He recited the first two berachos and when he got to the third beracha — *Shehechiyanu* — he hesitated for a moment, but then recited that beracha as well. After the service was complete, a man by the name of Mr. Zamietchkowski, who liked to banter with the Bluzhever Rebbe, approached the Rebbe and asked: “I can understand why you recited the first beracha (*l’hadlik ner*) on performance of the mitzvah. I can even understand why you recited the second beracha (*she’asa nisim*), which commemorates miracles of the past. But how can you possibly recite *Shehechiyanu*, a beracha that thanks G-d for bringing us to a moment like this?” The Rebbe answered that he too had the same question, which is why he hesitated to recite the beracha. But then he looked around and saw the crowd of people willing to express their faith and attend a Chanukah service with death staring at them

from all sides. He said that it is worthy to recite *Shehechiyanu* because of the faith on this special occasion. (Dr. Yaffa Eliach’s *Hasidic Tales of the Holocaust* pp. 13-15)

The Bluzhever’s Rebbe recited the *Shehechiyanu* not because it was the first night of Chanukah but because of the people that were present at that moment. It was the strength and courage of those people that generated an independent obligation to recite *Shehechiyanu*.

## Why does it enhance the mitzvah if one home has four candles and one has six?

This idea may give us insight into the concept of the *mehadrin* level. When we commemorate the number of people in the household, we are expressing an appreciation for G-d’s watchfulness over us as well as our own allegiance to our *mesorah*. By expressing that there are five people living in this home or ten people living in this home, we recognize that without His watchfulness and our allegiance, there would be nobody lighting Chanukah candles. The Jewish people would not have survived the physical threats and/or we would have succumbed to assimilation. The fact that there are five or ten people present is an

expression of Jewish continuity.

This could be what the Rambam refers to when he writes:

מצות נר חנוכה מצוה חביבה היא עד מאד  
וצריך אדם להזהר בה כדי להודיע הנס  
ולהוסיף בשבח הא-ל והודיה לו על הנסים  
שעשה לנו:

*The mitzvah of the Chanukah candle is very precious, and one must be very meticulous about it in order to promote the miracle and increase in one’s praise of the Lord and thanks to Him for the miracles that He has done for us.*

**Rambam, Hilchos Chanukah 4:12**

It was been suggested that when Rambam mentions the *nissim she’asa lanu*, the miracles that He has done for us, he is not referring only to the mitzvah of Chanukah but to the miracles that occur for us in each and every generation. He is referring to the fact that in the year 5780, we are still gathering to light Chanukah candles.

We all decide to go first class and light *mehadrin min hamehadrin*. However, the message of the business class level is still embedded within the mitzvah. Each of us should take stock of the miracles in our lives and the collective miracles of the Jewish people that brought us to where we are today, and thank Hashem for those miracles.



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# EIGHT PERSPECTIVES ON CHANUKAH

## Coming Back from the Brink

**Rabbi Ely Bacon**

*Mashgiach Ruchani and Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Torah Studies, Yeshiva University*

The period leading up to the miracle of Chanukah was a nadir of religious life for the Jewish people. Hellenism had made such significant inroads into the Jewish community that many felt the demise of traditional religious life was imminent. But the Chashmonaim and a handful of Jews did not share that skepticism. What was the source of their courage and optimism?

The pasuk in Netzavim (30:4) states:

אִם יִהְיֶה נְדָחֶךָ בְּקִצֵּה הַשָּׁמַיִם מִשָּׁם יִקְבְּצֶךָ ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ וּמִשָּׁם יִקְחֶךָ.

*If your dispersed will be at the ends of the heaven, from there Hashem, your G-d, will gather you in and from there He will take you.*

The *Zera Shimshon*, Rav Shimshon Nachmani zt”l, wonders why the

pasuk needs to say the word “*misham*,” from there, when describing Hashem collecting the Jewish people. The word seems superfluous.

Based on the Gemara in Megillah (16a), the *Zera Shimshon* offers the following explanation. Bnei Yisroel are compared both to the dust of the earth and to the stars of the heaven: When we fall as a nation we fall to the lowest levels and we are nothing more than dirt; but when we rise, we soar to the heights of the stars. The *Zera Shimshon* interprets the Gemara to mean that exactly the moment when we fall to our lowest level and it seems there is no hope for salvation, in that moment and in that place we are able to rise.

From where do the Jewish people draw this tremendous power to come back from the brink, from the place of their lowest depths? I would suggest the answer is hinted in the word we began with — “*misham*” — which is reminiscent of a famous Gemara in Shabbos (88a) about *kabbolas HaTorah*:

ואמר להם אם אתם מקבלים התורה מוטב ואם לאו שם תהא קבורתכם.

*Hashem said if you accept the Torah, good. If not, there will be your burial place.*

Prima facie, the Gemara should have said *poh* (פה), **here** will be your grave. So why does it say *sham* (שם), **there**? What does it come to teach us? Perhaps it is a companion message to the *Zera Shimshon*. Hashem was saying that if we do not accept the Torah, then when we reach the brink, the moments of *sham*, that will truly be our end: *sham tehe kevuraschem*. But by accepting the Torah and clinging to it steadfastly, then even when we are “there,” we can and will always come back!

Chanukah is a celebration of our unwavering commitment to the Torah and a Torah way of life. The Chashmonaim merited the tremendous salvation specifically because of that commitment. The Lubliner Rav, Rav Meir Shapiro, had a homiletic interpretation on the

opening comment of the Gemara, *Shabbos* 21b, about the Chanukah story — *Mai Chanukah d'tanu rabbanan* ... which literally translates as “what is [the story of] Chanukah as the rabbis taught.” Rav Shapiro read it as “if you want to know what gave the Chashmonaim the power to stand resolutely against our enemies, it is *d'tanu rabbanan* — the teachings of our Torah.” May we all be *zocheh* to continue to learn and spread the light of Torah and thereby merit the ultimate salvation speedily in our days.

## Tzadikim and Tehorim: Military Disadvantage?

**Rabbi Menachem Genack**  
*Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS and CEO, OU Kosher*

*Al Hanissim* lists a series of disadvantages that we had against the Syrian-Greek army and the miracle that Hashem provided for us in helping us defeat them. The list starts with *giborim b'yad chalashim*, the mighty in the hands of the weak, and then *rabim b'yad me'atim*, many in the hands of the few. These disadvantages are clearly understandable from a military perspective. However, the next three are more difficult to understand: *reshaim b'yad tzadikim*, the evil in the hands of the righteous, *temei'im b'yad tehorim*, the defiled in the hands of the pure, *v'zeidim b'yad oskei Torasecha*, and the wanton in the hands of those who study Your Torah. Why are we listing these disadvantages? Why were they less equipped to fight because they were righteous, pure people who studied Torah?

Perhaps the idea is that even in war,

there are certain moral and ethical standards. A military without ethics will destroy everything in its path including its own civilians. A military fighting an ethical war will go out of its way to avoid unnecessary casualties. This put the army of righteous, pure people who studied Torah at a military disadvantage. Therefore, in *Al Hanissim*, we thank Hashem for that aspect of the miracle of the war.

## Chanukah and the Search for Inner Beauty

**Rebbetzin Marjorie Glatt, JD**  
*Special Projects Coordinator, YUConnects*

Why are today's dating challenges so difficult? I blame the ancient Greeks. While we won the Chanukah war of spirituality over materialism and holiness over Hellenism, in some respects we are still fighting that war. It was the Greeks who first taught the world to emphasize physical beauty above all else. Descending from Noah's son, Yefet (root of “*yofei*,” meaning “pretty”), our Syrian/Greek adversaries worshipped pagan gods and pagan values. Jewish tradition, on the other hand, cherishes inner beauty, that which stems from within us.

The Hellenistic attitude pervades modern culture. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks quotes Matthew Arnold, a Victorian poet and social critic, who distinguished between Hellenism and Hebraism. Hellenism focuses on art and beauty. Hebraism (i.e. Jewish culture) is about ethics and righteousness. Lord Sacks notes that our ancient Jewish values are constantly being attacked by our

secular experience and its deviant norms. Indeed, he says, “Ours is the most Hellenistic age since the conversion of Constantine to Christianity in the 4th century.” [Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, “Candles in memory of a clash of civilisations,” December 16, 2006 available at [http://rs.hopedev.agency/candles-in-memory-of-a-clash-of-civilisations/.](http://rs.hopedev.agency/candles-in-memory-of-a-clash-of-civilisations/)]

Of course, as Jews, we can enjoy beauty — it is even praiseworthy in the proper setting. The vessels of the Beis Hamikdash were covered in gold. Yerushalayim received nine-tenths of the beauty of the world (*Kiddushin* 49a-b). Our saintly *imahot* (matriarchs) are often portrayed as “*yifat toar*” (beautiful in appearance). The Vilna Gaon (commentary to *Mishlei* 31:30) comments that when outer physical beauty exists alone, then it is “*sheker hachayn v'hevel hayofi*” — simply vanity. But true beauty is *yirat Hashem*, expressed as inner personality and *middos*. That type of beauty is worthy of praise and it is this beauty that is recognized in Sarah, Rivkah, Rachel and Leah.

There are dating apps today based solely on looking at a photo and then swiping right/left. Due to the ease of searching online, “blind dates” simply don't exist anymore and even matchmakers recommend a flattering photo to complement a dating profile. It is incumbent upon Jewish educators, Orthodox organizations, and yes, Jewish parents, to impress upon our young adults the essential values that matter in marriage, or indeed, any relationship. Kindness, consideration, responsibility, and religious sincerity are crucial characteristics that sustain a marriage. We are blessed to have that as part of our heritage.

Our Maccabee heroes recognized their spiritual war. Their fight was to preserve our Torah without contamination. Chanukah's celebration is the miracle of finding the pure, unadulterated olive oil. Interestingly, the Menorah that was lit by the Chashmonaim wasn't the beautiful golden menorah; after all, the Beis Hamikdash had been ransacked and vessels destroyed. The early rededication occurred with a simple menorah made of iron and tin (*Menachot* 28b). The light emanating from within was what mattered. Married or single, each of us can use our own spiritual light, fight the Hellenistic forces surrounding us, and continue the battle for authentic Torah Judaism.

## Pirumei Nisa Starts in the Home

### Rabbi Joshua Goller

*Mashgiach Ruchani, YU High School for Girls and Assistant Rabbi, Young Israel of West Hempstead*

We ordinarily associate the mitzvah of lighting ner Chanukah with the concept of *pirumei nisa*: a chance to publicize the great miracle that Hashem performed for us in those days. It would therefore be logical to assume that the more public we can make this mitzvah, the better. So perhaps the lighting should be outside. However, the Gemara qualifies this notion of *pirumei nisa* with the following statement:

תנו רבנן: גר חנוכה מצוה להניחה על פתח ביתו מבחוץ. אם היה דר בעלייה - מניחה בחלון הסמוכה לרשות הרבים. ובשעת הסכנה - מניחה על שלחנו, ודין

*Our rabbis taught: The candle of Chanukah should be lit at the entrance*

*of one's home on the outside. If one lives on a higher floor, one places it in the window closest to the public thoroughfare. In times of danger, one may place it on the table and that is sufficient.*

### Shabbat 21b

During times of danger, we can fulfill the mitzvah by lighting inside the home on our table. While the parameters and applications of this ruling are subject to halachic debate, there is a subtle message in this halachic ruling as well.

