Lubavitch





From the Chabad-Lubavitch Global Network

Spring-Summer 5783 / 2023 | Volume 11, Issue 3

CHAIRMAN

RABBI YEHUDA KRINSKY

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

BAILA OLIDORT

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

YOSEF B. FRIEDMAN

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

SARAH OGINCE

PRODUCTION EDITOR ELYA SILFEN

FEATURES EDITORS RENA UDKOFF

COPYEDITOR

BORUCH WERDIGER

ELIANA LEAH SILFEN

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

YONI BROWN YAEL KANE

SARAH OGINCE BORUCH WERDIGER

RENA UDKOFF

ADVISORY COMMITTEE

SARAH ALEVSKY SHNEUR BROOK PERETZ CHEIN SARAH PALTIEL

DOVIE SHAPIRO CHAYA SHAPIRO ARYFH WFINSTFIN ELIEZER ZAKLIKOVSKY

EDITORIAL CONSULTANT CHANA SILBERSTEIN

MEDIA RELATIONS YAACOV BEHRMAN

ART DIRECTION AND DESIGN

MOISHE MUCHNIK ZALMAN FRIEDMAN

& The Spotlight Design Team •••••

PUBLISHED BY

MACHNE ISRAEL LUBAVITCH **NEWS SERVICE**

The official news network of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement since 1958



CHABAD LUBAVITCH **HEADQUARTERS**

770 EASTERN PARKWAY BROOKLYN, NY 112 718-774-4000 | EDITOR@LUBAVITCH.COM WWW.LUBAVITCH.COM/MAGAZINE







@CHABADLUBAVITCH @LUB VITCH @CHABADLUBAVITCHHQ

E WRITE TO US!

KNOW OU BETTER HELPS US KE THIS MAGAZINE BETTER!

omments and feedback to: ditor@lubavitch.com

RIBE: LUBAVITCH.COM/SUBSCRIPTION

UBAVITCH INTERNATIONAL IS PUBLISHED 2 TIMES A YEAR, SEPTEMBER AND MARCH, BY MACHNE ISRAEL, 770 EASTERN PARKWAY, BROOKLYN, NY 11213



If in the old days, the yeshiva conveyed the spirit and essence of Torah to its students, today it must take this responsibility ever me seriously. In addition to its role as a conduit for the knowledge of Torah and Yiddishkeit, it must illuminate the hearts of its students with the light and love of Torah and mitzvahs. The yeshiva must imbue each student with passign for their heritage and an abiding commitment to the spiritual legacy of the Jey ish People.

—The Lubavitcher Rebbe

The Conversation

PERSONAL NARRATIVES



THINGS REMEMBERED

acon blueberry lach, and a purple hat: iters and scholars reflect unique ways that Judaism was expressed and er families. transmitted

PAGE

Call and Response

Memory and melody at the Passover Seder

PAGE 8



Parting Words

Remembering her father's words, a daughter reconnects.

PAGE 38

COVER PHOTO

Second Graders studying Torah at Yeshiva Oholei Torah.

PHOTO BY SCHNEUR MORYOSEF



A **L**eague f Their Own

The number of Jewish students in the Ivy League has fallen dramatically in the last twenty years. But, by other measures, Jewish life has never been stronger.

PAGE 15



Israeli or Jewish?

Early Zionists spurned religion as a relic of the past; today, nearly 80 percent of Israeli Jews identify as observant or traditional. Seventy-five years after the State's founding, Israel's search for meaning evolves.

PAGE 20

EDUCATION

TOTAL **IMMERSION**

Why would anyone choose to send their child to a yeshiva? As traditional Jewish education has recently come under attack, this is one question that is rarely asked.

PAGE 26



REVIEW

An Argument for the Sake of Heaven

Chaim Grade's My Quarrel with Hersh Rasseyner

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- **EDITORIALS**
- NEWSBRIEFS
- BOOK NOTES
- TALMUD TEASERS

PAGE 32

Chairman, Chabad-Lubavitch Educational/Social Services



And all your children shall be disciples of G-d, and great shall be the peace of your children.

—Isaiah 54:13

f you can read this editorial, thank a teacher. The heroes we call teachers are the reason any of us are where we are today. They teach their students how to read and write, how to add, subtract, multiply, divide. They teach them how to apply the lessons of history to the future. They introduce their students to the wonders of the natural world. Teachers prepare students to know how the world works, and how to work the world. They will have gained the "know-how."

But even the best students who have learned low to compete and how to cooperate to get ahead, may be left wondering "why." What is the real purpose of it all? And the more success their education affords them, the heavier this question may weigh apon them.

For some, the question presents itself immediately. For others it may come later, in midlife or not until they retire But absent an awareness of a Creator and a purpose-driven Creation—the student or the senior citizen will struggle for an answer.

The question is front-and-center in a Torah education. It is the subtext of every text the world came into existence by Divine design and with a Master plan. Adam, the human archetype, was created by the breath of O d to partner with Him in His objective. And so were we! It's a perspective that empowers students with a sense of responsibility and agency—wherever life will take them—to make the world a better, kinder, holier place.

he Mishnah asks (Sanhedrin 4:5): Why was Adam created alone, when all other creatures were created as part of a species? And hanswers, to teach us that each human life is equivalent to all hum an life. One must therefore know that "The world was created for me"—not as a matter of entitlement, but in recognition of the awesome responsibility and opportunity entrusted to each individual. For if you believe that "the world was created for he," there is no one to pass the buck to. This is the answer to the "Why?" that is implicit and explicit in a Torah education.

Even the best students who have learned how to compete and how to cooperate to get ahead, may be left wondering "Why?" What is the real purpose of it all?

n his meetings with philanthropists dedicated to he future of Jewish He, the Rebbe always reminded them that a Torah education is the birthright of every Jewish child. He encouraged those philanthropists to invest in schools that would give children the "knowwhy" together with the "know-how."

He expressed concern that when we fail to do so, we are missing an opportunity, for a child who grows up with no idea of why they exist or what their purpose in life might be, they are not always lucky enough to find answers later in life. They won't always ask these questions, and they won't always ask people who know how to answer. If it wasn't learned in school, it may very well never be learned.

We were created by a perfect Creator. And yet, He created us with our imperfections, and gave us an imperfect world to perfect. This may be the greatest gift schools and teachers impart to their students. We see today how dangerous it is when children are plagued by feelings of futility and meaninglessness. Giving a child purpose is giving them the oxygen of a meaningful life. Without it, children risk growing up with a sense of futility and meaninglessness, a kind of spiritual suffocation.

We should have a special place in our hearts for teachers and even greater gratitude for teachers who teach our children Torah. It is an act of great kindness to teach a child how to live. It is an act of Divine generosity, though, to teach that child why it matters, why they matter.

May G-d bless our teachers. May they be inspired to nurture their charges with an education that makes them faithful partners with G-d, filled with purpose, meaning and joy. •



LUBAVITCH INTERNATIONAL

Lamplighters

PODCAST

Stories from Chabad emissaries on the Jewish frontier

LATEST EPISODES



Ep. 32 Connecting Two Generations of Rabbis in a Boston NICU

with RABBI MAYSHE SCHWARTZ



Ep. 33 Lagos: A Small Jewish Community in an African City of 20 Million

with RABBI MENDY & MAZAL STERNBACH



Ep. 34 A Searching Teenager Becomes a Rabbi in his Hometown

with RABBI YITZCHAK **MENDEL WAGNER**



STEN & SUBSCRIBE AT VITCH.COM/PODCAST



Editor-in-Chief Lubavitch International



An Invitation to Awe

"Would that their heart as it is now sustain their awe of Me . . . "

—Deut. 5:25

ew theater productions have enjoyed the enduring appeal of Fiddler on the Roof. The play, which opened more than half a century ago, enthralled audiences with its nostalgic portrayal of shtetl life, and makes frequent comebacks to theaters around the world. A friend who recently saw it for the first time told me that she loved the musical because it gave her a much better understanding of Yiddishkeit.

I wanted her to know that for all its sentimental charm, Fiddler's depiction of delightfully irrational tradition is fundamentally misleading. For while Tevye has no idea why he does what he does, "Tradition"—the theme and opening number of the play—is an expression of Torah law, or Divine wisdom. But never having studied Torah, Tevye lacks the knowledge and the language that give meaning to tradition. He is sadly incapable of transmitting what is so dear to him, and can only watch helplessly as Yiddinheit loses its staying power for his daughters.

Tevye may be a fictional character, but Fiddler tells a familia story of loss and assimilation as Jewish heritage gives way to the allure of the new and the modern. It seems to make the point unwittingly—that tradition as nostalgic affection is unsustainable.

This, we know to be true. We've seen that it takes a commitment to regular Torah study to appreciate the depth and dimension that Yiddishkeit brings to life. And it takes practical engagement with tradition in the context of contemporary life to realize its timeless relevance and vitality. But both would still be insufficient without an elevating sense of awe.

When the Torah is given at Sinai, the Jewish people are thunderstruck by the voice of G-d who pronounces the first two of the Ten Commandments. They fear they will die of awe, and beg Moses to be their interlocutor. They want him—not G-d—to deliver the Commandments. The disappointment in G-d's response is appar-..." Would that their heart as it is now sustain their awe of Me ... Alas, they did not sustain the awe, and trouble was soon in the offing as the people turned to idol worship.

This moment reveals how important it is to nurture awe and wonder, which is so natural to children but so often lost to adults. This is why, rather than teaching Torah as they would any text, traditional Jewish schools teach their students to ponder the wonder and the melesty that flow through the Torah's every verse. They are taught to parse its every word and letter—and even the calligraphic flourishes that crown the letters—with awe.

The same is true for how we relate to our traditions. Rituals that are practiced by rote will hardly capture a child's imagination. Mitzvahs that we celebrate conscientiously, in mindful amazement of their power to elevate the mundane and redeem the prosaic, are bound to have greater resonance for children and subsequent generations.

Passover—the ultimate tradition—is a case in point. At the heart of the Seder are questions. The wise son sks, "What are all the laws?" The wicked son asks, "What's the point?" And the answers come, signifintly, not only in telling and teaching the story, but also in fifteen liver rituals that stimulate all of our senses, from a condition of bondage to a liberating experience of self-transcendence.

IN THIS ISSUE, WE LOOK AT THE VARIOUS WAYS THAT

tradition is passed on to the next generation. In This Is How We Learn (p.26), we consider the yeshiva the institution designed for the singular purpose of transmitting Torah. The personal narratives (p.11) illustrate the power of youthful awe, a parent's custom, a practice, a habit, even two words, that stir the soul awake after decades of dormancy.

Most of us who come to Yiddishkeit—or to a deeper engagement with it—want to be part of something larger than life. We want to learn, to know, and to understand until we reach a place beyond understanding. We want to explore and examine until we recognize that the knowledge structures that guide our understanding of the world cannot explain all its mysteries. We want an encounter with the ineffable.

In an age that has made life small and self-focused, in a milieu plagued by a pandemic of sadness among youth and a you-do-you mindset, the Passover Seder is an invitation to such an encounter. It brings us back within the family circle, to ask, to sing (p.8), to play, and to wonder, how this all got started, how simple rituals performed around a dining room table can carry so much weight; how the bonds between grandparents, parents, and children can point us toward a relationship with the Divine and a life blessed by awe. •



New on the Map of Chabad

"We cannot rest until we have reached every Jew, even one in the farthest corners of the world."

—The Rebbe

UNITED STATES

Ahwatukee, AZ Rabbi Levi & Chaya Minsky

South Scottsdale, AZ
Rabbi Shmuli &
Mushkie Bronstein

Westchester, CA Rabbi Ari & Chana Liberow

> Wheeling, IL Rabbi Mendel & Mushky Shmotkin

Beverly, MARabbi Menachem &
Fraidy Barber

Traverse City, MILaibel & Chaya Shemtov

Mendham & Chester Township, NJ Rabbi Ari & Sarah Herson

> Corvallis, OR Rabbi Menachem & Zahava Angster

Fishtown, PA Rabbi Berel & Bracha Paltiel

Lehi, UT Rabbi Chaim & Esty Zippel

Stowe, VT Rabbi Baruch & Sara Simon

INTERNATIONAL

Hamilton, Bermuda Rabbi Chaim &

Menuchy Birnhack

Coquitlam, BC, Canada
Rabbi Mordechai &

Nechama Gurevitz

San Andres, Colombia

Rabbi Mordechai & Hadas Bigio

Tenerife, Canary Islands, Spain Rabbi Noam & Chava Rosen

Worthing, UK Rabbi Shaya & Mushky Gourarie

Lusaka, Zambia Rabbi Mendy & Rivkah Hertz

Whangarei, New Zealand Rabbi Yitzchok Eichanan & Henny Kuperman



KENOSHA, WISCONSIN

Blessed by Failed Plans

Sometimes, things just seem to keep going wrong. Until they go right.

In December 2017, Rabbi
Tzali and Rivkie Wilschanski
purchased a plot of land with
plans to build a new home
for Kenosha's then-113-yearold Jewish community. But in
March 2020, just as they were
about to begin construction,
Covid-19 came and put a stop





to that. And in August 2022, when they were ready to roll, projected costs had grown to one million dollars over budget. The project had officially come to a halt.