In the classic work of *Chassidus*, the *Bnei Yisaschar* (Kislev 3:38), Rabbi Tzvi Elimelech Spira of Dinov (c. 1783–1841), writes that the word *v'dayo* — and that is sufficient — seems superfluous. The Gemara could have just ended by saying “place it on the table.” Rather, the word *v'dayo* tells us that those outside cannot properly understand or appreciate the message of the Menorah and the miracle it represents. They will deride it. It is sufficient to light for those people in your home. The message of Hashem's great miracles and omnipotence is only needed to be understood by those in the home; those who will appreciate it and use it to further the message of Hashem and His Torah in the world.

The challenge of living in a world full of people who don't understand the values of Torah or see G-d's hand in daily living is great. But recognize that it is up to those around the table, who are in the house, to be the ambassadors who will slowly bring back the days of true *pirumei nisa* — a day where everyone sees and understands the large and small miracles that Hashem has and continues to bestow upon us.

## Reclaiming Our Portion in Hashem

### Rabbi Zvi Sobolofsky

*Rosh Yeshiva, RIETS and Rabbi, Congregation Ohr Torah, Bergenfield, NJ*

The Midrash, *Bereishis Rabbah* 2:4, describes *galus Yavan* — the period of persecution that the Jews experienced in the time leading up to the Chanukah story — as *choshech*, darkness, because the Greeks darkened the eyes of the Jews by telling them to write on the horn of an ox, “you have no portion in the G-d of Israel.” Much has been written and said about this midrash. I would like to focus on what it means to have a portion in the G-d of Israel.

In Parashas Korach (18:20), Hashem states that the Kohanim and Levi'im will not receive a portion of land in Israel. Rather, *Ani chelekecha v'nachalasecha*, I am your portion and share. The Kohanim and Levi'im have a direct portion in Hashem. What do they do to attain that portion? They had two primary roles. First, they performed *avodah*, service, in the Beis Hamikdash. Second, when they weren't actively performing *avodah*, they were involved in learning and teaching Torah (see Rambam, *Hilchos Shemitah V'Yovel* 13:12). As such, having a portion in Hashem means having a portion in Torah learning and *avodah*.

The Greeks understood what it meant to have a portion in Hashem and their decrees reflected that. First, they wanted to ensure that we had no portion in Torah learning. In *Al Hanisim* the first thing we mention is *l'hashkicham Torasecha*, they attempted to have us forget the Torah. Second, they wanted to eliminate the *avoda* in the Beis Hamikdash by defiling it.

On Chanukah, we have an opportunity to reclaim our portion in Hashem. Our lighting of the Chanukah candles is an act of *avoda*. It mimics the lighting of the Menorah in the Beis Hamikdash and it is something even non-Kohanim can do. Chanukah is also a time when we can rededicate ourselves to Torah learning. By committing ourselves to Torah and *avodah*, we are stating that we have a portion in the G-d of Israel.

## At the Crossroad of Compromise and Commitment

### Rabbi Moshe Tzvi Weinberg

*Rebbe and Mashgiach Ruchani, YU Stone Beit Midrash Program, and Mashpia, Congregation Beth Abraham, Bergenfield, NJ*

While halacha allows for more than one “correct” conclusion arrived on by a competent halachic authority, its process is defined by a thorough search for and implementation of the truth. Worthy poskim may choose to differ in their final analysis, but it is perhaps less common that halacha reflects a blending of the various opinions to create a practice initially proposed by nobody.

A compromise of this sort finds expression in the (Ashkenazi) practice of affixing a mezuzah to our doorways. While Rashi (*Menachos* 33a) favors a vertical upright placement of the mezuzah, Rabbeinu Tam (*Menachos* 33a) advocates for a horizontal positioning of the scroll, echoing the arrangement of the Torah and the Tablets in the *Aron Kodesh* of the *Beis HaMikdash*. What are we to make of these conflicting opinions? While Rav Yosef Karo (YD 289:6) adopts the position of Rashi as normative,

we find a remarkable position, albeit not entirely unique in halacha, in the writings of the *Tur* (Rabbi Yaakov ben Asher, YD 289), which is later cited and recommended by Rema (YD 289:6). “Those who perform mitzvos precisely” seek to fulfill both the opinion of Rashi and Rabbeinu Tam. This is achieved through the creation of a *peshara* of sorts, a compromise opinion — positioning the mezuzah neither vertical nor horizontal but on a slant.

It has been suggested that particularly in the context of mezuzah, which marks the entranceways to our homes and dwelling spaces, it is appropriate to contemplate the need for compromise. The slanted mezuzah serves as a stark reminder of a simple truth and reality. A home, the very place where mezuzos are so proudly displayed, is often an environment of varying voices and opinions. The need for compromise is essential in upholding the metaphorical walls of the home.

However, while the need for confluence and compromise is certain, there are instances that call for our stance to be firm. It is perhaps for this very reason that the Gemara (*Shabbos* 22a) concludes that the optimal placement of the Chanukah menorah is on the left side of the doorway, *opposing*, as it were, the mezuzah. While the mezuzah represents the beauty of compromise, the menorah represents our fierce and unwavering commitment to absolute truth in the face of an oppressive “compromise.” The Ancient Syrian-Greeks never intended to exterminate the Jewish people (see Maharal’s *Ner Mitzvah* at length); rather, they sought to dilute our core Torah values, under the guise of “working together.” Loss of Torah identity is loss of Jewish identity

itself. Perhaps now more than ever, as we stand at the threshold of our homes on Chanukah, enveloped by a mezuzah of compromise on our right and the immutable truth of the menorah on our left, we must once again challenge ourselves to maintain the delicate balance between these two great ideals.

## Igniting The Spark From Within

### Mrs. Miriam White

*Judaic Studies/Director of Religious Guidance, Yeshiva University High School for Girls*

Often times we catch ourselves dreaming about making an impact on the world. Our minds race with visions of big achievements and accomplishments, and we hope for the day that we can solve a particular crisis, or enlighten the world in a meaningful way. We then realize that in order to turn these dreams into reality, we need to take practical steps toward these goals. The festival of Chanukah, which celebrates those who have made a unique impact on Jewish history, teaches us how to achieve those grand dreams we aspire to; we can learn this from **where**, **when** and **how** we light the menorah.

A. The Gemara in *Shabbos* (21b) tells us two, almost contradictory, statements about **where** we light the menorah. It says that the mitzvah is “*ner ish uveiso*,” that it is lit by each household, but then says that the menorah should be placed close to the entrance of the house *outside* of the home. [In the Diaspora, we usually light inside the home, but ensure that it is visible to those outside the home.] This duality, whereby the menorah is lit in the home, but in a

way that can be seen outside, teaches us a powerful lesson: that the homes we live in are our miracles, and a home and family has the power to transform the world around us. After all, the Chashmonaim were led by a single family of Matisyahu and his sons! Our success is not found in the masses but in a small number doing the right thing. As we say during Chanukah, “*V’rabim byad meatim*” — “*The many were delivered in the hands of the few.*” Although we Jews make up a small percentage of the world population, we can still have a lasting impact on the world around us. We need not travel to the end of the world and back to make an impact. Sometimes all it takes is the light from our home to illuminate a whole world.

**B. When** do we light the menorah? We light during the night, in the heart of winter, when the nights are the longest. It can feel like the night will last forever, and yet we add a small flame of light every night of Chanukah to remind us that even when all hope seems lost, and the world is too dark and complicated to repair, our job is to create a little bit of light to keep moving forward. Rav Hirsch describes this most strikingly in his book *Horeb*:

*Each year, when the Chanukah season recurs, lights are kindled in every home of Israel, and by every son of Israel, and the events of those days are celebrated in word and in song, paying homage to God. Thus the darkened courses of Israel are lit up by this message: “The spiritual light of Israel will never be dimmed.” And even if round about you everything becomes defiled by the oppression of the time, so long as the light remains pure within the confines of only one house or within the breast of only one man, live on joyfully amid all the wanton aberration, even die joyfully under the frenzy of a madman, for the spiritual life of Israel is saved: God watches over it; and even by*

*the light of one man He rekindles it anew. “Not by might, nor by power, but by My spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts (Zecharia iv, 6).”*

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**C. How** we light the menorah also teaches us a valuable lesson. Instead of starting with eight, we light one candle on the first night of Chanukah, and build from there. Each day we are *mosif veholech*, we add on a little bit more to what we did yesterday. One person can inspire another, who can inspire another, who inspires another, one person at a time.

Chanukah teaches us how to bring light into this world; by bringing light into our homes that can emanate outward, by inspiring us during the dark night to have a bit of hope, and that all it takes is just one individual to inspire another, who will then in turn inspire another, with ultimate hopes of making an impact in the world around them.

## An Interesting Spin on the Dreidel

**Rabbi Yehuda Willig**  
Rebbe, RIETS

The tradition of spinning the dreidel has ancient roots in the Chanukah story. Interestingly, we find another ancient custom of spinning: on Purim we spin the gragger. The commentaries note that although these two customs are quite similar, they differ in that the dreidel is spun from the top and the gragger from below. This difference requires an explanation.

The sefer *Ta’amei Haminhagim* suggests an answer based on another contrast between Chanukah and

Purim. On Purim we find that there was a powerful *hisorerusa d’letasa* (inspiration from below) as we fasted and did a communal teshuva. On Chanukah, however, we experienced *hisorerusa d’leila* (inspiration from above) as we undeservedly were granted miracles from Hashem. Based on this distinction we can now understand why, on Purim, we commemorate our salvation by spinning from below in remembrance of the *hisorerusa d’letasa*, while on Chanukah, we celebrate the miracles that occurred through *hisorerusa d’leila* — the spinning of the One above.

We can add another dimension to the meaning of the dreidel and its spin: A dreidel cannot independently stand on its own. Yet with a push and a spin from above it can move with exceptional speed. Similarly, on a national level, Klal Yisrael were incapable of standing on their own due to the terrible oppression of the Greeks. Yet with a push and a spin from the One above, we were able to succeed in an extraordinary victory.

This understanding can lead us to a greater appreciation of Hashem’s involvement in His world. After all, the earth we inhabit is spherical and whirls around and around, resembling the dreidel. Additionally, scientists note that if the world stopped spinning at its normal rate of 1,000 miles per hour, our planet would be uninhabitable. So as we twirl our dreidel this Chanukah, we should recall the miraculous events of the Chanukah story as well as the constant miracle called nature. As we spin our dreidel, we remind ourselves of Who is spinning our earth up above and Who is really in control of our universe.



## **SHABBOS INVITATIONS: INSPIRATION TO OBSERVE OR INCITEMENT TO SIN?**

**A**chad Ha'am said that "more than the Jews have kept the Shabbos, the Shabbos has kept the Jews."<sup>1</sup> Indeed, very few activities have done more for bringing Jews to Judaism than the Shabbos. The experience of a Shabbos meal, and of Shabbos in general, is such a positive force in bringing people closer to Torah that it has become a central tool in outreach and Jewish education. From Jeff Seidel arranging a Shabbos meal for a backpacker in Jerusalem to NCSY Shabbatonim, the Shabbos Project and Shabbos.com, the beauty

and sanctity of Shabbos has had a major impact on countless Jews. However, it is not always a simple thing to arrange such an experience. A Shabbos guest may not necessarily live within walking distance of the host, and many people find it awkward and uncomfortable to stay over at the home of a complete stranger. What then does halacha say about inviting people even if we know that they may drive?

Rav Asher Weiss frames the question in the introduction to his responsum on the subject:

*On the one hand we may not be flippant regarding the sanctity of Shabbos and act in a way that the people who we are bringing closer to the life of Torah . . . will see that, G-d forbid, we are being lax regarding the sanctity of Shabbos and ignoring its desecration. On the other hand, very frequently this is the sole opportunity to have a meaningful impact on these people. During the weekdays they are busy with work or study, and only on Shabbos are they available to be hosted. And, experience has shown, that there is no greater resource than a Shabbos table to bring*

hearts closer and to influence our wayward and unconvinced brothers.<sup>2</sup>

The most obvious halachic problem is the prohibition of “placing a stumbling block before the blind” (*lifnei iver*)<sup>3</sup> — causing another to sin,<sup>4</sup> which also applies (albeit *miderabanan*) even when one is not the cause of the sin, but merely aides and abets the sin, *mesayei yedei ovrei aveirah*.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, we are confronted with the tragedy of millions of Jews who are ignorant of Torah and have never experienced a Shabbos, and for whom this may be the one opportunity to experience authentic Judaism.

The subject of Shabbos invitations is an issue that has generated much discussion in halachic literature.<sup>6</sup> We will focus only on three of the major approaches in this essay. While each situation is unique and a *posek* should be consulted in each case, this article can be used as background for the question and to help understand the answer. Our discussion here is to “magnify the Torah and increase its honor” *lehagdil Torah ule-ha’adirah*,<sup>7</sup> and is “*lehalachah, velo lema’aseh*.”

In probably the earliest responsa on the subject, Rav Moshe Feinstein addressed a rabbi whose congregants wished to begin an educational minyan for children on Shabbos;<sup>8</sup> a woman who was asked to give a class for children, who were likely to be driven, on Shabbos afternoon;<sup>9</sup> and a rabbi who inquired if it was permitted to invite people to pray at the synagogue if they lived at a distance where it was clear that they would drive.<sup>10</sup> In each case Rav Moshe ruled that inviting someone on Shabbos when it was likely that they would drive is prohibited and a transgression

of *lifnei iver*. He also added that if they lived so far away that it was not possible to walk, then inviting them for Shabbos would also involve the prohibition of *meisis umediach*, the prohibition against proselytizing for idolatry and influencing people to transgress.<sup>11</sup> Some suggest<sup>12</sup> that it is possible that an invitation to a Shabbos meal where the sole intention is to bring the guest to Torah observance would have evoked a different response from Rav Moshe, “since one is sending a message that one wants the guest to ultimately keep Shabbos (and one’s intention is not to misguide the guest into doing more sins).”<sup>13</sup> However, Rav Moshe’s opinion is usually understood as prohibiting invitations even for outreach. This was also the opinion of Rav Yosef Shalom Eliashiv, who states that “one does not engage in ‘business deals’ regarding Torah laws, to say that it is worth it to transgress *lifnei iver* so that we can bring him to keep Shabbos.”<sup>14</sup>

Later discussion of the question raised the possibility of leniency by viewing the cases as not necessarily a binary choice between causing a transgression and not causing a transgression. Rather, *lifnei iver* situations may be nuanced and complex, where the choice is between two transgressions, one minor and one major. There may be cases where whatever we do there will be a negative outcome or transgression, in which case we should choose the lesser of two evils.<sup>15</sup> If we intend to remove a sin we are not in transgression of *lifnei iver*. Some examples should illustrate this idea.

Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach, in a responsum regarding giving food and drink to a guest who will not make a

blessing before eating, states:

*Since the prohibition of giving food to someone who will not make a bracha is solely due to the stumbling block that is being created, and if one refrains from serving him food one will create a greater “stumbling block” — he will be distanced from Torah and fear of Hashem, and may hate and be angry at those who walk in the path of the Torah — therefore, there is no sin whatsoever, as there is no lifnei iver; on the contrary, he is saving him from a greater “stumbling block” by actively substituting it for a smaller “stumbling block.”*<sup>16</sup>

A similar idea is mentioned by Rav Avraham Yeshaya Karelitz, the Chazon Ish, regarding the leniency of giving food that may have been produced in the *Shmittah* year in a prohibited fashion to a poor person:

*It appears that the reason the Sages were lenient in a doubt (safeik meshumar), even though placing a possible “lifnei iver” is certainly prohibited, and it would have been appropriate to be stringent in a case of uncertainty; because if we would be stringent in all doubts we would also cause a “lifnei iver.” For we would avoid kindness and preclude the paths of life and peace from ourselves and from them; they are merely ignorant [not evil] and we are obligated to sustain them and to be benevolent towards them. And how much more so, not to increase hatred and rivalry between us and them, and they would transgress “Do not hate your brother” and numerous other prohibitions that are no less severe than the prohibition from which we wish to save them.*<sup>17</sup>

Neither of the above responsa discuss inviting someone on Shabbos, but I believe we can find a similar idea in a responsum by Rav Moshe Shternbuch. A couple in Johannesburg who were *baalei teshuvah* wanted to

invite their non-religious parents for a Shabbos meal. They felt that experiencing a beautiful Shabbos with children and grandchildren would have a very positive effect on their parents' Judaism and bring them toward observance of mitzvos. In fact, they had hosted their parents a number of times and they seemed to be making progress in their attitude to Torah observance. The couple offered their parents accommodations, although they knew that the parents would want to stay in their own house and were fairly certain that the parents would drive. Rav Moshe Shternbuch (Av Beis Din of the Badatz in Jerusalem) responded:

*It appears that the prohibition of "lifnei iver" is similar to the literal understanding of tripping a blind person. If the intention of the one who causes the tripping is to benefit the other, then he is not causing a "stumbling block." Just like a surgeon is not considered as though he has injured the other; so too here, his intention is not to cause a sin . . . rather he hopes to guide them and bring them to truth. Therefore there is no prohibition of lifnei iver, and since he is not instructing them to drive, and on the contrary, he has expressed to them his pain regarding their driving . . .<sup>18</sup> it appears there is no prohibition of lifnei iver since his intention is solely for their good. However, there is a desecration of Hashem's name if they drive directly to his house publicly on Shabbos and so they should park in a place where it is not obvious that they are driving to his house. He should try as much as possible to prevent them from transgressing*

*Shabbos, but if this is not possible, and he feels that inviting them would have a positive effect on their return to Judaism, he should not refrain from this because of the prohibition of lifnei iver rather he should draw them close as much as possible. "The left should push away and the right hand should draw close"<sup>19</sup> and he should continue to exhort and instruct them regarding the severity of transgressing Shabbos and the sweetness of its observance, and with the help of Hashem he will turn them to the better path, and there is no greater honor of parents than this.<sup>20</sup>*

Perhaps we can suggest that underlying Rav Shternbuch's leniency is a non-binary view of lifnei iver. Not inviting the guests at all will not necessarily prevent transgressions. On the contrary, they will remain far from Torah observance, and engage in further transgression of Shabbos. Inviting them for Shabbos is not lifnei iver; we are not "placing a stumbling block before the blind" by inviting them, rather we are removing a larger stumbling block and replacing it with a smaller one. Rav Shternbuch is saying that if our intention is to remove a stumbling block then we are not transgressing lifnei iver at all. As Rav Auerbach stated, "Placing the smaller stumbling block is not an act of tripping, but an act of saving."<sup>21</sup> We can add to this the observation that the guest will be sinning less at the host's home on Shabbos than he would be if he did not come. This was noted by Rav Chaim Pinchas Scheinberg, who asked me, "What will your guest be doing otherwise if

he does not come for Shabbos? Will he not be driving, using electricity, eating non-kosher food? While he is at your house, at least he will be eating kosher and keeping Shabbos."<sup>22</sup> This idea is used by Rav Asher Weiss as an additional reason to be lenient.<sup>23</sup>

Rav Yechiel Yaakov Weinberg using the same logic, writes: *It appears that when the one who causes the stumbling intends to do a mitzvah, there is no lifnei iver. And regarding the very essence of the law of lifnei iver, if not for my awe of our great, recent rabbinic authorities, I would say, that any situation in which the one who causes the "stumbling block" has intention to do a mitzvah, then there is no prohibition of lifnei iver...<sup>24</sup>*

Rav Weinberg considered this to be a general leniency in similar halachic dilemmas:

*And from all of the above, an answer can be found for a number of questions that are relevant to lifnei iver, for example, if it is permitted to officiate at the wedding of a couple who are not careful about family purity laws, or if it is permitted to be a match-maker for couples who are not careful about Torah law in general.<sup>25</sup>*

A third approach is offered by Rav Asher Weiss. He rules that: *There is room to be lenient ... and the appropriate way to behave is the following: First one should insist that the guests stay for the whole of Shabbos and to arrange a place for them to sleep. One should express to them our pain if they only decide to attend the meals and transgress Shabbos. However, if despite this they decide to transgress Shabbos*



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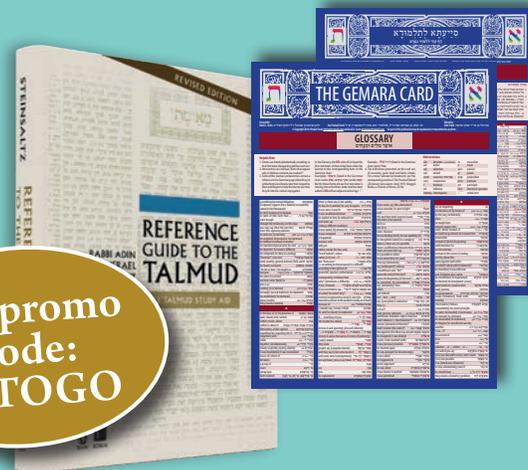
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and come anyway, one should draw them close and not prevent them from participating in the meals. Even if the invitation is not personal, but is a public invitation to the community, one should advertise that there is a possibility to stay over, and one may ignore the fact that they may choose to come by desecrating Shabbos, G-d forbid.

His ruling is based primarily on the idea that when one is not the cause of the sin, but merely aiding (*mesayei*), this is a rabbinic prohibition according to some, and according to others permitted. He cites the Ramah who rules leniently but says that a pious person should be stringent.<sup>26</sup> In our case, Rav Weiss writes *It appears clear and obvious to me that if his entire intention is to draw them close with cables of love and to bring them under the wings of the Divine Presence, his stringency will be a leniency. A pious person should be stringent in saving souls, to try with all his power to return the hearts of the children to their Father, and then one is not aiding in a sin, but performing a great mitzvah.*<sup>27</sup>

My revered teacher, Rav Moshe Shapiro zatzal, also maintained that we should offer the guest accommodations for all of Shabbos, but should welcome them anyway should they choose not to accept the accommodations and to drive. Rav Dovid Cohen suggested that we should say something to the effect of, “Come for Shabbos, I can accommodate you for sleeping and meals.” If the guest says “I can’t come for the whole Shabbos,” then you can reply, “You are always welcome.”<sup>28</sup> [As I stated earlier, a competent halachic

authority should be consulted, especially regarding something as severe as chillul Shabbos.]