A few days later, Rivkie stumbled across a bargain. The Colerget Conference Center, a ten-thousand-square-foot executive retreat campus built by local businessman **Roger R. Jayer** had been listed at a reduced price of \$1.5 million. "It didn't look like much at first," she remembers, "but when we saw the details, we knew we had to make an offer."

They did, and the community rallied to raise a final \$218,000. Chabad closed on the property for \$1.1 million just in time for Yom Kippur.

Three days later, Chabad of Kenosha had their new home. Exquisite Asian architecture and lush greenery elevate their new synagogue and community center, which is larger and more accessible than their original plans—all for a third of the price.

"We had our plans," Rivkie says, "but G-d had better plans!"

WARSAW, POLAND

A Rabbi, a State Senator, and 700 Orphans

Seven hundred orphans from Odessa, Ukraine, wrapped themselves smartly in new designer coats, courtesy of **Jason Rabin**, CEO of fashion distributor Centric Brands.

"They think they're in a fashion shoot," laughed **Ulya**, one of the orphanage's matrons.

The gift of coats, along with loads of toys and games, were personally delivered by Rabbi JJ Hecht of the Brooklyn-based non-profit Toys for Hospitalized Children. Former New Jersey state senator Ray Lesniak, and a group of volunteers, flew with the rabbi to Warsaw last October to visit the children and get a glimpse of Chabad of Warsaw's refugee relief work. The orphans were evacuated from Odessa at the start of the Russian invasion, and were brought to Warsaw where they are now living in a large converted hotel complex.

"The kids kept running up to us to pose for pictures or give us a hug," Rabbi Hecht says. "They were thrilled."

"We Built This Together"

II This is what family looks like." That's how **Bobby Lent** describes Shabbat at Chabad of the North Peninsula. And it is for him that the swank, new \$20 million Chabad complex is named.

Under the leadership of Rabbi Yossi and Esty Marcus since 2001, Chabad of

San Mateo blossomed. Parents vie to get their little ones into Esty's prestigious Chai Preschool. With a Hebrew school, Bar and Bat Mitzvah Club, summer camp Gan Izzy, and ever-growing Shabbat dinners, Chabad needed a bigger space to support these programs. But San Francisco's red-hot real estate market kept the dream of a community center out of reach.

Then, in 2016, a lead donation by Bobby and Fran Lent made it possible for Chabad to purchase three homes on Monte Diablo Ave. Just blocks from downtown, the location was perfect. The Koum Family Foundation, and Jack and Candee Klein, were among other major donors.

Visitors gasped as they toured the stunning two-story building when it opened last October. Six years in the making, the Lent Chabad Center was designed to be an inviting place for children and adults. With convenient of ground parking, it features a state-of-the-art preschool, a synagogue, an elegant community space, social hall, and a kitchen.

When the community finally walked into the new center, the feeling, says Rabbi Marcus, was, "Wow, we built this together."

MARTHA'S VINEYARD, MASSACHUSE

Shabbat Always In Season At Martha's Vineyard



too long after hanging out their shingle, Chabad of Martha's Vineyard hosted a series of fireside chats. "Critical Conversations" brought author Dara Horn to speak about antisemitism, former US ambassador Israel Dan Shapiro and Robert Greenway unpacked the Abraham Accords, and Israel's Ambassador to the UN, Gilad Erdan, spoke about defending Israel on the world stage.

The idyllic destination off the coast of

e Cod, Massachusetts, has long bustled with high-profile summer vacationers. ou after many seasonal residents have made Martha's Vineyard their permanent home, Rahm Tzvi and **Hadassah Alperowitz** got word of a growing demand for a Chabad presence on the island. Ahead of summer 2022, they boarded a ferry with a one-vay ticket to launch Chabad of Martha's Vineyard.

"People here are open to new experiences and looking for meaning," Rabbi Alperowitz says. Reservations filled up fast for Shabbat meals in their first months own. Looking forward, islanders will enjoy a slew of Jewish educational and cial programs the Chabad representatives will be rolling out.

MONTREAL, CANADA

FOR ISRAEL'S TEEN TERROR SURVIVORS

During their final Shabbat in Canada a group of Israeli teenagers was honored by the Montreal Torah Center community. The teens were visiting through a summer program sponsored by IVOW (Israeli Victims of War). The program works with survivors of terror or family members of terror victims.

Richard Dermer, who directs the thirty-yearold program, noted that the teens represent a real cross section of Israel. He and Israeli Consul General in Montreal, Paul Mirschson, greeted the

After the speeches, the program went off script. Community member **Jeremy Levy** quietly told a rabbibe and his wife wanted to donate a pair of tefill to every boy on the trip, and Shabbat candlestick to every girl, provided they commit to sing them regularly. When the rabbi relayed his fer to the teens, the majority—fifty-five girls and wenty boys—raised their hands.



But getting the promised tefillin and candlesticks to the teens before their return flight to Israel would prove no easy feat.

Rabbi Moshe New and his staff tracked down the appropriate number of tefillin in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and FedEx expedited the package to Toronto. The delivery ran into delays. Rabbi New had to go searching for it at a massive FedEx warehouse outside the city. He made it in the nick of time. With forty-five minutes left until their departure for the airport, the rabbi presented the gifts, and helped the teens bind tefillin for the first

"Our generation thirsts for real Jewish connection. The teens were ready to take on another mitzvah," said Rabbi New. "We just needed to respond to them."



Memory and melody at the Seder

YAEL KANE

he rising sun's rays start to trickle through the window at the Nemnis second Seder. It's 5 a.m. and three generations sit together at the end of the table Mendel, age ten, sings the loudest joined by his father Rabbi Mordechai Nemni, and his grandfather Mr. Shimon Nemni. At the other end of the table Mrs. Chana Nemni (Rabbi Nemni's wife) and I listen is they belt out the call-and-response fran of the Yiddish folk song "Vos Vet Zein." In it, a rhetorical student poses the future-facing question, "What will happen when Moshiach comes?" His rhetorical teacher responds: "a sudenyu," Yiddish for "a feast", referring to the long-anticipated feast of the Leviathan and Wild Ox.

As the Nemnis sing through further questions and answers, intensity builds with each added detail. What will we eat at the feast? The Leviathan and the Ox. What will we drink? Aged wine. Who will teach us Torah there? Moshe Rabbeinu. Who will play music for us? King David. Previous stanzas repeat and new ones layer on top, each answer drawing us deeper into the future reality. Until the climax: Who will reveal the secrets of the Torah? The Melech HaMoshiach. All of a sudden we're speeding back through all of the answers, and the journey is complete. (The English translation doesn't do the Yiddish justice.)

This scene, which I observed as a guest in their Brooklyn home when I was Mrs. Nemni's student in the Machon L'Yahadus seminary, has stuck with me throughout the years. What really struck me was that Mendel was singing the most enthusiastically, embracing our tradition with such palpable emotion at a relatively young age. He was the next link in the chain of generations, ready to carry its weight and strengthen its meaning. That night, I saw the essence of the Passover Seder—to tell the story of the Exodus to the next generation—embodied before my eyes.

The call-and-response format of "Vos Vet Zein" is ripe with educational possibilities that have been used by many cultures for millennia. The repetitive, question-and-answer structure allows for deep absorption of the message, while



The question-andanswer structure and repetition allow for deep absorption of the message; the melody becomes a vesser for the emotions of generations past to continue on.

melody becomes a vessel for transmitting the emotions of generations past. This call-and-response form can be found in the oral histories of tribal communities in West Africa. It can be found in the slave songs of the South in pre-Civil War America. It can be found in Italian operas and Brazilian sambas. And it can certainly be found in the Passover Seder.

The most famous call-and-response Passover song is "Dayeinu," detailing the miracles of the Exodus, emphasizing that each one alone would have "sufficed." Although "Dayeinu" was not originally part of the codified Talmudic-era Haggadah, one would be hard-pressed to find a Seder anywhere

in the world today without it. Its full text was first found in the ninth-century siddur of Rav Amram of Babylonia, making it over one thousand years old. Its endurance is a testament to the strength of its message.

Perhaps the joyfully repetitious chorus is what accounts for the song's universal popularity in modern times. The cheerful refrain on "dayeinu" climbs up the major scale, with each repetition of the word bringing us closer to the scale's resolution at the top (while we pound on the table, of course). As each stanza goes on and we list miracle after miracle, the feeling of gratitude grows. "Dayeinu" conveys emotional content in addition to the story of what happened. Through



singing it, we can stir within ourselves the joyfulness our ancestors must have felt while living through these events.

"Dayeinu" is sung in the middle of the Seder, perhaps at its climax. But the rest of the classic Passover call-and-response melodies are saved for the very end. The jovial song known as "Chad Gadya," literally "one kid," is as beloved as it is perplexing. It first appeared in a Haggadah from Prague in 1590, making it among the most recent additions. The lyrics describe the death of a young goat through many dark, happenstance occurrences, which repeat every stanza in a cumulative manner. The developing fiasco finally ends with "Ha Kadosh Baruch Hu" (i.e., G-d) killing the Ange of Death. Although the story may seem morbid, the underlying message—that G-d is in charge—matches the otherwise incongruously happy melody.

Many Chab d Houses conclude their community Seders with "Who Knows One, a song that shares the cumulative structure of "Chad Gadya" but whose lyrics are brighter. This joyous tune teaches the fund imentals of our faith through repetition, using numbers to list basic facts about our tradition: one is HaShem, two are the tablets, three are the lathers, four are the mothers, and so on. The song is sung in many languages the world over, and the melodies vary accordingly. The Russian melody is bold and assertive; the English version

is happy-go-lucky, replete with "ooh ah ahs"; and the Hebrew tune is minor and contemplative.

Yet, of all these cumulative call-andresponse songs, the Nemnis chose to end their Seder with the relatively obscure "Vos Vet Zein." I found this particularly intriguing, as Rabbi Nemni is of Tunisian Sefardic descent and the song is in Yiddish. What's more, the Nemnis are proud and meticulous Chabad Chasidim, and this song is not included in Chabad's Passover customs. In fact, at first glance, the song does not have anything to do with the Passover Seder. It's a traditional folk song, from the East European "alter heim," sung to inspire hope during harsh times.

When I asked Rabbi Nemni how this song made it into their Seder, he told me he originally learned the song as a child in school in England and began singing it at his family's Shabbat table. He would sing the questions, and his parents and siblings would respond with the answers. Seeing his son's personal connection to this song inspired Shimon Nemni to adopt it as part of the family's Seder. And seeing young Mendel's inspiration in singing it proves the wisdom of this decision. "The Pesach Seder is not just about what it says in the book," Rabbi Nemni explained to me. "It's about: What can *I* feel and add to this whole experience? This is what talks to the next generation. Whatever feeling you have

for it, the whole family feels it too."

Rabbi Nemni says his father liked this song at the Seder particularly because its focus on the ultimate redemption complements the story of the redemption from Egypt. Indeed, when describing the future redemption, G-d Himsel references the Exodus: "as in the days of your Exodus from Egypt, I will show you worders" (Mican 7:15). The Rebbe expounds on this connection and concludes that the anticipation of the future edemption is, in fact, a key theme and goal of the Seder Thus, for the Nemnis, singing "Vos Vet Zein" makes the Seder future-foursed and relevant, integrating his hopeful belief that has been essential to our tradition from its beginning.

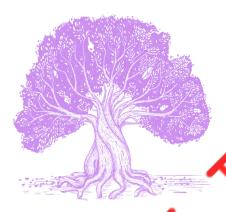
The sages explain that descriptions of the feast ("sudenyu") we will enjoy at the End of Days are a metaphor for the spiritual riches that will be revealed then. The feast represents the complete connection and infusion of physicality with spirituality. This is the redemption we have been awaiting for millennia: not just world peace, harmony between all people, and the end of hunger and disease, but the revelation of G-d Himself and the secrets of the Torah. The song brings us to this unified dimension, and it can become our reality, if only for a moment.

According to the Rebbe's commentary on the Haggadah, Rabbi Nemni told me, the entire text is intended to be sung. The Rebbe's comment speaks to the critical role of music in passing down our tradition. The music of the Seder imprints within us the deep emotions and national memories embedded within the text of the Haggadah. Through song, we access freedom and redemption; by using our vocal cords we can access our souls.

Not only is the Seder saturated with song, it is itself a sophisticated form of call-and-response. The rituals are designed to spark the children's curiosity, the famous Four Questions intended to be followed by many more. And when we call out to G-d at the end of the Seder, "Next year in Jerusalem!" we believe and trust that He will respond in kind. •

PERSONAL NARRATIVES

THINGS REMEMBERED **THINGS** TRANSMITTED



The Passover Haggadah ses questions stories, song, and food to bring the Exodus alive for children. Yet eve family has a second "haggadah," read throughout the year. Between the lines of text, at unexpected moments, or in the unspoken example of a practice, powerful messages are transmitted. And perhaps these various and varied customs are an knowledgment that, for each person, ess happens differently.

SCHOLARS AND WRITERS SHARE PERSONAL MEMORIES OF FAMILY TRADITIONS



MY FATHER PURPLE

JUDGE MARCUS SOLOMON

we grow older the themes and messages of Passover evolve in our minds; they become perhaps more sophisticated, more informed, and depending on circumstances, more impactful and emotional.