Chanukah is a time when we celebrate our miraculous victory over the Hellenists. The Hellenist Seleucids wanted to absorb the Jews culturally and turn Israel into a Greek vassal state. The Hellenists were successful in their campaign against Judaism. Many Jews were quite content to become Hellenists and adopted paganism and a Greek lifestyle. To these Jewish Hellenists, the Greeks represented all that was modern and new, while Judaism was antiquated and out of fashion. There are millions of Jews who know almost nothing about their heritage. They are not like the ancient Jewish Hellenists who were ideologically committed to assimilation; rather, they are merely ignorant. Often, the embrace of kindness, and the warmth of Shabbos can be enough to spark their interest. Today, to be a Maccabee does not require taking up arms; it requires reaching out with both arms. Those of us who observe the Shabbos have a responsibility to share this beautiful gift with our brothers and sisters. In my experience, and in the experience of many others, by sharing Shabbos, we too can rekindle the flame of Torah in the Jewish soul.

## Endnotes

1. *Shabbat VeTzioniyut, Hashiloach*, Vol. 3:6, Sivan 5658.
2. *Responsa Minchas Asher* 2:28.
3. Vayikra 19: 14.
4. *Avodah Zarah* 6b.

5. Tosfos, *Shabbos* 3a “*Bava dereishah*” — although this a matter of argument among the Rishonim as cited below by Rav Asher Weiss.
6. For the most comprehensive treatment on this issue that I have seen, refer to the article by Rabbi Avraham Edelstein, Olami Resources, The Laws of Outreach: Invitation for Shabbos, <http://nleresources.com/2019/08/new-from-the-laws-of-outreach-invitations-for-shabbos>.
7. *Yeshaya* 42:21.
8. *Igros Moshe, Orach Chaim* 1:98.
9. *Ibid.*, 4:71.
10. *Ibid.*, 1:99.
11. *Devarim* 13:6. *Igros Moshe, O”C* 1:99.
12. Cited by Rav Edelstein, based on a shiur by Rav Chaim Mintz.
13. From the article quoted above, p. 213.
14. *Chashukei Chemed on Sanhedrin* 21a.
15. *Kiddushin* 21b-22a.
16. *Minchas Shlomo* 1:35 (1).
17. *Chazon Ish, Shvi’is* 12:9.
18. “and there is no obligation of responsibility (*arvus*) to prevent them from sin, as they are public transgressors of Shabbos, as per *Shach* and *Dagul Mervavah, Yoreh Deah* 151.”
19. *Sotah* 47a.
20. *Teshuvos VeHanhagos, Orach Chaim* 1:358.
21. *Minchas Shlomo* 1:35 (1).
22. Rosh Yeshiva of Torah Ohr, Yerushalayim, in a conversation with the author of this article.
23. *Minchas Asher* 2:28:4.
24. *Teshuvos Seridei Aish*, Vol. 2, 57 (7).
25. *Ibid.* 57 (8).
26. Ramah, *Yoreh Deah* 151:1.
27. *Responsa Minchas Asher* 2:28 (also 2:29).
28. I heard this from Rav Cohen at an AJOP conference and in conversation with him. See Edelstein, p. 222.



## **KIRUV RECHOKIM: NOT JUST FOR PROFESSIONALS**

**W**e find ourselves well into Sefer Bereishis, and I believe there are no biblical stories, only Bible lessons. Why doesn't the Torah, our Constitution, begin with *hachodesh hazeh lachem* (this month is for you — Shemos ch. 12) and its flow of mitzvos? After all, other constitutions do not provide any biographical material regarding its authors or their contemporaries. Why the details of the lives of the Avos and Yosef and his brothers? This is much more than *d'rosh vekabel s'char* (study and receive reward). As a prerequisite to the 613 laws of the Torah, the Torah provides a picture, a road map of how to live our lives with the distinctive laws of Shabbos, kashrus, and not charging interest on loans one to another.

Interestingly, the Navi Yeshayah called Avraham Avinu “*ohavi*” (41:8), meaning “the one I love.” Why is he rewarded with this most honorable title? I believe that as Rashi teaches (Bereishis 18:1), *ve'atah siman livanecha*, Avraham is the model for his descendants, in that everyone desires to be a beloved of Hashem. So how do we achieve this honorable title? The Chafetz Chaim, in his introduction to the sefer *Chomas Ha-Das*, postulates that Avraham is called *ohavi* because he fulfilled the obligation/privilege of *ve'avavta es Hashem Elokecha* (you shall love Hashem Your G-d), understood by the Talmud, *Yoma* 86a, and by the *Sifri* as making Hashem beloved to the masses. Others should come to love G-d by observing our actions. The

verse describing who Avraham took with him on his journey to Canaan (Bereishis 12:5), *v'es hanefesh asher asu biCharan*, “the souls they made in Charan,” is understood by the Rambam *Hilchos Avodah Zarah* (1:3) to mean the many tens of thousands he brought under the wings of the Divine, educating masses of the existence and Divine providence of Hashem.

The Torah honors the Jewish people by referring to them in Devarim (14:1), *banim atem laHashem*, “you are children of Hashem.” Therefore, when we experience the loss of a close relative, the Ramban on this verse citing our Rabbis, teaches that we are not to mourn excessively, as Hashem, our Father, will comfort us.

As He comforts us, we owe it to Him to comfort Him. Just as the father is most happy and comforted when his children are united and come close to him, similarly when the Jewish people are united in their service of Hashem, and act in a brotherly manner to each other, this brings Him much nachas. Moreover, if we love our friend, we cannot tolerate others attacking and degrading him. Similarly, our love and allegiance to Hashem should not allow us to sit by idly while others profane His name, and dishonor Him by their neglect and disregard of his mitzvos. *Mesilas Yesharim* (19) cites the verse in Mishlei (28:4), “those who forsake the Torah praise the wicked and the keepers of Torah contend with them.” We must be the challengers, challenging those who don’t yet believe in the Oral Law and those whose lives are devoid of Jewish observance. King David in Tehilim (97:10) teaches “*ohavay Hashem sinu rah*,” lovers of Hashem despise evil. In addition, we are taught *ain HaKadosh Baruch Ho ohaiv elah mi she’ohaiv es Yisroel* — God loves those who love the Jewish people. We can show no greater love to the Jewish people than by returning those of His children that have become estranged from their Father in Heaven. Our showing patience, love, and respect to the not-yet learned and observant Jewish communities is our way of demonstrating our love for Him.

We are taught that when Avraham first arrives in Canaan, Hashem immediately informs him that this land is his and for his progeny that will be forthcoming. Avraham’s response was to build a mizbayach (Bereishis 12:8) “And he called in the name of Hashem.” Targum Unkelus understands this to mean that he prayed to Hashem. The Ramban

understands it as he proclaimed the name — the identity of G-d to all. Avraham was the first to engage in *kiruv rechokim*. Yitzchak also assumed the role of reaching out and touching many more souls, as we are taught and noted by the Sforno, Bereishis (26:5), that initially Hashem blesses Yitzchak because of his father’s accomplishments. However, after Yitzchak builds an altar (26:25) and preaches/teaches to the masses, he is privileged to warrant his own Divine communication. Regarding Yaakov, continues the Sforno, the Torah does not tell us that he was blessed in the merit of his father, since from his childhood on he was the *yoshev ohalim*, understood to mean *l’mod u’lilamed* — he was meant to study and enlighten others with his knowledge. This was especially so at the Yeshiva of Shem viAver, the place where those seeking to learn about Hashem gravitated.

The Talmud in *Succah* (49b) elaborates on the praise attributed to the first Matriarch Sarah, and which is recited/sung Friday night to extol the woman of the home. “*Pihah paschah bichachma visoras chesed al lishonah* — her mouth opens with wisdom and the Torah of kindness is on her tongue.” Asks the Talmud, is there a Torah of chesed and one not of chesed? The Talmud answers in the affirmative. Torah that is shared is *Toras chesed*. Torah that is not shared is not a Torah of chesed. Torah is meant not only to be studied, but taught to others.

Indeed, every morning, in the second bracha recited before the Shema, we petition Hashem to assist us *lilmod ulilamed*, to study and teach and perform all the tenets of your Torah. The immediate question is, are we all

teachers? Most of us are in business or other professions and vocations. The answer is that we are all charged and have the capacity to positively influence others, be it our peers in the workplace, at social gatherings and at Shabbos and Yom Tov tables.

Why are we all charged to be concerned about the spiritual well-being of the others? I would like to share five different approaches.

**I.** Upon entering the Land of Israel, the Jewish nation became *arayvim* — responsible one for another. This means, explains the Ritvah, that even if I have fulfilled my mitzvah, but another Jew nearby has not, if I can assist or influence him to perform the mitzvah and I don’t, my mitzvah is incomplete until the next one fulfills the mitzvah. On a metaphysical level the Jewish people are considered one soul, and therefore, a part of us is lacking if another Jew does not participate in Torah and mitzvos.

Moreover, the term *arev* literally means “co-signer.” If I co-signed a loan on someone’s behalf and the borrower was going to invest the money in a venture that I felt very strongly would not succeed, I would do everything in my power to dissuade the borrower from squandering the money and investing foolishly, since this could negatively affect my pocketbook. Here too, the Torah (Vayikra 19:17) ordains that we are to rebuke our neighbors and not suffer sins on their behalf. The Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 27b, understands this to mean that if I could have prevented another Jew from violating a Torah law, and chose to mind my own business, I receive part of the sin that could have been prevented.

**II.** The obligation to be *mekarev rechokim* is derived from the biblical

mitzvah of *hashavas aveidah*, the returning of a lost object. The Torah stresses the great responsibility and effort that we must exert to prevent the financial loss of our Jewish neighbor. The Talmud *Sanhedrin* (73a) teaches that if we are obligated to busy ourselves and show great concern for the material losses of the next one, all the more so regarding spiritual losses of the next one. The *Ohr Hachayim* actually learns this concept from the very text of the mitzvah — to return a lost object. He understands the directive, Devarim (22:2) to bring — gather in the lost object to your home — to also mean to bring the individual who has strayed off the *derech* into your home/ Bais Hamedrash and put him on the proper path.

**III.** It is interesting to note that the *Tana D'Bei Eliyahu* (27) understands the mitzvah of tzedakah to include not only providing the physical needs of the poor, but their spiritual necessities as well. The verse (Yeshayah 58:7) “surely you shall share your bread with the hungry” includes those hungry for Torah teaching, and bread is meant to refer to Torah. The *Pri Megadim* in *Orach Chaim* (37:4) teaches that if a person cannot afford a pair of Tefilin, the obligation falls on the community to enable him to fulfill the mitzvah. The *Maharam Shick* in his responsa, O.C. (322), writes that purchasing a mitzvah item on behalf of another Jew is a fulfillment of the mitzvah of tzedakah. In addition, the *Gra*, C.M. (292) explains the Ramah, who opined that we force a Jew who has a Jewish library to lend his books to others, that this is a form of tzedakah and the beis din has the power to enforce the giving of charity. All the more so if we are involved in kiruv rechokim it is a genuine fulfillment of

the mitzvah of tzedakah.

**IV.** The Talmud, *Shabbos* (31a), informs us of the six questions that await when in the next world we need to give an accounting of our life. One of these questions is *tzipisa liyishua* — did you yearn for the redemption? We are not only to pray thrice daily for the geula, but the Rambam, *Hilchos Tshuva* (7:5) sides with the opinion of Rebbe Eliezer that the redemption will not come until the Jewish people repent. Moreover, the Torah, Devarim (30:2) has assured us that the Jewish people will do tshuva. Rav Soloveitchik zt”l emphasized that the belief in the coming of Mashiach and the geula is another way of saying, “I believe in Knesses Yisroel, the Jewish people, and their ultimate return to Hashem, to Torah and mitzvos.”

Thus, each and every committed Jew is an ambassador of Hashem and His Torah and we dare not give up on the Jewish people when Hashem has not! Just as we find by birkas Moshe to the tribe of Levi, (Devarim 33:11), he blesses their effort, understood by Rashi as referring to their future battles against the Greek/Syrian armies, during which the Chashmonaim were most significantly outnumbered, but with their sincere total commitment to Hashem prevailed over the enemy against all odds. Similarly, we dare not be discouraged by the great number of assimilated Jews but should rather focus on our steadfast belief in the eternity of our Torah and people, and with the optimism derived from the promise of our Torah in Devarim (31:21) that Torah will never be forgotten by the Jewish people, we too will prevail in our outreach efforts.

**V.** Many might agree philosophically that kiruv rechokim is a noble

endeavor. However, with our busy, hectic schedules and limited time for our own Torah study, and recognizing that the study of Torah surpasses all other activities, we justify having no time for kiruv rechokim. We are making a grave error and are missing out on an important aspect of Talmud Torah. The Rambam *Hilchos Talmud Torah* (1:2) explains that an intrinsic aspect of Torah study is to teach Torah to others. Similarly, the Rambam in his *Sefer HaMitzvos* (pos. #11) writes that Talmud Torah is defined as *lilmod Torah ulilamdah*, to study Torah and to teach to others. Not only is the teaching of Torah to others an intellectual endeavor, it can often literally transform lives and those of generations to come.

I know personally of families whose lives were transformed by attending a Pesach seder. Seeing young children excited to share Divrei Torah, the singing, the very festive environment, the genuine feeling of living the Jewish destiny persuaded them to send their children to Yeshiva and the rest is history.

Often, when we are privileged to teach Torah to others, we derive more from the experience. Our understanding of the subject matter becomes clearer and more meaningful, and we become an integral part of our study partner's family. The wonderful organization called Partners in Torah — where beginners are paired with more knowledgeable laypeople somewhere else in the country to study together over the phone — is to be congratulated not only for the many thousands of hours of Talmud Torah studied (250,000 hours to date!), but for the friendships and life changing happenings that ensue from there.



# A CONVERSATION ON KIRUV

Rabbi Micah Greenland  
Rabbi Dovid Rosman  
Mrs. Shoshana Schechter  
Rabbi Mark Wildes

We asked four leaders in the field of Jewish outreach to share some of their wisdom and how we can inspire ourselves and inspire others.

## How has Jewish outreach changed over the past 20 years?

**Rabbi Greenland:** At its core, Jewish outreach is remarkably similar — at least as it relates to working with students in their teenage years — as it was 20 years ago. Fundamentally, teens want to feel that they matter and, relatedly, that how they live their lives matters. As a result, our strategy or approach is essentially similar to what it was two decades ago: create inspirational experiences that help awaken a connection to something greater than him or herself, and foster meaningful relationships with role models that the teen can confide in and emulate.

Nonetheless, there are dynamics that make Jewish outreach today even more important, and more challenging, than it was in past years.

First, today's teens — popularly known as Generation Z, encompassing those born between 1995 and 2015 — lack much of the basic Judaic knowledge that organizations like ours could almost take for granted in previous generations. The parents and grandparents of Gen Zers generally attended Hebrew School at least once a week, had at least a passing familiarity with Hebrew prayers, and possessed a basic understanding of the Jewish holidays.

None of that can be taken for granted today. To be sure, teens seem to be just as open to inspiration as their forebears. Moreover, they are generally just as likely — sometimes even more so — to establish vital relationships with advisors and role models. Effectively, the ingredients that animate a desire to grow Jewishly are very much present. However, because of their lack of Jewish literacy, it is definitely harder for motivated teens to progress as quickly as in previous generations. Many American Jewish teens cannot read the aleph beis, have never been to a Pesach seder, and are unaware of basic traditions like fasting on Yom Kippur. Consequently, once a teen is



**Rabbi Micah Greenland ('97YC, '02R)** is the International Director of NCSY, the worldwide youth movement of the Orthodox Union dedicated to connect, inspire and empower Jewish teens and encourage passionate Judaism through Torah and Tradition. Currently, NCSY reaches nearly 28,000 Jewish teens annually in the US, Canada, Israel, South America, and Europe and is the leader in the field of Israel teen travel experiences, bringing nearly 1,500 students to Israel on inspiring summer programs. Rabbi Greenland has served as International Director since 2013, after serving for twelve years as Regional Director of Midwest NCSY. During his tenure as International Director, NCSY has dramatically increased its reach and impact, nearly doubling the numbers of participants in weekly events and summer programs, as well as doubling the organization's fundraising revenue, and he has additional ambitious goals for the organization moving forward. In addition to his professional work in NCSY, Rabbi Greenland serves on the Board of Education of Arie Crown Hebrew Day School in Chicago and is past president of the Chicago Rabbinical Council.



**Rabbi Dovid Rosman ('99YC, '02R)** is the Director of Yeshivat Aish HaTorah in Jerusalem. The yeshiva, consisting of nine steady programs and several more short term programs throughout the school year, caters to close to a thousand men and women ranging from unaffiliated beginners to students studying towards rabbinic ordination. As the Yeshiva Director, Rabbi Rosman has been responsible for building and developing curriculum, innovative programming, and recruitment strategies that have been effective in outreach. He guides the staff of 50+ educators enabling them to be effective and successful teachers and mentors. His teaching responsibilities range from a daily advanced gemara shiur to weekly classes on marriage and self-development. Rabbi Rosman also has also spent thousands of hours counseling individual students and has developed an intimate understanding of the psyche of baalei teshuva and potential baalei teshuva. He is also the author of *Torah Connections* on the parsha (Feldheim), and *Your Wife, Your Self: A Husband's Guide to Shalom Bayis* (Feldheim).



**Mrs. Shoshana Schechter ('91SCW)** is Founder and Director of the Mechina Program and Stern College for Women. The Mechina Program is a beginner's program integrated into the Stern College Judaic Studies program. Students come from all over the country and all over the world. Women participate in inspirational Shabbat celebrations and enjoy hospitality in the homes of mentors, teachers and community leaders. Students also visit sites of Jewish and general interest in New York, one of the world's great centers of Jewish life. After two years in Mechina, students are integrated into the regular Jewish studies courses of Stern College for Women. As director, Mrs. Schechter teaches classes, mentors and inspires women to grow in their Judaism.



**Rabbi Mark Wildes ('89YC, '94R)** is the Founder and Director of Manhattan Jewish Experience. Manhattan Jewish Experience (MJE), a highly successful Jewish outreach and educational program that engages and reconnects unaffiliated Jewish men and women in their 20s & 30s with Judaism and the Jewish community. MJE has successfully reconnected thousands of previously unaffiliated Jewish men and women with Judaism and the Jewish community, hundreds of whom are today living committed Jewish lives and sending their children to Jewish Day Schools. Operating from its three locations in Manhattan, with a talented staff of 15 professionals, MJE's inspirational Shabbat dinners, beginners services, retreats, educational classes, holiday events and trips to Israel have touched the lives of thousands of young Jews and provided a venue through which 322 Jewish couples have married. As its director, Rabbi Wildes mentors the other MJE rabbis and educators, teaches multiple classes each week, delivers Shabbat sermons, blogs, mentors his many students and officiates their weddings, fundraises, leads MJE's Retreats, Shabbatonim and trips to Israel and each Shabbat, with his wife Jill, hosts 20 people at his Shabbat table. He also teaches an outreach training seminar at RIETS, Yeshiva University's rabbinical school, training new leaders for the future and is also the author of the highly acclaimed *Beyond the Instant: Jewish Wisdom for Lasting Happiness in a Fast-Paced Social Media World* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2018).

interested in learning and growing, the time-consuming effort to teach them Hebrew and orient them to the holidays and other traditions means that their growth is slower.

A second Gen Z characteristic is the fact that they are digital technology natives. As the first group to have smartphone and social media technology available to them from their earliest years, Gen Z has been exposed to an unprecedented amount of technology throughout their upbringing, and they are incredibly

attached to their mobile devices.

This has multiple ramifications. On the challenging side, it is harder to get and keep their attention. Programming needs to move at a fast pace, with frequent changes of medium and venue necessary for all activity. Additionally, Gen Z is used to virtually everything being customizable, from the exact type of coffee a person orders to exactly the music he or she listens to. As a result, it is challenging to create one-size-fits-all programming. Those of us responsible for innovation in

programming must ensure that we are building in opportunities for each participant to create an individualized experience within a communal context.

At the same time, humans still crave relational connections with other people. The smartphone era makes meaningful, in-person interactions increasingly rare. A significant advantage that outreach programs today offer is the chance for participants to find a respite from the digital world by forming significant relationships that matter. Particularly

when combined with the “disconnect to reconnect” opportunity that we experience each Shabbos and Yom Tov, there is something uniquely valuable that we have to offer teens today that they can appreciate more than in previous generations.

**Rabbi Rosman:** Assimilation is much further along. Many college-aged students have only one Jewish parent (in fact, while interviewing students, we’ve stopped asking if their father is Jewish — we won’t assume that a student with the last name “Cohen” is Jewish, while “McCarthy” probably has a Jewish mother). Therefore, even if any religious practices are observed at home, those practices are not solely Jewish and their basic knowledge of what it means to be Jewish is almost nonexistent. In addition, when the kiruv movement began, most unaffiliated people were raised with a basic Judeo-Christian value system, which was somewhat aligned with the Torah (such as the Ten Commandments). But today, Western society has moved further away from those set of moralities, and the student’s starting point, where they would align with us and find common ground, is drastically different from ours. This makes it more challenging to initially connect with them. The

State of Israel, for example, used to be of common interest and concern, and now may be an obstacle.

Another difference is how busy students are, in general and even when they are on vacation. It used to be that you could walk up to a student at the Kotel, ask him if he had some time to hear an inspirational class on Judaism, and walk him across the street to an Aish Essentials class. Now, almost all Kotel visitors are part of a tour, with a very rigid schedule, and a tour guide telling them that “in 30 minutes we’ll meet to go to the next place on our schedule.” In addition, the backpacker traveling the world searching for truth is almost nonexistent. Over the last decade students have become hyper-focused on getting internships to further their careers. This precludes them from taking time off from school to go to yeshiva and to seriously engage in evaluating and contemplating their belief systems.

A third change is the exposure to technology. Twenty years ago, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube didn’t exist, and Google had just begun. The attention span of the average student was longer than it is today. Students are not necessarily excited to sit through a morning of four back-to-

back, hour-long lectures, no matter how inspiring or entertaining.