And yet, my most enduring image and memory of ssover and its traditions is not remotely intellectual. It is colorful and joyous. At the Seder my father, of blessed memory, would don a large, circular purple hat that found its way through my mother's family from Plonsk in Poland to Australia in the nineteenth century. Our family Passover dinner set was a bold, deeply colorful floral pattern—the likes of which I have seen nowhere else. As a very young child I associated the customs, the food, the smells, my father's explanations and stories, the matzah, the wine, the songs-all with the evocative image of my father's purple hat and the bold floral design of the dinner plates. The smell of horseradish today still takes my mind back to those images.

Moses's delivery of the Jewish people, G-d's outstretched arm, the plaques of Egypt—my own good fortune as one who should see himself as if saved from Egyptian slavery—they were all sustained in my memory by the much more tangible appearance of my father's purple hat and the unusually bright dinner set. And by the happiness I felt from a young age with my family on those occasions when I knew the purple hat and colorful plates would make their appearance.

And so it is. My relationship to Passover and its messages may now be far more sophisticated. But it is the foundational experience of the primordial color and familial joy that brought me to a lifetime of discovery and commitment to my people's story.

Rabbi Justice Marcus Solomon is the founding rabbi of the Dianella Shule Mizrachi Perth. He was recently appointed a justice on the Supreme Court of Western Australia.



KICHELACH & ZEMIROT

MONA DEKOVEN FISHBANE

When my mother was a young girl living in Ostroviec, a shtetl in Poland, she and her grandfather would go to the mountains each summer to pick blueberries (yagodes). The berries were brought back home, where they were baked into a sweet yeast dough, a delicacy called kichelach. Mom baked kichelach for us when we were growing up. With the sweet taste of warm blueberries in pastry, we imbibed the traditions and stories of the past.

For much of her childhood, while her parents were in America working toward citizenship, Mom lived with her maternal grandparents in Ostroviec. My mother was especially close with her grandfather, Yitzchak Mendel. He was a shochet (ritual slaughterer) and a Gerer Chasid. We grew up hearing stories of my great-grandfather's friendship with the son of the Gerer Rebbe, the Sefat Emet.

Mom told us stories of her grandfather fringing home guests from shul on Friday night. Her grandmother would look outside to see how many guests he was bringing, and she would set the table for the correct number. Shabbat hospitality was highly valued in the family and Mom continued that tradition in her own home, welcoming Shabbat guests to our table. In addition to the delicious Shabbat food my mother prepared we sang zemirot in harmony with my father. A favorite was Kol M Kadesh Sh'y II, sung to a tune my father's father taught him from his Russian childhood. We taught this song to our children.

In our own home, my husband and I continue these family traditions. We rejoice in inviting friends to our home for Shabbat meals, singing zemirot and sharing divrei Torah. I continue the Hasidic passion of my great-grandparents. My husband and I learn Hasidic texts together, and our sons teach the tradition to their children. The joy of learning and of Shabbat meals at home, the aromas around the Shabbat table as we welcome guests—these traditions that I inhered from my parents live on in our home and into the next generation.

Mona D. Fishbane, Ph.D., is a psychologist in Teaneck, NJ; former Director of Couple Therapy Training, Chicago Center for Family Health. Author of Loving with the Brain in Mind: Neurobiology and Couple Therapy. Mona's website: www.monafishbane.com



BURNT BACO

y mother was raised in an all-female household in the turbulent years after World War II. Her famirsisted of two sisters: Her mother, a small, quiet woman taught a Yiddish after-school program for children where cortraits of Sholem Aleichem and I.L. Peretz graced the walls. Her aunt, the elder, worked in the garment district fighting, sometimes physically, with the ses for fair pay and the right to organize a union.

They were two of fourteen children. In the early 1930s, they left their parents—and Jewish observance—behind them in Poland, promising to send for the others as soon s they could afford it. After the war, they wrote letter after letter, to friends, acquaintances, the Red Cross, anyone who might know what had become of their family. They were never found.

The sisters raised my mother with love, but without Jewish holidays, Shabbat, or kosher food. There was, however, one ritual that my mother remembered vividly. Whenever her mother cooked bacon, she burned it beyond recognition. It was only years later, my mother told me, that she understood why. As a child, I imagined my mother coming home from school to smoke and spattered grease, and to the sorrow that permeated their small apartment on the Upper West Side.

In 2002, I took a year off from college to study at a Chabad seminary in Brooklyn. Before Passover, the students were marshaled into teams. We scoured every inch of the kitchen, washed and peeled every vegetable and fruit lest even a tiny amount of leaven enter our mouths. My job was to roast the chicken necks that would symbolize the Paschal sacrifice on the Seder plate.

Holding the small pieces of meat over an open flame, I watched the fat render, the skin blacken and char, and I hummed the song I had carefully memorized from the Haggadah: "This is what has stood by our forefathers, and by us . . ."

Sarah Ogince is associate editor at Lubavitch International.



SHABBAT FEAST

DAVID LEHMAN

How beautiful to me are the red fire escapes of my youth.

How goodly to me are the tents of morning housing the tenants of dry

seasons in books read and read again until mastered in old age by tigers who

crouch at the edge of the jungle ready to pounce.

How happy the wife who prepares the Sabbath feast.

How happy the son who knows by heart the benediction following the meal.

How happy the daughters who recite the verses of the Bible for their

father's pleasure. This week Jacob wrestles the angel G-d to a standstill.

How purple the stain of the wine on the white tablecloth, how sweet

the ruby wine, how cool the taste on the lips and tongue, how full of zest the

grape as it bursts into life in the mouth.

How savory with salt the yellow bread, broken into pieces and blessed, and

eaten standing up.

How sweet to the man are the days of his youth How surprised he wo

be, could he hear his own voice clamoring for attention at the dinner table

with his parents and sisters and perhaps an cle and aunt on a Friday night in 1961.

From Yeshiva Boy : Poems by David Lehman © 2009 (Scribner). Published here with permission from the author.

David Lemman, the series editor of The Best American Poetry, ited The Oxford Book of American Poetry. His eleven books of poerry include The Morning Line, Playlist, Poems in the Manner New and Selected Poems, When a Woman Loves a Man, and The My Mirror. The most recent of his many nonfiction books is The Mysterious Romance of Murder: Crime, Detection, and the Spirit of Noir. He lives in New York City and Ithaca, New York.



GRANDMA'S TREE LOANS

JORDANNA COPE-YOSSEP BODENHEIMER

y maternal grandmother, Dorothy, owned a small neighborhood grocery store. She worked very hard from early morning till evening to earn the family's livelihood, drawing in regulars with her famous tuna and egg salad sandwiches.

Once, she offhandedly mentioned to me that when a family needed financial help (several thousand dollars!), they ew they could count on her for a loan. They turned to her, ather than to wealthy relatives, because, as she told me, e set aside monies for that purpose.

It was only in my thirties that I discovered she maintained a free loan account throughout her lifetime. It was, she explained, a reflection of her own mother Raizel's example. Raizel died in Sokolov, Poland, at a very young age, and Grandma Dorothy, though just seven years old, had clear memories of her chessed. Raizel would cook a giant pot of soup and young Dorothy and her siblings would wait hungrily, while her mother ladled soup into bowls for the poor, before feeding her own children.

Grandma's letters to the editor of the Chicago Jewish Sentinel—protesting an injustice or defending Israel—similarly reflected this heightened sensitivity and sense of duty to the Jewish people, especially to the downtrodden and needy.

These memories, along with more recent ones of my own mother leading fundraising and activism campaigns in Chicago, formed me. For decades I collected food and money at the local Tekoa grocery store for Rabbanit Kapach—the Jerusalem tzedakah powerhouse—who lent bridal gowns, organized free camps and distributed money, food and clothes to thousands of Jerusalem's needy. My Tekoa community and I participate in a program called Tachlit that distributes surplus fruits and vegetables to poor families. As I look around at the hundreds of Israeli free loan societies and tzedakah initiatives, I feel my foremothers alive in me and thriving in Israeli society.

Adv. Rabanit Yardena (Cope-Yossef) Bodenheimer is a lecturer and a legal adviser to the government in the Jewish Law department at the Israeli Ministry of Justice. Yardena is a Nishmat Fertility Counselor and was founder and director of the Advanced Talmudic Institute for Women at Matan.



WHAT PASSES BETWEEN FATHER AND SON

YEHOSHUA NOVEMBER

I. In the picture of you at school, you stare out from the opening of an enormous box you've constructed out of wooden blocks.

What does life have in store for you?

Sometimes, you drift for long moments into yourself.

Those calling to you may as well be calling

from a country across the ocean. First son,

quiet boy with large forehead and accommodating temperament.

Today, I read a poem about a man whose father

broke his promise to take him fishing

when the man was young,

his father dying never having fulfilled his promise,

and the son's disappointment and later his recognition that want to live up to our wor

but the complicated life interjects.

What passes between father an son

and what is not passed and is, therefore, lost

II. Once, walking home from synagogue,

w descending on rel Hillet

rsaid, 🖊 person can speak to another person

but cannot experience what it means to be the other person.

The essence is not transferable."

I can't imagine you—as you are now-

ever wondering about this.

Chassidus says the father does

transfer the essence to the child

via his seed. And this is unlike transfer of wisdom

or sharing of thoughts.

It's the creation of a new entity, almos

out of nothingness.

It's the sobering p of the other l

There you are in the pi

staring out of the opening in the box. great builder an imaginative boy.

III. Sometimes, we learn

Torah together. And I don't understand how it is

that I've come to sit at the little black table

in the guest room with you,

studying Mishnayos—

I, who only later decided this meant something,

that it is, in fact, all of life.

Yehoshua November is the author of the poetry collections G-d's Optimism (a finalist for Los Angeles Times Book Prize) and Two Worlds Exist (a finalist for the National Jewish ook Award and Paterson Poetry Prize). His work has been featured in The New York Times Magazine, Harvard Divinity Bulletin, The Sun, VQR, on National Public Radio and On Being's Poetry Unbound series.



CONVERSATIONS WITH C-D

ood morning Mama," I say to my ninety-twoyear-old mother. She is sitting at the table in r Florida apartment about to start her breakfast. She looks up at me but doesn't respond.

She's in the middle of another conversation. She is talking with G-d.

Born in 1930, my mother grew up in France, her een years spent hiding from Nazis and French collaborators, moving from town to town, experiencing hinger and horrors. She obscured her Jewishness rom the townspeople, while never for a moment forgetting that she was Jewish. And all the time, talking to G-d.

After a bike accident, Mama told me to give money to charity, to thank G-d for having escaped what could have been a much worse outcome.

"What about the fact that I got into an accident in the first place?" I asked. She smiled and repeated, "Give money to charity."

I did. And I started putting on tefillin, too. Tying the leather straps to my arm and head, saying the Shema every morning. Binding myself to my Jewishness.

And to my father. Papa put on tefillin in his bedroom every morning, reading the transliteration of the Shema from an index card that a rabbi friend had written for him.

Papa joined the rest of us in our Jewish life, but Mama transmitted the most important thing to me: The thing behind the thing. She reminded me that the tangible is a finger pointing to the intangible. It is easy to forget about the unseen because, well, it's unseen. But it's the point. Ritual is important. We rely on the physical manifestations as a nudge, a reminder, a path in the woods.

But Mama never forgets—and by her example never lets me forget—that everything we do is to deepen our conversation with G-d.

Peter Bregman, CEO of Bregman Partners, is an executive coach. Best-selling author of 18 Minutes, and Leading with Emotional Courage, his most recent book is You Can Change Other People.



OF THEIR

As the Supreme Court prepares to issue decisions in two cases challenging affirmative action, a flurry of articles, podcasts, and opeds have looked back at the Ivy League's history of excluding Jews, Less attention has been paid, however, to what Jewish life in the Ives looks like now, and what it tells us about the Jewish future—on campus and off.

SARAH OGINCE

ow could a party without music be so loud? When Harvard College reopened its campus in the fall of 2021, Abe Atwood discovered that his neighborhood had gotten livelier. On Friday nights, he watched from the window of his dorm room in Marner House as people streamed toward two brightly lit tents nearby. The sound of talking and laughter emanating from inside them could be heard down the block.

Atwood had dropped in at Chabad events before Covid sent him home to Washington, D.C., but these alfresso dinners in February were something different: "It's a very, very warm atmosphere. And it gets more animated after the meal. You'll see people sitting there talking, singing, debating, cracking okes about whatever. It's always packed.'

And the crowd was diverse: undergrads rubbed shoulders with professors; graduate students chatted with people from the Cambridge community. The legal scholar and journalist Noah Feldman dropped in one week, the economist Paul Gompers another. At one of the first dinners Abe attended,

Harvard Chabad's founder and president, Rabbi Hirschy Zarchi, introduced him to teaching fellow Berel Feldman, and the two bonded over a shared interest in moral philosophy and the Real Madrid soccer club. They started getting together weekly to study Torah, chat, and watch soccer.

One friendship led to another. "There are people I know [through Chabad] who I would not have met in any other setting," Atwood says. Though he knew nothing about the movement before coming to college, by the time his sophomore year ended, Chabad had become an essential part of his life at Harvard: "I have a community that I identify with."

I asked him whether he could tell that the Jewish student body at Harvard had shrunk by 75 percent in the last twenty years. "Nah," he said. "You'd never know it."