But don’t be depressed! We are innovating to address today’s landscape of unaffiliated Jews. Kiruv is booming in ways that no one would ever have dreamed twenty years ago. Success in kiruv comes from Hashem, and since we know that Hashem wants us to bring back His people, we have a guarantee for success. All we must do is put in some effort. And our effort, our engagement, must change with the times. The same content — the Torah’s timeless teachings — taught twenty years ago can be taught today, it just has to be packaged differently. A lower student-teacher ratio creates more natural connections between student and teacher. Experiential, out-of-the-classroom classes and the use of multimedia is becoming more popular. The Aish JInternships program, which gives students exposure to yeshiva while furthering their career, has dropped the barrier that held students back from coming to yeshiva. Being part of a “movement” or something “big” is gaining lots of traction in the world; this phenomenon set the stage for “the Shabbos Project,” where over a million people are sharing the Shabbos experience. Engagement

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through social media and websites can draw students in at unprecedented levels and reach students in areas that *mekarvim* (outreach professionals) never even visited.

We can't forget that every Jew has a *neshama* and is yearning for wisdom on how to be successful, have positive relationships, be an excellent parent, gain self-esteem, and find purpose in life. And we have the goods — the Torah — which gives them that. Once we've engaged them, they are blown away.

**Mrs. Schechter:** Twenty years ago, there were no opportunities for women to have a serious beginner's level college Jewish studies program. Such a program had existed for the men at JSS for many years. Young women who decided to go to Stern College looking for inspiration but didn't have a lot of background were placed in lower level classes, but there was no real framework for them. Their fellow classmates would be active in trying to inspire teens on an NCSY Shabbaton or children from the former Soviet Union, not realizing that someone down the hall was looking for the same inspiration. I founded the Mechina program fifteen years ago to help fill that void. Women can now have an inspirational beginner's experience that is geared specifically for them and is fully integrated with their college experience. Furthermore, over the last twenty years, the landscape has become much broader and our students come from very diverse backgrounds, not just from a few local kiruv organizations.

**Rabbi Wildes:** The most dramatic change I have seen is in the very people we are reaching out to and engaging in Jewish life. The level of

Jewish knowledge and connection to religious observance has dramatically decreased in the last two decades. When I started doing outreach work 25 years ago, most of my students had a grandparent who was somewhat learned or at least minimally religious. Today that is a rarity. As a result, there is less familiarity with basic Jewish terms and concepts and more of a gap to bridge in terms of drawing others closer to Yiddishkeit. As my colleagues working in other outreach organizations have concurred, there is simply less of a "Jewish feeling" our participants possess, that we — outreach professionals — can tap into today. Coupled with relative morality being taught religiously on college campuses, it is simply more difficult to *mekarev* a Jew today than it was 20 years ago.

On the other hand, and on a more positive note, millennials, MJE's target population, are "meaning seekers." As a whole, millennials are searching for purpose and meaning in what they do professionally and in the relationships they pursue. They are less motivated by money than their parents' generation and in my experience, more open to ideas and a lifestyle that can be translated into a meaningful and even spiritual way of life. Shabbat is a great example. When Shabbat is presented as a way to disconnect from technology and ordinary life so one can become more connected to loved ones, to community and of course to Hashem, it often becomes the gateway to a life of Torah and mitzvot. This has been one of the main sources of MJE's success: demonstrating the relevance of Torah as a means for living a purposeful and meaningful life.

## **Given that our resources are limited, should our priority be to reach out to larger numbers of unaffiliated Jews with limited engagement or a smaller number of unaffiliated Jews with maximal engagement?**

**Rabbi Rosman:** I don't think it's as simple as one or the other. We need to make sure that our resources are being used to make a meaningful impact and lasting change. We must always ask ourselves, "how can I do that for the greatest amount of people?" The benchmark that will make that difference isn't crystal clear, but that must be the goal. However, I don't think we have limited resources. If everyone with a connection to Torah would commit to reaching out and dedicating themselves to kiruv we would have maximal engagement with a larger number of unaffiliated Jews. At the recent Body and Soul Retreat, a convention run by Project Inspire (a division of Aish HaTorah), 450 observant Jews from mainstream religious communities invited and engaged 450 less-connected Jews in a weekend full of education and a commitment to furthering their Jewish observance. This is a replicable model, primed for widespread success, and will make our resources unlimited.

The biggest problem, however, might not be manpower or money. It's time. With the high percentage of assimilation, if we wait too long, we will lose too many Jews, which makes the effort that much more difficult. Therefore we must impact the masses — at least to the extent that we can ensure that as many Jews as possible maintain a Jewish identity and remain part of the Jewish Nation until we're able to reach them.

**Rabbi Wildes:** I think we need to do some of both because in order to end up with enough unaffiliated Jews to invest in, you need to cast the net widely. Most outreach organizations, including MJE, operate with a funnel model. We offer easy access to larger numbers through more social and content-light programming such as Shabbat Dinners, Happy Hours, Ski Retreats, Holidays parties and the like. From those events, a smaller number of people will be drawn to more content/spiritually oriented events such as Basic Judaism, Hebrew classes, One-on-One Learning, Shabbatonim and Tefilah services. It is that group in which we then invest more seriously, but to tease out that smaller group, I have found larger events are necessary. Once that select group of wisdom and spiritual seekers have been identified, we then focus much of our personnel/

rabbinic resources on them. Hence, MJE's motto: "Resources for all, investment for those who seek." We engage this smaller group of seekers in other high impact programs such as our year-long Fellowship Learning program (named for Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm), Yeshiva/Seminary study in Israel and Shabbat hospitality where participants are sent to observant families for Shabbat meals.

**Mrs. Schechter:** Sustainability is rooted in individual relationships. If we go a mile wide, we might only end up an inch deep. We can try to reach out to a lot of people, but we have to realize that our success will be determined by how many people we can provide with individualized attention. Sometimes it is a rabbi, a teacher a mentor or advisor, and sometimes it can be an otherwise

unrelated community member who develops a friendship with this individual. Going wide is important as long as there a system in place to connect those who are more interested to someone who can develop a lasting relationship.

In Mechina, we have 25 to 30 students a year, which allows for individualized attention. We develop close relationships with our students, which lasts for years. I frequently attend their weddings and other family simchas long after their graduation, which is a testament to these long-lasting relationships.

**Rabbi Greenland:** Since the entire outreach imperative is a Godly mandate, the question of resource allocation is a particularly vexing one. To answer definitively would mean that we know which of those



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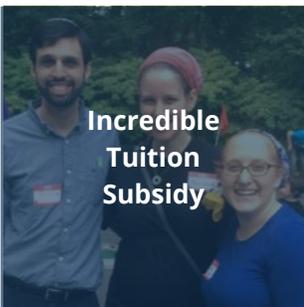


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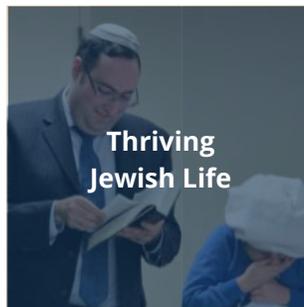
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alternatives is preferable to God, something none of us can claim to truly know.

To the extent I am comfortable taking a position, my answer is informed by the Gemara in *Brachos* 27b, and 28a, which reports the following episode: When Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya replaced Rabban Gamliel as the Nasi, he immediately instituted a change in the beis medrash. Previously, in Rabban Gamliel's tenure, entry to the beis medrash was limited to those students whose actions reflected their inner values; this significantly limited the number of students who came to study. Under Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya, the guard who had previously screened students for worthiness was removed, and everyone was invited to enter the beis medrash. As people poured in, hundreds of new benches were quickly added to accommodate the new students, with the Gemara recording a disagreement as to whether it was 400 or 700 new benches that were necessary. The *Ksav Sofer* offers a resolution to the dispute by suggesting that 400 benches may have been added, but 700 benches, encompassing even the students who had been present previously under Rabban Gamliel, were filled with students all experiencing a resurgence in their Torah study. According to this view, even the learning of those students who were permitted to enter under the previous administration was significantly enhanced by the many new students studying Torah in the same beis medrash. In fact, the Gemara reports that many questions that had previously been unanswered were resolved on that momentous day, likely because it was not only the quantity of people studying that increased, but the quality of their learning was itself perfected.

I believe this Gemara informs our dilemma about resource allocation for outreach. It would be easy to understand the choice as binary: between reaching a larger number of individuals with a seemingly "lower quality" interaction and focusing on a more select group of people with a more intensive, higher quality engagement. However, as the Gemara indicates, often the quality of the experience is itself impacted by the quantity of those participating. Moreover, it is often impossible to identify who has the potential to progress further in his or her journey of growth in Torah and mitzvos without first engaging with a larger group.

Finally, there is one other instructive element of the Gemara I would like to call attention to. Notably, the Gemara focuses not on the number of **people** who were added to the beis medrash, but rather the number of **benches**. Seemingly, merely demonstrating that everyone has a place — to sit, to study, to grow — is itself of tremendous value. Not only did Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya invite people to enter, he also made them feel welcome by offering each of them a place. By bringing in new benches, Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya was saying: "You are all wanted here. We can learn together and grow from one another." That message had an impact on two groups of people: both those who were already inside the beis medrash and also those who had just joined when the climate of exclusivity departed.

What kind of community do we want to be and what kind of message do we want to send to the rest of Klal Yisrael? I would suggest that there is tremendous value to all of us, both those who already feel connected to

Torah and mitzvos and those who do not, to live with the value that each individual matters and that no one can be left behind. As such, I believe our mandate is to do our utmost to reach every Jew — with as high quality an experience as we can.

### **What do you believe is the single greatest barrier to nurturing Jewish identity in the 21st century?**

**Mrs. Schechter:** Ironically, technology is our greatest barrier but it is also our greatest gateway. People have a steady diet of entertainment and they tend to stay home rather than look for ways to become engaged. Why go out when you can have your social interactions online? People are not as social in today's times. Running programs is more challenging. At the same time, because of technology, there is a lot more apathy, and the level of connection between people is not as deep, so there is a lot of opportunity to reach out to people looking to develop deep and meaningful relationships. In a world where people cannot find meaning, we have the opportunity to provide them with meaning.

**Rabbi Rosman:** In today's culture, it's unpopular to be identified with religion (even outside of Judaism). The media causes people to feel embarrassed to be connected with Israel, and to be proud of certain values they believe in. With social media, a person's personal life is much more public. Everyone knows what you're doing. Therefore, a person can no longer simply identify with religion or visit Israel. In order to take such a stance, he or she will have to be very strong and justify his or her views and travels and defend them against

antagonists. Few people are able to go that far against the tide.

### **Should outreach be left to “professionals,” or is it something that the general Jewish population should do, and if so, how?**

**Rabbi Rosman:** Kiruv is an obligation of every single Jew. The mitzvos of “*Lo sa’amod al dam rei’echa* — **Do not stand by idly on the blood of your neighbor**” (Shelah, *parshas Kedoshim* 60, *Taz*, Orach Chaim, 306:5, *Minchas Chinuch* 239:4), “*Hashev teshiveim* — **return a lost object**” (Shelah, *Torah Shebiksav*, *Parshas Ki Sisa*, *Or HaChaim Hakadosh*, *Devarim*, 22:1, *Chofetz Chaim*, *Chomos Ha’Das*, *Ma’amarei chizuk hadas* #3), “*Hochei’ach Tochi’ach* — **constructive criticism**” (Rambam, *Sefer HaMitzvos*, *aseh* #205), and *Ahavas Hashem* — **Love Hashem** (Rambam, *Sefer HaMitzvos*, *aseh* #3), are just a few of the many mitzvos requiring us to engage in kiruv.