Watching the Numbers

AFTER SHUTTING OUT JEWS IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH century, Ivy League universities dropped their official quotas in the 1950s (and their unofficial ones in the '60s). In subsequent years, campuses became

Harvard was among the first universities to close their campus in early 2020, but the Zarchis stayed put, moved all their operations outside, and became a center of activity for Jewish students who chose to remain in Cambridge.



Princeton students attending a public menorah lighting on campus this year.

ncreasingly Jewish. In 1967, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported that Harvard's student body was 25 percent Jewish. In the early 1980s, the number t Princeton University, once famous as a bastion of waspy antisemitism, was 18 percent.

But, in the past two decades, Jewish student populations in these prestigious schools have allen dramatically. In 2020, when the Harvard Crimson published a survey of the incoming freshman class that included a question about religion, 6 percent of the students surveyed checked the box labeled "Jewish."

The reasons for the drop in Jewish numbers are varied and complex. Exponentially larger applicant pools, which include many international students, and an increased focus on campus diversity have played a role: "Penn has made a tremendous effort to increase the number of what they call FGLIs first generation to attend college in low-income families" a Jewish leader at the school told me. "That's not many Jewish people these days." Some have also pointed to a waning of Jewish ambition, as each generation is further removed from the immigration cycle. But perhaps the most salient factor, and the most troubling, is that fewer and fewer young people are identifying themselves as

The decline has become a source of concern for Jewish organizations. "The active community on campus speaks about it with frustration," Rabbi Zarchi says. "But Chabad has not experienced a drop. From our perspective, Jewish life has never been more vibrant." Like Rabbi Zarchi, who arrived at Harvard twenty-five years ago, the Chabad reps at Princeton and Penn have been on campus long enough to observe the decline-and adapt to it. Working within their schools' unique culture and history, they have deepened their engagement, redefined relationships with other campus organizations, and reached out, even further, in the effort to build communities that will nurture the next generation of Jewish leaders.





HARVAR UNIVERSITY



WHERE THE JEWS WERE

WHEN STAN GEIGER ARRIVED AT HARVARD COLLEGE the late 1980s, he encountered a group of people he had heard about but never met: Orthodox Jews. "There were ten to fifteen of them in every class," recalls Geiger, who asked that his real name not be used "and at least as many graduate students." Intrigued, he started frequenting Rosovsky Hall, Harvard's Hillel building, where they congregated for prayer—two hundred people attended Shabbat morning services in those days, he says—and kosher meals.

When the Zarchis arrived in 1997, they saw the same thing, and opted to focus their work on graduate students, who were generally less well served by Hillel's programming. Sue Fishkoff's 2003 book, The Rebbe's Army, depicted the young couple hosting intimate, crystal-and-china Shabbat dinners for twenty graduate students.

But at some point, says Elkie Zarchi, they sensed a change. Undergraduates started appearing at the Shabbat table, bringing a new attitude with them "People would say to me, 'I'm not Jewish, but my grandma is," she recalls. "We weren't battling nega tive experiences. We were battling no experiences.

For these students, the warm, open atmospher at Chabad was a welcome contrast to the formality that permeates much of life at Harrard. Ruth Wisse, professor emerita of Yiddish Interature and comparative literature, told me: "The rest of us were running Jewish programs. The Zarchis were sharing a family meal."

Even as the official number of ews at Harvard was dropping, the Zarchis were putting out more and more place settings. "I don't think the kids are scared to identify as Jews," Rebbetzin Zarchi says. ust doesn't occur to them. It's not the life they're living."

Geiger who went on to earn both an MBA and law degree from Harvard, stayed long enough to neet the Zarchis, whom he found "captivating." He has kept a close watch on the state of Jewish life at hisalma mater. "We're one generation more assimlated," he says. "The people who I went to school with—their kids are not finding their way to Hillel." His daughter, a current sophomore at Harvard College, serves as a supervisor in Hillel's kosher kitchen, largely because no one else is interested in the job. "These days," he says, "it's all hands on deck."

Harvard was among the first universities to close their campus in early 2020, but the Zarchis stayed put, moved all their operations outside, and became a center of activity for Jewish students who chose to remain in Cambridge. This November, they received a \$5 million donation from Jackie and Omri Dahan, an alumnus of Harvard Business School, to endow Rabbi Zarchi's chair at Harvard Chabad and to establish a student fellowship that fosters Jewish leadership.

Their Shabbat dinners—which draw around two hundred students each week-are now too big to move back indoors.



Left: Harvard College students at the annual Harvard Chabad Bar Mitzvah Celebration with Rabbi Hirschy Zarchi (center). Abe Atwood is third from right.

Below: Members of Chabad's Jewish Heritage Program outside Lubavitch House at Penn.





A TASTE OF HOME

SERVANT JEWS HAVE NOT DISAPPEARED FROM THE IVY League; they have migrated, and in a surprising direction. Princeton University maintained a 3 percent quota or Jews in the early 1900s. Its selective eating clubs, famously depicted in F. Scott Fitzgerald's This Side of Paradise, wee rejecting many Jews as "socially unsuitable" as late as 1958. It is perhaps the last place in the Ivies one would expect to find a thriving Orthodox community.

"Jewish life at Princeton has gotten more religious over the past decade," Princeton Chabad director Rabbi Eitan Webb says. In large part, the community is a product of Princeton's checkered past with Jews. In the 1970s and '80s, Princeton President William G. Bowen made a concerted effort to attract day school students who had been put off by the school's reputation. Princeton experienced the same decline in numbers as the other Ivies—its Jewish population now hovers around 8 percent—yet the

community that Bowen recruited remains.

Reputations reinforce themselves, and Princeton became a place that attracts students like Nicole Klausner, a junior from Los Angeles majoring in computer science. "I chose to come to Princeton because the Jewish life was stronger than at other Ivy schools," she says, "and the academics really drew me."

Building community in this kind of environment is a collaborative process. Princeton's Center for Jewish Life (also established by Bowen) hosts the school's kosher cafeteria, offers three prayer services a day, and serves as a social space for students. "We have a class at Chabad where a dozen students learn Gemara with advanced commentaries every week," Rabbi Webb says. "The Hillel serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner. They're doing great work."

What Chabad provides, Klausner told me, is a taste of home. During her freshman year, when classes were remote and Hillel was limiting its indoor dining options, the Webbs set up a tent and welcomed her for Friday night dinner. "They've been instrumental for me in my adjustment," she says. Now the president of Chabad's student group, she has also served on Hillel's board. One organization she chose not to join, however, was an eating club: "I just didn't feel like I was missing anything."



EVOLVING SOCIAL SPACES

SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS CAN BE A POWERFUL TOOL for forming identity. Penn was once considered the most Jewish of all the Ivies (perhaps as much as 30 percent), and it has fostered a robust Greek life that reflects its students' interests—or lack thereof. When Rabbi Menachem Schmidt arrived at the University of Pennsylvania in 1980, he got a less than enthusiastic reception from the university's largest Jewish fraternity, Zeta Beta Tau: "When we showed up at ZBT, they would say hello for a minute and then throw us out of the building," he recalls.

Rabbi Schmidt persevered. Julie Blinbaum remembers attending parties at ZBT during the early aughts that happened to fall on Simchat Torah: "Suddenly you would see the Torah brought in. I wasn't sure what was going to happen the first time I saw that, but people just turned and embraced it and started dancing." The rabbi also started a student-run organization, the Jewish Heritage Program. In addition to doing community service projects and organizing social events, the program connects students to a powerful network of alumni like Blinbaum, who is now a senior director at AIPAC.

It was only when the number of Jew began declining that it became clear how integral Lubavitch House at Penn, which now emplo three couples full time, had become to the university's Jewish life Junior Evan Golinsky served as the president of ZBT for the 2021-22 school year. He told me the frat has far fewer Jewish members than it used to. My friends and I have taken it upon ourselves to ensure a strong connection between Chabad and ZBT," he says. "We're eping Jewish life alive at the fraternity."

Solinsky also brings ZBT's non-Jewish members to Labavitch House to "expand their minds," and that's a role the Chabad reps embrace. In 2017, spurged by a spate of suicides at the school, Lubavitch House director Rabbi Ephraim Levin collaborated with a Penn psychiatrist to develop a protocol that would train individual students—and student groups—to better support one another through active listening. The

non-sectarian program, Listen Up Cogwell, has trained over a thousand students at Penn, and is now being adopted on other campuses across the country.

After more than four decades at Penn, Schmidt is far from sanguine about the future of Jewish life at the school. He says Covid created a sea change in the student body's sense of commitment outside of schoolwork: "Social obligations don't weigh like they did before." And campus life is cyclical. "Just because you had three hundred people for Shabbat dinner last year, you can't assume you'll have them again. We're not complacent.

Deepening the Connection

THIS PAST DECEMBER, AMCHA, AN ORGANIZATION that tracks antisemitism on campus, released a report that described a "looming crisis for the American Jewish community" In incidents on campuses across the country, Jevish identity was suppressed, denigrated, and defined, the researchers found. The school at the top of the list, with the most reported incidents, was Harvard.

As a barometer for achievement and acceptance in American society, the number of Jewish students in the Ivy League has been a subject of fascination for more than a century. But in the context of the AMCHA study and broader trends in American Jewry, the current decline points to a truth far more disturbing than admission quotas or a loss of immigrant ambition: the next generaron of America's Jewish leaders may not even think of themselves as Jews.

Questions of identity have been at the forefront of Abe Atwood's mind lately. Six months after he met Berel Feldman, Atwood decided to join a new program at Chabad that offered bar and bat mitzvah celebrations to students who did not have one. Feldman taught him how to read Hebrew so that he could recite the blessings over the Torah; Atwood's friend, who had attended a Jewish school, volunteered to recite the Torah portion for him; Atwood's younger brother, a sophomore at Harvard, decided to join the ceremony. The Zarchis raised money to purchase a set of tefillin, organized a dinner, and hired a photographer.

"It was like a Vegas bar mitzvah," Atwood says, laughing. "But then all my friends showed up, and I was proud. I felt more connected to my Jewish identity than I did before." •

"It was only when the number **7** Jews began declining that it became clear how integral Lubavitch House, which now employs three couples full time, had become to Jewish life at Penn."

Israeli or Jewish?

Seventy-five years after the State's founding, Israel's search for meaning evolves

RENA UDKOFF

When the modern State of Israel was established leaders sought not only to provide a safe haven for the Jewish people, but to cultivate "the new Jew." Inste of the pale, bespectacled yes hive student poring over Talmudic tomes, the Israeli, or "Sabha" would be muscle and brawn, capable of defending and developing this swath of sun-drenched land.

Israel's early kibbutzim were the incubators for this experiment. Many of the original kibbutzniks were Holocaust survivors, eager to shed Jewish features that they associated with life under persecution. There'd be no Torah study on the kiloutzim. Socialism, not Judaism, would be the driving ideology, and their children would be raised with secular values instead of Jewish ones.

and third generations of Israelis came of without the fears and biases that plagued their immigrant elders. Though some contemporary Israelis 📶 as staunchly secular as their ancestors, others have turned back toward tradition. Seventy-five years after the State's founding, Lubavitch International looks at Israel's evolving search for meaning.





ilat Cherkassi, 55, grew up living the secular Israeli dream in Even Yehuda, a picturesque town between Tel Aviv and Netanya. Her father, famed Israeli basketball coach Ralph Klein, a Holocaust survivor and a beloved national hero, was known throughout the country as "Mr. Basketball". He received the Israel Prize for sport, and Cherkassi spent her childhood surrounded by the "who's who" of Israeli sports, along with esteemed guests who discussed politics, travel, and economics—but never Judaism.

"Our family was completely secular in every way," says Cherkassi. "We did not have mezuzahs. We de bread on Passover, and we would travel and eat on Yom Kippur. Growing up, I never had a single interaction with a religious person." As post-Shoah European immigrants, her parents viewed religious Jews as regressive, and Jewish practices as a hindrance to advancing Israel as a utopian secular democracy.

"My parents were very loving," she continues. "They did not hate religious people. They just thought that religion needed to go away. I was raised to be Israeli. To love my country, to love my land, to be a Zionist. Judaism was not part of that."

But even as a child, Cherkassi held a secret belief—she thought there was a G-d. "In my head, I would have little conversations with G-d, but I didn tell anyone because I thought they would laugh at me." Once, she fen snuck away on Yom Kippur to try to hear the shofar blasts at the end of the day—something she had learned about in school. When she arrived at the synagogue, she went around the building in circles, never mustering the courage to go in. "I was afraid of what the religious people would do to me."

After serving in the IDF, she studied set design at Tel Aviv University and began working at the Israeli Opera, quickly becoming a rising star in the art world.

But as her career took off, Cherkassi felt something was missing. "I thought that the gap inside me would be filled as soon as I achieved various goals: I would find a good job and be happy. I would get my own apartment and I would be happy. But every time I reached my goals, happiness seemed to move further down the horizon. I had the parties, the friends, and the dream Tel Aviv life. It wasn't enough."

Judaism in the Jewish State

THE "NEW JEW" FIRST DESCRIBED BY MAX NORDAU IN 1898 QUICKLY became a prototype for the ideal Israeli citizen: physically strong, agriculturally minded, and ideologically secular. Though Nordau's vision found pure expression in the original kibbutzim and moshavim, it has softened significantly over the seventy-five years since the State's founding. This is partly due to waves of immigration from more traditional Mizrahi populations, as well as to the high birth rate in religious communities. But the change has been an ideological one as well.

Daniel Gordis, Koret Distinguished Fellow at Shalem College in Jerusalem, and author of Israel: A Concise History of a Nation Reborn, believes that the turning point for Israeli Jews came in 1973. "After the Six Day War in 1967, Israelis felt invincible. But the disasters of the Yom Kippur War caused a huge break in the world of Ashkenazi Israeli ideology," Gordis says. "Many Israelis realized that peace is never really going to come. And there was a reckoning on how to identify and justify why Israelis were living in this difficult land. It is hard to make an argument for living here without Judaism as a cornerstone and primary value."

Today, nearly 80 percent of Israeli Jews identify as religiously observant or traditional to some degree. And while 20 percent are still proud to call themselves chiloni, or secular, they, too, are apt to incorporate elements of religious observance into their lives. Ninety-eight percent of Israeli Jews have mezuzahs on the doorposts of their homes. Ninety-two percent give their sons a brit milan-Almost all observe some form of a Passover Seder.

In a society once defined by the stark divide between religious and secular—chareidim and chilonim—gray areas are growing. And, as the third generation since the State's founding reaches maturity, many are seeking out tradition. They are creating their own models for New Jews—Jews who draw on their heritage as a source of spiritual nourishment and strength.

This gradual shift is reflected in the lives of individuals like Naavah Nachshon, who grew up in Yeshuv Timrat, a secular community. She does not consider herself religious. "From the age of sixteen," she says, "I remember grappling with the question of whether I am more Israeli or more Jewish, especially when I was in the army. When I was younger, I definitely identified more as Israeli."

Part of that was generational. "My parents came from the Holocaust," he explains. "Their lives were destroyed because of their Jewishness. Judaism was directly conected to their trauma." She recalls that many families in the libbutz on which her husband was raised came from very religious homes, and abandoned tradition for e socialist dream.

But, like many of their second-generation peers, Nachshon and her husband are now returning to their roots. "Why are we even in this land?" she asks. "It is only because we are Jewish."

In the years since 1973, Gordis says, a deep and widespread interest in Jewish tradition took root. Books on Jewish philosophy by Orthodox rabbis became regular bestsellers in Israel—even in the most secular bookstores.

And popular mainstream radio shows now host weekly segments on the Torah portion. "There is a huge market here of people who want to join the Jewish conversation and learn about the majesty of Judaic life."

Nachshon has spent the last thirty years studying with her yeshuv's Chabad rabbi, David Tal. And in that time, she has grown to love Judaism. Today, she lights Shabbat candles on Friday night and marks each Jewish holiday with traditional observances that she says bring meaning a joy to her life. Today she identifies first as a Jew, second as an Israeli

YET EVEN AS MANY YOUNGER ISRAELIS HAVE become more open to tradition, secular communities in Tel Aviv as well as yeshuoim, and kibbutzim across the country remain resistant and even hostile to the

This may partly be a consequence of the disconnect between Israel's secular and religious Jews, who generally inhabit separate social worlds and rarely cross paths. For some, this allows negative stereotypes to fester. For others, it simply results in a lack of exposure.

Yakir Kaufman, 58, attended what he described as an atheist school in Carmel,

Haifa. His family was not religious and his only encounter with Torah came in elementary and high school classes, which presented Tanach through the lenses of literary analysis and Christian commentaries. "It made no impact on me," says Kaufman, who always felt that there had to be something more out there.

After serving in the Lebanon war, Kaufman, like many discharged IDF soldiers, took time to travel and "find himself.'

"I was always looking for spirituality, and that slowly led me back to Judaism," he says. Now a neurologist working in the Jerusalem Department of Health, he completed a fellowship at the University of Toronto, where he encountered Chabad and began studying Chasidut.

According to a 2017 Brookings Institute study on Religion, State, and the Jewish Identity Crisis in Israel by Yedidia Stern, the second generation of Israelis "grew up in Jewish textual ignorance." As a consequence, says the study, "secular Israeli culture—as reflected in the education system, arts, philosophy, ethics, economy, law, media,





and politics—bears no significant traces of Jewish cultural heritage."

"There's a vacuum [that] needs to be filled," says Moni Andar, spokesperson for the Chabad Youth Organization in Israel. And where Israelis don't have access to Jewish study, the search for meaning sometimes leads them further afield. "Israelis have replaced many holidays and traditions with commercialized or meaningless versions of the cherished original," he notes. "Yom Kippur has become a bicycle holiday, with sales and races. Chanukah is eight days of shows. Possover is all about spring cleaning and usekeeping, and on Shavuot, there is ice cream."

Tel Aviv, the void has also been filled with non-Jewish holidays. Esther Piekarski moved to northern Tel Aviv in 1970 as a Chabad emissary. While the city has always been secular and metropolitan, she has noticed families in he neighborhood looking for new ways to entertain their kids. "Many families started celebrating Halloween with ck-or-treating. And in December, there are not that many menorahs in the windows, but I have noticed trees

"Many Israelis realized that peace is never really going to come. And there was a reckoning on how to identify and justify why Israelis were living in this difficult land. It is hard to make an argument for living here without Judaism as a cornerstone and primary value."

–Daniel Gordis

with lights," she says "Families need cultural celebrations and traditions that can engage and inspire their children."

Still, there is a hunger for more. For many pundits, the 2022 Israeli election was a referendum on the status of Jewish identity among the Israeli populace. One of the takeaways is that Israeli Jews want a more Jewish society.

Gordis suggests that Chabad's unique approach may be best-positioned to bridge the gap between Israel's secular and religious communities: "For secular Israelis, Chabad offers a well-articulated version of Judaism that is substantive but non-judgemental."

Chabad emissaries throughout Israel make themselves as accessible as possible, meeting Jews where they are. During Covid closures, the Piekarskis moved their prayer services from their Chabad House into open tents on the sidewalk.

"Tel Avivniks saw it and thought it was surreal that there were Tefillot [prayer services] in Kikar HaMedina (the largest plaza in Tel Aviv)," Piekarski says. "We were the most photographed *minyan* in the country. People who would never typically attend synagogue just stopped by and picked up a siddur." Today, the Piekarskis still maintain an outdoor Friday night minyan service, which draws people from all walks of life.

In her more than forty years on the job, Piekarski has noticed a shift in Israelis' interest and willingness to engage with Jewish practice. "I have nine sons," she says. "Decades ago, my oldest boys would go out to offer tefillin on the streets of Tel Aviv, and over four hours, they would get





DISCOVERY IN THE DIASPORA

"I left an

Israeli.

but

came

back as

ronically, many Israeli Jews who rediscover their Jewish roots begin their spiritual journey not in the Jewish homeland, but abroad. It is only outside of Israel that they experience life as a member of a minority faith, or have their first brush with antisemitism. The experiences provoke an internal reckoning with their identity.

Israelis love to travel. Upon completing their army service, a large majority of young Israelis embark on what has become a "rite of passage" to see the world. India, Thailand, and Nepal are choice destinations, known as the "Hummus Trail." where Israeli backpackers seek a change of scenery and pace.

India welcomes an estimated 80,000 Israeli travelers annually. Thailand welcomes 150,000. Some Israelis head to South America, including the popular destinations of Sag Carlos de Bariloche, Argentina, and Morros, Brazil.

And wherever they go, Chabad is there to greet them. Dozens of Chabad Houses around the world cate specifically to the offering hockosher meals, and a welcoming home away from home.

At these Chabad Houses, spiritual seekers exploring East Asian eligions discover Kabbalah, Jewish psychology, and meditation. Secular elis who would never step foot n a synagogue back home actively seek out the rabbi and skip a night on the town to enjoy a Shabbat meal with fellow Jews.

Some make their first connection with Chabad because of its availability and willingness to help them in their hour of need. Chabad emissaries are regularly called upon by the parents of Israelis who are lost in the Himalayas or entangled with the local authorities. The Israeli foreign ministry often turns to Chabad for getting these travelers home safely.

Naavah Nachshon shares a story about her niece who grew up in a completely secular family. "She had a work opportunity to go to Amsterdam, but when she arrived in the Netherlands, she discovered that the

> address she was given as fake and the entire ing was a scam. She was alone, in a foreign country, with no money recourse. In desperation, she called the Beit Chabad, and they, of course, offered to help. She ended up becoming an Au Pair at the Chabad House in Holland and soon took an

interest in Judaism. She returned to Israel and joined an Ulpana to learn

"When they are out there by themselves in the world, they want to feel some sense of connection and to discover something to serve as a reminder of who they are and where they came from," explains Moni Andar. "Many Israelis who live abroad for a while come back, and they say, 'I left an Israeli, but I came back as a Jew.'" •

maybe three 'yeses.' Sometimes zero. Today, youngest son goes out and he cannot wrantast enough to keep up with demand. I get dail calls from people in my community to give classes. If I had the time, I could be teaching Torah here in Tel Aviv the entire day."

Teshuvah or the Yeshuy

YESHUV TIMRAT IS A CLOSED COMMUNITY SETtlement of about 1,300 residents in the Yizrael Valley. It has been ideologically secular since its founding in 1981. When David and Dalia Tal moved there in 1983, David was a busy engineer and Dalia was working in the Israeli Department of Education. The couple had grown up largely secular and felt that the Yeshuv would be a great place to start a family.

Dalia notes that her parents did maintain few Jewish traditions during her youth. "On Friday nights, my father would make Kiddush at home," she says. But soon after, her parents were off to play cards with friends. And, as a teenager, Dalia herself wasn't interested in religion: "Like most of my friends, I considered myself a communist. Living on the Yeshuv was a perfect fit."

That was, until four years later, when both David and Dalia made the dramatic life decision to embrace Jewish observance, becoming what is known in Israel as chozrei biteshuvah.

"It seemed gradual at the time, but we discovered an interest in Torah and mitzvahs, and the more we learned, the more we wanted to observe," says David. The couple enrolled in comprehensive Torah study programs, moving to Migdal HaEmek—a city in northern Israel with robust religious infrastructure. Then they returned to their home in Yeshuv Timrat.

"When we came back," says Dalia, "my husband had a kippah and beard, and I was wearing a headscarf." The Tals were made to feel unwelcome. When David hosted a prayer service in their home, things went from bad to worse. The mezuzahs were stolen from their doorposts. During prayers, rambunctious youth would bang on their doors to disrupt them. "We had a very hard time in the beginning," says David. "The people on the Yeshuv were scared of us. They thought we were coming to completely change their way of life and shut down the roads on Shabbat or something."

But they were the outliers, Dalia says

thoughtfully. "We did not want a war. When Chabad asked us to become emissaries on the Yeshuv, our goal was to share the beauty of Judaism with our neighbors. Most people don't need what they think of as 'religion'. They need community. And that is what we provided."

When a member of the Yeshuv needed a bar mitzvah, Rabbi Tal offered to officiate. The convenience of onsite services drew people in. An esteemed educator, Dalia ran a summer camp that became a popular destination for the children of the Yeshuv. Parents started to appreciate the positive and judgment-free way that holidays and Jewish observances were presented.

"Slowly, things regulated," says David. After a few years of minyanim, the Tals were approved to establish the Yeshuv's first synagogue. Families came to them for lifecycle celebrations—circumcisions, weddings, funerals. Today, there is robust programming for Shabbat and holidays. Most of the boys on the Yeshuv have celebrated their bar mitzvahs with Rabbi Tal.

"There was an internal mind shift," says Irit Zis, 73, a resident of Yeshuv Timrat for thirty-four years. "People were surprised to find they enjoyed connecting with Jewish traditions in a warm and pleasant way. Before the Tals were here, Judaism was simply not available. But when you give people an accessible option, the demand will follow."

Searching for Meaning

BY THE TIME GILAT CHERKASSI WAS THIRTY-TWO SHE WAS desperate for a change from her seemingly idyllic life successful artist in Tel Aviv.

"I was very frustrated," she recalls "I did not have partner. I did not have children. I had no purpose." So sh decided to pick up and move to Kibbutz Lotan, a Reform community in southern Israel. One day, while walking past a friend's room there, she overheard a recorded lecture about G-d's presence in every individual's life

"The Torah class stopped me in my tracks," she says. "Before then, I as always searching and trying 'spiritual' methods: reading tea leaves, tarots, crystals. Nothing worked. When I heard the tape, I immediately recognized these words as truth.

Gilat wasted no time. She called the rabbi who had given the lecture and asked how much a tape cost. "I went to the kib butz office to check my account," she says. "I had enough money to buy sixty tapes. I called the rabbi again and told send me sixty tapes." The rabbi was shocked. "But which apes?" he asked. "What do you want to hear?"

"Whatever you think I need to hear," Gilat told him. After a week, a box with sixty tapes arrived, and so, she realls, "my journey to Orthodox Judaism began."

Gilat was not alone in her discovery. Twenty out of the one hundred members of the kibbutz were also inspired

by the Torah tapes and began adopting traditional observances into their lives. Among them was Ofir Cherkassi, who is today Gilat's husband.

Eventually, the entire group was asked to leave Kibbutz Lotan for being too religious. Gilat found herself back near her parents' home in Even Yehuda. A Chabad House had just opened across the street, and Gilat quickly developed a relationship with the Chabad emissaries who helped her the practical details involved with living a Jewish life.