In addition, the Yerushalmi (Sotah 7:4, quoted by the Ramban, *Devarim* 27:26) tells the story of King Yoshiyahu, who grew up in a house that actively worked to rid the Torah from Klal Yisrael. Because he grew up in such an environment, he hadn’t seen a sefer Torah for the first 18 years of his reign. While making repairs in the Beis Hamikdash, Chilkiyau (father of Yirmiyahu) found a sefer Torah and opened it to the pasuk “*arur asher lo yakim as divrei haTorah hazos* — Cursed be he who does not uphold all the words of the Torah.” When Yoshiyahu heard this, he ripped his clothes in anguish over all the years he had neglected the Torah out of sheer ignorance. Then he cried out “*alai lehakim* — it is on me to uphold the

Torah,” it is my responsibility to fix this, and he single handedly sparked a massive nationwide wave of *teshuvah*. The Chofetz Chaim (*Chomas Hadas*, *Ma’amarei chizuk hadas* #4) writes that this obligation doesn’t fall solely on the leaders of the community, but on every person who can strengthen religion within others.

But really, even without a list of commandments, anyone who has a deep care for people and understands that a connection with Hashem is the best thing for them, both in this world (giving a life full of meaning and satisfaction) and the next, should *naturally* want to share the beauty and depth of Judaism with the less affiliated.

And on a practical level, in order for kiruv to be successful, it is impossible for only specific individuals to do it. This is for two reasons: The first is that due to the number of Jews who need to be reached, it’s an unfeasible model to rely solely on professionals. The Chofetz Chaim (Introduction to *Ma’amarei chizuk hadas*) compares this to the firemen of his day. At an earlier time, there were so few fires that it was enough for a single group designated by the government to extinguish any fire that would come up. But as fires became more rampant, it became crucial that people all over would be ready to put out the fires in any place and at any time. So too with the fires of the *yetzer hara*. It was enough to have people like the Alshich or the Dubna Maggid who traveled around inspiring people. But now, when the fires of the *yetzer hara* have intensified and become more widespread, everyone needs to be on the team to help out. The second reason is that lay people are embedded with unaffiliated Jews

at work or other venues. They can connect in ways that *mekarvim* and rabbis cannot. The unaffiliated Jew never thinks of himself as becoming a rabbi, and therefore the lay person has a serious advantage in establishing a relationship with him.

There are also selfish reasons why an observant Jew should engage in kiruv. The *Chovos Halevavos* (*Sha’ar Habitachon*, ch. 4 and *Sha’ar Ahavas Hashem*, ch. 6) writes that someone who brings another closer to Hashem gets reward for all the other person’s and his decedents’ mitzvos. What an incredible return on investment! Even more important, however, is that articulating what Judaism is to someone else can help you understand what Judaism means to you and will strengthen your own *avodas Hashem*. Crystalizing the answers for tough issues in Judaism helps you build your own *emunah*. Talking about the beauty of the Torah and a Torah lifestyle allows you to appreciate what we have even more. As an ambassador of Hashem and the Torah, we rise to heights that we didn’t realize we were capable of.

How to do it is very easy. To start, share a simple Torah idea, like “did you know that the Torah speaks about happiness or how to be rich?” Simply



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inviting someone over for Shabbos can have a great impact. Don't be scared that they'll ask you something you don't know. And if you don't know the answer, just say "that's a great question! I would like to think about it and get back to you." Then go ask someone who answers these questions often. We would have no problem doing that when someone would ask us a halachic question, so why should it be different with hashkafic questions? If you want some basic training, Project Inspire offers short seminars where you can learn how to engage in kiruv, and there's a lot of information on their website and on Aish.com's. Project Inspire even has a series of comedy films that depict observant people in real-life scenarios with non-observant people. Aish.com has a live chat, where you can ask a rabbi any question and get an answer immediately. Project Inspire can set you up with someone for you to learn with over the phone (and will guide you as to what to learn). Bottom line, there are no excuses!

**Mrs. Schechter:** As I mentioned earlier, one of the most important components of kiruv is developing sincere relationships and in a certain sense, a non-kiruv professional might be better suited to develop a relationship than a professional. A beginner may be more guarded when interacting with a kiruv professional because he or she might view himself or herself as the kiruv professional's "project." Anyone can make such a great impact and all that is required is to be friendly and warm.

There are many opportunities to meet people who are interested in growing in their Judaism. Local rabbis and kiruv professionals are always looking for people who can host for Shabbos

and develop relationships with people who are growing in their Judaism.

At the same time, when developing relationships, issues do arise that require advice from a professional. It is important that a kiruv professional is involved who is attuned to the many sensitivities of family dynamics and other mental health issues, and who will seek guidance from a posek and mental health professional when necessary.

**There are simply too few outreach professionals to engage the large number of unaffiliated or less affiliated Jews. We need more soldiers in this battle and so everyone counts.**

**Rabbi Wildes:** Outreach should *not* be left to professionals for two reasons, one practical and one theological. First, there are simply too few outreach professionals to engage the large number of unaffiliated or less affiliated Jews. We need more soldiers in this battle and so everyone counts. It is also the friend, neighbor or colleague at work, by virtue of their more informal relationship, that can often have a greater impact than the rabbi or professional outreach worker.

Second, the Torah's charge of *hocheach tocheach* (Vayikra 19:17)—to correct or help improve a fellow Jew's relationship with Torah, is not limited to outreach professionals. This is a Biblical imperative that applies to each and every Jew. Rav Chaim of Volozhin wrote that the highest act

of *v'ahavta l'rei'acha kamocho*, love thy neighbor — something all Jews are also obligated in — is to give another Jew Torah. *Kol yisrael areivim ze bazeh* — "all Jews are responsible for one another" is not just a nice homiletical statement by our Sages, but an important halachic principle and the reason we repeat *brachot* for a fellow Jew if they are unable to recite it themselves. On Shabbat for example, even if one has already made their own Kiddush, one may recite the blessing again (with Hashem's name) on behalf of someone else. Rabbeinu Nissim, *Rosh Hashana* 8a, explains that this is because of *Kol yisrael areivim ze bazeh*. Even though we may have already made the blessing for ourselves, the concept of *areivus* teaches us that as long as a fellow Jew has not recited their own blessing, *our* mitzvah is incomplete. If we haven't helped others in their relationship with God, we have not fulfilled our own.

Hands down, the best way for *anyone* to engage someone less affiliated is by inviting them to your home for a Shabbat meal. Nothing is as powerful as seeing a family enjoying each other's conversation and not on their phones! Add some words of Torah and *z'mirot* to the mix and you're good to go. As one of my teachers, Rabbi Shlomo Riskin once said: "for the price of a chicken you can save a Jew". Alternatively, bringing someone to an interesting class or outreach event can be helpful as some are intimidated to come on their own.

**Are there methods that have been developed in the world of outreach that can be applied in engaging the apathy we often encounter within the FFB (Frum from birth) community?**

**Mrs. Schechter:** Our methodology is about finding a meaningful relationship with the Torah. We are in kiruv because we have a great product to sell and those who have grown up with Torah their whole lives have a great product to consume. They just have to realize how applicable it is to their lives.

In Devarim (10:12), Moshe Rabbeinu tells the Jewish people:

וַעֲתָהּ יִשְׂרָאֵל מָה ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ שְׂאֵל מֵעַמּוֹךְ כִּי  
אִם לִירְאָה אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְלַכֵּת בְּכָל דְרָכָיו  
וּלְאַהֲבָה אֹתוֹ וְלַעֲבֹד אֶת ה' אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל לִבְבְּךָ  
וּבְכָל נַפְשְׁךָ.

*And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God demand of you? Only this: to revere the Lord your God, to walk only in His paths, to love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and soul.*

The Gemara, *Megillah* 25a, asks: is *yirah*, reverence of Hashem, such an easy thing that Moshe Rabbeinu can tell us that all we need to do is revere Hashem? Rav Yosef Albo, *Sefer Ha'ikarim* 3:31, explains that the mitzvos are a formula for a meaningful life. Moshe Rabbeinu wasn't asking people for the "simple" task of revering Hashem. He was asking them to observe mitzvos for the purpose of living a meaningful life and the reverence would come as a result. If we could perhaps compare it to someone who goes to the doctor with a serious heart condition and the doctor says, "all you need to do is lose thirty pounds, just cut out unhealthy foods, fats and sugars and that will really improve your condition." The patient might say "What do you mean, 'Just?' It's not so easy to make those changes." But when he considers the fact that it can change his or her life, it may seem like a relatively easy change. If we can convey to those who suffer

from apathy that when we attend a class or when we daven, it's a way to connect to Hashem. It's not just another class that we need to attend or something we need to cross off of a checklist. It's a way to live a meaningful life.

**Rabbi Wildes:** There are a number of approaches we routinely use in outreach that I strongly believe should be used in confronting the apathy we find in the FFB world. I'd like to be specific, focusing on tefilah (prayer) and Torah study.

## A kiruv organization would never allow for a boring tefilah experience, nor should our own synagogues.

**Tefilah:** Davening in our shuls needs to be more inspiring. A kiruv organization would never allow for a boring tefilah experience, nor should our own synagogues. Shuls need to choose *ba'alei tefilah* who not only have pleasant voices, but who are also adept at getting others to sing. Prayer is not a spectator sport and we need to do better in engaging people in tefilah. Strategically placing a few *ba'alei ruach* around the bimah to sing along with the chazan can often encourage others to join. Also, offering brief explanations of the tefilot, particularly between aliyot during krias Hatorah, helps keep the people "in the game" and allows the congregation to understand at least the basics of tefilah. We make the assumption that people who have been davening their whole lives understand what

they say and only the beginners need explanations. We know this is not true and so brief tefilah insights during davening, or a tefilah class during the week, can really help. Finally, for those who would otherwise tune out during krias Hatorah, we offer a parsha class/discussion, which may also work in some communities.

**Torah Study:** What often inspires beginners to Judaism to become more committed is getting answers to their questions regarding Creation, God, Revelation and other basic Jewish concepts. Many are also interested in the more "spiritual," kabbalistic aspects of Judaism and that too is something every kiruv organization must teach if they wish to draw their students closer to God. These basic topics, as well as the more "spiritual" aspects of Torah, are either completely absent or too superficially covered in our yeshivot and day schools. Jewish day school students, particularly in high school, have legitimate questions and I believe would be drawn closer to Yiddishkeit if these areas were taught in a real way. The curriculum in most day schools, which focuses primarily on Talmud, Hebrew and Chumash works for a certain percentage of the student body. Many are uninspired for a host of reasons, but chief among them is that they are not learning the areas of Torah that interest them and they are not getting their questions answered. We are also not speaking enough to our children about God and spirituality. This is also why after twelve years of day school, there are yeshiva graduates who can easily read a pasuk in Chumash or a line in the Gemara but cannot tell you why we believe in God or why it is important to be religious. This would never work for a beginner to Judaism and it is not working for many of our own children.

The day school curriculum would greatly benefit from including more *hashkafa* and spirituality.

**Rabbi Greenland:** There are many, but I will limit my response to the one overarching approach that I believe is the most important.

The single most significant approach from the world of outreach that must be incorporated within the FFB community can be summarized simply as “warmth without judgment.” In the world of outreach, we accept everyone as they are, recognizing that everyone is on his or her individual journey. We don’t judge anyone by their appearance, by their family background, or by their attitudes or behaviors.