Breaking Through the B

WHEN HER FATHER PASSED AWAY IN 2008, GILAT alone. Her siblings did not believe in practicing a rel tradition.

Gilat says that, "Even today, after years of knowing me and my family, my brother will say things echoing all the negative stereotypes you see in the media When I correct him and point to myself, my nusband and my children, he says that we are the exception. The bias is not based in reality."

Yet slowly the degree of suspicion and hostility towards deeply religious communities in Israel is softening. Hit Israeli TV shows focusing on religious characters have humanized some of the more insular Orthodox communities and greater integration in the workforce has helped ease tensions.

The most successful approach, Gilat has found, is exposure. Today Gilat works as an artist who interprets Chasidic teachings through the medium of paper. Her art has been exhibited in galleries in Yafo.

"Art can act as a language," she says. "Once, at an exhibition I did in Even Yehuda, someone approached the organizer and said to her, 'This completely changed my view of spirituality and Jewish observance!' I have had people say, 'Wow, we never knew what Judaism and Chasidut were! We thought it was something completely different."

On Yeshuv Timrat, Rabbi David and Dalia Tal have a one-room studio below their home that they rented to a secular couple. After many months, the couple finally agreed to join the Tals for a Shabbat meal. At Kiddush, the Tals were surprised to see that the husband could recite the blessings perfectly. The couple explained that, for the past few months, they would stand at their window below the Tals' home while David was making *Kiddush*, and recite the blessings with him, eventually adopting the practice into their own life.

"It is hard to believe that the synagogue in the Yeshuv is full on Shabbat, and overflowing on Yom Kippur," says Naavah Nachshon. "There is a weekly write-up on the Torah portion in the Yeshuv newsletter. If people were not interested in reading it, it wouldn't be there. People want to know more." •

Why would anyone choose to send their child to a yeshiva? As tradition Jewish schooling has recently come under fierce attack, this is one question that is rarely asked. Missing entirely from the discussion is an examination of what the yeshiva offers. As a parent of young children, it is a question I cannot afford to ignore.

BORUCH WERDIGER

itting somewhere on my children's bookshelf is a clever picture book with an important point. It's titled This Is How We Do It, and in thirty or so pages of charmingly rendered illustrations, the book showcases the lives of seven real-life children from around the world, from Peru to

Uganda to Russia. Step by step, it proceeds through almost every part of a typical day: we find out where they live, meet their families, see what they wear to school, how they learn, what they eat. Ribaldo from Peru lives in a house built by his father in the Amazon rainforest and wears a "lion-buckle belt" to school; Kei of Japan wears indoor slippers in her classroom, studies "ethics" as a subject, and sleeps on a futon at night. In some ways, we discover, kids from Russia and Nigeria aren't all that different; in other ways they are. And more crucially: We have our way of doing things, but there are other ways, too.

From time to time, in a desperate attempt to get my children to eat something different for a change, I'll take



the book down from the shelf, and wave it about. "Did you know they have miso soup and grilled cod for breakfast in Japan? And in India, paneer paratha with chutney?" I implore them, as they refuse to eat a tomato. Do I know what paneer paratha is? No, of course not. Still, I carry on undeterred, hoping that the point will get across. (It doesn't.)

This book came to mind again not too long ago, and not just because I was trying to get the kids to help out with the vacuuming (like in Russia) or the laundry (India). Instead, I was thinking about some of the recent, and increasingly heated debate about veshiva education.

In the classical sense, a yeshiva is an institution for the advanced study of Talmud and Jewish thought—the Jewish equivalent of a liberal arts college. However, the term is widely used outside the context of higher education to refer to a Jewish school, elementary or secondary, focused predominantly on religious studies.

Within this broad category of Torah-focused education, not all yestivas are alike. Instruction might be in English or in Yiddish. Some will focus more on Talmud, others on Chasidic texts. In most cases, yeshivas include some level of general studies—subjects like language arts, math, and science But the common denominator of all traditional yeshivas—indeed, what makes a school a veshiva—is that the main focus is Torah study, traditional Jewish values, and the initiation into eligious life.

But many may wonder why parents would choose a yeshiva for their children. How will such an education repare children for life? Perhaps, I imagined, the debate could be elevated by the kind of pluralistic attitude gently sketched out in the pages of This Is How We Do It. The yeshiva differs from conventional schooling in some ways, but not in others. If the mindset espoused

by the book might (one day) move my kids to tolerate the thought of fish for breakfast, maybe it could help make the case for a different, but equally legitimate, set of educational priorities.

There is another thought, a more reflexive one, that I have when I flip through the pages of This Is How How Do It. Encountering other educational alternatives makes us examine our own choices: Over the years, I have been fortunate enough to benefit from a yeshiva education myself. But it's worth reflecting on what exactly it gave me. What has faded away, and what still remains? And now, blessed to make these same choices for my own children, I need to think hard about just what it is I hope to give them.

ROFESSOR MOSHE KRAKOWSKI, THE director of doctoral studies at Yeshiva University's Azrieli Graduate School of ewish Education, has been an essential voice in recent debates about religious education, putting out several deeply learned, long-form essays on the subject in the pages of the legacy Jewish magazine Commentary, the popular online heterodox publication Quillette, and elsewhere. In large part, as he told me over the phone, his work is one of translation-translating the values and priorities of yeshiva schooling into a language legible to the outside world.

In this task, his own personal background no doubt plays a role. As a child, he studied at traditional religious yeshivas from across the gamut of contemporary Orthodoxy (including, a Yiddish-speaking Lubavitch cheder in Chicago) before going on to earn a Ph.D. at Northwestern University. Even within Yeshiva University, an institution that straddles the benches

of the beit midrash and the groves academe, Krakowski is something of an outsider, comfortable with questioning conventional wisdom about education

Some of these shibboleths concern the most basic understanding what schools are for and what they do. When asked what a school is, most people would suggest that it is a place for acquiring useful knowledge. But even this generalization, broad to the point of banality, does not get the whole picture.

Certainly schools transmit knowledge, and much of it is useful, but that can't be the entire story. Krakowski points to numerous studies that have found that adults retain precious little of what they learn in school. The more relevant function performed by our schools, Professor Krakoswki suggests, lies in the various "non-cognitive skills" they impart to students—resilience, communication, discipline-and in preparing children for membership in society, or "socialization." Yeshivas have their own way of doing that.

BABY IN THE STUDY HALL

IN THE CLASSIC ETHICS OF OUR FATHERS,

the sage Yochanan ben Zakkai praises his disciple Yehoshua ben Chananya with an unusual turn of phrase: "Happy is the woman who gave birth to him." Yochanan goes on to laud his other star students to the heavens, but nobody else's parents come up. Now, we can only surmise that Yehoshua's colleagues' mothers were also very, very proud of their sons' exceptional scholarly accomplishments. Why don't they get a shout-out?

A passage in the Jerusalem Talmud helps us understand the unusual attention paid to Yehoshua's mother. "I remember," declares the venerable Dosa ben Hyrcanus, "that his mother brought his crib to the synagogue..."

The Italian commentator Ovadiah of Bartenura connects the dots: "It was she who made him a sage." During her pregnancy, Yehoshua's mother would go around to all the study halls in her city, soliciting blessings for her unborn child. Then, "from the day he was born, she did not take his crib out of the study hall, so that only the words of Torah would enter his ears."

The metaphor of a small child, too young to study, too young to understand, absorbing the holy atmosphere of the study hall is a helpful illustration of Krakowski's insight about the function of education. It suggests that Torah education is more than the mere transmission of knowledge. There is something else in the air of the study hall, in the sing-song of Talmud study, in the whiff of turning pages.

Of course, the study of Torah is the raison d'être of any yeshiva. It is a mitzvah, precious in its own right, not simply because of its utility later on in life. Basic competence in Hebrew, the ability to parse a mishnah or a page of Talmud, and some familiarity with Judaism's great texts, are simply part of what it means to be a literate lew.

There are also a range of second-or der, indirect benefits to Torah study. The great value placed on scholarship means that high academic demands are made of the yeshiva student. Talmudic study demands facility in multiple languages, a high level of reading comprehension, and a capacity for analytical reasoning-all skills which are readily transferable to other fields. Students have to engage with and evaluate a kaleidoscope of opinions and views, swirling about n the same page of the Talmud, and then—especially for older students tackling a text together with a study

partner, or chavruta—communicate their understanding to a classmate, who may have his own perspective on the matter. Just as important are the non-cognitive skills, like initiative, self-efficacy, perseverance, and grit, that get promoted in any kind of demanding, self-directed learningno matter the subject matter.

But what really distinguishes the yeshiva is the context for all of this. Parents who send their children to a veshiva desire an environment that respects and supports the beliefs and values of their home.

As a private school, a yeshiva's only prerogative is to represent the families and communities it serves Children learn about the holidays their families celebrate and the traditions they hold dear. On Friday they bring home some ideas from the weekly Torah reading to discuss with their family around the Shabbat table. Weekly parent-child learning programs are a regular feature of Jewish schools across the globe, designed to bolster the bond between parents and children Indeed, in many religious communities parents send their children to the same schools they attended. They, too, learned the rery same passage of the Mishnah, or of Chumash, in their own time, perhaps with their parents before them, and on and on it goes.

The yeshiva's curriculum designed to support students in the development of their middot, or positive character traits, and the idea of duty towards each other and G-d. Professor Krakowski points out that much of the ethics instruction that takes place in such institutions is embedded in the regular curriculum. Talmudic law, for example, is filled with details about returning lost property or respecting the right to privacy. And more than just teaching virtues, a religious education aims





to give the student a sense of purpose and place, an understanding of who they are and what life is all about. school, and communal life, initiating the child into a world of mutual responsibility, community and religious duty.

COMMUNITY

THIS TAKES US TO THE OTHER MAJOR function of the religious school. The yeshiva plays a critical role by introducing its students into Jewish communal life, and in creating that community in the first place. In truth, this is hardly unique to religious schools. Every society seeks to reproduce itself, and to maintain the conditions for its survival, by raising up the next generation with the values and ideals it holds most dear—not least through its education system. Since the religious lifestyle is so distinct, and community is so central to it, this socialization process is that much more important.

The yeshiva is an integral part of the broader community and often constitutes a very real community in its own right. The schools will often step in to help students in need of assistance, even in areas unrelated to their studies or schooling. It's not unusual for teachers and administrators to pitch in to help boys celebrating their bar mitzvahs with trappings their families might not otherwise afford, or to fundraise for more quotidian expenses.

Ultimately, this investment in communal life is itself critical to individual flourishing. Over the past few decades, the breakdown in families, religious organizations, and other forms of civic engagement has created an epidemic of loneliness and instability, and despair. For most people, being part of a community provides a crucial source of purpose and belonging. Robust communal life is an essential ingredient in raising healthy individuals.

Thus the yeshiva emerges as so much more than just a place of learning. It represents the nexus of home,

SUSTAINED IDENTITY

STILL CRITICS OF YESHIVA EDUCATION argue that an immersive Torah educaon handicaps its graduates, leaving hem incapable of ever venturing out of heir bubble. But many products of the most rigorous yeshivas who have in fact made their way successfully through Ivy League colleges and universities put that to the lie. Many go into law, the sciences, business, politics, and other fields. It is true that some may need to work hard to fill gaps in their general studies, but even here the discipline of a serious yeshiva training will serve them well in this endeavor. The challenge is ensuring that, whatever their field, the air they breathed in the study halls of Torah over the years of their yeshiva education continues to animate their life-choices, informing their ethics, shaping their humanity, keeping them anchored and inspired as they go on to serve their respective communities.

Some also become spiritual leaders, rabbis, teachers of Torah. In the 1960s, the Lubavitcher Rebbe decided to send a group of students on a twoyear mission to Melbourne, Australia, to serve the Jewish community there. As the story is told, a list of students thought to be well-suited to the task was chosen, all of them articulate, well-spoken, intelligent young men. They scrubbed up well and would be able to put a shiny, modern face on Chabad's old-school Russian roots. But, when presented to the Rebbe for his approval, the list was vetoed. Instead of choosing the most sophisticated students of the yeshiva, the

Rebbe hand-picked the least worldly, and the most studious, devout, devoted young men he could find. For some of them, English was a second, or even a third language.

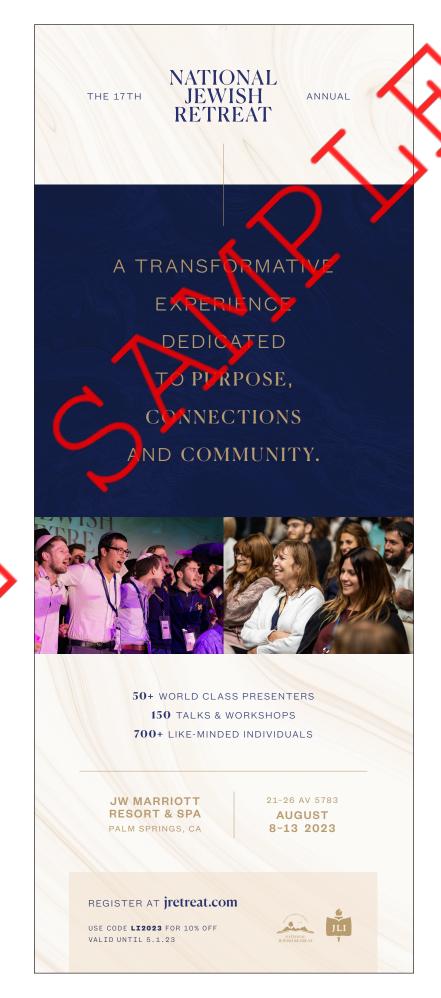
And yet, these boys' devotion to their studies and to the culture of the yeshiva would make them best suited to present a compelling vision of Torah life to others. Their proverbial ten thousand hours of study within the walls of the yeshiva had given them a certain mastery, not only of the subject matter, but of the wholesome integration of Torah into their lives. Thus fortified, they were more capable of negotiating life outside the yeshiva.

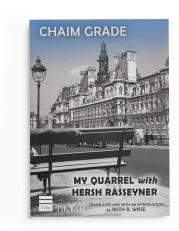
Any parent will be familiar with this basic dynamic. For the first few years of life, we nurture our children, surround them with love in a protective little bubble, a cocoon from which they will eventually emerge into the world, confident and self-assured. Every parent decides what they wish to give their children, how long to keep them close, and when to send them on their way. This is how we do it, writ large, in the yeshiva.

And it's what I hope to do for my own children.

The Judaism that I absorbed has given me a source of identity, a set of core values, a means of connection, a way of understanding the world, an ideal I can aspire towards, although never fully reach. Such connection to a faith and heritage is difficult to transmit in two-hour Talmud workshops, or even a semester of Jewish Studies. To find an organizing principle for your life, you need something larger than life, or at least some idea that transcends life itself. For me, it was the immersion in the yeshive where I witnessed the commitment of people I respected, studied with teachers devoted to the idea they taught, and was inspired by their example to put what I could into practice myself.

The yeshiva is a rare survivor in the twenty first century, and I cannot take it for granted. or all its shortcomings and insularity, the traditions and beliefs it nurtures are what I hope to give to my children. I want to transmit to them a magnificent tradition, not only as an object of study or a family relic, but as a vital and life-giving experience. I want them to feel how it lives, and to know how beautiful it is when it breathes ithin them. 🛭 🕩





REVIEW

My Quarrel With Hersh Rasseyne by Chaim Grade

Translated by Ruth Wisse

lished by The Tikvah Fund and Toby Press

VIEWED Y SARAH RINDNER

is 1948. Two Holocaust survivors run into each other on Paris subway Though each had sumed the other was killed in he Holocaust, they waste little time exchanging questions about wartime expeences or polite inquiries about the well-being of family and friends. Instead, the two fall back to an argument they had begun many years before, in the period preceding World War II. Both are graduates of the Novardok yeshiva in Thuania, and their argument is intellectual, philosophical, and also deeply personal. They debate the question of how a Jew should relate to the world around them. One believes the world outside of Judaism is rich with insight and enlightenment. The other maintains that the Torah is the only source of meaning in this life, and all other endeavors amount to nothing but vanity and self-destruction.

Chaim Vilner, a left-leaning Yiddish writer, admires secular humanist attempts to reform and improve the world. When he was younger, he was a student of Mussar, a Jewish movement that pursues spiritual and ethical perfection. He studied at Novardok, an extreme outpost of the Mussar movement where students would willingly engage in seemingly humiliating, self-abnegating behavior in order to break free from the physical world. Nearly all of the world of Novardok was wiped out during the Holocaust, with few surviving adherents. Hersh Rasseyner, Vilner's interlocutor, is one of them.

For Rasseyener, the only path towards moral improvement is through actions—the fulfillment of mitzvahs—and not through lofty philosophical abstraction. In Rasseyner's view, all of the wisdom of Western Civilization amounts to very little. After all, it did nothing to forestall the horrors of the first half of the twentieth century. As he tells Vilner: "You thought the world was striving to become better, but you discovered that is was striving for our blood."

The substance of this argument forms the bulk of the iconic Yiddish story, "My Quarrel with Hersh Rasseyner," first published by the Yiddish writer Chaim Grade (pronounced: grah-deh) in 1951. "My Quarrel" is a classic of Yiddish literature, due in large part to an early English translation by Milton Himmelfarb. This translation drew attention when it first appeared in Commentary Magazine in 1953. It was also canonized in Irving Howe's famous anthology of Yiddish stories. Yet Himmelfarb's elegant translation, accessible for an audience with minimal Jewish background, takes liberties with the original, downplaying many of Grade's rabbinic or Jewish expressions, and even deleting some parts of the story entirely.

Enter Ruth Wisse, a scholar of Yiddish and Jewish literature, whose new translation of "The Quarrel" restores the Jewish texture of the debate while presenting a more complete version of the story. Wisse's translation includes heretofore excluded passages, and also quotes many rabbinic phrases in their original Hebrew. The new edition, published by a partnership between Toby Press and the Tikvah Fund, even includes Grade original Yiddish text alongside the English In doing so, this version highlights dimensions of Grade's own Jewish identity that may have been less apparent in he story English incarnation.

Grade himself in his biography and chosen profession strongly resembles the maskil (enlightened) Vilner. He too spent time studying in Novardok and then abandoned the yeshiva, along with much of his religious observance—at least for a period f time. There are hints that the character Rasseyner is also based on a real acquaintance of Gades. Yet the story itself is remarkably even-handed, and one almost feels that, through Kasseyner, Grade allows himself to articulate certain truths that would have been unacceptable for him to express in his urbane terary milieu. This, in fact, is what makes the story so powerful and spiritual.

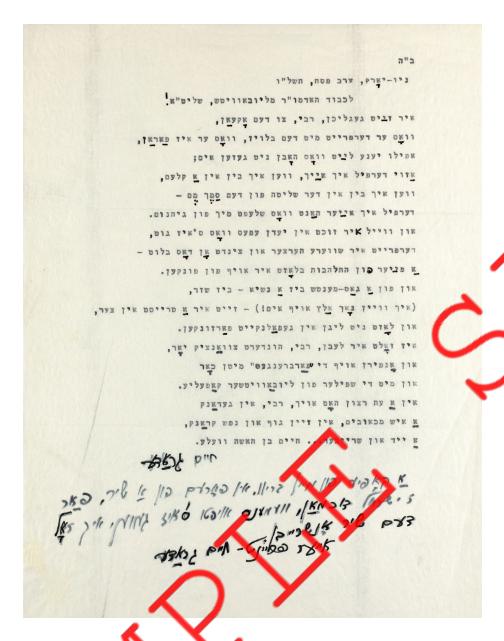
Rasseyner argues that the horrific experiences of anti-semitism during the Holocaust and throughout Jewish history prove that Jewish assimilation is doomed to fail. Even mild attempts at secularization, or moderation, of "lightening the burden" of Jewish tradition, are futile in Rasseyner's view. As he says, "a half truth is no truth." In keeping with Novardok's tradition of strident rebuke, Rasseyner does not hesitate to attack Vilner's sensibilities, his career, or even his personhood: "Instead of looking for solace in the Master of the World and in the Community of Israel," Rasseyner says, "you're looking for the glass splinters of your shattered dreams And as little as you'll have of the world to come, you have even less of this world."

One particularly illustrative section, which was excluded from the Himmelfarb translation and is restored by Wisse involves the only additional character in the story dent of Rasseyner's named Yehoshia who

My Quarrel with Hersh Rasseyner reads less like a "war" and more like an attempt at integration While the fiercely logical debate takes place between two Lithuanian yeshiva graduates with a high-level Talmudic background, there is omething distinctly romantic, and one could 🌃 say Chasidic, about the holistic mode that the story and the arguers embrace at the end.

Chaim Grade meets with the local leadership of Kfar Chabad, Israel 1964





Chaim Grade's letter to the Rebbe, dated the eve Passover, 1976

Written in Yiddish rl Grade is effusive in his pra of the Rebbe for-among r things—his impo ish people, and per onally, "for drawing him [Grade] out or dark places." He wishes the Rebbe long life at the rum of the Chabad-Lubaviton movement.

happens to come upon Vilner and Rasseyner in the middle of their debate. Rasseyner saved Yehoshua in the concentration camps and nourished him back to life physically and also spiritually, through Torah learning. Though he's initially respectful, Yehoshua turns critical and angry at the bareheaded Vilner for his life choices. In her introduction, Wisse suggests that Grade wrote Yehoshua as a critique of the ultra-Orthodox, especially when they lack maturity and perspective Yet Yehoshua's fiery presence in the story also reflect a different light on Rasseyner himself, who appears more gentle and mature by contras

Through Yehoshua's moving account of how Rasseyner saved his life in a concentration camp, we see Passeyner's ideals in action. We are allowed to experience, and not just intellectually absorb, how for Rasseyner, religious fervor and human empathy go hand in hand. At one point in their conversation, Vilner asks Rasseyner if he remembered to daven Mincha, the afternoon prayer, that day. Rasseyner tells him that, even if he had not, "I wouldn't have left you." Rasseyner may be critical and even harsh, but he is as uncomromising in his concern for Vilner as he is in les religious principles.

Still, while Wisse's translation makes Rasseyner's arguments more sympathetic than ever, Vilner continues to voice his part. He does not refute Rasseyner point by point, but rather appeals to the logic of those same arguments to make his own case for tolerance and inclusiveness. Vilner counters that Rasseyner's dismissal of secular, enlightened Jews is wrongheaded. Many of these ordinary assimilated Jews worked hard, tried to provide for and protect their families, and suffered in the catastrophes of the era just the same. Then Vilner extends a similar defense to the non-Jewish world, not the great artists and thinkers—who, he seems to implicitly cede to Rasseyner, did not do much to avert moral catastrophe—but two righteous gentiles, an elderly Pole and a Lithuanian, who quietly risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust. "Where in your world," Vilner asks Rasseyner, "is there a corner for these two old people?"

In the end, Vilner concludes that despite all the theological doubt and confusion wrought by the Holocaust and Communism, his love for his fellow Jews has become "more anxious and deeper." While his quarrel with Rasseyner allows Vilner to clarify and outline everything that he objects to about religious Judaism, in the process of arguing he discovers that his affection for his fellow Jews has

only strengthened despite, or perhaps as a result, of this extended debate. Vilner turns toward Rasseyner much in the way that Rasseyner turns toward him, and says, "I love you with all my soul." Before they part, the supposedly secular Vilner tells Rasseyner, "I say to you as the Almighty said to the Jews assembled in Jerusalem on the Holy Days: 'I want to be with you one day more, it is hard for me to part from you."

In her wonderful introduction to the story, Wisse recounts a debate over the translation of the story's title, "Mein Krig Mit Hersh Rasseyner." Should "Krig" be translated as the technically-correct "War" or the gentler "Quarrel?" Ultimately, the story reads less like a "war" and more like an attempt at integration. While the book's fiercely logical debate takes place between two Lithuanian yeshiva graduates with Talmudic backgrounds, there is something distinctly romantic, and one could also say Chasidic, about the holistic mode that the story and the arguers embrace at the end.

Interestingly, this pivot is anticipated elsewhere in the story in a short, infrequently cited exchange that is left out of the Himmelfarb translation, but which Wisse thankfully includes. Even before they begin to quarrel, Vilner notices that something has changed about Rasseyner's once-harsh mannerisms. "Reb Hersh," he tells him, "you're not speaking like a student of Novardok, but more like a Chasid of Lubavitch who is studying the Tanya."

Rasseyner answers that, for skeptics like Vilner, Chasidism and Mussar may seem like opposing points of view. But, on a deeper level, "they are one and the same...when I feel overpowered in the struggle of life, I study Mussar. And when Mussar leads me too far into gloom and seclusion and tears me away from the community of Israel and love for my fellow Jews-then I turn to Chasidism."

This passage is interesting because it broaden's Rasseyner's worldview beyond the nfines of the Novardok yeshiva and positions him as a representative of the diversity of religious Jewry. Perhaps the fact that Chasidism now features more prominently in his worldview is part of what ultimately allows Rasseyner and Vilner to relate to one another in a manner that they were unable to before.

In fact Grade himself, despite his complicated religious identity, and his Lithuanian veshiva background (he was also close with Rabbi Avrohom Yeshava Karelitz, the Chazon Ish) seems to have harbored a warm spot for Chabad Chasidut. After Grade's passing, his close friend, the late Chasid, Yisroel Duchman, wrote a remarkable obituary for Grade in the Algemeiner Journal that detailed some of this Lubavitch connection. Duchman spoke to Grade's time in Kfar Chabad after the war, as well as to his unique relationship with the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Like his characters Rasseyner and Vilner, Grade endured many difficulties during the Shoah. His wife and mother were murdered by the Germans, and his childhood community of Vilna was decimated. Even after having survived, Grade also encountered coldness from former friends and acquaintances from his Novardok yeshiva past, precisely when he need awarmth. Duchman quoted Grade as having said, "in Kfar Chabad I was warmed."

In reflecting upon his relationship with Grade Duchman made the following observation, which could easily be applied to "My Quarrel with Hersh Rasseyner" as well: "When we met we used to talk about Jews and adaism and about the world at large. We didn't always agree with one another and oftentimes we argued, but our differences of opinions never detracted from our friendship, and until his very last day, Grade remained a close and loyal friend." In addition to raising many fascinating theological issues and debates, "My Quarrel with Hersh Rasseyner" explores the way in which two mens' religious sensibilities (or lack thereof) are inextricably bound up with their feelings toward one another.