Sadly, our FFB community is filled with judgment. Despite Chazal being incredibly clear about the dangers of judging others, we routinely fall short in this area, and as a result we sometimes inflict irreparable harm on young people or adults within our Orthodox community. If only we could collectively resolve to import the warmth and lack of judgment from the outreach world into our FFB world, our community would instantly be a more growth-oriented and inspiring one.

**Rabbi Rosman:** Teaching Torah to an unaffiliated Jew requires two things: First, make no assumption that the student knows anything or believes in anything — not in Hashem or in the Torah. The education starts from ground up and must be given over in a non-judgmental way. Second, the teaching must show how our beliefs are valid and how the Torah is relevant and valuable to us. A life filled with Hashem is the most incredible thing you can ever have; better than all the other “opportunities” that the world

deems “exciting.” Some members of the FFB community aren’t mature enough at the age when they learned the basics. As they grow older, their education tends to focus on the what’s and how’s of Judaism, and little, if at all, on the why’s. Many young adults and adults in the FFB community are starving for this education, as we’ve seen in programs like Aish’s Geshet post high school program for young men from day school backgrounds, and from the fact that Aish’s Essentials program is packed with young men from the most esteemed yeshivot in Eretz Yisrael (both litvish and chasidish) and young women from all types of seminaries. A program called Amatz brought 50 women principals from the most yeshivish and chasidish girl schools to Eretz Yisrael to learn how to teach the fundamentals of Judaism, so they can bring it back to teach in their schools. If we can incorporate these fundamentals into advanced education in our yeshivas, it could make a big impact.

Another technique to consider. When an unaffiliated Jew falls in love with the Torah, he often wants to teach it to everyone. This has actually proven to be an excellent tool in strengthening and deepening their love for Torah and their *emunah*. If the FFB community could empower their students to teach Torah, even to one another, they will see drastic changes in the level of commitment and enthusiasm for Torah.

### **What was your most inspirational outreach experience?**

**Rabbi Wildes:** Approximately 10 years ago, a young man, an MJE participant by the name of Mark Arkovitz, approached me at the end

of the MJE Shabbat Beginners Service and asked: “Why does the Cantor each week carry the Torah from the Ark and leave the room with it? Where is he going with the Torah?” I answered, that since MJE does not have its own Torah and we borrow one from The Jewish Center (the synagogue downstairs), our Chazzan needs to return it each week to their Ark. Mark then asked why MJE does not have its own Torah. “Doesn’t it say somewhere that you’re supposed to write your own Torah?” he asked. “Yes” I acknowledged, “but a Torah can be very expensive, The Jewish Center has many and they are kind enough to lend us one of theirs.” “Well how much is a Torah?” asked Mark. I answered it could be like \$20,000, maybe even \$30,000 and then Mark asked: “Do you have to be a holy person to donate one?” I saw where the conversation was going and so I responded: “Mark, you’re a holy person.” And then this guy who I barely knew, who had been coming to MJE for just a few months, blurted out: “I’ll do it! I’d donate a Torah to MJE.”

Fast forward one year later. A Torah had been written and we planned a special *Hachnasat Sefer Torah*, an event to welcome our new Torah. I asked Mark if he wanted to speak at the celebration and he declined, saying he was “just a doctor, not a public speaker.” However, right before my beloved mentor Rabbi Jacob J. Schacter, whom I had asked to be our guest speaker, rose to address the large audience, Mark asked if he could share a few words. “Of course,” I told him, “this is your day.”

Mark got up and before a packed room, shared the following: “Thank you all for coming here today. Before

the big rabbi speaks, I wanted to tell you why I decided to become Shabbat observant. Growing up, I really only attended synagogue on the High Holidays, and a friend dragged me to MJE's Yom Kippur services. I liked the service and the crowd and so I started taking some classes and coming on Shabbat. I attended MJE's Shabbat services for like six months, but I really wasn't sure if I could ever become Shabbos observant. It's one thing to come to services, to the kiddush... but to start actually observing Shabbat — that's a big deal. But then I had this one patient." At the time, Mark was a pediatric surgeon at Columbia Presbyterian, and he went on to describe one of his patients, a five-year-old girl who unfortunately had a very poor prognosis. "I was assigned to her with a team of specialists but there was very little

we could do. Every night I'd walk by her room to look in on her. It was so sad. She was such a sweet little girl. I started to develop a relationship with the parents who were Chasidic. I had

**"God, you know there's nothing we can do to save this little girl's life, but if You save her life, I'll start keeping Shabbos."**

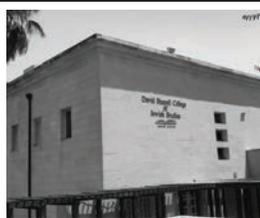
never known a Chasidic Jew before, and I felt so bad for them. One night, as I was finishing up my rounds, I passed by the little girl's room and walked in to check on her. She was sleeping peacefully. I sat at the edge of her bed and I had my first real talk with God. I looked up at the ceiling

and I said: "God, you know there's nothing we can do to save this little girl's life, but if You save her life, I'll start keeping Shabbos."

"Fast forward," Mark continued, "she survived and now I'm Shomer Shabbos." Thank you all for coming to celebrate MJE's new Torah.

I'll never forget that moment. Mark made aliyah, became a pediatric surgeon at Jerusalem's Shaarei Tzedek Hospital, got married and now has four children who all attend Yeshiva. Before Mark's friend dragged him to MJE on that fateful Yom Kippur day, Dr. Mark Arcovitz was unknown to the Jewish community. Today he is a learned, observant Jew raising his children in the ways of Torah and mitzvot. This is the opportunity we have and which we must take seriously — to inspire our Jewish brothers and

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sisters in the ways of Torah. There is no greater merit for our generation. May Hashem continue to bless our efforts.

**Rabbi Rosman:** There are so many! Meeting genuine, growth-oriented students who are on fire about Hashem and Torah inspires me every day. But here's just one example.

Eric Coopersmith was 19 years old, volunteering at Kibbutz Shaar Ha'amakim in Israel. During a visit to Jerusalem he stumbled across Aish HaTorah, where he met Ephraim Shore, a fellow Canadian who had been learning in the yeshiva for several months. Eric enjoyed his conversation with Ephraim and began to think that perhaps there is more to Judaism than what he was exposed to in Hebrew school. He told Ephraim that he would come back to visit in a month or so, but right now he had to complete his stint as a volunteer at the kibbutz.

Back at the kibbutz, Eric shared his impressions of Aish with his non-Jewish roommate. This roommate was a turned-off Roman Catholic, and he convinced Eric that the rabbis were snake-oil salesmen and that religion was empty. Eric subsequently decided to forget about spending any time at Aish and go directly back to Europe after he finished at the kibbutz.

Several weeks later, Ephraim was on a bus heading north. Looking out the window, he suddenly saw a sign for Kibbutz Shaar Ha'amakim. "Hey, isn't that the kibbutz where that guy Eric is?" Ephraim said to himself.

He quickly pressed the stop button and got off the bus. He tracked Eric down at the kibbutz and re-convinced him that it would be worthwhile to come back to Aish HaTorah to check out the wisdom of Judaism before continuing his year of travel in Europe.

To make a long story short, a few weeks later Eric returned to Aish HaTorah, where he eventually became a rabbi and one of the rosh yeshiva's closest confidants, responsible for developing many of Aish HaTorah's most successful and influential programs worldwide.

Ephraim could easily have stayed on the bus, which is what most of us probably would have done. After all, he had only met Eric once, for a few hours. But instead he seized the opportunity to reach out, not

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knowing the impact his actions would eventually have on the Jewish people.

**Rabbi Greenland:** There are lots of “wow” stories, but to me, the real inspiration comes from seeing genuine results. Being part of an organization like NCSY, I am inspired by the many Torah giants whose involvement in our programs began during their high school years and who now lead Jewish communities of their own. Roshei Yeshiva and Roshei Kollel like Harav Zev Leff, Rabbi Yehuda Cheplowitz, and Rabbi Yerachmiel Fried are living examples of the power of connecting with someone in a meaningful way during his or her high school years.

One story that is a bit closer to home, i.e. that took place during my own years as a staff member, involves a public-school student named Jennifer (not her real name) from Skokie, Illinois who graduated high school around ten years ago. Jennifer got involved in our programs during her sophomore year, slowly but surely deepening her involvement through Shabbatonim and weekly after school activities. Following Jennifer’s 11th grade year, she went on a summer Israel trip with NCSY, where she connected with a number of advisors who soon became important role models. As a result of those relationships, Jennifer made the landmark decision to attend seminary in Israel following high school.

Thus far, there is nothing particularly remarkable about Jennifer’s story. There are thousands who have followed a similar path. But what stands out about Jennifer was her determination that she would attend the same seminary — Michlala — that some of her advisors had attended. For a student from public school, it seemed like an impossible

goal. Nonetheless, we managed to arrange a meeting with a Michlala senior educator, and in November of her senior year she had an interview. While Jennifer made a strong impression through her remarkable resolve, she lacked the skills and background necessary to be admitted. Despite that limitation, the educator offered Jennifer a challenge. He handed her a list of sefarim that he wanted her to learn. If Jennifer would set up chavrusas in order to study 12 hours weekly — three hours each school day, Monday through Thursday, between November and March — he would reevaluate her for admission in March.

Jennifer rose to the challenge. She set up multiple chavrusas every day of the week and plugged away for four-and-a-half months. When the educator returned to Chicago before Pesach and tested Jennifer, he was undoubtedly impressed by the knowledge and skills she had gained during that time period. But even more, he was persuaded that the same determination that had brought her this far would ensure that she could be successful in Michlala as well. He accepted her on the spot.

Jennifer was indeed successful at Michlala and emerged from the experience a committed, inspired and knowledgeable young woman. Several years later, Jennifer married a young man from a different Midwestern city, himself an NCSY alumnus, with whom she is now raising a growing family as *shomrei Torah u’mitzvos*.

**Mrs. Schechter:** It is important to note that as much as we think that we inspire them, they also provide us with inspiration. I will share one particular story of a student of mine who grew up Catholic and was always

told that she has to love God. She was a very spiritual person but nothing really resonated. When she was 15 years old, she Googled “how to love God” and came across a shiur on yutorah.org. She listened to the shiur and was mesmerized. She then started listening to other shiurim on yutorah.org and was totally drawn to Judaism and ended up converting to Judaism.

There is a rabbinic expression, “*devarim hayotzim min halev nichnasim lalev*” — matters that leave the heart, enter the heart. If something is said sincerely and with feeling, it will be received with enthusiasm. This student was looking for something authentic and she found it because they were conveying a message that was authentic and doing so in an authentic way.

The Rambam, *Sefer Hamitzot, Aseh* no. 3, writes that when you admire someone, you tell everyone you know how great this person is and you try to get others to admire this person as much as you do. The Rambam says that this is a *mashal* (parable) for the mitzvah of loving Hashem. If we love Hashem and His Torah, we should be trying to convince everyone we know how great He is and how much they would benefit from having a relationship with Him. This, the Rambam says, is why Avraham Avinu made it his life mission to spread the word of God and bring people closer to Hashem. It was this type of approach that my student was able to pick up on yutorah.org. There was no hidden agenda. No tricks. Just someone trying to share a connection to Hashem with others. This is a simple but effective model for kiruv.



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