"My Quarrel with Hersh Rasseyner" ends at a kind of impasse, with neither side a clear victor. Chaim Grade's own life, however, ended with his instructions to be buried in the beautiful woolen tallit with which he prayed each day—a final hint as to which side his heart and soul ultimately belonged. •

Wisse's translation includes heretofore excluded passages, and also quotes many rabbinic phrases in their original Hebrew. The new edition even includes Grade's original Yiddish text alongside the English. In doing so, this version highlights dimensions of Grade's own Jewish identity that may have been less apparent in the story's previous English incarnation.

Book Notes

Starting With Sinai

Transformative Ideas Towards a Better Self: The Wisdom of Pirkei Avot

YOSSI SHANOWITZ | 247 PP

Pirkei Avot is entirely concerned with personal ethics, responsibility, and behavior—making it unique among all the Mishnaic tractates, which are generally focused on law and legal theory. This book weaves together those insights with the teachings of the *Tanya*—a classical Chasidic work. Each verse of Pirkei Avot is treated with anecdotes and parables to help elucidate the wisdom of the sages. The result is a guide for the making of a better self and a better world.

Inspiring to read anytime and on its own, *Starting With Sinai* is an excellent companion and resource for the study of Pirkei Avot, which is customarily read every Shabbat between Passover and the High Holidays.

Why God Why?

How To Believe in Heaven When It Hurts Like Hell

RABBI GERSHON SCHUSTERMAN | PROVIDENCE PRESS 255 PP



he author seemed to have all the answers when comforting the bereaved members of his community. But when the rabbi's young wife died suddenly, leaving him a thirty-eight-year-old widower with eleven children to raise, he was the one asking questions.

In his personal quest for an wers, Rabbi Schuste man considered popular literature on theodicy but found it licking. He rejects the notion offered by some "that there are pockets of untamed evil and chaos that even G-d has not conquered," arguing that the idea has no basis in Judaism. Instead, he reframes the question: "How can bad things happen to good people, like the sudden death of my wife, or the loss that you are going through, while we maintain the belief that a loving G-d is always in charge of the universe?"

Schusterman mines ancient Jewish sources as he tries to come to terms with his loss. The process leads him to realize that what he really is seeking is not answers to the unanswerable, but genuine solace in his deep sorrow. Leaning into his faith in a G-d who broke his heart, he explores the wisdom of rabbinic, mystical and Chasidic teachings to help him work through his grief. He emerges looking to the future with optimism.

"As I survey our society today, I'm convinced that, more than ever, people who are suffering a great loss need what we call in Judaism emes—the truth, G-d's Truth So this is a book about loss, suffering, and tragedy. It's about G-d, and ultimately, about hope."



F X C F R P T

My Gulag Life

Reb Mendel Futerfas Stories of a Soviet Prisoner

DOVID ZAKLIKOVSKI

MASIDIC ARCHIVES | 293 PP

his tiny book is filled with anecdotes from the memoirs of Reb Mendel Futerfas, a legendary Chasid who survived nearly a decade of incarceration in Soviet prisons with his faith and fearlessness intact. Excerpted from the book:

"During my imprisonment, I was allowed to receive packages from my family and friends in London. They sent basic necessities, clothing and non-perishable food. Of course, my family could not include any ritual items because it would compromise me, and

the items would be confiscated regardless.

It would take months for a package to arrive and I hoped dearly that they would send one for Pesach [Passover] that might include some matzah. Being that it was food, I thought my jailers would not take notice, and I would be able to fulfill one of the most important holiday requirements. Unfortunately, no package arrived. Eating matzah that Pesach was another mitzvah that, sadly, I could not perform.

It was a difficult holiday. Since bread was a staple food for me, I was left with nothing to eat. I barely survived on water and sugar cubes. The day after Pesach, when I was on the verge of starvation, I was called to the office and handed a package.

It contained matzah, and I immediately understood that the prison had deliberately withheld the package from me until after the holiday. I began to devour the matzah, but quickly stopped myself. I wrapped up the remaining matzah with a paper, and put it in my pocket, reminding myself that I would use it next year, on the first day of Pesach."

The Book of Jewish Knowledge

A Multifaceted Exploration of the Teachings, Observances and History of Judaism

EDITED AND COMPILED BY YANKY TAUBER

ROHR JEWISH LEARNING INSTITUTE | 496 PP SLIPCASED



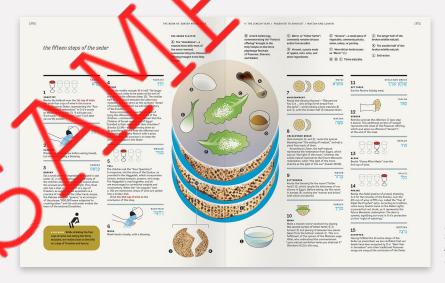
his bold attempt to capture the four-thousand-year story of Judaism in panorami lens dazzles with copious illustrations, gilt-edged pages, and a sweeping range of

Organized around five sections—Jewish History, Jewish Teaching, Jewish Practice, Th Jewish Year, and Lifecycle Milestones—the compendium is a user-friendly gateway to readers learning about Judaism for the first time.

Culling selectively from scriptural, Talmudic, Chasidic, and contemporary sources, the book examines 160 topics from Moses to mourning and from aliyah to the afterlife. Some themes are treated expansively, like the one on Torah Low, for example, which introduces readers to Jewish legal responsa, medical ethics, and business ethics. Others, like the entry on the holiday of Passover, give readers the basics: the biblical source for this festival, spiritual insights to matzah and leaven, images of illuminated Higg adahs, and an illustrated guide to the Seder.

The project's scope limits its depth, but the book's expository graphics do a great job of presenting and organizing large amounts of data in visual format. This, as well as amusing anecdotes and intriguing facts, make it appealing even to the well-versed reader.

Packaged in its own slipcase, the deluxe edition (109) makes an impressive conversation piece on the coffee table or as a gift. A flexcoveredition (\$79) is also available.



Illustrated guide to the fifteen steps of the Passover Seder



Reaching for the Heavens

Excerpts from the Writings of Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz

MAGID BOOKS | 177 PP

he hard-cover, pocket sized book spans themes of life, time, education, repentance, love, and redemption as distilled by the legendary scholar, author and teacher—the late Rabbi Steinsaltz. The following excerpt from The Thirteen Petalled Rose is among those included in this book:

"Throughout life, one asks the same question in many forms. This question lies at the heart of a search for oneself, a search that begins with the first glimmer of consciousness and continues to the very last breath. The search varies for every human being, at every stage of life. Often the search is conducted without any intellectual understanding; sometimes the subtlest philosophical nuances of thought may be brought into play, and at other times, the question does not even rise to the level of consciousness. But a person is never free of these essential questions: Who am I? Where have I come from? Where am I going? What for? Why?"

FIRST PERSON

PARTING WORDS

SUSAN HANDELMAN

n the Spring of 1977, I was working on my PhD in English literature, at the State University of New York at Buffalo when I decided to take a semester off to live and study in Crown Heights, Brooklyn at the Chabad Lubavitch world center. I was a spiritual seeker, and the Chabad rabbis in Buffalo had begun to connect me to Judaism. I wanted to try living it fully immersed—to test out its truth.

My mother met this announcement with deep concern and chagrin. I risked, she warned, being swallowed up in a backward community that had room for women only in the kitchen. I would be throwing away my academic career.

She was the youngest of eight children of devout Orthodox parents, Shmuel and Freida Katzin, who emigrated to Chicago at the turnof-the-century from a small town near Kovno, Lithuania. She told me that at her father's fung in Chicago, in the late 1930s, he was praised as one of "the last of the real talmidei hachamim [Torah scholars]." Alas, that was not something he was able to pass down to his Americanizing children in a time of assimilation and economic stress. "He couldn't fight America," she said.

After two months of my living in Crown Heights, my mother brevely ventured to Brooklyn from Chicago to see what had become of her daughter. I sensed her discomfort at seeing masses of black hatted, long-bearded Chasidim and bewigged women. But she was a composed, polite and gracious women. She began to enjoy meeting my friends, and the Lubavitch families to whom we were invited for the Shabbat meals. hey did not at all fit her fearful stereotypes.

On Friday night, we stood in the women's section of the large, crowded central Chabad synagogue, known as "770." When the Rebbe appeared, making the long walk from his office to his place near the Holy Ark, she turned to me nd said, "What a beautiful and dignified man!" On Sunday afternoon, before her departure, said to her: "Let's go stand in the little alcove near the front door of 770. The Rebbe goes out

of his office there to pray Mincha, the afternoon prayer, every day with the yeshiva students across the hall. People who are traveling come to get his blessings." She agreed.

There were about a dozen people gathered in the small space. I positioned her in front of me for a better view. The Rebbe came out, passing closely by our small knot of people, on his way The short prayers ended. I glimpsed him again close by, returning to his office. I saw his turn towards our group and softly say something, which I didn't understand, then continue on, and disappear.

My mother turned around towards me, and as she did, I saw tears streaming down her face.

"What's wrong?" I asked, quite concerned. My mother, who raised my brother and myself alone after my father died in 1959, was not a person who cried easily and especially in public.

But now the tears were quietly flowing down er reddened face.

you okay?" I asked again.

Yes."

"Why are you crying?"

"I don't know... He turned to me and said, 'Fohrt Gezunterheit.' That's what my father used to say to me when I would go on a trip. It means 'Travel safely—go in good health' in Yiddish."

She daubed her tears with a tissue. It was time to go to the airport.

Long after, when we discussed that moment, she said to me, "I don't know why I was crying. He touched something deep in my soul."

After her visit, she decided that she wanted to keep kosher and Shabbat, as she had in her parents' home. And she did.

My mother came to Brooklyn terrified that I was throwing my life away. But the memory of a simple Yiddish phrase that her father would say to her when she traveled, spoken quietly by a man whose face and being embodied the world of Torah of her father, reconnected her to her father, to Torah, and to her deepest soul. •



My late grandfather, Shmuel ben Meir HaCohen Katzin



Susan Handelman is Professor Emeritus of English Literature at Bar-Ilan University in Tel Aviv, Israel. She is the author of many books and articles including The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory, and Fragments of Redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Scholem, Benjamin and Levinas.

Get More From Your Lubavitch International Subscription



Yeshiva Days

The word "yeshiva" literally means "a sitting" or a "meeting." It is the name that has been used for the academy of higher learning—like a college or university—where the written and oral Torah is studied since time immemorial. In the U.S. the name has been used for elementary religious Jewish schools as well. The yeshiva takes up an important place in the Talmud, which examines its role from a historic and halachic perspective.



- 1. The institution of the yeshiva, says the Talmud, predates even the receiving of the Torah on Mt. Sinai, and existed in biblical days. In addition to the three patriarchs, the Talmud describes another biblical figure of that era at "sitting in a yeshiva." Who was it?
- a. Joseph, Jacob's beloved son
- b. Yishmael, Abraham's first sor
- c. Eliezer, Abraham's devoted servant
- d. Esau, Isaac's elder son
- 2. After the destruction of the Second Temple, Rabbi Yochanan Ben Zakkai famously established the new Jewish center in the Yeshiva (Academy) of Yavne At a later date (after the bar kochva evolt) the Talmud names nine yeshiva centers that were established by several great sages in various cities. Only one was established outside of the Holy Land. It was the yeshiva in:
- a. Nehardeah (today near the junction of the Euphrates and the Royal Canal)
- b. Rome, Italy
- c. Pumbedita (today the area near Fallujah, Iraq)
- d. Alexandria, Egypt
- 3. In its discussion of yeshiva decorum, the Talmudic sages established rules that ought to govern interactions between the teacher/lecturer and the students. Rabbi Meir proposed that if a student raises a question unrelated to the subject at hand, it must be announced as such. But the sages vetoed this rule because, they argued:
- The teacher has an obligation to help students even as concerns subjects that are not on the agenda.

- It will have a negative effect on the emotional wellbeing of the student if their question is not given attention.
- All Torah topics are interconnected, so any question on any subject is relevant.
- Raising ostensibly unrelated questions is advantageous, as it trains students to move easily from subject to subject.
- 4. According to one of the rules, the teacher is to repeat their lesson several times so as to ensure that the students grasp it fully. How many times?
- Four times, as per the four questions that are traditionally raised at the Seder table.
- b. Three times, because tripling has the effect of granting permanence.
- c. As many times as is necessary for every student to comprehend.
- d. Seven times, for seven completes a cycle.
- 5. The Talmud sees the yeshiva as a place of sanctity, making it unfit to use for mundane purposes. In a way, it regards the study hall of a yeshiva as even holier than the prayer hall of a synagogue. But the Talmud permits one of the following activities within its walls to accomodate students. Which is it?
- a. Napping
- b. Eating
- c. Drinking
- a. Small talk

Answers: IC (Yoma 28b); 2B (Sanhedrin 32b); 3C (Tosefta Sanhedrin 7:5); 4C (Eiruvin 54b); 5A (Sukkah 28a; Berachot 25a as per Shulchan Aruch Orach Chaim 151:3)

Art by Michoel Muchnik



From the Chabad-Lubavitch Global Network
770 EASTERN PARKWAY BROOKLYN, NY 11213

